

4

Hospitality of the Future

Introduction

The topic 'Hospitality of the Future' examines how rapidly the hospitality sector is changing and highlights innovative products and services that are becoming available. For example, space hotels, underwater accommodation, cruise ships and the use of robots are becoming more common in the hospitality sector. Although some of these innovations have not come to fruition, discussions regarding embracing new products and services should be undertaken rather than rejecting ideas based on previous industry expectations. In addition to the introduction of new products and services, technological change challenges traditional employment models of hospitality workers with a real concern regarding employment opportunities in the future that is also explored in Chapter 7. This chapter highlights some of the future aspects of hospitality services with a focus on the rise of robots in the Asian hospitality sector. A further analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of using artificial intelligence (AI) is given. The chapter concludes by suggesting new and changing technology will have an impact on the hospitality industry, however the extent of impact will differ for each type of hospitality business. Case studies are included to illustrate themes that reflect current customer service practices and potentially what the future holds.

Hospitality of the future overview

There is emerging research into the future of hospitality and the direction it will take based on new and changing technologies. First, the traditional function of the hospitality sector will always exist. This is due to the natural need for food, water and sleep. The physiological requirement for sustenance is essential for all creatures to survive. As Calpaldi stated 'eating is arguably the most fundamental of human activities' (1996: 1). Additionally, sustenance does not necessarily need consumption in a restaurant or other hospitality

venues, however, humans crave different foods, tastes and experiences. A restaurant for example, can satisfy these desires. Second, water is another element for the function of life and survival (Saltmarch, 2001). In terms of hospitality, this can extend to other beverages; soft drinks, cocktails, wines and beers among others, nonetheless all hospitality establishments will have water available as a staple beverage. Sleep is the third essential human function considered in the hospitality sector. All humans must sleep at some point to function properly (Horne, 1988). Hence, humans generally need a designated place to sleep. When people travel, they require safe, comfortable and clean accommodation facilities. Different standards of accommodation depend on location, cost, service standards, safety and product quality. It is therefore logical that food, water and sleep will always be required as a minimum for human existence. Other factors that may be considered can be loosely based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), including psychological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualisation concerns. Chung-Herrera (2007) suggests that successful businesses in hospitality attempt to satisfy all these levels from a customers' viewpoint especially psychological and safety needs. Guests are more likely to stay longer and become repeat customers if the overall experience surpasses their expectations.

Future of space travel for tourists

Although some of the discussions in this chapter have not actually occurred, it is important to keep an open mind about the possibility of ideas coming to fruition in the future. First, space travel is not currently a commercial reality, however it will be someday. The 'space race' as it is known, highlights the desire to become the first commercial entity in space that is not heavily subsidised by government (Seedhouse, 2010). Although many governments invest in a space program mainly for communication or military aspirations, there has been a shift to a commercial model and countries such as China, Japan and North Korea have economic aspirations as does America and Russia (Moltz, 2011). For space travel to become commercially viable, it is essential that paying customers' needs and wants are satisfied, which is a different focus to previous government policies.

Travelling into space for any length of time will require food, beverages and inevitably sleep; the same for humans on Earth. However, the consumption of these essential activities will not be the same. Strickland (2012) outlines the differences between hotels on Earth and potential hotels in space. His research suggests that initially space hotels will be small, cramped and require extensive guest training before venturing into space. This is most likely due to cost restraints and technological challenges. What is certain is the first space

hotels will not be the same as space vessels depicted in science-fiction movies. Challenges such as overcoming gravity, food production and water collection are real concerns let alone being able to travel in hyperspace (which is quicker than the speed of light), as seen in the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* movie franchises.

Strickland (2017) also considered the skills required by the first space hotel employees. Traditionally a good hospitality worker has four main attributes: 1) good work ethic, 2) being punctual, 3) being responsible, and 4) always accountable (Alonso and O'Neill, 2011). Tasks of a food and beverage attendant on Earth generally include taking orders, carrying plates and glasses, pouring drinks and polishing cutlery for example. Strickland (2017) suggested that these labour-intensive tasks are not required for the first space hotel employees. Instead, the skills required may be how to use equipment to heat food, overcome challenges of consuming a hot beverage, ability to use a toilet, application of telecommunications, administering first aid and perhaps pilot a space shuttle that are considered more vital. Already, there are fundamental differences in the skills required by hospitality workers simply based on the emerging reality of space travel.

Emergence of more underwater hotels

Similarly, underwater hotels have materialised although only a limited number of establishments are currently available. At present, underwater hotels do require the traditional attributes of a hospitality worker to fulfil guest expectations. Conrad Maldives' *The Muraka* on Rangali Island is an example of an underwater hotel. Visiting the website, you will notice that it has the same offerings of a five-star rated hotel. However, some hotel rooms and the restaurant are submerged. The underwater rooms are in shallow water and therefore not highly pressurised, allowing guests to roam freely in comfort (Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, 2020). As this is an exclusive hotel and resort, the price is high in comparison to other hotels; however, the experience may still be affordable and attractive to many. The quality of the facilities and services are comparable to many other hotels that offer underwater hotel rooms. For instance, other 5-star rated underwater hotels appear in Dubai, Florida, Sweden, Maldives, Zanzibar, St Lucia and Fiji, all with a high room rate and service standards.

Increase in cruise ship popularity

Cruise ships are not a new phenomenon however they are becoming more technologically advanced and customer service focused, which is an innovation in itself. In fact, the cruise ship industry has been one of the fastest