

New training courses needed

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Tourist guides and tour operators must tap the full potential of their businesses. - File pic

LETTERS: In 1964, the Kuala Lumpur Tourist Association took the initiative to organise the first tourist guide training course in Malaysia. In 1975, the Tourist Development Corporation introduced the licensing of tourist guides.

Fast forward to 1987, the Culture, Arts, and Tourism Ministry started to license travel and tour companies under the "Tour Operating Business and Travel Agency Business" (TOBTAB) regulations.

Over two decades later, from 2012, travel and tour operators have been required to attend the Travel and Tour Enhancement Course (TTEC) before they can renew their TOBTAB licence.

As for tourist guides, they must attend "Continuing Tourism Related Education" (CTRE) seminars.

Before the pandemic, many travel associations protested the compulsory attendance of TTEC, but were rejected by the Tourism, Arts, and Culture Ministry. It was a wise decision.

Although TTEC was meant for senior staff, the ministry had been lenient. Tourism training institutes accepted registrations from any individual claiming to be from a licensed travel or tour company, and only the company names appeared in the certificates.

Apart from the two-day Travel and Tours Management Course (TTMC), which is mandatory for all new travel and tour operators, and the one-day TTEC for licence renewal, travel trade personnel hardly receive any other industry- or job-related training.

Hence, their professionalism is lacking. Most don't understand the fundamentals and cannot interpret basic tourism terms or read statistics. Thus, they are unable to tap the full potential of their business.

The excuse that the TTEC is the same year in and year out does not hold water, as different staff can be sent to attend. Learning depends very much on the participants posing difficult questions or problems for trainers to offer solutions.

Unless the travel associations can recommend better programmes or play more active roles in developing or revising them, the current TTEC will have to be continued for the good of the industry.

However, it must revert to classroom training, as online briefings are ineffective.

Recently, there was a report that a tourist guide from Sarawak had sent a letter to Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing requesting to abolish CTRE seminars, which tourist guides must attend to renew their licence.

Nationwide, there are dozens of tourism training institutes, and they are allowed to develop and offer their own CTRE seminars after receiving sanction from the ministry. Each seminar may last three hours or less, but many attendees waste their time just to obtain the certificates.

If so, there is little to gain by attending CTRE, and tourist guides also have to spend around RM150 for the three seminars and lose income if the dates clash with guiding assignments.

For the one-day TTEC, the course fee was set much higher at RM350 from the beginning. Given a choice, tourist guides will want CTRE seminars to be abolished, and travel and tour operators prefer not to attend TTEC. But if the ministry does not continue to stand firm and play its rightful role as a regulator, the travel industry and customers will suffer.

At the same time, continuing with more of the same will not change things for the better.

Perhaps now is the time to revamp CTRE and TTEC to raise the professionalism of tourist guides and tour operators, which will be beneficial to the customers under their care.

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The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times