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Attracting and Retaining Emirati Jobseekers in the UAE's Cultural Tourism Sector: A Case Study of the Tour Guide Profession

by

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Abstract

Recently the UAE has been promoting itself as a tourist destination with the “brand Dubai” and “Abu Dhabi, visitors welcome” campaigns. Underpinning this is the expansions of AUH, DBX, Etihad and Emirates and a surfeit of hotels, malls and entertainment infrastructure. Yet while tourism represents an alternative income stream to the longstanding default of oil-rent, it only becomes ‘sustainable’ if it attracts and retains UAE national labour. This study investigates the factors that influence recruitment and retention rates in the Tour Guide profession. Alongside a number of interviews with Tour Guides (n=34), two survey instruments were used. One incorporating the Career Decision-Making Profile for prospective employees (n=186) and one tailored to incumbent employees, which incorporated the Job Satisfaction Survey (n=63). For both, the nature of the job was considered attractive (β .311; β .195), yet pejorative societal sentiment towards ‘non-conventional’ public sector employment had a negative impact (β -.144; β -.650). A key resultant recommendation is to redefine the role—to make it more academic in nature with active guiding being only one element of the occupation. Another is for a greater utilisation of this study’s dual-pronged approach: gauging two samples where the nexus is the academic subject being studied and a corresponding profession; such methods will better guide vocationally orientated interventions at Higher Education and, HRM recruitment/retention interventions within the UAE’s nascent knowledge-based economic sectors.

Keywords: Tourism, labour nationalisation (Emiratisation), talent retention, human resource management, career assessment, United Arab Emirates (UAE).