

subject focus

Travel & tourism in the UK

There are a number of different types of course available in the UK that offer international students a pathway into the travel and tourism industries.

The field of travel and tourism training in the UK has received something of a boost in recent years due to the strengthening of various economies around the world, fuelling international student demand.

Shane Wilkinson from Bournemouth Business School International has noticed that increasing numbers of students from Central Europe, Turkey and China have been enrolling on the school's pre-university level travel and tourism courses recently. He explains, "All [these countries] are emerging economies and mostly have a large or very large growth potential in the tourism sector."

At Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, David Bowie has also noticed rising demand from international students for the three Masters courses offered in this field at his university. He puts the growth down to an increase in interest from Southeast Asia. "These are countries with successful economies and a respect for education," he says. "The travel and tourism industry is a big employer worldwide and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing has fuelled demand for these courses."

For students with a thirst for travel and desire to learn about other cultures, the travel and tourism industry is a natural career choice. And UK travel and tourism training providers have some advantages when it comes to attracting students from overseas, according to Siân Gethin-Jones, International Officer at Richmond upon Thames College in London. "[Students come to the UK because of the] excellent reputation of the UK and due to English being a global language that is essential to master in order to have a career in tourism," she asserts.

There are a number of travel and tourism courses available to international students in the UK that span a whole range of education levels, including those that focus on English language learning. At Churchill House School of English in London, Alexandra Fletcher points out that the UK language teaching sector in the UK has a "long history of excellence in English for specific purposes". The school offers specific intermediate language courses in English plus travel and tourism, as well as providing travel and tourism electives as an optional part of a general English course. These courses are often the first step towards further training in the field.

"Our [role] as language schools is vitally important to enable students to progress to more long-term vocational courses – NVQ or similar," says Fletcher, who adds, "The hospitality profession is perceived to be a relatively secure one and in many emerging economies it is a growth industry."

Vocational qualifications, especially those designed to provide students with specific skills that increase the chances of being able to find work on finishing the course, are also widespread. Travel and tourism courses at Bournemouth Business School International are linked to Virgin Atlantic vocational qualifications, while students at New College Nottingham can study EFL with modules such as Airfares and ticketing and Tour rep courses. Work experience or internships are an important component of many travel and tourism courses and often prove to be an important route into the employment market for students.

Bowie reports that many of their postgraduate students do a one-year internship after a year of study as part of their course. "Many students end up working in one of the top hotel chains in the UK as a result of their internship," he asserts.

For students who already have a first degree, postgraduate courses in travel and tourism are an obvious gateway into the industry. Indeed, demand for such courses has increased so much in recent years that Oxford Brookes University has increased its course provision in this area. The MSc in International Travel and Tourism Management was introduced three years ago and is aimed at students with no previous experience in the industry. "We update our courses in line with student demand," says Bowie. "We are introducing a new course this September, an MSc in International Hotel and Tourism Marketing Management, and continually ensure that all our courses are kept up-to-date."

Keeping up with the changing demands of the industry is an important priority for all course providers. At New College Nottingham, this has led to a greater diversity among the subject areas covered and skills taught by the HND courses on offer. "Travel and tourism is no longer simply about package holidays, but includes government strategies, socio-economic factors, environmental [considerations] and of course the forever growing client base/market segmentation," says Sue Griffin at the college.

Griffin notes that more Chinese students are enrolling on their travel and tourism courses as an alternative to business studies and aims to build on this trend. "[We want to raise] students' awareness of the options [available] in the service sector, especially the huge numbers of Chinese students that arrive in the UK to study business and do not appreciate that service sector qualifications cover many aspects of marketing, budget management and law in relation to tourism."