

## DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TOURISM STUDENTS IN THE POST-COVID TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** The global tourism industry has faced a dramatic transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with long-lasting effects on travel behavior, safety protocols, and service expectations. In this new landscape, professional English communication has become even more essential, not only for effective customer service but also for crisis response, health communication, and digital interaction. This paper explores the current needs of the tourism industry in the post-COVID era and identifies key English language competencies required for tourism students. Using a qualitative review of curriculum materials, industry demands, and international reports, the study reveals specific gaps in tourism education and suggests pedagogical strategies for integrating real-world, communicative, and context-sensitive English skills. The paper argues for a shift from traditional transactional English teaching to a more comprehensive, responsive approach tailored to the post-pandemic travel environment.

**Keywords:** English for tourism, post-COVID travel, ESP, communication skills, tourism education, digital tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the global tourism industry to a standstill, resulting in significant losses in employment, revenue, and international mobility. Although travel restrictions have eased in many regions, the industry has re-emerged with a transformed set of values and practices. Travelers are now more conscious of hygiene, digital efficiency, and personal safety. As tourism restarts globally, the ability to communicate clearly, professionally, and empathetically has become a core requirement for tourism professionals.

English, as the lingua franca of the tourism industry, remains central to communication in airlines, hotels, travel agencies, cruise lines, and online platforms. However, the scope of required communication has expanded. Tourism workers must now explain health and safety measures, handle emotionally sensitive situations, and provide support across digital platforms. For students studying tourism, these changes demand a reconsideration of what professional English skills mean in today's context.

This article examines how tourism education can adapt to these shifts by equipping students with targeted English communication skills that reflect the new expectations of the post-COVID travel industry.

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive approach to investigate how tourism English education should evolve in the post-pandemic period. The data is drawn from three main sources:

- Curricular analysis: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials from tourism-focused educational institutions in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East were reviewed to assess content focus and real-world applicability.
- Industry reports: Publications and guidelines from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) from 2021 to 2024 were analyzed to identify emerging communication trends.
- Online job postings and training materials: Requirements from major global tourism employers (e.g., hotel chains, travel apps, airlines) were reviewed to determine the soft and language skills currently in demand.

Themes related to professional communication, safety messaging, digital interaction, and intercultural exchange were coded and analyzed to extract relevant findings for curriculum development.

Evolution of Communication in the Tourism Industry

Since 2020, the global tourism landscape has changed dramatically. The role of communication is no longer limited to basic customer service tasks such as giving directions or describing hotel amenities. Tourism professionals must now:

- Explain evolving travel restrictions or entry requirements in clear, reassuring language.
- Guide tourists through digital check-ins, contactless payments, and virtual customer service platforms.
- Use polite but assertive language when enforcing safety rules, such as mask mandates or social distancing.
- Manage emotionally charged conversations related to cancellations, health concerns, or travel anxiety.

This shift requires a broader, more empathetic style of communication, where language serves both informational and emotional purposes.

Essential English Language Skills based on the reviewed data, several key communication competencies have emerged as essential for tourism students:

- Health-related vocabulary and expressions, e.g., “mandatory quarantine,” “fully vaccinated,” “sanitation protocol,” “COVID-19 symptoms.”
- Crisis communication skills, including how to offer apologies, express empathy, and deliver bad news diplomatically.
- Digital communication: writing professional emails, using live chat platforms, and maintaining tone and clarity in virtual spaces.
- Conflict resolution in English, such as politely refusing requests or dealing with upset customers using non-confrontational language.
- Cultural sensitivity: being able to adjust communication styles for tourists from different backgrounds while respecting their health concerns or behaviors.

These skills go beyond traditional tourism English lessons, which typically focus on descriptive tasks, such as giving tours or taking reservations.

The post-COVID tourism industry presents both a challenge and an opportunity for ESP instruction. Educators now have the responsibility—and the creative space—to redesign English instruction for tourism in a way that reflects real-world, post-pandemic needs. To meet these demands, a shift in teaching philosophy is required: from transactional to interactional, from vocabulary memorization to scenario-based practice, and from rigid scripts to flexible, dynamic communication.

Recommended teaching strategies include:

- Role-play simulations: Realistic scenarios where students must explain COVID-19 travel rules, handle a customer complaint, or guide a guest through digital check-in.
- Task-based learning: Projects such as creating a safety guide for international visitors or writing a professional reply to an online travel review.
- Integration of authentic materials: Using airline announcements, hotel websites, or official health advisories as listening and reading material.
- Intercultural communication training: Discussions and case studies on how different cultures respond to health-related topics or travel safety.

Another important recommendation is the collaboration between language instructors and tourism professionals, ensuring that course content aligns with what employees are actually doing on the job.

Lastly, educators should ensure students develop not only linguistic fluency, but also emotional intelligence in English. In the post-COVID era, being able to calm a nervous tourist, offer reassurance, and communicate care—all in a second language—is a skill worth cultivating. The global pandemic has reshaped the tourism industry, emphasizing the need for flexible, empathetic, and professional communication.



English, as the global medium of tourism, must be taught in a way that reflects these new realities.

Tourism students must be equipped with language skills that go beyond simple transactions to include health communication, digital interaction, emotional intelligence, and crisis management. This article has shown that existing ESP programs often fall short of addressing the current needs of tourism students. Therefore, tourism education institutions must revise and enrich their English curricula to include real-life communication tasks, industry-specific vocabulary, and a stronger focus on intercultural and digital communication. The future of tourism depends not only on mobility and infrastructure but also on people—on how they speak, listen, empathize, and connect. In that sense, teaching English to tourism students is not just about language. It's about preparing them to be ambassadors of care, confidence, and competence in a changed world.

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