

Conference report

EuroCHRIE Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Futures, Jumeirah Beach Hotel Conference Centre, 6-9 October 2014, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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Introduction

The 32nd EuroCHRIE conference brought together more than 250 delegates from over 50 countries across the globe in Dubai to share their experiences, to learn from one another and to discuss trends and future development in hospitality and tourism. The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management (EAHM) in Dubai hosted this year's conference.

The main goal of a EuroCHRIE conference is "to bridge the gap between academia and industry and to become a platform of innovation".

The aim of the EuroCHRIE Dubai 2014 conference was to:

1. reflect on how the world of tourism and hospitality has changed;
2. scientifically consider what the future challenges and opportunities for the industry are;
3. consider how these changes need to be reflected in tourism and hospitality education; and
4. determine how International CHRIE and EuroCHRIE can assist us to change, develop and meet these new requirements and to excel in our missions to develop the industry leaders of the future (EuroCHRIE, 2014).

Keynote addresses and themes

The keynote addresses consisted of six themes on hospitality and tourism futures; education futures, sectoral futures, product type futures, technological futures, functional futures and futures topics.

Theme 1: education futures

In the opening plenary on the first key theme, "education futures", Prof David Russell (founder of The Russell Partnership and Chairman of The Total Simulator Company) gave a presentation titled "Future Proofing the Student Experience" about his involvement in the London Olympics 2012 and the lessons learnt from major events. He regarded developing scenario planning, applying personalisation, building a sustainable process, gaining customer profiling

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and providing consistent messaging as key lessons. He noted to “understand student, staff and visitor behaviour and needs by establishing their psychographic traits” a demographic profile PLUS is needed. This psychographic profile adds more factors containing interests, attitudes and opinions such as spending on certain products per week, focus on health, socially engagement, and brand loyalty.

Theme 2: sectoral futures

Mr Gaurav Sinha (founder and CEO of Insignia Worldwide) emphasized the state of servile industrial luxury we work in and where financial companies with no sense of legacy or space, own hotel properties. In addition, the rise of “faceless personalisation” in hotels where guests are treated with personalised service without the interaction of the front desk agent. He pointed out that “the connection economy” is creating a generation gap between digital immigrants and digital natives. He also noted the rise of economic refugees i.e. workers from poor background in the luxury industry of GCC region, who are too cautious to voice the mishaps in the workplace and are reluctant to leave their luxury work environment. He finished his key note with projection statistics on the Middle East: about 103 million visitors are forecasted in 2024 (about 50 million visitors in 2013); currently, global employment 202 million unemployed people worldwide, 40 per cent world youth unemployed, middle east over one in four unemployed youth. Direct contribution of travel and tourism to the Middle East tourism sector is projected to be 2.4 million jobs in 2024, with a total contribution of 6.31 million jobs in 2024.

Theme 3: product type futures

Future trends in hospitality and tourism were discussed by Mr Steve Hood (Senior Vice President of STR SHARE Centre). He addressed the value of brands and the trends related to hotel branding. He noticed the “boutiquification” of the hotel industry, the increase of boutique luxury hotels or soft brands by major hotel chains such Andaz by Hyatt, Edition by Marriott, while also signalling the trend of collaboration and diversification (e.g. Armani hotel, Virgin airline) in the hotel industry. Hotel brands have special focuses on guests segments such as for the eco conscious guest, the Chinese or millennial travellers, or health conscious guest. Revenue management, as he claimed, is becoming more important, yet it is facing issues and challenges; a rise of distribution channels and online travel agencies, a need to re-evaluate the segment mix with discounting strategies, shorter booking windows and new rate structures. Mr Hood outlined how the hotel industry can learn from the sharing economy such as the personalised touch, easy, state-of-the-art booking, the local authentic, local experience and perspective, and the more, larger, longer and different experience. On future tourism trends, he outlined some of the trends that will determine the characteristics of international tourism and travel. He predicted a continued rise in international travel, in particular the increase of Chinese travellers (25 million each year); more interest in special tourism niches such as eco, green tourism, health and wellness, food and farm. Technological changes in social media, local emphasis, and mobile ability are need enhancements. The understanding of and the impact of big data are rising, the question is how can tourism organisations analyse and use these data.

Theme 4: technology futures

On day two of the keynote addresses, Ms Salwan Finj (B2B Sales Division Head – Commercial Display and Lighting GULF Regional Senior Key Account Manager – Hospitality MEA LG) presented some of LG’s current and future developments. She acknowledged the arrival of virtual reality and holographic display. LG has launched the OLED technology, which is slowly moving forward to be used in hotels. Self-healing materials have been developed as a case for the LG flexible mobile phone and were introduced during this session. In the near future the hospitality industry will introduce door locks with retina scan, claimed to be the most secure mode. Technology is rapidly evolving, but its introduction is slowed down by the lack of content and the limitation of internet bandwidth, especially in hotels due to costs.

Theme 5: functional futures

Mr Peter Starks (president REDGlobal) highlighted the functional futures for operations, marketing, sales, human resources, etc., based on a major research among transnational hotel companies. He indicated for an overall strategy, a shift from process to personalisation while improving productivity. Revenue management will be even more essential in the future; it will be in the lead. Marketing and sales will be strictly linked to revenue management. Human resources will change: team management consists of people who are analytic as well as people with a more scientific approach to HR functions.

Business insight and skills will become more essential and are really appreciated by the industry. This unquestionably creates a heavier competition for talent and recruitment.

Theme 6: futures topics “Behavioural Economics & the Future of Hotel Design and Customer Service”

The last keynote speaker, Dr James Mabey (Senior Vice President, Development – Asia Pacific, Jumeirah Group) spoke about behavioural economics and applied some of its surprising findings to the hotel industry to show that not all travellers’ decisions are fully rational. According to Mabey, the key to ultimate hospitality experience is to aim for consistency in service delivery, “an experience with a positive critical incident is perceived as a better experience than a sameness fair experience” he noted. Hotels need to recognise pricing strategies and their effect on guest spending while at the same time delivering a wow effect.

Conclusion

The hospitality and tourism industry has faced some serious challenges due to the global economic downturn. However, the industry is continuing to grow in certain market segments. During this conference key leaders in the industry gave some recommendations on how to face challenges and take advantage of the opportunities. Their notes can be summarised as follows:

- developing scenario planning and building sustainable processes for major events can future-proof the experience;
- investments should be made in workforce yet look at economic diversity and background; and
- important and on-going trends are the rise of niche segments and the increased value of branding.

The next EuroCHRIE conference is to be held from 15-17 October 2015, hosted by Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.

Reference

EuroCHRIE (2014), “Hospitality and tourism futures”, paper presented at the Dubai Conference, The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, Dubai.

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