



Navigating workforce evolution and skill development: A study of Manipur's Tourism and Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

In the global scenario of tourism and hospitality industries, workforce evolution and skill development are needed. Manipur, a state in north-east India, showcases a unique perspective due to its diverse cultural and natural resources. Rapid changes in technological advancements, consumer preferences, and socio-cultural shifts necessitate a skilled and adaptable workforce. However, the workforce in Manipur's tourism and hospitality sectors often lacks the much-needed high-tech facilities and training in skill development to meet these evolving demands. By navigating the evolving workforce with prevailing skill development programmes with a focus on the implications for human resource management and training. In order to address these skill development issues, the study will investigate the roles of institutions and stakeholders in tourism and hospitality industries. Manipur could have a platform in the global tourism and hospitality industry and can unlock its full potential as a vibrant tourism destination by empowering its workforce with the necessary skills and competencies.

Keywords: Skill development, stakeholders, workforce, training

Introduction

Manipur, a destination blessed with diverse cultural heritage and unique geographical landscapes has a huge untapped tourism potential. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once described Manipur as the "Land of Jewel" (S.C. Joshi, 2002) [9]. With a rich history spanning over 2,500 years, Manipur has served as a significant hub for both economic and cultural exchanges across Asia. This beautiful state has a blend of traditions with rich cultural history, and it is a home to a unique variety of flora and fauna. Manipur, a hidden gem in the northeastern corner of India, 67% of Manipur's land area is covered by the forests. Manipur, the state where the world's only terrestrial lily "Shiroi lily" can be found, the floating national park "Keibul Lamjao national park" and the most unique "Sangai" (brow-antlered deer) also called the dancing deer can be found on this floating mass vegetation called Phumdi on the Loktak lake. And the boasts of being the birthplace of India's classical dance "Ras Leela" and "modern polo". The exotic cuisines, vibrant tribal dances, soothing native folk music's, intricate designs of handloom and handicrafts products, and "Ima keithel", the world's only market operated only by women where male vendors and retailers are not permitted to sell anything inside the market, attracts lots of tourist from all over the world. "Khongjom War Memorial Complex" holds significant historical significance in Manipur since it was the battlefield fought by Manipur against the British colonial expansion, popularly known as the "The Anglo-Manipuri War, 1891. Every year 23rd April is observed as "Khongjom Day" in remembrance of the martyrs who laid down their lives for their motherland. Manipur was also one of the battlefields of World War II where Japanese soldiers joined hands with the Indian National Army and fought against the British. Sponsored by the Japanese government, "The Imphal Peace Memorial" was constructed at the "Maibam Lotpa Ching" to honour the Japanese soldiers. For the Japanese tourists in Manipur, it is their pilgrimage site. Recently, the Japanese government collaborated with the

state government to safeguard the battlefield sites of World War II (Ngaseppam, 2023) [19].

The primary objective of the tourism and hospitality industries is to generate money by providing services. Poor/low-quality services have negative consequences on tourism and hospitality industries. Tourism and hospitality industry is an important factor in state's economic expansion. Also, the state's low-level growth for tourism and hospitality industry and socio-economic development is due to the lack of attention of the government (Sikder, 2014) [28]. Tourism and hospitality industry created direct or indirect job and contributed to the GDP of the state. Manipur shares international border with Myanmar, with good connectivity with southeast Asia, it has significant commercial advantage as well as in tourism and hospitality industry. Training and skill development for the local communities, who often receive the smallest share of the economic advantages from tourism and hospitality activities are of greatest need and institutions in the field of tourism and hospitality management committed to producing efficient and competitive human resources for the dynamic and diverse tourism and hospitality industry. The state's economic growth has been largely contributed to by the development of tourism and hospitality industry.

Objectives

1. To study the current scenario of workforce employed in tourism and hospitality sector
2. To explore the various strategies implemented in the state for skill development in tourism and hospitality industry.
3. To understand the various challenges and opportunities on workforce evolution and skill development with respect to Manipur tourism and hospitality industry.

Research Methodology

This study on "Navigating Workforce Evolution and Skill Development: A Study of Manipur's Tourism and

Hospitality Industry” is based on secondary sources obtained from a variety of available sources, including published works, government annual reports, websites, papers, journals, books and articles.

Background of the study

With its unique geographical characteristics and deep heritage of culture, Manipur is a destination with immense unexplored tourism potential. Manipur welcomes people with an array of vibrant and diverse activities, from cultural to outdoor adventures, and offers historical experiences. But Manipur’s tourism and hospitality industry challenges in retaining employees due to the slow career progression, low wages, and more job opportunities outside the state and to the limited infrastructure and lack of public awareness. Since 2013-14, the state witnessed a sudden increase in foreign tourist arrival due to the Sangai festival (Khawairakpam *et al.*, 2018) ^[12]. Manipur receives more domestic tourists than foreign tourists every year, and there was a considerable difference (Manipur Tourism). Therefore, there is a need to take up strategies to attract more foreign tourists to Manipur as well as domestic tourists. Being a service provider industry, it is imperative to build a strong and efficient mechanism of service delivery as most of the tourists come for recreational purposes. The quality of visitor experiences will go up drastically, and the benefits of tourism and hospitality in the state will be better understood if the tourism and hospitality sector offer educational and skill development training programs to all stakeholders involved with the tourism and hospitality sector. And to advance the state tourism and hospitality industry up to the mark of a global platform, a skilled workforce is necessary, which makes assessing training programs for workforce development and the importance of adapting to emerging patterns and advances in technology essential.

1. Current workforce landscape in manipur

The workforce evolution in the tourism and hospitality sectors has changed rapidly, leading to a skills gap between the required skills and what is currently available. With the objective of promoting the skill development in Manipur tourism and hospitality industry, the state government has a commitment to intensify digitalization and integration of technology in tourism and hospitality industry and the workforce development training through the State Institute of Hotel Management (Manipur tourism policy 2022) ^[33]. Manipur’s tourism and hospitality sector faces major issues of high gender gap, low female participation, and high unemployment among educated skilled youth. Compared to men, women are more committed to their jobs in tourism and hospitality industry (Lee, C. & Lee, J., 2012) ^[13]. But in Manipur, male employees constitute a larger share than female counterparts and they are more committed to their current organisation as compared to their female employees. Age profile of the employees are almost equally distributed between 20-30 years in hotel units of Manipur tourism and hospitality industry (Monsang). Multiple studies have shown that high unemployment causes migration (Mihi-Ramírez *et al.*, 2014, Neto and Mullet, 1998) ^[15, 18]. Young, unmarried women make up a significant group of these migrants. (Mukherjee and Dutta, 2017) ^[17]. In Manipur, the service offerings were relatively limited, primarily consisting of conventional and typical services. Almost all

the hotels failed to cooperate with the State Tourism Department, and neither the owners nor the managers had any professional training. (Thomas *et al.*, 2017) ^[31]. There is a need for educational levels for employee’s skilled development in tourism and hospitality industries to develop the evolution of the workforce (Bartlett *et al.*, 2016) ^[5].

The educational status of the employees shows some variations with most of the employees having completed graduation and some of the employees have completed 12th standard and some are having post graduate degree. Of all the employees currently engaged in this sector, only few of the employee’s possess educational qualifications related to tourism and hospitality industry (Monsang). Therefore, there exists a big mismatch between the requirements of the industry and the supply of Manipur’s tourism and hospitality industries human resources. With the lack of technical and vocational educational institutions, which leads to a shortage of skilled workers with technical skills. Most of the employees have attended training for skill development program, mainly on-the-job training is observed. In addition to on-the-job training, the employees have also received off-the-job training in the form of simulation (duplicating) for various natural and man-made calamities like fire, earthquake etc. In order to satisfy customers, people who are working in tourism and hospitality industries are required to have both hard and soft skills. Employees are engaged in skilled nature of work as well as unskilled nature of work, but educational levels have significant negative relationship with turnover intention. The economy is not creating enough suitable jobs, and technological changes are causing skill mismatches and job losses (Sharma, 2022) ^[26]. And there is a need of the hour to recruit employees from the tourism and hospitality background for the robust development. Many employees dislike working in shifts (Martins *et al.*, 2021) ^[14]. Average working hours in a day of the hospitality sector especially hotel units is 8-10 hours per day, and skilled employees are expected to have higher wages (Monsang). Previous studies also showed that many service-oriented persons fail to choose the tourism and hospitality industries as careers because of their working experience, and educated skilled workers are also often experience issues accepting jobs with low wages that demand few skills (Richardson, 2008, Solnet and Kralj, 2011) ^[24, 30]. Tourism and hospitality industry has a modest gender wage gap and pays unskilled workers better than most other sectors. (Oliver & Sard, 2021) ^[20]. Employees are engaged in skilled nature of work as well as unskilled nature of work, but educational levels have significant negative relationship with turnover intention. Although education level has no effect on job satisfaction, people with lower educational levels experience a greater lack of employment opportunities, but most levels of job satisfaction are based on the employee’s age, level of education, and experience in the field (Kara, 2010) ^[10]. Job satisfaction level among hotel employees is lowest as they are not satisfied with the benefits they received. Manipur fails to provide enough career development and planning opportunities for employee skill development training and programs to retain the best talent for tourism and hospitality industry.

2. Factors Driving Workforce Evolution

Manipur’s tourism and hospitality industry is still in its infancy and has not yet grown to its full potential. For the

workforce evolution, Manipur Tourism Policy 2020 also develops a compensation system for exceptional contributions to tourism promotion and enforces the use of approved local tour operators. And with the help of GIS modelling, the growth of potential tourist destination mapping in Manipur and the visitors are also satisfied with the facilities offered in tourist destinations (Prameshwori & Jamir). To advance the workforce evolution, Vocational education and teaching capacity development has been addressed by the NEP 2020 in order to increase learners' employability and vocational skills at all levels (Pathak, 2021) ^[21].

The workforce evolution in tourism and hospitality industry is being driven by programs for skill development and vocational education, and it demands and requires more skill development institutions to fostering the stakeholders for the continuous learning of modern tourism and hospitality trends. For the state to have a productive and innovative economy more skilled human potentials are needed because skills empower people to do innovative things in a productive way. The Indian government has also given top priority to skill development in the recent years. Through hands-on learning, vocational education provides students with experience and skills that are directly related to future careers (Kaushik, 2014) ^[11] and get practical exposures from collaboration and partnerships from various types of industries which is related to tourism and hospitality industry. With the rapid technological advancements both in international and national levels, one needs to evolve to give professional services to the customers. The role of upskilling in bridging the technological gap and encouraging inclusive training is much needed to create a diverse and skilled workforce. And all the Stakeholders of tourism and hospitality sectors can improve their strategies by using flexible learning models, developing collaborations between educational institutions and industry, and placing a strong emphasis on the development of both soft and technical skills (Ajayi & Udeh, 2024) ^[2] for workforce development.

3. Skill Development Needs for Manipur's Tourism Industry

Skill development means the process of the improving and expanding the skill sets to add more value to the organisation and career development, and it will ultimately support the state's tourism and hospitality sector's development both professionally and personally. And utilizing the productive, skilled human resources are essential for the long-term development. Hotels that were privately operated were better managed compared to those that were owned by the government (Thomas *et al.*, 2017) ^[31]. Cultivating skills has primarily reliant on internships (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019) ^[29]. The level of technical and skill development relates positively to the levels of employment and growth in opportunities (Akram, 2012). In Manipur, there is currently a lack of expansion of skill development programs or institutions. The demands of the industry and what the institution offers are different (Asirifi *et al.*, 2013) ^[3]. So, there is the importance of enhancing the relevance, effectiveness, and responsiveness of tourism education to meet the demands of the dynamic and evolving tourism industry (Philips, 2023) ^[22]. Initiatives to upskill and reskill the workforce of Manipur's tourism and hospitality industries must be implemented right away to close the

employability skills gap while maintaining the industry's competitiveness (Roop, 2023). And None of the other studies focused on the importance of knowledge management in the tourism and hospitality industries' supply chains (Deb *et al.*, 2023). Tourism and hospitality industry holds lots of potential for income, expertise, and employment redistribution and is less capital-intensive but highly labour-intensive. Findings from earlier research have shown how important it is to foresee technology changes to match employees' capabilities with demands in the future. (Ajayi & Udeh, 2024) ^[2]. So, the upskill employees for the rapidly evolving world of technology, there is a need to develop workforce training programs for new technologies. The dimension of effective and strong positive soft skills was communication, leadership, interpersonal, self-management, critical thinking, time management, problem-solving on organizational creativity. And Soft skills should be treated as a core subject to know the importance and more understanding by the students (Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020) ^[7]. Developing soft skills and technical skills can improve the lives of employees by increasing their employability, enabling advancement in their jobs, and smoothing workplace transitions that are beneficial to their well-being.

Strategies for Skill Development

The primary objective of higher educational and training programs in tourism and hospitality industry is to advance the development of the specific skills of the industry. Both academia and industries agree that there is a growing gap between the skills that entry-level employees in the tourism and hospitality industries are expected to have and the skills that young professionals should possess. (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019) ^[29]. Stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industries are unable to operate independently since they are interrelated with each other in order to achieve their goals. Stakeholder collaboration for the purposes of setting priorities, sharing of new ideas, problem & issue analysis, enhancement of skills, etc. with the industry & trade associations, approved tourism establishments, hospitality & travel institutes, and other government departments through coordination meetings, conferences, etc. Across rotation throughout various departments, internships enable students to obtain experience in all areas of the departments. The skill gap among employee's workforce eventually has a negative effect to tourism and hospitality stakeholders as well as the economy of the state. Closer collaboration between the skill development trainers and tourism industry functionaries will help the students know what the industry expects out of them and subsequently boost the industry, playing complimentary role by each of them (Babalola and W.A, 2019) ^[4]. Only few individuals having undergone skill training, the state still faces difficulties in filling employment requiring specific skills. In consequence of this employees must needed to get the appropriate skill development programs and training related to tourism and hospitality sector. It has been determined that insufficient research has been done to figure out the root causes of the inconsistent results of human resources management for skill development (Saad, 2013) ^[25]. Therefore, with the adoption of skill development techniques and strategies, problems with skill gaps, unemployment, and underemployment could be overcome.

Strategies to develop a skilled workforce in Manipur’s tourism and hospitality industries can include:

1. Identification of key issues and determining the workforce skills that are required in current industry needs and demands, to avoid any consequences and skill mismatch.
2. Inclusion of soft skill and implementation of technical skills development training and programs to raise the level of customer service satisfaction.
3. Collaboration and partnership with tourism and hospitality industry-related stakeholders develop hands-on practical or experiential learning experiences to gained from on-the-job training and internship.
4. Career planning guidance centres should be opened in each and every tourism and hospitality related institutions or training institutes for effectively development to one’s career where career counselling is made available to students and employees for further job placements/advancements.
5. Continuous evaluation and develop employee’s skill development training and programs for upskilling and reskilling the workforce to stay up to date with patterns of the tourism and hospitality industries as well as technological trends.

Case Studies and Best Practices

The State Government of Manipur and Central Government of India taken up different types of initiatives for the workforce evolution and skill development in Manipur’s tourism and hospitality industries. Most of the projects are taken up by Classic Hospitality Training Institute (CHTI) under government initiatives. Classic Hospitality Training Institute (CHTI) is a private industry, and it is a part of National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)-approved training partner. Also, the Tourism and Hospitality Sector Council (THSC) and the Sector Skill Council (SSC) have ties with Classic Hospitality Training Institute (CHTI).

The various projects which Classic Hospitality Training Institute (CHTI) has undertaken on behalf of the government of Manipur and India are listed below.

1. Skill Development Programme for Minorities and Other Backward classes under the Government of Manipur

The Department of Minorities and Other Backward Classes (MOBC), Manipur, sponsored the flagship program with the objective of upskilling the minorities and other backward classes (OBCs). In 2016, MOBC's Skill Development Program for tourism and hospitality industry let the Classic Hospitality Training Institute supervise a "Three Months Training Course" for various job roles. A total of 115 applicants from all throughout the state participated and successfully finished their training in a variety of departments.

Table 1: No. of candidates enrolled in MOBC programme-2016

S. No.	Job Roles	Minorities	OBC	Total Candidates
1	Front Office Associate	20	19	39
2	Food & Beverage Service	19	19	38
3	Housekeeping Operations	19	19	38
	Total	58	57	115

Source: <https://c-hti.com/about-hti/>

2. Border Area Development Program, Planning Dept, Govt of Manipur

In 2017, Classic Hospitality Training Institute conducted a six-month diploma program in hospitality operations under the Border Area Development Program (BADP), which was sponsored by the Manipur government's planning department. The International Land Borders consist of 17 States, and the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) has been implemented in each of them to address the unique developmental demands and promote the welfare of the residents of isolated and unreachable areas along international borders.

The Tourism and Hospitality sector course, under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) Skill Development Program, has trained 26 individuals from the districts of Ukhrul and Churachandpur. These candidates have a 100% placement record at various reputable firms.

Table 2: No. of students trained under (BADP) Programme-2017

S. No.	Male Students	Female Students	Total Students Trained	Placement Record
1	9	17	26	100%

Source: <https://c-hti.com/about-hti/>

3. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

The National Skill Development Corporation operates the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which was introduced by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). More Indian youths are going to be able to enroll in industry-relevant skill training through this skill certification scheme, which will enable them to get better employment opportunities. The PMKVY scheme comes in two types:

1. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY .1 - CSCM) which were conducted under PMKVY Central component (CSCM). With the guidance of Manipal City & Guilds in the year 2015, Classic Hospitality Training Institute started the programme with one job role (Front Office Associate). Subsequently, they added another job role (Housekeeping Attendant, Manual Cleaning) in the year 2016-17.
2. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY .2 - CSSM) Which were conducted under PMKVY State component. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) State component (CSSM), has been conducting trainings in three different job roles in tourism and hospitality industry are as follows:
 - a. Front Office Associate
 - b. Food & Beverage Service- Steward
 - c. Housekeeping Attendant (Manual Cleaning)

Classic Hospitality Training Institute (CHTI) have been conducting programme for both CSSM (Centrally Sponsored State Manage) and CSCM (Centrally Sponsored Centrally Manage). And successfully trained students and give 90 percent of placements under PMKVY programme in Manipur. Also, it helps in training students for the evolution of the workforce.

Challenges and Opportunities
Challenges

1. Lack of campus placements to ensure employability of the trainees and students.

2. There is lack of up-to-date modern technology and infrastructure available to support tourism and hospitality industries.
3. There is a lack of understanding regarding the employment opportunities in tourism and hospitality industries.
4. Lack of employees with expertise on specific tourism products, services and destinations.
5. There is a shortage of technical and vocational educational institutions.
6. High unemployment among educated and skilled people leads them to migrate in search of better opportunities. And they frequently change jobs because they are not getting enough benefits or opportunities to advance their careers.
7. Low student enrollment in the training programs of tourism and hospitality institutions is also one of the primary problems in the tourism and hospitality industries (Sharma and S.S, 2010).
8. Training programs for tourism and hospitality related institutions are expensive. Therefore, students cannot afford the courses, and it leads to stops the learners from enrolling in the programmes of tourism and hospitality institutions.

Opportunities

1. Tourism and Hospitality industry shows an emerging trend so there is huge potential and opportunities for career advancement.
2. It can contribute effectively to the development of the state and sustain the economy by implementing comprehensive training programs and skill development initiatives can bridge the skill gap of the workforce.
3. Collaboration with tourism and hospitality industry stakeholders can provide practical hands-on techniques for crisis management.
4. People centric management styles and practices can help in sustaining individual effectiveness through proper performance feedback and counselling and make informed strategic decisions.
5. Establishing career counselling centres can help retain the trained employees within the organisation and reduce attrition rates.
6. Efforts of the state government to promote digitalisation can help the employees acquire proficiency in using the latest and relevant technology for tourism and hospitality operations.
7. Focus on leadership skills can build a strong team which can maximise productivity and efficiency of the changing workforce.
8. Imparting problem-solving skills can help the employees navigate through the dynamic nature of this industry and cultivate adaptability and resilience in this ever-evolving tourism and hospitality landscape.
9. Empowering the employees to analyse the changing market trends and consumer behaviour can help uplift the quality of the services offered and can contribute significantly in the state's economic development.
10. As Manipur is the gateway to southeast Asian countries, special emphasis can be placed on offering foreign languages in the curriculum for the training programs in tourism and hospitality institutions to resonate with India's Act East Policy.

Conclusion

Manipur's tourism and hospitality industry could transform into a center for highly qualified workers through the implementation of various educational training and development initiatives. In a developing state like Manipur, skill development programs and training are essential. The main benefit of upskilling and reskilling the employees is that they can continuously provide better service, which will boost the Manipur tourism and hospitality industries. However, Manipur remains short of trained and skilled employees, with just one percent of the state's workforce having received skill-development training. Manipur's tourism and hospitality institutions are focusing on building the workforce of tomorrow's tourism and hospitality industries.

For the highly qualified human resources in Manipur's tourism and hospitality industry, there is a demand of grey collar workers, and the rust collar skills workers need to be essential to upskill and reskill to remain relevant to get career opportunities in the modern workforce of tourism and hospitality to be a better socio-economic society. The demand for trained workers in Manipur's tourism and hospitality industries is increasing, as well as the government plays a significant role in the process for skill development and training initiatives. Programs in institutions need to offer students challenging skill tasks along with lots of opportunities for hands-on learning, and this kind of well-rounded education will turn today's students into tomorrow's skilled employees. Both the government and tourism and hospitality industries are both conscious of this issue and the ground realities and, are working to resolve the problems. Therefore, the government is also constantly working to supply the equipment and facilities required for training and skill development.

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