

# Reflections on the theme issue outcomes: how is hospitality education embedding sustainable practices in their curriculum and program delivery? An Asian perspective

Theme Editors Sanjay Sharma and Sandeep Munjal share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

## Overview

Sustainable tourism and hospitality development could have a significant impact on the global sustainability and as you can read about in this issue, there are some encouraging signs of industry-led change and innovation in this area. Given the prominence and scale of the challenge, it is reasonable to assume that tourism and hospitality education should be in transition too. Here, colleges and universities have a key role to play and so this prompts the question: *Is tourism and hospitality education adapting to the changing circumstances and if so, to what extent?* As they reflect on the topic, Sanjay and Sandeep share their insights and experience of theme editing this issue. A list of the articles in the issue can be found in the [Appendix](#).

## Why in your view, is your theme issue strategic question important?

Historically, Asian countries have made a significant contribution to the global economy through manufacturing output and in the past decade the service sector has made a major contribution too. Global hospitality brands are increasing their presence across Asia as travel and tourism in the region expands and given the rapid changes that are occurring, it is important that academic institutions keep pace with the employment patterns and business environment.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, Asia's hospitality and tourism is making a strong recovery and with that, the nature of business is evolving to embrace technology-driven developments in operating procedures and remotely controlled operations, wider adoption of artificial intelligence and re-balancing of both domestic and international tourism that benefits local economies, environmentally-friendly business and eco-friendly travel. In this theme issue we sought to explore some of the characteristics of change and in particular, the drive for much greater sustainability in order to determine the implications for hospitality education curriculum design and the interface with industry in the Asian region.



## Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?

During our review of prior theme issues and in framing our own theme issue question: *How is hospitality education embedding sustainable practices in their curriculum and program delivery? An Asian perspective* we felt that a broad-ranging approach would be helpful so as to

incorporate the views of all stakeholders. In order to secure this outcome, we identified contributors from different countries in the region and beyond as well as authors from diverse backgrounds.

After completing our theme issue plan and finalizing the topics with the writing team, we felt that the collection of articles would provide the necessary breadth and depth of coverage to enable us to explore the industry-academia interface in planning for sustainability. Further, we have been able to identify examples of good practice and derive a better understanding of the issues and challenges that are impeding a transition to sustainable development in the Asian region's tourism and hospitality operations.

### **How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?**

Our theme issue mainly focuses on identifying and reviewing industry sustainable development initiatives in Asian countries and the preparedness of academic institutions delivering hospitality and tourism education to support these initiatives. We had a sense that academia is not moving quickly enough to support the transition in industry and so we sought to work with a team of contributors with research and other interests in this topic and where possible, with particular expertise in sustainable development in the Asian region. We felt that this approach also enabled us to draw on current research, industry trends and data and to focus our analysis on what is working well and on gaps in the collaboration between industry and academia. Of mutual interest is the value of internships to students, their college and the employer and the extent to which these stakeholders are confident that relevant skills and knowledge is demonstrated and applied by students during internship and later, full-time employment. In order to review and assess these issues, stakeholders were approached online and data collected by questionnaire, focus group and round table discussions, conferences, interviews all supported by secondary research. As a result, the discussion and outcomes reflect a well-balanced blend of opinions and perspectives from industry professionals, academics, students and other hospitality and tourism agencies.

### **What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?**

There were multiple interesting outcomes from our collective data gathering effort but above all, we found near universal agreement that the approach to hospitality and tourism business is changing rapidly and that currently, academic institutions in Asia are not keeping pace with the rate of change. This can be characterized as technology-driven change that had been stimulated by restrictions during the pandemic when online, remote and touchless technology had to be deployed and its diffusion and deployment is now accelerating. Overall, we were able to determine that there is a gap between the needs and expectations of industry and academic course provision for tourism and hospitality and in our concluding article, we set out ways in which academia can respond, with particular reference to technology and sustainability.

### **Thinking about your peer review process: what went well and why?**

Our peer review process was extremely helpful in validating our overall approach and as a feedback loop on each article in the collection. We also found the journal's guidelines on peer reviewing to be invaluable as the aim is to help each writing team member to reflect on the positioning of the article (accessible, engaging, applied) and to gauge the extent to which the outcomes and implications of their work had been addressed. The sense that we are working as one large team with a common objective is both helpful and energizing, especially from the theme editing perspective as an overall picture of the outcomes and implications began to

take shape. Overall, we feel that our theme issue managed to incorporate the views of all stakeholders and that our peer review process helped with incremental improvement and in retaining momentum with timely follow-ups and detailed feedback on ways of shaping each article so that it would be meaningful in responding to our theme issue question.

**What are the most significant outcomes of your theme issue in terms of the contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice?**

The outcomes of our theme issue are multi-dimensional and explored in each article. Among others, they include: Poor global distribution of sustainable development goal studies with limited representation in developing nations like India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia and that sustainable education is essential if the UN's sustainable development goals are to be achieved. Sustainability is a source of growing concern around the globe and recognition of the need for ethical business conduct is the first indication that it is starting to be taken seriously. We are also pleased that we were able to investigate aspects of the relationship between environmental practices and sustainability performance in various hospitality contexts and cultures.

**What are the implications for management action and applied research arising from your theme issue outcomes?**

Each article in the theme issue collection contains implications for management action and these and the related recommendations are specific to each article. Collectively the articles in the issue underpin our "call for action" recommendations in the concluding article and more generally, the following observation: there is significant variation in the information that hotel chains publicly disclose about their sustainability commitments and accomplishments though they are committed to a wide variety of environmental, social and economic issues that can be characterized as "weak" rather than "strong" sustainability practices. We also discerned some confusion about the role that corporate social responsibility plays in sustainable development.

**Having served as a WHATT theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?**

As we reflect on the detailed and lengthy process from planning to completion of a *WHATT* theme issue, we feel that it was a privilege to serve as theme editors and an excellent opportunity to contribute to stakeholder efforts to accelerate sustainability in tourism and hospitality operations. The objective of *WHATT* is to address contemporary, detailed and practical challenges and to generate outcomes that can be used by industry and academia. We feel that our collaborative effort – drawing on a large writing team and the views of many stakeholders – has enabled us to achieve this objective and it is a great feeling!

The support and guidance from the journal's managing editor was always helpful and his timely follow-up, review and feedback enabled the entire process to run smoothly. In addition to coordinating our theme issue writing team, it was a pleasure to interact with industry professionals and our authors. Overall, it was a really positive process, starting from approval of our proposal to uploading the final versions of the articles online. There is a sense that together, we have made a meaningful contribution and that is a deeply gratifying.

On behalf of all the authors, industry professionals, peer reviewers and other contributors, we would like to thank *WHATT* and the Emerald team for giving us this opportunity and for helping to ensure that it was a memorable collaborative and creative process.

### **About the Theme Editors:**

Sanjay Sharma is Head of School at Vedatya Institute, India, where he is responsible for academic and administrative affairs and collaboration with industry. Sanjay has worked with Taj Hotels, The Park, IHM PUSA, IIMT Oxford Brookes University, Premier Inn, UK and Whitbread, UK among others.

Sandeep Munjal is Professor and Director of the Vedatya Institute in India. During his early career he worked in management positions in the hospitality and retail sectors both in India and internationally with Taj Group of Hotels, Aramark Corporation (USA) and Compass Group among others.

*Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact the Managing Editor, Dr Richard Teare via the Emerald website.

### **Appendix**

#### **Theme issue contents (WHATT v15 n3 2023)**

#### **Hospitality education in Asia: is it sufficiently equipped to prepare future hospitality leaders?**

*Sanjay Sharma and Sandeep Munjal*

A viewpoint article that explains why the theme issue question is important and outlines the approach taken with reference to the hospitality industry and hospitality education. Further to this, the theme issue question is explored with particular reference to developments in the Asian region.

#### **Hospitality sustainable practices: a global perspective**

*Rekha Sharma*

This study aims to discern the impacts of the hospitality industry on the global ecosystem and how learning about sustainability can help strengthen the tourism and hospitality industry globally. Acceleration in the adoption of sustainable approaches is needed and in so doing, there are, operational, societal and environment benefits.

#### **Adoption of sustainable practices by Asian hotels: gaps in academia**

*Sidharth Srivastava, Sandeep Kumar Dey, Savita Sharma and Mark Ratilla*

This paper investigates the scarcity of green skills among young graduates in hospitality management in the Asian region and a gap in the skills required by industry. The current study is a call to action to identify the barriers to green training at the academic level.

#### **Sustainable luxury: from an oxymoron to a tautology, the case of the Indian luxury hospitality industry**

*Sonia Bharwani and David Mathews*

Finds that Indian luxury hotel brands are increasingly adopting green products and integrating innovative sustainability practices in their day-to-day operations. Yet few Indian hotel chains are currently integrating sustainability initiatives with front-line customer services to reinforce the green image of their brand.

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### **How does the hospitality industry integrate heritage?**

*Parul Munjal*

This research highlights the importance of nurturing heritage from the perspective of hospitality professionals in countries such as India that have a wealth of natural and cultural heritage resources. The intent is to bring out intersections of heritage and hospitality and place these in the context of global and local issues and concerns.

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### **Sustainability in hospitality education: research trends and future directions**

*Senthilkumaran Piramanayagam, Jyothi Mallya and Valsaraj Payini*

This research traces the evolution of sustainability in hospitality education with reference to education for sustainable development – a method intended to create awareness, knowledge and competence among stakeholders via higher education curricula in response to the UN's sustainable development goals.

### **How sustainable practices influence guests' willingness to pay a price premium in Fiji**

*Vikas Gupta, Savita Sharma and Sunil Kumar Sinha*

This study aims to determine the effect of sustainable practices on willingness to pay a price premium in the hotels and resorts of the Fiji Islands. It also assesses how the implementation of sustainable practices influences guest re-visit intentions.

### **Examining the issue of employee intentions to learn and adopt digital technology**

*Sheshadri Chatterje, Ranjan Chaudhur, Demetris Vrontis, Antonino Galati and Evangelia Stachou*

This study investigates the moderating role of the employee resistance to change motive on their intention to embrace digital technology and finds that employee resistance to change plays a significant role in the relationship between upgrading skill capability and their knowledge capability to relation to embracing digital technology.

### **Hospitality internships and green leaders: analyzing the engagement of interns with hotel sustainable development practices**

*Rashmeet Kapoor, Geetika Manchanda and Anjana Singh*

This study aims to highlight the importance of incorporating sustainability training as a core component of hotel internships. The study also reveals the positive impact and long term behavioral changes of students on internship in terms of attitudes and knowledge about sustainability.

### **Next generation employability and sustainability in the hospitality industry 5.0**

*Sarah Hussain, Anubha Mahender Singh, Priykrushna Mohanty and Mahender Reddy Gavinolla*

This study interprets the viewpoints of hospitality educators in India in relation to next-gen employability and career sustainability. Prior studies have focused on the use of robots and artificial intelligence in the service environment but the concept of people working alongside advanced technologies is fairly new and needs to be fully explored.

### **Driving the sustainability agenda: a wakeup call for hospitality education**

*Sandeep Munjal and Sanjay Sharma*

The concluding article identifies the varying perspectives and research findings that emanate from the collection of articles in this theme issue. It also re-visits the theme issue question and provides some directions for further research in the form of a call for action based on the key findings of this issue.