

# » SRI LANKA

Tourism and  
Hospitality  
Workforce  
Competitiveness

## ROADMAP

2018-2023

A Private Sector Approach

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A PRIVATE SECTOR APPROACH

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Published July 2018

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This Roadmap is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of the Private Sector Tourism Skills Committee and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



# Preface

This roadmap does not purport to be a comprehensive strategy, but rather a concise, actionable implementation guide, that responds to the urgent needs to meet workforce requirements over the next decade.

This roadmap was prepared by the Private Sector Tourism Skills Committee (TSC) with the support of Technical and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of Ministry of Science, Technology, Research, Skills Development and Vocational Training & Kandyan Heritage, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Sri Lanka Institute for Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM), Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC), and YouLead - a project funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by International Executive Service Corps (IESC).

The TSC is an informal association of leaders in the private sector, joined by representatives of the main tourism and hospitality training institutes and development agencies. TSC is explicitly private-sector led and voluntary. The idea of the skills committee was conceived by TVEC to ensure that the skills Sri Lanka's youth are learning are better aligned to the skills required in the marketplace.

This roadmap does not purport to be a comprehensive strategy, but rather a concise, actionable, implementation guide that responds to the urgent need to meet workforce requirements over the next decade. TSC's role is not simply to publish this document (we have too many good strategies that sit on bookshelves). It is a commitment to drive implementation of the initiatives outlined in this roadmap. TSC commits to implement these set of activities that they believe are collectively in the best interest of the entire sector, rather than the interests of any one individual organization. The roadmap was facilitated by experts James MacGregor and Srilal Miththapala.

## Voting Members

1. **Malik J. Fernando** (Committee Chair)- Director, MJF Holdings & Dilmah Tea & Managing Director, Resplendent Ceylon
2. **Angeline Ondaatjie** - Managing Director, Tangerine Group of Hotels & Tangerine Tours Sri Lanka
3. **Shiromal Cooray** - Managing Director, Jetwing Travels
4. **Jayantissa Kehelpannala** - Executive Vice President & Head-Maldivian Resorts, John Keells Holdings Plc
5. **Sanath Ukwatte** - Chairman, Mount Lavinia Hotel & President, The Hotels Association Sri Lanka
6. **Chamin Wickramasinghe** - Director/CEO, Theme Resorts & Spas
7. **Dileep Mudadeniya** - Head of Brand Marketing Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts, John Keells Group
8. **Timothy Wright** - Vice President & General Manager, Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo
9. **Steven Bradie-Miles** - Center Director, William Angliss Colombo Academy of Hospitality Management
10. **Preshan Dissanayake** - Managing Director, Thambapanni Leisure

## Ex-Officio Members

1. **Buddhika Hewawasam** - Director General/CEO, SLITHM
2. **Kavan Ratnayake** - Chairman, SLTDA
3. **Manjula Vidanapathirana** - Acting Director Industry Liaison, TVEC
4. **Chandra Vithanage** - Senior Assistant Secretary General, CCC

We also acknowledge the contributions of all who provided their time, information, and ideas; including individuals working at different levels of the tourism and hospitality industry- from security guards to senior managers. We particularly want to acknowledge the members of the Human Resources Advisory Subcommittee : **Kanchana Nanayakkara, Ishara Naufal, Irandi Wijegunawardane, Naradha Jayasinghe, Sujeeva Cooray, Kusalitha Devruwan, Ruwan Punchihewa, Asoka Jayawardena, Ranjan Amarasinghe and Gemunu Jinasena**. We also acknowledge **Abbas Esufally**, a senior advisor from the industry, for his invaluable guidance.

# Introduction

Sri Lankan tourism is at a critical point in its evolution. There is excellent potential to grow into a vibrant, sustainable industry that contributes to GDP and create long-lasting career opportunities.

Sri Lankan tourism is at a critical point in its evolution. The potential to grow into a vibrant, sustainable industry that contributes to GDP and create long-lasting career opportunities is excellent. On the other hand, there aren't enough and there will not be enough skilled Sri Lankans under current conditions to meet market demand.

TSC estimates that **25,000 - 30,000** additional employees will be required each year to service the projected increases in visitor arrivals—plus replacement for those leaving or retiring. SLTDA estimates the addition of **20,720** registered rooms by 2020. However, the combined training programs offered by government and private training institutions only graduate approximately 10,000 students annually. The current system, therefore, cannot generate enough skilled, employees to meet the requirements of the industry. It is within this urgent situation-some might say crisis, that the

TSC has embarked on a concerted effort to prepare this roadmap. It is a call to action for the private sector to significantly increase the number of trained hospitality and tourism workers over the next five years. We hope that government and the donor community will “crowd in” their resources and talent to enhance or accelerate the impact of our work, but we won't wait—our work has already begun. Much good analysis of the tourism and hospitality sector already exists, so this roadmap won't rehash that here. This roadmap draws extensively on the available research—particularly the excellent Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020 that SLTDA facilitated and produced.

The overall strategy of focusing on attracting more 'quality' tourists and guarding against 'over-tourism' will form the foundation of all initiatives planned. Thus, all actions will strive to enhance the quality of service and experience provided by front-line staff.



Two segments, youth and women, receive special attention because we believe that Sri Lanka will fail to create a sustainable, and competitive tourism and hospitality workforce without increased participation from women and young people. Encouraging substantially higher participation from these two demographics, however, is a challenge. Youth have little exposure to the sector; and women, who currently represent less than 10 percent of the workforce, face substantial obstacles to become equitable participants in the sector. Young women are reluctant to pursue a career in tourism and hospitality because of a myriad of factors including cultural perceptions, parental influence, and limitations such as transport and affordable childcare.

The success of any efforts to increase the number and competitiveness of Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality workforce depends on a combination of practical training programs, viable career pathways, public-private partnerships, and significant outreach to encourage new and different groups to embark on a career in tourism and hospitality. The initiatives selected to be included in this roadmap address these areas.

### A world class workforce for a world class destination...

Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality industry is in the right place at the right time. It's well situated to take advantage of the dramatic growth in tourism and hospitality from Asian markets; it has a wealth of natural and cultural assets that are well aligned with the fastest growth segments in the industry (e.g. health and wellness, sustainable, cultural and nature-based travel); its people are hospitable; and the climate is suitable for year-round travel. Industry analyses all highlight the fact that the 21st century traveler is seeking authentic experiences rather than just beautiful sights or sandy beaches. The takeaway for the TSC, therefore, is that our workforce is the most important asset we have—because quality visitor experiences come from interacting with local people. **Our vision is one where every traveler returns home admiring not just the amazing things they have seen, but the experiences they had with Sri Lankans who were friendly, knowledgeable, and responsive to their needs**—whether they met them in a bustling market in Colombo, hiking up on a mountain or surfing the waves in the East coast.

## Where do we start?

Taking the first step seems to be the biggest challenge in implementing a strategy when there is so much the industry could be doing. The advisors of this roadmap, therefore, spent time with an array of stakeholders, including young people considering a career in tourism and hospitality, to better understand what is most important, implementable and to prioritize initiatives that the private sector could gain traction on. These fell broadly into three activity streams:





## Training - The Core Activity Stream

The only way to achieve even the most conservative employment projections is to train as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. The priority training areas include :

1. **Update the curricula** and teaching methods used to prepare trainees for the most in-demand jobs in 7 existing and 6 new courses
2. Ensure that **at least 60% of courses are short-duration** courses or modularized, multi-stage courses suitable for small operators and will be a more flexible training/career path for tourism and hospitality employees
3. **Train at least 100 school teachers** to provide tourism and hospitality training in secondary schools
4. **Support comprehensive train-the-trainer programs** on new curricula for at least 200 instructors in vocational training institutes



## Support Activity Stream

Several other critical activities are required to support the creation of a competitive workforce including:

1. **High quality research** that identifies the current employment situation, emerging career pathways and best-practices
2. Generate work environments aligned with **global trends**
3. Create a **youth and women friendly work environment**



## Outreach Activity Stream

The tourism and hospitality sector is struggling to find qualified people while at the same time youth unemployment is over 20% (youth between the ages 20-24) and women's participation in the workforce is only 36%. If the industry is to grow, it will need to attract more young women and men. So how will the industry fill all these new courses it proposes to create? To encourage youth, women, and others to consider a career in tourism and hospitality, it will be necessary to design and manage an effective outreach campaign to increase awareness and build support for the creation of a more competitive, people-driven industry. This will include:

1. A nation-wide tourism awareness campaign that reaches **4 million young people and their families** in every district which would significantly improve the perception toward a career in tourism and hospitality
2. Outreach and engagement from **25 private sector role models**- 40% of them women—who can talk with youth and work with teachers to explain what a career in tourism and hospitality looks like
3. **Supporting the initiatives of the tourism sector curriculum** which the Ministry of Education is including in their 13-years guaranteed education program



# Priority Initiatives

The competitiveness of Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality workforce depends on a combination of practical training programs, viable career pathways, public-private partnerships, and significant outreach to encourage diverse groups to embark on a career in tourism and hospitality.

The following initiatives were selected by the TSC under four broad activity areas. These initiatives are based on extensive interviews conducted by the tourism and hospitality consultants and weighting the selection based on the following questions:

How essential are the initiatives to the future competitiveness of the industry?

Is the private sector able to effect real change?

How high is the commitment of the private sector to meaningfully support the initiative/s?

How quickly can impacts be achieved?

Will it result in sustainable, long-term, positive outcomes?

*A timeline for implementation is included after each section.*

## I.

### Enhance the Quality of Hospitality and Tourism Training

It is felt that the current curricula being delivered in most state and private sector training institutes are outdated and may not be in line with current needs and new developments in the tourism and hospitality industry (e.g. sustainability, higher quality experiential interactions, inclusiveness and adaptation have become essential requirements of a responsible tourism product).

There is also a need to expand the breadth and number of courses offered—for instance, the availability of high quality training for tour guides is one area that is underserved and quite complex given the number of specialties within it. It is also evident that with the demand for more experiential tourism offerings, there are new fields emerging which require a new set of skills and training, such as naturalists and rangers. This will open out a new 'catchment' of young people, with different educational backgrounds, who otherwise would not consider tourism and hospitality as a career.

#### 1) Keep trainings focused, practical and relevant

The TSC, with the help of its HR subcommittee, TVEC, and SLITHM will review and update 7 curricula and course materials for the main, entry-level positions in the industry, focusing on the shorter duration courses that can move youth more quickly into productive

employment (ideally within six months or less). The main training institutes will be encouraged to standardize their curricula where feasible, introduce teaching styles that are more interactive and student-centered, integrate essential soft skills and tilt the balance from classroom-based to practical and on-the-job training. The private sector will support this important shift by increasing the intake of apprentices and on-the-job trainees.

#### 2) Teach new skills

The TSC will prioritize the development of 6 new short courses or modules (three months or less) for specialized careers in tourism and hospitality. The committee, thanks to the HR Advisory Subcommittee recommendations have assessed a long list of potential courses and prioritized those we believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next few years. The selection is designed to fill gaps in the current offering, as well as help ensure that Sri Lanka catches up to current trends in the global marketplace. The prioritization is based on five criteria:

- 1) The potential impact of the training on the reputation and competitiveness of the industry as a whole;
- 2) The impact on employment;
- 3) The degree to which it supports the Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020;

- 4) The impact on regional tourism destination management; and
- 5) The opportunity to increase women and youth participation in tourism and hospitality.

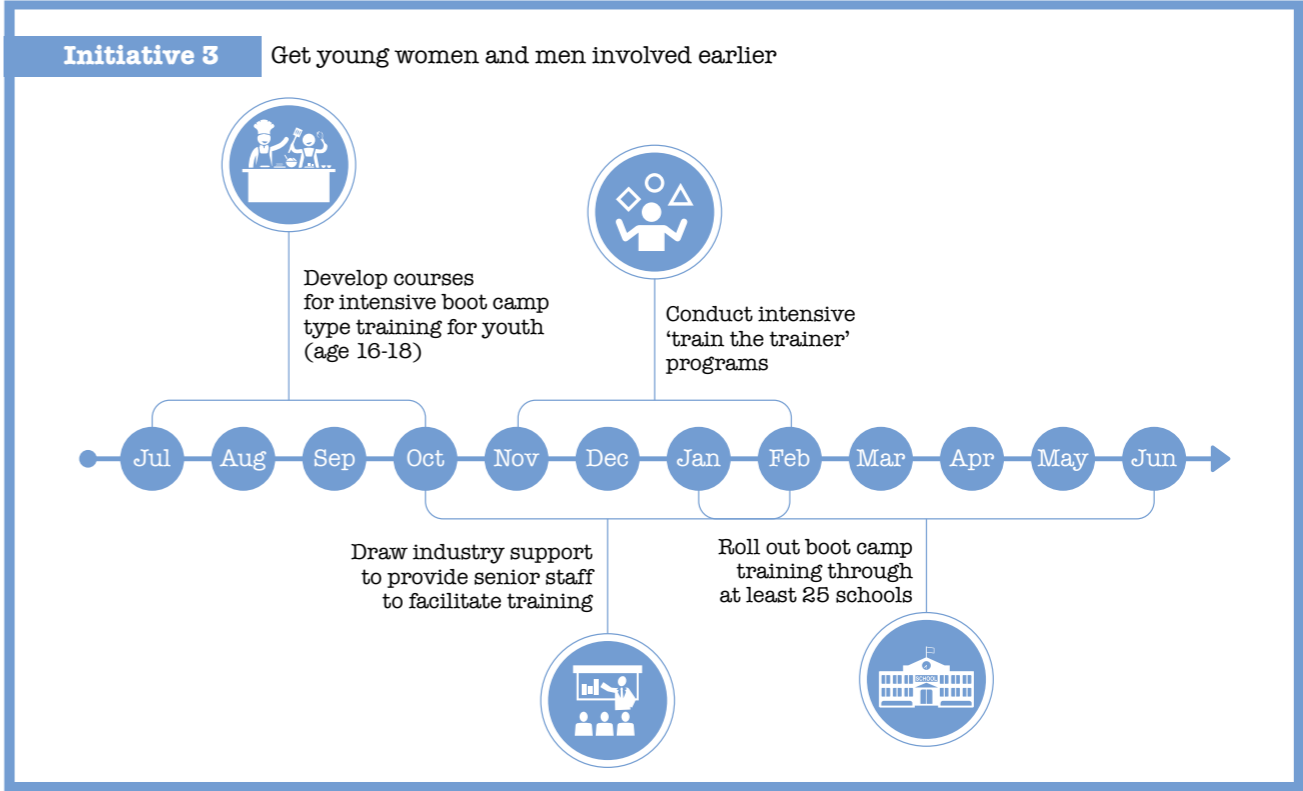
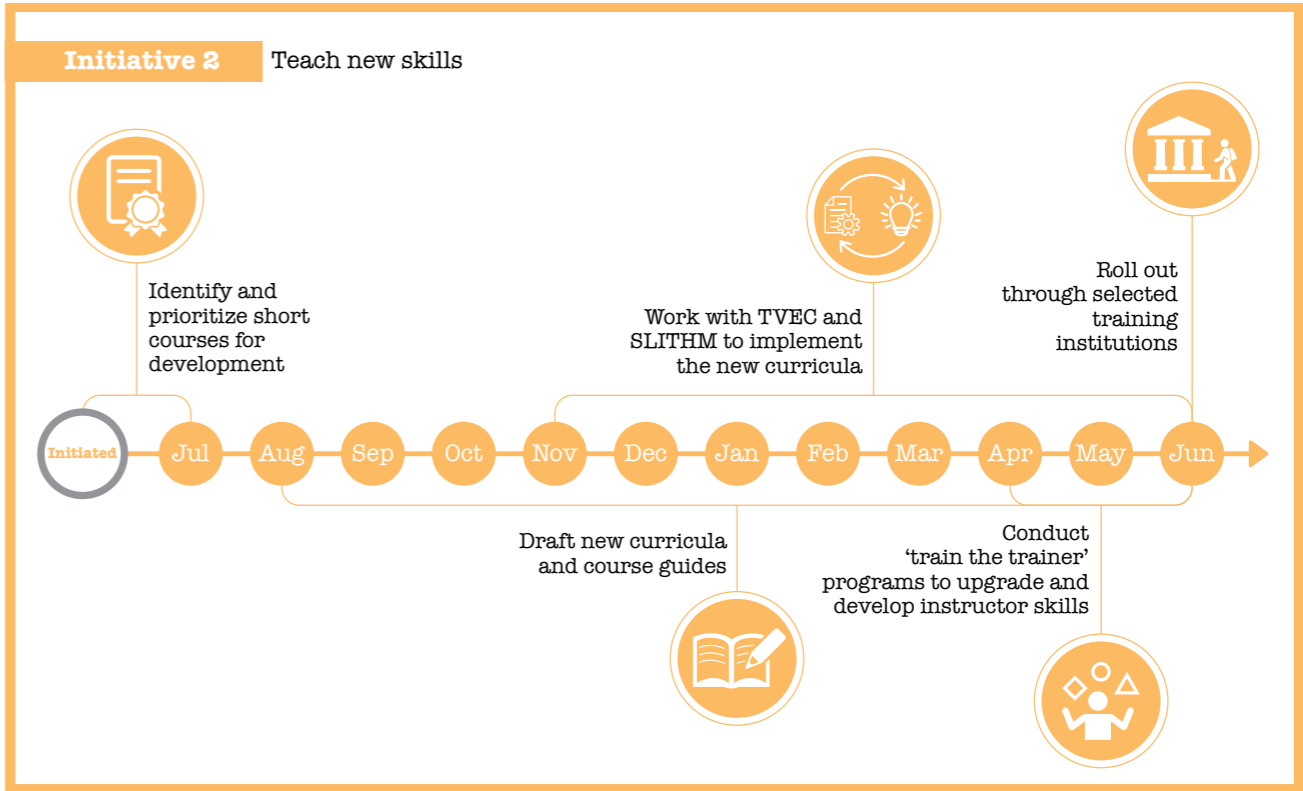
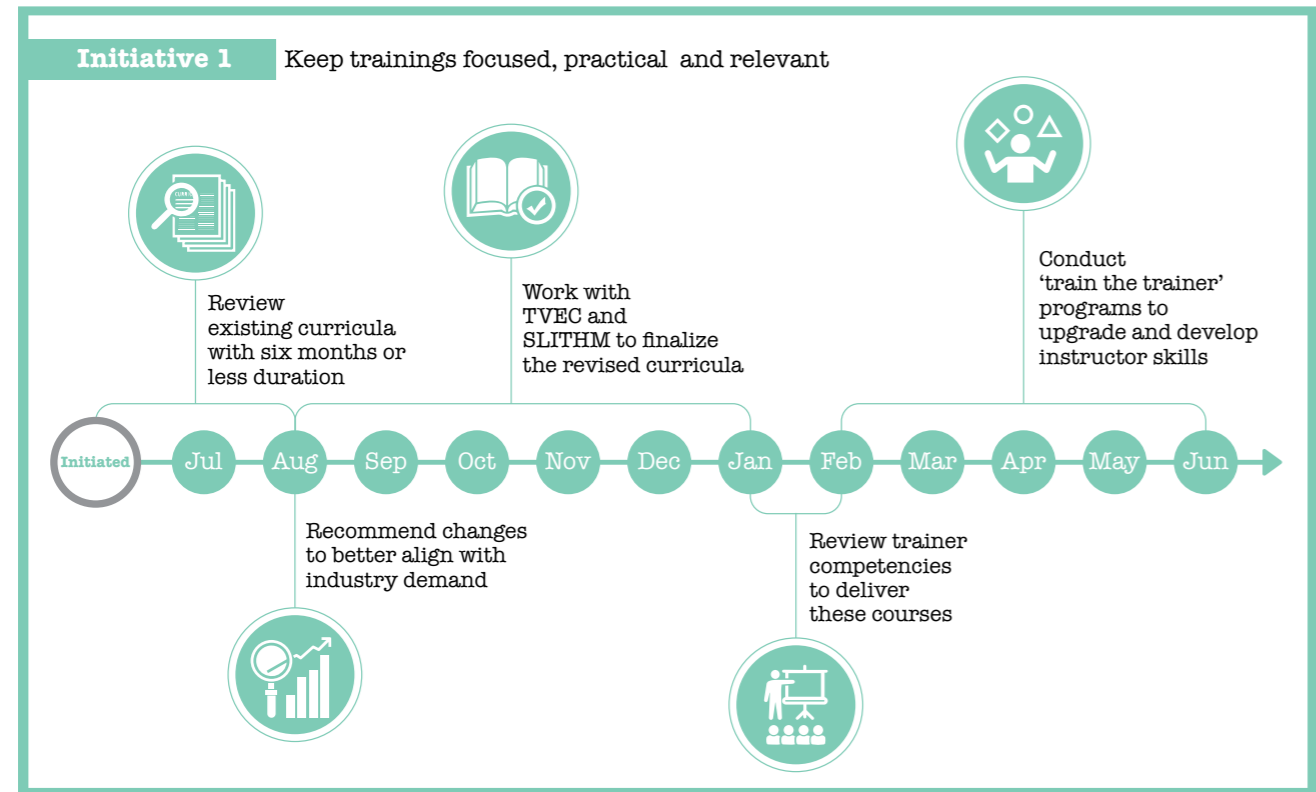
The TSC in association with the HR Advisory Subcommittee and consultants have already prioritized 6 new courses for development in new fields emerging in the tourism and hospitality sector. This will require a whole new set of skills and training, such as e-marketing, wellness services, and specialized guides. Consequently, it is anticipated that a broader base of young people, with different educational backgrounds, can be attracted to careers in tourism and hospitality.

**3) Get young women and men involved earlier**

The TSC will develop new, 4-6 weeks intensive internship opportunities for youth who are not moving on to university. Internships will increase their marketable skills, but

more than that, it generates a sense of responsibility, builds confidence and self-reliance, enhances communications skills and exposes them to the wealth of exciting career opportunities emerging in Sri Lanka. The members of the committee pledge to offer such internships in their organizations to interested youth and will work with the industry as a whole to encourage them to follow suit.

Sri Lanka will fail to create a sustainable, competitive tourism and hospitality workforce without increased participation from well-trained women and young people.





# II.

## Outreach: To Youth, their Parents, and Communities

Interest in a career in tourism and hospitality is gradually growing as tourists embrace Sri Lanka's wealth of natural beauty, history, and culture. Communities are starting to see the potential benefits for their residents and impact on their local economies. This process, however, is slow and cannot keep up with the rapid pace of growth or Sri Lanka's aspirations to continually add value to its tourism offering. Outreach and awareness building is essential to better inform youth, particularly women, their parents and their communities, about the long-term development and career prospects in tourism and hospitality, and to change entrenched cultural perceptions about the industry.

### 1) Demonstrate the benefits and long-term prospects of a career in tourism and hospitality

Produce short video clips, testimonials, and informative materials and use trainers, role models and ambassadors from the private sector to distribute the message that a career in tourism and hospitality is not only an exciting and highly varied career, but a great way to develop life skills and languages. The members of the committee will encourage their best employees to go out and talk to young people in schools and communities about what a modern career in tourism and hospitality is really like. The committee hopes

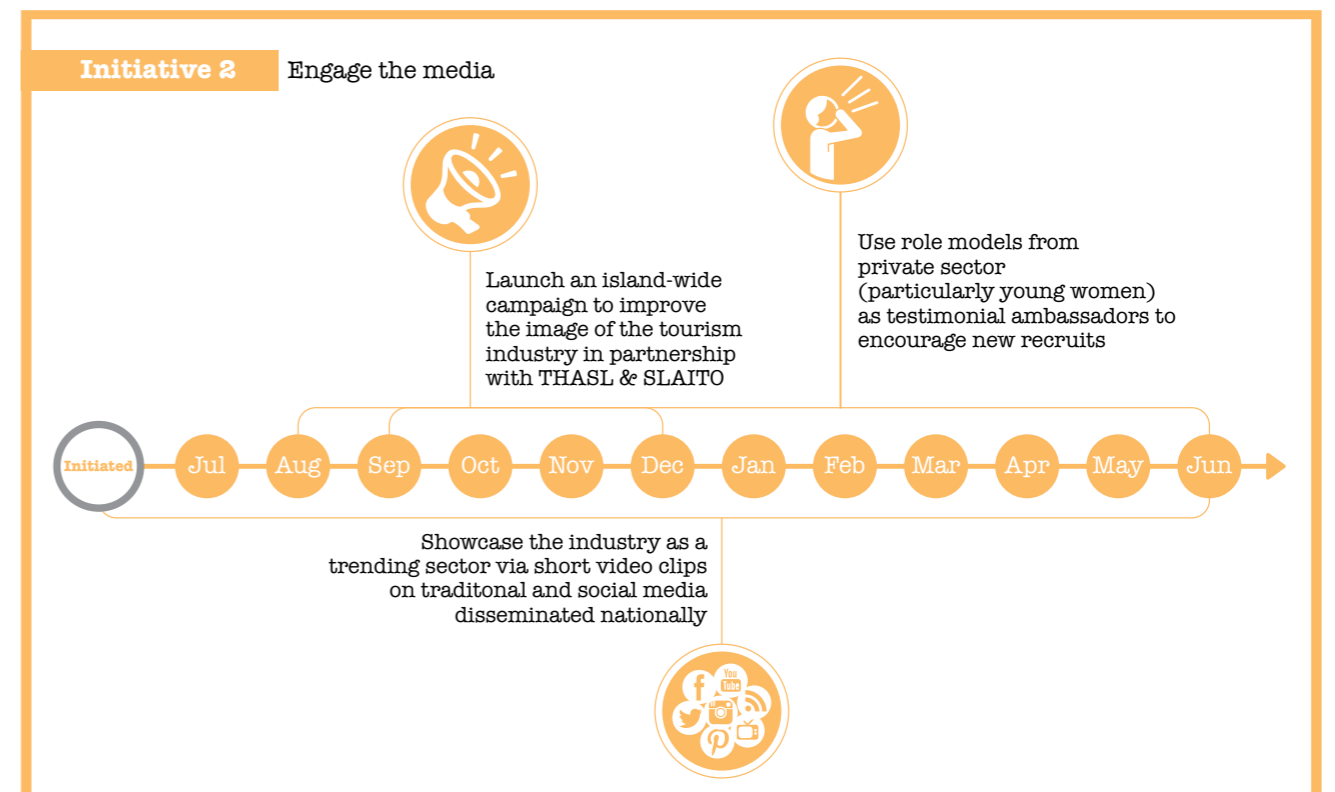
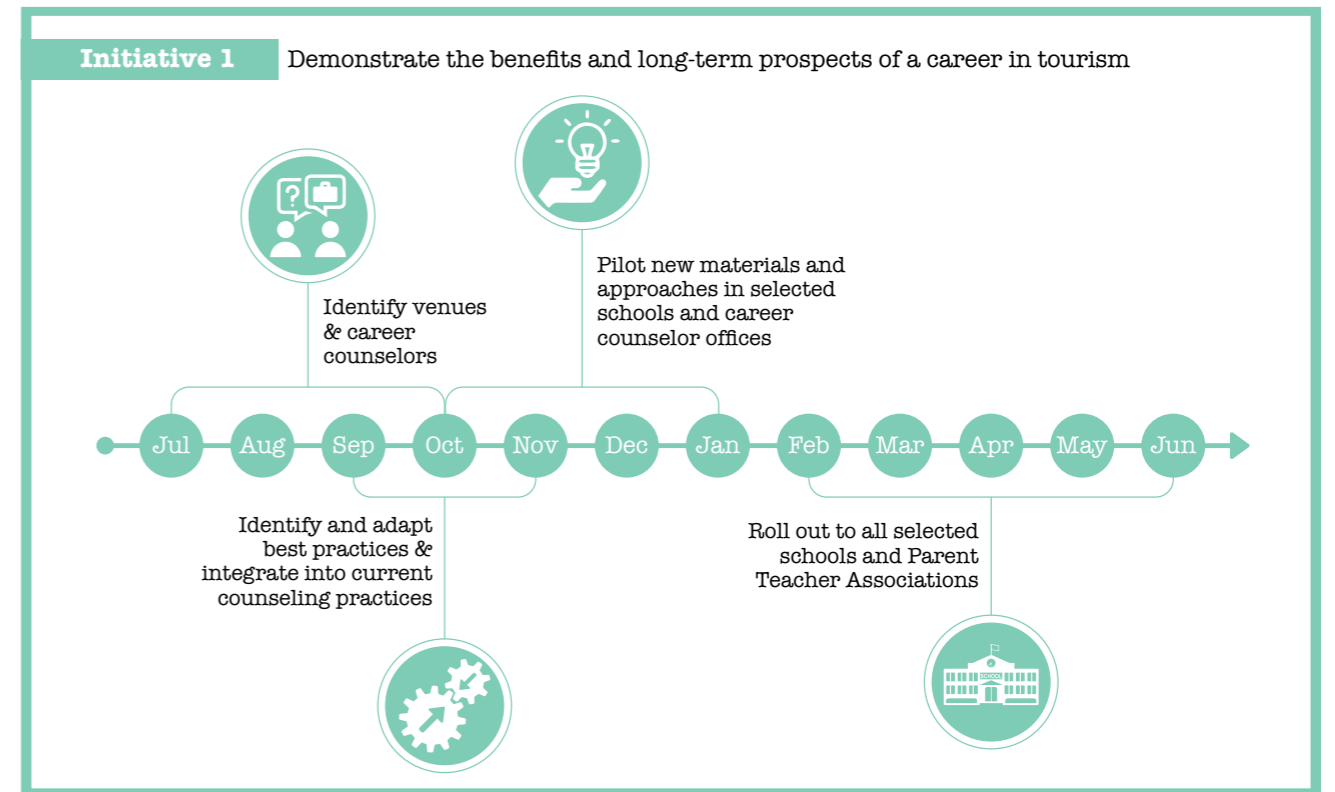
to encourage the rest of the industry to do the same. We will disseminate this message to parents and families through local community groups and leaders.

### 2) Engage the media

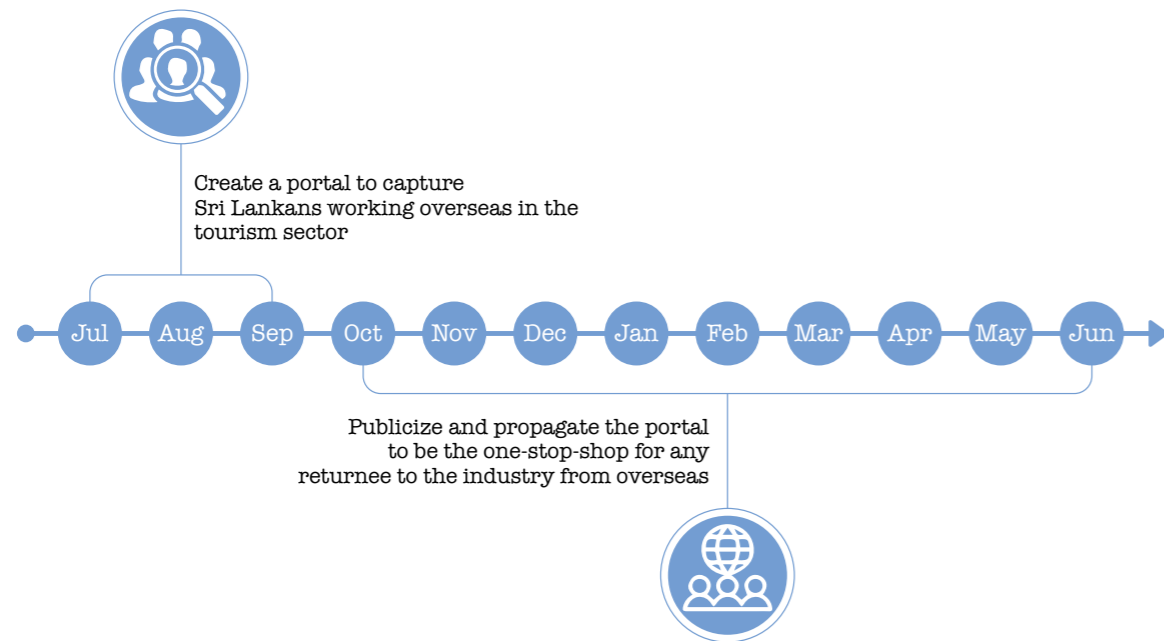
The TSC will coordinate with the major tourism and hospitality institutions (e.g. SLTDA, THASL, Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO)) to develop an island-wide outreach campaign in all media channels, with special focus on social media, to change perceptions of young people, educators, and parents regarding the industry. As this is a broad, promotional effort, government and donor support will greatly enhance this initiative of the private sector.

### 3) Entice skilled talent back to Sri Lanka

Create a database of Sri Lankans working overseas in the tourism and hospitality sector and establish a recruitment portal to reach out to them. The portal would include job listings and information about the development of the tourism and hospitality industry in Sri Lanka with an emphasis on encouraging them to return. Not only would these returnees bring a wealth of skills and knowledge back to the country, they will be encouraged to mentor and train young women and men entering the industry.



**Initiative 3** Entice skilled talent back to Sri Lanka



# III.

## Make Informed Decisions

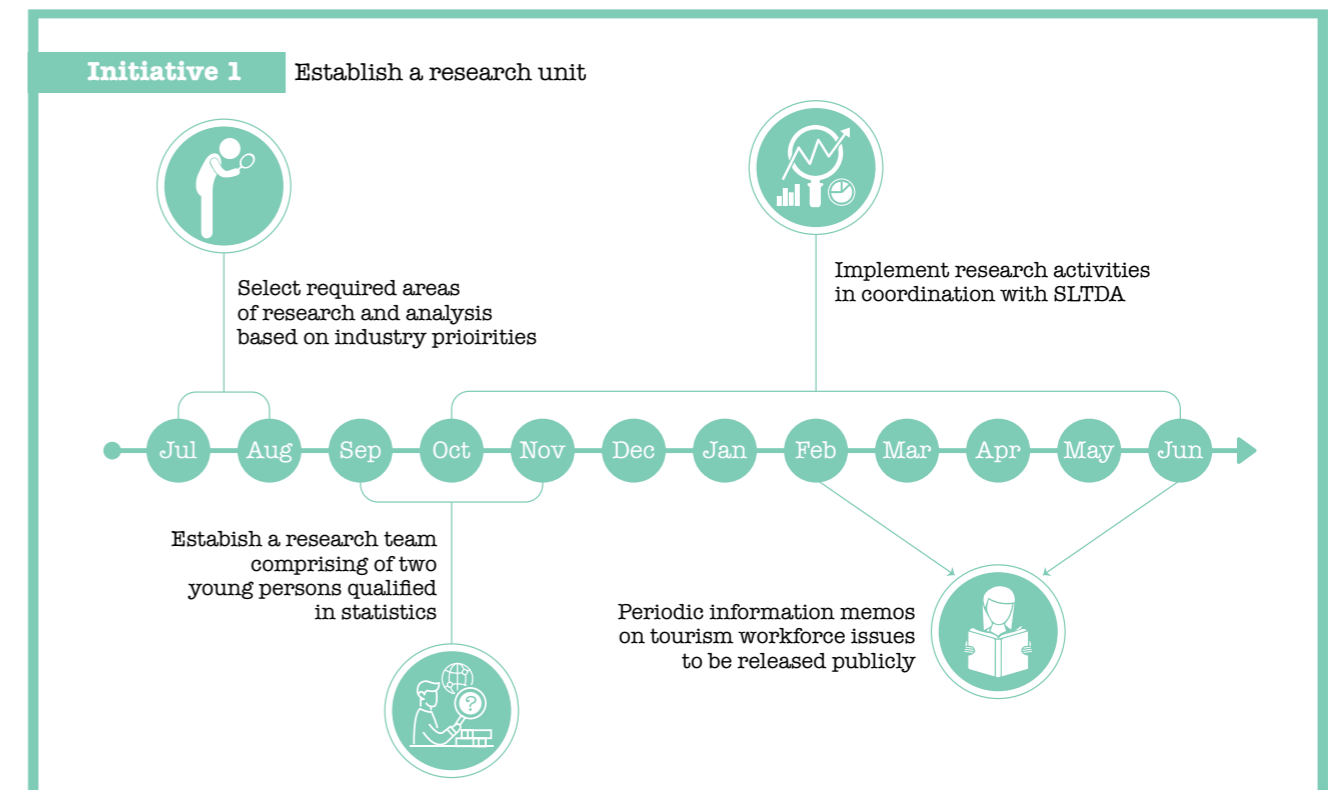
Given the speed at which the industry is changing, there is a pressing need for better, more timely information to enable the industry to make informed decisions about potential investments and policies that could improve workforce satisfaction and competitiveness. While SLTDA provides some valuable tourism related statistics, the committee hopes to work closely with the SLTDA to provide improved data collection and dissemination.

timely and useful strategic information to the industry and the training institutes. The unit will design and implement high quality analyses to help Sri Lankan tourism and hospitality organizations of all sizes and in all locations to make better decisions. The required areas of research and analysis need to be highlighted by the industry.

All information will be made publicly available and will be designed to be updated on a regular basis so that the industry can benefit from a better understanding of trends and trajectories related to the tourism and hospitality sector.

**1) Establish a small research unit**

Establish a small research unit under the TSC to work closely with the SLTDA to provide



# IV.

## Lead by Example

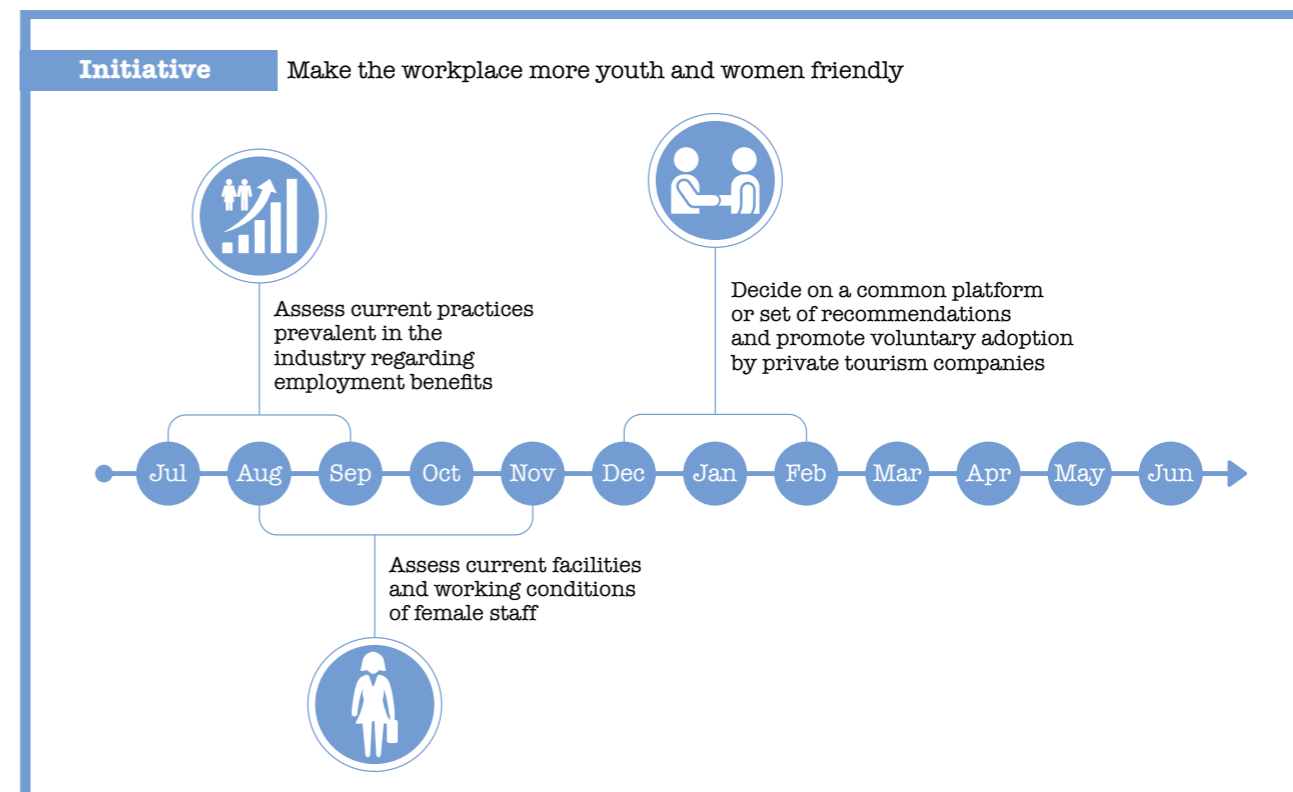
Companies and institutions are often quick to criticize others without looking inward to evaluate if their own actions could contribute to solving some of the broader challenges facing the industry—particularly the low number of women in the workforce. The private sector members of the TSC are not oblivious to the fact that “we too can do a better job of improving conditions in our own workplaces, which can encourage the participation of more young women and men. This could include changes to how we recruit, train, manage, compensate, and promote promising youth and women in the workplace. Offering opportunities for continuous learning, guaranteeing a better long-term career path, a living wage, and, where possible, addressing some of the pressing issues like childcare, staff housing, and safe transport will help attract and retain talented young women and men.

We will re-assess the working conditions, facilities, training and mentorship we provide and work with our peers in the industry to collectively adopt new policies and co-invest where there is an opportunity

to share costs in developing and retaining good people. Most new hires who leave the industry do so in their first six months, so proper mentoring, follow-up training and support during these months of employment is critical—particularly for youth who may be working away from their homes”.

### **Make the workplace more youth and women friendly**

The TSC will evaluate current practices prevalent in the industry for a clearer understanding of their potential impact and costs related to the recruitment and retention of women and youth. This will include but is not limited to an assessment of employee benefits, working hours, pay, workplace attitudes towards women and the potential impact of the availability of safe, affordable transport, housing, and child care. The TSC’s private sector members will start to implement the recommendations from the findings and encourage their peers to follow suit.



# Conclusion

This roadmap focuses on critical, practical measures that the industry will drive in their own interest, to avert a looming crisis. It does not profess to be a master plan for tourism.

The members of the TSC believe it is important to highlight the risks of over-tourism and the need to focus on value-addition. As an industry, the focus needs to shift from the total number of tourists to the value each tourist brings to Sri Lanka. This will make the growth rate in staff more manageable but makes it even more important that everyone who works in tourism and hospitality is well trained to provide an exceptional experience for travelers. The quality of staff needs to be improved significantly in terms of aptitude and skills—especially in new categories of employment.

The values driving the TSC's decisions are grounded in the pride of the Sri Lankan people, its nature, culture, social values and are based on the firm belief that these treasures must be shared with travelers in a sustainable manner. These riches must contribute to expanding the wealth of the Sri Lankan people, businesses and communities – it must not be depleted for short-term gain but preserved for future generations. **These key values are manifested in the guiding principles of the TSC and are based on our values and ideals and respond to the vision of establishing a world class workforce for a world class destination.**

## Guiding Principles

**Identity, diversity and cultural ties:** Any interventions will enhance and retain the authentic uniqueness of Sri Lanka, the diversity of its people, and their historic and cultural ties to local and international communities.

**Sustainability:** All training programs and resulting tourism activities will be based on protecting the natural, cultural, social and heritage values of the nation through proper resource management, minimizing environmental degradation and committing to reduce the impact on the climate.

**Integration for quality of life and local sourcing:** Tourism and hospitality training and services are an integral aspect of the socioeconomic structure of the community. Tourism services should be integrated into the life and economy of the local communities where they are based.

**Quality of service:** The quality of a traveler's experience is inseparable from the quality of service they receive and their interactions with the Sri Lankan people. Training programs will emphasize attentive, knowledgeable service that meets the quality standards of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

**Voluntary participation:** While everyone may be invited to share values, follow principles, and communicate interests and plans, no one should be forced to take part in organized action involuntarily. We, however, encourage all tourism and hospitality stakeholders to join us in this endeavor and champion the spirit of collaboration to realize these outcomes.

**DEVELOPED BY**

The Private Sector Tourism Skills Committee

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**SUPPORTED BY**



A Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA) project  
implemented by the  
International Executive Service Corps (IESC)

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