

## INCREASING REQUIREMENT FOR HOSPITALITY TRAINING

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► Students at institutions such as the National Hospitality Institute prepare to work in Oman's burgeoning hospitality sector

# HOSPITALITY BOOST

Oman's tourism and hospitality industry set for major fillip, government chalks out action plan to create a pool of skilled workers

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The hospitality and tourism industry in the sultanate will enter a fresh phase with close to three dozen new hotels and resorts coming up in the next five years. These will add 10,000 more rooms besides creating 10,000 jobs in the country.

The government has put a special emphasis on this industry to create a pool of skilled workers and the Ministry of Manpower is funding

the development of nationals to meet the industry's demand. With this objective, the government has initiated a study on development of human resources in association with the UN World Tourism Organization.

Amina Abdullah al Balushi, director of statistics and geographical information at the Ministry of Tourism, said that the study will look

into the employment opportunities in the upcoming tourism projects, the demand and supply of manpower, and evaluate the standard of the institutions, which are offering courses in the hospitality sector. "We are already collecting data and a survey is on among various stake holders, including travel tour operators. The report will be submitted to the government by the end of this year or early next year," she said.

Oman Tourism College (OTC), the National Hospitality Institute (NHI),

experienced local management professionals," said Toufiq al Ajmi, manager of student recruitment at the NHI.

According to Robert MacLean, principal of the NHI, the number of middle and top-level management positions will increase once the new properties start operations. "High-level training and world-class education are necessary to fill those posts," he said.

He continued, "Our diplomas in hotel management, which are approved by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, bring the students up to par with the global standard."

The main challenge, said Dr Mohammed Ahmed al Habsi, assistant dean of OTC, is to find talented candidates to occupy the top-level posts. "The working environment in some hotels may not promise a bright career. Salary structures have to be revised to attract local talent to the profession."

It is an opinion shared by Fran Collison, general manager of Food Safety Consultancy, which has so far trained more than 700 people who are now working in various hotels in the country.

She said, "The industry should be made more attractive to local people. Flexible working hours, better payment and incentives should come from the industry and the government to enhance the opportunities and attract nationals. The industry has great potential for the youth in the country. And by focusing on a specialised area, we can try and raise the standards and public awareness on this industry."

The awareness has already been raised to an extent and it brings aspirants like Ibrahim Ali Abdullah al Ghawi to Muscat. The 18-year-old from Sohar took the entrance test conducted by OTC on August 17. "Tourism has great potential in the sultanate and the government is encouraging youngsters like us," he said.

Jahari Nabil, who is pursuing a diploma course in hotel management at the NHI, said, "The lessons are good and enjoyable and our teachers make them interesting by involving us in presentations and practical sessions."

Food Safety Consultancy and Department of Tourism in Sohar, among others, will churn out close to 1,000 trained personnel every year. The OTC trains around 600 professionals in various spheres of the hospitality industry, while the student intake for the various courses offered by OTC is around 300 annually.

"We have to achieve 85 per cent Omanisation and also must develop skilled manpower very soon to meet this, a road map has been put in place to develop skilled