

Raising standards for hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia

Hospitality
and tourism
education

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present a briefing on milestones of Malaysia Centre of Tourism and Hospitality Education (MyCenTHE) regarding its role as a nation-building exercise in developing human capital talent for future sustainable hospitality and tourism in Malaysia. Under a national initiative by the ministry of education, hospitality and tourism educational institutes in the country have set out to better prepare graduates for industry. MyCenTHE aspires to build a hospitality and tourism cluster (threefold) so that Malaysia is able to increase its annual output of hospitality and tourism personnel from 20,000 in 2009 to 50,000 in 2020 and increase the share of graduates with diploma- or degree-level awards from 13% to 50% by 2020. These expectations can only be achieved by creating a sustainable pool of workers for this sector. It was in this context for which “MyCenTHE” was conceived.

Design/methodology/approach – The current study is based on documentary analysis of secondary sources, qualitative in nature, and presents a case study of MyCenTHE with its key accomplishments in promoting hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia.

Findings – The hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia is set to create 600,000 new job opportunities and in so doing, will need many more skilled, work-ready graduates in the coming decade. This paper

Professor Dr Kashif Hussain was a Dean of the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management at UCSI University from 2016-2019, and during this period, he held the position of a President of the Malaysia Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education (MyCenTHE). This national initiative to promote hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia is supported and guided by the Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Higher Education) Malaysia. Professor Dr Abdul Murad Ahmad is a CEO of East West International College and has been one of the most active members of MyCenTHE since its inception. Dr Leong Quee Ling from UCSI University has also served MyCenTHE as a Coordinator. The authors would like to recognize the coordinating services provided by Ms Muzira Binti Abdul Rahman, formerly of UCSI University, and Ms Nursyafiqah Binti Ramli, UCSI University, and thank them. The authors would also like to thank the cluster leaders, discipline leaders and members of the respective member institutions. The authors would also like to express their gratitude to Mr Nigel Fong of the Civil Service Delivery Unit, PEMANDU Associates and thank Ms Rozita Binti Rosli, Dr Roszana Binti Tapsir and other senior/associate members of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, for the annual funding provided to MyCenTHE.



highlights the collective efforts of the private higher education sector together with some selected public institutions (polytechnics) under the umbrella of the ministry of education through the MyCenTHE platform in promoting hospitality and tourism education nationwide via national awareness campaigns, conferences, skill competitions, seminars, forums and corporate social responsibility projects.

Originality/value – This paper is of value in its own context and in particular support from ministry and related authorities, 26 institutions of higher education working together, approaches to hundreds of local schools and thousands of audiences/participants in awareness campaigns.

Keywords Malaysia, Promotion, Education, Tourism and Hospitality, MyCenTHE

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The Malaysia Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education (MyCenTHE) was formed in 2010 with a nation-building approach in mind. It was led by private higher education institutions with the aim of providing quality graduates for the Malaysian hospitality and tourism industry. The body aspires to build a hospitality and tourism cluster (threefold) for the country to increase its annual output of hospitality and tourism personnel from 20,000 in 2009 to 50,000 in 2020 and to increase the share of graduates with diploma- or degree-level awards from 13 to 50 per cent. These expectations could only be achieved by creating a sustainable pool of workers/graduates for this sector. Thus, the inception of MyCenTHE, a body which was formed as a result of collaboration between several industry operators and higher education institutions to prepare students for the challenging and constantly evolving hospitality and tourism industry. MyCenTHE has been actively promoting hospitality and tourism education throughout the country with its cluster leaders and discipline leaders. MyCenTHE generally promotes a work-based learning framework through its annual national awareness campaigns, conferences, skills competitions, seminars, forums and corporate social responsibility projects. This paper presents a briefing on the milestones of MyCenTHE in its nation-building exercise with the objective of developing current and future human capital talent in Malaysia for sustainable hospitality tourism and hospitality.

Opportunities for the hospitality and tourism industry

The economic importance of the hospitality and tourism industry should not be underestimated. The industry has a number of influences on the global economy, mainly categorized as direct and total contribution to the greater economy. The UN World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2019) portrays this industry as a key driver of socio-economic progress for destinations secured through export revenues, creation of jobs and enterprises and infrastructure development. In a nutshell, it is an industry that is helping developing nations to solve issues related to unemployment and poverty by monetizing the potential arising from natural and cultural heritage. The future of the global hospitality and tourism industry revolves around a forecasted figure of 1.8 billion tourists by 2030 (UN-WTO, 2019). The total contribution of the industry to GDP was US\$8,811bn (10.4 per cent of GDP) in 2018 and is expected to increase by 3.6 per cent in 2019 and further to rise by 3.7 per cent p.a. to make it US\$13,085bn (11.5 per cent of GDP) by 2029. Similarly, in 2018, the total contribution of the industry to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 10.0 per cent of total employment with 318 million jobs. This is expected to rise by 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 328 million jobs and by 2.5 per cent p.a. to 420 million jobs in 2029 (11.7 per cent of total employment) (WTTC, 2019). This translates to more than 102,000,000 new job opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industry by 2029.

The future of this industry is also heavily reliant on support for infrastructure development. This can be seen from the hundreds of projects planned or already constructed by major hoteliers, for example, Marriott International Inc. (Asia) will be building 320 new hotels by 2020, Accor Hotel Group (Asia-Pacific) added 227 new hotels to its range of hotels by the end of 2017, Hilton Hotels and Resorts (Worldwide) and Starwood Hotels and Resorts (Worldwide), in that same year, erected 300 and 110 new hotels, respectively, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts (Worldwide) constructed 31 additional hotels in 2016, while InterContinental Hotels Group has plans to grow its presence by constructing some 1,200 new hotels in the near future. This equates to more than 2,000 new hotels, resorts and related infrastructure developments in recent years and in the near future.

When it comes to reaping benefits from the international tourism and hospitality industry, Malaysia is the 15th most visited destination in the world with 25.8 million tourists' arrivals in 2018 (UN-WTO, 2019). In 2017, this translated to RM 181bn (13.4 per cent) in GDP contribution for the local economy with some 1.7 million jobs (11.8 per cent) created from this booming industry. By 2028, Malaysia is expected to welcome some 50 million tourists, with a projected contribution of RM 296bn (14.4 per cent) to the local economy and 2.3 million jobs (13.2 per cent) (WTTC, 2018). This presents an immense challenge for Malaysia as it needs to produce graduates with the personal and professional skills to fill some 600,000 new jobs in its hospitality and tourism industry by 2028.

To achieve this, the nation's infrastructure and human capital development must be expanded to enhance its capacity and capability. MyCenTHE was formed with a nation-building approach in mind. It is led by private higher education institutions with the aim of providing well-trained graduates for Malaysia's hospitality and tourism industry. The body aspires to build a hospitality and tourism cluster for Malaysia that supports the following:

- an increase in the annual output of skilled tourism and hospitality personnel from 20,000 in 2009 to 50,000 in 2020; and
- an increase in the proportion of graduates at diploma- or degree-level from 13 to 50 per cent.

These aspirations can only be met by creating a sustainable pool of workers for this sector and hence the inception of MyCenTHE. The body was formed as a result of collaboration between several industry operators and higher education institutions to prepare students for the challenging and constantly evolving hospitality and tourism industry. UCSI University was entrusted by the government to champion this thrust by leading private higher education providers in Malaysia. This initiative is also helping to create an economic microclimate geared towards the hyperproduction of skilled technical talent, crafted to incentivize professionals for an increasingly competitive global market.

Background of Malaysia Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education

The MyCenTHE institution aims to improve the quality of hospitality and tourism education through collaborative partnerships between public and private sectors, referred to as clusters, to guarantee large-scale economic growth in the nation's hospitality and tourism industry (Table I).

Significant milestones: achievements and impact

With a target to have trained or reskilled 50 per cent of the industry workforce, MyCenTHE revived its governing structure and rebranded itself in 2016 to promote hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. The exercise included establishing a working committee consisting of educators from the higher education sector for the purpose of considering how

Table I.
Background of
MyCenTHE

Key objective	Raising the quality and quantity of the hospitality and tourism workforce in Malaysia
Mission statement	To deliver high quality hospitality and management education programmes with a scholarly emphasis on skill-based excellence within the discipline by using real-time training and work experience To provide affordable and accessible tourism and hospitality education programmes catered towards the constantly evolving industry, through expert training and a refined instructional approach To produce successful, highly employable and promising professionals with strong ethics and qualities of workmanship, who are capable of nurturing talent domestically or internationally To support local government in policy development and other related reviews for a healthier development environment in tourism and hospitality education and industry
Vision	To be recognized as a regional leader of scholastic excellence for tourism and hospitality education dedicated solely to creating an accessible pathway for Malaysians to develop their own technical talent This is accomplished by becoming inventive professionals in an increasingly competitive international market to ensure the highest and most dynamic quality of presentation, service and advancement within the tourism and hospitality industry
Performance areas	Quantity of workforce: increase student numbers to meet national demand Quality of workforce: increase share of diploma graduates in the workforce Cluster success: scale cluster model to multiple hubs Rural reach: extend education, jobs and business opportunities to under-privileged areas
CSR	Income: increase monthly income To encourage new pathways for education by giving financial aid to the rural populace of Malaysia To prioritize the development of educational opportunities for under-privileged communities

to raise the quality of the workforce. The committee has 26 member institutions, including 9 cluster leaders and 4 discipline leaders, nationwide. They are as follows:

- (1) ASCOT Academy (Sabah).
- (2) Asian Tourism International College (Sabah).
- (3) Berjaya University College (Kuala Lumpur).
- (4) City University (Selangor).
- (5) East West International College (Negeri Sembilan).
- (6) Imperia College of Hospitality and Tourism Academy (Pahang).
- (7) INTI College (Sabah).
- (8) KDU University College (Penang and Kuala Lumpur).
- (9) Kolej Teknikal Yayasan Sabah (Sabah).
- (10) Langkawi Tourism Academy (Kedah).
- (11) Nilai University (Negeri Sembilan).
- (12) Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan (Johor).
- (13) Politeknik Kota Kinabalu (Sabah).
- (14) Politeknik Merlimau Melaka (Melaka).

- (15) President College (Kuala Lumpur).
- (16) SATT College (Sarawak).
- (17) SEGi University College (Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak).
- (18) SG Academy (Kuala Lumpur).
- (19) Sunway College (Johor).
- (20) Sunway Le Cordon Bleu (Selangor).
- (21) Sunway University (Selangor).
- (22) Taylor's University (Selangor).
- (23) Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (Perak and Kuala Lumpur).
- (24) UCSI University (Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak).
- (25) University College Sabah Foundation (Sabah).
- (26) YTL International College of Hotel Management (Kuala Lumpur).

Roles of cluster leaders and discipline leaders

- to function as a strategic coordinator and to encourage co-operation among institutions in response to regional human capital needs through synergized capacity building (institutions and industry);
- to encourage and facilitate shared learning by adopting best practices in the higher education system to develop the sector's human capital in the region;
- to enhance effective collaboration among industry players to ensure that the supply and demand of skilled human resources is balanced (institution–industry–student); and
- to promote hospitality and tourism work-based learning programmes through corporate social responsibility (CRS) activities (Table II).

No.	Cluster leaders	State	Year
1	UCSI University	Sarawak	2011
2	KDU University College	Penang	2011
3	East West International College	Negeri Sembilan	2013
4	Politeknik Merlimau	Melaka	2014
5	University College Sabah Foundation	Sabah	2015
6	Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan	Johor	2015
7	Imperia College of Hospitality and Tourism Academy	Pahang	2015
8	Langkawi Tourism Academy	Kedah	2017
9	TAR UC	Perak	2017
No.	Discipline Leaders	Discipline	Year
1	Sunway University	Hospitality	2011
2	Berjaya University	Tourism and Events	2016
3	Taylor's University	Hospitality and Culinary Arts	2011
4	KDU University College	Hospitality and Culinary Arts	2017
5	Sunway Le Cordon Bleu	Culinary Arts	2017

Table II.
MyCenTHE cluster
leaders and discipline
leaders

TalentCorp: Structured Internship Programme

The Structured Internship Programme (SIP) by TalentCorp was launched with the support and collaboration of some 28 industry partners simultaneously with MyCenTHE. The programme was extended to students pursuing diploma and/or degree courses, allowing hotels that provide SIPs to qualify for double tax deductions. This also encourages employers to offer a modest financial allowance to interns.

Guidelines to good practices: work-based learning

In support of guidelines to good practices and MyCenTHE, “Guidelines for good practices: work based learning (WBL)” was published by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency in 2015 consisting of a panel of experts from JPK (1), MyCenTHE (1), HEPs (2), MAHv (1), Automotive (2) and Retails (1) to ensure the relevance of hospitality and tourism education and that it is matched to the needs of industry. MyCenTHE cluster leaders/members have implemented WBL programmes as a component of their curricula (hotel/hospitality management, recreation/leisure management, travel/tourism management, culinary arts/ culinary management, food service/restaurants management, etc.) in addition to the conventional programmes. This approach is providing learners with the required professional skills in accordance with industry trends, real-time experience and employment opportunities, and this has contributed to enhanced graduate employability and industry engagement.

Malaysian Qualifications Agency revision of national programme standards for hospitality and tourism education

Currently, MyCenTHE is working with the MQA to revise the standards of national programmes related to hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. This partnership, mainly consisting of a panel of experts from HEPs (3), MyCenTHE (1) and industry players (1), is expected to present and publish this revision by the end of 2019.

Branding and promotions nationwide

In recent years, MyCenTHE has helped to facilitate a robust performance by reorganizing its key strategies and plans for moving forward. For example, it has revitalized its branding and promotional efforts via several national awareness campaigns, including using social media platforms, to educate and promote awareness of the hospitality and tourism industry and the current and future prospects that it offers. To achieve this and other outcomes, MyCenTHE has been conducting regular monthly meetings since 2016 to carry out the following:

- consolidate efforts and enhance collaborations among cluster leaders and member institutions (empowerment);
- enhance connections and engagements with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Human Resources (under the guidance of the Ministry of Education) (government linkage);
- strengthen collaborations and extend industry participation and partnerships (industry linkage);
- improve coordination of activities among member institutions (responsibility); and
- encourage everyone to work together (teamwork).

MyCenTHE implemented three national awareness campaigns in 2017 and 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Kedah, Perak, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak with the following taglines: “We Want You In the Hospitality and Tourism Industry”, “Malaysia Paradise Homestay” and “Explore Malaysia”. The objective of these campaigns was to promote hospitality and tourism education nationwide to 5,000 students in 200 local schools by bringing them to various hotels, resorts, theme parks, convention centres and tourism companies, homestays and city centres, so that they could learn about the nature, work, lifestyle and culture of the industry. These campaigns have served as an example in bridging the gap between academia and industry.

Other successful activities organized under the umbrella of MyCenTHE are as follows:

- a national symposium on tourism and hospitality in 2016 (Johor);
- an Asia-Pacific centre for events management conference in 2016 and 2018 (Kuala Lumpur);
- the launch of a WBL centre: Bukit Gambang Resort in 2016 (Pahang);
- “Next Big Chef” competition in 2016, 2017 and 2018 (Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak);
- “iCHEF: Battle of The Six Continents” in 2017 (Putrajaya);
- Imperia ASEAN hospitality challenge in 2017-2018 (Pahang);
- MyCenTHE Skills Challenge in 2017 (Negeri Sembilan);
- Kiulu community project for homestay in 2017 and 2018 (Sabah);
- Ultimate obstacle challenge race in 2017 (Kuala Lumpur);
- National Symposium on Halal in Tourism and Hospitality in 2017 (Melaka);
- KL Explorace 1.0 in 2017;
- TARC UC festival in 2018 (Perak);
- i-Create Evo competition on Halal compliance creative product 2018 (Johor); and
- QS Subject Focus Summit in Hospitality and Tourism in 2018 (Sarawak).

Summary

MyCenTHE's efforts in promoting hospitality and tourism through education helped to recruit some 26,000 students in 2016 (52 per cent), a further 30,000 students in 2017 (60 per cent) and around 35,000 students in 2018 (70 per cent). Together with the 26 member institutions and the nine clusters across the nation, MyCenTHE has been working to raise the quality and quantity of the workforce, with the goal of adding 50,000 skilled workers by 2020. Furthermore, MyCenTHE aims to have trained or reskilled 50 per cent of the industry workforce with the further objective of facilitating an increased average salary from RM 2,000 to RM 4,000. In this context, the collective efforts of the private higher education sector together with some selected public institutions (polytechnics) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and through MyCenTHE have helped to promote hospitality and tourism education nationwide via national awareness campaigns, conferences, skill competitions, seminars, forums and CSR projects. It is estimated by MyCenTHE that these activities reach some 10,000 event participants annually. This raises standards for hospitality and tourism education through MyCenTHE in Malaysia. Because of recent changes in the political governance of the country, MyCenTHE is expected to gain momentum in 2020 and beyond under the supervision and guidance of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia.

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