

Tourism schools must improve English

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Thailand's education system should help enhance language skills for students to develop the Thai tourism industry to compete with neighbouring countries over the next decade.

Dusit Thani College rector Veera Pardattanapanich said other Asean countries have aggressively promoted tourism and tourism educational development to serve potential business growth in the region the past several years.

In addition to the hotel business, airlines, particularly low-cost ones, and tour operators need more manpower.

The standard of tourism education in Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia is lower than in Thailand, she said, as only the Philippines produces tourist workers that can work in the global market.

"Indonesians are clever, fast-learning, and their English language skills are good, but they have few tourism educational institutions. Myanmar people are smart, curious

and willing to develop themselves. I think they will be impressive competitors to Thais in the next 10 years," she said.

Thailand has over 100 educational institutions teaching tourism and hospitality. The question is, do they meet market demand and standards? How many of these people will work in the same field after they graduate?

Thais are weak at English language, she said. If they can develop this skill, they can easily compete with others in the regional tourism industry.

More schools must let students gain first-hand experience through internships with hotels or travel companies.

Some 3,000 students graduate from Dusit Thani College each year. Ms Veera said most of them find jobs in tourism and hospitality after they graduate. She guaranteed they will get jobs if they are hard working and well-disposed.

The hotel industry in Thailand still has a labour shortage as tourism continues to grow. Many international five-star hotels hire students as soon as they graduate.

Thai parents' perception of hotel jobs is changing. Chef has become a popular career, as Dusit Thani College graduates 500 students per year at its culinary arts and kitchen management courses.

The salary plus commission for a new graduate at a Thai hotel was estimated at over 20,000 baht a month. Some hotels offer more than 100,000 baht per month for the executive housekeeper position. A career in the tourism field offers bright opportunities because skilled people can work abroad.

"Many new graduates from our college have worked overseas. They earn over 100,000 baht a month, compared with 20,000 baht in Thailand. We should encourage our students to work abroad," she said.

Thai workers are in demand at international hotels because they are service-minded and for their Thai style.

Many Thai operators limit the salaries of Thai employees, said Ms Veera, partly because they cannot increase their room rates to the same level as those in neighbouring countries, even though the Thai hotels may be superior.