

LAB-MOVIE

LABOUR MARKET OBSERVATORY
IN VIETNAM UNIVERSITIES



**Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration
(TUEBA)**

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS IN TOURISM SECTOR OF THAI NGUYEN PROVINCE

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Executive Summary

As one of the members of the **Lab - Movie project (Labour Market Observatory in Vietnam universities)** funded by the Erasmus+ of the European Union in the period of 2020 - 2023, the University of Economics and Business Administration - Thai Nguyen University conducted a survey of businesses in the field of tourism on labor and employment issues. Following is the main content of the report on the survey results:

First, Thai Nguyen which is the political, economic and educational center of the Northern Midlands and Mountains with many beautiful landscapes is considered as a potential and attractive tourist destinations. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world and its complicated spreads in Vietnam has negatively affected tourism activities of the province: decreased number of visitors and tourism revenue, closed accommodation facilities and tourist areas, reduced workforce, and temporarily suspended operations.

Second, our survey, taking place during the complicated spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, encountered many difficulties, including the failure to contact the businesses, and the unwillingness of many businesses to provide interview information. As a result, we could collect information from only 07 accommodation establishments/hotels, and 08 tourism companies, reaching the total of only 15 observations. The sample was too small to generate statistical inferences to the population, but it still revealed some significant results.

Third, despite a dull picture of the employment in hospitality and tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years, most hotel and tourism managers in Thai Nguyen have a fairly positive perspective of the future. The most stably trendy employment in hospitality setor are Receptionist; Restaurant staff; Housekeeping; Bar waiter/waitress, and Security. Meanwhile, the most trendy employment in tourism are sales, tour guide, and tour operator.

Fourth, the typical organisational structures of hospitality and tourism companies in Thai Nguyen are functional and hieararchical, in which employees are divided into

different departments by work specialization, and the department in charge has a direct guidance with the employees under its management. In general, organizational structure of a tourism business is somehow less complex than that of a hospitality business.

Fifth, the qualifications and requirements of the most trendy professional figures in hospitality and tourism are different in each position. Of these job positions mentioned above, receptionist requires high educational level and skills but the salary for this position is relatively low compared to the other jobs that require the same level of education and skills. Besides, due to the typical characteristics of tourism services, most of the positions require experience rather than education. However, the tourism managers also believe that education has positive impacts on gaining valuable experience, i.e., employees with high level of education tends to learn better from experiences and can develop more quickly than those with low education. Therefore, they still place high preferences to graduates from universities or colleges, especially those with majors in tourism, and business administration.

In conclusion, never before has the tourism industry in Vietnam in general and Thai Nguyen province in particular been severely affected by the epidemic like in the COVID-19 pandemic. These difficulties requires Thai Nguyen tourism industry to adapt, using internal resources creativity to find opportunities in challenges, thereby, helping businesses retain employees, reduce incurred costs, and quickly stabilize business operations as soon as the pandemic is under control.

1. Overview of tourism activities in Thai Nguyen province

Thai Nguyen is the political, economic and educational center of the Northern Midlands and Mountains with many beautiful landscapes such as Nui Coc Lake tourist area, a part of Tam Dao National Park, along with hills and mountains. Green tea creates the famous brand nationwide. In the province, there are 550 intangible cultural heritages which are inventoried and cataloged in accordance with the law on cultural heritage. In which, 17 typical and unique heritages have been included in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritages. In addition, Thai Nguyen currently has more than 1,000 relics protected and promoted according to the provisions of the law on cultural heritage, of which 283 relics have been ranked with 1 special national-level relic, 52 national monuments, and 218 provincial relics, etc. Thai Nguyen is considered as a potential and attractive tourist destinations throughout the country.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic had broken out, Thai Nguyen annually welcomed tens of thousands of domestic and foreign tourists. Although the revenue from tourism services is not equal to the provinces and cities with good development conditions, it is still at a good level, contributing to the development of the local economy, increasing income and creating jobs for workers. However, at the beginning of 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world and its complicated spreads in Vietnam negatively affected tourism activities of the province.

According to a report by the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Thai Nguyen province (2020), the province currently has 450 tourist accommodation establishments with over 6,200 rooms, of which 50 hotels and 400 establishments meet the standards for tourists to rent. In the last 5 years before 2020, the number of tourists to Thai Nguyen had continuously increased, in which, the growth of international tourists reached 6%/year, domestic tourists increased by 15%/year. In 2019, tourists to Thai Nguyen reached 2.9 million, of which, there were 2,824,700 domestic visitors (accounting for 97.4%) and 75,300 international visitors (accounting for 2.6%). Income from tourism services gradually improved; the growth rate in the period 2013-2019 reached 13.9%/year. However, due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020, tourism development targets have decreased sharply compared to 2019.

Specifically, guests served by accommodation facilities reached 558,000 (equal to 56% compared to 2019); visitors at tourist sites and attractions reached 572,000 (equivalent to 33% compared to 2019); international visitors reached 23,000 arrivals (equivalent to 30% compared to 2019). In 2021, visitors at attractions reached 54.6%, international visitors reached 61% compared to 2020; Revenue from tourism businesses dropped sharply.

Under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activities have stalled, leading to a decrease in the number of visitors and tourism revenue (Anh, 2020; Hoa and Huy, 2021; Huynh et al. 2021). Many hotels, accommodation facilities and tourist areas in the province are closed or operating in moderation due to the impact of the pandemic. Many entities switch to other businesses or carry out repairs and upgrades. Human resources in tourism were seriously affected. Accommodation establishments, businesses and tourist entities had to reduce their workforce, and some travel businesses had to temporarily suspend operations. Employees have to take frequent or partial leave, affecting their income and leading to a decrease in tourism revenue, which has a significant impact on the overall economy of the province. In general, the COVID-19 epidemic has frozen the tourism industry (Hang and Hiep, 2020) not only in the country, but also in Thai Nguyen. For many hotels and accompanying tourism services, the decline is huge and directly affects their revenue, which highly impacts the lives of workers operating in the field of tourism.

2. Survey results of hotels and travel businesses in Thai Nguyen province

2.1. *Status of conducting the survey*

Within the framework of the Lab - Movie project (Labour Market Observatory in Vietnam Universities, Thai Nguyen University – the University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA), has conducted a survey of hotel and travel businesses in Thai Nguyen province; however, due to the time of the survey taking place during the complicated spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activities were in stagnation. Many hotels, accommodation facilities and tourist resorts in the province were closed or operating in moderation, so the survey process encountered many difficulties. In Thai Nguyen province, there are only six 3-star hotels and no 4-star

hotels or higher, of which only four out of six 3-star hotels were willing to get interviewed. Therefore, the research team has expanded the selection criteria for survey subjects but only collected information from 07 accommodation establishments/hotels. Out of about 30 travel companies registered in the Thai Nguyen Association of Tourism, most of them have temporarily suspended operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, so the survey team could not contact them. As a result, only 08 tourism companies were willing to provide interview information. The sample was too small to generate statistical inferences to the population, but it still revealed some significant results.

The purpose of the survey is:

- Researching on employment situation of hotels and travel companies in Thai Nguyen
- Setting up a list of enterprises in tourism sector for the Labour market observatory
- Obtaining data on the employment in hotels and travel agents in Thai Nguyen

The survey consists of 4 parts: A- General information; B- Personnel; C- Business goals and prediction on personnel changes; D- Customers and investment. (See details in the Appendix). Interviewees were general managers or human resource managers.

Regarding the method of collecting interview information, in the context that many policies to prevent and treat the COVID-19 epidemic have been thoroughly implemented, face-to-face interviews faced many difficulties. Therefore, the research team of TUEBA flexibly used many methods including phone calls, emails, online interviews via Zoom platform, computer-aided web interviews (CAWI), combined with face-to-face interviews where possible. Out of the total of 15 enterprises participating in the interview (07 accommodation/hotels and 08 travel agencies), 06 enterprises answered by phone, 03 enterprises answered via Zoom, 02 enterprises answered via CAWI, and 04 enterprises answered face-to-face interviews.

Each interview method has its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, Face-to-face interview has the advantages of getting more detailed information; keeping

the interviewee focused on the completion of the survey; creating a good relationship with the interviewee, capturing the interviewees' emoticons; so the data seems to be more reliable. But the disadvantages of face-to-face interview include time-consuming; difficulties in contacting and arranging the appointment to the managers; unrelated discussions during the interview; interview on printed paper leading to manual data entry. Besides, it is also expensive because of personnel cost and administrative cost.

Regarding cawi, the advantages are immediate records to the main server, no data input costs; answers are collected and stored electronically, so respondents can do the survey any time without limited entries; inexpensive without costs for personnel, printing, and administration; reduced time for analysis. But the downsides are: time-consuming to prepare for the online questionnaire; respondents are not willing to complete the questionnaire leading to many invalid ones; respondents promise but fail to visit the web; and less reliable data.

Telephone interview has following advantages: Accessing wide geographical area; keeping costs down; delivering similar quality data. However, disadvantages include hanging up at any time; behavior and body language cannot be observed; less information than face-to-face interviews. Online interview via Zoom has advantages such as greater flexibility; fewer delays or cancellations; ability to use multimedia; savings on costs and time; but disadvantages include connectivity issues, missing non-verbal cues.

2.2. Survey results in the field of hospitality

Below are the results of the survey conducted at seven hotels/accomodations in Thai Nguyen province, which were available or it was possible to get contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report focuses on the characteristics of the current staff and the performance of the accommodation facilities at the surveyed hotels/accomodations, changes in the workforce before and during the pandemic, as well as prospects after the pandemic.

2.2.1. Current staff and accommodation facilities

Of the seven hotels/accomodations that were willing to answer the questionnaire, four respondents (57,14%) are not a member of a hotel chain. All of them operate throughout the year, and provide some other accompanying services for customers besides the main service of serving guests. These extra services are diversified, including Restaurant/Diner; Bars; Convention Center; Lecture hall/ Auditorium, Wellness Center, Beauty Care Center, Karaoke, entertainment, laundry service, car rental, etc. One hotel even provides golf service.

Most of the staff in Thai Nguyen hotels/accomodations are non-seasonal employees (staff hired on a permanent basis). Only two out of seven surveyed hotels have seasonal employees (staff hired on a fixed-term basis), and the percentage is relatively low (less than 8% of the total employees). Regarding the educational level of the staff, 35 – 60% of employees with long-term contracts have bachelor degrees, while less than 50% of employees with seasonal contracts have bachelor degrees. With respect to gender structure, women represents a total of 50 – 80% of employees, regardless of seasonal or non-seasonal employees.

Table 1. Percentage of graduates and females employed at the surveyed hotels/accomodations

Employment	Number of employees with long-term contracts		Number of employees with seasonal contracts	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Total	154	100%	6	100%
People with a bachelor's degree	82	53.25%	2	33.33%
Female employees	103	66.88%	4	66.67%

Table 1 shows that for the whole sample, employees who have bachelor degrees and long-term contracts account for half of the staff in the hotels/accomodations. On average, there is a large amount of females operating in this field, both seasonal and non-seasonal.

3/7 hotels/accomodations (42,86%) stated that they collaborate with external experts/personnel to do some typical activities for positions like Tour guide; Medical staff; Driver; Restaurant staff. 4/7 hotels/accomodations (57.14%) have hosted interns or trainees who have got training in such fields as Hotel management; Tourism; Marketing.

2.2.2. *Changes in and outlook for personnel*

From the data we obtained through the survey, despite a dull picture of the employment in tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years, most hotel managers have a fairly positive perspective of the future.

In the past 2 years, 100% of surveyed hotels have not achieved their business goals. 5/7 hotels/accomodations (71.43%) still engaged in recruitment activities while one hotel did not recruit and remained the staff structure, and another one even reduced its staff. The employments were mostly for Receptionist; Housekeeping; Restaurant staff; Bar waiter/waitress; Marketing executive/ manager, and Security. Of the five hotels/accomodations that continued recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic, all of them hired graduates from colleges or universities, even for the part-time jobs. The three most popular majors that the hotels/accomodations recruited are tourism, hotel management, and business administration.

In the next 2 years, 5/7 hotels/accomodations (71.43%) will recruit more employees (including replacement personnel). Job position that companies intend to recruit include Receptionist; Housekeeping; Restaurant staff; Sales staff, Bar waiter/waitress, and Security.

Table 2: Trends in employment positions in hospitality sector in Thai Nguyen

Employment in the past 2 years	Employment in the next 2 years
Receptionist	Receptionist
Restaurant staff	Restaurant waiter/waitress
Marketing executive/ manager	Sales staff

Housekeeping	Housekeeping
Bar waiter/waitress	Bar staff
Security	Security

Table 2 shows that, the most stably trendy employment in hospitality setor are Receptionist; Restaurant staff; Housekeeping; Bar waiter/waitress, and Security. Of these job positions, receptionist requires high educational level and skills but the salary for this position is relatively low compared to the other jobs that require the same level of education and skills. Therefore, most hotels/accomodations have the most difficulty in recruiting and retaining receptionists. The respondents also believes the job positions that will have the best recruitment prospects are Receptionist; Marketing; and Sales.

Hotels/accomodations have difficulties in finding suitable personnel, mostly because the candidate does not meet the job requirements, or the number of applicants is limited. This is especially true in the context of Thai Nguyen which is a mountainous province with very few tourism attractions.

Most of the customers staying in Thai Nguyen hotels/accomodations are business crew, or visiting experts for certain work. The number of customers depend on travelling activities, which was strongly and negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Foreign visitors account for less than 10% of customers in a year, mainly from Asia like China, Korea, Japan, India, Southeast Asia, and some from America or Australia. They also come to Thai Nguyen mostly for businesses.

In the coming years, surveyed respondents believe in the development of tourism industry in general and companies operating in the hospitality industry in particular. 3/7 companies believe it will grow while another 3/7 companies believe it will remain stable. Therefore, many activities are being invested, or planned to invest in near future to meet the expected increasing demand. However, according to the surveyed hotels/accomodations in Thai Nguyen, some activities are believed unimportant, like restructuring/improving corporate structure; replacing and modernizing machinery, equipment and facilities; expanding new services; adding new job positions in the hotel. The reason might lie in the economies scale of these hotels/accomodations which are

mostly small and low-ranking compared to others in big cities like Hanoi, Hochiminh City, or in tourism cities like Quang Ninh, Da Nang.

2.3. Survey results in the field of tourism

The survey conducted for eight travel companies in Thai Nguyen also focuses on the characteristics of the current staff at the surveyed entities, changes in the workforce before and during the pandemic, as well as prospects after the pandemic.

2.3.1. Current situation

Of the eight travel agencies that answered the questionnaire, six respondents (75%) are not a member of a chain of tour operators. Half of them (4/8) have a single head office. All the travel agencies provide both inbound and outbound services, but their customers are mainly domestic ones.

Due to the seasonality in tourism, it is typical for travel companies to outsource their services, especially during the peak of the tourism seasons. Regarding the educational level of the surveyed travel companies' staff, from 60 to 100% of employees with long-term contracts have bachelor degrees while 50 – 100% of employees with seasonal contracts have bachelor degrees. These percentages are higher than those in the hospitality sector as mentioned above. The reason is operating in tourism requires more specialized knowledge and skills than in hospitality, especially when the educational level of tourists have significantly increased.

The positions that travel agencies usually collaborate with external experts/personnel in doing typical activities include tour guide, medical staff, and driver. They also host interns or trainees who have got training in such fields as hotel management, travelling, marketing, and business administration. The number of external experts and interns/trainees normally increase sharply during the peak season. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities were also negatively affected due to the remarkable decrease in the number of tourists.

2.3.2. Changes in and outlook for personnel

Similar to the hotel managers, most tourism managers have fairly positive perspectives of the development in the future. 6/8 companies believe that in the coming

years, tourism industry in general and companies operating in the travel industry in particular will grow while only 2/8 companies believe it will remain stable.

The COVID-19 has directly and strongly affected tourism. Therefore, 7/8 businesses have not achieved their business goals in the past 2 years. None have engaged in recruitment activities; they even decreased the number of employees and revolved job positions. However, in the next 2 years, all companies intend to recruit more employees (including replacement personnel).

Table 3: Trends in employment positions in tourism sector in Thai Nguyen

Position that companies intend to recruit	Position with the best recruitment prospects
Sales	Marketing
Tour guide	Tour guide
Accountant	Hotel and restaurant
Travel	Tour operator
Marketing	Sales
Tour operator	

Table 3 shows that, the most trendy employment in tourism are sales, tour guide, and tour operator. Due to the typical characteristics of tourism services, most of the positions require experience rather than education. However, the tourism managers also believe that education has positive impacts on gaining valuable experience, i.e., employees with high level of education tends to learn better from experiences and can develop more quickly than those with low education. Therefore, they still place high preferences to graduates from universities or colleges, especially those with majors in tourism, and business administration.

7/8 surveyed companies have difficulties in finding suitable personnel, mostly because the candidate does not meet the job requirements, or the number of applicants

is limited. These are in common with the hospitality, and the reason is the same. Since Thai Nguyen is a mountainous province with very few tourism attractions, there are not many candidates for tourism positions, especially those require high level of education and skills. People with such high education and skills tend to work in other economic sectors with higher salaries and more stability. This is also the reason why most companies have the most difficulty in recruiting tour operators.

Customers of the surveyed travel agencies are both locals and visitors. But foreign visitors account for a very small percentagem (less than 5%) of customers in a year, mainly from China, Korea, India, and Southeast Asia. The main reason lies in the underdevelopment of tourism in Thai Nguyen province. Moreover, investment activities in tourism are limited. Most items are being invested, or planed to invest in the near future. Some respondentes even believe that such activities as business innovation/restructuring, new software, developing/upgrading the online sales/reservation system are unimportant.

3. Organizational structures

Through the survey, we have some insights into the business structure of the hospitality and tourism agencies. The organisational structures presented in this report are neither ideal nor popular for all companies within the sector but consist of the common departments that we consider important for most tourism companies in Thai Nguyen province. In general, the typical organisational structures of hospitality and tourism companies in Thai Nguyen are functional and hieararchical, in which employees are divided into different departments by work specialization, and the department in charge has a direct guidance with the employees under its management. Following are some more details.

3.1. Organizational structures of hospitality businesses

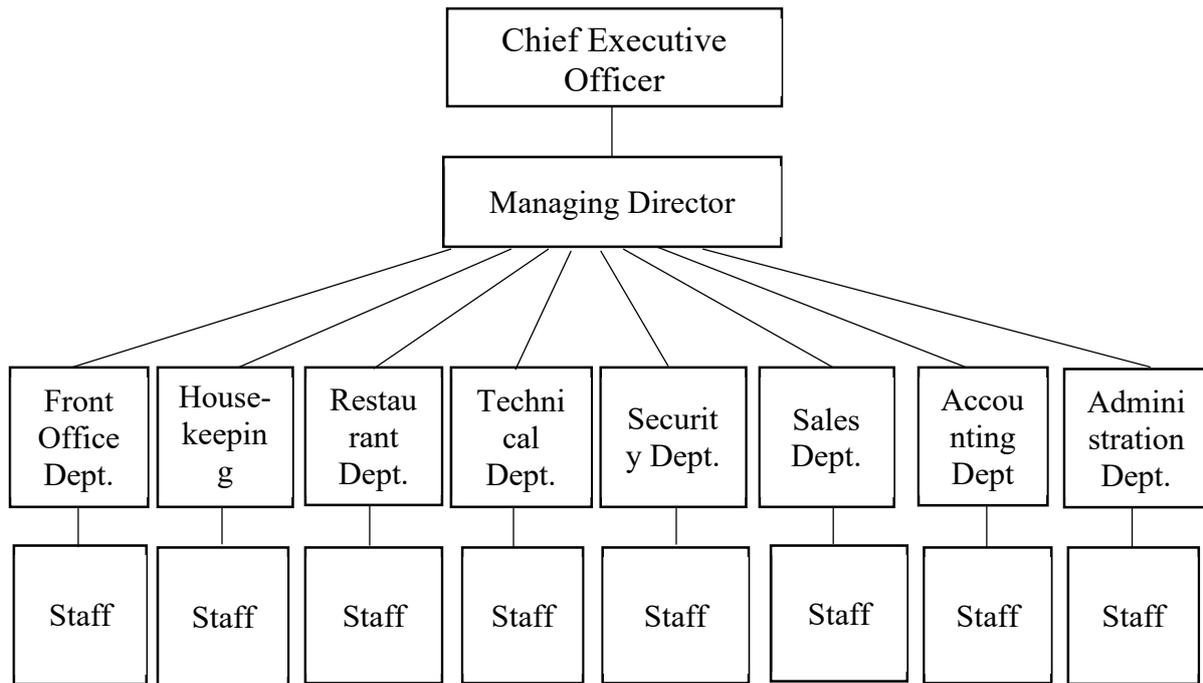


Figure 1: Organizational structure of a general hospitality business in Thai Nguyen

In particular, a common structure of a hospitality business in Thai Nguyen consists of the following positions:

- Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for the overall management of the hotel's business activities. He often reports to the Board of Directors, updates strategic plans, gets feedback from the Board about the development direction of the hotel and monitor the hotel management.

- Managing director is in charge of direct management of daily business activities, including marketing, budget management, revenue and profit maximization of the hotel. He devises the hotel's policies and strategies, under the direct leadership of the CEO.

- Department heads are responsible for implementing the hotel's strategic management. Each department in the hotel gets the assignments from the managing director, and promptly reports all problems to him. Department heads assign and manage work through divisions or teams. They inspect and supervise the work of employees in their departments, decide to reward and discipline employees if necessary.

- + Front desk department ensures reception work, including booking, check-in, check-out, providing information about services in the hotel and ensuring contact information for guests in the hotel. For example, the receptionist should master the types

and number of guests, organize reception, understand needs of guests and guide them to use equipment, utensils and services in the room when guests arrive at the hotel. He also collects the information on customers' opinions and reports daily to the department head.

+ Housekeeping (Room) department provides accommodation products and services at the hotel. It organizes, manages, operates and maintains the entire system of interior equipment and assets in bedrooms and accommodation areas. In particular, besides being responsible for cleaning rooms, public areas, and laundry, the housekeeping staff should fully provide the services and goods in the bedroom at the request of guests, in accordance with hotel regulations; fully and accurately record the situation of using rooms, and services arising during the day to compare and confirm payment invoices when guests leave; organizing the management and maintenance of guests' things left behind at the hotel; notifying the reception department to find all measures to promptly return them to guests.

+ Restaurant department performs the work related to food and beverage at the Hotel, including kitchen and waiters/waitresses performing the following tasks: Process a variety of foods with high quality, correct technical process, beautiful appearance; Regularly change the menu to meet the diverse needs of customers; Decorate dining room, banquet room, function room; Organizing and serving guests during on-site meals, or organizing mobile catering, and in-room dining for guests.

+ Technical department ensures the hotel in good operation (machines, technical systems and equipment in the hotel), repairs, manages and supervises machinery, equipment and technical systems in the hotel.

+ Security department is an indispensable part in a hotel. The department is responsible for keeping the safety of customers, hotel properties as well as security in the hotel. Security staff is the person who customers get contact at first when coming to the hotel, and leave the last. So the security team is always well aware of their proper working attitude and seriousness.

+ Sales department is responsible for image creation, brand development, market research, market development and expansion, implementation of marketing programs

approved by the board of directors, advising the managing director on marketing strategies, customer products, sales promotion of the hotel's products and services.

+ Accounting department is responsible for tracking the hotel's financial activities, receiving cash payments and bank transfers, paying salaries, preparing internal reports, accounting and financial regulations, advising the director in the process of proposing emulation, reward, discipline, and salary increases for officers and employees of the hotel, implementing other functions as assigned by the director.

+ Administration (Human Resources) Department is responsible for employee recruitment as well as training programs, employee relationship, salary, labor relations and human resource development.

3.2. *Organizational structures of tourism businesses*

Organizational structure of a tourism business is somehow less complex than that of a hospitality business. Generally, a tourism company's management apparatus consists of the following departments: Director; ticketing department, marketing department, finance and accounting department, tour management, and administration department. However, the structure can be flexible to adapt to the situation. For example, during the recent Covid-19 pandemic when the employment was reduced, an employee could take many tasks: A tour guide could take all actions from ticketing, operating tour, guiding customers during the tour, taking post-tour survey and providing customer care services.

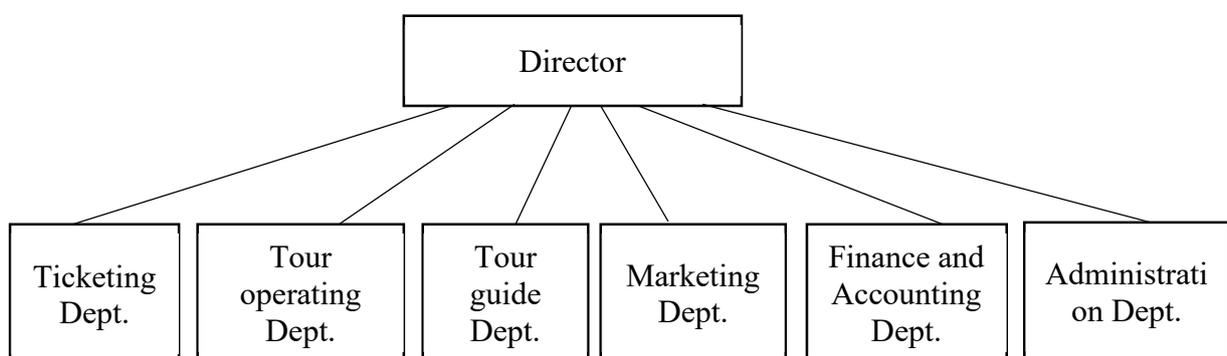


Figure 2: Organizational structure of a general tourism business in Thai Nguyen

- Director is the general manager of the tourism company, who sets the missions and goals of the company and approves all decisions on daily performance. He is the sole legal representative for the company to sign contracts.

- Ticketing department sells air tickets of domestic and international airlines, sometimes even sells domestic train/car tickets. The staff should provide customers with product information, make reservations, sell tickets, change reservations, sell last-minute tickets, collect baggage fees, excess baggage, late arrivals, and other services as prescribed at the airport. They also perform sales network, collect market information and be responsible for building a professional working environment, safety and security, promoting teamwork and personal responsibility.

- Tour operator department is responsible for designing and managing domestic and international tours. Tour operators both directly plan travel and help visitors handle any problems that arise. Specifically, tour operator staff have to design travel plans at many different locations, conduct field trips to survey the destination, directly work with agents selling air tickets, trains, cars and representatives of restaurants and hotels, pay attention to negotiate the most suitable price and quality of services. Besides, they are also responsible for directly dealing, introducing, consulting and negotiating with customers, observing and managing groups of tourists to ensure a successful trip, flexibly handling of unexpected situations and incidents, regularly accumulate professional knowledge and practical experience to improve themselves, and preparing detailed statistics to report to management.

- Tour guides are the representatives of the tourism company, on behalf of the company, to directly implement the tours and commitments to customers. They perform the work stated in travel contracts given by the tour operators. After receiving a specific schedule for a trip, tour guides need to review customer information, check vehicles, prepare necessary equipment, etc. to ensure the entire trip of the best quality. During the trip, the tour guide should stimulate interaction, create excitement for guests to bring them good experiences, and connects team members. The tour guides are also the ones who solve the problems that arise during the entire journey.

- Marketing department has the role of linking, acting as a bridge between the company and customers. It organizes domestic and foreign market research, attracts and

invites customers through propaganda and advertising activities about the company. It has functions to advise the director on market selection planning, service improvements to suit the needs of the market.

- Finance and accounting department is responsible for making periodical reports, monitoring and recording the company's expenditures, use of capital, assets, revenue and expenditure sources.

- Administration department is responsible for organizing and coordinating with other departments to develop and implement monthly, quarterly and annual work plans. It advises the director on the organization, training, evaluation, promotion, arrangement, reward and discipline of employees. It is responsible for purchasing, managing, monitoring and repairing equipment when damaged. It also advises, develops and organizes the implementation of the company's rules and regulations, assigns work and takes responsibility for the entire work of employees in the department, including recruitment process, personnel training, human resource development and company culture building.

4. Professional figures

This section will present several highly demanded professional figures of the positions that interviewees kept recruiting even during the Covid-19 pandemic and those they believe increasingly important in the future.

4.1. Professional figures of hospitality businesses

The important professional figures in hospitality sector in Thai Nguyen province are presented in Table 2. The details of characteristics of each position are as follows:

4.1.1. Receptionist

The hotel receptionist is an important person who welcomes guests warmly, politely and professionally in the hotel lobby, supports and advises guests about the products/services at the hotel through receiving and answering phones, responding to inquiries and complaints from customers, perform check-in and check-out procedures as required. The front desk team of a hotel represents the hotel to welcome customers,

therefore, the attitude of the receptionist may determine whether the customers will return to continue using the services of the hotel or not.

In general, a hotel receptionist takes care of guests from their arrival to departure. First, he/she assists guests to check-in. After warmly welcoming guests, the hotel receptionist will confirm booking information (in case the guest has booked a room in advance). In case guests have not booked a room, the hotel receptionist will check the list of available rooms and directly advise on the room class, room rate, payment method, utilities, etc. Through the reservation list, the hotel receptionist can control the number of rooms, ensuring perfect service quality to customers. The receptionist should provide information about services available at the hotel such as dining, spa, fitness, laundry, etc., along with transportation services such as car rental, souvenir shopping, etc. and guides the basic procedures of the stay.

Second, the hotel receptionist will support and serve customers during their staying. For example, he/she should introduce guests to local festival events that are happening, some attractions, convenience stores, fine dining, and more. If possible, the receptionist should do what guests require, including keeping room keys, taking care of their assets when arriving or leaving, handling incoming and outgoing calls from guests. Besides, the receptionist also coordinates with related departments to make room transfer requests for guests, handle requests and complaints from customers.

Third, the hotel receptionist conducts check-out process for guests. When a guest ends the stay, the task of the hotel receptionist is to contact other departments to record the guest's service consumption and prepare payment information. In particular, the receptionist gets back the room card/key from customers, contacts guest room inspection and check if the guest forgets something to return it if any, checks and reconfirms with guests the services they used during their stays, notifies guests of the amount to be paid, performs payment procedures and prints invoices for guests, returns guests with documents such as identity cards or passports, asks guests about their satisfaction with the hotel, thanks and says goodbye to the guest.

Becoming a hotel receptionist requires many knowledge and skills. In fact, based on the size of the hotel, the manager will make the appropriate recruitment requirements for hotel receptionists. Often employers will require candidates to graduate from a college or university majoring in hotel management, hotel tourism management or related professions. Besides, since receptionists represent the face of the hotel, employers often have high requirements for appearance. The hotel receptionist needs to have a good-looking appearance, from 1.58 meters or higher for women and from 1.7 meters or more for men.

A hotel receptionist should have many soft skills. First, communication skills are in high demand in service industries including hospitality, because receptionists need to exchange, interact and convince customers quite a lot. For now, foreign language requirements (minimum level of English) are also considered an important criterion when working as a hotel receptionist because they must communicate with many foreign customers. Second, problem solving skills are important. During the service providing process, there will be many situations that occur between staff and customers. Therefore, the skill of handling situations for hotel receptionists is an indispensable skill. Third, a receptionist should be able to withstand high work pressure because the job has many links with related departments and the receptionist must be flexible to solve problems with guests. The amount of work is dense and sometimes meeting difficult guests also puts the receptionist under a lot of pressure. Fourth, a hotel receptionist is also required for time management and organization skills. He/she needs to control the number of rooms and customers booking appointments directly or through the hotline. Therefore, the receptionist must have general management skills and arrange appropriate time, ensure service quality, avoid causing troubles for guests.

4.1.2. Restaurant waiter/waitress

A restaurant waiter/waitress is in charge of receiving orders and requests of guests, serving food and drinks to guests in restaurants of hotels. He/she confirms whether the customer is satisfied with their meal or not and handles problems arising during the eating process (if any). Because of such direct contact with customers, a

restaurant waiter/waitress plays an important part in satisfying customers during their stay.

The daily work of a restaurant waiter/waitress includes many different processes. First, at the beginning of the shift, he/she must change uniforms, ensure clean personal hygiene, dynamic and flexible working style, keep tables and chairs neat and tidy, clean eating utensils, arrange and present the dining table according to the regulations of the restaurant and hotel. Second, he/she introduces guests to food and drinks at the restaurant, takes orders from customers, confirms the dishes, drinks and other requirements of customers, transfers orders to the kitchen to prepare them for customers, receives inquiries from customers, and prepares other requests of guests, makes payment for guests when leaving, says goodbye to guests, cleans up the dining tables to prepare for the next customers. Third, a restaurant waiter/waitress also performs maintenance of tools neatly and in the right place, manages the restaurant's tables and chairs, cups, reports back to the manager when there are chipped or damaged items. Fourth, besides coordinating work with other departments, a restaurant waiter/waitress also reports to the department head/ manager any problems that occur during work.

In order to create a professional working environment to attract customers, restaurants and hotels should set standards of service for restaurant waiters/waitresses. For example, working attire must be neat and tidy; welcoming guests attentively, and understanding needs of customers. There are also standards of introducing the food and drinks at the restaurant, receiving accurate orders from customers, reporting them to the kitchen department for preparation and ensuring cleanliness and maintenance of tools at the restaurant. In this sense, restaurant waiters/waitresses should be able to communicate flexibly and convincingly to create sympathy with customers.

Regarding the requirements on necessary skills of restaurant waiters/waitresses at hotels, they must have good working attitude. In general, they must comply with the rules at work. Another key requirement is good communication with customers, which makes customers happy about the restaurant and its products. The impression that each

waiter/waitress leaves on the customer's heart can help the restaurant gain more customers through referrals from previous customers. Moreover, foreign language skills are helpful, especially in large restaurants and hotels where the number of customers is very large, including foreign tourists. Foreign language proficiency can be seen as an effective advantage to succeed at work, with many opportunities for promotion later. Therefore, at present, in large restaurants, an indispensable requirement in recruitment is that the waiters/waitresses must be fluent in at least one foreign language other than their mother tongue to be able to provide best services for customers.

Finally, working in a restaurant requires to deal with many different people with different personalities, so it is inevitable to face difficult customers who complain about the products, or even get angry. Therefore, restaurant staff must have problem-solving skills to avoid losing customer trust and creating a bad image of the restaurant. With each such situation, restaurant staff need to calmly resolve, putting the customer's interests first. If there are difficult situations to solve, restaurant staff can consult managers and superiors

4.1.3. Marketing executives/ managers

Marketing executives implement the plans set by the Director and the Marketing Manager, ensuring that marketing activities take place smoothly and regularly. They should be wise with bold tactics to promote products/services and hotel image. While marketing executives focus implementing marketing plans, marketing managers gather information about markets to set the plans and guide marketing executives with specific tasks. These positions work together to ensure a successful marketing team, but they have different jobs and required qualities.

Main jobs of a marketing executive include: Receive the marketing plan from the leaders, implement and monitor the activities in the plan; Organize and measure the effectiveness of advertising/communication campaigns on advertising channels with an allowable budget; Manage the hotel's marketing channel system like fanpage, website, email, etc.; Report to superiors on the effectiveness of marketing activities. Therefore,

a marketing executive must have basic marketing knowledge, good teamwork skills, good organization and time management skills, good analytical thinking, and be creative, and flexible.

A marketing manager directly analyzes, plans, implements and controls a hotel's marketing plans. The marketing manager plays an important role in planning (from planning research, formulating pricing policy, building program, to product development), and implementing marketing research programs, assigning activities, organizational structure, etc. He/she must be able to negotiate with relevant units, motivate employees, evaluate performance of a marketing team, etc.

In general, a marketing team are required to have basic marketing knowledge and how to use basic marketing tools. Besides, they should have negotiation and persuasion skills; analytical, situational and decision-making skill; strategic thinking skill; team building and development skills; self-study, self-improvement, and intuitive thinking. Regarding the attitude, a marketing team should have the capacity to create and innovate, customer-centered attitude, and sensitivity. With respect to education, while a marketing executive are required to have a high school diploma or bachelor's degree, a marketing manager should have at least a bachelor's degree or higher. The salary of a marketing manager is normally higher than that of a marketing executive.

4.1.4. Sales staff

The main job of sales staff is to provide complete and appropriate solutions for each customer in order to increase revenue and profit for the hotel. Accordingly, a salesperson needs to focus on goals, actively seek and build relationships with potential customers. In particular, he/she should introduce, advise and convince customers to use products/services; resolve customer issues and complaints to ensure customer satisfaction and reliability; report to management levels on customer needs, problems and concerns; competitor activities and potential in business development of products/services. Besides, a salesman/saleswoman is also responsible for directly or

indirectly finding, maintaining and developing a network of potential customers and partners.

Regarding job requirements for this position, a salesman/saleswoman must have a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Marketing or similar. Besides, he/she should be proficient in Microsoft Office tools such as Word, Excel, Powerpoint and familiar with CRM software, be able to self-motivate and set specific goals and focus on achieving them. Furthermore, it is necessary to be proficient in communication and negotiation to a wide range of audiences, proficient in work organization and time management, proficient in relationship management skills, and open-minded, willing to learn, and able to work independently and in a team.

Besides fully understanding hotel operations and hospitality industry, a salesman/saleswoman should be able to analyze situations, handle situations and make decisions based on results-focused thinking. He/she also needs to have customer-centered attitude to deliver the most suitable services for each customer.

4.1.5. Housekeeping, bar, and security staff

Positions of housekeeping, bar, and security staff do not require high level of education, only intermediate graduate or higher, with relevant certificates. Normally, preference will be given to candidates who have experience and good communication, know foreign languages like English or Chinese, be energetic and passionate about work. In particular, each position is required to do some main tasks as follows:

The general responsibility of the room staff is to ensure that the room is clean and to answer questions and requests from customers about services and issues related to the room. Room attendants will be responsible for changing the sheets and making the bed, replacing used towels, sweeping and mopping the floor, cleaning the furniture in the room, tracking and replenishing necessary items in the room such as soap, toothpaste, shampoo, cleaning the hallway area, and reporting to the manager any problems related to engineering and maintenance. In general, room staff must ensure all rooms are clean and tidy, ensure hotel security, help customers with their problems,

coordinate with front desk staff and other departments to ensure work. In order to complete these tasks, they should know how to use basic cleaning equipment, have good physical health, withstand work pressure, be flexible in shifts. Besides, room attendants often must contact and answer questions and requests of customers, so a potential candidate for this position is necessarily a friendly and professional person who knows how to behave. For example, greeting guests and speaking politely with happy smiles are a communication skill that any room attendant should have. Although the job is mainly directed to cleaning the room, the room staff must coordinate with many other departments such as management, reception, security. Therefore, teamwork skills are really needed for this position. Working with other departments well, room staff will quickly complete their work and increase work efficiency.

The hotel bar staff directly create, mix and provide the drinks requested by guests at the hotel bar. Bar staff will mainly prepare drinks such as wine, cocktails, beer. The bar staff can directly deliver drinks to customers or in some cases through waiters/waitresses. In general, they are responsible for greeting customers, introducing menus and taking orders, preparing drinks and serving drinks as requested by guests, and maintaining cleanliness. Particularly, in the preparation stage, they need to prepare tools and materials, receive and check the quality of ingredients before serving customers, wash and clean ingredients and tools for preparation at the bar, check tools to make sure they are working properly. In the servicing stage, they must greet customers, check the customer's identity before serving to make sure the customer's age is allowed to use alcohol, record service requests from guests, do mixing and creating drinks like cocktails or wine, present in an eye-catching way the drinks requested by customers, and request payment from customers before they leave the bar. Besides, the bar staff need to know how to consult guests to the bar's available drinks of the day, give advice on suitable drinks for customers, and handle complaints from customers.

Security officers are known to be responsible for security and safety issues, both in terms of property and lives of customers, employees and businesses. They do work like guiding and helping to arrange vehicles, instructing them the correct way, contacting

relevant staff to answer the needs of guests. In general, the position of security guard does not have high requirements. However, candidates applying for this position should also have certain skills and qualities like quick response to emergency, honesty, bravery, discipline, etc.

4.2. Professional figures of tourism businesses

The important professional figures in hospitality sector in Thai Nguyen province are presented in Table 2. The details of characteristics of each position are as follows:

4.2.1. Marketing executives/ managers

Like marketing executives/ managers in a hotel, marketing executives/ managers in tourism business also have similar job tasks and requirements. The difference is the focus on tourism activities. Tourism marketing includes all marketing and advertising activities aimed at tourists - the target customers of the tourism industry, in order to provide information about tourism-related products and services, including travel services, accommodation services, transportation services, information consulting services and finally services at the destination (amusement parks, monuments, scenic spots, etc.)

In each service group, the tasks of tourism marketing staff are quite different. For example, marketing for a tourist destination will be very different from marketing for an accommodation establishment, or between different types of accommodation such as hotels or homestays, there are also different ways of marketing to customers. In planning a marketing project, a tourism marketer must have knowledge of new trends in tourism to have the most general view of the tourism market and the targeting segment. In executing marketing projects, a tourism marketer needs to bring a specific, attractive, and enthralling experience to customers, giving them a real expectation at the destination. Marketing staff is also responsible for monitoring the indicators and trends of interaction, customer feedback about the marketing campaign, thereby evaluating the success of the campaign.

In addition to the tourism knowledge, in order to meet the recruitment requirements to become a tourism marketing staff, candidates need to cultivate additional marketing skills like the ability to communicate, maintain and develop relationships because interacting with colleagues and potential customers is very important in tourism. Besides, content creation skills are also one of the most important skills that marketers must know. Having new quality content can attract customers to visit, interact on the website, social networks (social media) to create conversions. Foreign languages are another important requirement. English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and languages of South-east Asian nations are widely used in the tourism industry of Thai Nguuyen province. Finally, politeness, professional and friendly attitude that is always putting the interests of customers first, professional handling are all required.

4.2.2. Sales staff

Like in a hotel, sales staff in tourism business also have similar job tasks and requirements. The difference is the focus on tourism activities. Tour sales staff is in charge of introducing, consulting and selling tours to customers, including travel agencies, hotels, groups or individual guests. Their main work focuses on selling existing tours or designing new tours at the request of guests. Besides advising customers on travel options suitable to their needs and ability to pay and time arrangement, tour sales staff also assist international customers with visa application.

Normally, tour sales staff in offices, small agencies or hotels only sell pre-designed tours organized and performed by tour operators. Meanwhile, working at a large company may require them to participate in surveying destinations, services, working with partners and suppliers (restaurants, hotels, transportation units, tourist attractions). ...) to design and calculate tour prices. In addition, tour sales staff can support tour operators to do their jobs well, ensure attractive programs, increase revenue and ensure service quality for customers, handle all cases arising during the tour.

As mentioned earlier, specific jobs of tour sales staff depend on their working place, but in general some typical responsibilities include researching different destinations

and means of travel in terms of customs, and weather conditions, evaluating prices, designing a reasonable tour program in terms of schedule and pricing. Tour sales staff also reach out to potential customers, learn about their needs and desires, then recommend suitable tours or travel packages. They organize trips from the beginning to the end, through booking air, train or car tickets and accommodation, contacting tour guides. Moreover, they provide travelers with pertinent information and useful travel materials like guides, maps, program of events, etc., be responsible for invoicing customers and participating in the promotion and advertising of tours by itinerary, handle arising problems such as tour cancellation, accident, conflict, refund, etc., create and update customer electronic records, achieve revenue and profit targets, attend travel events and fairs to expand relationships, sell more tours and keep up to date with the latest travel trends.

A degree is not a requirement for a tour sales staff, but in an increasingly competitive market, candidates with professional qualifications will have an added advantage. The basic requirements for this position are usually an intermediate or higher degree in Tourism, Hotel Management, Travel Management, Business or a related field. More importantly, they must love to travel, have many self-sufficient travel experiences, discover many destinations by themselves, be proficient in tourism software like computer reservation system, understand travel trends, be fluent in English (or other foreign languages), and knowledgeable about culture, history and geography of destinations. Moreover, they should have sales skills with customer-oriented approach, understand the domestic and international tourism market, be able to design tours suitable for trip purposes. In addition, they also need to have effective presentation, persuasion and communication skills, and be able to solve problems and handle crises.

4.2.3. Tour guides

Tour guides directly lead the tourists and visitors throughout the journey, help them better understand the places to visit, have a good experience with the travel service of the company. They are directly responsible for the entire trip of the guest. In a travel

and tourism business, every job of a tour guide is clearly designed and planned, specifically for each specific tour. The first task that the tour guide needs to do is to receive the tour schedule for a trip from the operator who performs the work on documents, travel contracts. Next, the tour guide starts reviewing customer information, checking vehicles, preparing necessary equipment, etc. During the trip, the tour guide is the manager who stimulates interaction, creates excitement for guests to make the trip meaningful. In general, the work of a tour guide is quite versatile, requiring enthusiasm and good working skills, always focusing on high intensity.

Tourism has a close relationship with accompanying services such as accommodation facilities, hotels, restaurants, amusement parks, etc. The job of a tour guide is to monitor and supervise how they serve, and to evaluate and give specific suggestions to the service providers so that they can come up with a tour plan to handle and improve the service better in the following tours. This is to cement a long-term cooperation between the two parties as well as bring the best experience to customers.

Besides being the organizer of fun activities, sightseeing according to the trip's plan, the tour guide also solves the problems that arise during the entire journey. In fact, there are many common arising situations from customers that the tour guide must deal with such as: forgetting things, complaining guests, transportation problems, etc. With these cases, the tour guide needs to be calm, use his/her skills to solve the most appropriate and fastest way. Another important task of a tour guide is to receive guest feedback and report back to improve service better every day. This is also an important stage in assessing the tour guide's capacity, helping them to correct their existing weaknesses and promote their strengths in each trip.

Becoming a tour guide is not too difficult. Anyone who graduates from a professional intermediate school or higher and undergoes a short-term training course of 1.5 months - 2 months has fully met the legal conditions to issue a domestic tourist guide card. To become an international guide, there are slightly higher professional requirements - that is, you must have graduated from a university or higher, and have an appropriate foreign language certificate.

However, to become a successful and talented tour guide, in addition to the requirements of professional knowledge, you need to have many skills. First of all, voiceover in tourism is one of the vital factors that create the identity and brand for a tour guide. Voiceover is not only conveying information to visitors, but it is an artist's soul because tour guides are artisans to make it livelier and more attractive, not to make visitors sleepy. Second, good guides need to communicate well – direct or indirect communication, non-verbal communication. They should always smile brightly – these smiles will dissolve any distance between guides and tourists. Three basic elements that make up the communication process are Attitude, Skills and Knowledge. Therefore, a tour guide always improve himself/ herself to have an attractive communication style. Third, a professional and successful tour guide needs to be very delicate and sharp in handling arising situations. While going on the tour, there are many situations that cannot be foreseen, requiring the guide to always confidently master all problems to have proper solutions. Fourth, for an international tour guide, foreign language skills are extremely important. Foreign language skills are not only limited to listening - speaking - reading - writing but also understanding the unique cultural features of each country. You must go in-depth, discover the tourist's personality so that you can share and understand each other better. Currently, the popular languages in Vietnam are English, Chinese, Russian, Korean, French, German, Spanish. A tour guide needs to master one or more languages to keep up with the trend of integration and development.

In addition, a talented tour guide in the technology 4.0 era needs to master online tools to spread the brand, the image of nature and the unique cultural features of the country and people through the social networks, radio - television, multimedia advertising to promote customers, and change their psychological behavior. Moreover, a tour guide should be able to work in a team and work independently because in any field, especially in the tourism industry, the cooperation is a must for a success. Tour guides are only part of a chain of tourist activities and services; therefore, it is necessary to regularly interact and support each other between departments for the best results. Finally, organizational and management skills are essential for tour guides to manage many members, link groups of tourists together, and form a unified block.

4.2.4. Tour operators

To have a tour, there are many people involved in the process. In particular, the tour operator is the person who prepares all the logistical issues to ensure the tour takes place according to the schedule. This is the person responsible for planning the trip to bring the experience to the customer. Tour operators are in charge of all the necessary work for a trip such as schedules, transportation, hotel reservations, motels, meals, entertainment, etc.

Despite not following tourists as closely as tour guides, tour operators play an extremely important role in bringing success to the tour. They are responsible for planning and designing trips that bring the best experience to tourists, consulting and persuading customers to sign travel contracts, working with service providers such as transportation, dining, entertainment, etc. to negotiate on a good manner, quality and price. They also adjust and assign responsibilities to the tour guide in charge of the trip, coordinate with the tour guide to control the schedule, and solve problems arising during the trip. Besides, tour operators need to survey competitor companies to come up with suitable programs to attract customers, make a report to state the advantages and disadvantages of tour operators in carrying out tourism activities, then propose solutions to solve problems and shortcomings to increase operational efficiency and satisfy customers.

To complete all these tasks, tour operators must have good communication and persuasion skills, including internal communication skills with colleagues in dividing work and planning implementation, and external communication skills with customers to advise on trip information, travel schedules and contract equipment, and communication skills with suppliers and partners to ensure that transportation, dining, and entertainment issues are carried out in accordance with the set tour operating process.

In addition, tour operators are required to withstand work pressure because they have a lot of work to do. This requires personnel to stay calm to handle and solve arising problems. Besides, time management skills are important because tour operation requires personnel to have the ability to arrange and assign work to help bring high

efficiency in the working process. Moreover, they deal with many customers, including foreign tourists. Therefore, the proficiency of foreign languages like English is almost an indispensable skill.

4.2.5. Accountant

Accountant is one of the important positions in all businesses. Accountants are responsible for receiving information, calculating and handling all work related to assets and changes in assets of the business. They will also summarize the above information and produce reports that are valuable to the tourism company. The superiors will base on this report to assess the financial situation, and then have directions to deploy activities in the business in the most effective way. Currently, this position is being extremely interested by many young people. Although the nature of the work is quite stressful, the return is a decent salary.

Accountants play a very important role in operating a business apparatus. They contribute to improving business efficiency by controlling the financial position of the business, helping to limit financial shortages. Accountants will monitor the entire operation of the business. Then, they conduct statistics, check, analyze specific data, support budgeting and cost planning in each project.

Accounting is a common job, but to become a good accountant, candidates need to meet some of criteria. Since the accountant directly works with the numbers that require high accuracy, professional knowledge is a must. Candidates need to graduate in related fields such as accounting, auditing, finance. In addition, candidates also need to equip some other qualifications such as: certificate of accounting practice, certificate in financial management and tax reporting, or in-depth certificate of accounting knowledge, etc.

Accountants need to have skills in observing, analyzing and synthesizing data. Working with a lot of numbers, this skill helps them synthesize and analyze accurately to assess the overall business situation of the business. Besides, it is necessary to have good planning skills to report and track the situation throughout. Planning skills help

accountants prepare in advance, so that the assigned tasks will be done quickly. Also, good communication skills help accountants easily interact with colleagues and superiors. If unexpected things happen, they will easily receive help from people around. Moreover, since economic laws at home and abroad are adjusted and changed regularly, accountants need to have skills in reading documents in English to understand the terms, and update information regularly. Finally, time management skills are helpful to divide working time appropriately, limiting the situation of stagnant work.

To fulfill the tasks, indispensable qualities of an accountant. One of the most important qualities is being meticulous, careful and accurate in work because his work relates with numbers all the time. During the year, there will be periods when the accounting department must work continuously with high intensity, so being able to withstand pressure is an advantage. Besides, the accounting department works with money related documents, so an accountant must be a highly disciplined person and take responsibility for actions. Also, financial numbers are always one of the sensitive issues when working. Therefore, this job requires accounting staff to be honest through the reports.

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