

# **The Issues of Hospitality and Tourism Education in Malaysia**

## **Abstract**

Malaysian hospitality and tourism industry has experienced a remarkable growth and received strong support from the government. The industry is recognized as one of the major industries in providing foreign exchange earnings and generating employment to the people. Therefore, the need for training in tourism and hospitality in upgrading the competencies level of workforce to participate in the industry is very important. Over the last 30 years, the number of tourism and hospitality education program in Malaysia has increased significantly. Presently, tourism and hospitality education is offered by a number of public and private universities, colleges and polytechnics. This paper describes some of the research issues and concerns pertaining to the hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. The objectives of this study are to critically examine the content of the tourism and hospitality curriculum offered by relevant higher learning institutions and to determine whether the present curriculum contents are what have been expected by the relevant stakeholders such as educators and industry practitioners. This proposed study will be beneficial to the academics in the relevant field in designing an effective hospitality curriculum which is flexible and well adapted to the dynamic environment. The expected outcome of the study provides educators a guideline as what the contents of the program should be focused on in order to prepare competent graduates to enter the hospitality job market.

**Keywords:** Hospitality Education, curricular, tourism and hospitality industry, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

The tourism industry is recognized as one of the major industries in providing foreign exchange earnings and giving employment to the people. The latest figure provided by the Tourism Malaysia website indicates that the number of tourist arrivals to the country is increasing yearly as well as the total tourist receipts (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). For example, for the year 2009, tourism contributed 20.6 million tourist arrivals, an increase of 7% compared to the previous year. The latest tourist receipts registered for 2009 was over RM53 billion, an increase of 8% compared to the same period in 2008. This significant economic contribution of the industry to the country has resulted in the government to recognize the fully important of the industry and to make Malaysia one of the largest tourism marketplaces in the region (Nair and Whitelaw, 2008)

In order to cater to increasing employment opportunities and the demand for well competent workforce, the number of tourism and hospitality education program offered by higher learning institutions in Malaysia has increased rapidly. Over the last 30 years, the training and education for tourism and hospitality is carried out by public and private agencies (Goldsmith and Zahari, 1994). It is indicated that the need for training in tourism and hospitality in upgrading the competencies level of workforce to serve the industry is very important. In Malaysia, presently, tourism and hospitality education program is offered by a number of public and private universities, colleges and polytechnics. The certification in the form of degrees and diploma are awarded for the students who have successfully completed the program over certain duration of time. Since the first hospitality and tourism training program being introduced by National Productivity Corporation (NPC) in the early 70s (Goldsmith and Zahari 1994) and subsequently pioneered by MARA Institute of Technology or UiTM (School of Hotel and Tourism Management) which was established in 1967, hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia has undergone through so many changes.

Therefore, this article provides some of the issues that are related to the current perspectives of tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia which have merit of research undertakings. In this article, I also briefly address some of the previous studies that are related to tourism and hospitality education. This article is part of the ongoing doctorate study which focuses on tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia. To date, there is lacking of extensive study being conducted directly about the current state of hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. Based on the literature search, there were two relevant articles that describe the issues of hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. First, a study by Nair and Whitelaw (2008) which explained some of the factors that have influenced the tourism and hospitality students in selecting tourism and hospitality program of various institutions in the country. Second, a study by Goldsmith and Zahari (1994) which briefly described the hospitality training and education aspects by

emphasizing the significant aspect of training and education to the students and to the country in upgrading the skills and competencies of the workforce for the industry. Therefore this study recognizes this existing gap and contributes to the lack of studies in this area.

### **Research in Tourism and Hospitality Education**

The issues of tourism education have drawn various interests from tourism scholars lately especially in analyzing the effectiveness of the curriculum (Sheldon et al., 2008). In Malaysia, empirical or scholarly research on tourism and hospitality education is relatively new but yet there are certainly many issues that need to be examined such as curriculum development, curriculum contents and the quality of the programs. The tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia is developing at the fast rate with so many public and private high learning institutions are offering such program. The quality of the programs has to be monitored and investigated in order to produce the right kind of graduates with the right kind of mindsets. This can be achieved partly by studying the tourism and hospitality curricular by getting significant input and feedbacks from the various stakeholders.

It is very important that higher education to develop a very comprehensive tourism and hospitality curricula in preparing graduates for the present and the future of the industry (Tribe 2001). Tribe (2002) also suggested that tourism and hospitality education must be able to equip students with a more liberal education so that at they can think creatively and innovatively for a wider career opportunities. Based on the identified literature, most of the studies tend to focus on the contents of the tourism and hospitality curriculum which being developed exclusively for developed countries. As rightly pointed out by Jayawardena (2001), the contents of the tourism and hospitality program offered by the developing countries including Malaysia also need to be critically investigated in order to effectively provide quality education and training in the respective field. According to Inui et.al (2006), tourism education tends to focus on enabling students to find suitable career opportunities in the industry and overlooks the other important part of education; to provide students with a philosophical and sociological foundation of tourism education. Thus, it is suggested that a well balanced of vocational and liberal aspects of tourism education to be taught to the students for producing a well-rounded graduate.

According to Nair and Whitelaw (2008), tourism and hospitality management programs offered by higher learning institutions in Malaysia have increased rapidly and therefore the issues of accountability, credibility and effectiveness of the program should be of concern among the stakeholders such as education providers, government and students. Consequently, this situation contributes to lack of focus within current offering of tourism and hospitality management

educational program with many high learning institutions provide different contents and scope of the programs.

Nevertheless, there are many other areas of research that can be performed in regards to the tourism and hospitality education. For example, Jayawardena (2001) claims that most universities and colleges in developing countries offer tourism and hospitality program which lack of industry and market orientation. Furthermore, the same author also articulated that many tourism and hospitality program offered by high learning institutions in developing countries are simply an imitation from the program that are offered by developed countries. Therefore, the program appears to be lack of focus in terms of balancing theory and relevant practices and whether the curriculum contents developed are in line with what have been expected by the relevant stakeholders such as industry players, community and so on. Other interesting issue pointed by the same author is for a study to be conducted in investigating whether the program contents are considering local sensitivities such as religious and political issues. In Malaysia, it is a challenge to understand multiethnic and multireligious society especially in educating the students on certain sensitive issues such as dress code requirements, halal issues and so on. This is a very interesting argument indeed. The question here is that how can we verify such claim? This is definitely one the areas that warrant further research.

Another interesting study that can be replicated for will be a study performed by Ernawati (2003). The researcher reported the outcome of hospitality education research on tourism education in Indonesia. The researcher examined the current curriculum content and determined the relevance of the tourism curriculum for careers in the industry by getting views from various stakeholders such as educators, students and industry practitioners. Interestingly, the study commented that over than half of respondents who consist of those various stakeholders such as tourism professionals, educators and government officials suggested that the current curriculum was irrelevant to careers in the industry. Therefore, it is interesting to know whether the same outcome may appear if the same study is conducted in Malaysia.

A study by Ring et al. (2009) also illustrates some of the important pictures regarding tourism and hospitality education. The researchers argue that despite that many tourism and hospitality programs are offered by various high learning institutions, little studies have been conducted on the way curricular are designed, its effectiveness and whether the program should be similar or different. This study explains the needs for revising the structure of tourism and hospitality curriculum in order to keep abreast with the changes of the industry. By analyzing the content of bachelor tourism program, the researchers offered suggestions on how to improve the various components of tourism curricular as perceived by academics as well as industry professionals.

## **Proposed research**

Based on reviews of the current research, there are indeed many areas of hospitality and tourism education that can be further investigated particularly in Malaysia. For example, a study maybe conducted to investigate the tourism and hospitality education and curriculum design among universities that offer the program in Malaysia. This study will determine whether the tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia satisfies the needs and aspirations of various important stakeholders such as tourism educators, students, industry and local community. Another study maybe to investigate the contents of the various tourism and hospitality program which are currently offered by the higher learning institutions in Malaysia and to compare and contrast what are the significant differences among those programs offered by the private higher learning institutions with those from public higher learning institutions.

The proposed study also may explain the issues and challenges of developing tourism and hospitality in Malaysia and identify some of the relevant factors that may influence the curriculum development. It also justifies why tourism and hospitality educators need to reexamine the present contents of the curriculum and realign with what have been outlined by the various tourism and hospitality scholars. Due to the financial constraints and time limitations, this ongoing research will only focus on the public higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Currently, there are eight public higher learning institutions in Malaysia that offer tourism and hospitality related program. **(Refer to table 1)**. However, there are also private higher learning institutions in Malaysia that offer a degree program in tourism and hospitality education program which to be reserved for a future study.

### **Objectives of the proposed research**

Based on the review of the current literature, the objectives of the study that will be carried by the author are summarized as follows:

- To critically examine the content of hospitality programs currently offered by higher learning institutions in Malaysia.
- To determine whether the present contents of hospitality curriculum is what has been expected by identified stakeholders
- To identify what are the common qualifications needed to enter the program
- To identify what are the teaching modes or delivery offered by these institutions.
- To suggest the correct structures of hospitality curricular that are in line with what various stakeholders (educators, students, industry and community in general) ask for.

This research will also determine to answer the following research questions:

- What are the contents of hospitality program currently offered by higher learning institutions Malaysia?
- What are the important components of curricular structures as perceived by the stakeholders?
- How should hospitality program be offered to the students?
- Why higher learning institutions need to be very selective in choosing the students for the tourism and hospitality program?
- How can these institutions provide very effective learning modes for studying tourism and hospitality?

## **Conclusion**

The expected outcome of this ongoing research will be significant for policy makers, educators and the industry to reflect on the current state of the hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia and to review the curricular if necessary. It is realized that the development of hospitality program is complicated due to the nature of the industry which is multidisciplinary and segmented (Lewis 2006). However, the curriculum of the program has to be carefully crafted based on various inputs from the stakeholders so that the content of the programs are flexible and well adapted to the dynamic environment. Furthermore, the role of education in producing knowledge workers in the tourism industry is very critical in order to sustain the industry to the highest level. Providing quality tourism and hospitality education must be a priority and this can only be achieved through proper curricular design that fit with the local contents and feedbacks from wider stakeholders such as students, educators, industry and society in general. The significant growth of various tourism and hospitality education available in Malaysia indicates that the industry is moving at the fast mode. Therefore, this phenomenon provides opportunities for relevant researchers to conduct various studies on these tourism and hospitality education issues and this proposed study highlights some of the important research areas to be investigated.

**Table 1**

<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>YEAR COMMENCED</b>	<b>PROGRAM</b>
UiTM	1996	B. Sc Hotel Management B. Sc Food Service Management
	2004	B. Sc. Tourism Management
Universiti Utara Malaysia	1999	Bachelor of Tourism Management
	2003	Bachelor of Hospitality Management
Universiti Putra Malaysia	2002	Elective courses in Hospitality & tourism under the Faculty of Business Administration & Economics) B. Management (hospitality, Tourism & Recreation)
Universiti Malaya	1996/97	2 elective courses in Hotel & Tourism Management under the Faculty of Business & Accountancy
	2002	B. Business (Hotel & Tourism Management)
Universiti Sains Malaysia	1975	Elective course for the B. Sc. in Housing, Building and Planning under the Faculty of Housing, Building & Planning
	2004	M. Sc. in Tourism Development
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	1989	Elective course in Tourism Planning for the Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning
	1997	Building and Planning under the Faculty of Built Environment
	1998	
Universiti Malaysia Sabah	1997	Bachelor of Business (Hotel Management)
	2006	Bachelor of Business (Tourism Management)

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	2007	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Tourism)
	2008	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Hospitality)

**Undergraduate Tourism And Hospitality Education In Public Higher Education Institutions**

Adapted from Bagul and Marzuki (2007)

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