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DDI: People Power

Economy: A Leap Next Year?
A CAREER IN TRAVEL

By Vickneswaran Nair

Hungry for an exciting and rewarding career? No other career offers the challenge and excitement as the hospitality and tourism industry does. The advent of modern technology and the ease of travel have increased global awareness on hospitality and tourism. Travel has become a need in today’s globalised world as well as a part of one’s lifestyle and habit.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (1997), the economics of the 21st century will be dominated by three industries – telecommunications, information technology and tourism.

The travel and tourism industries have grown by 500% in the last 25 years. It is estimated that by the year 2020 there will be 1.6 billion annual international tourist arrivals worldwide. Collectively, these visitors will spend US$2 trillion. More importantly, the industry is undergoing a major shift with the switch from established areas like the Caribbean, Hawaii and the Mediterranean, to the Asia Pacific Region.

It is interesting to realise that in 1997 travel and tourism provided an employment rate of 10.5% of the total world employment, with up to 25% of all employment in some areas, such as the Caribbean. It has been estimated that by 2007 more than 100 million people worldwide will be employed in this sector. Tourism is now seen to be of importance to most countries of the world, including Malaysia.

GROWING FAST

More importantly, tourism is growing the fastest in the Asia Pacific region and is the number two foreign exchange earner in Malaysia, having brought in revenue of RM22 billion in 2001 from 12.7 million visitor arrivals.

Between 1997 and 2002, 166 new hotels have been opened in Malaysia, creating an additional 38,177 guest rooms requiring about 57,266 more employees to fill up the different job vacancies. Latest statistics of the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia) show 9.9 million tourist arrivals up to the month of September 2002.

The government is optimistic that tourism will become a fundamental pillar in our development because of its potential contribution to our economy.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) predicted that tourism employment in the Asia Pacific region would increase by more than 33 million. The rise in direct tourism employment demands qualified manpower, especially in both skills and managerial levels.

“As employment opportunities in hospitality and tourism continue to rise, demand for graduates with a good business sense, strong product knowledge and operational know-how becomes increasingly evident. It is not easy to find these sort of graduates in the market today,” said Eric Olmedo, Director of Studies at Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism.

Olmedo added: “Hotels, food production and distribution, travel and tour operators, event companies, independent restaurants, catering and food service organisations are today seeking these type of graduates – those who have good operational and product knowledge, good marketing and selling skills, are able to communicate and negotiate with clients and can think out of the box.”

MAIN SECTOR OF ECONOMY

The Malaysian government, through the 3rd Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3), the 8th Malaysia Plan and the National Economic Recovery Plan, has recognised tourism as one of the main sectors of the country’s economy.

Thus, hundreds of millions of ringgit have been allocated for tourism promotion and tourism development. Promotions such as “Malaysia, Truly Asia” have attracted thousands of new tourists to existing and new tourist destinations while “Cuti-Cuti Malaysia” has given domestic tourism a tremendous boost.

The Colours of Malaysia, Mega Shopping Carnival, International Conventions and Conferences, Gourmet Festivals, sporting events...
and so on have made the tourism industry vibrant and full of opportunities.

Malaysia is full of natural resources with a rich historical and cultural heritage, thus making it an ideal place to promote tourism. At the same time, it has good infrastructure like the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, network of highways, the light rail transit, shopping and entertainment centres, international class hotels and resorts, conference and trade centres, just to name a few. Therefore, the country is in an excellent position to become a destination in Asia in this millennium.

During this time, the nature of tourism has developed in scope and direction, away from traditional activities, such as the sunshine, sand and sea holidays to a wide range of new activities such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, sports and leisure activities, eco-tourism and sustainable tourism.

**A DYNAMIC CAREER**

The hospitality and tourism industry has grown dramatically in recent years and today is widely regarded as a major creator of jobs. The hospitality and tourism sector is one of the most interesting career fields in the world. It can be exciting, stimulating, dynamic, stressful, challenging, frustrating and, most importantly, FUN!

Hospitality and tourism is a serious business, representing millions of jobs and billions of dollars. The hospitality and tourism industry helps people get to business engagements and make more money, take vacations, see the wonders of the world, honeymoon, study abroad, visit health centres and spas, or even gamble their money away if they so choose!

What is the status of the hospitality and tourism industry? No one really knows, but the hospitality and tourism field is constantly changing. Indeed, change it must if it expects to keep pace with the exploding tourism growth created by a more affluent and mobile society.

What lies ahead in the hospitality and tourism industry? Dynamic growth and many opportunities.

According to all current indicators, opportunities for a career in the hospitality and tourism field are expected to increase substantially in the years ahead. Although, it is impossible to predict precisely what opportunities will exist, the fact remains that the growth of tourism is expected to generate a wide range of jobs for those who are trained and prepared.

**Whatever the field you are in, it is your responsibility to achieve a high level of professional training and development as is possible.**

**REWARDING CAREER**

A career in the hospitality and tourism industry is as fulfilling and rewarding as many jobs, and perhaps more so than most. The professional standard of the future is expected to be higher than it has been for many segments of the field. Only those who are prepared can expect advancement and a secure position in the industry of tomorrow. Whatever facet of this huge industry is chosen as a service career, the needs, desires, safety and comfort of the client or passenger must always come first.

People skill is the most important skill in the hospitality and tourism industry. The ability to relate to those you serve – whether you call them customers, clients, guests or passengers – is critical to success. The hospitality and tourism professional must deal with the public. Tourists today are sophisticated consumers. They expect superb service from well-trained and knowledgeable hospitality and tourism professionals. If you are personally committed to excellence in service and in your profession, you will find your place in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Add to your people skill, a willingness to get the necessary training and education, to start at the beginning, to work hard, to keep an open mind, be creative, to be flexible, to learn and explore something new about the world every day and you will fit the description of a hospitality and tourism professional headed for success.

No other industry satisfies so many needs, both personal and professional. Careers in hospitality and tourism give us the opportunity to:

- serve and help others
- learn more about the world and its people
- become more sophisticated, cultured and interesting
- experience personal growth
- work with interesting and exciting people
- meet new challenges
- become more independent
- be proud of ourselves and the jobs we do
- enjoy life and have FUN!

**A PROFESSION IN DEMAND**

The advancement of hospitality and tourism education at tertiary level will manifest itself into a mechanism of transfer of knowledge, expertise and technology within the global industry. To focus on these aspects, it requires a critical and careful shift towards creating an excellent teaching and learning environment.

A career in hospitality and tourism is one of the very few careers that can indeed make a vocation a vacation. Imagine a career that lets you be on holiday while on the job. Going places, seeing places and living life to the fullest. It is the way to go for people who long to see the world and enjoy meeting people.
Hospitality and tourism, in all its areas, offers great potential for job opportunities, career advancement and job satisfaction than any other industry. Tourism by nature is global and is today the world’s largest industry. Clearly there is and will be considerable international demand for highly skilled and qualified young people to manage the growth.

A DEMANDING PROFESSION

In this regard, professional training and education in the field of hospitality and tourism are highly important. The mode of training and education should also emphasise the elements of local and international flavour. As such, holding an internationally recognised qualification from a university of such stature in the field of hospitality and tourism is the key to the doors of exciting careers and to literally work in any part of the world.

While the exciting career demands hard work, it offers attractive salaries and excellent job prospects. There are ample opportunities for self-improvement as you will be able to travel, meet people and gain international exposure.

Being in the industry allows you to travel all over the world meeting different people from different backgrounds and cultures. Eventually, the experience and exposure gained will be of great value to you when you start your own hotel and tourism business enterprise.

GREAT CHOICE OF CAREER OPTIONS

With a hospitality and tourism management qualification, you can choose from a wide range of careers at supervisory and management levels. Your career fields include:

- Hospitality and Food Services
- Tourism
- Sports/Entertainment
- Marketing & Communications
- Consultancy
- Education & Training
- Food Industry
- Health
- Entrepreneurships

The hotel and catering industry or rather the hospitality industry is a dynamic industry in which no two days are the same. It provides enormous challenge in terms of both hotel and food service management and professional cookery. One is afforded great variety in one’s work, and hotels offer one the opportunity to meet people of all nationalities and from all walks of life. Various career opportunities exist for both men and women in this industry. Hotel Management, Food Service Management, Professional Cookery, Walters, Wine Stewards and Bartenders are some of the popular ones.

The travel and tourism career programmes are normally designed to prepare students for careers in travel and tour companies, cruise liners, hotels and resorts, advertising, public relations, tourism promotion board, event management companies and other related pursuits.

Workers in the hospitality and tourism industry often refer to these services as the front of the house and the back of the house. The front of the house consists of the jobs that allow the workers to interact directly with the guests. Positions in this area include the general manager, concierge, and sales/marketing director. Workers in the back of the house include the executive chef, chief of security, and controller. These jobs are very important even though these employees do not have direct contact with the guests. They do, however, ensure the success of the establishment.

COMPETITION

There are a number of professional paths an interested applicant might follow. Competition for employees at the managerial level is so keen that some members of the industry are offering signing bonuses as a way to stimulate growth for their establishments.

Each of the four segments of the hospitality industry – restaurant, culinary, lodging and tourism – is struggling to locate and maintain middle and upper-level personnel. The lodging industry is hiring at a faster rate than the restaurant or tourism segments.

Whatever the field you are in, it is your responsibility to achieve a high level of professional training and development as is possible. Sooner or later, your education will be recognised as a valuable and essential asset in employment consideration.

Samuel Johnson, the great essayist, once wrote, "The future is purchased by the present". Your entire career, advancement, earning power, lifestyle and professional status will depend to a very great extent on how well you plan and prepare yourself through balanced study and education.