

TOMORROW'S TRAILBLAZERS

Asia's rise as a dynamo of travel and tourism could be curtailed without more skilled graduates entering the work force. Meet five of these up and coming talents

STORY BY PRUDENCE LUI

There is a Chinese saying: it may take 10 years to grow a tree but a century to educate a person. In these speedy times that is set to change, especially in the travel world.

According to Shukun Zhang, Dean and Associate Professor of Tourism School of Hubei Vocational-Technical College in Xiaogan of Hubei, tourism education in mainland China has been developing very fast in last 20 years. "As of the year 2011, there are 1,115 colleges and/or universities offering tourism education programs. On average, 159,700 college graduates are generated a year. The most prestigious hotel/tourism schools are located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang Province as these places are the economically developed."

This means an incredible demand for young employees. "The tourism and hotel job market in China is really promising with the industry hunger for employees, especially for those college educated graduates. But the challenge is that many graduates from tourism colleges are choosing to be employed with other industry sectors." For many parents, Zhang pointed out, the travel and hospitality fields are no-go zones. "Parents have no interest in sending their children to tourism colleges. This results in a national drop of students choosing the tourism and hotel management programs, compared with other programmes such as nursing."

The problem is exacerbated by young people's disinterest in these careers. "The new generation's lack of enthusiasm for the hospitality industry, and their dislike of serving others is very common in mainland China in one-child families."

The Macau-based Institute for Tourism Studies is a reputable training ground for hospitality and tourism talent. President Dr Fanny Vong observed that throughout the course of history, older generations find youth lacking in certain skills or attitudes. "I think it's important to try to uncover talents in every generation. For example, this generation is very tech-savvy and their way of communicating, working, organising, and their outlook on life may be very different from our generation."

She added: "As long as young people are given the chance to receive the kind of education and training that unleash their potential and shape the right moral values, these differences in attitudes, ways of working and thinking can actually open up new horizons and possibilities."

In this feature, we look at five promising young talents who have just started or about to embark on careers in the industry.

special report

NAME: CALVIN YUEN

JOB TITLE: CORPORATE TRAINEE -
SHANGRI-LA HOTELS AND RESORTS

After toiling in hospitality education programmes and placements for seven years and earning his first-class honours of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Hotel Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, diligent Calvin Yuen eventually got ready to get his hands dirty and joined Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts as a Corporate Trainee, with the Kowloon Shangri-La, in June 2012.

He said, "I love my job very much. The Corporate Trainee programme is well-structured. I am now undergoing institutional learning at the Shangri-La Academy. Next, I will be going to another hotel property for specialised training in my focus area of F&B. In Stage 2, the training will focus on specialisation through learning and mentoring. The final phase will provide me with the opportunity to perform the actual role as a supervisor/manager.

"As a fresh graduate, I am seeking opportunities to learn, promote the brand, transfer to properties in different locations, experience every department of the operation, receive guidance from upper management, and join special projects other than basic operation. That is why I love this Corporate Trainee programme." These programmes are difficult to get into with around one opening for every two hundred applicants.

Yuen won the Rudy Choy Educational Fund scholarship in 2008 and since then he has been a Young Skal member of Skal International Hong Kong for almost four years. "In this industry, it all depends on your attitude and to be self-motivated. Sometimes you need to volunteer to learn a lot. I was nominated as the Secretary of Young Skal in January 2009. However, my role was not restricted to the job description associated with the position. After almost four years with this association, apart from the role of secretary to facilitate the communication and take care of membership, I also organize Young Skal events to benefit young professionals in this industry by inviting guest speakers such as General Managers from hotels. With the 'Buddying Scheme' I can provide guidance to the new members on their academic and job-related issues. I am also assisting Skal International Hong Kong for content management on the official website and helping out during their monthly luncheons."

His dream job goal is to be the General Manager of a five-star hotel, and to open a new hotel. "I'm working towards that now by accruing knowledge from different departments, starting with F&B, then moving on to other related departments and finally all divisions. It is also nice to know everyone in the hotel, from every division, at every level as I always learn from talking to them. Besides, being a Young Skal member also provides me with the chance to seek advice from Skal members at senior management levels and very keen to nurture young professionals."



special report



NAME: AMY CHAN

JOB TITLE: STUDENT AND
YOUNG SKAL MEMBER

Just 20, Amy's passion developed an interest in the world of hospitality at an early age. "When I went travelling with my family or on vacations, I always enjoyed and loved the way they made me feel 'special', so I want to make people feel the way I did when I travelled."

Recently graduated from the Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) with a Higher Diploma in Hotel and Catering, her thirst for knowledge inspired her to sign up for the two-year BSc (Hons) in Convention & Event Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

She recalled, "Back in my final year at IVE, I was most concerned about where I would carry on my further studies after graduation as I would like to continue my education in this field. Over the next two years at Polytechnic University, I want to know more about planning and organizing events. During my three years at IVE, I helped out at many industrial luncheons held at our school in which I soon became interested and eager to learn more in this area."

With more and more new hotels opening in Hong Kong these days, Chan has seen many of her fellow students get offered good jobs after graduating.

During her student placement at the Hong Kong Jockey Club, Amy received a crash course in disaster management, when the plate she was holding fell on the diners' table and pieces of fish scattered everywhere. "I was shocked and kept apologising to the guests at the table. The interesting thing was that the guests burst out laughing and asked whether I practiced kung fu to and used my inner powers to make the dish explode. I guess I should be thankful that I had customers with a sense of humour."

"My dream job is to own and operate my own hotel. It doesn't have to be big, but I want to be able to design the hotel myself. I would love to work with a team that has the same passion as I do for hotels and the hospitality industry. Also, I want every guest to feel like they are treated 'special'."

Chan feels lucky that she has relatives working in the industry or she might not have found out about these opportunities. "Many students in Hong Kong don't know they could study about hospitality rather than physics and history. Subjects related to the hospitality industry like hotel management and tourism management should be introduced at an earlier stage in our educations. This will enable more students to discover their potential and get interested in the hospitality industry earlier."