

Reflections on the theme issue outcomes

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The way forward: how is Malaysian hospitality and tourism education working with industry?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to profile the *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* theme issue “The way forward: how is Malaysian hospitality and tourism education working with industry?” with reference to the experiences of the theme editors and writing team.

Design/methodology/approach – Structured questions were used to enable the theme editors to reflect on the rationale for the theme issue question, the starting point, the selection of the writing team and material and the editorial process.

Findings – Malaysia’s hospitality and tourism industry is facing an acute shortage of skilled employees, accentuated by the fact that jobs in the industry are not broadly appealing to Malaysians.

Practical implications – The hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia wants to employ graduates with a professional attitude and mindset, and to secure this objective, a greater focus on work-based learning is needed.

Originality/value – The paper draws on discussion and applied research to explore the hospitality and tourism industry–education collaboration in Malaysia and the ways in which employability and retention can be enhanced by a greater emphasis on work-based learning.

Keywords Malaysia, Lifelong learning, Industry, Education, Work-based learning, Hospitality and tourism

Paper type Viewpoint

Theme Editors Kashif Hussain, Neethiahnanthan Ari Ragavan, Vincent Tang Thien Ming and Chris Low Kam Loong share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.



Overview

Globally, hospitality and tourism education is at crossroads, as it faces numerous, simultaneous challenges. For example, society expects that hospitality education will result in employment with significant earning potential. Yet in the industry, the ever-changing expectations of customers must be met, and to stay competitive, productivity gains are sought – without affecting the levels of personal services. Disruptors such as Airbnb pose a further challenge to the status quo. Given these developments, graduates need to be well prepared so that they can respond to the dynamic industry changes that are occurring. This is the backdrop to the theme issue question: The way forward: How is Malaysian hospitality and tourism education working with industry? A list of the articles in this issue can be found in [Appendix](#).

Why, in your view, is your theme issue's strategic question important?

If Malaysia is to achieve its potential as a tourist destination, it must respond to the challenges faced by hospitality and tourism education. A number of headline statistics highlight Malaysia's tourism prospects. For example, Malaysia is currently the 11th most visited destination in the world, with 25.8 million tourist arrivals in 2018, contributing RM181.4bn to the economy, with 1.7 million jobs being the total contribution to employment. By 2028, Malaysia is expected to welcome 49.4 million tourist arrivals, contributing RM296.3bn (14.4 per cent) to the economy, with 2.3 million (13.2 per cent) being the estimated contribution to employment. This rate of growth presents an immense challenge to the Malaysian hospitality and tourism industry, as it is estimated that it will need skilled graduates for 600,000 new job opportunities in the coming decade (World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Travel and Tourism Economic Impact Report 2018 on Malaysia from: www.wttc.org).

Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?

University hospitality and tourism departments are complex organizations that are expected to deliver excellence in education, job placement and research. Balancing these demands with economic realities, changes in visitor behaviour and expectations and rapid advances in technology poses significant challenges that academic leaders must confront. A further dimension that adds to complexity is the ongoing internationalization of the hospitality sector, job placements and the proliferation of cross-border education and research collaboration.

The aim of this theme issue was to explore the role that lifelong learning can play in fostering a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by hospitality and tourism education and to begin articulating a practical vision for moving hospitality schools forward. This helped to frame a subset of questions:

- Q1. What paradigm shifts and new educational frameworks will be needed to support hospitality and tourism curriculum development?
- Q2. What new partnerships are needed to advance hospitality and tourism education and industry collaboration?
- Q3. What are the hospitality and tourism industry salary prospects as well as minimum wage and employability issues?

To explore these questions, the theme editors drew on their own academic and industry backgrounds and assembled a writing team consisting of both academics and industry

practitioners. This blend of skills and experience helped to ensure that the outcomes are of practical and theoretical value to hospitality and tourism education development with particular reference to current industry issues.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

The theme issue consists of an interrelated collection of studies that, taken together, addresses the overarching and secondary questions outlined earlier. In so doing, the issue explores aspects of curriculum development, academic partnerships with the industry and minimum wage and industry's employability issues.

In planning terms, a wide-ranging invitation initiated our thinking about the content and focal points, later refined by a discussion at the *QS Subject Focus Summit on Hospitality and Tourism* event on 5-7 December 2018 that included a workshop session for the *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* writing team. The authors were invited to participate in a two-hour workshop during the summit, facilitated by the theme editors who outlined the theme issue objectives and *WHATT* guidelines for the contributors.

We are pleased that it was possible to foster genuine collaboration, as the articles in this collection reflect the efforts of both academics and industry practitioners. We specifically asked them to discuss the theme issue question and sub-questions with reference to their own insights and experience of the Malaysian hospitality and tourism industry and related educational provisions, and this enabled the preparation of well-rounded articles that focus on addressing the industry's concerns.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

The hospitality and tourism industry is no different from other service industries that are struggling to adapt to and keep pace with the disruptive digital impacts on their industry and the economy as a whole. In hospitality and tourism, technological innovations are affecting accommodation, food services and travel and planning activities. An important discussion point related to the inclusion of digital technologies in the curriculum with reference to: learning outcomes and pedagogy, developing professional skills for employment and knowledge about mobile technologies and apps, automation technologies, cloud technology, robotics and artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and big data concepts. A further discussion point is related to the extent to which hospitality and tourism education providers should consider offering work-based learning approaches and incorporating the 2u2i industry–education approach. The benefits arising from this include the involvement of the industry in curriculum development, the enhancement of graduate employability, closer alignment with the skills required by the industry and the facilitation of study programmes with domestic and foreign academic partners. A broader-based partnering approach adds value for students, as they experience different societies and cultures. It also potentially yields monetary benefits for the participating institutions.

Thinking about your peer review process: What went well and why?

To set up the theme issue, a workshop session at the *QS Subject Focus Summit on Hospitality and Tourism* event on 5-7 December 2018 was organized. This went well, and it enabled the theme editors to outline the nature of the theme issue, its strategic question and related key questions. It also provided an ideal forum for face-to-face discussions about the *WHATT* approach and guidelines for contributors. In particular, it enabled us to highlight the importance of collaborative industry–education work and writing. When draft versions of the papers had been received, the review process followed *WHATT*'s standard procedures. A number of meetings were arranged to review the articles, and the theme

editors and lead authors worked closely together to incorporate review comments and suggested improvements. It was an interesting exercise for the theme editors because the emphasis was different from standard academic writing – the aim being to highlight and respond to issues that are of concern to the industry. That said, the involvement of industry practitioners at editorial, review and author levels was challenging, as our goal was to bridge the academia–industry divide. The essence of the challenge lies in the fact that academics and practitioners think and work in distinctly different ways. That said, working together on this issue was a memorable and ultimately successful experience. One of the theme editors is an industry practitioner, and he said that this theme issue helped him to learn about the complexities of developing hospitality and tourism curriculum and maintaining the programme standards set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The MQA requires educational providers to comply regardless of what the industry wants and expects, and this can be a source of tension. However, new windows of opportunity are much closer as an outcome of this theme issue, and work-based learning and 2u2i approaches are better understood and appreciated. It was interesting to reflect on a comment made by an author who is an industry practitioner who said that it is much easier to read and critically reflect on academic research than the task of writing an article. The practitioner-author described this as a “mountain climbing task”, but a fruitful learning experience that went deeper than conventional industry journalism.

What are the most significant outcomes of your theme issue in terms of the contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice?

This theme issue contains nine articles spanning conceptual papers, case studies and applied research about Malaysia. In sequence, the topics covered are as follows: hospitality and tourism education through the lens of an emerging digital economy, the role and value of industry–education partnerships based on work-based learning, enhancing student employability via the 2u2i education–industry programme, recent advances in hospitality and tourism education, the effective design and implementation of hospitality internship programmes, the perceptions and preferences of food and beverage outlet hiring managers, the role of education in human capital development, minimum wage issues in the industry and the promotion of hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia.

What are the implications for management action and applied research arising from your theme issue outcomes?

Malaysia’s hospitality and tourism industry is facing an acute shortage of skilled employees, accentuated by the fact that jobs in the industry are not broadly appealing to Malaysians. The industry is keen to attract graduates with a professional attitude and mindset, and to secure this objective, a greater focus on work-based learning is needed. This issue also highlights the fact that Malaysia’s minimum wage policy has proven to be cost-effective for the industry, but that, as yet, has not helped to enhance employee motivation and productivity. This is a facet of the industry that needs attention and support by both educational providers and the industry as they seek to model professional practice in their respective development approaches. Short internship programmes (typically three to six months) are not viewed by stakeholders (students, industry, educational providers) as especially productive because work-based learning approaches and 2u2i programmes and/or collaboration with organizations like the Global University for Lifelong Learning better reflect the changing needs of the industry. For educational providers, the wider adoption of digital technologies within the curriculum is viewed as a priority as funding for this

becomes available to augment the graduate skill set, enhance employment prospects and add value for employers.

Although much has been done by the Malaysia Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education and other agencies to promote hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia, this initiative will need to be sustained, given the anticipated 600,000 new hospitality and tourism job opportunities in Malaysia in this decade. Further support from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture is clearly needed. Finally, the strategic question “The way forward: How is Malaysian hospitality and tourism education working with industry?” could also be applied to other ASEAN nations, so that they are able to better understand how their hospitality and tourism education sector is working with the industry.

Having served as a *WHATT* theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?

Lead Theme Editor Kashif Hussain writes:

It seems to be the case that anyone who has had the opportunity to theme edit a *WHATT* theme issue wants to do it again and to extend the industry–education collaboration still further. This is the third time that I have served as a theme editor of *WHATT* and I’d like to thank managing editor Richard Teare for inspiring me. In 2002, I was a postgraduate student when I first encountered Richard. At the time, he was the editor of the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, and with his support, I managed to publish two papers. Since then, Richard has maintained contact and promoted a fruitful and important approach to applied hospitality and tourism research and writing. I have come to appreciate his unique advice on scholarly research and specifically the importance of the language and engagement of academic writing. I too now believe that academic writing should be as clear and simple as possible so that it is accessible to students from diverse cultures around the world. The framework of *WHATT* with its relatively unique theme issue approach is enabling applied hospitality and tourism research to advance by involving industry practitioners in collaborative research and writing. As with this theme issue, the approach yields significant benefits in bridging the gap between academia and industry and the outcomes of this form of collaboration are influential for local authorities and policy makers too.

Appendix. Theme issue contents (*WHATT* v12 n2 2020)

Hospitality and tourism education in an emerging digital economy

Samuel Adeyinka-Ojo, Sean Lee, Shamsul Kamariah Abdullah and John Teo

This article addresses the strategic industry challenge relating to new education frameworks. This article identifies key digital literacy and employability skills that students and educators need to develop to better understand and negotiate the changing, digitally focused landscape of the hospitality and tourism industry.

Work-based learning: an approach towards entrepreneurial advancement

Abdul Murad bin Ahmad, Kashif Hussain, Erdogan Ekiz and Vincent Tang Thien Ming

This article promotes the adoption of a work-based learning approach by highlighting the benefits to students, organizations and the economy. It provides a review and synthesis of current literature, including two case studies that demonstrate the application of entrepreneurial education in different countries.

Enhancing hospitality and tourism graduate employability through the 2u2i program

Mohd Fadil Mohd Yusof, Anthony Wong, Ghazali Ahmad, Roslizawati Che Aziz and Kashif Hussain

This article presents the concept of 2u2i – two years of attachment with the university and two years of attachment with the industry – which is a new learning mode introduced by the Ministry of Education as a strategy to enhance the employability of university undergraduate-degree students in Malaysia.

The advancement of hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia

Abdul Murad bin Ahmad, Kashif Hussain, Erdogan Ekiz and Vincent Tang Thien Ming

This article explores how hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia is working with the industry. This article provides specific recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders that, if implemented, could facilitate further improvements in tourism and hospitality education in support of the industry in Malaysia.

Hospitality internship program insights

Arif Kamisan Pusiran, Yuzainy Janin, Sarimah Ismail and Lorna Jimi Dalinting

This paper provides some insights on current industry internship practices and the perceptions of students during their internship experience. This paper also highlights some issues pertaining to internship from the students' and the industry's perspective and implications for enhancing guidelines for student internships.

Perceptions and preferences of hiring managers

Reuben Yong Soon Chen and Chris Kam Loong Low

This article explores the suitability of former airline cabin crew to management positions in food and beverage outlets. It concludes that with customized and effective re-training, food and beverage hiring managers are willing to employ people with different service industry experiences in managerial positions.

Competently skilled human capital through education for the hospitality and tourism industry

Mark Kasa, Joey Kho, Danial Yong, Kashif Hussain and Patrick Lau

This article explores the viability of the curricula offered by a university specializing in hospitality and tourism education in Kuching, Sarawak. The purpose of this article is to explore the relevance and application of the hospitality and tourism education curricula to the current and future needs of the Sarawak hospitality and tourism industry.

Industry perspectives on Malaysian hotel minimum wage issues

Ann Selvaranee Balasingam and Alwie Manaf

This article investigates and compares the impact of the Malaysian minimum wage order from the perspective of two different stakeholders: Malaysian hotel managers and employees. Drawing on a small interview sample, this article offers perspectives on the latest wage increase impact, some six years after its implementation.

Raising standards for hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia

Kashif Hussain, Abdul Murad bin Ahmad, Neethiahnanthan Ari Ragavan and Leong Quee Ling

The hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia is creating new jobs and needs many more skilled, work-ready graduates. This paper highlights the response of the private, higher education sector together with some selected public institutions (polytechnics) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education.

Conclusion: How is Malaysian hospitality and tourism education working with industry?

Kashif Hussain, Neethiahnanthan Ari Ragavan, Vincent Tang Thien Ming and Chris Low Kam Loong

This article re-visits the theme issue question, reviews the contributions made and identifies an agenda for enhancing collaboration between educational providers and Malaysia's hospitality and tourism industry with particular reference to developing industry-specific skills and a professional mindset using work-based learning approaches.

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Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATTT) aims to make practical and theoretical contributions to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATTT* theme editor, do please contact the Managing Editor, Richard Teare via the Emerald website