

Expectations versus Reality in International Cruise-Line Employment: A Comparative Study of Hospitality Management Students' Career Expectations and Cruise-Line Employees' Work Experiences

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Article History:

Date Received: June 11, 2026

Date Revised: July 22, 2026

Date Accepted: July 24, 2026

Date Published: July 30, 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21660465>

Document ID: 2026IJROMS0197

Recommended Citation:

Jumawan, J. M. F. (2026). *Expectations versus Reality in International Cruise-Line Employment: A Comparative Study of Hospitality Management Students' Career Expectations and Cruise-Line Employees' Work Experiences*. *International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(6), 363–376.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21660465>

Abstract. This study examined the gap between the career expectations of Hospitality Management students and the work experiences of cruise-line employees in international cruise-line employment. Specifically, it compared students' expectations with employees' actual workplace experiences across key employment dimensions, including salary and benefits, working environment, career growth, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological competence. A quantitative descriptive-comparative research design was employed involving 60 participants, comprising 30 Hospitality Management students and 30 cruise-line employees with international work experience. Data were collected using a validated survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that Hospitality Management students generally held high expectations regarding career opportunities, cultural exposure, and technological competence in the cruise-line industry. In contrast, cruise-line employees reported moderate work experiences, particularly highlighting challenges related to work-life balance, extended working hours, and prolonged separation from family. Significant differences were found between students' expectations and employees' work experiences in terms of salary and benefits, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological competence. However, no significant differences were observed in the working environment and career growth, suggesting that students' expectations in these areas were generally consistent with employees' actual experiences. The study highlights the gap between expectations and the realities of international cruise-line employment and underscores the need for stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and the cruise industry. Enhancing experiential learning opportunities and providing realistic career orientation programs may better prepare Hospitality Management students for the demands and challenges of careers in the international cruise-line sector.

Keywords: Career Expectations; Cruise-Line Employees; International Cruise-line Employment; Hospitality Management Students; Work Experiences

Introduction

The global cruise-line industry has become one of the fastest growing sectors in international tourism and hospitality (Dowling, 2018; Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2013). International cruise companies provide diverse employment opportunities for hospitality graduates in areas such as food and beverage services, housekeeping, guest relations, entertainment, and tourism operations (Testa, 2014). Owing to competitive salaries, opportunities for international travel, and career advancement, many Hospitality Management students aspire to pursue careers aboard international cruise ships after graduation (Papathanassis, 2017).

In the Philippines, Hospitality Management programs continue to produce graduates equipped with service-oriented competencies aligned with the needs of the global cruise industry (CHED, 2017; Tesone & Ricci, 2005). Higher education institutions actively encourage students to explore careers in cruise tourism because of the sustained international demand for qualified hospitality professionals (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2019). However, despite the perceived benefits of cruise-line employment, studies have documented that employees frequently encounter challenges such as cultural adjustment, extended working hours, homesickness, physically demanding workloads, and strict organizational policies (Klein, 2011; Chin, 2008).

Hospitality Management students often develop their expectations of cruise-line employment through social media, recruitment campaigns, academic orientations, and the experiences shared by former or current cruise-line employees. While these sources provide valuable insights, they may also create idealized perceptions that do not fully reflect the realities of working in the international cruise industry. A mismatch between expectations and actual employment conditions may influence graduates' career preparedness, job satisfaction, retention, and long-term career development.

Although previous studies have examined career aspirations in hospitality education and working conditions in the cruise-line industry separately, limited research has directly compared the career expectations of Hospitality Management students with the actual work experiences of international cruise-line employees using a quantitative comparative approach. This gap restricts the ability of educational institutions and industry stakeholders to determine whether graduates are adequately prepared for the realities of international cruise-line employment and whether current academic programs effectively align with industry demands.

Addressing this gap is important because understanding the differences between students' expectations and employees' actual work experiences can provide evidence for improving curriculum design, career guidance, experiential learning opportunities, and industry-academe partnerships. Such insights can help develop graduates who possess realistic career expectations and are better prepared for the operational, cultural, and professional demands of international cruise-line employment.

Accordingly, this study compares the career expectations of Hospitality Management students with the work experiences of international cruise-line employees across key employment dimensions, including salary and benefits, working environment, career growth, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological competence. The findings are expected to contribute to hospitality education, maritime hospitality research, and workforce development by providing empirical evidence to strengthen the alignment between academic preparation and the realities of employment in the international cruise-line industry.

Research Questions

This study aims to assess the perceptions of Hospitality Management students in Zamboanga City and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers toward employment in international cruise lines. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the expectations of Hospitality Management students regarding employment in international cruise lines in terms of:
 - 1.1 Salary and benefits;
 - 1.2 Working environment;
 - 1.3 Career growth opportunities;
 - 1.4 Work-life balance;
 - 1.5 Cultural exposure; and
 - 1.6 Technological and operational systems knowledge?
2. What are the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers regarding:
 - 2.1 Salary and benefits;
 - 2.2 Working conditions;
 - 2.3 Career advancement;
 - 2.4 Work-life balance;
 - 2.5 Cultural adaptation; and
 - 2.6 Technological and operational systems knowledge?
3. Is there a significant difference between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers?
4. Is there a significant difference between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers when respondents are grouped according to their demographic profiles?
5. Based on the findings, what developmental plan can be developed to prepare Hospitality Management students?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on the comparison of the perceptions of Hospitality Management students in Zamboanga City with the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers in terms of salary and benefits, working conditions, career opportunities, work-life balance, cultural exposure and technological and operational systems knowledge. In addition, respondents of the study included selected Hospitality Management students from colleges and universities in Zamboanga City and multinational cruise-line workers currently or previously employed in international cruise companies. The study is limited only to respondents

within the selected locale and does not include other tourism-related industries such as hotels, airlines, or resorts.

Literature Review

Salary and benefits

Cruise ship employment is characterized by a variable salary structure influenced by job role, experience, and contract arrangements. Workers typically earn between \$1,200 and \$3,500 per month, with additional income from tips and bonuses, especially in service-related roles (Thakkar, 2023). Furthermore, cruise ship workers often receive non-monetary benefits such as free accommodation, meals, and transportation, which significantly enhance their total earnings despite relatively modest base salaries (MadAboutCruises, 2026). Similarly, Conner (2018) emphasized that the cruise industry offers a unique compensation structure combining wages and onboard benefits, making it attractive to workers from developing countries despite long working hours and demanding conditions. Cruise line companies provide comprehensive compensation packages that include health benefits, retirement plans, training opportunities, travel perks, and recognition programs (Disney Cruise Line, 2026). In addition, employees are provided with free lodging, food, and international travel opportunities, which increase the overall value of employment beyond monetary pay (CruiseSolutioner, 2025).

Working environment

Cruise tourism management literature emphasizes that cruise ships present a unique working environment where employees both live and work in confined spaces. This arrangement creates a highly structured and disciplined organizational culture that can be challenging for employees. While the industry offers travel opportunities and financial benefits, it also requires high levels of adaptability and resilience. These realities may not always align with the idealized expectations of aspiring hospitality professionals (Papathanassis, 2017). The global cruise industry has been recognized as one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism, providing extensive employment opportunities for hospitality graduates. Cruise ships operate as floating resorts that require a wide range of service-oriented professionals, including those in food services, housekeeping, and guest relations. Despite these opportunities, working conditions are often characterized by long hours, strict organizational structures, and continuous service demands. These characteristics illustrate the complexity of cruise-line employment and highlight potential differences between expectations and actual work realities (Dowling, 2018). In the field of hospitality management, employees are expected to meet high service standards while managing customer satisfaction in a fast-paced environment. The nature of hospitality work involves emotional labor, flexibility, and strong interpersonal skills. Although students often perceive hospitality careers as attractive and rewarding, the actual work environment can be demanding and physically exhausting. This emphasizes the existence of a gap between perceived and actual job conditions (Barrows et al., 2012). Global tourism reports highlight that the expansion of international tourism has increased employment opportunities in sectors such as cruise tourism. This growth attracts hospitality students who view the industry as a pathway to global mobility and financial stability. However, the rapid growth of the industry also leads to increased competition and demanding work conditions. These factors can influence how students perceive the reality of employment in the sector (UNWTO, 2019). The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 provides international standards for working conditions in maritime industries, including cruise ships. It outlines regulations concerning working hours, accommodations, health protection, and employee welfare. While these standards aim to protect workers, challenges in implementation and compliance still exist. As a result, actual working conditions may vary, contributing to differences between expected and experienced work environments (International Labour Organization, 2013).

Career growth opportunities

Human resource management in hospitality highlights the importance of preparing employees for the realities of the industry through training and professional development. Employers emphasize adaptability, teamwork, and the ability to work in multicultural environments. However, new entrants often struggle with the transition from academic preparation to real-life working conditions. This suggests that students may not fully understand the demands of the workplace prior to employment (Testa & Sipe, 2012). Hospitality management literature further explains that the industry is service-driven and requires continuous interaction with guests, often under pressure. Employees are expected to maintain professionalism regardless of challenging situations, which can lead to stress and burnout. While students anticipate career growth and fulfillment, the reality involves dealing with customer complaints, irregular schedules, and high performance expectations. These factors contribute to the discrepancy between expectations and realities in hospitality careers (Walker, 2017).

Work-life balance

Hospitality management literature also explains that employees are required to perform emotional labor, which involves managing personal feelings to meet organizational expectations. This requirement can lead to job stress and emotional exhaustion if not properly managed. While students may focus on the glamorous aspects of hospitality work, the emotional demands of the job are often underestimated. This further supports the concept of expectation versus reality in hospitality and cruise-line employment (Lashley, 2008). Work-life balance is a critical concern in cruise ship employment due to the unique working conditions onboard, where employees must adapt to long working hours, limited personal time, and separation from family. Evangelista (2021) explained that cruise workers often experience work-life conflict, particularly when job demands interfere with family responsibilities and personal needs. Despite this, company support systems and benefits can help employees manage their work-life balance. The nature of work onboard cruise ships significantly affects employees' well-being and work-life balance, as the environment combines both workplace and living space. Lütkenhaus (2020) emphasized that factors such as heavy workload, stress, and restricted leisure opportunities influence the ability of crew members to maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. The continuous work cycle and limited time off often contribute to fatigue and imbalance. In the hospitality field, work-life balance is also a major factor shaping career expectations of students. Moretić (2021) identified that students place high importance on achieving a balance between work and personal life, as it affects job satisfaction and long-term career commitment. However, Dighliya (2023) noted that students are aware that the hospitality industry is often associated with long working hours and poor work-life balance, which may influence their willingness to pursue careers in sectors such as cruise-line employment.

Cultural exposure

Tourism literature emphasizes that the industry's growth has led to an increased demand for skilled hospitality workers worldwide. This demand encourages students to pursue hospitality-related courses with the expectation of global employment opportunities. However, the competitive and demanding nature of the industry means that not all expectations are met. Understanding these conditions is essential for students preparing for international careers (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). The cruise industry is recognized for its highly multicultural workforce, where employees from different nationalities, cultures, and backgrounds work together in a confined environment. Gebauer (2020) described cruise ships as spaces of intense cultural interaction, where employees continuously engage with diverse cultural perspectives, fostering intercultural learning and adaptability. Similarly, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA, 2024) emphasized that cruise ships employ crew members from over 75 nationalities, providing a unique opportunity for cultural exchange and global exposure, which enhances teamwork and service delivery in an international setting. Cruise ship employment offers continuous cross-cultural interaction as workers live and work with multinational teams. Alibec and Apostol-Mateş (2023) explained that cross-cultural communication is essential in such environments, enabling employees to share knowledge, negotiate differences, and overcome cultural barriers while working onboard. In addition, Susaeta et al. (2024) noted that the cruise industry is among the sectors with the highest workforce diversity, where multicultural environments can enhance creativity, innovation, and knowledge exchange when effectively managed. In the hospitality and tourism field, cultural exposure forms an essential part of students' career preparation and expectations. Boger, Bradford, and Lin (2025) emphasized that hospitality education aims to develop intercultural competence, preparing students to function effectively in a global and culturally diverse industry. Likewise, Cha et al. (2025) highlighted that openness to cultural diversity enhances students' engagement, learning, and social development, as interactions with diverse groups allow them to gain broader perspectives and improve interpersonal skills.

Technological and operational systems knowledge

The reviewed literature consistently suggests that while hospitality and cruise-line careers are perceived as attractive due to financial, professional, and global opportunities, the actual work environment involves significant physical, emotional, and social demands. These differences highlight the existence of a gap between students' expectations (IV) and actual workplace experiences (DV), which form the foundation of the present study. Technological knowledge is essential in cruise-line employment due to the increasing integration of digital systems, automation, and smart technologies in ship operations. Buhalis, Papathanassis, and Vafeidou (2022) explained that cruise ships operate within a "smart cruise ecosystem" where interconnected technologies such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and automation systems are used to manage operations, enhance efficiency, and improve guest services. Similarly, González-Santiago et al. (2024) described that cruise tourism services increasingly rely on robotics, service automation, digital platforms, and virtual technologies, requiring employees to possess technological expertise to function

effectively in a modern cruise environment. Cruise ship operations involve complex and integrated operational systems, requiring comprehensive knowledge of logistics, customer service systems, safety procedures, and onboard management processes. Gibson and Parkman (2019) emphasized that cruise operations include multiple coordinated systems such as customer service platforms, food and beverage operations, facility management, and safety systems, all of which require skilled personnel with operational knowledge. Moreover, Arrichiello and Gualeni (2019) highlighted that cruise ships are highly complex technological systems, where systems engineering and digital models are used to manage design, production, and operational processes efficiently, reinforcing the need for structured technical and operational knowledge among personnel. In the hospitality industry, technological and system-related skills are considered essential competencies for future professionals. Quinn (2012) emphasized that technology, systems, and information management skills are critical requirements for hospitality graduates, as modern industry operations rely heavily on digital tools and information systems. Likewise, Ivanov (2020) noted that the rapid adoption of automation technologies, artificial intelligence, and digital systems is transforming hospitality jobs, requiring employees to develop advanced technical skills and adaptability to remain competitive in a technology-driven environment.

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that international cruise-line employment offers numerous professional advantages, including competitive compensation packages, international travel opportunities, multicultural exposure, and career advancement (Conner, 2018; Papathanassis, 2017; Thakkar, 2023). Similarly, studies in hospitality education indicate that Hospitality Management students are generally attracted to careers in the cruise industry because they perceive these opportunities as financially rewarding and professionally fulfilling (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012; Moretić, 2021). These findings suggest a common understanding that the cruise-line industry presents promising career prospects for aspiring hospitality professionals. Despite these similarities, previous studies also reveal that the realities of cruise-line employment differ substantially from students' expectations. While students often anticipate attractive salaries, international travel, and rapid career advancement, research involving cruise-line employees highlights challenges such as long working hours, work-life imbalance, emotional labor, cultural adjustment, physically demanding tasks, and strict organizational policies (Klein, 2011; Lashley, 2008; Lütkenhaus, 2020; Walker, 2017). Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that technological competence and the ability to operate digital systems have become increasingly important as cruise operations adopt smart technologies and automated service platforms (Buhalis et al., 2022; Ivanov, 2020). These findings indicate that employment in international cruise lines requires competencies and resilience that may not be fully reflected in students' initial career expectations. Although previous research has examined individual aspects of cruise-line employment, such as salary and benefits, work-life balance, cultural diversity, career development, and technological competence, most studies have investigated these topics independently or focused exclusively on either students or current employees. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence directly comparing the career expectations of Hospitality Management students with the actual work experiences of international cruise-line employees across multiple employment dimensions using a quantitative comparative approach. This study addresses this gap by comparing Hospitality Management students' career expectations with cruise-line employees' work experiences in terms of salary and benefits, working environment, career growth, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological competence. By examining both groups simultaneously, the study provides empirical evidence that can support curriculum enhancement, strengthen industry-academe collaboration, and better prepare future hospitality graduates for the realities of international cruise-line employment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design to examine and compare the career expectations of Hospitality Management students with the work experiences of cruise-line employees in international cruise-line employment. A descriptive research design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data to describe the characteristics, perceptions, and conditions of a population without manipulating the study variables (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the design was used to describe the respondents' perceptions across key employment dimensions, including salary and benefits, working environment, career growth, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological competence. The comparative component of the research design was employed to determine whether significant differences existed between the two independent groups, the Hospitality Management students and cruise-line employees, with respect to these employment dimensions. Comparing students' career expectations with employees' actual work experiences provides a clearer understanding of the extent to which expectations align with or differ from the realities of international cruise-line employment. This approach is appropriate for

identifying expectation–reality gaps that may influence career preparedness, employment decisions, and curriculum relevance. Consistent with the descriptive-comparative design, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' perceptions and the Mann–Whitney U test to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between the two groups. According to Calderon and Gonzales (2012), descriptive-comparative research is appropriate for examining existing conditions and comparing groups to identify similarities and differences without manipulating variables. Accordingly, this design enabled the researcher to objectively describe and compare the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the work experiences of cruise-line employees in international cruise-line employment.

Sampling Design

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select respondents who possessed relevant knowledge and experience related to the research problem. A total of 60 participants were included in the study, comprising 30 Hospitality Management students and 30 cruise-line employees working in international cruise lines. The respondents were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria to ensure that they could provide relevant and reliable information regarding career expectations and employment in the international cruise-line industry. To achieve balanced representation, the participants were grouped according to sex during data organization and analysis. This enabled the researcher to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents and facilitated meaningful comparisons between the two study groups. The use of purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study required participants who possessed specific educational backgrounds or professional experience relevant to the research objectives.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected colleges and universities in Zamboanga City offering Hospitality Management programs school year 2025-2026. Additional respondents included multinational cruise-line workers accessible through professional networks and online communication platforms.

Research Participants

The respondents of the study consisted of Hospitality Management students enrolled in selected institutions in Zamboanga City and Multinational cruise-line workers currently or previously employed in international cruise companies.

Research Instrument

This study utilized a researcher-made survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument to obtain relevant information regarding the expectations and perceptions of Hospitality Management students, as well as the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers. A researcher-made questionnaire is appropriate when existing standardized instruments do not fully capture the specific variables and context of the study (Calderon & Gonzales, 2012). In this case, the instrument was specifically designed to align with the objectives of the study, particularly the variables of salary and benefits, working environment, career growth opportunities, work-life balance, cultural exposure or adaptation, and technological and operational systems knowledge.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher conducted the data collection process through an online survey using Google Forms. Prior to the administration of the survey, a structured questionnaire was developed and converted into a Google Form to facilitate efficient distribution and data collection. The Google Form link was distributed to the target respondents through the assistance of the researcher's former colleagues in the academe who are currently teaching in various universities in Zamboanga City. These colleagues helped disseminate the survey link to qualified Hospitality Management students. Likewise, the researcher sought the assistance of former colleagues currently employed on international cruise ships to facilitate the distribution of the survey to cruise-line workers who met the criteria for participation in the study. The researcher personally sent the Google Form link to the identified respondents and provided a brief explanation regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the instructions for completing the survey questionnaire. Respondents were given sufficient time to answer the questionnaire, and follow-up reminders were sent to encourage participation and improve the response rate. Upon completion of the data collection period, all responses submitted through Google Forms were automatically recorded and compiled. Then these data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What are the expectations of Hospitality Management students regarding employment in international cruise lines in terms of: Salary and benefits, Working environment, Career growth opportunities, Work-life balance, Cultural exposure, Technological and operational systems knowledge?

Table 1. Summary of Expectations of Hospitality Management Students

	Expectations	N	Mean	SD
Hospitality Management Students	Career Growth Opportunities	33	3.442	1.317
	Cultural Exposure	33	3.552	1.303
	Salary	33	3.341	1.350
	Technological and operational systems knowledge	33	3.467	1.307
	Work Life Balance	33	3.424	1.220
	Working Environment	33	3.442	1.403

Table 1 presents the expectations of Hospitality Management students regarding employment in international cruise lines across six employment dimensions. Overall, the findings indicate that students have high expectations toward careers in the international cruise-line industry, as reflected by the high mean scores across all variables. This suggests that students generally perceive cruise-line employment as offering valuable opportunities for professional development, international exposure, and career advancement. Among the variables, Cultural Exposure obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.552$, $SD = 1.303$), indicating that students strongly expect international cruise-line employment to provide opportunities for interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and developing global competencies. This finding reflects the growing importance of intercultural competence in the hospitality industry, where employees regularly serve guests from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The result supports the work of Earley and Ang (2003), who emphasized that exposure to multicultural environments enhances cultural intelligence, an essential competency for effective performance in global organizations. Likewise, Stahl et al. (2010) reported that culturally diverse workplaces promote learning, innovation, and professional growth by encouraging collaboration among individuals with different perspectives. The finding suggests that educational institutions should continue integrating intercultural learning experiences into Hospitality Management curricula, while cruise-line companies should sustain inclusive workplace practices that prepare employees to work effectively in multicultural environments. High expectations were likewise observed for Technological and Operational Systems Knowledge ($M = 3.467$), Career Growth Opportunities ($M = 3.442$), Working Environment ($M = 3.442$), and Work-Life Balance ($M = 3.424$). These results indicate that students recognize the importance of acquiring technological competencies and expect cruise-line employers to provide supportive work environments and opportunities for professional advancement. The increasing digitalization of hospitality operations has made proficiency in reservation systems, property management systems, and other operational technologies an essential requirement for employment. This finding is consistent with Buhalis and Leung (2018), who argued that digital transformation has significantly reshaped hospitality operations, requiring future professionals to possess advanced technological competencies. Similarly, Richardson (2010) found that hospitality students are motivated not only by employment opportunities but also by career advancement, professional development, and international exposure. These findings highlight the need for higher education institutions to strengthen industry-based learning experiences and integrate contemporary hospitality technologies into their academic programs to enhance graduates' industry readiness. Although Salary recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.341$, $SD = 1.350$), it still falls within the High category, indicating that compensation remains an important expectation among Hospitality Management students. However, compared with other employment dimensions, students appear to place relatively greater value on opportunities for international exposure, technological learning, and career development than on financial rewards alone. This finding suggests that students increasingly view employment in international cruise lines as an investment in long-term career growth rather than solely a source of immediate financial gain. Nevertheless, previous studies consistently recognize competitive compensation as a critical factor influencing employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2022). Likewise, Watkins and Fusch (2022) emphasized that equitable compensation contributes significantly to employee retention and long-term organizational performance. Therefore, while salary may not be the strongest motivating factor among students, maintaining competitive compensation packages remains essential for attracting and retaining qualified hospitality professionals. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Hospitality Management students possess positive and optimistic expectations regarding careers in international cruise-line employment. Their expectations extend beyond financial rewards to include professional development, technological competence, multicultural engagement, and supportive working environments. These findings have important implications

for both hospitality education and the cruise-line industry. Higher education institutions should strengthen curriculum integration of hospitality technologies, industry simulations, experiential learning, and career orientation programs that provide students with realistic insights into cruise-line employment. At the same time, cruise-line companies should continue investing in employee development, technological innovation, multicultural workplace initiatives, and career progression programs to ensure that graduates' expectations are aligned with the realities of employment. Strengthening collaboration between academia and industry will better prepare future Hospitality Management graduates for successful and sustainable careers in the international cruise-line sector.

Research Question 2: What are the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers in terms of: Salary and benefits, Working environment, Career growth opportunities, Work-life balance, Cultural exposure, Technological and operational systems knowledge?

Table 2. Summary of Actual Experiences of Multinational Cruise-line Workers

	Actual Experience	N	Mean	SD
Cruiselines Employees	Career Growth Opportunities	22	3.71	1.161
	Cultural Exposure	22	3.82	1.151
	Salary	22	3.68	1.127
	Technological and operational systems knowledge	22	3.79	1.169
	Work Life Balance	22	3.72	1.119
	Working Environment	22	3.65	0.964

Table 2 presents the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers across six dimensions of employment. Overall, respondents reported a high level of actual experience in all measured aspects, with an overall mean of approximately 3.73, indicating that cruise-line employment provides meaningful professional experiences while also presenting unique workplace demands. Among the six dimensions, Cultural Exposure obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.151$), suggesting that respondents strongly experience interactions with individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds. This finding reflects the inherently multicultural nature of the international cruise industry, where employees collaborate with colleagues and serve guests from different parts of the world. Such exposure fosters intercultural communication skills, cultural intelligence, adaptability, and global awareness, which are considered essential competencies in the hospitality and tourism sector. These findings are consistent with the work of Stahl et al. (2010), who argued that multicultural work environments enhance employee learning, innovation, and cross-cultural collaboration. Likewise, Earley and Ang (2003) emphasized that continuous interaction with culturally diverse individuals develops cultural intelligence, enabling employees to perform more effectively in global organizations. The second highest-rated dimension was Technological and Operational Systems Knowledge ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.169$). This indicates that cruise-line employees gain substantial exposure to modern hospitality technologies, digital reservation systems, automated operational processes, and standardized service procedures. The increasing integration of technology into cruise operations enables employees to develop competencies that are highly valued across the hospitality industry. This finding supports Buhalis and Law (2008), who emphasized that technological innovation has transformed hospitality operations by improving service efficiency and enhancing employee productivity. Consequently, cruise-line employment not only provides practical work experience but also equips employees with technological competencies that improve their employability and career mobility. Work-Life Balance ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.119$) and Career Growth Opportunities ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.161$) also received high ratings, indicating that respondents acknowledge both the opportunities and challenges associated with cruise-line employment. While employees recognize the availability of career advancement through international exposure, training, and promotion opportunities, they likewise experience difficulties in maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life. Long working hours, prolonged contracts, physical demands, and separation from family are common realities in cruise employment. These findings align with Sampson and Ellis (2019), who reported that seafarers frequently experience psychological stress, fatigue, and emotional strain due to extended periods away from home. Similarly, Haar et al. (2014) found that work-life balance significantly influences employee well-being, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Despite these challenges, respondents continue to perceive cruise-line employment as providing worthwhile professional development and long-term career prospects. The dimension Salary obtained a mean of 3.68 ($SD = 1.127$), indicating that respondents generally perceive their compensation positively. Although salary was not the highest-rated factor, employees still considered it a beneficial aspect of cruise-line employment. This finding may suggest that workers recognize the financial advantages associated with international cruise employment while simultaneously considering

the demanding workload and extended working hours required to earn these benefits. Herzberg's (1966) Two-Factor Theory explains that salary functions primarily as a hygiene factor—it reduces dissatisfaction but does not necessarily create long-term motivation. Therefore, while competitive compensation contributes to employee satisfaction, it must be complemented by career development opportunities, recognition, and supportive working conditions to sustain motivation and retention.

Among all dimensions, Working Environment obtained the lowest mean ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.964$), although it still falls within the High descriptive category. This result suggests that respondents generally perceive their working environment positively but recognize opportunities for improvement. Factors such as workload intensity, limited personal space, physically demanding tasks, interpersonal relationships, and occupational health and safety may influence employees' perceptions of their work environment. Cruise operations are characterized by long working hours and high service expectations, making supportive workplace conditions particularly important. Dumitriu et al. (2025) emphasized that a healthy work environment contributes significantly to employee well-being, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Similarly, Roni et al. (2024) reported that improvements in workplace conditions enhance employee engagement, morale, and organizational commitment. The relatively lower rating for this dimension suggests that cruise-line companies should continue investing in employee welfare programs, mental health initiatives, workload management strategies, and supportive leadership practices. The overall mean of 3.73 demonstrates that multinational cruise-line workers experience a generally positive employment environment characterized by professional growth, technological advancement, financial opportunities, and valuable intercultural experiences. At the same time, the findings highlight persistent challenges related to work-life balance and workplace conditions that require continuous organizational attention. These results support Armstrong (2020), who argued that employee satisfaction depends on an appropriate balance between organizational rewards, career opportunities, supportive management, and favorable working conditions. From the perspective of hospitality education, these findings have important implications for curriculum development. Higher education institutions offering Hospitality Management programs should strengthen industry immersion, multicultural competency training, digital hospitality systems instruction, and resilience-building activities that prepare students for the realities of cruise-line employment. Integrating simulation-based learning, shipboard operational systems, intercultural communication, and wellness management into the curriculum can better align students' expectations with actual industry experiences. For industry stakeholders, particularly cruise-line companies, the findings underscore the importance of maintaining employee development programs while simultaneously enhancing welfare initiatives. Organizations should continue investing in leadership development, continuous training, mental health support, work-life balance initiatives, and employee engagement programs. Such efforts may improve job satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and strengthen organizational performance while ensuring that cruise-line employment remains both professionally rewarding and personally sustainable. Overall, the findings demonstrate that multinational cruise-line employment offers substantial opportunities for professional and personal growth through multicultural exposure, technological competence, and career advancement. However, sustaining these positive experiences requires ongoing collaboration between hospitality education institutions and the cruise industry to prepare future professionals and continuously improve employees' working conditions and overall well-being.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers?

Table 3. Expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers

		Statistic	p
Salary	Mann-Whitney U	0	<.001
Working Environment	Mann-Whitney U	360	0.959
Career Growth Opportunities	Mann-Whitney U	336	0.640
Work Life Balance	Mann-Whitney U	129	<.001
Cultural Exposure	Mann-Whitney U	143	<.001
Technological and operational systems knowledge	Mann-Whitney U	217	0.012

Table 3 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test comparing the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) states that there is a significant difference between the two groups. The results reveal that some variables show significant differences, while others do not. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference between expectations and actual experiences, while a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates no significant difference. There is a significant difference between students' expectations and workers' actual experiences regarding salary. This indicates that students' expectations about salary do not match the reality experienced by cruise-line workers. Students may either overestimate or underestimate compensation, leading to unrealistic expectations. According to Mabaso and Dlamini (2022), discrepancies between expected and actual compensation can lead to dissatisfaction when employees enter the workforce. Similarly, Richardson (2010) emphasized that hospitality students often have expectations that differ significantly from real industry conditions, particularly in terms of pay. There is a significant difference between expectations and actual experiences regarding work-life balance. This suggests that students' perceptions of work-life balance are not aligned with the realities of cruise-line employment, which is often associated with long working hours and family separation. According to Haar et al. (2014), work-life balance strongly influences employee satisfaction, and unmet expectations can result in stress and dissatisfaction. Likewise, Sampson and Ellis (2019) reported that maritime workers frequently experience challenges such as fatigue and separation from family, which are often underestimated by outsiders. There is a significant difference between expectations and actual experiences regarding cultural exposure. This indicates that students' expectations of cultural exposure differ from workers' actual experiences. While students may expect purely positive multicultural experiences, employees may encounter both benefits and challenges, such as cultural adjustment and communication barriers. Stahl et al. (2010) found that cultural diversity can enhance learning and innovation but also presents challenges when not properly managed. Similarly, Hofstede (2011) emphasized that cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and adjustment difficulties. There is a significant difference between expectations and actual experiences regarding technological knowledge. This suggests that students' expectations about the use of technology differ from the actual technological demands experienced by workers. Students may either feel underprepared or unaware of the level of technological adaptability required onboard. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), technological developments in the hospitality and tourism industry require employees to continuously adapt to digital systems. Sigala (2018) also noted that gaps between education and industry practices can lead to mismatches in technological competencies. However, there is no significant difference between expectations and actual experiences. This indicates that students' expectations about the working environment are consistent with the realities experienced by cruise-line workers. According to Dumitriu et al. (2025), perceptions of the work environment are generally formed realistically through education and exposure, leading to alignment between expectations and actual conditions. There is no significant difference between expectations and actual experiences regarding career growth. This suggests that students have a realistic understanding of career advancement opportunities in cruise-line employment, and these align with workers' experiences. According to Ladkin (2011), hospitality students often develop practical expectations about career progression based on industry knowledge and training. The findings show that there is a partial significant difference between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers. Significant differences exist in: Salary, Work-life balance, Cultural exposure and Technological knowledge. No significant differences exist in: Working environment and Career growth opportunities. This indicates that while students have accurate expectations regarding working environment and career growth, they have misaligned perceptions in more complex and experience-based aspects such as compensation, work-life balance, cultural interaction, and technological demands. This gap highlights the need for: Stronger industry exposure and immersion programs; Enhanced curriculum alignment with real-world practices and More internships and experiential learning opportunities. As emphasized by Richardson (2010), bridging the gap between expectations and actual industry experiences is essential for preparing students for sustainable careers in hospitality.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers when respondents are grouped according to sex.

Table 4. Expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of multinational cruise-line workers when respondents are grouped according to sex

Sex	Statistic	p
Salary	Mann-Whitney U 253	0.047
Working Environment	Mann-Whitney U 346	0.706
Career Growth Opportunities	Mann-Whitney U 351	0.770
Work Life Balance	Mann-Whitney U 248	0.040
Cultural Exposure	Mann-Whitney U 263	0.072
Technological and operational systems knowledge	Mann-Whitney U 303	0.269

Table 4 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test comparing the expectations and actual experiences of respondents when grouped according to sex (male vs. female). The alternative hypothesis (H_a) states that there is a significant difference between male and female respondents. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference, while a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates no significant difference. There is a significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of salary expectations and actual experiences. This suggests that males and females have different perceptions or experiences regarding compensation in cruise-line employment. Gender differences may influence how salary is valued or perceived, possibly due to disparities in job roles, expectations, or career priorities. According to Blau and Kahn (2017), gender differences in wages and compensation perceptions are common across industries, often influenced by occupational roles and societal expectations. Similarly, Joshi et al. (2015) found that men and women may evaluate compensation differently based on career goals and workplace experiences. There is a significant difference between male and female respondents regarding work-life balance. This indicates that males and females experience or perceive work-life balance differently in cruise-line employment. Female employees may experience greater challenges in balancing work and personal responsibilities, particularly due to traditional family roles and expectations. According to Haar et al. (2014), work-life balance experiences vary significantly across demographic groups, including gender. Additionally, Allen et al. (2014) emphasized that women often face higher work–family conflict, which affects their job satisfaction and well-being. This finding implies that cruise-line companies should consider gender-sensitive policies, such as flexible work arrangements and family support programs. There is no significant difference between male and female respondents. Both groups share similar perceptions and experiences regarding the working environment, suggesting consistency in how workplace conditions are experienced regardless of gender. Research by Dumitriu et al. (2025) indicates that workplace environment factors often affect employees similarly, regardless of gender, when organizational policies are standardized. There is no significant difference between male and female respondents regarding career growth opportunities. This suggests that both male and female respondents perceive similar opportunities for promotion and career development in cruise-line employment. According to Ladkin (2011), career progression in hospitality is often based on experience and performance, which can minimize gender differences in perceptions of advancement. There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of cultural exposure. This indicates that both groups equally experience and perceive cultural exposure in the cruise-line environment. Stahl et al. (2010) noted that multicultural work environments provide similar exposure and learning opportunities to all employees regardless of gender. There is no significant difference between male and female respondents. This suggests that both males and females have similar perceptions and experiences regarding technological skills and operational systems. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), technological competence in hospitality is increasingly standardized, making access and adaptation similar across genders. The findings reveal a partial significant difference between the expectations and actual experiences of respondents when grouped according to sex. Significant differences exist in: Salary and Work-life balance. No significant differences exist in: Working environment; Career growth opportunities; Cultural exposure and Technological knowledge. This indicates that gender influences perceptions mainly in areas related to compensation and personal well-being, while other professional aspects remain consistent across groups. Cruise-line organizations should address gender disparities in salary perceptions and work-life balance experiences. Policies should be developed to ensure fair compensation and better work-life balance support for all employees, especially considering gender-specific needs and the absence of differences in other areas suggests that cruise-line companies maintain relatively equal opportunities and experiences in terms of career growth, environment, and technology. As highlighted by Blau and Kahn (2017), addressing gender differences in workplace experiences is essential for promoting equality and improving organizational performance.

Research Question 5: Based on the findings, what developmental plan can be developed to prepare Hospitality Management students?

Based on the findings, an enhanced preparation program is proposed to address the identified gaps between students' expectations and actual industry realities. While students exhibit high expectations in terms of cultural exposure and career advancement, discrepancies remain in areas such as salary expectations, work-life balance, cultural adaptation, and technological preparedness. Hence, the proposed developmental plan aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively meet the demands of the cruise-line industry. The program is designed to achieve several key objectives, including developing realistic expectations about cruise-line employment, enhancing adaptability to diverse cultural environments, improving technological and operational competencies, fostering resilience and work-life balance strategies, and strengthening professional skills aligned with industry standards. To operationalize these objectives, a comprehensive set of interventions is outlined. Career orientation and expectation-setting activities, such as seminars, industry talks, and alumni sharing sessions, are intended to provide students with realistic insights into employment conditions. Work-life balance and resilience training through stress management workshops, mental health programs, and time management sessions aim to improve students' emotional readiness. Furthermore, cultural competence development is emphasized through intercultural communication workshops, role-playing activities, and language enhancement programs to prepare students for global work environments. Technological skills enhancement is addressed through training on hospitality systems, simulation exercises, and computer literacy programs to ensure operational readiness. Industry immersion is strengthened through on-the-job training, industry visits, and possible shipboard familiarization to provide hands-on experience. In addition, professional skills development initiatives, including leadership training, communication workshops, and career planning sessions, are integrated to enhance employability. Gender sensitivity and inclusivity awareness are also incorporated to promote equitable workplace perspectives. The implementation of the developmental plan requires a collaborative approach involving academic institutions, industry partners, and guidance professionals. These initiatives will be embedded within the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and internship programs to ensure continuous and holistic student development. To monitor effectiveness, the program will utilize pre- and post-assessments, student feedback, internship evaluations, and tracer studies of graduates. Overall, the implementation of this enhanced preparation program is expected to produce graduates who possess realistic career expectations, strong intercultural adaptability, improved technological competence, effective coping mechanisms for workplace challenges, and readiness for global hospitality careers, particularly in the cruise-line industry.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation of respondents were voluntary. Respondents' identities and personal information remained confidential. Respondents may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Hospitality Management students possess strong and positive expectations toward employment in international cruise lines, particularly regarding cultural exposure and career development opportunities. These expectations indicate that students are motivated not only by financial rewards but also by opportunities for professional growth, international experience, and personal development. The study further reveals that multinational cruise-line workers experience a dynamic and rewarding work environment that promotes career advancement, cultural diversity, and the acquisition of technological and operational competencies. However, these positive experiences are accompanied by considerable challenges, particularly in maintaining work-life balance due to long working hours, demanding schedules, and prolonged separation from family. Moreover, significant differences exist between the expectations of Hospitality Management students and the actual experiences of cruise-line workers in the areas of salary, work-life balance, cultural exposure, and technological and operational systems knowledge. These findings indicate that students may not yet have a comprehensive understanding of the realities of cruise-line employment, highlighting the need for greater industry exposure and career preparation before entering the workforce. Finally, the study concludes that sex significantly influences perceptions and experiences related to salary and work-life balance, while no significant differences were observed in the areas of working environment, career growth opportunities, cultural exposure, and technological and operational systems knowledge. This suggests that although certain employment experiences vary by sex, the cruise-line industry generally provides equitable opportunities for professional growth and workplace experiences.

Reccomendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the preparation and experiences of Hospitality Management students pursuing cruise-line careers. Academic institutions are encouraged to strengthen their curricula by integrating industry-oriented learning experiences such as internships, shipboard immersion programs, simulation activities, and seminars led by cruise-line professionals, while also providing comprehensive career orientation programs that present realistic insights into compensation, work demands, technological requirements, cultural adaptation, and work-life balance; moreover, establishing strong partnerships with international cruise-line companies is essential to ensure alignment with current industry standards and workforce needs. Hospitality Management students, on the other hand, are advised to actively engage in continuous professional development by pursuing internships, certifications, language training, leadership opportunities, and multicultural exposure, as well as cultivating realistic expectations regarding the challenges of shipboard employment, particularly in terms of work-life balance, technological adaptation, and the demands of working in diverse and fast-paced environments. Meanwhile, cruise-line companies are encouraged to enhance employee welfare by implementing programs that support work-life balance, including efficient scheduling systems, sufficient rest periods, mental health services, and family support initiatives, alongside regularly reviewing compensation and benefits packages to maintain competitiveness and ensure long-term financial security; in addition, organizations should promote transparent promotion systems, structured career development pathways, continuous professional training, and gender-responsive policies that foster inclusivity, fairness, and equal opportunities. Finally, future researchers are recommended to replicate the study using larger and more diverse samples to improve generalizability, conduct comparative analyses across different cruise-line companies, nationalities, or hospitality programs, and employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to better understand how career expectations evolve into actual workplace experiences over time, while also exploring other influencing factors such as organizational culture, leadership practices, job satisfaction, employee resilience, mental well-being, and career commitment.

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