

# Post-Lockdown Transition: Hospitality Recovery Strategies

**A**fter months of lockdowns, the world is now preparing for openings. The easing of travel and hospitality restrictions are taking place across the globe, and a growing number of countries are set to resume international air travel in the coming weeks. Here are the likely recovery strategies for five severely impacted sectors: namely Airlines and Cruises, Tour and Meetings Businesses, Hotels and Lodging, Food Services, and Theme Parks.

## 1. AIRLINE AND CRUISE INDUSTRY

Wearing face masks is still compulsory on planes and in airports, trolley service is being scrapped or reduced, and airlines are coping with the challenge of social distancing onboard. Blocking middle seat assignments and capping the number of available seats are clearly money-losing strategies which have already resulted in higher fares. Malaysia Airlines and Qatar Airways have clarified that their recent air ticket price increases cover the loss of the flights' load factors (between 50% and 70%). In the short term, the focus of yield management for airlines' pricing strategy should be shifted from profit maximization to breakeven optimization. In order to stay cost efficient, a series of route-cutting and code-sharing measures must be widely implemented until the end of 2020. On the other hand, the cruise industry will need more than die-hard cruisers to kick-start their operations. Cases of Covid-19 infections involving cruise ships have significantly shaped how travellers feel about taking cruises and when. Hence, addressing travellers' health and hygiene worries are equally important as improving sanitation measures, noting that a large cruise ship is a massive yet confined floating city. Flexible cancellation policies and inclusiveness of travel and health insurance are extra ways to promote safe assurance.

## 2. TOUR AND MEETINGS INDUSTRY

As social distancing rules are gradually relaxed to accommodate bigger group of gatherings, tour operators and meetings operators are eager to resume

their businesses with new operation models targeting small and niche domestic markets. The challenge ahead is to reintroduce destinations and attractions that are already known to locals. The strategies ahead should focus on in-depth exploration of existing destinations, rather than new destination development which are not feasible in times of financial crisis. Similarly, the meetings industry should share the same approaches to recovery. Even though business travellers are likely to lead international travelling, many SME companies have cut down on their travelling budget and are considering online meetings and virtual exhibitions for the long term. A hybrid future model of meetings, exhibitions, and conventions which features both offline and online experiences is key to the recovery.

## 3. HOTEL AND LODGING INDUSTRY

Many hotels are reluctant to reopen, as numbers from domestic tourism and restricted foreign arrivals are far from breakeven. Multinational large-scale hotels are likely to recover faster as they are more financially ready for wider sanitation and social distancing measures. For examples, some high-end hotels are hiring staff to enforce in-house health regulations, using shoe sanitizing mats at entrances, installing antimicrobial films over high-touch surfaces, and installing medical-grade air purifiers. However, these additional investments have raised concerns over low profit margins. In terms of services, the way forward should be guestroom-centred, with extended in-room services including wellness, fitness activities, meals, and more.

## 4. FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY

Complying with Covid-19 cleaning and sanitizing guidelines, reducing 'high-touch' surfaces not only reduces cross-contamination risk, but is also beneficial for cost control. For example, removal of unnecessary items on tables and elimination of physical menus. Takeaway meals and working with online delivery platforms to compensate for the decrease in seating

capacity helps, too. For dine-in, extending operation hours with the help of staggered reservations to manage waiting times can be implemented. Since working at home is likely to permanently increase post-Covid, recipe-ready ingredients or partially ready-to-eat foods are also options to be considered.

## 5. THEME PARK INDUSTRY

The post-lockdown for theme parks will mean reopening with reduced capacity, which will dramatically impact revenues. For instance, the Chinese government has mandated 24,000 maximum visitors (about 30%) of Shanghai Disneyland's 80,000 capacity. Having said that, Disney is ready to address smaller crowds with smaller staffing. Labour has always been a huge component of theme park operation, so a more on-demand approach is needed in recruitment to ensure fixed labour costs are minimised. Operators must also be cautious about the hidden costs of hiring casual workers – regular orientations and trainings on health and safety which are becoming more essential than ever before. A provisional shift of target market is necessary, considering slower returns of families with younger children.

## CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, many businesses did not survive the lockdown, with layoffs continuing even after the lockdown, and the recovery will not be an ordinary one. The current global tourism and hospitality businesses will surely need more than a recovery plan – the industry needs a 'transition plan.' A recovery plan can get you back to normal, but a transition plan brings you to a 'new normal.' ■

*Assoc. Prof.  
Dr Daniel Chong  
School of  
Hospitality  
Sunway University*



# Happiness at Work

**D**id you know that, according to positive psychology researchers, employees who feel pleasure in doing their work become a great model to others who are less interested? Happiness – a measure of overall satisfaction in the workplace – constantly improves productivity and performance at work. Being happy is a primary catalyst for individuals to do their jobs successfully. The organisations which are able to maintain long-term employee happiness can sustain efficiency, while companies which foster pessimism and unhappiness in the workplace will slay efficiency and productivity. In contrast, happiness can form positivity in the workplace, increase creativity, and reduce stress (Annie McKee, 2017).

Employees who find their job enjoyable are more successful in the workplace, and individuals with a happy character are probably more resilient to stressful conditions in their job and show more passion and pride after accomplishing their job. Happy employees also bring their contentment from their job to their home; similarly, they also transmit their happiness from their home to their workplace (Asiyabi & Mirabi, 2012). Happiness at work is a practice for a healthy life, particularly for those who spend a large portion of the day in the workplace.

## HOW CAN HAPPINESS BE AFFECTED AT WORK?

- Being open-minded at the workplace and giving a warm greeting to each other may be sound very simple, but actually can build a sense of something that busy, focused colleagues almost forget. Acknowledging your colleagues with warm attitude can change the entire atmosphere at the workplace and make it a much nicer place.
- Occasionally doing something out of the routine can lead to a more contented workplace. Treating your colleagues or employees to something even very small, showing that you care about them, makes them feel special and will lead to a happier feeling in the workplace. This doesn't mean spending your working

hours chatting about an individual's private problems or mistakes, but can be as simple as taking the time to ask, "How are you?"

- Individuals with relationships at work can boost their satisfaction and engage more fully in their work. Workplace friendships can have a positive impact on work activities and job productivity. Be responsible for your happiness, try to spread happy thoughts, and surround yourself with positive people.
- Become a happier colleague by implanting the values of "SMILE" that every happy mind understands. Behavioural research has shown that smiling can be a source of joy, health and stress relief for people. Surrounding yourself with loving people with smiles on their faces will elevate your own spirit and put you in a happy mood. And what's more, smiling is often contagious!
- Development that highlights the importance of diversity and inclusivity at the workplace, can affect happiness. Good employers should identify the skills of professionals regardless of nationality, race, gender, or religion. Creating mutual awareness among employees about the difference in culture and languages can reduce misunderstandings and increase empathy among co-workers, which results in a happier workplace.
- Employers can inspire employees to have occupational goals. Once employees sense that they have an important goal to achieve, they tolerate less-than-ideal conditions at the workplace, since it is a means to achieve their goal. Certainly, the acknowledgement of any employee's achievement is an essential aspect to keeping them happy and motivated in the workplace. Employees who don't receive acknowledgement upon their achievement lose their inspiration in the long run, which results in less productivity in the workplace.
- A sense of fairness can increase happiness. Employees feel happy when they are treated fairly and equally within the organisation. They feel that the employer values them

equally and is committed to them as an employee. This will increase the level of trust between managers/supervisor and employees, which further helps employees to achieve their full potential.

In the hospitality industry, customer satisfaction is vital since evidence shows that happy customers generate more profits. To have contented customers, organisations should have contented employees. Therefore, it can be said that increasing happiness in the workplace is crucial for improving organisational productivity and profit. Consequently, happiness is a meaningful issue for the organisation and keeping employees happy at work is a fundamental challenge for employers. One approach to this can be creating a community with "happy minds", where everybody has a sense of belonging, a feeling that they matter to each other and the team, and a shared reliance through their commitment to being together. This kind of workplace is a great way to enhance employees' happiness. Managers need to be aware of the fact that if the employees are treated fairly and honest communication is encouraged and offered, this will help employees to feel happier and consequently motivate them in their daily jobs.

Can you find even one reason for not seeking happiness at work? Through your happiness, you can create more success at work and bring more health to your life. So, as much as possible, choose happiness! ■



*Dr Kamelia Chaichi  
School of Hospitality  
Sunway University*

# The Evolution of Tourism

**D**ue to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have read reports about the sharp dive suffered by the tourism industry. Perhaps some readers themselves have been affected due to lockdowns and closed borders. One sure lesson learned from this pandemic, though, is that new forms of tourism are necessary; some are already up and running, such as virtual tourism. Additionally, many tourists are now focused on domestic travel guides like LokaLocal, an online social travel platform. While the current situation forces everything towards a new normal, sometimes I like to stop and reflect on tourism as it was like in the past. As a traveller, have you ever wondered what tourism might have been in like decades or even centuries ago?

Let start with the very term *tourism*. Going back to medieval times, up to about the 15th century, the term *tourism* was not applied. In fact, the word *travail* was used to carry the meaning of torture. This term reflected on the complexity of human movement back then, as people suffered from the difficulty of walking or riding on the rough roads, being exposed to extreme weather, having no (or very poor) transportation options. Later, the term *travail* evolved to *travel*, which brought a totally new meaning – to go from one place to another. Subsequently, the word *tour* is derived from the French root word for *tower*, which references circulation. In 1811, the term *tourism* was 'officially' applied, which described a circular itinerary of a tourist moving away from his normal routine and then returning to his point of origin – home.

The changes in terminologies were also reflected on the evolution of tourism itself. One of the earliest human movements was recorded in 776 BCE, when the first Olympic Games took place in Greece. It is documented that people travelled to Mount Olympus from all over Europe and the Middle East. (Ironically, the

2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo had to be postponed specifically to curtail human movement amid a pandemic.) However, the era that encouraged people to travel most vigorously was during the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in the early fourth century, when many people travelled for pilgrimage purposes. Unfortunately, due to an outbreak of disease, then as now, travelling activity ceased. It was later revived during the Renaissance in the mid-15th century. This reformation encouraged groups of the social elite, as well as educators, to travel throughout Europe, which became well-known as 'The Grand Tour', whereby the wealthy travelled along with scholars or tutors to gain new knowledge, particularly on arts and culture. (We still have *study tours* in the modern world, too!) Due to the difficult journey, most grand tours were well-funded, and servants usually came along to carry luggage. (When they called it The Grand Tour, they weren't kidding!)

In following centuries, namely from 1550 to 1820, travelling activities in Europe extended to health treatments, what today we would call *spa tourism*. In England, the town of Bath was a prominent vacation destination for upper-class tourists, not only for spa treatments but also to flaunt their opulent wealth and engage in social activities. Obviously, tourism was definitely a luxury pursuit in those days, and it wasn't really until the Industrial Revolution in 1750, with its many changes yielding spare time and money among the middle class. With the great timing on the innovation of railways, a package tour offered by a brilliant opportunist named Mr. Thomas Cook catalysed and popularised travel, positioning it as a leisurely lifestyle. The transformation resulted in a new tourism era called the *Railway Age*. Unfortunately, the Thomas Cook Group closed down in 2019, after a remarkable 178 years in business. (There is now talk of its revival in the near future, but for now, it remains another Covid casualty.)

Meanwhile, in Asia, the *Silk Route* included some of earliest records tracing regular human movement, beginning in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 25 CE) and further branching out to seven routes during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), which connected China to Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Europe, Africa, and other Asian countries. Due to the immense geographical coverage, challenges such as extreme climates, language barriers, and cultural contrasts made journeys difficult and dangerous. Despite this, the Silk Routes served as an important travelling channel, where foods, technology, arts, culture, and literature were shared between China and other neighbouring countries.

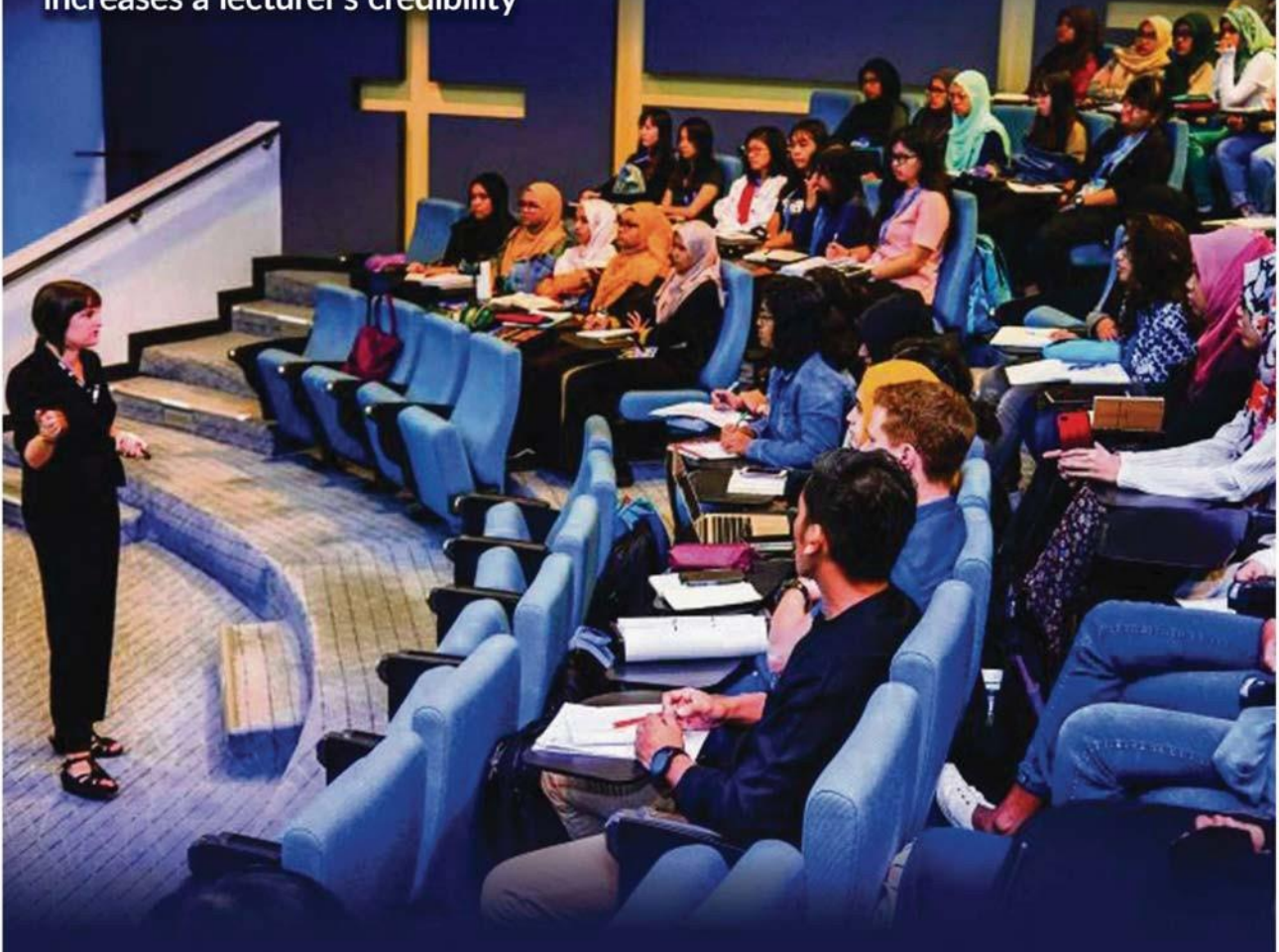
In more modern times, up to today human movement and ease of travel are more prolific than ever before (apart from the current pandemic). Transportation improvements, socio-political and diplomatic progress, and innovation of travel-centred entrepreneurs have all contributed to the tourism industry. Since the end of WWII, the industry has grown and expanded until today, the so-called *modern tourism* era. Whatever comes next in the post-pandemic era, it's clear the tourism industry was not built overnight, but was in fact a long process over several centuries. ■



Dr Teh Pek Yen  
School of Hospitality  
Sunway University

# Bringing real-world experiences into classrooms

Academic qualifications are important, but possessing work experience in the field of their expertise increases a lecturer's credibility



INDUSTRY 4.0-relevant; future-proof students; producing graduates who are job makers instead of job seekers.

These are terms often thrown at institutions and students to remind the former of the importance of moulding the latter into multi-skilled assets.

But how do lecturers translate the constantly evolving demands of the industry to students, if they do not have sufficient work experience themselves and thus, aren't up to date with current, practical and relatable content?

Malaysian Society for Higher Education Policy and Research Development deputy chairman Prof Dr Rosna Awang-Hashim said having paper qualifications alone is not enough for lecturers.

Based on her interactions with Malaysian undergraduates over the years, a large number expressed their preference to study with lecturers who were industry practitioners.

"They said it motivates them when they learn from experts.

"Lecturers with industry experience bring insights from industry and real world projects into the classroom," she said, adding that often, these lecturers tend to have better industry networks that may help boost students' career opportunities.

Striking a balance between both qualifications is imperative and lecturers who were industry practitioners must continue to keep themselves updated with the

latest changes.

Some, Prof Rosna said, may lose touch with the field once they join academia, thus, making their industry experience no longer relevant to the current job landscape.

"So, academics must always maintain good relationships with professionals from the industry".

While Sunway University School of Hospitality Assoc Prof and programme leader Dr Chong Ka Leong does not dispute the importance of obtaining relevant academic qualifications, he said the transfer of knowledge has little to do with how highly educated a lecturer is.

Knowledgeable lecturers without passion, he said, are not contagious in their

teaching.

"If a lecturer is able to bring to the table the workings of the real-world to complement students' theory-based learning, it will undoubtedly inspire students.

"This will then translate into the institution producing graduates with character and passion, which is exactly what the industry wants," he added.

Agreeing, Prof Rosna said whether a lecturer with high academic qualifications will be able to deliver the necessary lessons to ensure students are employable depends on individual lecturers. - By SANDHYA MENON

> MORE STORIES ON PAGES 4&5

# Industry practitioners bridge knowledge gap

Lecturers who join academia with relevant academic qualifications and work experience are a boon to students

Stories by SANDHYA MENON  
sandhyamenon@thestar.com.my

THE industry-academia relationship isn't a new one.

While industry experts remind higher education institutions to produce students with real-world skills, varsities have had various programmes over the years to do just that.

But merely encouraging students to enrol in apprentice-based programmes is not enough, experts insist.

More needs to be done. Varsities need competent lecturers with industry experience to transfer real-world knowledge to their students.

In a document launched early this year, the Education Ministry called on private higher education institutions (PHEIs) to bring in more teaching staff with industry experience or to improve the quality of their programmes.

Dubbed 'The Way Forward for Private Higher Education Institutions: Education as an Industry (2020-2025)', the document had also recommended PHEIs work closely with industries to set-up industrial scale facilities on campus for teaching purposes.

"There is diversification in the quality of teaching staff with proper academic qualifications in PHEIs.

"Faculty members in PHEIs are largely those with postgraduate degrees, which show that PHEIs will continue to provide quality higher education to its students," the document read.

It is vital for universities to align themselves seamlessly with the needs and developments of industries, Datuk Dr Parmjit Singh said.

The Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (Mapcu) president explained that it's crucial for universities to also have a body of instructors and lecturers with solid industry experience.

"Their real life experiences are invaluable in providing the depth required to achieve learning outcomes and competencies sought after by employers.

"Varsities cannot exist in silos and define their purpose in their own convenient ways.

"They must realise that they have bigger responsibilities to students who have enrolled in universities to pursue a chosen field of study which will lead them to attaining a qualification with the sole purpose of fulfilling their career aspirations."

Employers look towards universities to supply talent with the requisite levels of knowledge and competencies to perform on the job.

Private universities especially, Parmjit said, will not be able to sustain their operations in the long term if their graduates' employability track records are dismal.

The alignment with industries, he added, is pivotal if universities aspire to ensure that

their graduates are employable and marketable.

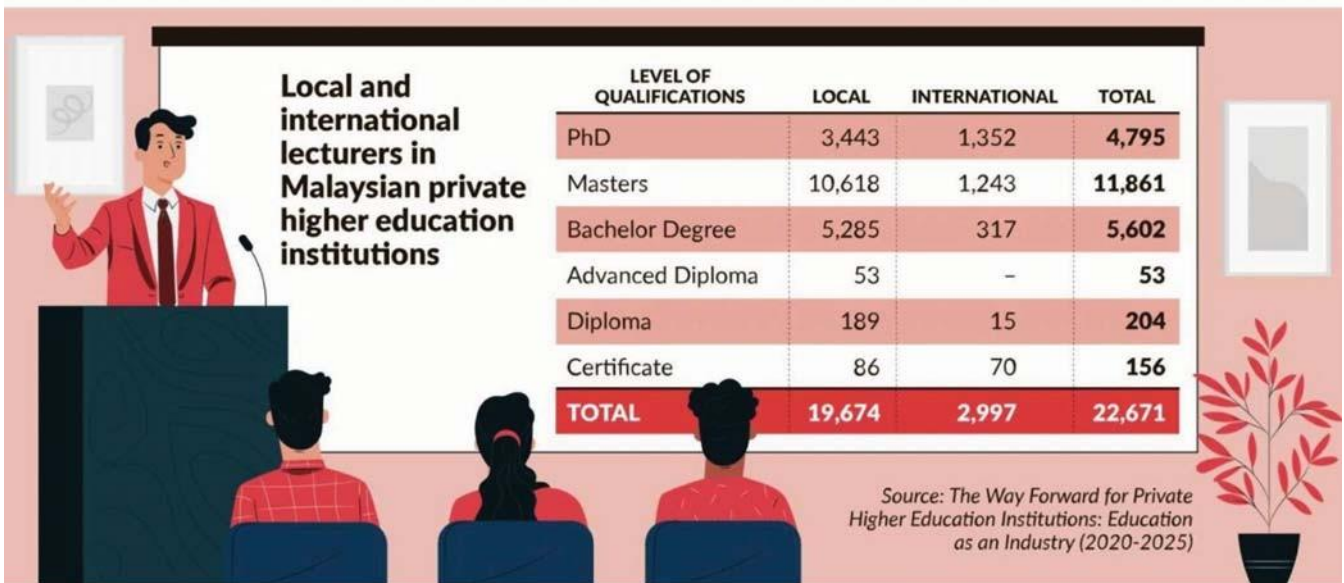
He noted that for private universities, they are neither funded nor aided by the government and are entirely dependent on the fees paid by students.

Therefore, they have to continually ensure that their courses and programmes are relevant to industry needs both locally and globally.

It is also essential for universities to remind students throughout their studies, Parmjit said, of what employers expect from them once they graduate.

"Academic staff play a very important role as they are expected to develop students to be ready for the industry, and to be able to translate theory to real-world practice.

"For this to happen effectively, the staff themselves must have first-hand experience of what it's like to work in the industry."



## What the lecturers say

Public and private varsity lecturers with industry experience share their insights with *StarEdu* on the importance and need to complement academic qualifications with real-world experience.

### Academia-industry work hand-in-hand

Mohamed Jamil Ahmad retired in 2011, armed with over 34 years of experience in the urban planning industry.

After his retirement, he was invited to deliver part-time lectures by Universiti Malaya at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning Faculty of Built Environment.

He is currently an Associate Professor at the department.

"While most of my colleagues and contemporaries have sunk into retirement doing things they had dreamed off in their working life, teaching and disseminating knowledge in urban planning has always been in my 'shopping cart'."

"Imparting essential urban planning knowledge to young students of the Built Environment course has been very fulfilling and satisfying."

"Practical experiences add colour to your lectures and sharing sessions as lessons can be interspersed with real life examples. More often than not, this creates extra value in your presentation during lessons," he said.

By giving real life practical experiences, he said, the "authenticity" and "authenticity" in the deliberation will make an academic's lessons more interesting and believable.

Having this extra skill is important because as a former industry practitioner, he said, educators will be able to achieve better academic results and add value to their students' pursuit of real work experience.

"You also tend to be more apt at problem solving and imparting street smart qualities on your students. Going into academia also opens up new doors for your career as you are now part of a global community of researchers and scientists."

For urban planning to improve, a cooperative relationship between industry and academia needs to be established and flourish.

Thus, both need each other, he added. Decision making in urban planning must be evidence based, and planning policies and products need to be tested from time to time to remain relevant.

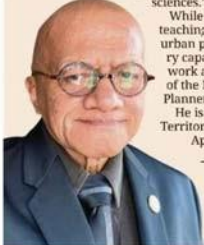
Universities must prepare and undertake empirical research into formulating future planning methodologies, he said.

"The industry needs to provide funding towards that end as there isn't enough research-based studies being funded by the urban planning sector."

"There are many university-industry collaborations in the fields of technology, medicine and science, but there is a lack of similar collaboration in the social sciences."

While Mohamed Jamil's focus is on teaching, he is still involved in the urban planning industry in an advisory capacity. He does consultancy work and is a co-opted exco member of the Malaysian Institute of Planners.

He is also a member of the Federal Territory Planning Urban Planning Appeal Board.



**Mohamed Jamil:** Real life examples add colour to lectures and sharing sessions.

### Industrial exposure is crucial for lecturers

Dr Siva Kumar Sivanesan uses his seven years of experience working in the engineering industry as a catalyst for his lessons.

Armed with 15 years of experience as an educator, the Taylor's University School of Computer Science & Engineering head teaches subjects such as Engineering Statics, Dynamics, Engineering Mathematics, Theory of Machines, Manufacturing Processes, and also supervises post-graduate students.

From witnessing the processes involved in employing technology that allows for efficient creation of systems and products, and being involved in the design, implementation and operation stages of manufacturing lines, to monitoring the mass producing television sets, he has done it all.

"These served as a platform for me to witness real time implementation and application of science and technology."

"Being able to describe in detail and channel the minds of young learners to align with industrial needs are among the many factors that have allowed me to create an environment that makes learning fun and thought provoking."

Industrial exposure, he said, is crucial for those aspiring to enter academia, as it will serve as a platform to gauge the level of a student's readiness in academic and interpersonal skills before they step into the real world.

It encapsulates the nurturing of soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and leadership qualities.

The teaching of soft skills to students can only be effectively executed, he believes, if a situation based on real time industry related challenges is carried out in the classroom.

"Academia serves as a platform for students to build and sustain the growth of knowledge, skills and attributes."

"When academia gets 'too academic', real world solutions mooted by learners from such an environment become vague and hard to perceive."

"Developing solutions for real world or industry challenges today require more rigorous analysis of norms and uncertainties which cannot be statistically calculated."

Academia should remain academic intensive, he said, when the fundamentals underlying a certain concept is put forth.

However, it needs to widen its scope and include aspects such as emotional intelligence and soft skills.

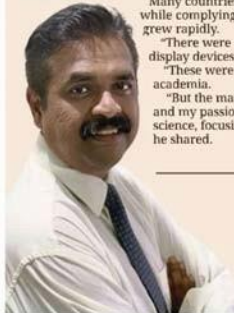
At the time he left engineering for academia, Malaysia's manufacturing sector was significantly impacted due to the rapid growth of trade globalisation.

Many countries manufactured products at lower costs while complying to strict quality requirements that grew rapidly.

"There were also swift changes in the production of display devices."

"These were among the catalysts for me to consider academia."

"But the main pull factor was my ability to teach and my passion to delve deeper into the application of science, focusing on the niche areas of Engineering," he shared.



**Siva Kumar:** Industrial exposure is crucial for academics as it will serve as a platform to gauge the level of a student's readiness in academic and interpersonal skills before they step into the real world.

### Staying industry-relevant

Becoming a lecturer was a calling for Dr Chong Ka Leong. He had already spent eight years in the hospitality industry when he made the career switch.

Growing up with learning difficulties, the Sunway University School of Hospitality Assoc Prof and programme leader wanted to help students who are weak learners.

But before he dove into the teaching world, he wanted to ensure that he had the relevant industry experience first.

"I did not want to join academia without having practical knowledge and industry experience; it is important for us as lecturers."

"We teach according to global standards and ideal practices. But teaching according to international benchmarks do not necessarily mean that the knowledge is suitable for the local scenario."

"Having industry experience fills such knowledge gaps. We must be able to relate whatever is taught to the local scenario so students are able to understand the challenges better. We must strike a balance and relate theories with the practical world."

The advantage of having both academic qualifications and industry experience, he said, will help educators stay industry-relevant.

This ensures that lecturers will be able to produce graduates who embody sustainable values and business ethics and are industry ready.

"Over the years, academia has been criticised for being 'overly academic'."

This is a term Chong disagrees with but he does not blame industry practitioners.

"It serves as a reminder to academicians to continue staying connected with the industry be it through direct involvement via projects and research, or indirectly through case studies, collaborations and internships."

The pros of staying academic focused is that educators are research informed, in touch with global good practices and able to continue educating students about ideal business work ethics and sustainable values, he said.

However, the cons that come with it, Chong said, is that academia will continue to be labelled as impractical, and be perceived as producing inflexible graduates with unrealistic and critical mindsets and an inability to adapt.

**Chong:** Having industry experience complements gaps that exist in academia.



## Sharing realistic experiences is an advantage

It's an advantage to be able to share personal and realistic experiences with her students, Dr Chin Phaik Nie said.

This is especially so with students who do not have working experience or those at the early stages of their career.

The Universiti Sains Malaysia Graduate School of Business senior lecturer has worked in various multinational corporations involved in the manufacturing and sub-contracting sectors for nine years.

She has an additional 10 years of voluntary work experience with NGOs in dealing with children and teenager's with special needs therapy.

"It is not only work-related experiences, but also the life experiences that we as lecturers have accumulated from our working life, that make us better educators.

"Most of my students work in multinational corporations and having been in such corporations, the understanding of the big picture and how things work in factories allow me to relate to their work better, know them better, be empathetic when it comes to their work schedules.

"I get to create more relevant examples, and explain the applications of theories in their actual working environment," she explained.

Chin, who holds a doctorate in Economics, said having these skills as an educator is an advantage, she said, as it has trained her to be disciplined, detailed, firm and quick in decision making. It also equips her with good presentation skills.

This in turn allows her to improve her teaching methods and impart knowledge more effectively.

Explaining how she made the jump to academia, she said it was the death of her colleague that spurred her to become an educator.

"It made me think about what I really want to do until the day I retire and after much consideration, I entered academia in 2017 when I joined USM as a full time researcher and lecturer."

**Chin:** It's an advantage to be able to share personal and realistic experiences with students.



## The benefits of having academic staff with strong industry experience:

- The output of projects, case studies and assignments given to students would be closer to the work expected by industry.

- The ability to share their own real-life experiences, anecdotes and insights as to what employers expect of graduates – not just in core skills areas, but also in terms of professionalism and ethics.

- The continuous enriching and evolving of the course curriculum and content.

- The relevant exposure of students to real world problems to meet industry expectations.

- The ability to go beyond textbook knowledge to a more functional knowledge when they design classroom activities or projects.

Source: Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities president Datuk Dr Parmjit Singh and Malaysian Society for Higher Education Policy and Research Development deputy chairman Prof Dr Rosna Awang-Hashim.



# Demystifying Islamic Hospitality

Understanding Islamic hospitality and identifying the challenges facing the industry

The global Muslim population totalled 1.6 billion in 2010 and is forecasted to increase dramatically to 2.8 billion in 2050 according to Pew Research Center. In the latter part of this century, Islam is expected to exceed Christianity as the largest religion in the world.

Such demographic changes have partly driven significant research in understanding Islamic forms of tourism and key trends. I have been researching the sociocultural and market dynamics of Islamic hospitality for over a decade and I do believe that this phenomenon is far more conceptually important and relevant than the popular usage of “Islamic tourism”.

Given the plethora of studies concerning Islamic tourism over the past 10 years, there could be misuse and misapplication of “Islamic tourism” in academic circles. While Islamic travel

is commonly related to sacred and auspicious journeys (e.g. the Hajj), the concept of Islamic hospitality has been somewhat mystified due to the populist element of tourism.

Accordingly, the term “tourism” often signifies frivolous and hedonistic activities, which can arguably strengthen our social statuses, self-identities and egos particularly now with social media. Yet, the concept of hospitality is fundamentally about being welcoming and hospitable.

Hospitality is highly embedded within both the Qur’an and the Hadith, symbolising the importance of treating guests well and refraining from self-indulgence. On a rudimentary level, Islam is about being humble and not revelling in ostentatious activities.

Having lived and worked in the Middle East for almost a decade, I have

conducted a historic assessment of Islamic hospitality through examining narratives of past travel writers and historians, particularly within the context of the Middle East where Islam originated from.

The process of indulging guests and greeting them in an almost ritualistic hospitable manner has its origins in the Bedouin Arab communities and pre-Islamic societies. In certain ancient Arab communities, sharing a meal denoted a sense of belonging to host families and groups, exemplifying the informal qualities of hospitality.

However, through the globalisation of tourism, travel and mobility as well as the rise of capitalism and advanced consumerism, hospitality has become more formalised and commercialised in nature, form and process. To some extent, these transformations have taken Islamic

hospitality out of private spaces and places and into commercialised settings and formal contexts.

An “Islamic hospitality industry” has rapidly emerged with the production and consumption of *halal* food and the development and expansion of the Islamic hotel sector (especially in the Islamic world), *halal* restaurants and cafes, and Islamic niche products (e.g. Islamic tourism destinations, *halal* airlines, Islamic cruises and Islamic events).

There is also an increase in organisations responsible for the Islamic legitimisation (i.e. authentication and verification) of *halal* products and services, which is a challenge for *halal* food industries. Globally, there are conflicting perspectives over the “*halalness*” of meat products with differing views on animal slaughter methods. Even different organisations that inspect food within a country have varying views on animal feed, packaging and logistics.

There should be more coherence and standardisation in terms of *halal* certification policies domestically, regionally and internationally, especially to reassure consumers of the legitimacy of the product and to prevent *halal* fraud that has been increasing in non-Islamic countries.

Another challenge in the application of Islamic hospitality is the distinction between Islamic-friendly and Shari’a-compliant hospitality products and services. For example, an Islamic-friendly hotel may not serve alcohol directly to customers but might use desserts with alcohol products or gelatine (which includes pork derivatives).

On the other hand, fully yielding to Shari’a law implies that the design and construction of the hotel would need to consider a number of directives. Washing and toilet facilities, for instance, need to be positioned away from Mecca and all sinks need to be equipped with *halal*-

friendly soap and toilets with a bidet shower or health faucet. There would be options to close off areas for women and families and ensure no artwork depicting human or animal forms nor ostentation is displayed.

Fundamentally, it would be crucial for such hotels to be equipped with clearly defined male and female prayer rooms, markers (*Qibla* stickers) indicating the direction of Mecca, prayer mats, beads (*tasbeeh*), and built-in washing facilities.

I have previously worked on interpreting the concept design of a Shari’a-compliant hotel and I believe that in addition to attracting Muslim guests, the objective is also to entice non-Muslim guests interested in seeking authentic and lifestyle-conscious experiences. Such experiences indicate significant latent market demand and the potentiality for non-Muslims to embark on cultural learning experiences.

In line with Islamic ethical and philanthropic principles (e.g. *zakat*), there should be a clear emphasis on social responsibility. In hotels (and restaurants) there should be established food redistribution policies for waste and unused food and directives that facilitate eating practices associated with moderation and consumer value. Having lavish buffets, for instance, may not be aligned with the Islamic directive concerning “modesty”.

While Islamic hospitality needs to be contextualised based on market and consumer demands, the products and services offered must also align with Islamic values and sensibilities. As the Muslim population grows, so too will the demand for Islamic hospitality and, indeed, authentic experiences.

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**Professor Marcus Stephenson**

School of Hospitality

[mstephenson@sunway.edu.my](mailto:mstephenson@sunway.edu.my)



# The rise of fastidious tourists

The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly caught all of us off guard, severely impacting work, play and learning.

The Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), which was lifted on June 10, saw a massive increase in domestic tourism overnight. All the main tourist points of interest in Malaysia were heaving with tourists going about eating, shopping and sightseeing. The National Security Council Malaysia (MKN) drew up standard operating procedures (SOPs), together with the relevant ministries and agencies, for many economic sectors. These SOPs were to be enforced immediately by businesses and organisations. However, the onus is on business operators. The continuity of domestic tourism — without casualties from a third wave of Covid-19 infections — depends entirely on people conforming to the new normal. Despite handfuls of apathetic tourists here and there, the majority are extremely careful, especially those with children and the elderly. Whether we are gearing up for domestic or international tourism, we must conform to the new normal.

The Spanish Flu of 1918, which infected about a third of the world's population, saw a big increase in infected cases in the second and third waves. No matter what is being said or predicted about the future of travel, one certainty is that carefree tourists are being transformed into fastidious tourists. This will be more prevalent when more international borders are opened.

There are two sides to the coin, one being people's health and safety, and the other, their wages and income. Economic activity must go on in order to complete the cycle, enabling companies and organisations to supply tourism-re-



DR DAISY GAYATHRI  
School of Hospitality  
Sunway University

lated products profitably by keeping costs to a minimum. Even though the CMCO has been lifted and there is a domestic tourism boom, not all business sectors have been allowed to reopen. The hardest hit are full-service airlines and hotels, which are dependent on international tourism. It has been reported that many renowned hotels in Malaysia have closed their doors. Airlines are facing major financial issues. Then there are nightlife outlets, entertainment centres, tour operators, restaurants and Airbnb operators.

International tourism is all about bringing in revenue, which directly contributes to the country's GDP. Last year, Malaysia received 26.1 million international tourists and they contributed RM86.14 billion to the economy. Tourist receipts went to shopping (33.6%), accommodation (24%), F&B (13.3%), local transportation (7.6%), organised tours (6.3%), entertainment (3.4%), medical (3.4%), domestic airfares (2.6%), fuel (0.3%), sports (0.2%) and others (0.4%). For these in-destination products and services to continue bringing in the money, the SOPs created by MKN must be adhered to. We must remember to find a balance between health and safety, and wages and income for the people, businesses and the country.

It takes one bad apple to spoil the whole barrel — be it the first case on a flight or in a hotel, restaurant, and shopping centre or even city or country. The phobia an infection generates will deter tourists from coming, or returning. It will take years for the tourism industry to recover.

So, it is better to have measures in place than have regrets. How prepared are we to welcome the new kind of tourists, who are particular about hygiene and cleanliness? How are we

to convince them that we have taken all the necessary steps and actions under the SOPs to prepare for their arrival?

For instance, the top shopping locations for international tourists are Bukit Bintang-KLCC (72.8%), Johor Baru (43.3%), Petaling Street (31.1%), Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (27.7%), KLIA/Klia2 (26.4%) and Melaka (21.3%). What are we doing for mass tourism? Are we waiting for a vaccine that will solve everything? Are we throwing SOPs out of the window to keep costs down and stay afloat?

Shopping venues, including retail outlets, have to come up with solutions for space, convenience and safety; accommodation owners, including hotels and Airbnb proprietors, should think about hygiene standards; managers of F&B outlets must think about safe dining and clean toilets; local transportation companies have to think about having healthy drivers and sanitised vehicles; operators of organised tours have to think about safe and clean places to take tourists to, and so on.

There are certainly many high-tech equipment and gadgets on the market, but we do not have to resort to them yet. We could come up with new roles for the excess human capital (thanks to job losses) we have right now. Perhaps we could have a Covid-19 Security Officer at every establishment to enforce adherence to SOPs. Hopefully, this will give confidence to fastidious tourists as well as persuade the government to open up more businesses and economic activities.

Preparation, planning and experimenting should start now. Because once the borders open, it will be very difficult to mitigate any eventualities. **E**