Making a mark

BY spearheading the drive to reshape the domestic tourism and hospitality industry through education, UCSI University can take heart in a successful year for the Malaysian Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education, better known as MyCenTHE.

Involving some of Malaysia’s foremost education providers – both public and private – MyCenTHE is on track to achieve a nationwide rollout and new clusters were launched in Penang and Sabah this year.

The original two clusters, launched by UCSI in Sarawak and KL, have established themselves and another cluster is set to launch in Johor.

MyCenTHE is on course to strike a better balance in an industry that is facing a dearth of qualified personnel – only around 16% of tourism industry personnel possess the minimum qualification of a diploma.

The tourism and hospitality industry is expected to grow three-fold by 2020 and to equip 50% of the workforce with a diploma or a degree, approximately 50,000 qualified industry personnel with diplomas or degrees need to graduate each year – up from the current total of 20,000.

These developments were detailed in a book titled, Value Innovation in Tourism Human Capital Development that was authored by UCSI University vice-president (Strategic Projects) Assoc Prof Dr Wong Kong Yew.

Launched by Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin during MyCenTHE’s first anniversary celebration, the book also detailed outreach programmes like a corporate social responsibility initiative that offered scholarships to poor Penan children.

While these developments are encouraging, Dr Wong – also MyCenTHE president – stressed that much work remained in realising the national agenda.

“By spearheading and leading MyCenTHE, UCSI University is effectively carrying the flag of tourism and hospitality education,” he mused.

“We can’t be too happy lest we forget the responsibilities we shoulder.

As UCSI’s unique work-based learning (WBL) curriculum is used as a benchmark for all MyCenTHE members, Dr Wong explained that it had to be continually fine-tuned to match the requirements and best practices of an ever-changing industry.

Feedback is frequently sought from industry players and graduate abilities were stacked up against the industry’s needs.

The result is a dynamic two-year Diploma in Hotel Management that offers students up to 10 times the hours of industrial exposure when compared to conventional programmes. Students receive a stipend for their efforts, effectively earning and learning at the same time.

“The WBL curriculum was designed to address the long-standing mismatch between graduate capabilities and industrial expectations,” explained Dr Wong, who is also a tourism economics specialist.

“To ensure students receive the real deal, all faculty lecturers are industry practitioners who lead by example, exposing students not only to all facets of hotel service – namely, food and beverage; kitchen operations; front office and housekeeping – but also the entrepreneurial side of things.”

With the launch of Le Quadri – UCSI’s very own boutique hotel – students have the luxury of obtaining that exposure in-house.

Boasting a fine dining restaurant, a patisserie and a lounge, the hotel has begun taking in guests and students have the perfect opportunity to apply what they learn, while getting paid in the process.

It is worth noting that internship opportunities also abound at the university’s many industrial partners like Pullman Hotel, the Grand Margherita Hotel and the Riverside Majestic Hotel, among others.

The feedback received has been positive and the industrial partners are impressed to the point where graduates of the WBL curriculum are guaranteed a job at these hotels, subject to availability.

Even better, the two-year diploma course will count as actual work experience and WBL graduates are expected to earn around 30% more than most fresh graduates in the field. Some might even be fast tracked into supervisory positions, setting them on an enviable career trajectory.

International pedigree

Building on its solid domestic credentials, UCSI is now casting a wider net to maximise its student experience.

Students are groomed to showcase their talents at the best hospitality companies and a breakthrough was recently achieved on the international front when 16 students from UCSI’s Sarawak campus obtained coveted internships at luxury hotels and resorts, overseas.

The experience is invaluable, particularly for Michele Kong Suet Mei and Rebecca Tan Shuh Ying, who headed to Japan’s renowned Niseko ski resort for five-month stints.

Widely regarded as one of the world’s premier ski holiday destinations, Niseko is thronged by tourists from the world over and the duo will benefit from the steep learning curve they must scale to meet international expectations.

The other 14 students were accepted for six-month internships at premium hotel chains in Singapore like Wyndham Group Hotel, Marina Mandarin Hotel, Movenpick Hotel and Resort Sentosa, as well as the Conrad Centennial Singapore Hotel.

Commenting on the feat, UCSI Sarawak campus chief operating officer Tuong Ying said that the experience would boost their students’ employability and raise the aspirations of their peers.

“The university endeavours to give its students wholesome hospitality education through unique placements like these,” she enthused.

“Exposure such as this will equip students with the business acumen of the global economy and they will learn to appreciate different business cultures and perspectives.

This will serve them well in their future careers as they develop into global citizens who are competent and capable.”

As the first successful cluster in MyCenTHE, it is somewhat fitting that UCSI’s Sarawak campus is getting its time in the spotlight.

The Sarawak campus has attracted...
a number of foreign students from First World countries like Germany, Denmark and Canada, among others, in recent years and the trend is set to continue through student and staff exchange programmes.

These developments tie in nicely with MyCenTHE's efforts to benchmark Malaysia against some of the world's leading tourist destinations. International exposure is pivotal; half the battle is won when the people that matter are keen to study on our shores.

Although efforts to reshape an industry may be tough, the journey is more than worthwhile if a solid curriculum, international recognition and assurance come along with it. And at UCSI, that much is a certainty.

To find out more about UCSI University's diploma in Hotel Management, visit any day from Monday to Saturday (9am - 6pm) for course counselling. You may also contact the counsellors at 03-9101 8880 or e-mail www.ucsi.edu.my/onlineenquiry

For more information, visit the UCSI University website at www.ucsi.edu.my

(from left) Dr Pang Chau Leong, Director General, Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, Dr Wong, Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Datuk Dr Victor Wee, Datuk Peter Ng, UCSI Group founder and chairman.