

Tourism Skills+Jobs | Key Findings [1]

UPDATE: TrainingAid is conducting research on the current landscape of (online and offline) training opportunities in sustainability for tourism professionals, and seeking input from industry stakeholders [2].

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

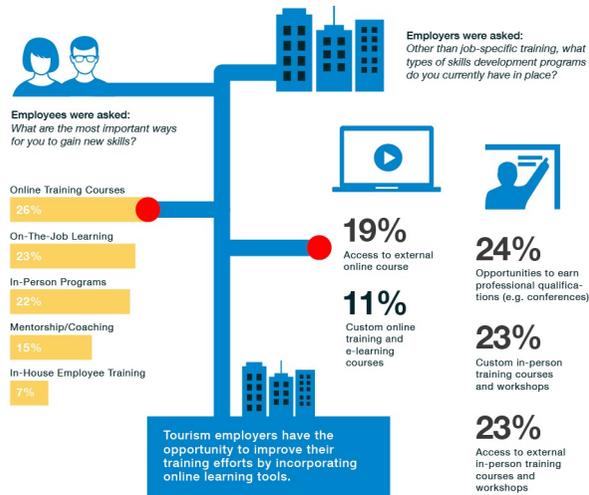
A total of 105 responses were collected during the survey period (April 25 - May 25, 2016), submitted by survey participants from 52 countries. The survey asked the participants to select one of the following two categories, each of which was associated with a specific set of questions: (1) Employer, 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".



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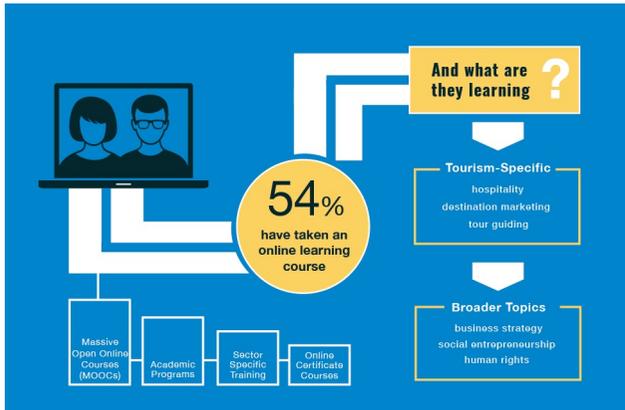
Tourism Professionals Value Online Learning (But Their Employers May Not Know It)



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".

Tourism industry employers, on the other hand, are not (yet) focusing on offering online learning opportunities for their staff members. In-person workshops, professionals conferences and classroom training events are the most common types of skills development opportunities that tourism organizations are offering their employees.

Online Learning Habits of Tourism Professionals



Many tourism professionals have participated in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and other types of e-learning programs on various topics, both directly and indirectly related to tourism.

More than half (53.3%) the respondents in the "Employee" category said they have participated in an online training course or e-learning program. Of those, 40% mentioned MOOCs. In addition to MOOCs, various other types of online courses were mentioned, including webinars, custom online courses for professionals, and academic and lifelong learning programs. Notably, these survey respondents' experiences with e-learning are **not limited to courses that are directly related to tourism**, but also those whose primary focus is not tourism, including topics such as innovative business strategies, social entrepreneurship, human rights and international development.

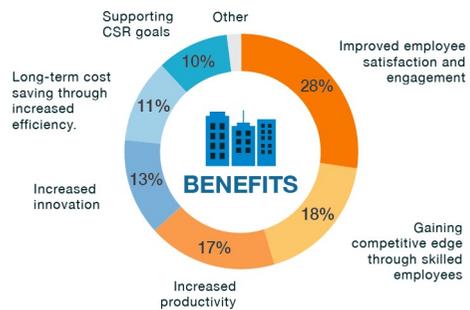
Money is the No.1 Obstacle to Implementing Skills Development Opportunities



Both tourism employers and employees view **cost and time as the main challenges 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".

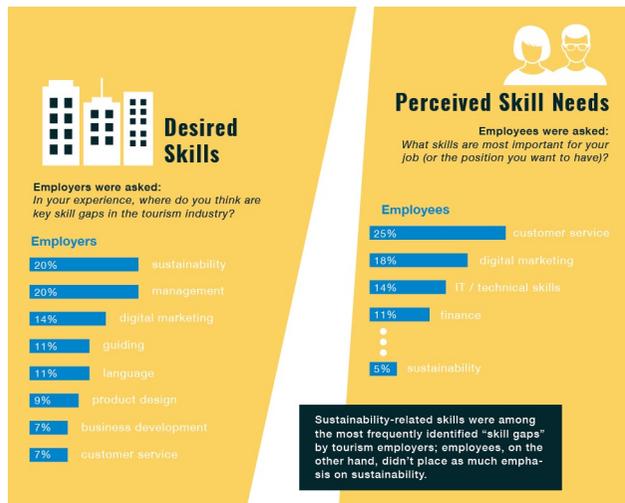
But Many Employers Recognize the ROI of Investing in Skills



Many tourism industry employers identify key 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".

Sustainability: Lack of Skilled Professionals, or Gap in Awareness?



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 about skill gaps, nine (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**. Many also commented that these skill gaps they see need to be recognized not just for staff positions (e.g. front desk managers, tour guides) but also at the management level.

Based on the answers to the "Employee" category question, "What skills do you think are most important for the job you currently have (or the position you want to have)?", many tourism professionals, employees and career seekers 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.

Soft Skills Are Critical to Tourism Job Performance



Both employers and employees emphasized the importance of "soft skills", such as critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, self-motivation and curiosity to learn.

A large number of survey respondents, particularly those in the "Employee" category, identified various "people skills" including **interpersonal communication, 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 Skills + Jobs | 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. 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.



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

Making learning social is a key to successfully implementing an eTraining program. Depending on your learning goals, "social" may mean 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*.



3. Make sustainability skills a priority

Making sustainability a priority in organization-wide skills development efforts will help create an environment where employees are more engaged and motivated. At the industry level, an important solution 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 others in the industry may start to see sustainability as a business priority as well.



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

Soft skills such as effective interpersonal communications, work ethics, teamwork and collaboration are a critical part of tourism industry 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.



5. Help employees identify opportunities for professional development

While allowing employees to seek learning opportunities is a great approach, it is also important for the employee to help with the process of identifying skills development needs and opportunities, as many professionals are busy with their day-to-day obligations and may find it difficult to proactively seek learning opportunities, let alone knowing what skills would be valuable to their job roles and career goals.



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. Many important soft and hard skills for tourism industry professionals are not specific to the tourism industry, but rather, broad transferrable professional skills and competencies. It's 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 industries.

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