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Short term courses, long term gains

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INDIAN IT services are well known across the world and eagerly lapped up by clients abroad. But why is it that IT training services are not as widely recognised? This despite the fact that IT training services in India are priced at around US\$100 per day compared to \$500 to \$1,000 per day in the US and Europe. An informed research on the internet indicates that a European customer can save at least 50 per cent cost by choosing India for a two-week course.

The opportunity has not been lost on the Indian IT training industry and quite a few of them have targeted the global market. However, success has been elusive. Essentially, it has been a problem of plenty. Unlike other services that came offshore, domestic opportunity is itself quite huge for IT training. Why put so much time and energy in living up to the expectations of a hard-to-please European

customer when so many domestic students are knocking on your door?

There are three non-negotiable components of a successful education tourism business unit---world-class instructors, world-class infrastructure and "never-out-of-sight" end-to-end solution (from the time they arrive in India to the time they fly back). The last service is easier said than done. A training company does not have experience of managing all travel related services. It has been the nemesis of many an IT training company aspiring for a global opportunity. The global customer is not willing to compromise on quality or convenience. An "education tourist" is travelling on an education agenda. He does not appreciate surprises associated with travelling.

There are other reasons as well why education tourism has not yet taken off in a big way. Incredible India is not incredibly safe, which forces many clients to stay away.



Our visa regime is another dampener. Uncertainty, delays and paperwork in obtaining Indian visas makes the economic advantage seem much less attractive. Education tourism has seen an upswing in Thailand and Dubai primarily because of their visa-on-arrival facility that we in India do

not provide.

Lastly there is no organisation like NASSCOM to help the fledgling industry develop. A "National Association for Education Tourism (NAET)" can encourage more IT training companies to seriously target the education tourism opportunity, create a platform to share best

practices and collectively market the industry worldwide.

Business opportunities are not limited to Europe and the US alone. IT professionals from smaller countries like the Maldives, Mauritius, Brunei and Liberia regularly travel to Europe and US for training and certification. They could just as easily be directed towards India. Studies show that an estimated 60 per cent customers choose education tourism because required training is not available in their country, 30 per cent travel because they save money and less than 10 per cent travel with a tourist agenda. The opportunity, therefore, is huge. IT training and certification is a \$20 billion industry. Of course, all of it cannot be offshored to India, but a target of 5 per cent is not overly ambitious.

Education Tourism's advantages are immense for the Indian economy. Apart from valuable foreign exchange, education tourism broadens the export foot print as

well--- education tourism units can be established in smaller towns such as Shimla, Dehradun and Panjim, bringing employment opportunities for IT professionals. It can also help create inroads in non-traditional export markets in Africa, Central Asia, Pacific Ocean. What's more, every successful education tourism unit will go all out to ensure that the tourist has a pleasant experience, thus helping build the "Incredible India" word-of-mouth in the truest sense.

Between 400 AD and 1,100 AD, Nalanda University attracted scholars and students to India from all over the world. It housed over 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers in an era when India was considered the Mecca of higher education. If properly tapped, IT education tourism has the potential to put the country back on the world education map.

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