



Tourism education and training

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Abstract

In this critical note, author outlines the trends on skills those would be required during for a changing tourism and hospitality landscape. Author identifies the current skill gaps in the sector. Paper also discusses the new opportunities for tourism and hospitality graduates in related sectors. Author critically examines the readiness to meet such requirements and advises on preparations to be made therefore.

Keywords: Tourism, education, training, manpower needs, skills

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Introduction

Prior to the current meltdown and the downturn following the tragic events of 26/11 at Mumbai, India's economic growth story has fuelled unprecedented interest in our country. This has lead to a flow of capital and surge of confidence amongst Indian companies many of whom are now charting an aggressive globalisation plan symbolised by recent acquisitions in the international space. The success of our IT companies continues and an illustrative example is in the fact that over 65000 employees work overseas for just one Indian organisation in the new technology environment. The demographics of India are also changing. With a projected mobile user population of 500 million by 2010, communication, information, entertainment and technology are converging as never before.

While these changes offer enormous opportunities they also present challenges especially in the HR domain. Getting aspirants with the right skill sets, training them on an ongoing basis to face up to changes in an ever increasingly dynamic environment, rewarding and retaining personnel are all going to require tremendous attention. This will

require a paradigm shift in the way in which we view education and training, which have so far largely been in a static situation with regard to course content, teaching methodologies, skills of teachers and relationship between education and its applications in the corporate world. Even in the past there was a gap between knowledge acquired in a formal environment and that desired by those providing employment. This will increase unless there is a review of current practises and changes are introduced.

The recent exodus of students to other countries has increased with the more liberal foreign exchange regime as well as ease of funding education through bank loans. This trend is likely to continue and will place further pressure on the supply side in tourism already adversely affected by the preference by students to opt for more lucrative assignments in other sectors like the BPO/ call centre companies and emerging retail chains. Vittorio Raddicce while heading Selfridges and embarking on a Bollywood promotion at his store said he was in the business of “Retail Theatre” and even shopping is emerging as an experiential exercise. The rapid growth plans of Dubai are also likely to influence the manpower base.

Changing priorities

The priorities in tourism have also altered from being a generator of foreign exchange with a focus on international arrivals to an industry capable of generating employment across a very diverse spectrum of skill sets and organisational size. This requires a shift in focus to domestic and regional tourism. It also requires the creation of content ranging from improving service attitudes of the lowest denominator such as porters, taxi drivers, waiters, housekeeping staff to training pilots for the huge inventory of airplanes for which orders have already been placed.

Indian carriers currently employ over 300 pilots of Non Indian origin thanks to a lack of training facilities. Already the emergence of private academies providing crew such as airhostesses, pursers and ground handling have helped fulfil some of the demand and the success of these institutions is likely to spawn imitations without adequate content. The increase in the Call Centre and BPO sector will require better fleet management, training of drivers and increased security measures. More inter-modal transport hubs are likely to

emerge with the completion of metro projects and the National Highway programme. Midway facilities need to match up to the aspirations of a new generation of travellers.

In the hotel sector too our inventory of rooms is set to more than double in the organised sector without a corresponding increase in training institutes to provide the necessary manpower. The unprecedented demand for rooms in gateway cities by business travellers has created a huge shortage in supply. Land prices have increased leading to a surge in speculative investment, extortionist tariffs without a corresponding increase in providing value. It will result in levels of enthusiasm in building hotels which are unlikely to be sustainable in the long run without a robust management in place.

The information available to potential investors is also weak without data on the exact nature of the segments filling hotel rooms, the demographics, purpose of visit, length of stay and the revenues. In cities like Bangalore where the need for extended stay is clearly the cause of increased demand, the so called unorganised sector is growing at a far more rapid pace with many serviced apartments.

Since the need for sensibly priced mid market and budget accommodation is likely to be the enduring business model, new chains and new configurations of accommodation are emerging which challenge some of the established parameters. In an accommodation unit the three broad areas of built space are the private spaces (the rooms, suites, and apartments), the public spaces (the lobby, corridors, restaurants, conference rooms, health club, swimming pool, business centre, front office) and the service areas (kitchen, stores, laundry, air-conditioning plants, boilers, water treatment etc). In order to improve efficiencies, sensitivity analysis to increase revenue generating areas and multi-use capabilities as well as look at better supply chain management, outsourcing of laundry/housekeeping/security/franchising of food outlets/branding of bars is desirable and needs analysts with creative abilities.

Opportunities and challenges

The extension of hospitality services to the management of malls, IT parks, Hostels for students, training of entrepreneurs seeking to turn their homes into bed and breakfast establishments will require dynamic training modules.

The JNURM programme intended to vitalise our urban environment presents opportunities to have better utilisation of community resources.

We are already witnessing a very high attrition rate in many of the sectors and HR units now look at a raft of reward and compensation packages to attract good talent and more importantly to retain talent. This means having a strong career building programme including off-sites, team building exercises and external training courses of varying duration as well as incentive programmes, conferences and motivational exercises.

Hitherto inaccessible places will now be better connected and more importantly be linked with a more robust communication network. This allows more remote places and units of smaller sizes to create a viable hospitality proposition. Project development therefore will be a component for ensuring success.

Already the web based world is changing the distribution pattern and having a dynamic web-based business model for marketing, reservations and handling loyalty programmes will become a key differentiator. Communicating using an internet platform requires using text, still and moving images, sound, voice over, music and this will require new skill sets which embrace technology and creativity.

Making choices amongst the different media channels available to reach a targeted segment will be increasingly complex and the allocation of scarce resources will mean increased sophistication in planning tools.

As travellers become more experienced their aspiration too will change. We can expect a demand for more experience based, participatory packages for varying durations as opposed to a sightseeing oriented, spectator based, static itinerary of fixed duration. This will require the creation of marketing and information collateral which will engage the visitor. The demand for the kind of collateral created at Mehrangarh will rapidly increase.

While India is a youthful country we must not lose sight of the fact that by 2010 there would be over 100 million people who will be over 60 years of age. The creation of active retiree communities as opposed to senior citizen conclaves will be the need of the hour. This will mean the management of built spaces with a clustering of services will become

far more important than just buildings. Here too the need for training and education of personnel will become the key differentiator.

As the affluence of the Indians increases and the sensitivity to our own rich tradition of crafts, music, textiles, art and dance forms gets enhanced, gifting and creating linkages between creative communities and their potential clients, both individual and corporate, many of whom will have a larger awareness of their Social responsibilities will be an important business opportunity. This in turn will mean bringing about relationships between diverse stakeholders through a transparent sponsorship and partnership programme.

More people of Indian origin resident overseas will have an increased desire to ensure that their children imbibe and retain a sense of their roots. They may encourage school leaving youngsters to spend their gap year in India working with NGOs and volunteer groups and also travelling within India.

Interest in alternate lifestyles, remedies, rejuvenation programmes, traditional treatments based on Ayurveda/ Unani, herbal remedies, organic produce and fresh farm based products will increase significantly and this in turn will require the escalation of training establishments, certification programmes and modifying content.

With the increase in the number of TV channels the interest in travel and travel related programmes will increase significantly and will require partnership between those with media skills and those with hospitality related skills.

Loyalty programmes will need to evolve as there will be a clutter which will lead inevitably to a sensible clustering. This has already happened in the West with UK leading the pack with the remarkable success of the Nectar programme.

We are already witnessing mergers and acquisitions and this too will increase.

Last word

Cheryl Anderson started her career as a school teacher, moved on to managing children on cruise ships as a Tour Guide, went on to formally train as a guide and then wrote her best selling “ Getting paid to travel”. Her crowning glory however was creating an online guide training programme which has now found acceptance at 1200 colleges across USA.

Online education is clearly the way of the future and obviously needs to be backed with real time experience and this again call for an overhaul of teaching methodologies.

Closer home our need to develop 14000 volunteers for the 2010 Commonwealth Games will test our capabilities to provide internationally acceptable standards of hospitality to visitors. While our warmth is well known, the need is to integrate this with efficiency and effectiveness.

Whatever has been described above is intended to give an insight to the rapid changes which are taking place and the need to adapt to these changes. This will require an assessment of our current status, of the gaps that exist between career opportunities and the relevance of the course content of our various programmes, the need to provide faculty with the resources and training to make their contribution more relevant and meaningful, and to upgrade our institutions with an infusion of relevant technology tools to meet the challenges of the future and to be able to harness opportunities to truly put India on the world map in every respect.