



# Tourism Talent Shortage in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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## Abstract

Worldwide recent crisis has proved the need of implementing new training programs that support tailored mentoring and improve employees' soft skills. COVID-19 sanitary pandemic, Ukraine war, and the political uncertainty have triggered an unheard impact on global travel markets that will further perpetuate leaving a lasting footprint on the tourism industry. How the sector faces all these challenges by attracting and retaining tourists that have unexpected and new elevated expectations remain to be seen. Tourism managers are seeking to future-proof their businesses by incorporating high-tech initiatives and sustainable development protocols and practices. Hence, now the tourism industry's biggest challenge is to confront the tourism workforce shortages.

Although it seems that new jobs are required and will need to be included into the DNA of the industry so as to face with the high-quality standards of this new panorama, the sector popularity is related to low-paid and qualified job positions. Hence, beyond all these considerations, it is mandatory to develop and train young generations within the digital skills for the effective and sustainable

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tourism management, bring up to light the future jobs that are here to stay, and provide practical and helpful insights of how to improve the soft skills for this long-life learning tourism workforce.

In the view of the current panorama, this chapter aims at addressing valuable insights and recommendations to handle with the staff shortages, to foster drivers to attract and retain generation Z to adhere to the tourism workforce, and to cope with new high-tech implementations. Finally, the chapter drafts some of the implications for tourism education.

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### Keywords

Tourism workforce · Future of work · Tourism employees · Training

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## Introduction: 2022, the Year of the Tourism Labor Crisis

The tourism industry is a key driver of the global economy creating 289 million jobs, contributing with 6.1% of the world's GDP, being tourism related 1 in 11 jobs (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022a). Despite the figures are positive, the world has been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic with extended periods of lockdowns and severe travel restrictions. Thus, the tourism sector contribution had a big loss from 2019 to 2020, when 62 million jobs were lost and the contribution to GDP dropped from 10.3% to 5.3%. Precisely, in 2019 there were 333 million persons working for this industry, which meant 1 out of 10 of all jobs were tourism related, and just 1 year later, the figure dropped to 271 million (Kim et al., 2021; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022a). The contribution of this sector to jobs is growing slowly in comparison to the increase in contribution to GDP as human resources evolution is less elastic. This is because the process of firing existing personnel and hiring new talent takes time (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b).

While the priority worldwide, within significant government proactive measures, has been to mitigate the socio-economic effects by incentivizing job retention, supporting self-employment, protecting the most vulnerable groups, among others, the uncertainty of the tourism sector recovery in the short term has increased with Ukraine war, the rise of fuel and gas prices, the reduce of income and, hence, of employment (Sun et al., 2021). Although the abovementioned figures are relevant to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem the tourism industry is facing, the local economic impact and job loss are unmeasurable (Sigala, 2020; Sun et al., 2021). The scarcity of employees is affecting all kind of job positions in the industry, such as waitresses, airliner pilots, cruise employees, among many others.

It has been reported high turnover patterns in tourism workforce in past years (Goh & Lee, 2018), as older employees are leaving the sector and new generations such as Generation Z, which have unknown attitudes toward working in this dynamic industry. The sector is still demanding a labor force to fill the vacancies that emerged during all these crises due to the need of rehiring displaced workers, the movement of workers to other industries, the fall in the number of migrant workers,

and the increased departure of older workers (Goh & Okumus, 2020; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b).

All the effects of these crises in tourism workforce have meant a change in the ‘war of talent’. On one hand, now companies are mainly valued not for the practice of ‘people first’ and job security although tough periods of time such as lockdowns, the chance they offer their employees to have a career planning and progression opportunities, work remotely, permanent jobs and not temporary due to seasonal peaks, among others (Baum et al., 2020). On the other hand, this situation is highlighting the need for qualified and well-trained hospitality graduates that are motivated to remain in the industry in a moment of a pessimistic demographic pyramid, where older workers, which are the majority in almost all continents, are leaving their jobs due to natural life cycle evolution (Goh & Lee, 2018; Goh & Okumus, 2020). Work in this industry is still associated to modern slavery that lacks of guaranteeing human rights and which practices are unsustainable (Johnson, 2020). At the same time, there is a big polemic about the effects of automation technologies on tourism and hospitality jobs whether it will eliminate, change, and/or create new job positions in the industry (Ivanov, 2020).

It is reasonable that staff shortages have been identified as one of the key challenges the hospitality sector has to face on its path to recovery from the actual crises in order it does not remain an issue in the longer term (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b). In the light of the above discussion, this chapter aims at addressing significant recommendations to cope with the staff shortages, to define the drivers to attract and retain generation Z to join the tourism workforce, and to confront the technological revolution. Finally, the chapter looks at the tourism jobs of the future, the future skills needed by tourism employees, and sketches some of the implications for tourism education.

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## Tourism Staff Shortage: Rethinking Talent Management

The tourism staff shortage has highlighted the need to re-consider if the basic pillar of guaranteeing the tourism staff of decent work is been accomplished. Hospitality positions have been associated to low-pay, seasonality, stress, operational tasks and physically and psychologically demanding (Goh & Lee, 2018). In this regard, Joblist (2022), a job-search site, has recently published a report that outlines that North-American hospitality and retail workers are the most likely to say they are looking for a higher-paying job (56%). COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized important negative effects that are actually diminishing the tourism workforce attractiveness (Baum et al., 2020; Liu-Lastres et al., 2022):

- *Job insecurity*: Intensification of the precarity and workplace exploitation.
- *Employee burnout*: Mistreatment of workers and customers, heavy workload, high stress, lack of socialization and networking, reduction of the sense of belonging, and loyalty to organizations.

- *Extensive structural changes and entrepreneurial opportunism*: This can reduce the market monopoly, but there are still legislator and regulatory gaps in the system that do not protect employees' security and livelihood.
- *Talent loss*: Preference of working in less vulnerable sectors (such as retail, agriculture, etc.), seeking jobs with greater career potential, and reconsideration of work-life balance priorities.
- *Amplification of regulation*: Even closing frontline hospitality services.

Tourism employees are facing significant career development challenges, as the society's perception is that their overall education level is low. Hence, it is recommended they acquire more business-oriented and transferable skills as tourism job positions are very vulnerable to emergency circumstances such as COVID-19 (Chen et al., 2022; Huang & Baker, 2021). The recognition of employee's dignity is through the provision of decent work, which allows workers to feel recognized both in monetary and non-monetary terms (Lucas, 2017; Winchenbach et al., 2019). Ensuring an effective employer branding strategy is key to attract and retain talent, in the war of talent. Recently, different employer branding initiatives to overcome with tourism labor shortage have been suggested (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022a). To sum up, the following proposal has been made:

1. *Talent mobility*. Facilitating workforce movement within countries or internationally can help filling the skills gap or balance the demand and supply of employees.
2. *Flexible and remote work*. Enabling these practices, where feasible, while maintaining salaries, boosts productivity and well-being. It introduces part-time, contract-based opportunities and shorter working weeks.
3. *Highlighting of work-life balance opportunities*. Offering high-quality work experiences by stimulating positive relationships between employees, workplace happiness. It not only outlines policies but incorporates measurement systems to identify problems so as to provide effective solutions.
4. *Competitive benefits package*. In the awake of COVID-19 pandemic, many tourism employees are still struggling with mental health issues and having fears regarding job security and unemployment.
5. *Educational and training programs*. Reskilling and upskilling are crucial to bridging skills gaps and training a workforce that ensues sustainable tourism development.
6. *Personalized career progression*. Employers have to promote a personalized career plan and offer a diversity of roles that entail a wide range of skills.
7. *Intensify partnerships and collaborations*. This kind of coordination will improve performance, flexibility, career opportunities, and, hence, tourism sustainability.
8. *High-tech adoption*. These solutions can improve employees' daily tasks by reducing the time they spent on operational tasks, improving their creativity and the customer service.

9. *Fostering transparency.* The communication strategies must be evoked to only attract talent but also to retain employees' loyalty to the business. Hence, transparency has become a pillar and moreover during internal crises.

All these initiatives and policies will entail a more flexible mindset and the prioritization and require stakeholder collaboration (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). Precisely, governments should assist offering financial incentives such as subsidies or tax reliefs. Besides, public administration should conjointly with academia identify the required skills to gain competitive advantage in the international market toward facilitating flexible and decent work, labor mobility, improve the skills of the workforce, attract and retain talent, provide appealing benefits, and, therefore, recover the good image as employer industry (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022a). Moreover, this will imply a considerable effort bearing in mind that these has highly suffered from anxiety during the pandemic, magnifying mental health challenges, which will have to be confronted by employers offering their staff members stress-relief initiatives such as courses or even apps (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022).

Finally, it is important to pinpoint that tourism businesses have to deal with any macro- and micro-environmental change; every single social, economic, or political circumstance has an impact on the industry. Thus, this means that the sector has to cope and adapt to changing situations bearing on mind that the priority is not only satisfying potential visitors' needs but also employees' needs.

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## Recruiting Generation Z to Enhance Sustainable Tourism Development

It seems that we are ignoring the needs and desires of the tourism workforce as it is led by baby boomers, a generation that is approaching retirement and is defined by their less emphasis on social work values (Goh & Lee, 2018). Gen Z is occupying junior job positions, right now that are turbulent times characterized by the high-speed advancement of technologies, requiring them a tremendous and according adaptation to the actual context. Hence, facing this recruitment challenge has recommended the next actions to attract generation Z (Jolly et al., 2022):

1. *Draw attention to appealing job attributes.* Gen Z values workplaces that emphasize employees well-being with interesting, fun, fulfilling positions over salary bands.
2. *Reveal well-defined careers pathways.* They desire career success and they do not expect job position stagnation, so reveal the customized career planning the company has.
3. *Foster travel opportunities.* Offer chances for training and working opportunities in different countries or even holiday housing chances.
4. *Boost customer service training.* Providing service excellence requires investment in high-quality educational and training programs.

5. *Plan 'open days' for potential employees.* This will provide transparency on job expectations.
6. *Offer clear transparency regarding pay structure.* This can be complemented by offering incentives and rewards to service excellence.
7. *Guarantee equal and fair opportunities.* Avoid any kind of discrimination and be concerned of the diverse pool of the tourism labor workforce.
8. *Involve family and relatives.* It is not a cliché that Gen Z seeks approval about their job positions and career progression to their family members.
9. *Design a mentoring program.* It helps improving service performance expectations, and new employees also manage their feelings more adequately.
10. *Engage through motivated employees.* Gen Z looks for role models, offer them proofs for inspiration throughout real stories of employees.

The recovery from the pandemic is been slow as the major problem is the lack of trust due to the numerous layoffs that took place during that period. The energy crisis that Europe is currently facing is making that market still unstable, although some other trends have emerged such as the increase of co-working spaces, co-living, digital nomads, or even the emergent “energy tourists”. The drop of employment rates obviously was due to the low record of tourist arrivals forced by the government-ordered lockdowns worldwide during the pandemic. But the lower paid and lack of clear career advancement opportunities is not new in the industry and now it is hitting hard the industry that is struggling to hire and re-hire employees that were lost during the health crisis. Besides, people are demanding a sense of purpose and of fulfillment and as it is imperative to accomplish sustainable development goals, this can help build a robust employer branding value proposition. In this regard, employees need to feel motivated which can be fostered by inspiring them with the business shared purpose (Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021).

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## **Unlocking the Potential of High-Tech Initiatives That Maximize Employees' Productivity**

The arrival of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, a concept used to define the current moment of adaptation of RAISA technology, is modifying how economies develop and how businesses create value and thus is modifying the nature of jobs (Parsons et al., 2022; Schwab, 2017). In the early 2000s, the tourism industry was already facing the challenge of adopting their distribution channels to e-tourism, and 10 years later this sector became the most popular in Internet as travel services were the largest category of products sold globally across the net (Buhalis et al., 2019; Parsons et al., 2022). Thus, it demonstrated the capacity of the sector to foster active modernization. Despite the fact that the implementation of Robots, Artificial Intelligence, Service Automation (RAISA in advance) in the tourism industry is still in its infancy, the fears have risen again (like in past times) among young generations in relation to the job losses and human substitution (Hou et al., 2021; Tojib et al., 2022).

The fact is that the actual disruption is bringing new and unknown challenges such as job dislocation and job losses, and it is particularly affecting lower-skilled employees. However, it is also providing many competitive opportunities such as job creation, improvement of productivity rates, and an increase in workplace safety (Rydzik & Sharma, 2021). The OECD (2021) has recently indicated that many of current digital skill constraints the tourism workforce is heading are the scarce state intervention in tourism planning, precisely in significant issues such as skills development. In this regard, the challenge the world is facing in relation to the decrease of natality rates has forced companies to look up for solutions that accelerate employees' productivity and dedication to significant responsibilities such as innovation, rather than spending their labor time on operational processes (Ivanov, 2020). The truth is that RAISA can lead to the elimination of job positions, but these can be associated to those operative tasks that are undesired by employees and leave them more time to do effective functions where they feel recognized (Choi et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of digitalization and many of these new high-tech implementations are been used to cope with the actual crisis and build resilience by respecting sustainable development goals (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

As abovementioned, staff shortages and the low natality rates will force companies' adoption of RAISA in operative functions such as repetitive tasks, calculations, standard and basic communication, among others. The job positions that require social skills or emotional intelligence will be more complicated to substitute by high-tech devices. It has been demonstrated that the essence of tourism experiences is related to human-value services (Parsons et al., 2022). Therefore, RAISA cannot offer a personalized engagement but can do the repetitive tasks no employee wants to execute. All this context will meaningfully decrease the entry-level career opportunities for those candidates that have lower education (Ivanov, 2020; Khaliq et al., 2022). Accounts, drivers, receptionists, cooks, cleaners, and sales agents will not completely disappear in the near future, but the job positions will considerably drop. Thus, it is quite reasonable that the implementation of RAISA is increasing employee anxiety and levels of labor turnover (Li et al., 2019).

The performance of almost all job positions will change due to the implementation of RAISA processes, which will mean that new specialists will be demanded such as employees with degrees in data science, robotics, artificial intelligence, among others. Outsourcing practices will become very common for RAISA-related tasks, as these will imply highly paid and scarce employees and expensive technology and its maintenance. Hence, the skills that will be required in the future workforce will be basically social, green, and technical. Hence, COVID-19 has created an opportunity for the industry to re-establish a sustainable economic system (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022).

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## Conclusion

This chapter provides a critical overview of the current tourism labor situation. It discusses the main factors that have motivated the workforce crisis and different scholar and institutional proposals of how companies can (1) face with staff

shortage, (2) attract new talent, and (3) use RAISA to raise employees' productivity. This chapter also has focused particularly on Generation Z as it is the youngest generation that is being hired currently and that will be the leaders of tomorrow.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit hard tourism workers and it is currently the tourism sector that is one of the slowest recovering back from the drop of 2020, when 62 million jobs were lost (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b). It is important to outline that this industry is unfortunately re-known for the precarious work contracts, exploiting low entry barriers to work, quick-fire recruitment, cost-cutting staff, and 'high touch' which is the greatest risk to the re-entry after an economic crisis (Baum et al., 2020; Ivanov et al., 2020). Due to this context, millions of affected workers had to seek for new job positions to re-join the labor market, which meant that many had to accomplish career transitions. These career transitions implied that some workers remained in the labor market (i.e., but not necessarily in tourism sector) and others increased their employee value (Huang & Baker, 2021). All these circumstances have modified the tourism workforce.

The staff shortages will imply meaningful changes in companies and public administrations as it will require the implementation of policies that facilitate decent, flexible, and remote work, offer labor mobility and safety conditions, promote educational and training courses to upskill and reskill the tourism workforce, strengthen collaboration at all levels, and manage high-tech advancements (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b). Different recommendations have been proposed to address resilience (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Huang & Liu, 2022) and are mainly dealing with:

1. The importance of meeting tourists' needs and demonstrate formal commitment to sustainable development.
2. The implementation of accessible and inexpensive high-tech advancements to later invest on more sophisticated.
3. The introduction of innovative activities so as to expand competitiveness that rises businesses value and build up chances to survive from future crises.
4. The employees' compromise to sustainable tourism principles and implication to develop such practices.
5. The support from public administrations in the implementation of these new RAISA advancements.

It is estimated that the tourism sector will likely return to pre-pandemic levels around 2023, which is supported for by the data collected in 2021 as the industry contributed with 6.1% to global GDP. A longer-term forecast announces that between 2022 and 2032 the sector will create 126 million of job positions and will grow a 5.8% annually (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022b). However, tourism employees have drastically modified their work-related expectations and their new needs have to be considered to recover their trust (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022).

Generation Z employees are characterized by their interest on the qualitative aspects of the job positions, prioritizing the stability, mobility, excitement opportunities a company offers, rather than focusing primarily on the salary conditions.

Besides, recruiters should also pay attention to their career planning to guarantee their success offering them training and educational courses and mentoring programs for new potential employees to diminish unrealistic expectations, enhance service performance, facilitate employee pathway development, and provide role models (Goh & Lee, 2018; Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). This sort of programs alleviates future problems and reduces stressful situations.

RAISA advancements will change the tasks of the future positions by deleting jobs, changing the performance of others, and creating new ones. Therefore, companies will experiment changes in their service processes and will have to train their employees so as to gain competitive advantages from the adoption of RAISA (Tuomi et al., 2020). New business models will emerge although human to human interactions will be at the heart of tourism and hospitality services. Universities, public administrations, companies, and all stakeholders will have to adapt to this new high-tech reality (Ivanov, 2020). In this regard, universities and other higher education institutions will have to respond to these high-tech challenges, and new curricula will have to be developed to respond to the change with the RAISA widespread. The main problem of developing these new curricula is the lack of clarity of how to teach this field of knowledge as there is often a mismatch between what it is demanded by the sector and what it is taught in class (Güden et al., 2022).

Precisely, as stated by Ivanov (2020) actually no university offers robotics or AI modules in tourism programs and this will have to compulsory change in order to be up-to-date with the needs of sector and society in its whole. Hence, the reality is that technology-related skills remain in demand and that there are different options for senior employees to qualify them for the current context, such as coding bootcamps or massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Huang & Baker, 2021).

Built upon the analysis, this chapter has summarized the current employee situation and has offered practical insights into solutions related to the tourism staff shortage. Nowadays the number of unfilled positions is growing, and it seems that this phenomenon is not going to stop if employers do not eager to recover employees' satisfaction by bearing in mind their concerns and needs. Specifically, this will imply that businesses will have to take into account their requirements regarding work-life balance, career development, mobility, benefits packages, educational programs, and transparency. Besides, the 'robonomic' economy is redefining work concepts which means that all businesses have to handle how to navigate (without shrinking) in uncertainties and disconcerting times (Webster & Ivanov, 2020). In the time horizon of about 50 years, the way we travel now will be very different and many members of Generation Z will be employed in the industry, and hopefully they will be enjoying a highly automated employee experience.

All this new panorama the tourism industry is currently facing can resolve long-standing labor problems and serve as a base to design and implement innovative solutions and measures that reform the tourism labor structure toward a sustainable industry development. It is a fact that the reputation and image as employer industry has to improve and that is not a new problem. Although many of the abovementioned recommendations are well-known by the sector, these have not been yet accomplished and left this summer the tourism industry understaffed for

‘revenge travel’. While the industry recovered the travel confidence, the tourism workforce remained shivering and trembling. Let’s hope that this recent experience has served us as a wake-up call.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Are Curriculum in Hospitality and Tourism Programs Designed to Encourage the Development of Skills, Learning, Research and Employability in Students?](#)
- ▶ [Interconnected Pathways and Prospects: Exploring the Synergies between Literary Geography, Tourism, and Education](#)
- ▶ [Soft Skills and Interpersonal Skills for Tourism and Hospitality Industry](#)

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