

A Certain Degree



of Hospitality

Big fun becomes big business as tourist destinations worldwide grow more sophisticated and international in nature.

by Sharon Skinn & illustrations by Elwood H. Smith

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing and most important economic sectors in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization, more than 700 million tourists chose to travel in 2002; in 2001, international tourism accounted for \$463 billion worldwide. It seems logical, therefore, that travel and hospitality organizations worldwide should be looking to business schools to train new managers for their hotels, restaurants, resorts, and airlines. In fact, a number of business schools and freestanding hotel schools around the world have dedicated themselves to just that cause.

While many hospitality programs were born in human development and food and nutrition programs, today many more are located within schools of business or in entirely self-contained colleges. What

they provide—even when they carry a name such as the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration at the University of Nevada Las Vegas—is far more than a grounding in hotel basics, says Stuart H. Mann, dean of that school. “The name ‘college of hotel administration’ is really a misnomer,” he says.

“We offer management in the fields of lodging, restaurants, conventions and meetings, recreation, entertainment, and tourism retailing.”

The growth in hospitality degree programs has directly paralleled the growth in the tourism industry, according to Jeroen Oskam of the Maastricht Hotel Management School in the Netherlands. When a region sees an upsurge in tourism and competition increases, he says, “the quality of the tourist product becomes a decisive factor. At that point, hotels and other companies realize that having a well-prepared staff will be the key to success.”

Similarly, the changes in hospitality programs mirror the changes in the industry itself, Oskam notes. He expects the future of tourism to be affected by demographic factors such as aging populations, and economic growth in emerging countries that will lead them to welcome tourists. It’s

inevitable that as hotels and restaurants are transformed from family-owned enterprises to multinational companies with thousands of employees, hospitality management programs will become more international in nature and focus on the challenges of running global corporations.

Accent on Flavor

While students in hospitality classes learn the basic functional disciplines of finance, marketing, and OB, specialty courses often define the programs. For instance, at the Maastricht Hotel Management School, students take courses on the sustainable development of tourist areas. At UNLV, specialty areas cover gaming management, wines and spirits, and food

production. Diversity management and gastronomy courses flourish at the Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, England.

Many hospitality schools also feature facilities rarely found in the general run of b-schools: in-house restaurants and hotels. The Brookes restaurant in Oxford is a commercial restaurant open to the public and staffed by a full-time team of chefs. Much of the labor, however, is provided by first-year students who work in the kitchen for one day a week.

“Before they go into industry, we want them to work in a realistic environment,” says Donald Sloan, head of Oxford Brooke’s Department of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management.

Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration also boasts a restaurant, as well as a hotel, at its campus in Ithaca, New York. While breakfast and lunch at Rhapsody are served by a professional staff, dinners are run entirely by students four nights a week. Students rotate between serving as staff and acting as managers who assign cooking and serving tasks to their classmates. “There’s a static menu that’s regularly offered, but the managers must come up with the specials that are offered that week,” says Brad Walp, director of graduate enrollment and student services. The night’s work also usually includes a research component. “For example, one team might decide to measure some facet of customer satisfaction,



so we might put together a survey for the people coming to the restaurant that night,” he says.

More than 300 undergraduates also spend some time working at the Statler, the 150-room business-class hotel directly connected to Cornell. “There are a lot of opportunities for students to learn from the experience, whether it’s working as a clerk at the front desk or as a manager in the banqueting department,” says Walp. Students also conduct research projects through the hotel, collecting marketing data or watching how a public relations firm promotes the Statler. “Right now we’re refurbishing many of our hotel rooms, so the general manager invites students interested in design to sit in on meetings with vendors. In various dimensions, we can use the hotel as a learning facility.”

Other schools have opted not to take on the responsibility of an in-house restaurant or hotel. At the new hospitality and tourism management program at San Diego State University in California, for instance, the school decided to

use the whole city as its living laboratory. “Within half an hour of campus, we have 500 hotels that range from the Four Seasons to high-end resorts to convention hotels to urban motels,” says Carl Winston, director of the program. “We have thousands of eating establishments nearby, from the international restaurant to the roadside diner. We have nine casinos and an international border within half an hour of the campus. Last year, 150 cruise ships docked here. We’ve got four major amusement parks, an international airport, and more than 100 country clubs.”

Instead of launching its own enterprises to teach students the basics, SDSU made a conscious effort to work with local industries. “At the very beginning of the class, we partnered with several restaurants in town, including fast-food, casual dining, fine dining, and hotel establishments,” says Winston. “We’d much rather have the ratio of experts to students be 20 to one in a commercial restaurant than have 30 students working in a campus restaurant.”

Studying Safety

Like any other industry, hospitality is at the mercy of prevailing market forces—and the two biggest forces to hit in recent years were terrorism and the surrounding recession. “The travel tourism industry was probably affected more than any other sector by the events of September 11, 2001, and we still haven’t recovered from that,” says Stuart Mann of UNLV. “The combination of terrorism and the recession has had a significant impact on airline travel, hotel occupancies, and business at resort destinations.”

It’s also redefined the concept of safety in the eyes of hotel owners and their customers. “The key issue is foreseeability,” says SDSU’s Carl Winston, who recently conducted a seminar on safety for hotel operators. “Two years ago, no one thought there was a chance someone would walk into a hotel and blow it up. Today, if I had to testify whether or not I could foresee that some terrorist would enter a hotel and shoot somebody, I’d have to say yes. That’s raised the bar considerably.”

As the world changes, Winston notes, safety precautions get more sophisticated. Hotel upgrades that have occurred in the past generations are sprinklers, hard-wired smoke detectors, peepholes, and electronic keys. Now that terrorist organizations might be targeting unarmed citizens, hotels must upgrade safety precautions again—not just to protect

their customers from harm, but to protect themselves from negative public reaction. “Let’s say a terrorist goes in and blows up a hotel,” says Winston. “People will say, ‘That hotel should have done more to protect its customers! It should have foreseen this could happen! It’s one of those terrible big companies.’ I think the big chains are very vulnerable to a terrorist event from many perspectives, including publicity.”

The corporate emphasis on safety is translated into classroom projects as students learn to test how security might be compromised. Winston took a team of students to five hotels and had them try to breach security in various areas. “Four out of five got into the kitchen. Four out of five got drinks with no ID check. One got into a room with no key,” he says.

SDSU students also study safety issues such as how to prevent employee violence, guard against identity theft, and choose security officers. They’re also taught to drill employees on safety measures. “Walk up to the front desk and ask the staff, ‘What are you going to do if a fire breaks out? If someone walks in with a gun?’ Don’t just put these things in the manual—train on them,” says Winston.

Finally, says Winston, SDSU teaches students to stay current on local laws and regulations—as well as general practices in their regions. “For instance, there’s going to be a higher degree of security in Las Vegas than there is in St. Louis because of all the casino cash. You need more security in a resort market because guests will be bringing valuables to the pool.”

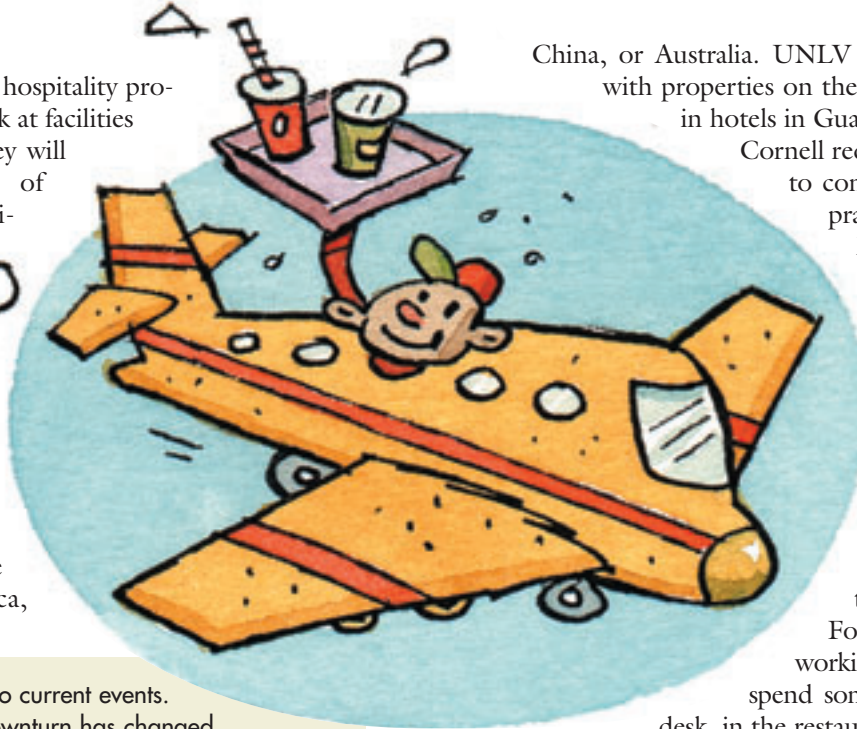
Safety issues are not the only ones that have been incorporat-

a clerk at the front desk or as a manager in the banqueting department.

In various dimensions, we can use the hotel as a learning facility."

Learning to Work

Whether or not students in hospitality programs have a chance to work at facilities on the school property, they will certainly get some kind of hands-on industry experience through external internships—and the standard internship projects often sound glamorous. For instance, Maastricht undergrads are required to take two five-month internships, one of which must be to a location in Europe, the U.S., the Caribbean, South Africa,



ed into curricula in response to current events.

For instance, the economic downturn has changed the way students learn to evaluate business expenses. "Many students are experiencing a recession for the first time in their lives, and we're able to talk about the importance of costs as well as the importance of revenue," says Mann.

The downturn also has given students an incentive to look at hotels and restaurants in the lower range of luxury. "Instead of staying in first-class hotels and flying first class, many people are shifting down in terms of how they're traveling and where they're choosing to stay," says Brad Walp of Cornell University. "Therefore, some strata of the market have done better during the recession. This has brought about some changes in the demographic of what students are going out to do."

The recession also has affected students entering and leaving hospitality programs in other ways, as schools experienced a dropoff in applications right after 9/11—and students experienced a dropoff in certain kinds of job opportunities. Nonetheless, these programs have all continued to thrive, even during the downturn. Jeroen Oskam of the Maastricht Hotel Management School attributes that partly to the fact that programs like his focus strongly on business hotels, which have been largely unaffected by the recession—and partly to the fact that a bad economy is almost always good for business schools.

"To put it simply," he says, "in hard times employees will seek to secure their positions by improving their qualifications."

China, or Australia. UNLV students can intern with properties on the Las Vegas strip—or in hotels in Guam and China. While Cornell requires all undergrads to complete 800 hours of practical training in a hospitality environment, a few take an extended six-month internship in a location like London.

Many internships require students to rotate through the various departments in their host companies. For instance, a student working at a hotel would spend some time at the front desk, in the restaurant, in the sales and catering department, in the sales force, in the accounting department, and so on. "It's a way for students to find out what they like and what likes them," says Winston. At SDSU, the internship is accompanied by a CD-ROM that includes nearly 100 assignments, from tasks the student must accomplish to data he must discover. "One item on the checklist might be, 'Make an appointment with the director of sales and find out this answer,'" says Winston. "Or it might be, 'Discover the cost of the utility bill.' We're just trying to expose students to the real aspects of the operation."

At Oxford Brookes, students spend their second year working in the field at major hotel chains, resorts, tourism organizations, cruise liners, and tourist attractions. Because the students—and the program—are very international, many of the assignments are in foreign countries. Students start at a relatively low "operational" level. "We're very aware that sometimes management students feel they should be running the operation straight off, and that's why we made a conscious decision to send them out in their second year," says Sloan. "We just want them to get a feel for how the organization operates. If they display ability, a year is long enough for them to be given more responsibility."

Whether a student acquires work experience through an internship or as part of the school program, such experience is essential, Sloan believes. "Hospitality employers favor students who are mature, worldly wise, and have a good

Graduates from Maastricht have taken such jobs as general manager or sales director of a major international hotel, marketing manager of a catering service, guest relations manager on a cruise line, and managing director of a resort.

background of work experience with reputable companies. At our school, the year in industry also provides a context for students when they return to more advanced studies in their third and fourth years.”

The Student Body

Not only are hospitality students mature and experienced, for the most part they’re fun to be around. At Maastricht, typical students must have practical experience and be able to speak three languages—but generally they also have “independent, innovative, ambitious, and extroverted personalities,” notes Oskam. Mann says that students in the UNLV program tend to be “outgoing, gregarious, people-oriented, and engaging.”

Even so, says Sloan, the “typical” student varies from country to country. “A lot of it relates to the attitude that a particular society has about working in hospitality and tourism,” says Sloan. “In many countries, it’s an extremely well respected profession, a worthy career. In other countries with a strong class system—and the U.K. falls into this bracket—the hospitality industry has unpleasant associations with servitude and servility, which discourages some people from entering the field. But what we often get are students who are very interested in travel and who want hands-on jobs instead of desk-based employment.”

At the graduate level, many are a bit older than other business students. They’ve come to the program having already worked in the industry for a while and are looking for a degree that will help them climb the hospitality ladder. “If I were to stereotype a graduate student, it would be someone who already has a lot of hands-on operational experience and who is currently a department head or a general manager at a smaller hotel,” says Walp. “We also get students who have worked in banking, real estate, and related fields, but who have somehow been exposed to hospitality projects.”

Once these outgoing students earn their degrees, they have a certain cachet. “They have a special awareness of the practical implications of management decisions,” says Oskam. “They will have acquired insight into intercultural communication, not just based on theory, but based on the experience of being part of an international student team.”

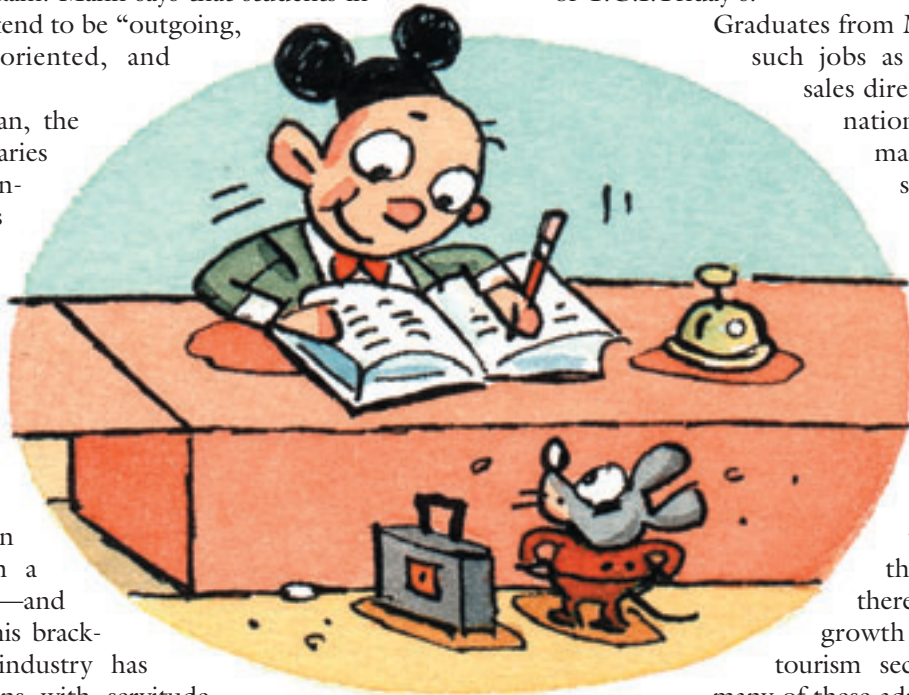
They also have a chance to go on to a wide variety of careers. “Entry-level positions would have titles that start ‘assistant manager of,’” says Mann. “In a hotel, they’d be assistant managers of front desk operations or housekeeping. They might be assistant restaurant managers at Chili’s or T.G.I. Friday’s.”

Graduates from Maastricht have taken such jobs as general manager or sales director of a major international hotel, marketing manager of a catering service, guest relations manager on a cruise line, and managing director of a resort.

Room for More

While there has been a boom in the number of hospitality programs offered in the past ten years, there’s been tremendous growth in the travel and tourism sector as well, leading many of these administrators to believe the market for such programs is not yet saturated. “For a long time, we couldn’t graduate enough entry-level people for the industry,” says Mann. “Right now, because of the recession and 9/11, jobs are not as easy to come by in areas such as conventions and lodgings, but there’s always room for good people.”

“It’s such a big industry that I think there are many roles for academia,” says Walp. “There are travel and tourism applications. There are international and government applications, as some graduates work in ministries of travel and tourism. There are opportunities in the airline industry. Any number of other service-focused industries, whether they’re involved in banking or real estate, can use graduates who understand the service industry in a broad context.”



Existing schools are considering partnerships with other organizations—sometimes with the specific goal of increasing hospitality programs in developing countries. For instance, says Oskam, ten years ago, the Maastricht Hotel Management School helped create the International Maastricht College, a Dutch-Bulgarian School for Hospitality in Albena, Bulgaria. “Furthermore, the school cooperates with the hotel school system in Cuba and is looking into the possibility of establishing similar links with South Africa, China, and Thailand,” he says.

Even though these administrators feel there is room for new programs, they warn that such programs can be difficult and expensive to set up. “You can’t really graduate a student in hospitality management without giving that student experience in managing the food and beverage function, and you need laboratory facilities for that function,” notes Mann of UNLV. “Food and beverage classes require hands-on training, which means small class sizes, which means many sections and many instructors. Therefore, it’s a costly program.”

It can also be a costly program because it absolutely has to be international to have any value, notes Sloan. In addition, he says, a hospitality program requires close ties with industry. “If you don’t understand the changing nature of the industry, you’re going to lose relevance very, very quickly, and then your students won’t be in demand upon graduation,” he says. “At the same time, you have to maintain academic credibility. There is a perception sometimes that vocational qualifications are not as academic as other areas of study within universities. So you must maintain academic rigor, which requires you to have an understanding of the broader higher educational environment.”

That academic rigor must focus on management basics to be successful. “If there’s a new player in the market, it would serve all of us better if that school gives students a solid, well-rounded business background and builds the hospitality focus on top of that,” says Walp. “All the students who then go into the industry would have a baseline knowledge—they would be thinkers and decision-makers—and the specific knowledge they would bring about the industry would just be icing on the cake.”

That specific knowledge about the hospitality industry undoubtedly will become even more important as the tourism sector continues to flourish worldwide. Even if war in the Middle East disrupts travel and tourism for a while, the hospitality industry has shown it can quickly rebound. Schools looking to find a niche program that will separate them from their peers may very well find that a tourism program is just their ticket to the global market. 