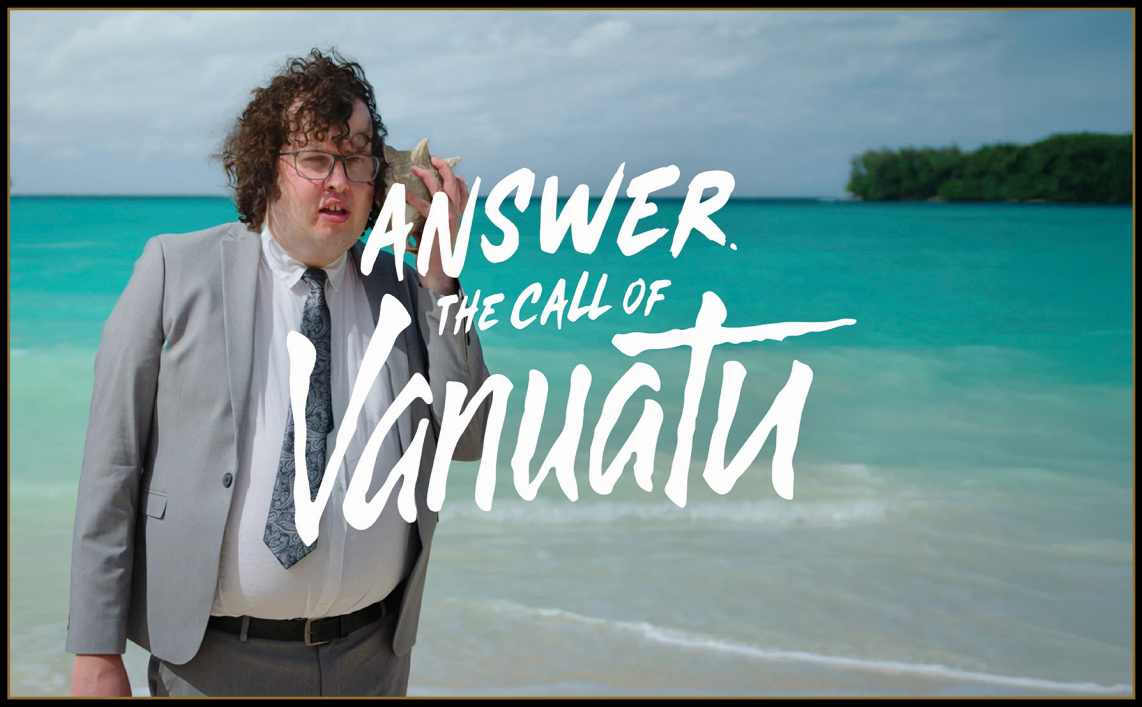
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Title
How Vanuatu got Aussies to Answer the Call

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Q1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & WHY DOES THIS CASE DESERVE AN AWARD?

> How does a tourism-dependent challenger recover from disaster when it can't afford to buy back attention?
>
> Vanuatu entered 2025 carrying the weight of multiple cyclones, a collapsed national airline carrier, and a capital city earthquake, while competing for Australian travellers against destinations with deeper pockets. Waiting for traveller confidence to return wasn't an option.
>
> The breakthrough came from rejecting the Pacific's promise of relaxation entirely. Rejecting the category codes, Vanuatu leaned into differentiation: raw, unfiltered adventure, closer than Australians think.
>
> The campaign worked in two moves. First, a seven-episode social series starring cult-favourite Kiwi comedian Ray O'Leary, resetting what adventure in the Pacific could look like. Then converted that attention into action, intercepting Australian travellers at key planning moments and making the extraordinary feel within reach.
>
> Answer the Call of Vanuatu contributed to three years of recovery in a single year: consideration up 44%, Australian arrivals up 28%, and every dollar spent returned $21 into the local economy. This case shows what's possible when a destination stops competing on category terms and starts competing on its own, delivering outsized results on an undersized budget.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IMAGE.



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Q2. WHAT WAS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE?

Vanuatu: A small island in the minds of Australians

Australia is one of the world's most travel-active markets, where overseas holidays are a core lifestyle behaviour. But the competitive set is vast. Australian travellers are far more likely to consider Asia, Europe, Bali/Indonesia, or the UK/Ireland, with only 2.5% considering the South Pacific.[1]

Within that small share, Pacific Island destinations compete fiercely. Vanuatu sits alongside Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa and Tonga in the 'Pacific island escape' set.

The competitive imbalance is significant. Category leader Fiji historically outspends Vanuatu in paid media by ~7:1, reinforcing its dominance in awareness and travel planning.[2]

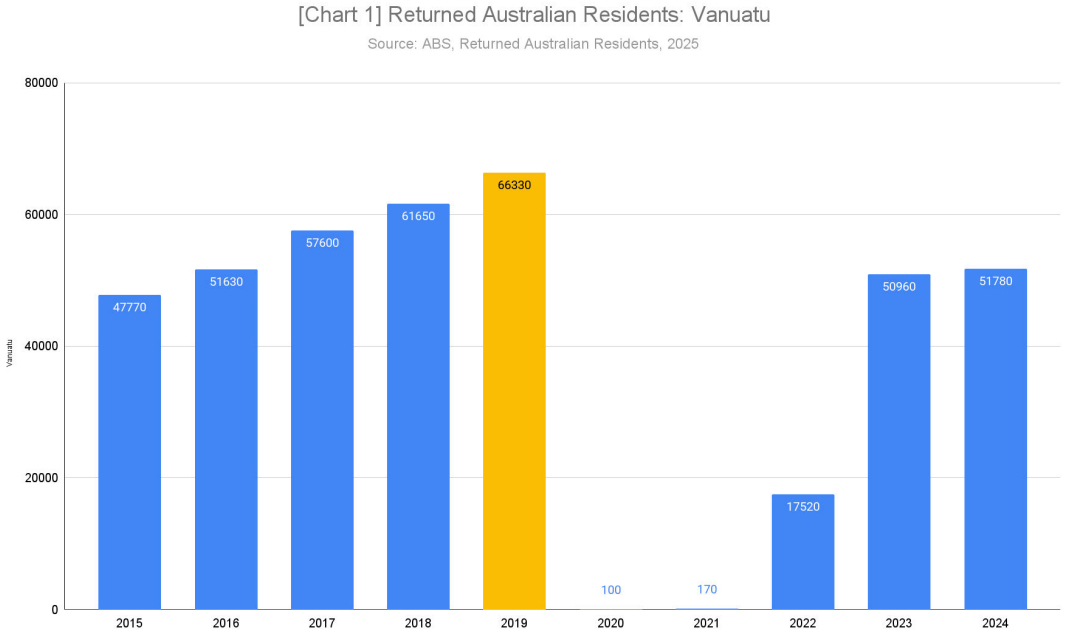
At the same time, Australians shortlist just 2–4 destinations when planning a holiday.[3] For smaller island nations like Vanuatu, the challenge is clear: break into that shortlist without the budgets to buy attention.

Tourism is life and death for Vanuatu

Tourism is the backbone of Vanuatu's economy, contributing approximately 30% of national GDP and supporting thousands of local jobs. When visitation declines, the consequences ripple through communities, affecting livelihoods and the nation's economic stability.

Between 2023 and 2024, Vanuatu faced a succession of shocks: Twin Cyclones Judy and Kevin were followed by Cyclone Lola. Then, in May 2024, the national carrier Air Vanuatu collapsed, severely disrupting international access. Months later, in December 2024 a major earthquake struck the capital, Port Vila. Beyond the physical damage, these events destabilised traveller confidence and the destination harder to reach. For a small Pacific nation competing against heavily funded destinations like Fiji, recovery was not automatic: confidence needed to be rebuilt, and demand reignited.[4] For the island nation of Vanuatu, hope that people would naturally return was far from certain.

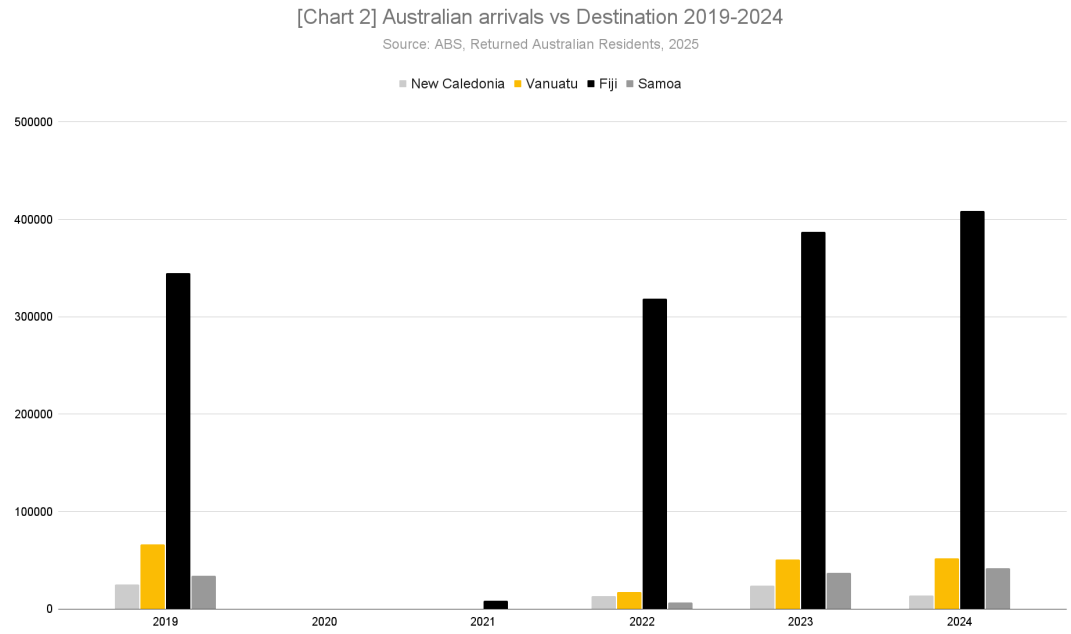
Australian arrivals had stalled well below Vanuatu's 2019 peak of 66,330 visitors, growing just 1.6% annually. By contrast, the South Pacific category was growing at 6% YoY.[5] Vanuatu wasn't just recovering slowly, it was losing ground.



[Chart 1: Returned Australian Residents: Vanuatu 2019-2024]

Restoring growth was critical, not just to recover the 2019 peak, but to resume the 8.6% compounding annual growth rate (CAGR) that historically drove national tourism between 2015 and 2019.[6]

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[Chart 2: Category visitation: Australian arrivals vs Destination 2019-2024]

The problem wasn't demand for island holidays: Fiji was still growing in Australian arrivals each year and dominating the category. The real barrier was mental availability: Vanuatu simply wasn't making the shortlist. Brand tracking in 2024 showed consideration sat at 16%, and within that only 28% of considerers progressed to active planning.[7]

Digital behaviour told the same story. The Vanuatu Tourism Office website attracted 396,000 active users in 2024, an indicator of planning intent, but still below levels needed to drive meaningful consideration.[8]

Limited budgets meant Vanuatu couldn't compete with the share of voice of dominant competitors like Fiji. Even when travellers saw communications, low brand linkage meant "lack of familiarity" remained a key barrier to consideration.[9] For a smaller challenger brand, that imbalance creates a dangerous dynamic: when destinations look and sound similar, travellers default to the most familiar.

The chain of issues was clear. The compounding disasters that had ravaged Vanuatu could only be reversed if we could stand out in communications, earn a place on the shortlist, convert interest into action, and restart arrivals growth. For the people of Vanuatu, the stakes weren't just marketing success, they were national recovery.

[1] YouGov Profiles, 2024.
[2] Effies Database, 'How Bringing Fijian Culture to the Fore of its Tourism Brand', 2023.
[3] Tourism Australia, Primary research, 2023.
[4] The Guardian, 'Never seems to end': exhausted quake-hit Vanuatu rebuilds again, 2025
[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Residents Returning Data, 2025.
[6] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Residents Returning Data, 2025.
[7] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[8] Vanuatu Tourism Office, Google Analytics data, 2025.

Q3. WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES? State specific goals.

Given tourism contributes ~30% of Vanuatu's GDP, our objectives were not incremental, they were existential. We needed to restore economic momentum following successive disasters and outperform a competitive category leader.

Business

Objective: Restart inbound Australian visitation

KPI 1: Recover to 2019 level of 66,330 Australian visitors.

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This was a stretch target; 2019 visitation represents Vanuatu's best year for Australian tourists. This goal marked full recovery beyond pre-COVID and pre-disaster levels, a symbolic and economic milestone for the nation, but was unlikely to be achieved in a single year given recent growth.

KPI 2: Achieve at least 8.6% growth in Australian arrivals YoY.

This target reflects the average annual growth rate between 2015-2019 that eventually got us to Vanuatu's peak arrivals figure of 66,330. But, growth in recent years had stagnated at 1.6% despite campaign activity in 2023/2024, while the South Pacific Island category was continuing to grow at 6%.[10] This target was deliberately ambitious, reflecting the urgency to fill newly launched routes and accelerate national recovery.

Marketing

Objective: Convert interest into action

KPI 1: Drive +25% growth in traffic to the Vanuatu Tourism Office website

Website visitation was a leading indicator of booking intent. In destination marketing, site visits correlate strongly with itinerary research and flight comparison behaviour. 396,000 active users represented our benchmark to beat from 2024.[11]

KPI 2: Increase planning intent among those considering Vanuatu above 28%.[12]

This behavioural shift was critical. Travel is a high-involvement purchase; increasing planning intent signals movement from inspiration to purchase consideration, the bridge between marketing and commercial impact. Early brand tracking in 2024 established this benchmark to see how we are moving our audience through the holiday decision making process.

Brand

Objective: Earn a place on the shortlist

KPI: Achieve ≥20% consideration from 16%.

Brand tracking in 2024 established our benchmark of 16% consideration.[13] A 4-point increase represented a 25% relative uplift, significant in a low-consideration, high-competition category dominated by Fiji.

Communications

Objective: Cut through and be remembered

KPI: Achieve >33% brand linkage across both phases of the campaign.

With a limited media budget, we couldn't rely on scale to build awareness. Every impression needed to work harder, ensuring Australian travellers immediately recognised our creative as Vanuatu. Brand linkage therefore became critical. Studies of destination advertising show only around 33% of audiences correctly attribute ads to the right destination.[14] Surpassing this benchmark would demonstrate our communications were cutting through the category and sticking to Vanuatu.

[9] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Residents Returning Data, 2025.
[11] Vanuatu Tourism Office, Google Analytics data, 2025.
[12] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[13] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[14] Longman, J., & Williams, T. (2020). Tourism destination branding through advertising strategies. Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA). Paper No. 99367

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Q4. WHAT WAS YOUR STRATEGY AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

Our strategy needed to do two things: 1) give Vanuatu a differentiated positioning in a crowded Pacific Island category, and 2) unlock a behavioural lever to nudge Australians into actively considering it for their next holiday.

An audience defined by a need to escape the every day

Vanuatu is not a destination that would appeal to everyone, but that fact alone guided our approach from targeting en masse to focusing on an active emerging need state.

Rather than targeting broad sun-seeking, 'flop and drop' holidaymakers, we identified a high-value growth segment we called Aussie Experience Collectors. This was both an existing and expansion audience: Australians already travelling internationally each year, culturally curious and experience-driven, but not fully considering Vanuatu.

Experience Collectors are typically couples aged 30–55, educated, dual-income and time-poor, yet willing to invest in meaningful experiences. Well-travelled and socially influenced, they are motivated by discovery, culture and nature. For them, 'escape' means wanting to feel something different from their everyday life. Their routine of long hours and constant screen time had induced a sense of 'robotic living'.[15]

Yet our starting point revealed a contradiction. Research showed this audience actively sought nature-rich, off-the-beaten-track destinations.[16] But when planning holidays, they defaulted to familiar, heavily marketed destinations. Despite aligning perfectly with their motivations, Vanuatu wasn't making their shortlist.

Adventure is Vanuatu's differentiator, but has been mis-coded

In Pacific Island marketing, beauty had become a commodity. Every island promises turquoise water and relaxation, so any use of these codes would blur together and often default to the category leader, Fiji.[17] Yet social listening revealed Vanuatu's true equity: top descriptors were Eco-tourism, Extreme, Wild, Adventure and Raw. [18]

Meanwhile, Australians' idea of adventure had been culturally pigeon-holed as extreme, physical, and high-risk Queenstown-style thrill-seeking experiences that felt exclusive and 'not for me' to the majority of travellers.[19]

The opportunity was clear. Adventure in Vanuatu is different: it's immersive and transformative, not about danger, but about feeling something you've never felt before. It's about experiences that reset the everyday routine and make you feel wonderfully out of place.

Aussies underestimate their proximity to Vanuatu

Australians have a tendency to see the Pacific as distant and homogenous.[20] In reality, Vanuatu sits less than three hours from Brisbane and Sydney, with new direct flights removing barriers to access. The immersive adventure of Vanuatu's 83 isles could now be in easy reach.

The strategic opportunity was to reframe Vanuatu as the Pacific's most accessible adventure: a place that feels a world away from the ordinary, yet is surprisingly within reach. We distilled this into a single strategic idea: **Vanuatu is the ultimate antidote to routine, offering raw and unfiltered adventure closer than you'd think.**

[15] Roy Morgan Data, 2024.

[16] Nielsen Consumer and Media View (CMV) data, 2023.

[17] Pratt, Stephen. 'Same, Same but Different: Perceptions of South Pacific Destinations Among Australian Travelers.' Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing. 30. 595-609. 10.1080/10548408.2013.810997. 2013.

[18] Brandwatch Social Listening Data, 2024.

[19] Sharma-Brymer, V., & Brymer, E. 'Adventure tourism and tourist experience: revisiting diversity and inclusion.' 2017.

[20] Pratt, Stephen.'Same, Same but Different: Perceptions of South Pacific Destinations Among Australian Travelers.' Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing. 30. 595-609. 10.1080/10548408.2013.810997. 2013.

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Q5. HOW WAS YOUR STRATEGY BROUGHT TO LIFE?

A whole new Call to Vanuatu

To sharpen the platform "Answer the Call of Vanuatu" with new, differentiated meaning, we needed to move beyond generic category codes and embed the destination brand into audiences' minds.

Redefining adventure

At the heart of the campaign was a re-coding of what adventure in Vanuatu means. To jolt audiences out of what they'd expect from a trip to Vanuatu, we enlisted Ray O'Leary, the cult-favourite Kiwi comedian, as our everyman on tour. Deadpan, grey-suited, and notoriously habitual, Ray was the perfect foil to embody routine being disrupted by adventure.

Over seven social-first episodes in a series entitled '*The Wake-Up Call',* Ray confronted fire, white-water rapids, rope bridges, and unfamiliar cuisine, creating moments that were humorous, memorable, and unmistakably Vanuatu. Episodic content was deployed across YouTube, TikTok, Meta, and programmatic, with short-form cutdowns extending reach and longer-form episodes driving engagement. Ray's deadpan humour contrasted sharply with the vibrancy of the destination, making Vanuatu feel transformative yet accessible - reinforcing that adventure isn't just for the elite thrill-seeker, it's for everyone.

Nudging Australians to act

We also needed to ensure we converted interest into consideration and planning. *'Adventure Passes'* translated Vanuatu's repositioned adventure into an actionable, tangible experience. By linking new Australian flight routes to symbolic tickets for off-the-beaten-track experiences, we made the extraordinary feel attainable. The boarding-pass motif became an instant cue for 'go travelling' with digital, social, and programmatic placements intercepting audiences during key planning moments. Meta (Instagram & Facebook) and TikTok captured inspiration and consideration behaviours, while programmatic display and Spotify delivered timely, contextually relevant nudges, reinforcing both proximity and accessibility.

Synergy of Reset and Nudge

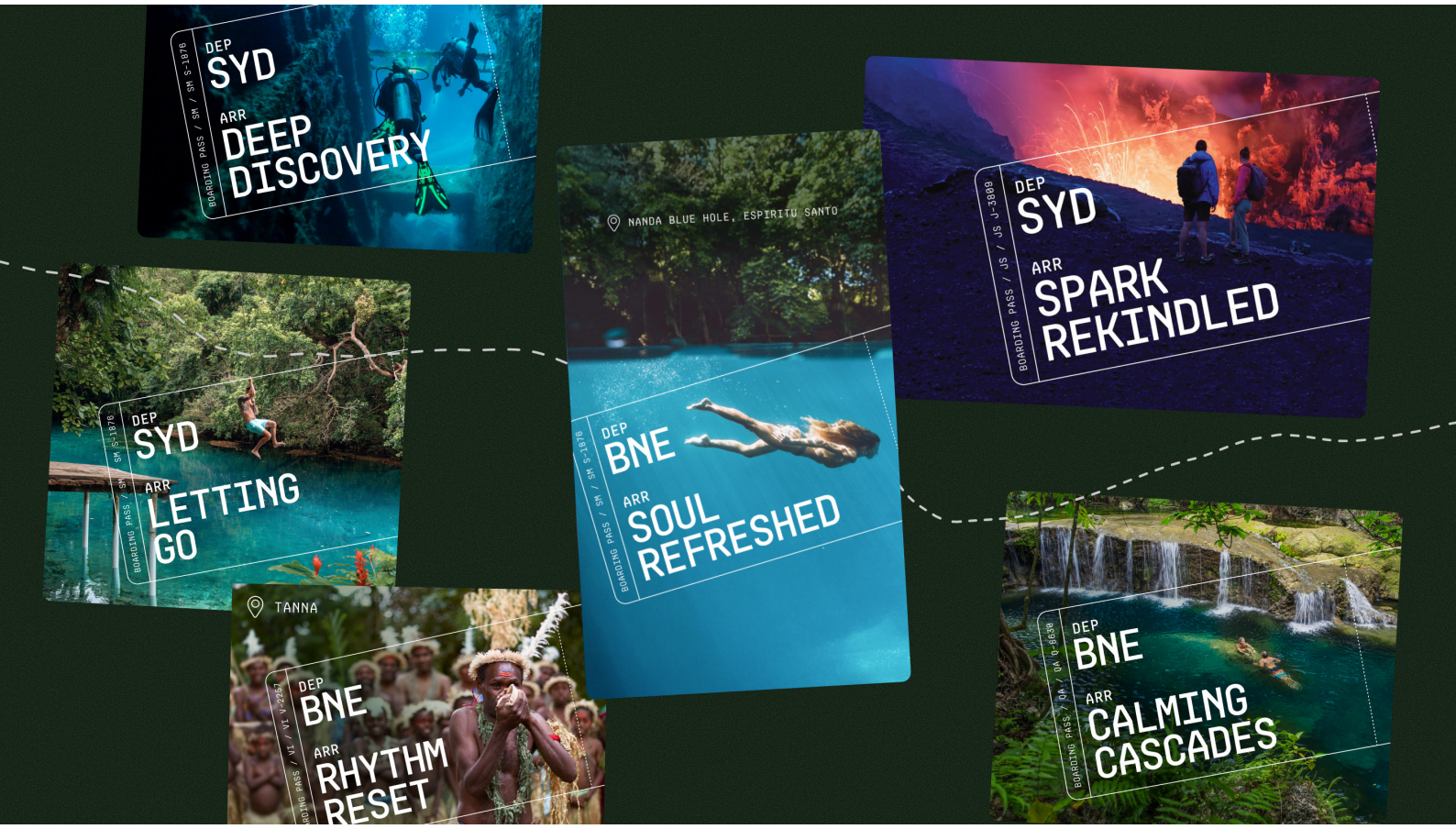
The *'Wake-up Call'* and *'Adventure Passes'* phases worked in tandem: one reset codes of adventure, the other provided the nudge to act. Together, they formed a yin-and-yang: humor and memorability drove awareness, while tangible, actionable cues prompted planning behaviour. Every execution fused Vanuatu's raw adventure with sonic and visual branding cues, ensuring the destination was unmistakably Vanuatu at every touchpoint.

Integrated media strategy

With a smaller budget than competing tourism boards, channels were selected for maximum impact rather than mass reach. Social-first platforms dominated how Aussie Experience Collectors discover and research travel, letting creativity work harder than spend. Supporting channels reinforced the journey: programmatic delivered reach and frequency during research moments, Spotify reached audiences in passive contexts, and all activity drove traffic to an optimised Vanuatu.travel website, turning consideration into measurable planning and conversion.

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IMAGES SUPPORTING BRINGING THE STRATEGY TO LIFE.





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Q6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL?

The campaign created a direct chain of effects, reversing our business decline and achieving three years' worth of recovery in one.

Communications

Objective: Cut through and be remembered

KPI: Achieve >33% brand linkage for both campaign phases.

Result: Both phases achieved 84% brand linkage.[21]

Our first task was to get noticed. The quirky, relatable creative achieved 84% brand linkage, proving the creative was unmistakably linked to Vanuatu. This indicates the campaign successfully reclaimed Vanuatu's identity, making it top-of-mind for Australians during shortlisting, a crucial step from awareness to active planning.

Brand

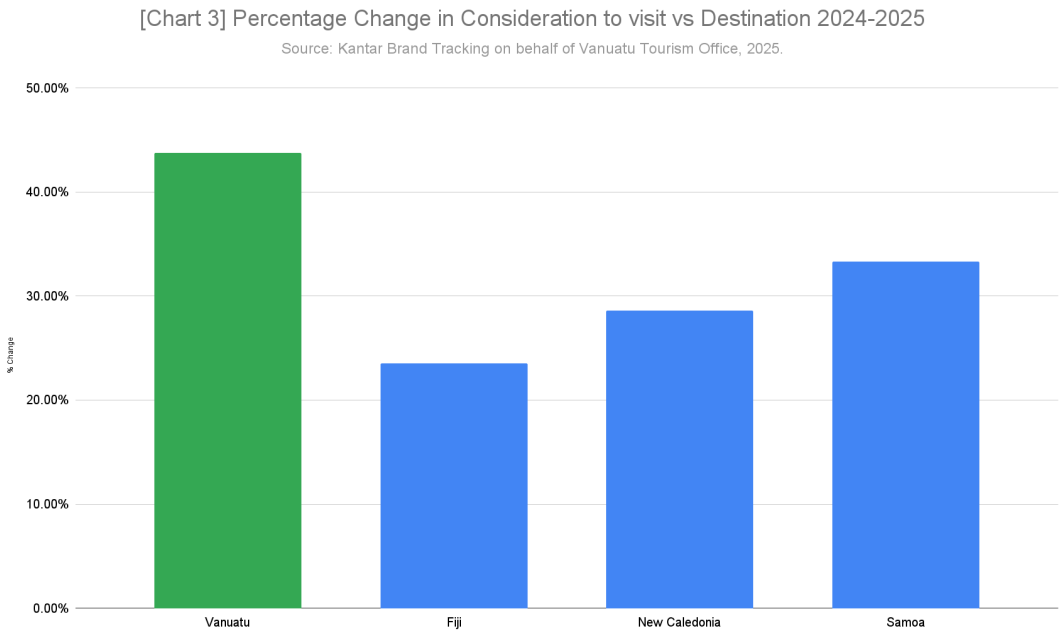
Objective: Earn a place on the shortlist

KPI: Achieve ≥20% consideration up from 16%.

Result: **Consideration grew to 23% in 2025.**

By redefining adventure, we earned a place on the shortlist. While our competitors also rose in consideration, Vanuatu grew more. This 7-point lift YoY (44% relative increase) is significant in a category dominated by Fiji, showing the work stood out against the category.[22]

[Chart 3: Percentage change in consideration to visit vs destination 2024-2025]



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Marketing

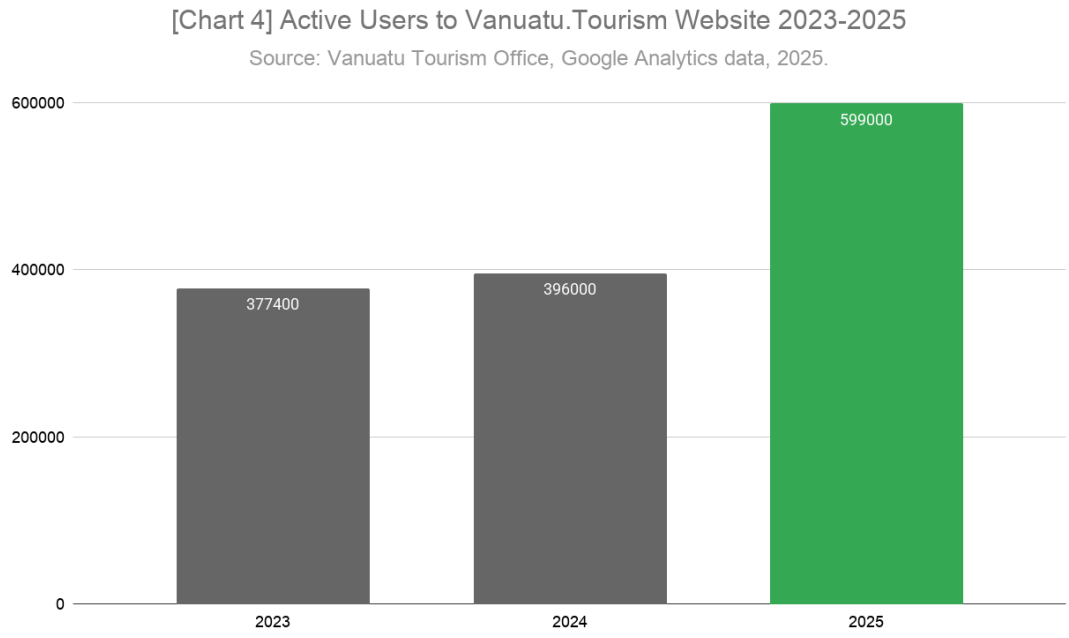
Objective: Convert interest into action

KPI 1: Drive +25% growth in traffic to the Vanuatu Tourism Office website

Result: **Web performance increased by 51% YoY.**

We successfully moved audiences down the funnel. Website visitation rose 51% YoY, from 396,000 in 2024 to 599,000 active users. As a leading indicator of booking intent, this demonstrates high-quality engagement, showing audiences moved from inspiration to researching and considering a trip.[23]

[Chart 4: Active users to Vanuatu.Tourism Website 2023-2025]



KPI 2: Increase planning intent among those considering Vanuatu above 28%.

Result: **Considerers of Vanuatu actively planning a holiday increased to 45%.**

The share of considerers actively planning a holiday rose from 28% to 45%, demonstrating a tangible shift from dreaming to a booking mindset. This movement bridges marketing engagement and commercial outcomes, proving the campaign nudged the audience through the decision-making process.[24]

Business

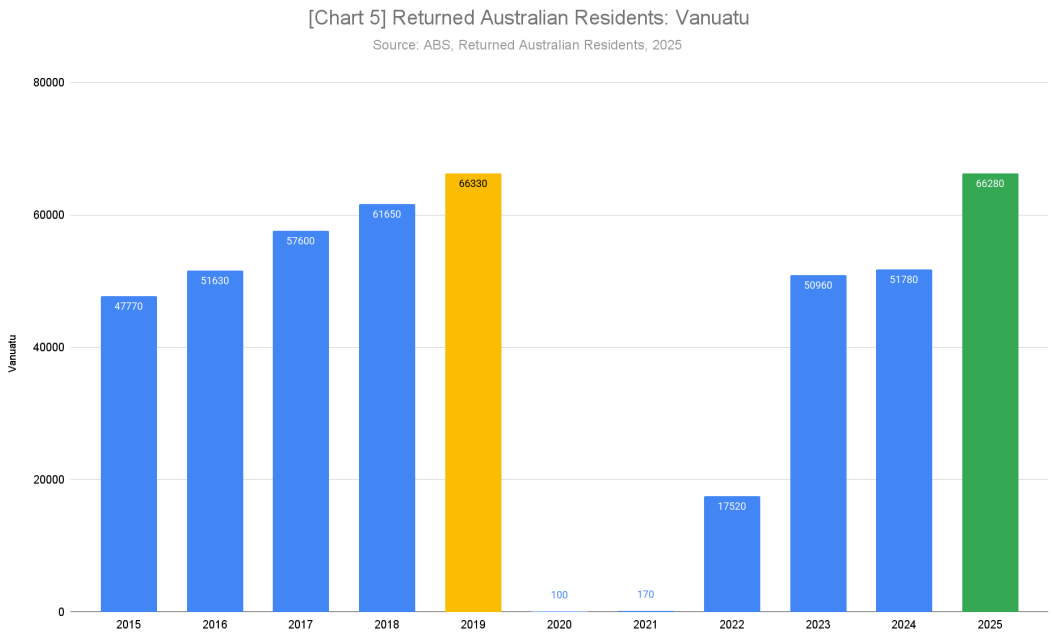
Objective: Restart inbound Australian visitation growth

KPI 1: Recover to 2019 level of 66,330 Australian visitors.

Result: **In 2025, Australian visitation to Vanuatu reached 66,230.[25]**

Recovering to 66,330 visitors was a stretch goal. In 2025, visitation reached 66,230, effectively restoring Vanuatu's pre-disaster peak. This rapid rebound was both symbolic and economic: it proved Australians were actively choosing Vanuatu again, validating the campaign's impact and the destination's renewed resilience.

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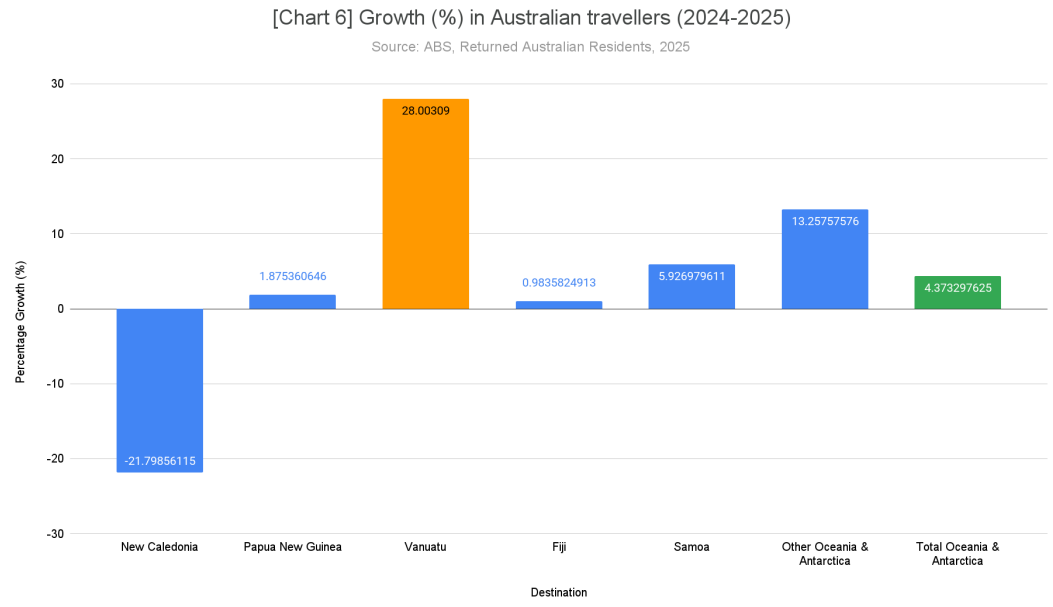


[Chart 5: Actual Australian arrivals to Vanuatu 2019-2025]

KPI 2: Achieve at least 8.6% growth in Australian arrivals YoY.

Result: **In 2025, Australian visitation to Vanuatu grew by 28% YoY.**

We aimed for the 8.6% historical growth rate against recent stagnation of 1.6% (2023/24) and a South Pacific category average of 4%. Vanuatu delivered +28% YoY growth - seven times the category average - representing 3 years worth of growth in a single year.[26]



[Chart 6: Growth in arrivals YoY across South pacific island destinations 2025]

[21] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[22] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[23] Vanuatu Tourism Office, Google Analytics data, 2025.
[24] Kantar Brand Tracking on behalf of Vanuatu Tourism Office, 2025.
[25] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Residents Returning Data, 2025.
[26] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Residents Returning Data, 2025.

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Q7. WAS THE CAMPAIGN A GOOD INVESTMENT?

The short answer is yes. We could have made this easy on ourselves: take the total Australian visitors, multiply by average spend per traveller, and land an ROI number so large it'd raise eyebrows (192:1). We didn't do that.

Instead, we've been conservative. Vanuatu was already growing before COVID and multiple disasters hit; Australian arrivals grew at 8.6% CAGR between 2016 and 2019. A recovering destination doesn't get to claim all its growth as campaign-driven, so we discounted for natural trajectory to get our **net visitor uplift** before attributing a single dollar to the work.

To work out the **economic impact per visitor per trip** we chose not to use 2025's per-visitor spend figures, which spiked significantly to USD$3,497, instead we wanted to be as conservative as possible in our calculation so we used the 2024 rate of USD$2,954[27].

After all that discounting, the **total attributable visitor uplift** lands at 8,772 more Australians, generating an estimated AUD$38.6 million in local economic impact for Vanuatu against a total destination budget of $1,793,150:

Net visitor uplift: To isolate the marketing contribution, we applied the 8.6% natural growth discount to our 2025 arrivals (66,250) and subtracted the 2024 baseline (51,780), resulting in a conservative uplift of 8,772 visitors.

Economic impact per trip: Based on 2024 IVS data, we calculated the local economic injection at USD$2,954 per visitor.

Total revenue uplift: 8,772 visitors × USD$2,954 = USD$25,912,488.

Total attributable revenue uplift: Using the 2025 exchange rate floor of 1.4887 USD to AUD, the total attributable revenue uplift is AUD$38,575,920.89.[28]

Overall ROI: AUD$38,575,921 / AUD$1,793,150 total marketing investment = **21.5:1**

For every dollar spent, Vanuatu got twenty one back into its economy. In an economy this dependent on visitor dollars, where tourism isn't a growth lever but a survival one, a 21:1 return means money in the pockets of local guides, guesthouse owners, and market vendors across the archipelago.

[27] Pacific Tourism Organisation, International Visitor Survey Data: Vanuatu, 2025
[28] Xe Currency Data, 2025.

Q8. DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RESULT WAS NOT DUE TO OTHER FACTORS

Natural recovery from disaster

After a natural disaster, some recovery is expected. Travellers return, flights resume, and life moves on. But Vanuatu's situation was different. Multiple disasters had done more than damage infrastructure, they'd damaged confidence. In a category where Fiji spends heavily to stay front of mind, a passive recovery strategy wasn't a strategy at all. Without deliberate, compelling work to rebuild consideration, Australian travellers had every reason to look elsewhere and plenty of better-funded alternatives waiting to catch them.

Expanded airline routes & trade activity

New direct services from Qantas, Jetstar, Solomon Airlines, and Virgin Australia increased seat capacity. However, routes alone could not restore demand. Airline advertising leveraging sale airfares & discount packages typically operate lower in the funnel, selling seats rather than creating destination desire. Our campaign addressed the upstream task: rebuilding confidence and ensuring Australians actively considered Vanuatu when shortlisting holidays.

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Exchange rate stability

Between 2023-2025, the VUV/AUD exchange rate remained tightly range-bound, with the cost of 1,000 Vatu fluctuating by less than AUD$1.60.[29] This meant there was no material pricing advantage or disadvantage, so visitation growth cannot be attributed to currency movements.

Together, these factors suggest that while supportive conditions existed, they do not sufficiently explain the scale of uplift achieved.

[29] Xe Currency Data, 2025.

Q9. GIVE CONTEXT TO BUDGET IN COMPARISON TO COMPETITORS.

Budget is less

Q10. GIVE CONTEXT TO THE BRAND'S OVERALL BUDGET.

Brand budget is more

Q11. MEDIA BUDGET ELABORATION

The 2025 budget increased to support newly launched flight routes but remained far below better funded destinations like Tourism Fiji, Tourism New Zealand and domestic destinations like Tasmania. Investment was weighted toward paid and owned channels to build upstream consideration and clearly articulate Vanuatu's distinctiveness, while earned and shared media amplified the social-first creative. Despite a modest budget relative to the competition, the campaign significantly outperformed expectations, helping drive +28% growth in Australian arrivals (seven times the Pacific Island category average) and a 21:1 return on investment. Demonstrating how distinctive creativity and efficient channel selection can generate disproportionate return on media investment.

Q12. DESCRIBE OWNED MEDIA ACTIVITY

Owned media played a central role in converting inspiration into intent. The optimised Vanuatu.travel website served as the primary conversion hub, housing itineraries, experience content, flight information and planning tools that supported deeper research and trip consideration. All paid, earned and shared activity directed traffic here. Vanuatu Tourism Office's owned social channels (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok) hosted full episodic content, cutdowns and behind-the-scenes assets, enabling sequential storytelling and ongoing engagement. These channels allowed us to control narrative, reinforce distinct brand cues, and capture high-intent behaviours beyond the initial media exposure.

Q13. OUTLINE ANY SPONSORSHIPS

NA

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Q14. OUTLINE COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS

> Audio
>
> Digital Display
>
> Digital Video (long and short form)
>
> Paid Social Media
>
> Organic social
>
> Influencer/creator
>
> Website
>
> Trade show collateral

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