



SAVO SUNSET LODGE



Savo Sunset Lodge, staying connected and thriving

Bernard Kemakeza's parents established Savo Sunset Lodge over 15 years ago with the intention of stimulating commercial tourism activity for the island community.

"My parents started the business in 2005, and the responsibility was handed over to me in 2018, where I have continued operations until today," said Bernard.

"Currently, there are not that many tourism operations on Savo. There is only Savo Sunset Lodge where we provide accommodation and run local



activities with the cooperation and support of the local community."

Located in the Solomon Islands Central Islands Province, Savo is not a large island. It is only 31 square kilometers in size, and has a population of around 4,000. Access to the island is only possible via boat, and is 39.5 kilometers from the capital of Honiara, where boat travel takes approximately an hour. Savo is a Solomon Islands icon, with volcano treks being a drawcard for both locals and international visitors.



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"The main reason the lodge was established is not only because Savo had no tourism operators. It was the proximity to Honiara, and with its wildlife and geothermal attractions. The island definitely had the capacity to attract visitors."

"My parents had a vision, and that is now being well realized, with Savo Sunset Lodge being one of the most popular destinations within the Central Islands Province."

"We are also very supportive of community activities and events. We sponsor and organize sporting events for the school children bi-annually, providing trophies and prizes. We also support the Churches with various donations and fundraising activities, and we often assist the local clinics by



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transporting emergency cases from Savo to Honiara," explained Bernard.

Over the years, Savo Sunset Lodge has welcomed and entertained guests from all walks of life. "One of the most memorable moments was when the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, RAMSI, were here. The mission comprised of numerous member countries from Oceania and Australia. A very multicultural mission, with many nice people, who would often frequent Savo Sunset Lodge. We made many great friends from the ranks of the mission," he fondly recalled.

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"That is what I really love about being in the tourism industry. It is the people we meet; we sing and share together. The people who come to Savo Sunset Lodge, they all became our friends."

However, it has not all been smooth sailing. Savo Sunset Lodge is also vulnerable to natural disasters. "Cyclones are a challenge, and we get a number of them blowing through every year, each time causing loss of business as seas are too rough, buildings get damaged, and crop farms are flooded. Then there is the constant concern that the volcano may erupt, every so often we get some rumblings which causes concern," noted Bernard.



When the Covid-19 global pandemic halted tourism and travel; spending dropped, and the once bustling lodge was reduced to 33% occupancy, while only retaining 9 employees to continue operations. With this, Savo Sunset Lodge has shifted its focus to the domestic market, drawing the majority of their guests from Honiara.

"Tourism Solomons, Solomon Airlines, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and Ministry of Public Service came up with a concept to support local operators during the pandemic. We focused our

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marketing to the domestic audience, and actually amending the Public Service entitlements to allow for Public Servants to spend their holidays at listed partner operators."

"This is now called Lumi Tugeda Holidays, where Savo Sunset Lodge is listed, and has a package offer that includes boat transfers, accommodation, meals, and activities such as hikes to the volcano crater, visiting the megapod fields, and swimming with a pod of dolphins that frequent the Savo waters. Then there are also the sunsets, which are particularly spectacular from Savo, and this is how the lodge got its name," shared Bernard.



He added that, *"Facebook has also really improved our exposure, it is not expensive and it allows us to gain the attention of the domestic tourism market. We are very appreciative of Facebook and the connections it has helped us establish."*

"Facebook has become an essential component of our marketing strategy; it has really helped us expand our profile. As an SME and operator based in rural Solomon Islands, digital marketing is essential when it comes to giving our products and services exposure."



"The spectacular sunsets from Savo is how the lodge got its name."

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In addition, Bernard hopes that more local youths take on the challenge to establish more tourism products and contribute to the country's economy. *"I am one of the Savo Island youths, and I am looking forward to seeing Solomon Islanders being involved more in the tourism industry. It is sustainable and ecologically friendly, which is best for the future of this country."*

Savo Sunset Lodge is one of many partners of the Solomon Islands tourism industry. As they maintain business during these challenging times, Bernard and the Savo Sunset Lodge team look forward to the day when international visitors can once more travel to enjoy the beauty and adventures of Savo Island.





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