

Local tourism growth unlocks industry careers for students

As the South African and African tourism continues to rise, more students are opting for a career in the industry as opportunities grow. "We've seen a steady increase in enrolments for tourism and hospitality-related qualifications and courses over the past three years, which points to a growing demand in the field," says Ncumisa Makrayi, senior team leader at Oxbridge Academy, which serves more than 20,000 South African distance learning students every year.



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Makrayi says the industry is attractive not only to young people, but also to those seeking a career change later in life, because of the growing and diverse opportunities at both junior and senior level.

At current, the direct and indirect jobs in South Africa's tourism industry is estimated at more than 1.2 million. But the World Economic Forum (WEF) has estimated that sub-Saharan Africa will create about 3.2 million tourism jobs between 2012 and 2022. Additionally, the WEF expects African tourism employment to grow by 2.3% per annum.

Makrayi says that it would be impossible to note all the opportunities in the industry and the fields that can be pursued, but that these include positions such as hotel manager and receptionist, reservations clerk, travel agent, tour guide, waiter and bartender, barista, event planner, flight planner, travel agent, concierge, and chef.

"Another major benefit in this industry is that there is a lot of scope – and indeed we are seeing this happen – for suitably qualified and experienced professionals to start their own small businesses in their chosen field," adds Makrayi.

Makrayi, however, states, that with the increase in opportunity, there is also an increase in competition for available opportunities; which means that people wishing to enter the industry will do well to show that they have mastered the basic theory in their chosen field and that they have some experience.

"The benefit is that there are many options for pursuing a qualification in your own time and at your own pace, so that you can continue earning while learning."

Research is key to match strengths, passion

She adds that, before deciding on a specific field in tourism, candidates should do their research and determine which careers are best matched to their individual strengths and passion. "For instance, travel agents research, plan, and book trips for individuals and groups. Although people are starting to research and book their travel plans online, it's often easier to use an agent, as they have years of experience and knowledge, and know how to avoid expensive mistakes by making suitable flight bookings, hotel selections and transfer arrangements. If you're considering becoming a travel agent, you will need great organisational skills and attention to detail, and the ability to think on your feet."

Hotel managers, on the other hand, need to be comfortable with great responsibility and must be able to juggle many balls at once. "As a hotel manager, you will be responsible for the daily running of the hotel, including recruiting, training and supervising staff; managing budgets; planning maintenance work; dealing with customers' complaints; overseeing reservations; promoting and marketing the hotel; and ensuring that the hotel complies with health and safety regulations."

For those who enjoy travelling, becoming a tour operator is the job of a lifetime. "But it's not all sunshine and sangrias," says Makrayi. "You must still be able to deal competently with logistics, and with various service providers such as bus operators, airlines and hoteliers."

Makrayi suggests that a good starting point for those who want to pursue a career in tourism, but who are not yet sure in which field, is to do a National Tourism Certificate that is registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). "That will give you a solid theoretical grounding and a foot in many doors, while you investigate exactly which field is the best fit for you."

"And for those who do know exactly what they want to do, there are many fantastic short courses and skills certificates related to specific tourism and hospitality careers, which will give them the foundation they need to enter the workplace with confidence."

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