

A STUDY OF GAP ANALYSIS BETWEEN TOURISM INDUSTRY AND TOURISM EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The yawning gap that exists between the tourism industry and the academia stresses upon the need to determine the services that attract and retain foreign and domestic tourists. This paper concerns the extent to which tourism higher education meets the needs and expectations of the tourism industry in India. To do this, the perceptions of tourists and managers in the tourism industry are compared with those of educators and students in tourism higher education. The current study is conducted not only on the basis of requirements identified by previous researchers, but also on the basis of the need to provide an ongoing pool of skilled employees to facilitate growth in the tourism industry. The stakeholders, students, university authorities' and sector representatives' reactions have been examined to judge the effectiveness of the formal education programs and suggestions have been made to prepare the students for the tourism industry.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum, Tourism Education, Tourism Industry, Internship, Industrial Training.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is currently the world's largest industry and the fastest growing sector of the market. Worldwide tourism is ranked second highest revenue-generating industry next to the oil industry. It is viewed as multidimensional, possessing physical, social, cultural, economic and political characteristics. Educators [1] identified that the multidisciplinary nature of the tourism industry requires qualified personnel with abilities to synthesize and integrate their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Still very few people in the tourism industry speak multiple languages, are proficient in hi-tech computer skills or have a good knowledge of statistics and how to utilize them. There is a

constant need for educators to retain an up-to-date knowledge of trends in the tourism industry and practices to ensure that the academic perspective is consistent with the industry approach [2]. Littlejohn and Watson [3] advocate the inclusion of international languages as a compulsory addition to the curriculum without which causes both financial and opportunity losses and the inability to adapt to upcoming challenges can occur. The need for internationalizing the curriculum with aims to prepare and equip students for challenges of globalization has been pointed out by Sangikul [4].

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Existing curriculum in higher institutions generally places more emphasis on classroom instructions without adequate skills development. Therefore, tourism curriculum designers need to meet the dynamic industry requirements that develop the students' managerial skills such as leadership quality, the ability to solve problems and dealing with customers.

Students may enroll with wide educational backgrounds and interests and would plan to graduate with different likings, either to work in the hospitality sector, the transportation sector, the food-service industry, the attractions sector, or perhaps in the public sector or an economic development agency. An examination of the tourism educational literature indicates that the tourism industry has criticized tourism education for not adequately preparing people for employment in the industry [5-7]. Furthermore, the tourism curriculum has neither kept pace with developments in quality education, nor adequately served the needs of the tourism sector [8]. Another reason why the tourism industry does not recognize tourism education is because employers are often confused about what educational courses are on offer. In order to be more competitive, tourism education should be tailored to meet the needs of the tourism industry in terms of the professional skills required [9]. If the design of tourism curriculum neglects tourism industry needs, tourism education will not be sustainable and ultimately will not benefit the development of the tourism industry. A greater dialogue between the tourism industry and tourism education is therefore vital.

NEEDS OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

The boom in free trade implies more travel for pleasure and business, both from within and outside the country. Being a multidimensional industry, tourism encompasses a vast variety in

itself. These are Sports tourism, Spiritual tourism, Medical tourism, Social tourism, Food tourism, Eco tourism etc. apart from traditional tourism meant only for entertainment and recreation.

It is characterized by large number of small and medium sized enterprise along with multinational large companies. Tourism, as a labour-intensive industry, is both complimented and criticized for its impact on employment. Some give credit to the tourism industry for providing mechanism for generating employment opportunities for both developing countries with surplus labour and for industrialized countries with high levels of unemployment [11]. Others question the value and quality of tourism jobs, with a lack of higher-level jobs resulting in a lack of career development[7].

Professionally educated and trained employees are required in various fields:

1. Chefs/ cooks in restaurants having hands on multi-cuisine along with the taste of authentic food from the deep indoors of the country.
2. Experts in hotel management to provide comfortable and required accommodation.
3. Trained and recognized guides to lead the tourists. Guides to have the complete knowledge of the local area including the history, geography, architecture, ecology, environment, customs, culture and traditions, food and clothing, multiple languages (according to the prospective tourists) including local, national and foreign languages.
4. Trained travel agents to facilitate air, train and bus ticketing. Also providing for tour guide.

There is a requirement to generate a proper system of calculating hotel, restaurants, bed and breakfast, guest houses etc. in order to

know the exact number of tourists in the country. Then only we can accurately know the domestic tourists, as the foreign tourists can be calculated through the immigration department. As per the respondents, some other major problems apart from tourism education were related to general education. For example, developing the habits of hygiene and sanitation, proper security, an insight of "atithi devobhav", etc. Inadequate knowledge and skills prevail in the areas of world economics, currency exchange, natural disasters, terrorism, tourism management, multi-languages, information communication technology in tourism and new tourism product development.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES TO TOURISM EDUCATION

Many educational institutions all around the world offer varied courses to cover different aspects of travel and tourism. There are around 380 colleges in India offering approximately 555 such courses under the degree of M.A, BHM, BHCT, PGDCA, MTM, MBA, B. Sc, M. Sc, and other diplomas, bachelors and masters level programs. Although tourism higher education in India continues to grow, it faces great challenges.

Despite the relatively large number of university pass outs, there is a shortage of tourism workforce at the operational fronts in major tourist destinations. The changing global employment markets as well as technological advances are two critical considerations to be taken into account in terms of employability skills programs or curricula. Indications clearly are that:

- The existing tourism curricula do not keep track of dynamism of the tourism industry
- Courses taught in tourism institutions are either too broad or lack focus

- There is an insufficient hands-on experience opportunity for students
- There is ineffective language training other than in the mother tongue
- There is an inability to apply theory courses taught in the classes to the actual tourism industry work-place environment
- The teaching materials are instruct or focused that cover mainly their interests, and understanding is not being updated regularly
- Prescribed textbooks are either very expensive (international publishers) or written by international instructors who focus primarily on issues and environments different from Indian tourism perspectives.

Hospitality and Tourism is an interdisciplinary field requiring different employability competency that has yet to gain attention by tourism and hospitality educators in the academia. If the travel and tourism industry in India hopes to sustain itself, it will need personnel who are both willing and enthusiastic workforce. For this awareness has to be created amongst the society. There are various scholarship programs offered by the government but are to be propagated. Developing and implementing an effective tourism education is just half the battle; recruiting and then retaining individuals with the right blend of interpersonal and technical skills is also challenging because tourism needs people who are both trained and inspired. It is a hard fact that not all fresh tourism industry entrants feel 100% optimistic towards working in the tourism industry. Many of them continue to dream only to reach top managerial positions without adequate learning and tricks of the trade. They really need to sink into the realism of having to "climb the ranks," in a tourism & hospitality environment.

On-the-job training programs, internships or placements are further practical means to get

an early exposure to working in the tourism environment. Industrial training enhances the ability of students to critically reflect on the tourism business. Six or twelve months in industry placements [termed IBL or Industry Based Learning], i.e. once the students have completed a substantial part of their studies, enables them to test and contextualize their acquired knowledge in real-life situations. This concept is widely being practiced in India and abroad. From the employer's perspective, it is a golden opportunity to test the students themselves during internships and making the decision to or not to recruit them. In fact students can be molded as per the requirement of the particular firm during such training programs. Some small firms see internships a source of inexpensive labor due to shortage of funds and provide a good platform beneficial both, to the students as well as the company.

SUGGESTIONS

Research work of students should be integrated with tourism organization. Though this way, the company's values may be aligned with education. Students fairly unimaginative in their job and enterprise orientation should be awakened by tourism educators about practical understanding, such as career growth and structure, pay, promotional opportunities, working conditions, expected skills and training requirements, to prepare graduates in a more realistic manner for India's demanding tourism industry.

The faculty composition of both international and local teaching staff in educational institutions may add an international dimension. International teaching staff can share personal experiences from back home and pin-point the similarities and contrasts between India's tourism and hospitality and abroad. This uplifts students' learning and broadens their perspectives in the class.

Tourism related projects should be a part of study which can take up day-to-day issues on the pattern of learning by doing. Student-led field work outside class is a capstone activity that develops skills and the crucial understanding of the actual tourism industry environment. Field trips are often undertaken with a dominating spirit of edutainment.

Educational institutes need to provide a platform to interact with industry employers. Industry-based training can assist students in acquiring the needed competencies to enrich the tourism industry.

Activities like campus recruitment; panel discussions etc with prospective employers should be the integral part of curriculum. This could wisely connect students, or graduating students about to enter the workforce and to share opportunities in the tourism industry.

Modern teaching pedagogies should be involved to provide a better understanding of subject topics, such as out-of-class visits to industrial sites, inviting professional guest speakers, case study discussions, internships, brain storming sessions, the use of videos, films & documentaries, individual and group presentations, thesis/ non-thesis academic writings that combine adequate skills and necessary knowledge required by the tourism industry. This way students gain confidence through meaningful presentations and effectively passing on messages in their written reports, all of which will definitely be applicable to the tourism industry in the future.

The institutions schools should prepare students not only for working for others but also for working for oneself i.e. creating a start-up mentality and entrepreneurial skills. Establishing entrepreneurship training programs will bring significant contributions to the students' skills, increasing the number of graduates interested in creating their own

tourism venture after graduation. Various schemes of start-ups are announced by our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi that is helpful to the students

The industrial training experience improves students' skills and abilities and prepares them against unexpected situations. The training coordinator should work with the organizations to plan intended use and compensation of interns. This should include positions and responsibility given to interns, department rotation, working hours, meals, transportation, uniforms and accommodations. Even salary, social security insurance and health insurance should be considered.

More cooperation between the educational institutions and industry is necessary and should be developed. This may be achieved by appointment of senior practitioners as external examiners, the use of advisory panels and visiting lecturers to enhance understanding between organizations and universities.

There is a significant scope of research in the area. Some of the examples are:

- (i) There is no suggested formula to count the hotels and accommodations in India. The data is collected only from those hotels and restaurants which are registered with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.
- (ii) A broad and appropriate basis is to be developed to calculate the more accurate number of domestic and foreign tourists in India. This would help us frame a better policy for tourist industry.

Small vocational courses with government support should be advocated and propagated to help the local guides, travel agents and hotel managers without professional degrees. Specific courses must be designed for specific purpose and region. Most importantly, an awareness must be created about these

programs among the local its. This would be immensely helpful for domestic tourists who long for professional but economic travel assistance. The professional approach and offers would help not only in attracting new tourists but also retaining the old ones.

CONCLUSION

India is a very vast country with huge cultural, social, environmental, regional and lingual variations. Hence there cannot be a single tourism education program model that can be applied for all institutions. Each institution should for whom the program is intended and what is expected from it to fulfill the need of diversity. The education should provide the needed tools and experience to students to prepare them take the future work life responsibility, to create awareness about the scope of tourism industry and to attract students by the dynamic life of tourism industry. The tourism industry should be involved in curriculum development of educational institutions in such a way that the course contents and delivery are consistent with the industry expectations.

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