

D4 ISSUES

Are you ready for take-off?

UAE's tourism is booming and the hospitality industry is becoming an exciting career choice

DUBAI

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As the world shrinks with increased connectivity, tourism and hospitality prospects are registering an astonishing surge, with increasing numbers of new pathways and sub careers. Students now think of tourism and hospitality as a 'safe bet'. Education spoke to Fabienne Rollandin, director of industry relations with Laureate Hospitality Education, Switzerland, which has now opened a branch in Dubai to help prepare young executives for the challenges of this burgeoning sector.



Supplied picture

Fabienne Rollandin

■ Director of Industry Relations, Laureate Hospitality Education.

According to the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO), the number of travellers in the Middle East more than doubled, from 24.1 million to 60.3 million between 2000 and 2010. This level of growth is unique in the world.

■ **Hospitality and tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world. What's responsible for its exponential growth?**

Several factors, mostly related to development, have made modern tourism one of the key drivers for socio-economic progress. To name a few: more affluence throughout the world, particularly after World War Two. As people become wealthier, there is more disposable income and also paid time off-work to enjoy travelling during the holidays and vacation time. This has been particularly true for emerging economies where the middle class is experiencing not only growth but for the first time, the ability to travel at will in a faster and cheaper way.

Second, improvements in technology: travelling today is much quicker and considerably less expensive. Highways and air travel have helped reduce the time to move in between countries and the internet has made it easier for people to book online and choose budget options for their travelling needs. Third, the wide choices, with vacation packages by 'destination' travel and ecotourism, which encourages travellers to go to places and in ways that match their interests and values.

■ **Is there an essential difference between eastern and western hospitality traditions?**

I do not think there is any essential difference. Hospitality in western or eastern part of the world is about welcoming people and making them experience a unique hospitality journey.

■ **What are the strengths of hospitality and tourism in the Middle East?**

The growth happening in this region. According to the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO), the number of travellers in the Middle East more than doubled, from 24.1 million to

60.3 million between 2000 and 2010. This level of growth is unique in the world and it happened despite the volatility experienced in certain parts of the region.

Dubai, for example, welcomed 10 million visitors last year and keeps growing, with its ambitious plan to welcome 20 million visitors by 2020. This growth means investment, which allows innovation in building hotels, innovation in service, international mix and diversity.

Factors like powerful branding campaigns on the part of governments to promote their countries and/or cities, religious tourism, and of course, the beauty of the region and the UAE's positioning as a thriving business hub renders this a sustainable tourism growth.

For a young professional in the hospitality industry, this is an ideal time. With such growth, the industry also demands highly skilled professionals who can support the expansion and demands of tourists coming not only from the region but from all over the world.

Glon and Les Roches' programmes have been recently recognised by the UAE's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) as one of the universities where nationals can pursue an education and get full scholarship (financial support) from the government. Indeed, we are very proud to

be part of the UAE's efforts to professionalise the industry and prepare the country for the increased demand resulting from a dynamic and growing tourism and hospitality industry.

Many of our graduates are currently employed in the UAE, excelling in their work and shaping the way the industry is evolving and adapting to current growth challenges and the ones to come as the region prepares for events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar.

■ **What are the challenges or weaknesses in this industry?**

The one that immediately comes to mind is the recent turmoil in the region. However, tourism has proven to be a quite resilient industry and countries affected by the Arab Spring, for example, are showing slow recovery in the last year.

Countries which are stable remain very attractive destinations and pull other areas of the region as well - Dubai and Abu Dhabi have brought increased tourism to neighbouring countries as a kind of domino effect. You may also note that intraregional travel accounts for 80 per cent of the total travel, with regional tourists also seeking to stay and enjoy the attractions in the area.

In terms of the hospitality industry itself, the industry is making efforts to change the generalised perception

Making a manager

What does hospitality and management teach students about people management?

The need to understand the hospitality's fundamentals. Such as, how long it takes to clean a room or to cook a meal? This is important to eventually become a successful general manager.

On craft-based learning courses, students get hands-on practical experiences that allow them to understand the functions they will manage and the operational challenges they will face throughout their careers.

Students from all over the globe, with greatly diverse mentalities and cultural backgrounds, work alongside each other. As such, by the time they graduate, they learn to be open-minded, tolerant, and flexible: skills in line with what the industry expects from a manager who will have to cope with a diversity of talents and employees' cultures.