Case Study

All Play and No Work: The Case of Revitalizing Career Perceptions in Canada's Tourism Industry

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Abstract

This case analyzes the challenges facing the Canadian tourism industry workforce following the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by perceptions of careers in the tourism industry as temporary, low-wage, and unsatisfactory for long-term prospects. According to Tourism HR Canada, a pan-Canadian organization focused on supporting the recovery and growth of the Canadian tourism industry, these declines have created significant challenges for employers struggling to recruit and retain employees. This case study aims to equip students with the necessary tools to analyze data collected by Tourism HR Canada and its partners to identify Canadians' perceptions of jobs in the tourism industry and develop actionable recommendations for tourism employers. Students will use this data to uncover patterns in the provided data and compare their findings across different contexts, with the ultimate goal of developing a robust Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis to transform the public's perceptions and reshape the Canadian tourism workforce.

Keywords

Canada, labor, recruitment, retention, human resources management

Introduction

Think back to a cherished vacation—perhaps enjoying a drink on a hot sandy beach, visiting a famous museum, or strolling through a busy street in an unfamiliar town, browsing the local shops before dining at a new restaurant. Now, imagine that experience with fewer staff to cook your meal at the restaurant, guide you through the museum, or help get you to that sandy beach. Wouldn't you agree that your experience would have been much less enjoyable in this case?

This scenario, though exaggerated, is plausible given the challenges related to negative perceptions of careers in the tourism industry, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Suwannakul, 2024). Tourism employees suddenly found themselves working less, choosing different careers, or—in the hardest-of-hit businesses—being permanently laid off. In Canada, tourism employment rates fell more than any other sector between February and April 2020 (LMIC, 2020) and continue to struggle to return to pre-pandemic levels. This has caused a ripple effect on people just beginning to enter the workforce as social pressures to choose alternative career paths continue to swell.

However, the Canadian tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience despite these many challenges (Government of Canada, 2023). Leading the recovery

efforts is Tourism HR Canada, a pan-Canadian organization that strives to "…support the growth of Canada's visitor economy with a skilled, diverse, inclusive, and resilient workforce" (Tourism HR Canada, 2024, para. 1). Tourism HR Canada has been hard at work collecting crucial information to measure Canadians' perceptions toward careers in the tourism industry (Tourism HR Canada, 2022). Although they now have lots of data, they could use some help to analyze it and create unique solutions. As students studying in a program related to tourism or hospitality, you are uniquely positioned to assist them, given your industry knowledge and the potential impact on you when it comes time to graduate and enter the job market yourselves.

Therefore, this case study aims to equip students with the necessary tools to analyze data collected by Tourism HR Canada and its partners to identify Canadians' perceptions toward jobs in the tourism industry and develop recommendations for tourism employers to navigate the industry's
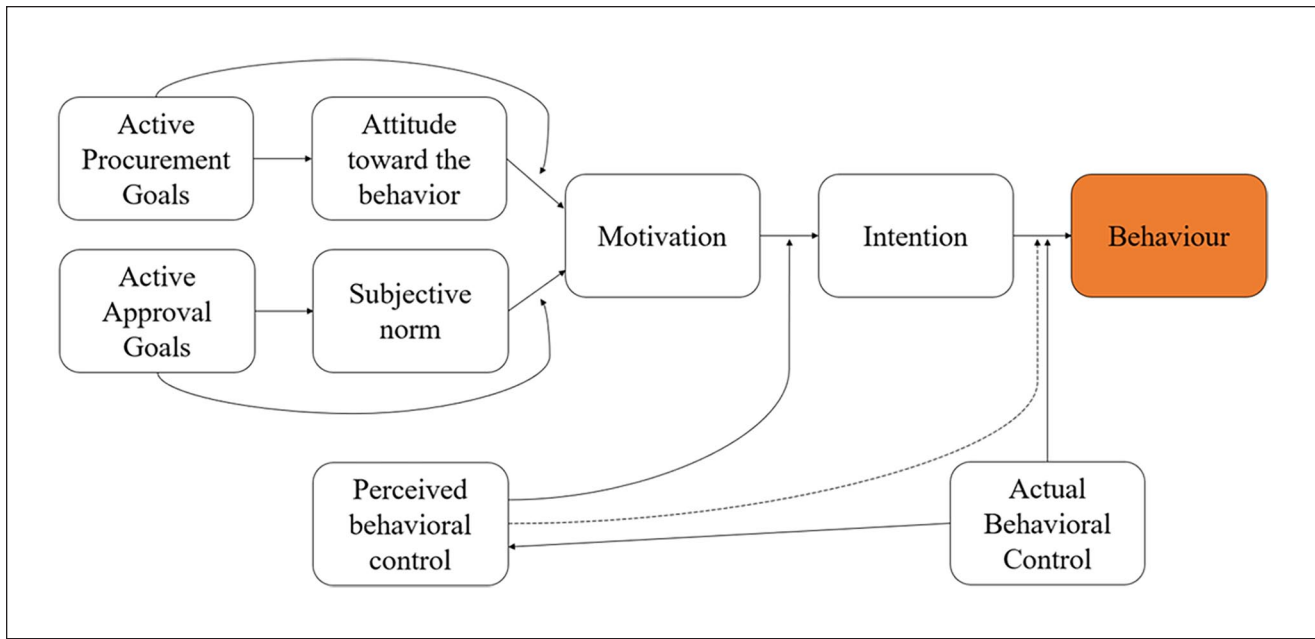
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Figure 1. Visual depiction of the theory of reasoned goal pursuit framework.
Source. Ajzen and Kruglanski (2019, p. 782).

future. To accomplish this aim and successfully complete this case study, you will review the case details and then respond to the first five discussion questions posed at the end. Then, in question six, you'll perform a SWOT Analysis to synthesize your findings and develop recommendations for tourism employers. Your insights will help to address public perception challenges in alignment with Tourism HR Canada's mission to recover and grow the visitor economy.

Theoretical Background

Theory of Reasoned Goal Pursuit

An individual's behaviors are often linked to the goals they set for themselves across various scenarios (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999). For example, in the context of a student who wants to improve their health, the behavior might take the form of starting a new diet with the goal of losing weight. A behavior without a goal often cannot be sustained (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2001). Continuing with the same example, starting a new diet without considering how it will actually lead to weight loss will not likely succeed since diets come in many forms, and not all focus just on reducing weight. This same logic can be applied to improving career perceptions in the tourism industry. An employer might hire workers from new sources (the behavior) to increase the pool of talented and motivated employees (the goal). Or perhaps they reimagined their internal training programs or created incentives for employees to complete external industry certifications (the behavior) in an effort to motivate

current employees to remain and grow within the organization (the goal).

The relationship between an individual's goals and behaviors has been recently conceptualized by Ajzen and Kruglanski (2019) in what they call the theory of reasoned goal pursuit (TRGP). Before the TRGP was introduced, the theory of planned behavior was the most popular approach for behavioral economists to predict, understand, and change social behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). However, that theory did not pay sufficient attention to why people engage in certain behaviors in the first place, arguing that the answer lies in an individual's desire to attain a particular goal (or goals). By combining the theory of planned behavior with goal systems theory, the resultant TRGP provides a more complete view of how motivation leads to actual behavior (Luong, 2024).

Referring to the diagram in Figure 1, goals can be subdivided into two types depending on whether they benefit the goal-seeker directly (procurement goals) or through social acceptance (approval goals) (Hamilton et al., 2024). The goals then influence either attitudes (i.e., beliefs and expectations toward the behavior) or subjective norms (i.e., the overall sense of social pressure and approval). If those attitudes and subjective norms are positive, this will motivate the individual, leading to intentions to perform an action. However, even with the best intentions, behaviors are also affected by actual and perceived behavioral controls, which can limit an individual's behaviors, such as how much time or money they believe they need to carry them out successfully (Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019).

It is worth considering the various elements of the TRGP in this case study since the public's perceptions of careers in the tourism industry are not easily discerned. While certain aspects seem to play a recurring role in shaping their perceptions, including lower wages and limited growth opportunities (Roney, 2007), others are less self-evident, and the goals among tourism industry workers may vary considerably. For instance, summer jobs in Canada are typically more popular than jobs in the spring or fall seasons, and careers in adventure tourism have lower turnover rates than those in restaurants or hotels. Each scenario will lead to differing goals among employees and employers depending on their unique circumstances. By exploring beliefs about the outcomes of pursuing a career in tourism and identifying the main goals while working in the industry, strategies can be developed to positively shift the public's perceptions and highlight the industry's potential for growth and satisfaction.

SWOT Analysis

It is often tempting to jump from reading the provided information to making recommendations without taking any steps in between. However, doing so will likely result in missed insights and scattered solutions since the data should first be collected and sorted into meaningful categories. One widely applied tool that can help achieve this is a SWOT analysis, a decision-support tool that allows a person to identify, analyze, and act on both internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats that impact a company's performance (BDC, n.d.).

There are six steps involved in conducting a SWOT analysis, including (1) recruiting stakeholders, (2) convening a focus group to confirm the purpose and focus, (3) identifying and categorizing the SWOT elements, (4) analyzing the results, (5) synthesizing the findings, and (6) interpreting the findings to form recommendations (Leigh, 2009).

Despite its seeming simplicity, choosing the best information for a SWOT analysis will take time and practice. One helpful approach is using AQCD factors (David et al., 2019), which stand for "actionable, quantified, comparative, and divisional." The bullet points below summarize each factor.

- It is *actionable* if it is specific and can be addressed.
- It is *quantified* when it can be supported by numeric figures like dates, percentages, and quantities.
- It is *comparative*, meaning it shows how it has changed over time.
- It is *divisional*, in that it considers differences across sectors, demographics, positions, and geographic locations.

For example, an internal weakness might be initially written as "Tourism employers struggle to recruit and retain employees." This could be vastly improved using AQCD factors, as follows: "An average of 55% of tourism employers (*quantified*) have reported experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining entry-level employees in the food and beverages service sector (*divisional*), which is 2 to 3 times higher than for those in non-entry-level positions in the same sector (*comparative and actionable*)."

Now that you are familiar with the complex relationship between goals and behaviors and have reviewed the tools for completing a SWOT analysis, let's review the current literature on attitudes toward jobs in the Canadian tourism industry to see what has already been discussed.

Literature Review

The research on tourism workforce perceptions is as varied and complex as the careers themselves, with findings that reflect both the good and bad sides of stakeholders' attitudes and beliefs. Starting with the good, students in Canadian tourism and hospitality degree programs have identified the great potential for job satisfaction in the industry, particularly for those who are "people-focused" and passionate about serving others, a factor that often comes up as a top motivator to work in the industry, even higher than wage potential in many cases (Mooney & Jameson, 2018). Yet the potential for earning a sufficient wage is also considered important. When asked about what fair pay in the tourism industry should look like, a sample of Canadian university students responded that it must exceed the minimum wage and that the opportunity to earn tips on top of their base pay added to its appeal (Gordon & McAdams, 2023). They also anticipated higher levels of job security due to the seemingly low ratio of applicants relative to available positions, which increased for those who had completed an internship during their program (Suwannakul, 2024). Families of immigrant workers to Canada feel that jobs in tourism businesses are an effective starting point toward obtaining permanent residence status (Mooney & Jameson, 2018). Finally, the Canadian tourism industry provides a viable career path for marginalized groups, particularly women, younger Canadians, and racialized immigrants (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011), making it one of the country's most inclusive employment sectors (Fresnoza et al., 2024).

However, scholars have also recognized several perceived concerns. Lower wages and fewer opportunities for professional growth disproportionately impact marginalized groups (Gomaa & Sobaih, 2014; Wright & Dimanche, 2023). There is also a clear challenge regarding the availability of training across all employment levels in the industry. One study revealed that nearly four out of five recently hired employees in tourism or hospitality positions felt they did not receive adequate training to do their jobs, although the findings differed based on the organization's size (Gordon & McAdams, 2023). Beyond the factors mentioned, there are a variety of additional influences on perceptions of careers in tourism that may also affect public

perceptions, including seasonality (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003), changing immigration policies (Dimanche & Perzyna, 2023), unjust or unsafe work environments (Knollenberg et al., 2024), opinions of job quality (Gordon & McAdams, 2023), sustainability (Ethan, 2024), and emerging technologies (Neumann & Mason, 2023).

There seem to be cultural and societal differences between Canadians' and non-Canadians' views of the importance and appeal of working in the tourism industry. Take, for instance, the study by Tung et al. (2018) that compared students enrolled in a tourism-related program in either Macau or Canada, revealing a gap in the perceived social norms regarding the legitimacy of these programs. Specifically, they observed that while the peers of Macanese students would applaud them for studying in an essential field, the Canadian students' peers criticized their career prospects, growth opportunities, and potential earnings once they graduate (Tung et al., 2018). In one example, a Canadian student was confronted by another who mockingly asked where they expected to be in 5 years and that they "…can't just work at hotels forever even if [they] love to travel" (Tung et al., 2018, p. 522).

From the tourism suppliers' perspective, employers must focus on recruiting and developing highly motivated employees rather than taking any qualified applicants and trying to fit them into the role (Mooney & Jameson, 2018). Since the skills that tourism industry employees learn are highly transferable to many other industries and contexts (Strietska-Ilina & Tessaring, 2005), finding meaningful ways to keep them engaged and interested should be among their top priorities. Regrettably, this has not been the case, as only about 50% of those who graduated with a tourism-related degree work in tourism, often citing lack of pay and relatively fewer growth opportunities as the leading causes (Strietska-Ilina & Tessaring, 2005). The rates are even higher when considering only frontline workers (Vo-Thanh et al., 2022). With tourism-supported jobs still about 10% lower than pre-pandemic levels, Canada's federal administrator has added its voice to the challenge by launching their "Canada 365: Federal Tourism Growth Strategy" in July 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023). The report cites the importance of a robust workforce and the need for all impacted tourism stakeholders to focus on ensuring the industry's continuing prosperity.

Next, let's examine the specific data from Tourism HR Canada and its partners to identify the challenges facing the country's tourism employers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public Perceptions of Careers in the Tourism Industry

Canadians' perceptions toward the tourism industry, in general, are favorable. According to the Fall 2022 version of

the General Population Survey regarding tourism workforce perceptions by Tourism HR Canada (2022), 89% of Canadians view tourism as essential to the economic well-being of Canada. Similarly, 87% of Canadians consider it necessary to their provincial economy. Despite these positive sentiments, the perceptions of Canadians toward careers in the tourism industry are less promising. Generally, there is an underlying perception that tourism industry careers are often temporary and do not pay high enough wages relative to the required hours. In fact, over one-third of Canadians agree that working in the tourism industry is only a short-term employment opportunity, and only slightly more (37%) feel that tourism careers offer excellent career opportunities. When asked about whether there is a growing labor shortage, 68% of Canadians agreed.

The shift in perceptions toward tourism-related careers as long-term opportunities following the COVID-19 pandemic may not surprise many. International travel to Canada dropped by over 50% between February 2020 and June 2021, resulting in closed borders and strict restrictions on non-essential travel to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021). This led to empty hotel beds and restaurant dining rooms, which meant fewer employees needed to serve them. At the height of the pandemic, over 800,000 tourism jobs were lost (Labour Market Information Council, 2020).

These perceptions are shared by those who have worked in the tourism industry, showing that the problem is not simply a lack of understanding by the general population. Among those who have previously worked in the industry, 70% of those surveyed felt the pay was too low for the work being done, and 64% agreed that the income wasn't enough to sustain a satisfactory life. Although Canadians' views were generally better, they still agreed that wages are too low (59%) and tourism jobs don't lead to a satisfactory life (54%).

So, what does the actual data say, and how can these perceptions be challenged? Is it true that the industry pays too low wages and overworks its employees, or is something bigger at play here?

Tourism Employment in Canada

In terms of revenue, the tourism industry has generated $102 billion in revenue across 29 sectors across Canada. The strength of the tourism industry is in its workforce, with almost 1 in 10 workers in Canada being employed by a tourism employer across five key sectors—tourism, accommodations, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services. As of March 2023, 1,906,000 people worked within these sectors, a decrease of 88,900 workers since the same time in 2019 (Tourism HR Canada, 2023b). These declines are being led by food and beverage services (down by 47,800 people since 2019) and accommodations (down by 40,300 people
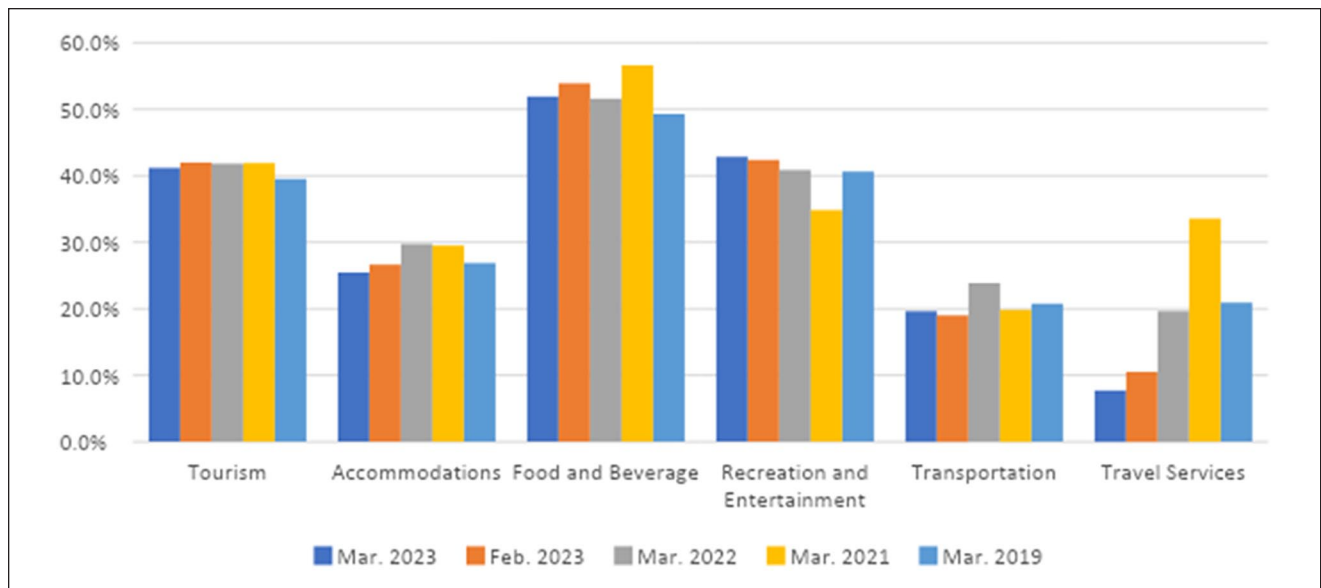
Figure 2. Percentage of part-time employment.
Source. Tourism HR Canada, Labour Force Survey Analysis (March 2023).
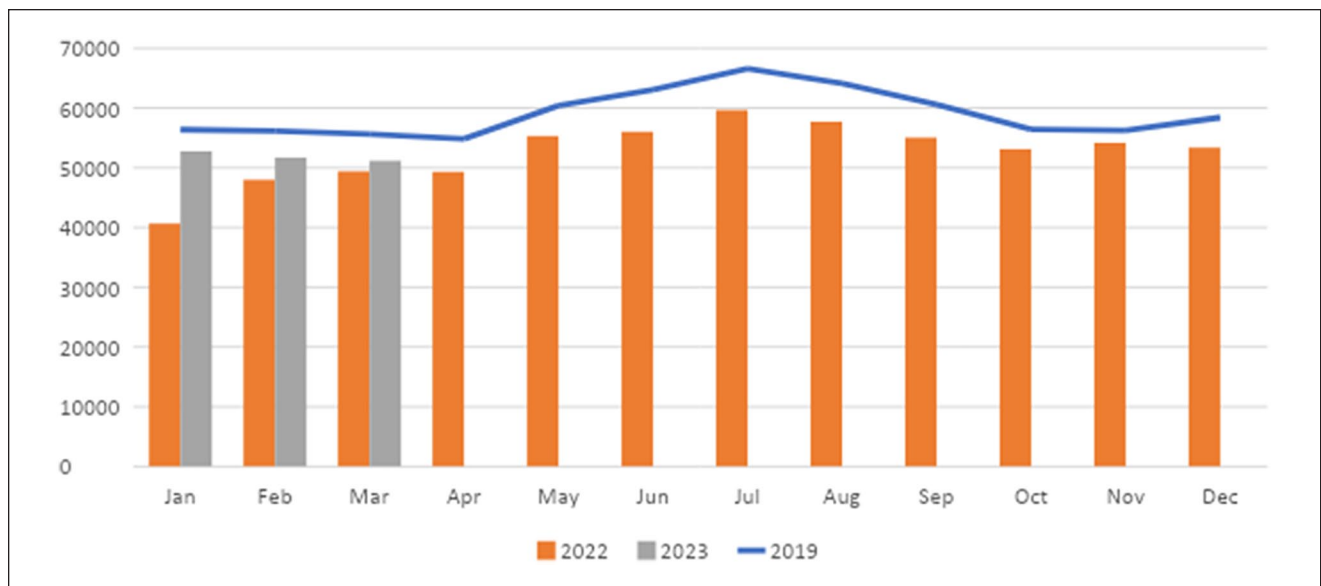
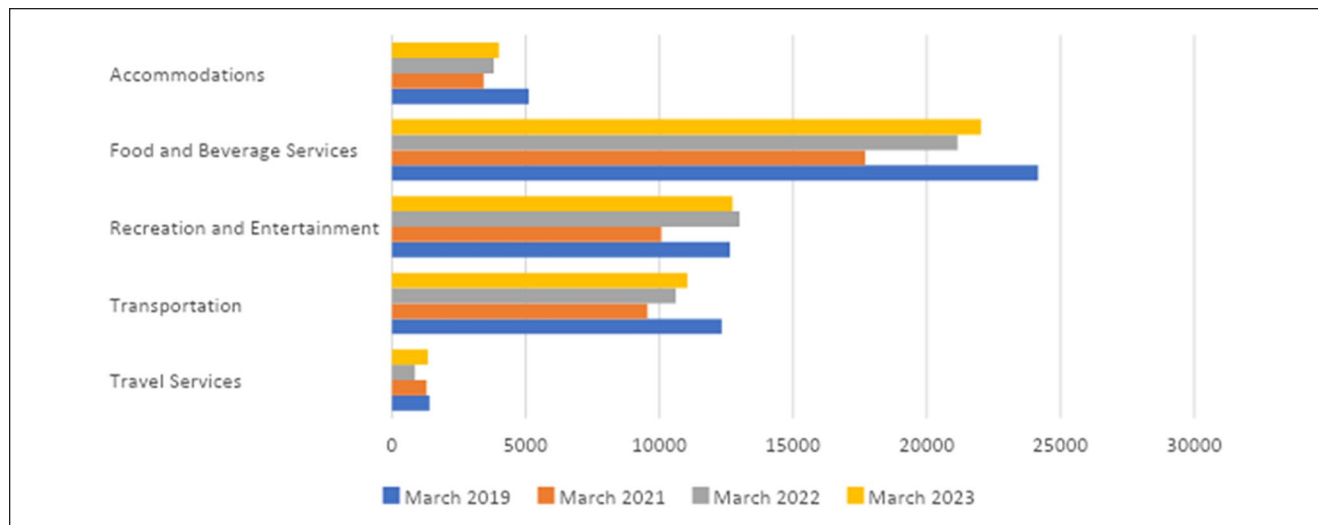**Figure 3.** Total hours worked (×1,000) in tourism.
Source. Tourism HR Canada, Labour Force Survey Analysis (March 2023).

since 2019) (Tourism HR Canada, 2023b). Only the recreation and entertainment sector has surpassed 2019 numbers (up by 20,600 people since 2019). Figure 2 shows the percentage of part-time employment between 2019 and 2023 across all tourism-related sectors, with many employees within the accommodations and travel services sectors switching to full-time employment versus other industries that are more likely to hire part-time workers in sectors

that have limited off-season demand, such as ski hills or waterparks.

In terms of the total number of hours worked as reported by tourism industry employees, the data shows that although the hours worked to date in 2023 are moving in a similar pattern as the 2019 levels, they remain around 7% lower on average and 4.5% lower in March 2023 than March 2019, suggesting that people are working fewer hours on average

Figure 4. Total hours worked (×1,000) per industry group.
Source. Tourism HR Canada, Labour Force Survey Analysis (March 2023).

Table 1. Recruitment and Retention Difficulties, by Tourism Sector.

Occupations	%	Occupations	%
Accommodation (*n* = 135)		Food and beverage services (*n* = 61)	
Housekeeping	78	Food preparation/cooks	70
Maintenance	39	Serving staff	51
Customer service representatives/sales	31	Bartender	44
Food preparation/cooks	27	Maintenance	28
Serving staff	26	Frontline client-facing supervisory staff	15
Recreation and entertainment (*n* = 133)		Transportation (*n* = 63)	
Customer service representatives/sales	34	Drivers	73
Maintenance	28	Other customer-facing staff	21
Customer-facing staff (e.g., ushers/ticket takers)	27	Customer service representatives/sales	17
Food preparation/cooks	27	Administrative/clerical	14
Serving staff	19	Pilots	13
Travel services (*n* = 60)			
Travel agents	60		
Sales and marketing	28		
Tour planners	25		
Administrative/clerical	22		
Frontline supervisory staff (those with customer-facing responsibilities)	22		

Source. Tourism HR Canada, Canadian Tourism Labour Market Snapshot (February 2023).

across the industry's sectors (Figure 3). One of the factors affecting the number of hours worked may be the shift toward an increased prioritization of work-life balance post-pandemic, which employers are unsure how to manage effectively.

The hours worked based on each industry sector are also provided by Tourism HR Canada and are reported below in Figure 4. Of note are the significant differences in reported hours worked across the industry segments, which are partially explained by the size of each segment and the types of work available in each.

Industry Perceptions on the Tourism Labour Shortage

The January 2023 edition of the Business Intelligence Survey by Tourism HR Canada asked tourism providers across the five key sectors to share their data regarding the impact of the

Programs Used to Recruit Workers	Jan. 2023 (n=342)	Apr. 23 (n=300)
Temporary Foreign Workers	7%	10%
Provincial Nominee Programs	4%	6%
International Experience Canada	4%	5%
International student programs	5%	6%
International Mobility Program	-	3%
None of the above	83%	81%
Don't know	3%	1%

Considered Programs for Future Recruitment	Jan. 2023 (n=342)	Apr. 23 (n=300)
International student programs	44%	40%
Temporary Foreign Workers	41%	38%
International Experience Canada	40%	35%
Provincial Nominee Programs	36%	34%
International Mobility Program	-	27%
None of the above	33%	38%
Don't know	7%	3%

Figure 5. Comparison of recruitment programs, current and future.
Source. Tourism HR Canada, Business Intelligence Survey (June 2023).

COVID-19 pandemic on labor. The survey results confirmed that tourism was still in flux in 2023 due to significant pandemic-induced impacts. According to the survey, a staggering 89% of businesses have reported facing challenges within the past 4 months, driven mainly by gaps in their workforce. Specifically, 43% of all companies reported shortages, and two in five have an average of four job vacancies they are actively trying to fill. The challenges facing tourism businesses do not end with finding people to work. The survey revealed that nearly 1/3rd (31%) of companies have equal trouble retaining existing workers. Reasons for leaving one's job in the industry include personal or family reasons, illness or disability, dissatisfaction, retirement, and other reasons (e.g., going back to school). When narrowed to specific jobs within each tourism sector (see Table 1), those in entry- or mid-level positions report the most significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees (Tourism HR Canada, 2023a).

Fortunately, many tourism businesses are actively trying to fight back against these disheartening statistics. Increased recruitment efforts, improved wages, benefits, and perks, social media hiring campaigns, and increased use of government programs are all examples of changes reported by many of those surveyed. There are also mounting efforts to streamline the sector's training by various organizations offering in-person and virtual training programs to fill in any knowledge gaps. For instance, the Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Aeronautics (WISA) has just launched a self-paced e-learning series focused on increasing industry professionals' understanding of the impacts of climate change and sustainability on the airline sector. WISA's founder, Dr. Suzanne Kearns, mirrors the position of Tourism HR Canada that "we need a robust, sustained, confident and diverse workforce to support the industry" (Roe, 2024, para. 8).

Unfortunately, despite these promising steps in the right direction, most things have remained unchanged. When asked whether they've updated their training procedures post-pandemic, only 20% of businesses said they had. This is somewhat perplexing because one might expect the training process to require an update to manage the industry's "new normal," especially knowing that there is a strong correlation between employee training and client satisfaction.

Limited efforts have also been made in many other recruitment strategies that reflect out-of-the-box opportunities. For instance, only 6% of businesses have tried hiring more workers from underrepresented populations or local sources within their communities. Within the food and beverage services sector, only 3% of companies reported hiring workers from underrepresented populations in October 2022 and none in January 2023. Perhaps most alarming is that nearly 1 in 10 firms claimed not to use any strategy to increase recruitment despite the abundance of available methods. Further, when asked whether their business uses targeted recruitment practices for individuals from equity-seeking groups, the results showed that most businesses shy away from targeting their recruitment efforts. Only 13% of surveyed companies indicated that they did use targeted recruiting, among which focus on members of visible minorities (74%), people with disabilities (67%), Indigenous peoples (56%), women (56%), and LGBTQ2 (54%) groups. Finally, there also appears to be a unique opportunity for tourism businesses to consider using immigration programs to recruit new employees. Tourism HR Canada (2023c) provides the rates at which companies use immigrant programs to recruit their workers, depicted in Figure 5. In most cases, the rates have stayed relatively flat between January and April 2023, and it seems unlikely that businesses will consider using immigrant programs for future recruitment based on the survey results.

Conclusion

With the start of the pandemic fading increasingly into the past, tourism businesses must stay hyper-focused on the future

recovery of the industry. To do this, they will need to find innovative and unique solutions to overcome the weaknesses that COVID-19 exposed as people witnessed the devastation of the travel and tourism industry. Negative perceptions were affirmed as entire destinations were shut down, and many employers were forced to adapt or risk closing their doors permanently. This has led to a Catch-22: The industry's workforce cannot thrive until the public changes its negative perceptions, but perceptions won't change until it proves that tourism careers are competitive and long-term. The not-so-easy task for tourism employers is to move the conversation forward by demonstrating many excellent industry opportunities for those willing to give it another chance.

Discussion

Hopefully, this case study has helped you develop some ideas of how tourism employers can more effectively recruit and retain employees across the various sectors.

The following questions will help guide your analysis:

1. Generally, what patterns can be identified from the provided data, and, importantly, what factors can be isolated to help recruit employees from potentially new sources while motivating existing employees to remain with the organization?
2. Review the March 2023 Tourism Labour Force Survey data available publicly from Tourism HR Canada (see References section below for the URL). What additional trends beyond those provided in the case study can you find that support your findings related to types of industries, employment status (full-time vs. part-time), and union participation? Create a chart to visualize the trend(s) you've found.
3. Compare the data from the March 2023 survey with the most recent version available. To locate the most recent survey, you can Google "Canadian Tourism Labour Market Snapshot" and select the most recent month and year combination. How have the numbers changed since this case study was published? Are trends generally moving in a positive direction? What do you think is spurring these changes?
4. Which sectors are facing the most significant challenges with recruitment and retention? Which sectors are facing the most minor challenges? Why might these differences exist, and how should tourism businesses respond?
5. Analyze Figures 2–5 by focusing on a single tourism industry sector and comparing the 2019 levels with the March 2023 data. What did you find? Were you surprised by the results of your analysis? Why or why not? Can you identify why they may be relevant in the specific context of goals, attitudes,

intentions, and behaviors from the theory of reasoned goal pursuit?
6. Once you have responded to the questions above, your final task is to connect the dots by completing the six steps of a SWOT analysis outlined in the theoretical background section of this case study. Your analysis should focus on the details in the case related to Canadians' perceptions of tourism labor, COVID-19 impacts, fluctuations across tourism industry sectors, and future outlooks for employers. Please aim for at least five points per SWOT element, ensuring each adheres to the AQCD factor format.

If you are an ICHRIE member, you can access the Teaching Notes for this case study here: https://ichrie.memberclicks.net/jhtc. If you are not an ICHRIE member, the Teaching Notes will be published in a future Sage Business Cases (SBC) annual collection: https://sk.sagepub.com/cases. For more information, please contact info@sagepub.com.

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