Reflections on the theme issue outcomes: What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry to re-build?

Lead theme editor Chandi Jayawardena shares his reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview
Given the impact of the pandemic on hospitality and tourism operations worldwide, there have been many references to the implications for industry re-building in this journal and elsewhere. In this context, this theme issue set out to review the role of innovation in the re-building process and a list of the articles contained in the issue can be found in the Appendix.

Why in your view, is your theme issue strategic question important?
This theme issue strategic question is important because the storm of the worse global pandemic in nearly a century is not yet over. As most parts of the world are looking to a future, it is important to have scholarly debates and to learn from international best practice. This issue does that by documenting innovative initiatives to re-build the tourism and hospitality industry in various parts of the world.

Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?
The first step, our WHATT roundtable in 2021 as a part of the 8th International Conferences on Hospitality and Tourism Management (ICOHT) was insightful. Twelve experts from the industry and academia were invited to participate as panellists. They represented eight countries (Canada, Guyana, Iran, Jamaica, the Philippines, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the USA) and I moderated the roundtable discussion. This discussion generated 19 suggestions for hospitality and tourism in the post-pandemic era and they are listed in the opening viewpoint article. Seven of these panellists became authors of papers that are included in this theme issue and so overall, the approach worked well.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?
This theme issue features 28 authors (mainly university professors) from 12 countries who have written regional and country-related articles that span activities in 121 countries. I hope that industry professionals, researchers, academics and policy makers will learn from the best practice ideas that are contained in this collection of work. As noted earlier, stakeholder interaction began with the roundtable discussion and half of the panellists were industry representatives so as to ensure that the debate was grounded in the issues facing the industry. Thereafter, the articles selected for the theme issue were written by educators.
What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

We used tailor-made questions to enable the panellists to respond to the issues of concern to them. In doing so, some of the concepts for post-pandemic era re-building in hospitality and tourism evolved directly from the roundtable discussion and are summarised below:

1. Industry should lead initiatives with inputs from academia in developing and delivering short and practical training programmes.

2. In curriculum development and programme development, academics should include new thinking models.

3. Academics should fully review the curriculum and include more critical thinking and soft skills.

4. Aspects of re-branding of the industry to attract more millennials should be considered.

5. A sustained effort is needed to develop the multitasking skills of students and employees.

6. Curriculum updates should be undertaken with inputs from the industry.

7. To address the generation gap in the workforce, more effort is needed to listen and respond to millennials as many of them have entrepreneurial abilities and could develop new ideas and approaches.

8. Include a focussed financial perspective in the curriculum to explain sources of cash, use of money and cash flow for the hospitality industry. Given that pandemic-related government support has ended in most locations, this is important to assist operators to sustain their businesses.

9. Ensure that high school counsellors have accurate and adequate information for dissemination to high school students so that they may fully realise the industry career possibilities available to them.

10. Those destinations most affected by the pandemic and other major challenges should initially focus on domestic tourism.

11. Aim to revise the current curriculum by balancing theories and practical skills using new frameworks and models suitable for the post-pandemic era.

12. Many destinations will need to review and redefine their tourism plans and provisions and where possible, include indigenous practices, wellness, yoga, meditation and other spiritual and cultural features.

13. Industry should take advantage of social opportunities to find simple but effective ways to learn from each other (e.g. participation in the Global Hospitality Forum).

14. View tourism beyond its commercial elements to share with tourist the genuineness of that experience.

15. Be prepared for tourists with different needs such as more intense travel experience seekers and tourists who are more concerned with health and safety.

16. Hotels in tourism locations may benefit from enhanced provision for wellness, and mental wellbeing.

17. Aim to be better prepared for the looming energy crisis which may impact on the airline industry, creating an oversupply of rooms, restaurant seats and theatre seats.
Anticipate more tourists who are travelling while they can in uncertain times.

Industry stakeholders need to plan to do things differently and in so doing, drive applied research. They may also need to review and adjust the products and services they have on offer.

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

We used a two-step peer review process. My two co-theme editors reviewed most of the papers as did our independent peer reviewers mainly from Brock University and Niagara College in Canada. This meant that we could guide our large writing team on both technical aspects of the theme issue (e.g. avoiding overlaps) and on practicalities such as article length and submission deadlines.

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

Each paper provides country or region-specific contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice and in the concluding article, a summary is provided that draws generalised conclusions about re-building tourism and hospitality operations and the role of innovation in this.

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

In conclusion, the following 14 key learning outcomes emerge from this issue:

1. Re-think tourism and hospitality products, services, productivity and competitiveness with resilience, restructuring and renewing as the key focus for the future.
2. Focus on sustaining resilience of national economies and domestic tourism as a major national policy priority.
3. Step into new paradigms of special interest tourism (i.e. wellness tourism, honeymoon tourism, rural tourism, agriculture tourism, etc.).
4. Re-think and fine-tune tourism and hospitality products, services, curriculum, employee recruitment and training.
5. Enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector with a strong emphasis on collaboration between government, academia and industry.
6. Encourage partnerships between industry and academia in curriculum updating, organising short training programmes, recruitment of millennials as employees, etc.
7. Better prepare in crisis management with more efficient contingency planning to include both the observation of warning signs and the implementation of effective post-disaster strategies to help overcome the negative effects that can occur.
8. Focus on changed/changing needs of tourists as a result of the global pandemic.
9. Focus on digital transformation, operational efficiency and sustainability as the innovation drivers in hospitality. Revenue-management systems could be sped up and made more efficient with digitalisation adoption.
10. Embrace as well as leverage technology to its full potential, but to support rather than drive interactions.
(11) Reduce consumer touch points as much as possible through the use of robotics, automation and self-service kiosks.

(12) Focus on achieving key goals, such as: health and safety of all stakeholders, operational efficiencies and environmental sustainability.

(13) Create collaborative frameworks that are geared to reflect a diverse range of stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality operations.

(14) The “innovate or perish” mind-set spurred by the pandemic should be promoted in all sectors of tourism.

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

I have thoroughly enjoyed serving as a theme editor of seven *WHATT* theme issues since the inception of the journal. What I enjoy most is interacting with researchers and industry leaders in order to produce a collection of articles that offers practical solutions to contemporary hospitality and tourism industry challenges. In this, creating opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other is especially valuable.

**About the Theme Editors:**

Dr Chandi Jayawardena is the President of Chandi J. Associates Consulting, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, and the Founder/Administrator of the Global Hospitality Forum which now has over 5,000 members from over 100 countries. He has spent over five decades in the international hospitality and tourism industry in various capacities, including hotel general manager, professor, dean and consultant. He is a Past President of the Institute of Hospitality, UK (HCIMA). His publication record includes 11 books, 12 journal theme issues and over 125 papers. Chandi can be contacted at: chandij@sympatico.ca

*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 v14 n6 2022)**

**WHATT roundtable: what innovations would enable tourism and hospitality industry to re-build?**

*Chandi Jayawardena and G. V. H. Dinusha*

Provide a narration of a conference roundtable involving practitioners and academics. The discussion identified 20 implementable suggestions for post-pandemic era tourism and hospitality industry re-building.

**What innovations would assist the North American hospitality and tourism industry to recover?**

*Paul A. Willie and Chandi Jayawardena*

Argue that domestic tourism should be encouraged and that the industry should communicate what actions have been taken to mitigate COVID-19 transmission, aim to understand what consumers want and need in a COVID-19 environment and embrace and leverage technology to its full potential.
What innovations would enable tourism and hospitality industry in the Caribbean to re-build?
Anne P. Crick

Aims to identify the opportunities for re-setting Caribbean tourism along the lines of sustainability, the use of SMART technology and social inclusion so that it yields long term benefits all of its stakeholders in the region.

What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry in Guyana to re-build?
Donald Sinclair and Camille Ishmael

Aim to explore three questions: How was the tourism and hospitality industry in Guyana impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? What recovery strategies have been designed? What are the prospects for the successful implementation of those strategies?

What innovations would enable tourism and hospitality industry in the European Union to re-build?
Altaf Sovani

Discusses innovations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the type and nature of investments and reforms required to realise transformation in the tourism and hospitality industry of the European Union.

What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry in Africa to re-build?
Hilary Kennedy Nji Bama, Tshinakho Nyathela and Washington Makuzva

Discuss the outcomes of an exploratory study of the innovations, adaptations and best practices that the tourism and hospitality industry in Africa is developing and/or using in response to COVID-19 pandemic-induced disruption.

What innovations would enable hospitality in South Africa to re-build?
T. Nyathela-Sunday, N. Septoe, C. Menze, I. Banoobai-Anwar, B. Seager, N. Davids and C. Buser

There are relatively few studies that report on the issues relating to the pandemic and the hospitality industry in South Africa. This paper contributes to the literature regarding a pre-COVID-19 overview, the impact of the pandemic and the innovations and strategies in place to rebuild the hospitality industry.

Digital transformation, operational efficiency and sustainability: innovation drivers for hospitality’s rebound in the United Arab Emirates
Sanjay Nadkarni and Inam Haider

Investigate the actions taken by United Arab Emirates (UAE) industry stakeholders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate impact, ensure continuity and target growth. More specifically, the focus is to investigate innovations adopted across hotel brands, both, local and international.

What innovations would enable tourism and hospitality industry in India to re-build?
Shaheed Khan and M. Freeda Maria Swarna

Explore the challenges and opportunities that the Indian tourism and hospitality faces to re-build itself. The questions discussed include: What is to be done, the role of the Government at the Federal and Provincial level and how should the stakeholders of the tourism ecosystem play out?

What innovations would enable tourism in Sri Lanka to re-build?
Suranga Silva and Chandi Jayawardena

Discuss tourism in Sri Lanka in the context of the current pandemic and other challenges and suggests 12 key measures and nine suggestions for innovation to rebuild tourism in Sri Lanka from 2022 to 2030.
What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia to re-build?
*Kandappan Balasubramanian*

Highlights emerging challenges and issues for Malaysian hospitality and tourism businesses. In addition, it offers specific recommendations and strategies to enable industry stakeholders to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons for resilience building in tourism and hospitality: the case of New Zealand
*Sarith Munasinghe, Lawrence Powell, Hanshika Herath and Rosemary Frey*

Outline the actions taken by the New Zealand government and tourism sectors in response to COVID-19 and explores the potential lessons for resilience building in tourism for other destinations.

**Conclusion: What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry to re-build?**
*Chandi Jayawardena*

Summarises the 14 main learning outcomes from the collection of articles contained in this theme issue that sought to explore the question: “What innovations would enable the tourism and hospitality industry to re-build?”