

Tourism Skills + Jobs



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In addition to those who have participated in the online survey “Tourism Skills+Jobs” and those who have provided comments anonymously, the following tourism industry experts have contributed to the research by sharing their insights: **Kelly Galaski**, Program & Operations Manager, Americas & Europe, Planeterra Foundation / G Adventures; **Vera Holwerda-Hirth**, Sales Manager, Merapi Tour & Travel; **Ted Martens**, Vice President, Marketing & Sustainability, Natural Habitat Adventures; **Antje Martins**, Customer Service & Training Manager, Earth Check; **Ameer Virani**, Sustainability Coordinator, EXO Travel Myanmar; and **Rod Walters**, Partner, Knowledge Travel Partners.

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Digital Version for Online Distribution

First Published July 2016

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Introduction: Why Skills Matter

“People are a unique source of value and competitive advantage, driving innovation and supporting sustainable tourism development.”
– Jane Stacey, OECD France



Investing in skills as part of core business strategy

The topic of professional skills development is not only relevant to the discussion of sustainable tourism and sustainability practices, but also a critical part of sustained business success.

Rather than thinking about professional skills development as confined to HR departments or mandatory employee training programs, tourism businesses and organizations should focus on investing in employees' professional growth as a key part of their business strategy.

Investing in employees' skills development needs by providing the necessary time, resources and support is an important way for the employer to demonstrate that employees' contributions to the company are valued, whether it's about the performance of job-specific tasks, or about the implementation of company-wide goals such as sustainability initiatives.

Improving employee engagement, increasing productivity

Investing in skills building opportunities can help improve employee engagement and enhance employee morale, which, in turn, can help improve employee retention. This offers a critical advantage as "businesses with highly engaged employees see higher customer satisfaction, have lower turnover rates, and outperform in terms of CR [corporate responsibility] impact and ROI" (PwC, 2014).

Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group, has been famously quoted as saying "*Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they do not want to. If you look after your staff, they will look after your customers. It is that simple*" (Branson, 2014).

A key part of looking after your employees – and by extension looking after the needs of your customers, which helps strengthen your business performance and customer loyalty – should be empowering them through opportunities for skills development and professional growth.

This is a "win-win" for employers and employees, as having a knowledgeable, creative and engaged team of employees is a key ingredient of sustained business success.

Contributing to a stronger, more competitive tourism industry

In addition to supporting training and professional development needs internally, tourism industry employers play a critical role in, and have important responsibilities for investing in skills development opportunities for current and future tourism professionals, supporting the sustainable development of the tourism industry as a whole.

Skills matter for sustainable tourism and for the sustainable development of tourism, because the individuals who work in tourism – and the skills they bring to the industry – are sources of innovation, which the industry needs in order to stay competitive.

"People are a unique source of value and competitive advantage, driving innovation, delivering quality tourism services and supporting sustainable tourism development." - Jane Stacey, OECD France

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Research: “Tourism Skills + Jobs”

Skills matter for your tourism business success, and for the sustainable development of our industry.



Industry stakeholder survey and interviews

TrainingAid conducted an online survey of tourism industry stakeholders on the topic of skills development for industry professionals. The main objectives of the survey were:

- To understand tourism industry stakeholders’ learning and professional development needs.
- To gain insights into desired and required skills, as well as perceived skill gaps in the industry.

- To learn about examples of training and skills development opportunities currently available for tourism professionals.
- To identify key challenges and needs for improving training programs and skills development opportunities.

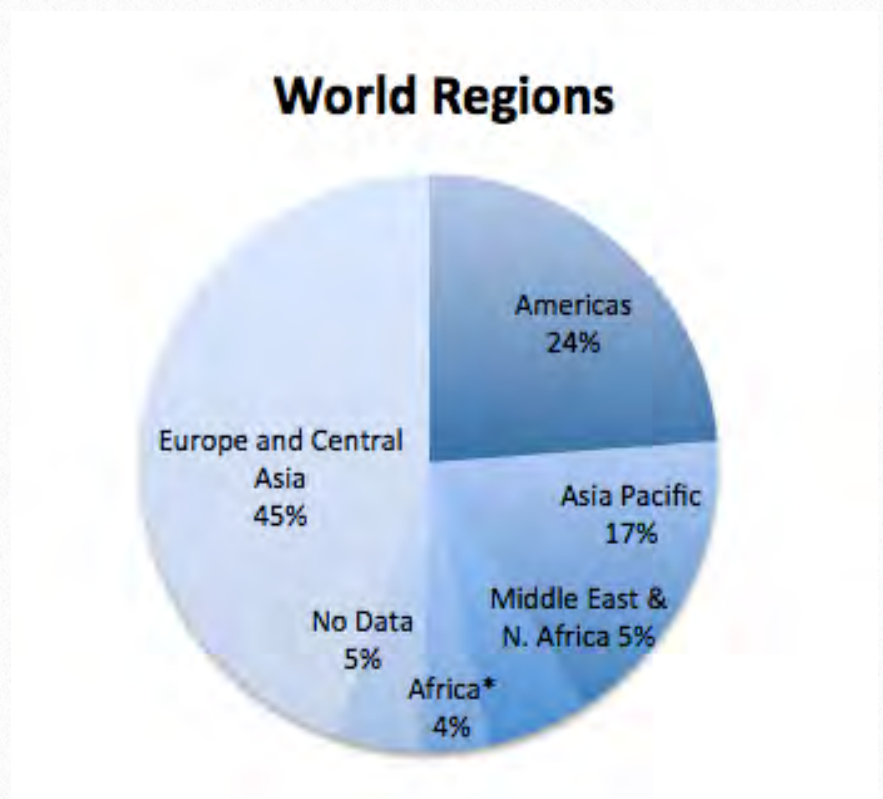
A total of 105 responses were collected during the survey period (April 25 - May 25, 2016), submitted by survey participants from 52 countries.

In addition to the online survey, follow-up interviews with 10 of the survey participants were conducted via Skype call or email. The follow-up interview questions were all specifically related to the answers that the interviewees provided in response to one or more of the open-end questions in the survey. The comments and feedback gathered through these interviews are reflected in the recommendations.

Survey participant numbers and industry sectors

Of the 105 survey respondents, a majority (45%) came from Europe and Central Asia, followed by the Americas (24%) and Asia-Pacific (17%).

Chart 1: Regions of the world represented by survey participants



*Countries in Western, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

The largest number (36%) of survey participants are affiliated with the private sector, representing or working for tour operators and travel agencies. The academic and non-profit sectors are the second

most represented among this group, followed by accommodations, destinations, and government organizations.

Chart 2: Sectors of the tourism industry represented by survey participants



Employer- and employee-perspectives on tourism training opportunities

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in its 2015 report discusses “talent gaps and deficiencies” in the industry that are and expected to lead to negative consequences such as “inferior customer service and quality standards” when positions are filled by under-qualified and under-experienced staff due to skills gaps, and negative impacts on various business factors including “costs, bottom-line profitability, competitiveness, ... brand, investment and ultimately future growth” (WTTC, 2015).

The TrainingAid survey, therefore, was designed to capture opinions and insights from both the employer and employee perspectives, with the aim of

learning about and better understanding current issues, key challenges and future opportunities in the areas of skills building, training and talent development in travel and tourism.

The survey participants were asked to select one of the following two categories, each of which was associated with a specific set of questions.

Survey question for all participants

Which of the following best describes your current status?

1. Employer, business owner/manager, team leader - offering or want to offer training opportunities for your staff or team members.
2. Employee, independent professional, career seeker - want to access training opportunities for yourself.

Of the total 105 responses collected, 46 survey participants selected the “Employer” category, and 60 “Employee”. The distinction between these two categories is important in properly interpreting the context of survey responses, and to gather input from both the “demand” and “supply” sides of the tourism industry labor and skills: employers seeking talent (demand) and individuals seeking employment (supply).

Sources and Further Reading

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), 2015, "Global Talent Trends and Issues for the Travel & Tourism Sector"



Some of the key findings from the survey are presented in this infographic by TrainingAid:

<https://www.trainingaid.org/infographics/tourism-skills-and-jobs>

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Survey Results & Key Takeaways

Key findings on skills training for tourism industry professionals - from online learning habits to critical skill gaps.



1. Many tourism businesses and organizations provide their employees and team members with training and skills development opportunities.

More than 65% of those who selected the “Employer” category answered “Yes” to the question, “Other than job-specific training (e.g. compliance

training as part of the required employee orientation), does your company currently offer opportunities for your staff members to gain new skills?”.

2. Both tourism employers and employees view cost and time as the main challenges to implementing skills development opportunities.



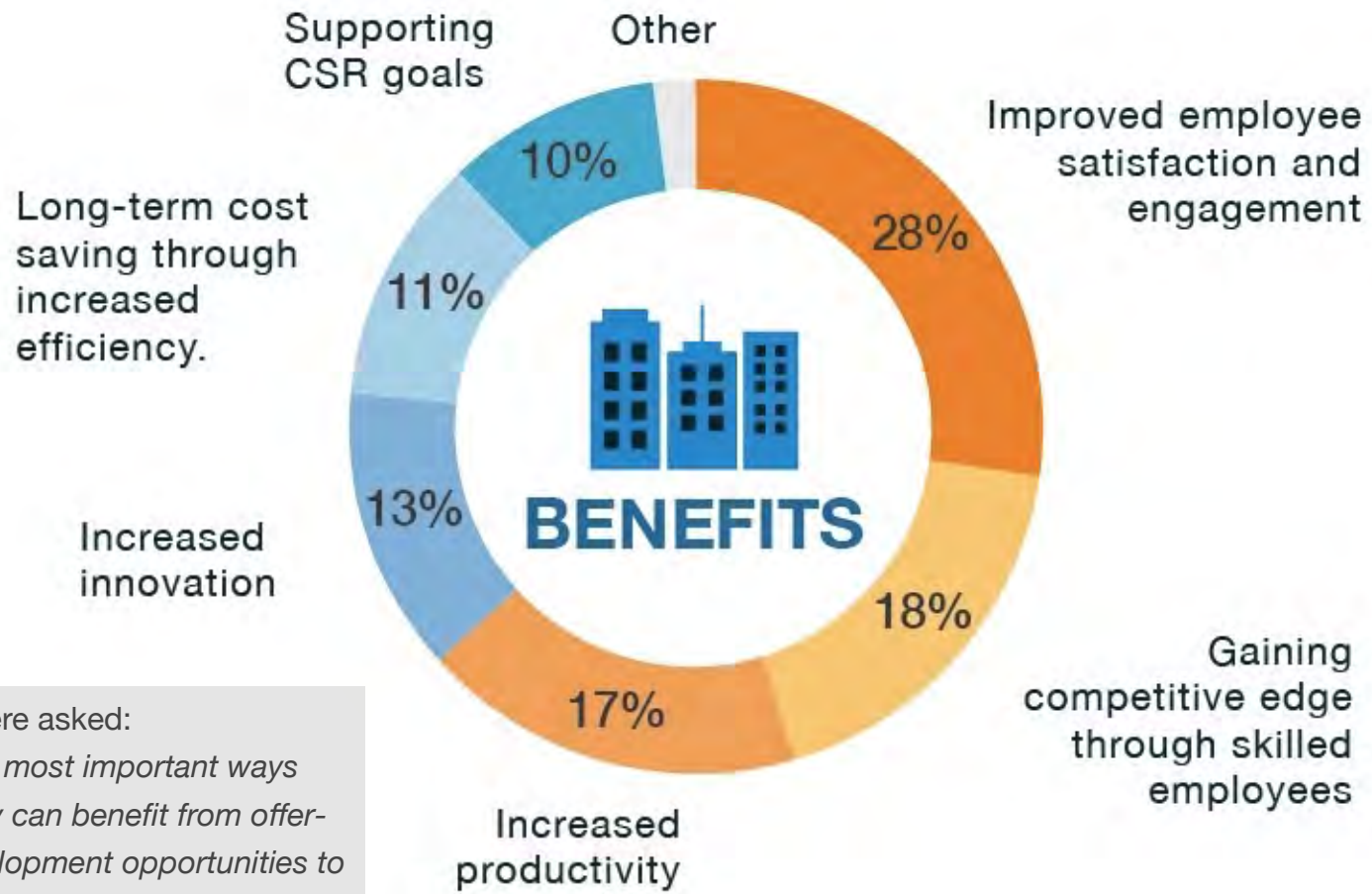
Cost and time are top factors that both tourism employers and employees consider to be obstacles to implementing skills development opportunities.

In response to questions about the main challenges and obstacles to implementing and investing in professional training, perhaps expectedly, the most frequently selected answers in both the employers and employees categories were "cost" and "time".

3. Many tourism industry employers identify key business benefits of proactive approaches to employee training and skills development

In response to the question, "What do you think are the most important ways your company can benefit from offering skills development opportunities to staff members?", the answer most frequently selected was "Improved employee satisfaction and engagement", followed by "Gaining competitive edge through skilled employees" and "Increased productivity".

On the other hand, the answer option "Supporting CSR (corporate social responsibility) goals" was not selected by many respondents, showing that there is a strong level of awareness that employee engagement is a critical part of expected outcomes of training and skills development efforts, but



Employers were asked:
“What are the most important ways your company can benefit from offering skills development opportunities to staff members?”

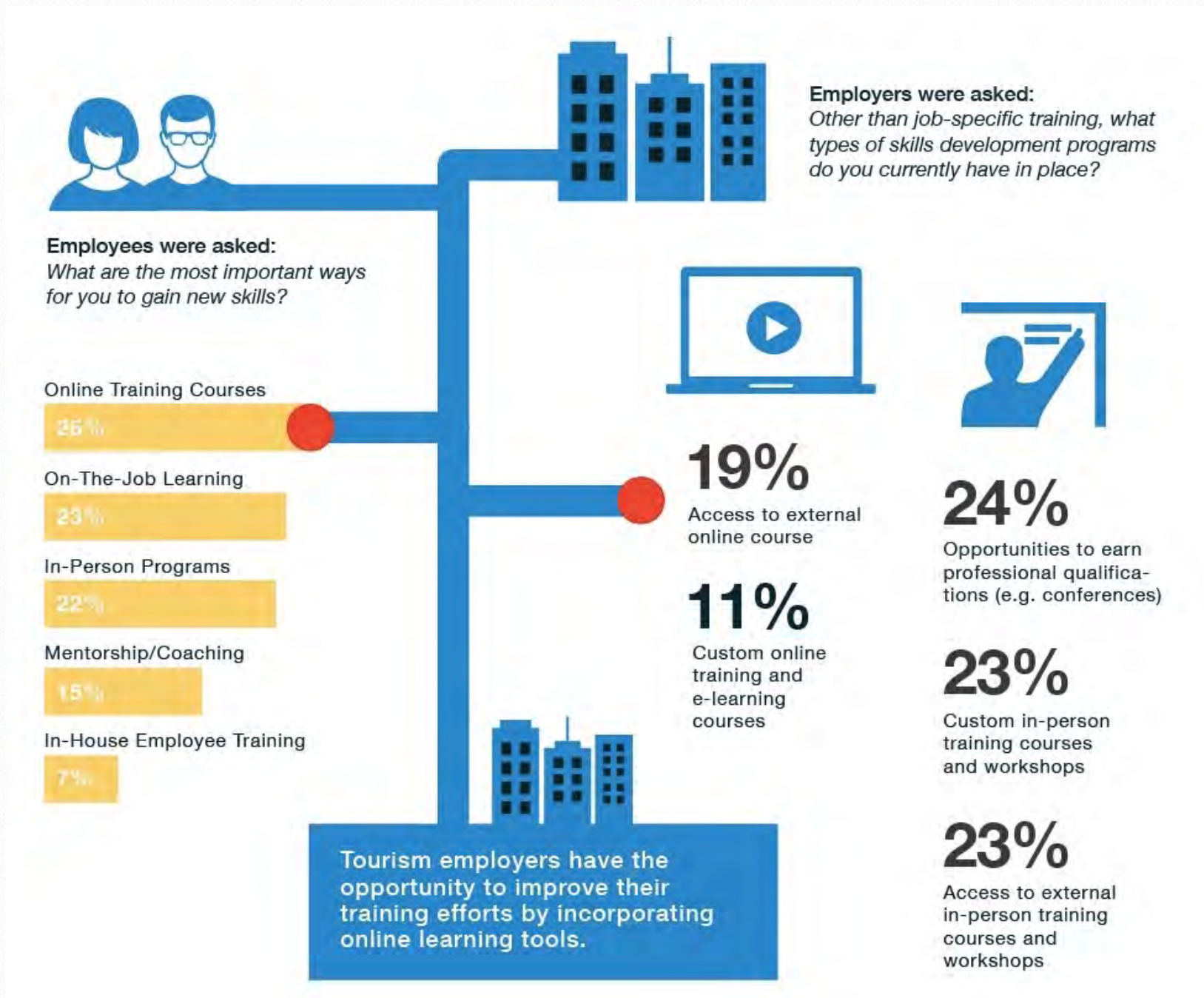
Many tourism employers believe investing in skills development leads to positive benefits such as improved employee satisfaction and engagement.

that the relationship between such efforts and CSR goals is not widely recognized.

4. In-person workshops, professional conferences and classroom training events are the most common types of skills development opportunities that tourism organizations are offering their employees.

The respondents in the “Employer” category who indicated that they currently offer skills development opportunities for their employees (other than required job training) were then asked to select the specific types of training and skills development programs they have in place.

The most common answers were “Opportunities to earn professional certificates or qualifications”*, “Custom in-person training courses and workshops”, and “Access to external in-person training courses and workshops”.



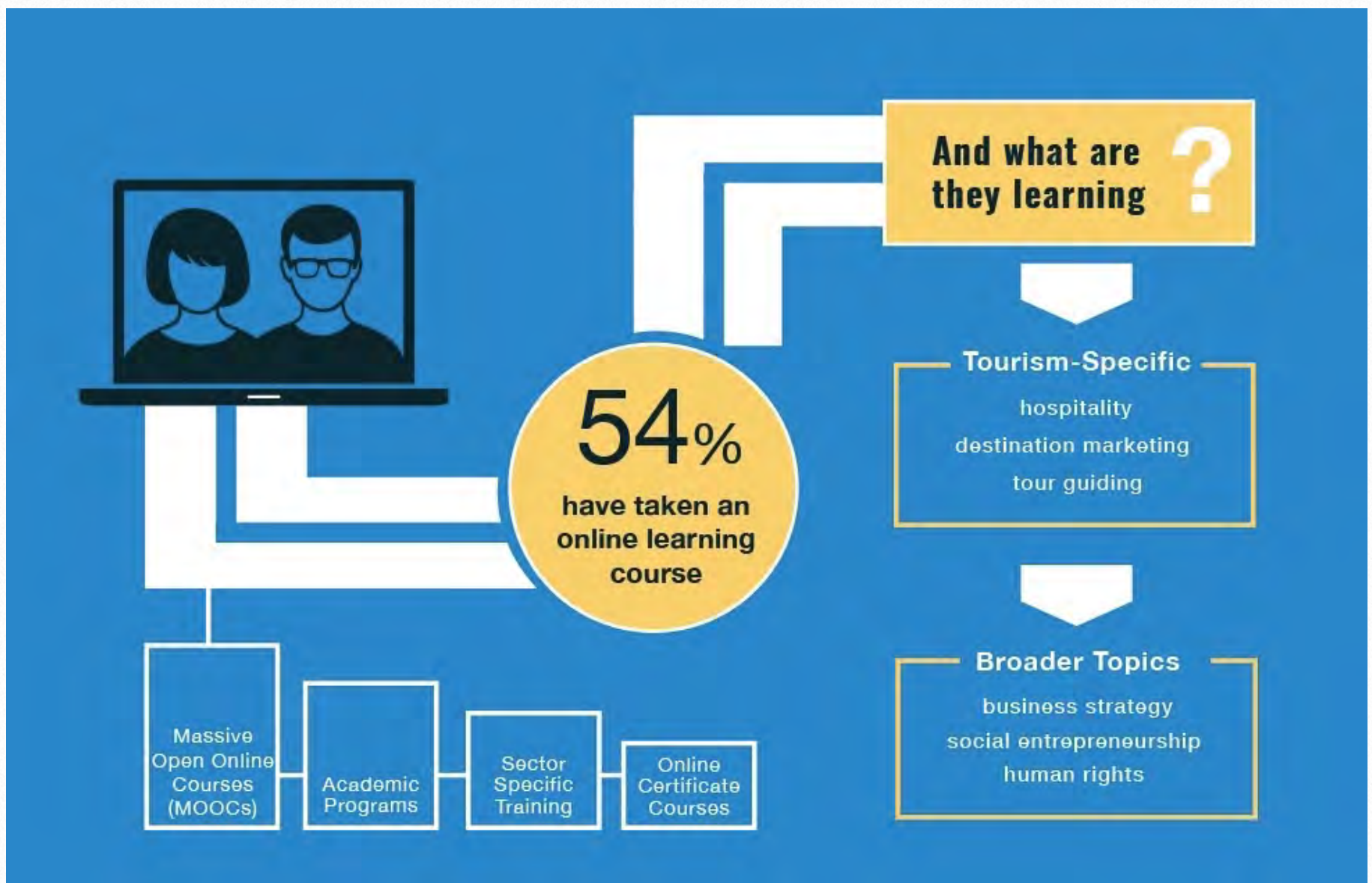
A large number of tourism industry professionals consider online learning among the most important ways to gain new skills.

*Regarding the option “Opportunities to earn professional certificates or qualifications”, many survey responders explained that they provide such opportunities by offering their employees and team members the chance to attend professional conferences and other educational events.

Online training options (“Access to external online courses”, “Custom online training and e-learning courses”) were least frequently selected, showing that tourism industry employees are not (yet) focusing on online programs when it comes to their employee training efforts.

5. Online learning *is* important to tourism professionals.

A large number of those who selected the “Employee” category noted that “taking online training courses and e-learning programs” is among the most important ways for them to acquire new skills, followed by “On-the-job learning” and “Attending training workshops/seminars or other in-person programs”.



Many tourism professionals have experience with online courses on various topics including those not directly related to tourism.

6. Many tourism professionals have taken MOOCs on topics that are directly *and indirectly* related to tourism.

More than half (53.3%) the respondents in the “Employee” category said they’ve participated in an online training course or e-learning program. Of those, 40% mentioned MOOCs, some stating that they’ve taken a particular MOOC, and others noting that they’ve taken many MOOCs from multiple providers. Notably, these survey respondents’ experiences with MOOCs are not limited to courses on topics that are directly related to tourism, but also those whose primary focus is not tourism, including topics such as business strategies, social entrepreneurship and international development.

7. Many tourism professionals have also participate in other types of e-learning programs on various topics.

In addition to MOOCs, various other types of online courses were mentioned, including academic programs and online lifelong learning opportunities for tourism professionals (e.g. degree programs that are fully or partially available online), tourism industry-related professional certificate programs, and other tourism position- or

What are MOOCs?

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are “courses designed for large numbers of participants that can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications, and offer a full/complete course experience online for free” (OpenupEd).



Desired Skills

Employers were asked:
In your experience, where do you think are key skill gaps in the tourism industry?

Employers



Perceived Skill Needs

Employees were asked:
What skills are most important for your job (or the position you want to have)?

Employees



Sustainability-related skills were among the most frequently identified “skill gaps” by tourism employers; employees, on the other hand, didn’t place as much emphasis on sustainability.

Sustainability-related skills were among the most frequently identified skills gaps by tourism industry employers.

sector-specific programs (e.g. online destination specialist programs, courses on booking systems and other travel technologies).

8. Many tourism employers see skill gaps in sustainability-related areas for both staff and management positions.

Of the total of 40 responses to the “Employer” category question regarding perceived skill gaps in the tourism industry, 9 (23%) mentioned a skill area related to sustainability practices (e.g. “sustainability skills”, “sustainable tourism practices”, “expertise in responsible tourism solutions”) as a key area of skill gaps in the tourism industry.

9. There seems to be an “awareness gap” in sustainability-related skills between employers and employees / job seekers.

Based on the answers to the “Employee” category question on the most important skills for their current (or desired future) jobs, many tourism professionals don’t place as much emphasis on sustainability-related skills as the “Employer” group. Technical skills and position-specific skills are identified by the largest numbers of respondents as most important (e.g. customer service, digital marketing, financial management).

10. Soft skills matter

Both employers and employees emphasized the importance of “soft skills”, or personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people, such as critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, self-motivation and curiosity to learn. Below are some comments by respondents in the “Employers” category about key transferrable skills that are important for tourism professionals:

- Employees need to be able to “find current and quality information to serve business needs”.

- It’s not only important to have well-rounded knowledge, but one must be able to turn information and knowledge into practical actions.

11. Many tourism professionals value people skills and recognize them as critical to their job performance.

A large number of survey respondents, particularly those in the “Employee” category, identified various “people skills” including interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal, online and face-to-face), cross-cultural understanding and relationship building as among the most important skills for their current (or desired future) jobs. For example, one participant mentioned a “passion for people” as being the most important professional trait to have.

Tourism, at its core, is all about people: the individuals who make up various communities and organizations creating, managing, promoting and participating in travel experiences. It’s no surprise, therefore, that many tourism industry professionals consider “people skills” to be a key to their success.



The emphasis on soft skills and people skills is also demonstrated by the survey responses in the “Employer” category about the priorities in hiring and recruitment practices. Close to two-thirds of the respondents said that personal and cultural alignment is a more important factor than specific skill sets when seeking and evaluating job candidates.

Key factors in tourism talent search

Employers were asked: *Which of the following best describes your company's recruitment approaches?*

- You have some skills requirements, but focus more on finding the right match in terms of company culture and values. - **65.2%**
- You seek out candidates who have skills that are specified in job descriptions. - **26.1%**
- Rather than trying to fit candidates into certain positions, you create positions based on people's skills and talent. - **8.7%**

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Recommendations

One size does not fit all, but all can benefit from best practices.



Tourism businesses and industry organizations can benefit from implementing both in-person programs and online solutions in order to support and complement their internal skills development needs and to increase the impact of their training efforts.

There are a wide range of approaches available, each with different sets of strengths and weaknesses. It is important, therefore, to look at existing

examples, learn from the lessons of those that have implemented successful approaches, and incorporate lessons learned into effective and long-term training strategies.

Based on the TrainingAid survey and follow-up interviews with tourism industry stakeholders, here are six key recommendations:

1. Take advantage of MOOCs as lifelong learning and corporate learning programs.

Tourism industry organizations may adopt the lifelong learning approach to support their employee training programs.

What is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning is “learning that is pursued throughout life”, with one of its main pillars being “learning to do – equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments” (LLCQ, “What Is Lifelong Learning?”)

One prominent example of online learning opportunities available for lifelong learners are MOOCs, which are university-style courses offered online, usually for free. As shown by the TrainingAid survey results, many tourism professionals are interested in and/or have participated in MOOCs. The fact that MOOCs are already widely recognized by tourism professionals, combined with the open and (usually) free nature of MOOCs may make these courses attractive options for tourism industry organizations.

In addition to individuals accessing free online courses on topics that are relevant to them, MOOCs can be, and in some cases are already starting to be used as part of corporate learning and workplace training programs. Some corporations develop their own MOOC programs that are either used only internally or also made available for external users (e.g. as a way to engage potential hires). Others choose to utilize existing MOOC platforms by curating relevant courses for their employees and team members to participate in.

Jeanne Meister, co-author of *The 2020 Workplace*, explains that in addition to offering free online

courses, MOOCs also provide an effective (and cost-effective) way to implement “an innovative on-line learning design for employees” where the learners have more control over when and how they learn (Meister, 2015).

In addition to these benefits, an important question when considering MOOCs for businesses is whether the learning experience is appropriate for the specific *context* of learning: who needs to learn what and why. For example, a MOOC that is offered by a university and has academically-focused approaches and requirements (e.g. required readings on theories, paper assignments, exams) will not be a suitable option for a busy tourism industry professional who needs to acquire practical skills to improve job performance.

2. Social learning: Make people at the center of training goals and learning experiences.

Building on the above point about the importance of the context of learning, any eTraining program, whether adopting MOOCs for corporate learning or creating own in-house custom online courses, must strive to create a learning experience that is relevant to the individuals participating in the program and their needs and expectations.

Having a beautifully designed learning platform with advanced features and functionality, for example, will not help unless the learners are engaged and motivated to come to and actively participate in the learning experience. In any tourism organization, large or small, team dynamics and the relationships the team members build with each other are a key factor in forming and defining the organizational culture. Learning and skills building opportunities must also be designed to be in line with the context of the organizational culture.

“I would like to follow serious courses that will enhance my ... knowledge about how things work in the travel business. Most E-training programs are soon forgotten after a few weeks, [but] with personal contact the information stays longer in mind, at least if they are interesting.”

- Vera Holwerda-Hirth,
Sales Manager, Merapi
Tour & Travel



The key is to make the eTraining program engaging and meaningful in the context of who needs and wants to learn what and - importantly - *why*.

Making learning social is critical to successfully implementing an eTraining program. “Social” may mean, depending on the organization and the specific learning goals for its team, utilizing social media tools, incorporating game-based learning techniques, or blending online and in-person learning activities. The key is to make the learners at the center of the learning experience and to make the eTraining program engaging and meaningful in the context of who needs and wants to learn what and - importantly - *why*.

For example, is your team engaged in online learning in order to accomplish a specific goal that the business has for its sustainability initiative? Then, turning the online learning experience more social by making it a team activity with a shared goal can be an effective approach.

Businesses require eTraining programs designed “to foster not only the content knowledge of employees, but also the social skills they require to succeed”, and “[i]t is increasingly important to engage learners socially, because they stand to learn as much from each other as from formal instruction” (Tood and George, 2015). The key question, therefore, is not whether businesses should utilize traditional lecture-format courses or online courses, but rather, what the right approach is to creating an effective strategy with social learning at its core.

“At EXO Travel, we have our own [sustainability training] strategy and conduct training in-house. This includes training on environmental management, identifying socially responsible and eco-friendly products and suppliers, and encouraging best practices from travelers. We also developed a monthly sustainability quiz so staff can learn more about different topics.”

- Ameer Virani, Sustainability Coordinator, EXO Travel Myanmar



3. Make sustainability skills a priority.

Although the awareness of sustainable tourism is increasing across the industry, the reality of sustainability training in tourism today is that there is still a skill gap, as identified by many of the TrainingAid survey participants in the “Employer” category, and there is also a lack of awareness as shown in the answers by many of the “Employee” category survey respondents.

At the organizational level, the efforts to increase skills related to sustainability and sustainable tourism practices are often focused around a particular department or group within a company, for example, offering sustainability training to those who have positions that are specifically related to the company’s sustainability practices.

While having individuals or teams who are empowered to lead in areas related to sustainability is a great approach for driving sustainability awareness and practice within an organization, for a more lasting impact, sustainability should be part of the organization-wide training and skills development goals, and not a separate program only for the “sustainability people”.

Making sustainability a priority in organization-wide training and skills development efforts will not only support the success of tourism businesses’ CSR initiatives, but also help create an environment where employees and team members are more engaged and motivated.

“People want to work for a successful, high-performing organization on projects that help them grow and in ways that connect them to something larger than themselves” - PwC Corporate Responsibility Report (2014)

“We are trying to lead the tourism industry to be proactive in developing tourism sustainably. We made sustainability a core value of the company culture and it features in everyone’s role.”
- Ameer Virani, EXO Travel Myanmar

At the individual level, many tourism industry professionals also seem to view sustainability as something reserved for the “sustainability people”. To raise awareness of the need and relevance of sustainability-related skills for tourism professionals, one of the key solution is to start early. And here, universities and educational institutions play a critical role in supporting the sustainable development of the tourism industry: by incorporating sustainability-related themes and topics into hospitality training course, university courses and apprentice programs - not as an “add-on”, but as part of the core curriculum with clear objectives to equip future tourism industry professionals with a solid understanding of sustainability issues and the skills they need to implement sustainable tourism practices in all facets of the industry.

At the industry level, an important solution for driving positive change in terms of both awareness and practice of sustainable tourism is for those organizations that are actively engaged in sustainability to show initiative in highlighting the need and relevance of sustainability skills in practice, so that their own employees may be inspired to be more proactively engaged, and that other organizations in the industry may start to see sustainability as a business priority as well.

4. Not just technical skills: don’t forget soft skills.

As shown by many of the survey participants’ comments, soft skills such as interpersonal communications, work ethics, teamwork and collaboration are a critical part of job performance. Some of these positive attributes may be “natural” to people and difficult to instill if someone does not possess such qualities. It is, however, not only possible, but also important for companies to invest in skills training that addresses soft skills, as well as “hard skills” that are specifically related to employees’ positions and tasks.

“The most successful teams consist of members who have skill sets that complement one another and play off of team members’ strengths. When employers invest in training in hard and soft skills, it helps employees feel valued as they work toward career development goals.” - Paul Sebastien, vice president and general manager of Udemy for Business

“Young employees are more likely to engage with training which meets their personal as well as company needs and aspirations. So for young people, purely functional, task-related training is valued less than more generic skills development.”

- World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC) Report, *Global Talent Trends and Issues for the Travel & Tourism Sector*



Skills development does not always need to come in the form of formal training; tourism organizations can create opportunities for “learning by doing” to make learning more natural and enjoyable for employees.

The focus on soft skills is in line with the shift in the tourism industry, as today’s younger generations come with new and different sets of expectations about their professional careers and skills development opportunities.

5. Go beyond required training: Help employees identify opportunities for continuous learning and professional development.

Whether focusing on job-specific skill sets or broader soft skills, professional growth and skills development do not always need to come in the form of formal employee training. In addition to developing eTraining and other skills building programs, tourism industry organizations can create effective “learning by doing” opportunities to make learning more natural and enjoyable for employees.

Letting employees “learn by doing” may mean providing opportunities and the environment internally for practicing certain skills - for example, getting someone to lead a discussion at a team meeting or a company event (practicing effective presentation, communication and facilitation skills), or involving staff members from different department in designing a sustainability

program for the company (practicing team work, collaboration and project management skills).

“Learning by doing” can also happen through external opportunities such as joining local and international industry events and projects, and participating in or even leading partnership initiatives or campaigns working in collaboration with other organizations.

While offering flexible opportunities and allowing employees to seek and identify learning needs are a great approach especially when it comes to the “learning by doing” way of skills development. At the same time, however, it is important for the employee to help with the process of identify skills development needs and opportunities.

For many tourism professionals, the reality of their work is that they are mostly busy with the job-specific tasks and their day-to-day obligations. It can therefore be difficult to proactively seek continuous learning opportunities, let alone knowing what skills would be valuable to their current job roles and to their future career goals.

Kelly Galaski, Program & Operations Manager, Americas & Europe at Planeterra Foundation / G Adventures, noted: *“Personally I have had a lot of professional development opportunities in the form of projects I’ve been given and conferences I’ve been able to attend.”* Since project management is a critical aspect of her job, she has identified the benefits of learning more about and further strengthening skills in project management, and was supported by the company to participate in a week-long course on the topic. Based on her own experience, Ms Galaski recommends the following as a way for tourism employers to better support skills development needs of industry professionals: *“1. The employee being able to identify what kind of skill development they*

need, and then searching for a program, or
2. Companies helping employees identify what skills need developing and encouraging them to seek out such a training program.”

Implementing these solutions require that the employer understands what’s important for the employees and how they’d like to access learning and training opportunities, which comes down to good business and team management practice of valuing each employee’s contributions to the company.

6. Think outside of the tourism box: Seek the best opportunities for your team’s specific needs and goals, within and outside of travel and tourism.

There are various task- and job- oriented skill sets in the tourism industry that are specific to the positions and sectors that individual employees are in. On the other hand, many important soft and hard skills that tourism industry professionals need in order to succeed in their jobs are not specific to the tourism industry, but rather, broad transferrable professional skills and competencies.

It is important for tourism organizations, therefore, to consider training and skills development opportunities outside of the tourism industry, given that the best opportunities may be available in other sectors. Looking at skills needs and training opportunities only within the tourism context may lead to narrowing the options and missing out on the opportunities best suited to address your company’s and team members’ needs.

Providing comments about his team members’ skills development needs and the best opportunities to address those needs, Ted Martens, Vice President, Marketing & Sustainability at Natural Habitat Adventures, noted that rather than just focusing on

tourism-related programs, he seeks learning opportunities outside of the tourism industry, which, when it comes to marketing-related skills, is often “*where the innovation comes from*”. The learning-form-the-best approach is important in helping the business stay ahead of the curve. A key part of this approach, for Natural Habitat Adventures, is sending marketing team members to technical marketing conferences such as Direct Marketing Association (DMA)’s annual conference “&THEN”, Marketing Nation Summit by Marketo, and the inbound marketing conference and training event by Hubspot.

Of course, seeking the best opportunities that are out there, in marketing or other fields, is not always a realistic goal for tourism organizations, especially for small businesses. The key approach and lesson, however, of thinking outside of the tourism box applies to all tourism companies regardless of size or scope.

Worldwide, small and medium-sized enterprises represent the majority of the travel and tourism industry, accounting for over 90% of tourism businesses in some regions (Manente, Minghetti and Mingotto, 2014). This means that the most of the tourism industry employers likely lack the resources and funding required to implement best practices in training and skills development in the tourism industry.

eTraining, utilizing affordable, scalable and accessible online tools for training and skills development, can be particularly relevant in this context. As demonstrated in this report, however, not all eTraining options are created equally, and there is no one “right” or “best” way of implementing eTraining for tourism organizations. Tourism industry employers therefore have an important responsibility to identify and support opportunities that properly address the *context* of their employee’s learning and skills development needs, not just the content of learning.

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TrainingAid is an international tourism e-learning company offering online training courses and skills development opportunities for travel and tourism industry professionals.

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