TECHNICAL NOTE

THE 17th UNWTO ASIA/PACIFIC EXECUTIVE TRAINING PROGRAMME
ON TOURISM POLICY AND STRATEGY

Human Resource Development in Tourism
– Navigating Post-Covid Challenges

Monday, 13 - Thursday, 16 November 2023
Da Nang, Viet Nam

Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific
UN World Tourism Organization
1. Background

Since its inception in 2006, the UNWTO has hosted the Asia/Pacific Executive Training Programme on Tourism Policy and Strategy, a highly esteemed annual event that continues to make waves in the region. Set apart as the only program of its kind, our Executive Training Programme has earned its reputation for stimulating content and thought-provoking discussions that shape the future of tourism policies.

This year, we proudly present the 17th edition, centered around the pivotal theme of 'Human Resource Development in Tourism.' We cordially invite high-level officials within their respective governments from across Asia and the Pacific to seize this opportunity for growth and advancement in defining and shaping the tourism sector.

Our Executive Training Programme brings together high-level officials, providing a lively platform for knowledge exchange through lectures, discussions, debates, and presentations. Participants will immerse themselves in successful practices in policy and strategy formulation and implementation, unlocking their potential to drive sustainable tourism growth.

Delegates attending this exclusive event gain more than just knowledge; they forge invaluable connections with like-minded professionals from the region, creating a powerful network that will continually fuel their strategic tourism thinking throughout their careers.

The impact of this program reaches far and wide, benefiting both the host destination and the attendees. By participating in the Executive Training Programme, participants will be equipped to design and formulate meaningful policies and programs that drive resilient tourism growth and pave the way for a prosperous and socially responsible future. The 17th edition of the Executive Training Programme will be held under the theme of ‘Human Resource Development in Tourism – Navigating Post-Covid Challenges’.

2. Context

According to the International Labour Organisation, the disruption to economic activity in the tourism sector has had a massive impact on the livelihoods of its workers, millions of whom lost their jobs and incomes. Employment supported directly or indirectly by the sector fell 18.5 per cent to 272 million, a loss of almost 62 million jobs. Reflecting the substantial effects of lockdown measures on the sector, global employment in accommodation and food services suffered the largest decline of all sectors (-9.4 per cent) in 2020. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the sector were particularly hard hit, with millions of enterprises going bankrupt and millions of workers losing their jobs as a result. Women, young people and migrant workers, as well as workers with disabilities and indigenous persons, many of whom worked informally, suffered the greatest exposure to job losses and business closures.¹

The post-pandemic era has brought an uncertainty onto the tourism industry - especially in relation to human resource development. During the pandemic, businesses faced travel restrictions, lockdowns, and reduced customer demand. Now, the uncertainty of how to attract and manage the workforce has led to cautious and questionable hiring practices and a reluctance to invest in extensive human resource development initiatives, impacting the industry’s ability to rebound, attract and retain skilled talent.

Although travel has since resumed and the industry is now recovering, the labour supply has not yet bounced back. This scarcity of experienced and skilled employees poses challenges in delivering quality services and maintaining operational efficiency, making human resource development more crucial than ever. According to the UNWTO and other research the public and private sectors must unite in a new, comprehensive drive to attract new and old workers back to a fundamentally changed industry:

**Education/Training/On the job training:** The path to tourism's recovery post-pandemic is both challenging and promising, offering governments, employers, and workers an opportunity to rethink the sector's future. Over the years, the tourism industry has faced significant *decent* work issues and scrutiny regarding its environmental and social impact. To achieve a sustainable tourism sector, supportive education and training policies are essential. These policies should prioritize entrepreneurship, enterprises, especially MSMEs, helping them build resilience and sustainability to withstand future economic shocks and crises. Investing in training/upskilling/on the job learning for the industry's workforce is crucial - facilitate the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy - paying particular attention to women, youth and the marginalised.

The pathway to a post-pandemic recovery in tourism presents governments, employers and workers with a complex challenge; new opportunities have arisen but require a complete overhaul of outdated curricula, inexperienced teachers, outdated training labs and training material.

**A shift in Consumer Expectations:** Post-pandemic travellers have altered expectations, prioritizing health, wellness and safety measures. Airlines, accommodation providers, and restaurants must adapt their operations accordingly, requiring extensive employee training to implement and maintain new safety protocols and product knowledge. This shift in consumer demands necessitates ongoing human resource development to ensure employees are equipped to deliver safe and satisfactory experiences.

**Upskilling/Reskilling and Digital Adaptability:** The pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, AI, microlearning and contactless solutions in the tourism industry. Airlines, hotels, and restaurants had to pivot their operations to meet new health guidelines, leading to increased demand for digital skills and adaptability in the workforce. Human resource development must focus on upskilling employees to navigate the evolving technological landscape and provide seamless service in a post-pandemic environment.

**Resilience:** The tourism industry faced severe economic challenges during the pandemic, with airlines experiencing reduced travel demand, hotels facing low occupancy rates, and restaurants dealing with limited dine-in options. In the post-pandemic phase, these businesses are still recovering financially, leading to budget constraints for human resource development initiatives. Balancing the need for skill development with cost-effectiveness becomes crucial in such situations.

In conclusion, the crisis in human resource development in the tourism industry is exacerbated by lingering uncertainty, labour shortages, shifting consumer expectations, the demand for reskilling and adaptability, and economic constraints. The tourism sector must address these challenges strategically to rebuild their workforce and ensure a sustainable and resilient future for the tourism sector. Human resource development plays a pivotal role in equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the post-pandemic tourism landscape.
Session I. A shift in Customer Expectation and its Impact on HRD: A look at how destinations can prepare tourism workers to position destinations for post pandemic focus on hygiene, high tech, contactless, wellness, outdoors, sustainability. Changing consumer expectations in the few years leading to the pandemic and expectations set after the pandemic, is changing the tourism experiences and the ways tourism companies provide those experiences.

Session II. The Importance of Education and on the job Training: How the model of on the job training (OJT) has to change. What needs to change? What is not working anymore? How can public sector work with the private sector to develop more current and relevant OJT?

Session III. Upskilling and digital adaptability: How can the public sector work with the private sector to upskill certain tourism workers? What can be done to enable older tourism workers to adapt to more digitisation? What can be done enhance greater adoption of digitisation in tourism and how can we ensure that technologies do not always replace human labour but used to enhance visitor experiences?

Session IV. Building greater resilience to crisis: How can tourism policymakers prepare tourism workers for post pandemic tourism products? What skills do our tourism workers need to make the tourism industry more resilient to crises? What must we include in our training to enable tourism workers to face the climate crisis?

3. Training Programme Objective

The overall theme for the 17th UNWTO Asia/Pacific Executive Training Programme is Human Resource Development - The Lingering Uncertainty, which is a burning issue for destinations across the globe.

UNWTO has been conducting this annual high-level executive training programme on tourism policy and strategy in the Asia-Pacific region since 2006. It is an important forum for high-level policy makers of the region’s National Tourism Administrations aimed at exchanging views on effective and responsive formulation of policies and strategies related to the development and management of their tourism industries. This year’s edition will focus on Human Resource Development in Tourism because of the ongoing post-pandemic manpower challenges of the tourism industry resulting in the strong need for reskilling and upskilling to address labour shortages and to improve relevant skills of the workforce. And it is particularly more meaningful to conduct the Training Programme in cooperation with Duy Tan University, as it is the only institution in Viet Nam that boasts UNWTO’s TedQual certified programmes.

The training aims to:

- Emphasize the importance of Human Resource Development (HRD) in the tourism sector and imprint the significance of HRD in achieving sustainable development goals in tourism.
- Look at the trend of changing patterns of demand and supply of human resources in the tourism sector and discuss important issues on HRD in tourism, especially in post COVID-19 era.
- Share the role of the government and the public sector for HRD and discuss ways to cooperate with various stakeholders.

The training programme will be held in person and should be interactive and participatory.

4. Executive Training Programme Overview

The 17th Asia/Pacific Executive Training Programme will start on 13 November 2023 with the Opening ceremony and Forum on Human Resource Development in Tourism, which will be open to local participants to broaden the discussion.
From 13 to 16 November, there will be four training sessions, and each session will focus on topics regarding Human Resource Development. Each session will have a similar structure, with an opening speech (shorter than 30 minutes), followed by Q&A. After that, country presentations (4 - 6 in each session, all shorter than 10 minutes) will address specificities and highlight the best practices on each topic. These country presentations will detail national policies, strategies, and programmes to support Human Resource Development. Later, discussions will be held for all delegates so that they can share their country’s views and recommendations for policy on each topic. A final panel discussion and technical conclusion will serve as a general wrap up of previous Sessions.

The last day of the event on 16 November will consist of a Technical Tour organized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Viet Nam. This tour and other social events are a wonderful opportunity for delegates to experience the culture and beauty of Viet Nam and network with tourism leaders across Asia and the Pacific region.