Industry insight - Tourism

In a nutshell

The tourism sector has such breadth and diversity it means there are numerous opportunities for graduates. The sector can be divided into two parts - the travel industry and the tourism services industry. These include transport services, accommodation, food and drink establishments, travel agencies, transport rental and cultural, sport and recreation services. Due to its very nature, jobs are available worldwide, either through overseas airlines and tour operators or through UK companies that have international offices and opportunities.

Although it is, to some extent, an unpredictable sector (due to unexpected events such as economic recession, natural catastrophe and industrial action, for example) it is resilient and generally regarded as quick to recover.

An increasing number of people are opting to spend more holidays within the UK due to various factors such as the recession, increased environmental awareness and a desire to take fewer flights. VisitBritain, in partnership with the regional tourist boards Visit Scotland, Visit Wales and Discover Northern Ireland, ensures that Britain is marketed effectively both at home and overseas. On a national level, this is also achieved through the many Tourist Information Centres located in towns and cities throughout the country.

What kind of work can I do?

There are a number of different areas of work within the tourism sector, including:

- **customer service** - client facing roles in travel agencies, tourist boards, airline jobs as air cabin crew and holiday representative, customer service manager and hotel manager, theme park manager and tour manager, tourism officer, tourist information centre manager and travel agency manager;
- **marketing** - for tourist boards, tour operators and travel in roles such as marketing executive and sales promotion account executive;
- **sales** - within travel agencies or for tourist attractions such as theme parks and activity days, see sales executive;
- **product development** - for tourist attractions in certain regions, for example, which may involve a mixture of marketing, business planning and advertising, see advertising account planner and advertising account executive;
• **IT and administration** in a number of different areas related to tourism, take a look at systems developer or secretary/administrator.

**What’s it like working in this sector?**

• Work conditions vary according to your role. You may work in an office, in a customer service environment, outdoors or on board a plane or a cruise ship.
• For permanent posts at graduate level, pay rates will vary, depending on skills and the levels of expertise required. This sector is not generally known for high remuneration but management positions will demand higher salaries and minimum wage legislation has brought lower paid positions in line.
• Working hours vary depending on the role but you should expect to work unsocial hours in many of the roles in the tourism industry.
• The travel and tourism industries tend to be female dominated.
• There are good opportunities in the industry to work part time. Around half the sector’s workforce is part time.
• Depending on your job role, regular overseas travel may be required.
• Tourism comprises some 249,000 businesses which generate £115 billion annually for the UK economy.
• It’s the UK’s sixth largest industry and third largest employer, employing 1 in 11 people.
• More than 80% of businesses employ fewer than 10 people (all statistics sourced from Tourism Alliance First Annual Overview of Tourism Statistics, 2012).

For information on working overseas, see the Opportunities abroad section.

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**Entry and progression**

**How do I find a job?**

Many vacancies are advertised at jobcentres. For regional jobs, for example within a travel agency or tourism office, check the local papers and internet job boards.

It is also worth keeping an eye on social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook for jobs and networking opportunities. Industry-specific media sites such as Visit Britain Media Centre can help keep you informed with regular industry related news updates.

Graduate schemes are not common, but do exist within most of the larger, hotel chains and travel groups. Many graduates that enter these schemes have completed a tourism
and hospitality or management degree, although most of these companies accept any degree subject.

Company websites are useful job sources. They tell you how to apply for different jobs, whether they have graduate schemes and how to apply for them. Your university careers centre has a variety of directories that you may use to search for companies. See the Typical employers section for information on potential recruiters.

Unlike hospitality where recruitment drives tend to be seasonal, recruitment in travel and tourism is fairly constant throughout the year.

**What skills do I need?**

Application forms, CVs and covering letters should reflect a mix of skills from subject-related to technical skills that you have developed during your studies.

As well as your academic qualifications, it is important to be able to demonstrate skills such as teamwork, communication and customer service skills. Work experience, experience abroad and language skills may also be helpful.

Your application should show you have an understanding of the tourism industry, including infrastructure, services, and political, social and economic issues. Try also to demonstrate an awareness of current trends within the industry and the reasons behind them.

**Where can I find work experience?**

Any work experience you have acquired in the hospitality services industry as a student will be useful. This might be hotel or bar work where you will have gained valuable experience working face-to-face with clients.

Another way of gaining experience within this industry is through a work placement. The process of finding a placement is very similar to finding a permanent job. Many companies advertise available placements on their websites, job boards and at university careers services. Ask at your university careers office where they advertise their placement vacancies. Also, consider approaching companies speculatively and not just waiting until they advertise.

Many employers, though they may not specify a need for a degree in tourism or a related subject, ask you to demonstrate knowledge and experience in this field. So examples of how you have gained such experience, either as part of your degree, through any work experience or gap travelling that you have done, strengthens your application. You may find, though, that salaries are lower compared with those for traditional graduate occupations.

The [Institute of Travel and Tourism (ITT)](https://www.itt.org.uk) has a careers section on their website.
Is postgraduate study useful?

Postgraduate qualifications are not necessary to enter the sector, but some graduates find that once they have industry experience, a postgraduate qualification helps develop the skills needed in order to enhance their promotion prospects. A postgraduate qualification in for example, communications, public relations or management may be seen as very relevant within this sector.

How can my career develop?

The sector is generally well qualified and has a comprehensive training structure (NVQ Levels 1-5 or equivalent, a degree being regarded as Level 4 and postgraduate qualifications as Level 5).

Career development in tourism is through experience and in-service training. Many senior executives in this industry started their careers at entry level.

Because of the mobility between tour operators, airlines and travel agents there is significant scope for career development and networking opportunities can be very useful. Staff in smaller organisations may find that they need to move to larger organisations in order to gain more responsibility or to specialise.

Typical employers

The tourism services industry: comprising transportation, accommodation and entertainment.

The travel industry: comprising retail travel services such as high street travel agencies, travel insurance and online travel services, tour operators, bureaux de change and travel ticketing agencies. The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) is the body which represents travel agencies and tour operators.

Big players

Depending on whether you are interested in the travel industry or the tourism services industry, both offer big employers which provide opportunities for graduates.

In the travel industry, Thomas Cook Group Plc is one of the world’s leading leisure travel groups. It was formed in 2007 after the merger of Thomas Cook AG and My Travel Group Plc. Its principal brands include Thomas Cook, Condor and Direct Holidays.

TUI Travel PLC was created in 2007 from the merger of First Choice Holidays Plc and the Tourism Division of TUI AG. It is another of the leading international travel groups,
operating in over 180 countries. TUI offers an 18-month International Management Trainee programme for graduates.

Large airline companies include Ryanair, EasyJet, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic.

There are a large number of agencies organising gap year travel, such as Gapyear.com, Gapadvice.org and Yearoutgroup.org.

The Saga Group owns travel interests targeted at the over-50s. They specialise in cruises, tours, resort breaks and short UK breaks.

Global hotel chains including Hilton and Intercontinental, Accor and Marriott offer various opportunities for graduates, especially in management.

The tourist authorities such as VisitBritain, Visit Scotland, Visit Wales and Discover Northern Ireland are also major employers.

**Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**

SMEs are organisations with less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of around £26million. Working for a smaller company can be rewarding because you are more likely to forge a path for yourself within the company, although opportunities to try other departments may be limited.

SMEs are unlikely to use the testing and assessment techniques of larger companies, or follow lengthy recruitment procedures. SMEs are more likely to advertise their vacancies through the local press, university careers service bulletins, local graduate vacancy listings, jobcentres, and word of mouth, rather than rely on their reputation and a presence at graduate recruitment fairs.

Careers services should have listings of jobs with small firms; see also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

**Self-employment**

As with other sectors, there are a growing number of consultants who carry out policy and research on behalf of other organisations such as tour operations and government offices. To be able to get into this type of role it is important to demonstrate sector specific knowledge, which would have usually been gained by professional experience or thorough research-based knowledge. Graduates who enter this area usually have previous tourism or related experience and a relevant postgraduate qualification.
Opportunities abroad

It is possible to have an international career with the major leisure travel groups, as they have offices in other countries and vacancies may be advertised throughout the organisation.

Working as a resort representative is an obvious way of getting a placement abroad. The reps often spend the summer season working in one country and winter in another location, depending on their language skills and experience. Many travel agents and tour operators also have overseas reps positions, which involve sourcing and finding out about resorts that they can add to their portfolio to sell to the consumer.

Those working for tour operators in contracts or product development may travel abroad regularly as part of their job.

Working within the cruise industry allows you to travel to many different countries depending on the company that you work for. The UK market is strong and the cruise industry in Europe generated more than 300,000 jobs in 2011, according to the European Cruise Council.

There are opportunities to work in most overseas countries in the tourism industry, but some provide more jobs than others. The USA, Japan and northern European countries have strong outbound tourism industries. Others such as Greece, Spain, Australia and New Zealand welcome many more visitors than they export and so work as resort reps or in inbound tourism are more likely here. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) produces detailed profiles for every country worldwide, giving headline facts and figures as well as outlining cultural, economic and historical information and its relationship with the UK.

Will my qualifications be recognised?

British qualifications are well regarded and this sector is particularly favourable to qualification transferability. Be prepared to familiarise yourself with the educational structure in the country that interests you, so that you can provide an indication of the comparable level of your academic achievements when writing an application. Your university careers service may have an international employment information section that would be helpful.
Future trends

The rise in ‘staycationing’ and developing tourist destinations within the UK

There is an increased push to develop UK coastal resorts, as well as furthering tourism in the countryside and improving domestic visitor attractions. There has been an increase in demand for domestic destinations, known as ‘staycationing’, particularly when the exchange rate from pounds to euros is unfavourable for UK tourists.

Sustainable tourism

Organisations are working to develop the quality of tourism, minimise waste and provide exciting and sustainable travel opportunities. Ecotourism sites are particularly prevalent on the web.

Niche tourism

There’s a trend towards developing holiday packages for specific markets, integrating getting away with hobbies and interests, such as sports, birth, educational and creative.

Emerging holiday markets

New emerging markets such as the Balkans, Vietnam and the Middle East are growing in popularity. As these markets grow, the battle for tourists will become increasingly competitive.

Jargon buster

- **Incoming or inbound tourism** - refers to visitors from other countries coming to the UK.
- **Outbound tourism** - refers to UK residents travelling abroad.
- **Domestic tourism** - refers to UK residents travelling within the UK.
- **Ecotourism** - defined by the International Ecotourism Society as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people’.
- **FITs** - fully independent travellers are those who follow their own itinerary rather than take a package or travel with a group.
- **GITs** - group independent travellers are those who follow their own itinerary, with others but independently of a tour guide.
- **Ground handlers** - tour operators providing services to incoming passengers, often on behalf of an overseas travel agent.
- **Long haul** - usually refers to destinations in the Middle East, Asia, the Americas and Australia with long flight times of over 6 hours.

- **Mid haul (or medium haul)** - usually refers to destinations outside the Euro zone, with a journey time length somewhere between short and long haul, such as north African destinations such as Egypt and Morocco, as well as Cyprus and the Canary Islands.

- **Short haul** - usually refers to destinations within the Euro zone with flight times of under around 3 hours.

- **Staycation** - holidaying in the country where you live, as opposed to vacationing abroad.

- **Sustainable tourism** - the *World Tourism Organisation (UNTO)* defines it as, “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” Rather than being a type of product, it is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, it is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management rather than being an add-on component.

- **TICs** - tourist information centres.

- **VFR** - refers to the domestic trend of visiting friends and relatives.