

FUTURE OF OMAN TOURISM PERCEPTION OF THE STUDENTS IN TOURISM STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Oman's 'Vision 2040' aims at diversifying its economic activities from oil and gas sector to tourism sector. The vision and mission statement aims at developing tourism as a sustainable economic sector. The objective of the study is to analyze the various factors affecting the students' perceptions towards choosing Tourism studies as their main stream. The study was conducted with 223 students of tourism studies who were selected on the basis of random sampling and were contacted through a well-defined questionnaire. The primary data was collected, compiled and thoroughly analyzed to arrive at conclusions. A critical analysis was carried out using null hypothesis, chi-square and ranking tests.

The study reveals that the factors like non-discrimination of gender, promotion opportunities, and physical working conditions play a crucial role in motivating most of the students in choosing tourism studies. Further this paper critically analyzes the discouraging factors for their aversion towards tourism industry.

Our empirical results reveal that the high risk of accidents, non-tourism spouse preferences, Omani traditional values discourage the attitude towards choosing tourism as their future job and hence the tourism studies. The study further demonstrates that there is a strong association between the motivating factors and the reasons for students choosing tourism as their studies. There exists necessity for the Government and the related sponsoring institutions to look into these factors and encourage our young tourism students who will in return render their full support towards diversifying Oman's future economy towards tourism.

Key words: Tourism in Oman, Tourism & Hospitality Studies, Tourism Students' Perceptions, Diversification of Oman's economy, Oman's Vision 2040.

INTRODUCTION

The Travel and Tourism Industry made a direct contribution of USD 2,155.4 billion in 2013 (2.9% of total GDP) worldwide. Its total contribution to GDP was USD 6990.3bn (9.5% of the GDP) in 2013 (WTTC, 2014). This Industry is estimated to have directly supported 100,894,000 jobs in 2013. It estimates this figure to grow to 126,257,000 jobs or 3.5% of total employment by 2024. It is not a wonder that most of the countries are turning towards this Industry as a viable and sustainable alternative to fuel their economies (WTTC, 2014) and Sultanate of Oman is no exception to it. On the 38th national day of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, reaffirmed the necessity to give tourism priority in the country's future development programs. He added that "The tourism industry is well qualified to offer career opportunities to Omanis".

The Arab states are giving priority to economic diversification, through huge investments and projects that are being implemented by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Martin Hvidt, 2013). As pointed out by Cook and Nielson (2011), each country has its own unique history of diversification, Oman, for example, is building a service and tourism industry. Economic diversification has been prioritized in the planning effort since 1970s, considering the country's limited oil and gas resources and their unreliability as an income generator in the long run i.e. oil production peaked in 2001 at 960,000 barrels a day and in 2010, rate of production was 800,000 barrels a day (MEED, 2010). Since 1970's Oman has been planning its development using the 5 year plan format and is one of the first GCC country which placed emphasis on economic diversification to reduce its dependence on Oil and Gas. Sultanate of Oman has started implementing the policy of diverting oil based economy towards tourism economy and it is a part of Vision-2040. The main aim of Vision 2040 is to provide suitable conditions for economic diversification to do away on excess dependency on oil production (MONE, 1995). The Vision 2040 which covers the period 1996-2040 underlines the importance of the same. The Vision 2040 includes a plan to make tourism the next main source of income for Oman after Oil and Gas. The vision statement for tourism development in the country aims at developing tourism as an important and sustainable social economic sector. The mission statement clearly states that, "Tourism will help to facilitate economic diversification, preservation of cultural integrity and



environmental protection of Sultanate of Oman", (MOT, 2015). In Oman, though the Government set aside RO 298 million for development of Human Resources for all the industries including the tourism industry, the localization drive has met with limited success due to gaps such as lack of interest in joining the hospitality sector; lack of skilled Omani staff especially with regards to language skills in the tourism industry in general and tour guidance specifically. (TOO Aug, 2014).

The Government has recognized the need to train and educate more Omani nationals to prepare them for taking up employment in the tourism and hospitality sector (Bontenbal and Aziz, 2013). Omanisation in tourism sector is boosting up the nationals to take up the jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry. Confirming this is the Omani ministerial Decree No.159/2003 which enforces 100% Omanisation of employees in the un-skilled labour force in the tourism sector (MOM, 2003). The employment criteria in the tourism sector has been geared up in the tourism and hospitality sector since 2003 vide Ministerial decree No.165/2003 which demonstrates the Omanization plans in the tourism sector to increase up to a certain percentages of 2007 viz. 83 % in airlines, 100 % in tourist restaurants, 80% in travel agents and 75% in 3/4/5 star hotels (MOM, 2003a). Despite such efforts the target is yet to be reached. The following table shows the prevailing status of workforce employed in Tourism Sector:

Table 1. showing the Manpower/Labor in Tourism Sector 2013

	Omani	Expatriate	Total	Omanization %
Airline Agencies	3152	2163	5315	59.30
Tourism Agencies	1265	2312	3577	35.36
Accommodation	2724	6608	9332	29.19
Car Rentals	210	124	334	62.87
Totals	7351	11207	18558	39.61

Source: Al Balushi, A A, Human Resources Dept., Ministry of Tourism, 2014

Since 2000, there have been various reforms in order to improve and facilitate foreign investments. With the induction of the country into WTO (in 2000) its strategy of promoting tourism industry to enhance private sector participation has been successful. With this, the country's other objectives like including remote areas within this development, as well as increasing employment opportunities for its citizens became easily achievable.

In the current VIII year plan (2011-2015), the government has allocated a huge amount for the development of tourism infrastructure. It spent RO 2084 million for Airport and Port construction and RO 1233 million for development and expansion. RO 503 million was allocated for Road improvement and development. In addition sanctions were given for the construction of additional 3000 hotel rooms by the end of 2014.

All these investments saw a positive effect on the tourist arrival leading to an increase in tourism revenue for the country. As per WTTC (2014) statistics, Oman's Travel and Tourism industry made a direct contribution of 3% to the GDP (RO 982.8 Million). This is expected to grow by 5.4% per annum, leading to an overall contribution of 3.9% (RO 1834.2 Million) by 2024. The employment generated by this industry was at 3.3% of the total employment in the country, which accounted for 37000 jobs. This is expected to increase to 60000 jobs by 2024. This means that the Omanization targets could easily be met. Omanization meant localization of jobs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is argued that a country's development and economic growth can be achieved by promotion of enterprise among students – a trait which requires knowledge of entrepreneurship, financial resources, and the business environment (Milius & Sarkiene, 2008). Since tourism has the potential to create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities on a large scale for youths (Sokhalingam et.al, 2013) Oman sees it as potential sector to develop. According to Martin Hvidt (2013) Oman along with other GCC countries was striving to steer its nationals (both men and women) to educate themselves and compete for jobs in the private and public sectors alike. Omani students are not keen in taking up professions in the tourism and hospitality industry even though there is very good scope and enormous job opportunities in Tourism sector of Oman.

Riley et. Al. (2002) suggest that tourism employment is devastated by the confusing complexity of its own image. It is seen a glamorous Industry but the jobs on its own are seen as low skilled, and low paying. (Riley et al., 2002). Even parents do not support the student's decisions to take up job in this industry stating reasons like 'servitude' and low career growth prospects (Pang, 2010). This might be the reason as stated by Pizzam (1982) that the employees within the line are often looked upon as being uneducated, unmotivated, untrained, unskilled and unproductive. This is confirmed by Mahony and Sillitoe that many positions within this industry needs only little experience and low



skills (O'Mahony and Sillitoe, 2001). According to Roney and Oztin (2007), though the Tourism Industry is credited with employment generation, the jobs themselves were low paid, and mostly needed low skills. He also emphasized that it is very essential for the tourism industry to have skilled and committed work force in order to be profitable in the current highly competitive and globalized business environment. But as per a report by Aplen Capital Bank in September 2014, the growth of hospitality industry was threatened to be slowed down due to lack of skilled work force.

According to Kusluvan (2003), understanding current tourism student's attitude and perspective will help to gain an insight to why many graduates are disinclined to join or even continue to work in this industry. Casado (1992) investigated the basic expectations of students in the tourism sector and found their expectations to be 'fairly realistic' before their graduation period. Jenkins (2001) has noted that undergraduate hospitality students' perceptions of the industry deteriorate as their degree course progresses. Chellen and Nunkoo analyzed the factors nature of work, social status, industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, career prospects, promotion opportunities, co-workers, managers, pay/benefits and commitment to the tourism industry (Chellen and Nunkoo, 2010). A study conducted among the students of Adnan Menderes University in Turkey showed that the internship students gave high priority to good and fair wages, opportunities for career development, tactful and professional management and personal growth (Yuksel et al. 2003). The perception is that the tourism industry is having low pay, require low skills, non-socializable working hours, tension mounted jobs, no promotional and training opportunities (Richardson, 2009; Walmsley, 2004). However, the study by Harmon deduced that a better recognition of the tourism jobs will bring about a rise in the level of commitment of students towards the industry (Chellan, 2010). However, it is argued that commitment to tourism and hospitality industry will be determined by the perceptions and attitudes of the students, the future workers of the industry, who though potential recruits have a negative image of working in the industry (Aksu and Koksall, 2005). The same was confirmed by Richardson that the undergraduate students who are studying tourism and hospitality in Australia. These students did not believe that the industry offers them the attributes that they see as important in choosing a future career (Richardson, 2009). Many students who enter tourism and hospitality studies programmes have no real understanding of the types of work available and the employment conditions in the industry (Barron and Maxwell, 1993). In the recent past, Colleges from Tourism & Hospitality Studies in Oman facing many drop outs in the courses offered by them which is trivial from the Statistical Bulletin of Oman. Though various researches have been carried out to find out the reasons for the turn over from the industry, the root cause of the problem remains unsolved. Therefore this research focusses on the study of the students' perception and the students' psychology towards the industry as they will be the future generation of Oman.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted among the students from various colleges of Tourism and Hospitality Management Studies in Oman. 223 questionnaires were distributed. To confirm accuracy, the questionnaires were personally handed over to the students and unbiased responses were collected helping them through translating and supplementing with the necessary explanation wherever required.

DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Table No. 2 Showing Demographic information about the respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	95	42.6
	Female	128	57.4
Home Town	Ibri	6	2.7
	Muscat	127	57.0
	Musandam	17	7.6
	Nizwa	12	5.4
	Sohar	23	10.3
	Salalah	5	2.2
	Sur	2	0.9
	Others	31	13.9
Work Experience	No Prior exp.	182	81.6
	Less than 2 years	16	7.2
	2 – 5 years	10	4.5
	More than 5 years	15	6.7



Major – Course of study	Tourism Management	195	87.4
	Hotel Management	16	7.2
	Event Management	9	4.0
	Hospitality Mgt.	1	0.4
	Club Management	1	0.4
	Others	1	0.4
Enrollment of study	Full time	222	99.6
	Part time	1	0.4
Nationality	Omani	221	99.1
	Non-Omanis	2	0.9
Studies - Discontinuity	No (First time of study)	194	87.0
	One time discontinued	28	12.6
	Discontinued for 2 times	1	0.4
Sponsorship	100 % by Ministry	155	69.5
	50 % by Ministry & 50 % Self	45	20.2
	100 % Self sponsored	23	10.3
GPA during study	1 – 2	27	12.1
	>2 – 3	137	61.4
	>3 – 4	55	24.7
	>4	4	1.8
choice of study	Yes – Tourism	189	84.8
	Not Tourism	34	15.2
Different career paths in Tourism	Yes – awaits	74	33.2
	No	149	66.8
Plan to start own Business	Yes	83	37.2
	No	140	62.8
Recent Developments	Yes	53	23.8
	No	170	76.2
Tourism promotion / campaign by Govt.	Yes	27	12.1
	No	196	87.9
Job vacancies in Tourism	Yes	60	26.9
	No	163	73.1
Applied for job based on any advertisement	Yes	14	6.3
	No	209	93.7

Source: Questionnaire

It is evident from the table 3, that p value is less than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. i.e. it connotes that there is a significant relationship between the statements pertaining to the reason for selecting tourism and hospitality course and the choices of the respondents. Thus, the claimed assertion that ‘the issues (statements) play a dominant role in affecting the selection of tourism and hospitality course’ is proved positively. Further, it is evident from the K-S values that ‘A future career in Tourism’ was ranked first among the factors followed by the factors ‘Getting a scholarship’ and ‘The only major I was offered’

Table 3. Showing the Reason for selecting Tourism and Hospitality Course

#	Statements	SD	D	UD	A	SA	K-S value	χ^2	p value
1	A future career in Tourism	6 2.7%	7 3.1%	18 8.1%	52 23.3%	140 62.8%	5.392	92.686	.000
2	Parents compelled me	83 37.2%	51 22.9%	22 9.9%	33 14.8%	34 15.2%	3.395		
3	Curriculum is reasonable	29 13.0%	27 12.1%	24 10.8%	58 26.0%	85 38.1%	3.596		
4	Course fee reasonable	29 13.0%	38 17.0%	36 16.1%	50 22.4%	70 31.4%	2.939		
5	I got scholarship	19 8.5%	11 4.9%	43 19.3%	34 15.2%	116 52.0%	4.567		
6	Easy to get a job	1 0.4%	2 0.9%	39 17.5%	80 35.9%	101 45.3%	4.160		
7	Studying Tourism is Easier	6 2.7%	26 11.7%	10 4.5%	66 29.6%	115 51.6%	4.335		
8	The only major I was offered	8 3.6%	39 17.5%	7 3.1%	53 23.8%	116 52.0%	4.475		

Table 4. Showing Personality Traits

#	Statements	SD	D	UD	A	SA	K-S value	χ^2	p value
1	Love to travel	33 14.8%	23 10.3%	12 5.4%	58 26.0%	97 43.5%	3.995	144.426	0.000
2	Love to meet people	2 0.9%	4 1.8%	10 4.5%	47 21.1%	160 71.7%	6.255		
3	Do not mind working in shifts	10 4.5%	15 6.7%	28 12.6%	65 29.1%	105 47.1%	3.954		
4	Love to work with people with different culture	4 1.8%	32 14.3%	16 7.2%	44 19.7%	127 57.0%	4.999		
5	Love to work abroad	28 12.6%	68 30.5%	25 11.2%	34 15.2%	68 30.5%	3.365		

It is evident from the above table 4 that p value is less than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. I.e. it connotes that there is a significant relationship between the statements pertaining to personality traits and the choices of the respondents. Thus, the claimed assertion that 'statements play a dominant



role in affecting the personality traits' is proved positively. Further, It can be seen from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ranking in the above table that the respondent believe the prime personality trait towards tourism is 'Love to meet people' followed by 'Love to work with people with different culture'; followed by 'Love to travel'.

Table 5. Showing the Motivating factors towards Tourism jobs

#	Statements	SD	D	UD	A	SA	K-S value	χ^2	p value
1	Get chances to meet famous people during tourism job	59 26.5%	54 24.2%	12 5.4%	60 26.9%	38 17.0%	3.298	154.220	.000
2	There is always something new to learn in this Tourism job	22 9.9%	52 23.3%	13 5.8%	70 31.4%	66 29.6%	3.850		
3	Physical working conditions are good in Tourism	14 6.3%	28 12.6%	26 11.7%	78 35.0%	77 34.5%	4.036		
4	No vocational qualification required in Tourism industry	18 8.1%	28 12.6%	31 13.9%	69 30.9%	77 34.5%	3.635		
5	There is no sex discrimination in Tourism industry	58 26.0%	88 39.5%	18 8.1%	40 17.9%	19 8.5%	4.294		
6	Plenty of job openings available in Tourism Industry	77 34.5%	62 27.8%	14 6.3%	44 19.7%	26 11.7%	3.734		
7	There are lots of promotion opportunities in Tourism job	69 30.9%	75 33.6%	10 4.5%	42 18.8%	27 12.1%	3.151		

It is evident from the above table 5 that p value is less than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. I.e. it connotes that there is a significant relationship between the statements pertaining to the motivating factors and the choices of the respondents. Thus, the claimed assertion that 'the motivating factors (statements) play a dominant role in affecting the selection of tourism and hospitality course' is proved positively. Further, it is evident from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov values that 'No sex discrimination in the Tourism industry' was ranked first among the factors followed by the factors 'Good Physical working conditions' and 'There is always something new to learn in this tourism job'.

It is evident from the below table 6 that p value is less than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. I.e. it connotes that there is a significant relationship between the statements pertaining to the reason for not joining the tourism and hospitality courses and the choices of the respondents. Thus, the claimed assertion that 'the issues (statements) play a dominant role in influencing the non-selection of tourism and hospitality course' is proved positively. Further, it is evident from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov values that 'High risk of accidents in the tourism industry' was ranked first among the factors followed by the factors 'Omanis do not prefer to marry a boy/girl from tourism industry' and 'No job security'.

Table 6. Showing the Reasons for not joining the Tourism Industry

#	Statements	SD	D	UD	A	SA	K-S value	χ^2	p value
1	No job security in this sector	29 13.0%	24 10.8%	31 13.9%	72 32.3%	67 30.0%	4.151	165.704	.000
2	Tourism job is not respected in Omani Society	13 5.8%	19 8.5%	32 14.3%	69 30.9%	90 40.4%	3.608		
3	Omanis do not prefer to marry a boy/girl working in Tourism Industry	10 4.5%	29 13.0%	19 8.5%	90 40.4%	75 33.6%	4.322		
4	There are high risk of accidents in the Tourism Industry	62 27.8%	95 42.6%	27 12.1%	24 10.8%	15 6.7%	4.358		
5	Working hours are not suitable for regular life	25 11.2%	34 15.2%	30 13.5%	70 31.4%	64 28.7%	3.625		
6	Promotion opportunities are less	8 3.6%	17 7.6%	26 11.7%	66 29.6%	106 47.5%	4.010		
7	Most of the people working in the Tourism Industry are rude	17 7.6%	35 15.7%	33 14.8%	60 26.9%	78 35.0%	3.313		
8	Pay is low and not sufficient	8 3.6%	20 9.0%	30 13.5%	67 30.0%	98 43.9%	3.712		
9	Fringe benefits (bonus, holiday, meals) are insufficient	3 1.3%	11 4.9%	49 22.0%	70 31.4%	90 40.4%	3.596		
10	Working in Tourism is in contradiction to my family values / Traditional values	17 7.6%	17 7.6%	26 11.7%	62 27.8%	101 45.3%	3.749		

Table's No. 7 (a), (b), (c) and (d) showing the Results of Analysis of Variance Test

Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Personality Traits, Motivating Factors towards Tourism ^a		Enter

^a All requested variables entered

^b Dependent Variable: Reason for Selecting Tourism Course

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.155 ^a	.024	.015	3.733

a. Predictors: (Constant), PERSONALITY TRAITS, MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75.927	2	37.964	2.725	.068 ^a
	Residual	3065.086	220	13.932		
	Total	3141.013	222			

a. Predictors: (Constant), PERSONALITY TRAITS, MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM

b. Dependent Variable: REASON FOR SELECTING TOURISM

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	27.584	1.890		14.593	.000
	MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM	.113	.049	.154	2.306	.022
	PERSONALITY TRAITS	1.855E-02	.082	.015	.226	.821

a. Dependent Variable: REASON FOR SELECTING TOURISM

F (2,220) is low and p-value >.05 therefore the null hypothesis is proved. Further it is observed that the p-value for personality traits is greater than .05. Thus eliminating the variable personality traits ANOVA is carried out thus we get the following:

Table's No. 8 (a), (b), (c) and (d) showing the Results of Analysis of Variance Test after elimination

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM ^a	.	Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. Dependent Variable: REASON FOR SELECTING TOURISM

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.155 ^a	.024	.020	3.725

a. Predictors: (Constant), MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75.214	1	75.214	5.422	.021 ^a
	Residual	3065.800	221	13.872		
	Total	3141.013	222			

a. Predictors: (Constant), MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM

b. Dependent Variable: REASON FOR SELECTING TOURISM

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	27.936	1.068		26.160	.000
	MOTIVATING FACTORS TOWARDS TOURISM	.114	.049	.155	2.328	.021

a. Dependent Variable: REASON FOR SELECTING TOURISM

The obtained linear regression is $V_2 = 27.936 + .114 V_1$ where $V_1 =$ Motivating Factors and $V_2 =$ Reason for selecting Tourism studies.

It can be seen from the above that all the factors have impact on the reasons for students' selection.

RESULTS, SUGGESTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

According to the ranking by the respondents, among the reasons for selecting tourism studies 'A future career in Tourism' ranked first followed by the factors 'Getting a scholarship' and 'the only major I was offered'. The personality trait towards tourism is 'Love to meet people' followed by 'Love to work with people with different culture'; followed by 'Love to travel'. The motivating affecting the selection of tourism course is 'No sex discrimination in the Tourism industry' followed by the factors 'Good Physical working conditions' and 'there is always something new to learn in this tourism job'. The factors for the non-selection of tourism and hospitality course is 'High risk of accidents in the tourism industry' followed by the factors 'Omanis do not prefer to marry a boy/girl from tourism industry' and 'No job security'.

Further the ANOVA shows that there is a strong association between the motivating factors and the reasons for students choosing tourism as their studies whereas the personality traits do not have any impact on the selection.

Therefore, Government should take measures to enhance and fix up a better salary structures for tourism industries sector. Governmental assistance should be provided in the form of training, policy reformations towards entrepreneurs venturing in Tourism sector. Synchronization should be made between the Tourism and Hospitality professional associations and the related educational Institutions. Hotels and Tourism companies should volunteer to recruit the institutions to provide internship to tourism qualified professionals. Tourism and Hospitality educational institutions should include more practical field visits and tours so as to provide the students with the hands on training facilities so that the students will be attracted towards Tourism sector and motivated to take up tourism and hospitality jobs which will push up the younger generation to boost up the fast growing economic growth and development of Oman.

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