

NEED FOR PROFESSIONALISM AND QUALITY SERVICE OF THE TOURIST GUIDES IN OMAN

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE

The objectives of the study are to investigate the factors impeding the professionalism of the tourist guides in Oman and to analyze the service quality improvement of the tourist guides.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

56 samples were collected from the tourist guides in Oman working in public and private sector, and the samples were selected on a random sampling basis. Using a well-defined questionnaire data was collected, analyzed and interpreted to derive the conclusion.

FINDINGS

The empirical results reveal that there is a rectilinear relationship between the Finance, Societal factors and the Success of Tourist Guide profession. But it is observed that from the negative coefficients that the finance and societal factors make a negative impact on the tourist guide job.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is suggested that specialized courses should be offered by the Government to tourist guides to improve their performances and, financial and moral support should also be provided by the Government to take up Tourist guide profession. The tourist guides prefer the Government should support tourist guides to participate in global events of tourism. **Social Implications**

It is found that the tourist guides profession is considered neither as a decent job nor as a prestigious job by the society and the media only can correct the view of the society.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE

No study has investigated the professionalism and quality of service of the tourist guides in Oman, and this study will help the planners and the Government to boost tourism.

KEYWORDS: *Tourist guides in Oman, Service Quality, Professionalism, Tourism Entrepreneurship, Financial support, Social Networking sites.*

INTRODUCTION

The economy of Sultanate of Oman is oil based. Through Vision-2040, Oman aims at diversifying its economy towards tourism economy so as to get rid of excessive dependency on oil ([Ministry of National Economy](#), 1995). Oman is the first Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country to implement diversification in its real terms. The Plan of Vision 2040 considers tourism industry as an alternative source of income to Oil and Gas sector. By 2040, the Sultanate of Oman is aiming to attract more than five million international visitors, and also it targets to generate 6 percent annual GDP from tourism ([Anderson](#), 2016). The vision statement of tourism development envisages that tourism should be given predominant importance to become a sustainable sector. The Omani Government is taking sincere efforts to develop and regulate tourism activities in Oman. For this reason, the Government has built a College- Oman Tourism College (OTC) exclusively for the purpose of graduating nationals to become tourism guides and tourism experts ([Nsaim](#), 2008). As a part of the tourism strategy, Oman is planning to attract lots of international visitors, in the decades to come.

Tourism sector encompasses various components such as Hotels, Guest houses, Resorts, Restaurants, Tour operating agencies, Tours, tourist guides, Tourist attraction spots such as Museums and archaeological sites, etc. Amongst those, tourist guide is the most important element which helps to develop the tourism sector to the highest core. Tourist guides have always been an integral part of the tourism industry and have always been helpful for promoting the destinations around the World. What a tourist Guide provides is the experience of the destination which without the help of a professional Tourist Guide would be impossible. [Hu](#) (2007) claimed that tourist guides are the agents of sustainable development and the lack of effective training towards professionalism and the absence of protections measures towards tourist guides and ineffective monitoring measures will jeopardize sustainable development. The Tourist Guides are the innovators, the real entrepreneurs of the tourism industry who use their brain and hard work to offer their experience of the destinations in different forms. By the increasing influence of the internet and social networking, the modern tourists are very much aware of the facts about the places of their visit and thereby the job of the tourist guides becoming more difficult and complex. On the other hand, although enormous efforts had been made by the Ministry of Tourism in the form of huge investments in infrastructure development for the growth of sustainable tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, the number of the tourists inflow is high whereas the number of qualified tourist guides is lesser. Especially the supply of tourist guides from the locale to meet the demand is very low.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, the number of tourists who visited Sultanate of Oman last year was around 2.1 million, and this number increases to 7 percent against the rate of growth in the Asia (9.1 %) and the rate of growth in Europe (8.5 %). This has resulted in the launch of 18 new hotels in Oman too ([Trenwith, 2015](#)). Not like in the bygone days, Oman has introduced electronic visa applications procedure so as to grant tourist visa to foreigners in an easier way to convene tourism in Oman ([Maria, 2015](#)). Further to this, the Ministry of Tourism has relaxed visa procedures to four countries Iran, India, Russia and China. As per the agreement with the Royal Oman Police – the new e-visa facilitation initiative and visa procedures' tourists from these countries can visit Oman easily, and the visa can be issued upon arrival ([Web report, 2017](#)).

One of the tourism professionals reported that Omani youths are more inclined towards taking up jobs in Oil & Gas (O&G) sectors or white collar jobs rather than tourism and hence there is a big gap and a huge demand for tourist guides among the manpower available. Further, there are no academic courses which focus to disseminate the knowledge of the Oman history, traditional and cultural values of Oman. Further, it is highly notable that tourist guides are neglected and no importance is given to them. The tourist guides job is considered as a seasonal one and only during certain seasons such as fall season and the Muscat Festival period they get chances to earn income with which they have to survive for the rest of the year. This has made them a sort of reluctance towards tourist guide jobs, and they started seeking other jobs and business services not because of trepidation but to ensure a steady income. As per [Khan and Krishnamurthy](#) (2016a), Tourism Entrepreneurship in Oman is facing challenges due to lack of financial prospects and the tourist guides are suffering from financial support. It is reported that an Omani youth wants to venture into tourism sector is neither given guidance nor financial support from the Government.

The role of tourist guide profession is one of the most important components which will enrich the tourism sector to become a sustainable sector. It would be challenging to fascinate the potential individuals towards the tourism sector, especially potential tourist guides with the required competencies. Indeed, they lack encouragement and training to improve professionalism and service quality as it becomes the duty of the Government to support tourist guides in building the tourism sector a strong one in Oman. Understanding these needs, Government of Oman has encouraging Omani nationals to venture into tourism entrepreneurship to bring forth the potentiality and the talent hidden within them. Besides such encouragement, the Oman tourism sector lags behind especially in the area of recruitment of tourist guides, giving rise to the room for study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to [Wilson](#) (2008), a tourist guide is one who guides the tourists and provides all the related information about the place of their visit. [Howard, Thwaites, and Smith](#) (2001) predicated that on conserving traditional values, local guides act as gatekeepers limiting the information and directing access to the culture. Tourist guides need to satisfy multiple stakeholders simultaneously especially the visitors who expect safety, health and a memorable travel experience ([Weiler and Ham, 2002](#)). [Lai](#) (2013) identified the factors affecting travelers' technological recognition of an application based mobile tourist guide towards analyzing informativeness and entertainment. [Huang, Hsu, and Chan](#) (2011) found that the tourist guide performance has a direct effect on tourist satisfaction with guiding service. Indeed, tourist guides take the lead role in promoting local economic development. [Zhang and Chow](#) (2004) affirmed that the accomplishment and affluence of the tourism industry depend on the performance of tourist guides who serve as 'the moment of truth,' building the image of the country and the tourist spots, and enhance the satisfaction level of the tourists. [Mohamadkhani](#) (2008) claimed that the tourist guides are the most influential personalities in the tourism sector and the success of tourist guides require expertise and a skill set of

capabilities. [Jacobson](#) (2005) suggested the knowledge, skills, and abilities a tourist guide should acquire to become a successful tourist guide and the qualifications to become certified. [Prakash, Chowdhary, and Sunayna](#) (2011) identified that the factors – quality of the job, skills, working environment, challenges, attractiveness in tourist guide job, and the substructure – determine the chances of persons becoming tourist guides. [Mak, Wong, and Chang](#) (2010) identified the factors affecting the service quality of the tourist guides are the market, tourist behavior and the prevailing competition. The basic challenge facing the growth of tourism in the Sultanate of Oman is the unprofessional taxi drivers and the lack of willingness from Omanis to join the hospitality sector (Times of Oman, 2014). Through [Jane Orde document](#) (2011) it is confirmed that the fee fixed for the tourist guides is very low compared to other professions and discourages good people joining this profession. Sometimes, the tour operators delay the payment of tourist guides by weeks or months. This is why [Khan and Krishnamurthy](#) (2016) emphasized that the Oman Government should take steps to standardize salaries of the tourism industry and make a conducive environment for Omani youth to take up the tourist guide profession voluntarily. [MohammedKhani and Ashrafi](#) (2013) confirmed that the need for the planners and the Government policymakers to introduce training for the tourist guides towards creating professional behaviors, attaining practical knowledge and acquiring proficiency. [Al Tawqi](#) (2014) found that the Government believes and takes efforts to promote tourist guides, who are the main link between tourist places and the visitors, creating the impression that local community should participate in the decision-making through tourism entrepreneurship. [Khan and Krishnamurthy \(2016a\)](#) confirmed that non-tourism spouse preferences and traditional values discourage tourism profession and also prevents people from setting up of tourism-related entrepreneurial activities in Oman.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

56 samples were collected from the tourist guides of Oman working in public and private sector, and the samples were selected on a random sampling basis. Using a well-defined questionnaire data was collected, compiled, tabulated and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and interpreted to derive the conclusion.

Table.1 Demographic details of the respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	53	94.6
	Female	3	5.4
Age	15 – 25 years	6	10.7
	25 – 35 years	39	69.6
	35 – 45 years	10	17.9
	> 45 years	1	1.8
Educational Qualification	Diploma	33	58.9
	Bachelor	13	23.2
	Others	10	17.9
Marital Status	Single	28	50.0
	Married	27	48.2
	Divorced	1	1.8

Source: Questionnaire

From table no.1 above, the demographic details can be observed.

Table 2. Government Support

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	K-S value	Chi-square	p-value
1	Government provides support to tourist guides thereby increase the number of tourist guides in Oman	11 19.6%	1 1.8%	9 16.1%	26 46.4%	9 16.1%	2.277	40.964	.000
2	Government supports to participate in Global	1 1.8%	4 7.1%	8 14.3%	29 51.8%	14 25.0%	2.294		

	events of Tourism which helps to develop my performance								
3	Specialized courses are offered by Government to the tourist guides to improve their performance	8 14.3%	1 1.8%	11 19.6%	29 51.8%	7 12.5%	2.369		
4	Financial and Moral support provided by the Government contributes to the enrolment of young Oman to take up Tourist guide profession	9 16.1%	1 1.8%	7 12.5%	26 46.4%	13 23.2%	2.330		

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements of Government support and the choices of the respondents.

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is less than 0.05 for all the statements i.e. null hypothesis is proved wrong. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the Statements of Government support and the choices of the respondents. Further, it can be seen from the K-S values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that ‘Specialized courses are offered by Government to the tourist guides to improve their performance’ ranked first followed by ‘Financial and Moral support provided by the Government contributes to the enrolment of young Oman to take up Tourist guide profession’ and ‘Government supports to participate in Global events of Tourism which helps to develop my performance’.

Table 3. Societal Status

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	K-S value	Chi-square	p-value
1	Socialization helps obtain contacts easier working as a tourist guide	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	6 10.7%	16 28.6%	31 55.4%	2.341	23.357	.010
2	Society looks at tourist guide respectfully	9 16.1%	6 10.7%	7 12.5%	19 33.9%	15 26.8%	1.942		
3	I receive support from my family to work in this job	2 3.6%	0 0.0%	7 12.5%	22 39.3%	25 44.6%	1.856		
4	The media has a major role in the correct view of society to work as a tourist guide	3 5.4%	1 1.8%	5 8.9%	33 58.9%	14 25.0%	2.651		
5	Tourist guide is considered NEITHER as a decent job NOR as a prestigious job	3 5.4%	1 1.8%	3 5.4%	33 58.9%	16 28.6%	2.694		

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements of societal status and the choices of the respondents.

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is less than 0.05 for all the statements i.e. null hypothesis is proved wrong. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the Statements of Societal status and the choices of the respondents. Further, it can be seen from the K-S values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that ‘Tourist guide is considered NEITHER as a decent job NOR as a prestigious job’ ranked first followed by ‘The media has a major role in the correct view of society to work as a tourist guide’ and ‘Socialization helps obtain contacts easier working as a tourist guide’.

Table 4. Finance

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	K-S value	Chi-square	p-value
1	Salary that I get fits my qualification	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	14 25.0%	19 33.9%	20 35.7%	1.576	15.893	.013
2	Financial incentive that I get encourages me to work in this profession – additional perks such as tips	1 1.8%	1 1.8%	11 19.6%	13 23.2%	30 53.6%	2.386		
3	Salary motivates me to continue in this profession	14 25.0%	3 5.4%	13 23.2%	18 32.1%	8 14.3%	1.600		
4	I am just satisfied with the amount of money that was accorded to me as a tourist guide	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	9 16.1%	33 58.9%	14 25.0%	2.286		

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements of Finance and the choices of the respondents.

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is less than 0.05 for all the statements i.e. null hypothesis is proved wrong. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the Statements of Finance and the choices of the respondents. Further, it can be seen from the K-S values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that 'Financial incentive that I get encourages me to work in this profession – additional perks such as tips' ranked first followed by 'I am just satisfied with the amount of money that was accorded to me as a tourist guide' and 'Salary motivates me to continue in this profession'.

Table 5. Experience

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	K-S value	Chi-square	p-value
1	Tourist guide must have sufficient experience and high skills of cultural understanding behavior of the tourist	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	14 25.0%	19 33.9%	20 35.7%	2.768	22.500	.048
2	Exposure through attending training increases my professional and service quality	1 1.8%	1 1.8%	11 19.6%	13 23.2%	30 53.6%	2.491		
3	I attend enough number of training courses and workshops throughout my working to develop my performance	14 25.0%	3 5.4%	13 23.2%	18 32.1%	8 14.3%	1.764		
4	I enjoy meeting and salutation from customers in my job	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	9 16.1%	33 58.9%	14 25.0%	2.092		
5	Tourist guide job is challenging and demanding more from my experience	4 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 1.8%	31 55.4%	20 35.7%	2.705		
6	I know most of the tasks beforehand I commence my work	5 8.9%	0 0.0%	2 3.6%	24 42.9%	25 44.6%	2.431		

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements of Experience and the choices of the respondents.

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is less than 0.05 for all the statements i.e. null hypothesis is proved wrong. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the Statements of Experience and the choices of the respondents. Further, it can be seen from the K-S values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that 'Tourist guide must have sufficient experience and high skills of cultural understanding behavior of the tourist' ranked first followed by 'Tourist guide job is challenging and demanding more from my experience' and 'Exposure through attending training increases my professional and service quality'.

Table 6. Successful Tourist Guide

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	K-S value	Chi-square	p-value
1	I have succeeded in my tourist guide job	0 0.0%	1 1.8%	8 14.3%	27 48.2%	20 35.7%	1.827	32.571	.000
2	I can easily manage any number of tourists at the same time	1 1.8%	3 5.4%	1 1.8%	28 50.0%	23 41.1%	2.289		
3	I am well versed with the rules and regulations of the Tourism Ministry in Oman	4 7.1%	1 1.8%	0 0.0%	14 25.0%	37 66.1%	2.718		
4	My proficiency in languages other than Arabic makes my job easier and succeed	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	6 10.7%	12 21.4%	38 67.9%	3.092		
5	I can easily handle foreign tourists without giving them any difficulty	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 3.6%	23 41.1%	31 55.4%	2.649		
6	I am kind, polite and show hospitality to my tourists	0 0.0%	4 7.1%	2 3.6%	6 10.7%	44 78.6%	3.446		

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements of Successful tourist guides and the choices of the respondents.

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is less than 0.05 for all the statements i.e. null hypothesis is proved wrong. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the Statements of successful tourist guides and the choices of the respondents. Further, it can be seen from the K-S values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that 'I am kind, polite and show hospitality to my tourists' ranked first followed by 'My proficiency in languages other than Arabic makes my job easier and succeed' and 'I am well versed with the rules and regulations of the Tourism Ministry in Oman'.

REGRESSION

Table 7 (a), (b), (c) & (d)

Variables Entered/Removed ^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Societal Status, Finance Government Support, Experience ^b	.	Enter

^a Dependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

^b Independent Variable: Societal Status, Finance, Government support, Experience.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421 ^a	.177	.113	2.056

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	46.464	4	11.616	2.749	.038 ^b
Residual	215.518	51	4.226		
	261.982	55			

^a Dependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

^b Independent Variable: Societal Status, Finance, Government support, Experience.

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	32.246	2.735		11.788	.000
Government Support	.090	.077	.156	1.173	.246
Finance	-.246	.115	-.274	-2.151	.036
Experience	.037	.064	.078	.570	.571
Societal Status	-.204	.092	-.291	-2.220	.031

^a Dependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

p-value for the variables Government support and Experience is > .05. So eliminating these variables, the analysis is carried out, and the results are as follows:

Table 8 (a), (b), (c) & (d)

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Societal Status, Finance ^b	.	Enter

^a Dependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

^b Independent Variable: Societal Status, Finance.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.375 ^a	.141	.108	2.061

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	36.914	2	18.457	4.346	.018 ^b
Residual	225.068	53	4.247		
	261.982	55			

^a Dependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

^b Independent Variable: Societal Status, Finance

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	33.809	2.489		13.584	.000
Finance	-.238	.114	-.265	-2.083	.042
Societal Status	-.182	.090	-.259	-2.032	.047

^aDependent Variable: Successful Tourist Guide

From the above table 10 (b), it can be seen that 14.1% of the respondents are influenced by the equation given below.

Since all the p-values < 0.05, the derived linear regression will be as follows:

$$TG = 33.809 - 0.238 F - 0.182 SS$$

Where, TG – Successful Tourist Guide job,

F – Finance

SS – Societal Status

There is an association between the Successful Tourist Guide ship and Finance and Societal Success. i.e. There is an impact of Finance and Societal Success factors on Success of Tourist Guide ship. But the negative coefficients shows that finance and societal success makes a negative impact on the tourist guide ship.

RESULTS

The study reveals that there are more male members working as a tourist guide and youngsters preferably in the age of 25-35 working as tourist guides. Further, the majority of the tourist guides are single.

Amongst the Government support factors, the respondents preferred and suggested that specialized courses should be offered by the Government to tourist guides to improve their performances and Financial and Moral support should also be provided by the Government to take up Tourist guide profession. Further to this, they prefer the Government should support tourist guides to participate in global events of tourism as well.

Through the societal status factors, the respondents opined that Tourist guides profession is considered neither as a decent job nor as a prestigious job by the society and the media only can correct the view of the society.

The choices of the financial factors by the respondents implies that though financial incentive encourages the tourist guides to continue their profession due to the additional perks they obtain such as tips, it is reported that they are just satisfied with the amount they obtain.

The choices of the Experience factors by the respondents indicates that specialized courses and training should be offered by the Government to improve their performance as they respondents believe that the tourist guide job requires high skills and a good understanding of the culture. It was also assumed that the profession demands more experience.

The statements of successful tourist guides confirmed that the tourist guides should be kind, polite and show hospitality to the tourists and proficient in languages other than Arabic and should be well versed with the rules and regulations of the Tourism Ministry in Oman.

Further, the linear regression derived proves that there is an impact of Finance and Societal factors on the Success of Tourist Guide profession. But it is noted from the negative coefficients that finance and societal success makes a negative impact on the tourist guide job.

CONCLUSION

Tour guiding is considered in Oman as a menial job with low returns, and it does not fetch appropriate incentives. Most of the tourist guides are of the opinion that guiding alone will not be sufficient to maintain a family. This is because tourist guides in Oman are suffering from lack of support from the Government both in terms of finance and, guidance and training. They are neglected for no reasons.

Thus it is necessarily suggested that the Government should offer specialized courses or training to the Tourist guides so as to improve their performances and should provide financial/moral support. Further, the tourist guides should be encouraged to participate in global events of tourism. [Al Raisi](#) (2014) confirmed that Non-omani tourist guides participate in international tourism events outside Oman representing the private travel agencies whereas an Omani tourist guide does not get a chance to such international exposures due to Governmental bureaucracies. Thus it is suggested that Ministry of Tourism should organize annual conference within Oman involving all the tourist guides of Oman so as to interact with each of them and find out the difficulties faced by them.

Financial incentive obtained through the profession of tourist guides are just sufficient and not that much encouraging, and so Government can fix up salary standards for this professionals. And to create an image in the minds of the society that tourist guide job is a decent profession, media should also take an active role in changing the opinion.

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