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Hospitality & Tourism Vocation: Program Selection in a Private Institution of Higher Learning in Malaysia
Hospitality & Tourism Vocation: Program Selection in a Private Institution of Higher Learning in Malaysia

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Introduction

The tourism industry is the second largest foreign exchange earner in Malaysia, a developing nation in Southeast Asia. According to the Immigration Department of Malaysia’s (2007) latest statistics, for the year 2007, tourism contributed, 20.97 million tourist arrivals, an increase of 19.5% compared to the same period in 2006. The total tourist receipts for 2007 were RM46.1 billion (US$14.11 billion), an all time record. According to the WTTC (2007), Malaysia’s Travel & Tourism economy generated 1.2 million jobs in 2007 (which is 11.4% of total employment in Malaysia). By 2017, this figure is expected to grow to a total of 1.8 million jobs (PATA, 2007). Subsequently, the report by PATA also indicated the dramatic recent increases on tourist arrival that will continue to make Malaysia the largest Southeast Asia tourism marketplace.

In an effort to keep pace with increasing employment opportunities and the demand for qualified personnel, there has been an increase in the number of education institutions offering hospitality, tourism and culinary arts program in Malaysia (StudyMalaysia.com, 2008). This is similar to the trends recorded in the other parts of the world since 2000 as presented by Joseph and Joseph (2000).

The proliferation of new hospitality and tourism management programs in Malaysia, not to mention the increased enrolment figures of existing hospitality schools, has led to an increased concern about the programs’ accountability, credibility and effectiveness. Based on a tracer study that was conducted in 1997 by University of Technology MARA (UiTM), one of the oldest and largest hospitality and tourism education provider in Malaysia, approximately 70% of hospitality graduates were not working in the Malaysian hospitality or related industries (Talib, 1997). A similar study conducted in 2000 by UiTM further discovered that only 28% of their graduates were working directly in hospitality and related industries (AMUT, 2000). Other studies conducted in the United Kingdom and United States in the 1990s showed similar trends (Brotherton, 1993; Buchicchio, 1991; Cotton, 1991; Leslie, 1991; Mitchell, 1991; Purcell, 1993; Purcell & Quinn, 1996).

Thus, the understanding of why students choose this vocation and the university where they study is an important aim of this study. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to investigate the perception of students enrolled into the hospitality and tourism program at Taylor’s College in Malaysia towards their choice of this vocation and to investigate their choice of institution of higher learning. The word “term” is used in place of “semester” in this paper to describe the first three months of the study period of a student in a program.

Literature Review

Hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia had a strong vocational culture in order to meet the short-term needs of the industry rather than a traditional university education for the students’ and industry’s future requirements.

The rising importance of tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia is intrinsically linked to developments in the industry and the national education system. The early beginnings of hospitality and tourism education took the form of vocational and skills training with the focus on entry-level employment. Formal hospitality training began in 1967 when the Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management was introduced at the MARA Institute of Technology (which has subsequently become the MARA University of Technology). In 1975 the institute offered three other programs, namely, the Diploma in Chef Training, the Diploma in Tourism Administration and the Diploma in Institutional and Catering Management.

Hospitality programs gained momentum in the mid-1980s when rapid expansion in the hotel industry created a demand for skilled hotel staff. The National Productivity Corporation (NPC) of Malaysia introduced various trade and vocational courses in hotel and catering. This period also saw the establishment of non-degree conferring colleges with collaborative ventures with foreign universities. Private colleges began to offer hospitality and tourism program leading to diploma, higher and advanced diplomas, which could be used as requisites for entry into reputable hospitality and tourism institutions in France, Switzerland, Australia, Britain and the United States. Among the first private colleges to offer hospitality courses were Stamford College in 1980 and the French partnered Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism in 1987.

A major shift in education policy in the mid 1990s was to liberalise higher education and gradually make undergraduate education accessible to the general population, with a national