



Research on Career Planning of Hotel Management Students under the Background of Cultural-Tourism Integration — A Case Study of Lijiang

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Received

2026-09-22

Accepted

2026-10-23

Published

2026-10-28

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65192/df03k506>

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Abstract

With the continuous advancement of Lijiang's initiative to build a world-famous cultural tourism city, the cultural and tourism industry has become a pillar of the local economy. Accommodation formats including hotels, homestays and hillside hotels are thriving. While the industry's demand for hotel management professionals keeps expanding, it is confronted with practical dilemmas such as talent outflow, students' insufficient professional identity and diversified job competition. Based on official statistical data of Lijiang's cultural-tourism industry and the status quo of talent training for hotel management majors in local universities, this paper analyzes the employment market demand of Lijiang's hotel industry and the employment advantages of hotel management majors. It sorts out practical problems existing in students' career planning and puts forward optimization countermeasures from the perspectives of students' self-improvement, local career path selection and collaborative education among universities, enterprises and the government. This paper provides references for hotel-management majors in Lijiang to formulate career plans and realize high-quality employment.

Keywords

Hotel management; Career planning; Cultural-tourism integration; Lijiang; Homestay talents

1. Introduction

Relying on the World Cultural Heritage — the Old Town of Lijiang, the cultural-tourism industry serves as the core pillar of Lijiang's economy. According to publicly available official statistics, Lijiang received 80.64 million tourists and achieved a total tourism revenue of 138.523 billion yuan in 2024 (Yunnan Provincial Department of Transport, 2025). The tertiary industry accounted for 54.2% of the city's GDP. The cultural-tourism industry directly drove 200,000 jobs and indirectly boosted 400,000 jobs (Xinhua, 2025). The region is home to international brand hotels, star-rated hotels, hillside hotels and characteristic residential inns, forming diverse and abundant accommodation formats.

The Hotel Management major of Lijiang Culture and Tourism College is a national first-class undergraduate major construction point (Lijiang Culture and Tourism College, n.d.). It adopts the "3+0.5+0.5" talent training model and has established school-enterprise cooperation with leading local cultural-tourism enterprises such as InterContinental Lijiang Ancient Town

Resort. Every year, it supplies a large number of hotel-management graduates to local industries. Nevertheless, many students are confused about career choices: whether to work in high-end chain hotels or engage in emerging posts such as homestay housekeeper and hillside hotel operation. Faced with the obvious peak and off-peak seasons of the tourism industry and the heavy workload of entry-level positions, they hesitate over whether to stay and develop in Lijiang. Many students blindly adopt generic templates for career planning without considering the characteristics of Lijiang's local industry, which leads to vague career goals, frequent job-hopping and a high industry turnover rate.

Career planning is critical for hotel management graduates. Scientific career planning helps students identify their own strengths and weaknesses, match with job requirements of the industry and realize personal value (Lu & Adler, 2009). Combined with Lijiang's official industry data, this paper studies the dilemmas and solutions of career planning for hotel management students targeting local hotels and new homestay formats.

2. Research Background and Research Foundation

2.1 Development Overview of Lijiang's Hotel and Cultural-Tourism Industry

Lijiang's accommodation industry has formed a coordinated development pattern of high-end resort hotels, star-rated hotels, hillside hotels and boutique homestays. There are 5,399 standardized homestays and inns (Yunnan Provincial Department of Justice, 2026), directly creating more than 17,000 jobs, and the total number of cultural-tourism practitioners in the city exceeds 300,000. The industry is faced with a structural talent contradiction: there is a huge shortage of front-line service staff in peak tourist seasons, while the supply of ordinary service personnel is sufficient. Compound talents proficient in homestay management and operation, resort hotel middle-level administration, and digital cultural-tourism operation are in acute shortage.

To make up for the shortage of cultural-tourism talents, Lijiang Municipal Government launched the Lijiang Talent Support Program, setting up special policies for cultural-tourism talents. One-time subsidies up to 100,000 yuan are offered for high-end homestay management talents, and the construction of the professional evaluation system for homestay housekeepers is promoted (Organization Department of the CPC Lijiang Municipal Committee, 2024), which fully reflects the urgent demand of the local industry for high-quality hotel management talents. Meanwhile, the industry also has prominent inherent drawbacks. Lijiang is characterized by striking seasonal differences in tourism. Some homestays are trapped in homogeneous competition. The workload of entry-level positions fluctuates greatly with seasons, and the overall staff turnover rate remains high, placing high psychological demands on practitioners.

2.2 Domestic and Foreign Research Status

Research on hospitality careers has examined students' expectations and perceptions of industry employment (Goh & Lee, 2018; Richardson, 2010). Studies in China also connect career barriers and professional identity with students' career intentions (Liu et al., 2023; Lu & Adler, 2009). Internship research emphasizes programme quality, language and communication skills, and internship satisfaction as influences on career preparation and intentions (Chen et al., 2023; Collins & Pearlman, 2023; Zikrah et al., 2025). Entrepreneurship offers another relevant career direction for hospitality and tourism students (Boz, 2026). At the industry level, working conditions and seasonal employee leadership remain relevant to workforce retention (Aktürk & Yeşiltaş, 2024; Baum, 2015).

Local accounts of Lijiang's tourism development emphasize accommodation upgrading and homestay governance (Lijiang Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, 2025). Few studies specifically focus on the career planning of hotel-management students from local universities. Most researches fail to incorporate emerging local formats such as homestay housekeeper and hillside hotel operation into the career planning framework, which constitutes the research entry point of this paper.

2.3 Research Purpose and Significance

Theoretically, this paper enriches the research on career planning of hotel management students in tourist cities under cultural-tourism integration, and incorporates Lijiang's local emerging formats into the analytical system of career planning. Practically, it helps local hotel management students objectively understand the current situation of Lijiang's hotel and homestay industry and identify their career orientation. In addition, it provides practical references for universities' career guidance, cultural-tourism enterprises' recruitment and government's cultivation of cultural-tourism talents.

2.4 Research Ideas

This paper firstly sorts out publicly available official data of Lijiang's cultural-tourism accommodation industry and summarizes the characteristics of industry talent demand. Secondly, it analyzes the employment advantages of hotel management students in Lijiang. Thirdly, it explores various practical problems existing in students' career planning practice. Finally, feasible countermeasures and suggestions are put forward from four dimensions: students, universities, enterprises and the government.

3. Analysis of Employment Demand of Hotel Industry in Lijiang

3.1 Overall Talent Demand Characteristics of Lijiang's Accommodation Industry

Lijiang's accommodation industry is a typical labor-intensive industry. Its positions can be categorized into traditional hotel positions and emerging local-format positions. Traditional positions include front desk, housekeeping, catering, human resources and marketing. Local emerging positions mainly refer to homestay housekeeper, homestay operation, experience planning for hillside hotels, cultural-tourism new media operation and brand management of inns. National occupational standards provide a basis for identifying the skills required of homestay housekeepers (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security & Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024).

Affected by tourism seasonality, the shortage of front-line positions surges in peak seasons. However, what the industry lacks in the long run is not basic service staff, but compound talents who are familiar with local Naxi culture, equipped with professional hotel management capabilities and master new media operation and customer maintenance skills. Lijiang Human Resources and Social Security Bureau holds special job fairs for cultural-tourism talents every year. Many enterprises indicate that graduates with a systematic professional training background are more favored.

There are obvious hierarchies in job entry thresholds. Basic positions such as room cleaners and entry-level front desk staff have low access thresholds. By contrast, positions such as homestay principal, hotel department manager and hillside-hotel project manager impose strict requirements on professional knowledge, practical experience, cultural understanding and comprehensive management capabilities, which are not low-threshold jobs.

3.2 Employment Motivation and Job Demands of Hotel Management Students

The career demands of hotel management students in local universities in Lijiang can be roughly divided into three categories. The first group chooses to stay in Lijiang, aiming for international brand hotels or boutique homestays, attracted by the local living environment and opportunities in the cultural-tourism industry. The second group goes to chain hotel groups in Kunming, Sanya, Shanghai and other cities for career development. The third group takes cross-industry jobs, shifting to cultural-tourism planning, new media, administration and other positions.

Students generally face career-selection contradictions. While optimistic about the development prospect of Lijiang's cultural-tourism industry, they worry about the heavy workload at entry-level positions and income volatility caused by tourism seasons. Besides, they suffer from social stereotypes against the service industry. Many students have a vague understanding of emerging positions such as homestay housekeepers, unclear promotion paths and lack complete and clear career plans.

4. Employment Advantages of Hotel Management Students in Lijiang

4.1 Systematic Professional Knowledge Reserve

Taking the Hotel Management major of Lijiang Culture and Tourism College as an example, students systematically study courses including Introduction to Hotel Management, Hotel Service Etiquette, Hotel English, Housekeeping Management, Catering Operation and Digital Hotel Operation. They are familiar with the standardized operation process of hotels. Compared with non-professional job seekers, hotel management students can quickly adapt to the standardized management system of hotels and get familiar with front desk, catering and housekeeping work, possessing a theoretical foundation for promotion to management positions.

4.2 Practical Resource Advantages in Local Cultural-Tourism Scenarios

Local universities have built training bases with many high-end hotels and boutique homestays in Lijiang. Students can participate in internships in local enterprises during their school years, get familiar with the operation mode of resort hotels and homestays, and understand how Naxi ethnic culture is integrated into accommodation products. Compared with graduates seeking jobs from other regions, students from local colleges are familiar with the local environment and better adapt to resort accommodation positions in Lijiang, which serves as an important competitive advantage.

4.3 Comprehensive Competencies Adaptable to the Development of Homestays and Boutique Hotels

Boutique homestays and resort hotels in Lijiang provide more than basic reception services. They require practitioners to organize intangible cultural heritage experience activities, plan tourist activities and receive foreign visitors. Hotel management students receive systematic etiquette training. Some have artistic talents and strong communication and coordination skills. They are competent in homestay housekeeper reception, customer maintenance and activity planning, forming differentiated advantages in the competition of the local boutique accommodation industry.

5. Existing Problems in Career Planning of Hotel Management Students in Lijiang

5.1 Prominent Competitive Pressure from Cross-major Job Seekers

Lijiang's hotel and homestay industry is inclusive with diverse sources of job applicants. Hotel management students face competition not only from peers of the same major, but also from graduates of other majors.

First, fine-arts majors. Many fine-arts students possess strengths in photography and literary creation and have advantages in homestay activity planning and travel-photography supporting positions. Nevertheless, hotel management students master standardized operation and hotel oral English, making them more competitive in international resort hotels and standardized management positions.

Second, foreign language majors. Foreign language students have outstanding language competence and an edge in receiving inbound tourists, yet they lack practical training in hotel operation and are unfamiliar with the logic of homestay operation, so they are less competitive for comprehensive management positions than hotel management students. In addition, a large number of graduates majoring in tourism management, journalism and communication flood into new media positions of homestays, further intensifying job competition.

5.2 Insufficient Professional Identity towards Local Hotel and Homestay Industry

Social stereotypes still exist against the accommodation service industry. Some students simply equate homestay housekeepers with room cleaners. Some yearn for Lijiang's cultural-tourism industry but resist training at entry-level positions, and develop an unrealistic expectation: they aim for high-level positions yet are unwilling to take entry-level training posts. They frequently change jobs during internships and employment with low professional loyalty. Although Lijiang has carried out the professional evaluation system for homestay housekeepers, many students on campus know little about it and fail to incorporate emerging local positions into their own career planning.

5.3 Misunderstanding of "Low Threshold" Industry and Misaligned Perception of Job Hierarchies

Misled by public opinions, many students hold the one-sided belief that the hotel and homestay industry requires no professional capabilities. In fact, recruitment standards for back-office functional positions and management positions in Lijiang's international resort hotels and boutique homestays are rigorous, requiring professional background, practical experience, as well as knowledge of ethnic culture and new media skills. Students tend to confuse the recruitment criteria of entry-level positions and management positions. They either underestimate the required abilities or despise front-line experience, leading to a distorted judgment of job hierarchies.

5.4 Cognitive Bias on Work Intensity and Salary Structure of the Industry

Lijiang's accommodation industry has striking seasonal differences. Overtime work and heavy workload are common in peak seasons. Many students only notice the basic base salary of entry-level positions during school, without understanding the real local salary structure: most enterprises provide free accommodation and meals to reduce living costs. High-end hotels and boutique homestays offer performance bonuses and peak-season subsidies, and

excellent homestay housekeepers can also obtain performance rewards from customer maintenance. Due to insufficient understanding of working hours and salary during college, students suffer a great psychological gap after employment and choose to resign directly, interrupting their career development.

5.5 Conflicts between Traditional Career Concepts and the Particularity of Cultural-Tourism Industry

Traditional social perceptions treat civil-service and public-institution positions as stable and decent careers, while hotel and homestay jobs are viewed as unstable. The objectively high turnover rate of Lijiang's homestay industry further deepens the concerns of students and their parents. Many parents prefer their children to obtain public-sector jobs and do not support them to engage in hotel or homestay related work, bringing external pressure on students' career choices.

5.6 Lack of Local Emerging Formats in Career Planning

Most of the current career planning teaching in universities revolves around traditional star hotel positions, rarely introducing local characteristic positions such as homestay housekeeper, hillside hotel operation and cultural-tourism new media operation. Students lack information about these emerging local positions, and their career planning is limited to traditional positions like front desk manager and catering manager, failing to fully grasp the development opportunities of local industries.

6. Countermeasures to Improve Career Planning of Hotel Management Students

6.1 At Student Level

6.1.1 Improve comprehensive capabilities in an all-round way

First, foster healthy professional psychology. View Lijiang's hotel and homestay industry objectively, rationally treat training at entry-level positions, and accept the fluctuating work rhythm brought by the peak and off-peak seasons of tourism. Take the initiative to relieve emotions when encountering setbacks at work, abandon the misconception that the "service industry is inferior" and build a positive professional mentality.

Second, polish professional image and comprehensive literacy. Pay attention to a decent professional image and master business service etiquette proficiently (Kaufman & Ricci, 2014). Combined with the needs of Lijiang's industry, take the initiative to learn Naxi ethnic culture and reception foreign languages to adapt to reception work in resort hotels and homestays.

Third, consolidate professional foundation and expand cross-disciplinary skills. Master the core courses of hotel management, take the initiative to learn short-video editing and community operation, keep track of industry policies released by Lijiang Bureau of Culture and Tourism, and get familiar with the development trend of the hillside hotel and homestay industry.

Fourth, establish correct values for career selection. Break the inherent stereotype that only public-sector jobs are good jobs, face up to the social value of the cultural-tourism service industry, and treat emerging occupations such as homestay housekeepers and resort hotel management rationally.

6.1.2 Conduct scientific career planning based on Lijiang local market

Firstly, objectively evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses. Recognize personal advantages and drawbacks, and select suitable positions according to willingness to adapt to the seasonal work rhythm. Those good at cultural planning can target homestay housekeeper and hillside hotel experience planning positions; students with outstanding foreign language competence can aim at foreign-related positions in international brand resort hotels.

Secondly, match job directions according to personality. Outgoing students with good communication skills are suitable for front desk, homestay housekeeper and sales positions; careful and introverted students fit housekeeping management, human resources and back-office operation positions. Do not confine yourself to traditional hotel positions, and actively take local emerging formats as alternative career options.

Thirdly, expand diverse career paths based on interests. Hotel management students do not have to stick to traditional hotel positions. They can try paths such as homestay principal, cultural-tourism activity planning and homestay new media operation in combination with personal interests, making full use of cultural-tourism resources in Lijiang.

Lastly, establish a long-term development perspective. Management positions in hotels and homestays all require front-line entry-level accumulation. Students should adopt a long-term vision and understand that front-line training is a phased process. After accumulating practical experience, cultural understanding and operational capabilities, they can be promoted to supervisor or homestay principal. Take the initiative to learn local policies such as the Lijiang Talent Support Program and the professional evaluation system for homestay housekeepers to plan long-term career paths.

6.2 At University Level: Optimize Vocational Education and Employment Guidance by Connecting with Lijiang Industries

First, update the teaching content of career planning and add teaching modules of local emerging formats including homestay housekeeper and hillside hotel operation. Invite practitioners from local hotels and homestays to enter classrooms to introduce the real job content, salary level and promotion channels of local positions.

Second, deepen industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation with high-end hotels and homestay clusters in Lijiang. Encourage students to choose high-quality homestays for internships instead of only large chain hotels. Rely on cultural-tourism talent job fairs, build communication channels between enterprises and students and push local employment information.

Third, carry out targeted employment psychological counseling. Launch special counseling for problems such as the weak professional identity of students and conflicts of family career concepts to ease career anxiety.

6.3 At Enterprise and Government Level: Improve the Cultivation and Guarantee Mechanism of Cultural-Tourism Talents

For enterprises: local hotel and homestay enterprises shall improve internal talent training systems, build clear promotion channels from entry-level to management positions, optimize salary subsidies for peak and off-peak seasons, improve staff accommodation and meal benefits, and strengthen the promotion of positions such as homestay housekeepers to help graduates clarify career growth paths.

For the government: implement the Lijiang Talent Support Program and the professional evaluation system for homestay housekeepers, and carry out policy publicity on talent subsidies and professional evaluation for college students. Organize special training for cultural-tourism talents, promote the joint training of local hotel management talents by universities, industry associations and enterprises, reduce talent outflow and attract more graduates to engage in the cultural-tourism industry in Lijiang.

7. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of Lijiang building a world-famous cultural tourism city, the booming hotel, homestay and hillside hotel industries bring abundant employment opportunities as well as many practical challenges for hotel management students. Hotel management students possess advantages such as systematic professional knowledge and local practical training resources, yet they have shortcomings in cross-major competition, recognition of professional identity, understanding of emerging formats, and prediction of salary and working hours. Their career planning tends to be divorced from the reality of Lijiang's local industries.

Effective career planning requires multi-party collaborative efforts. Students should improve themselves comprehensively in psychological literacy, professional skills and values, base themselves on Lijiang's local industries and incorporate emerging formats such as homestay housekeeper and hillside hotel operation into career options. Universities shall optimize teaching content and deepen local industry-education integration. Enterprises shall improve internal promotion and welfare guarantees. The government shall implement cultural-tourism talent policies and perfect talent evaluation and incentive mechanisms. Joint efforts of all parties help hotel management students in Lijiang identify their career orientation, fulfill personal career aspirations, and deliver high-quality professionals for the high-quality development of Lijiang's cultural-tourism industry.

This study has limitations. As a single-city case study, its findings may not be fully generalizable to other tourist destinations with different industrial structures. Moreover, the analysis relies primarily on official statistics and secondary sources rather than a large-scale first-hand survey, so the sample basis for the observed student perceptions remains limited. Future research could employ questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews with a larger sample to strengthen the empirical evidence.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Funding

There is no funding to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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