

# **Opportunities for BA graduates in the tourism industry**

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## INTRODUCTION

Although few Hong Kong University graduates enter the tourism industry, opportunities for B.A. graduates are many. This report is based on my working experience in the Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA) and statistics published by the HKTA and the Careers Education and Placement Centre of the University of Hong Kong. It outlines the role of the tourism industry in Hong Kong, the roles and functions of the HKTA and expectations of graduates entering the field.

### *The tourism industry in Hong Kong*

Hong Kong is one of the leading holiday destinations in the world. In order to promote the tourism industry and to further attract visitors, the Hong Kong government established the Hong Kong Tourist Association in 1957. Since then, Hong Kong's popularity among overseas travellers has grown and visitor arrivals have increased steadily (see Appendix 1).

Despite the Asian economic downturn in the second half of 1997, which saw negative growth in tourism revenues, the Hong Kong tourism industry remains the tenth largest in the world. To a certain extent, the downturn proved to be an opportunity for the industry to refurbish and restructure so that it could reinforce its competitive edge in the region and pave the way towards success in the next millennium.

As one of the H.K.T.A. local promotional slogans says: "Tourism works for you." Tourism contributes significantly to the economy of Hong Kong. In 1997, Hong Kong welcomed 10.4 million visitors and received HK\$72.1 billion in tourism revenues, making the travel and tourism sector one of Hong Kong's largest earners of foreign exchange. Furthermore, some 12%

of Hong Kong's working population, (i.e. 360,000 persons) are employed directly or indirectly in the industry. The industry also contributes up to 6% of Hong Kong's Gross Domestic Product.

***Roles and functions of the Hong Kong Tourist Association***

Established in 1957, The HKTA has six main objectives as part of its goal to develop the Hong Kong tourism industry:

- ✓ to increase the number of visitors to Hong Kong
- ✓ to further the development of Hong Kong as a tourist destination
- ✓ to promote the improvement of facilities for visitors
- ✓ to market Hong Kong's visitor attractions overseas
- ✓ to coordinate the activities of the tourism industry
- ✓ to advise the government on matters relating to the tourism industry

Being a statutory body, the HKTA is under the supervision of a Board of Management that includes Mr. Stephen Ip, JP, Secretary for Economic Services. In addition to its headquarters in the Citicorp Centre in North Point, there are 18 offices worldwide located in the major cities in the world (see Appendix 2). It has a total number of 395 staff, of whom 86 are stationed overseas.

*Career prospects for B.A. students*

According to the statistics published by the Careers Education and Placement Centre of the University of Hong Kong, only around 3% of 1997 graduates were directly employed in the tourism industry, in places such as hotels, airlines and the H.K.T.A. Of these, students of the Japanese Studies Department constituted the highest number of successful candidates, which may be due to their Japanese language ability.

In fact, there are many opportunities for B.A. graduates to join the tourism industry. The basic entry requirements of the career field are friendliness, maturity, a positive approach and excellent language skills. As ambassadors of Hong Kong, all members of the tourism trade are required to be particularly friendly, thoughtful and considerate to overseas visitors. Most importantly, they have to be bilingual in English and Cantonese. Other foreign languages are also an advantage, so that they can easily communicate with people from all over the world. Moreover, executives of hotels, airlines and travel agencies must be willing to travel abroad to promote business and attend meetings.

Although many BA graduates have the basic qualities and skills required for a successful career in the tourism industry, competition is keen, because the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and other local and overseas institutes offer courses specializing in tourism.

### *Use of English at the HKTA*

The HKTA is a good example of the expectations of recent graduates in regard to languages. As some 20% of staff members of the Association are foreigners stationed overseas, English is - the main medium of communication, as outlined below:

#### Written Communication

- Writing internal & external correspondence, e.g. e-mails, faxes, letters, reports
- Reading documents, memos and journals -

#### Spoken Communication

- Conducting meetings, seminars, presentations and press conferences;
- Handling telephone enquiries, general discussions.

As Hong Kong has recently become part of China, Putonghua has also become an important communication medium in the Association. Therefore, its Human Resources Department expects new applicants to have *not only* the basic entry requirements mentioned in Section 3, *but also* to have a high standard of both English and Putonghua.

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## CONCLUSION

The tourism industry will be one of the fastest growing industries in the 21st century and is a field that BA graduates should consider for their future career. Although competition is keen, BA students' personal qualities and language skills place them in a good position to enter this field.

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