Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT): Using questions to find and apply solutions to industry challenges

WHATT is an Emerald peer-reviewed journal – for more details please visit:
http://emeraldgrouppublishing.com/whatt.htm

Prior to establishing WHATT, Dr. Richard Teare, Managing Editor, WHATT was the founding editor of the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (IJCHM) for 20 years. IJCHM sought to facilitate an interchange between industry and academia and ran a series of conferences to encourage industry and academic collaboration. This initiative helped to secure strong industry involvement during the early years. However, it proved difficult to sustain this approach because academics were increasingly encouraged by their institutions to submit papers to top tier academic journals. Today's reality is that the majority of articles published in hospitality and tourism journals comply with academic research criteria but relevance to industry is often lacking.

Why was WHATT established and how is it different?

WHATT was established to help address the imbalance and to re-connect with industry. WHATT re-visits and re-conceptualizes an industry-education collaborative approach to applied research. It is our view that pressure to publish in the highest-ranking journals has contributed to a gap between the issues and challenges that Industry faces and the body of knowledge as reflected in the academic hospitality and tourism literature. WHATT seeks to explore ways of bridging the gap and re-connecting academics and practitioners via a question-based publishing format that encourages innovation, exploration and the creation of interesting, engaging articles that provide an integrated, step-by-step response to a key strategic question. WHATT's aim and approach is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) editorial objectives

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Aim:
WHATT provides thematic reviews of the major challenges for sustainable hospitality and tourism development. This is facilitated by dialogue and applied research with industry combined with secondary research and the views of practitioners in the field. This helps to ensure that every issue provides practical solutions to industry challenges.

Theme issue format:
Every theme is directed by a strategic question that guides applied and collaborative research, literature review, idea generation, discussion and the formation of practical, implementable solutions.

Every issue:

- Contains a summary of literature and prior research relevant to the theme.
- Reports on dialogue between academics and practitioners facilitated by WHATT round table forum discussions, interviews, collaborative writing and industry viewpoint articles relating to a specific industry challenge.
- Features a concluding article that summarizes responses to the strategic question and the recommendations for management action.

What do stakeholders think about the format?

This is the second WHATT issue I have edited or co-edited and additionally I have helped others at the University of Houston who have served as theme editors. Hospitality research creates value when the questions researchers are investigating are the same ones industry is asking. (Dr John Bowen, Theme Editor, v7 n3, 2015).

WHATT's editorial objectives are designed to encourage a flexible and creative response to a key strategic question that is of concern to both practitioners and academics. As we have been using and developing this format for ten years, what have we learnt so far?

Our theme editors really enjoy the process of forming a team of writers, researchers and practitioners to explore a key issue. Appendix 1 lists questions covering a diverse range of topics.

On the value of collaborative research: *I drew on expertise from Government, academia and industry to investigate, analyze and test the possible solutions - we found that WHATT's objectives and format provide an ideal vehicle to fully explore the nature of the food safety challenge and then present workable solutions based on dialogue and collaboration with many different interest groups. One significant outcome of the collaborative effort is the first set of codes of practice for each industry sub-sector we studied. This is a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge and it will strengthen industry best practice.* (Professor Eunice Taylor, Theme Editor, v7 n1, 2015)

On the role of the theme issue in developing the outcomes from a conference: *The opportunity to extend, shape and disseminate time-limited discussions between academics and practitioners at a conference event is truly invaluable. The effort needed to bring stakeholders together and to facilitate a meaningful interchange about the issues that need to be addressed is significant and without a forum to extend and capture the dialogue, it is difficult to establish a foundation on which to build. In this context, the journal's flexible yet rigorous planning format has really challenged the contributing team to think deeply about our theme issue question – not only 'why' improvements are needed but 'how' they can be made.* (Dr Angela M Benson, Theme Editor, v7 n2, 2015)

Most importantly, our readers like the format! The number of article downloads from WHATT is increasing year-on-year. In 2009 (our first year) there were 2,988 article downloads. The number increased to 10,806 in 2010 and to 53,580 article downloads in 2014. In 2015 the article downloads increased to a record number of 66,211. In part, we think that this is because students undertaking dissertations and other projects discover that each theme issue is an integrated and sequential set of articles and so the entire theme issue is helpful to their study.

In 2013, WHATT was reviewed by 'Scopus' the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature with 50 million records, spanning 21,000 titles from 5,000 publishers. This is what the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB) said to the Managing Editor of WHATT, in their email of 23 August, 2013 when confirming their decision to include WHATT in the Scopus database:

> *This is a good quality journal with a clear scope and purpose. Each issue comprises articles from one theme. Although the diversity within an issue sometimes is limited (but in line with the theme) the themes are diverse and relate to various regions and topics. The journal is already well cited in other publications and coverage in Scopus will hopefully help to increase the impact even more.*

Appendix 1 lists all WHATT theme strategic questions and Appendix 2 lists the key features and outcomes relating to a couple of examples. It also illustrates the flexibility of the WHATT format and the different ways in which theme editors and their teams are using their theme issue to make a contribution to professional practice and/or to the body of knowledge. We should add that these four examples are indicative of the potential value of the WHATT format - each and every theme issue produces comparable outcomes.

WHATT's theme editors are asked to author or co-author a summary article in which they reflect back on their initial strategic question, review the respective contributions made by the authors of each article in the collection and finally consider the implications and outcomes with reference to management action and further investigation and enquiry. In drawing, together, the individual contributions in this way, we have found that the WHATT format facilitates a detailed response to the 'So what?' question that is so often missing from standard academic form writing. The nature of WHATT's collaborative approach to applied research and publishing makes this possible and helps to ensure that WHATT's contribution is grounded in both theory and practice.

How will the ICOHT 2017 linked to WHATT?

The Co-Chair of the 5th International Conference on Hospitality & Tourism Management 2017 (http://tourismconference.co/), Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena will edit the WHATT Volume 10, Number 1, 2019. Chandi was an Associate Editor of IJCHM for five years from 2003 to 2008, and is a founding member of the WHATT Editorial Advisory Board . Chandi edited the first pilot theme issue of WHATT in IJCHM in 2008, and since then been active in editing or co-editing six WHATT theme issues on the Amazon, Canada, Sri Lanka, the Guianas and Guyana. Chandi plans to consider many outcome articles based on conference presentations at ICHOT 2017, for publishing. Therefore, research done by academics while collaborating with industry leaders, are sought for ICOHT. The strategic question of WHATT v.11 n.1. will be "*How does Innovation help in tourism around the world?*" and this will be aligned to the ICOHT 2017 theme. Chandi is aiming to generate a dozen of powerful & practical case studies (each around 3,000 words) from key tourist destinations around the world for this theme issue. A launch of WHATT v.11 n.1. will be arranged during the 7th International Conference on Hospitality & Tourism Management (ICOHT) in 2019. This means, free 'limited time' access to all articles on WHATT v.11 n.1, will be given to the participants of ICOHT 2019.

Appendix 1:

WHATT theme issue questions (2008-2015)

WHATT pilot, 2008 (in conjunction with the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*)
1. How should Niagara Region respond to the challenges it faces and find solutions to preserve and develop its tourism industry**?**
2. What are the practical and psychological barriers to HACCP in the hospitality industry and how have they been overcome?
3. What are the contemporary human resource issues for talent management in hospitality and tourism?

Volume 1, 2009
4. What contribution will hospitality and tourism make in securing sustainable economic growth in India?
5. What are the possible solutions to the problem of excessive alcohol consumption?
6. What are the implications of climate change for the Caribbean travel and tourism industry?
7. How can casino gaming be used to maximize the benefits for tourism destinations?

Volume 2, 2010
8. How has the use of technology in the US hospitality industry affected human resource practices and guest satisfaction levels in the industry?
9. Does sustainable tourism offer solutions for the protection of the Amazon rainforest?
10. How do theme parks and attractions contribute to the sustainability of tourism destinations?
11. How can tourist destinations become more competitive – what key tools can be used to achieve this aim?
12. How can the visitor experience be enhanced for spiritual and cultural tourism in India?

Volume 3, 2011
13. To what extent can action learning enable Sandals Resorts International to sustain its position as the world's leading luxury all-inclusive resort company?
14. How can the film induced tourism phenomenon be sustainably managed?
15. Is there a need for sustainable management within the event industry?
16. What are the challenges of diversity management in the US hospitality industry?
17. Can evolving methods of food safety management provide global solutions for the food service sector?

Volume 4, 2012
18. Tourism, crime and terrorism: What are the risks, challenges and policy options?
19. What are the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in India?
20. What are the ingredients for success in bar food operations?
21. To what extent might sustainable tourism mitigate the impact of global warming?
22. What are the emerging strategic and financial issues in the Indian hospitality industry?

Volume 5, 2013
23. What are the influences on perception and image in hospitality and tourism and how might they be understood and managed?
24. What innovations are needed in the Canadian hotel industry and how might they be implemented to secure the industry's future?
25. How can effective university-industry partnerships be developed?
26. How can rural tourism move up the value chain from low yield to high yield by incorporating innovative responsible tourism practices?
27. How might post-war Sri Lanka develop inbound tourism?

Volume 6, 2014
28. How could hospitality and tourism firms implement responsible business practices?
29. Tourism in a transforming world economy and the impacts of the brave new world: How might developing nations achieve long-term sustainable development?
30. How might tourism contribute to poverty reduction in Latin American countries?
31. Expo 2020: How is Dubai's hospitality and tourism industry preparing?
32. Did the context of economic crisis affect the image of Portugal as a tourist destination? What were the answers and lessons learned?

Volume 7, 2015
33. What action can government take to improve food safety in a diverse and multi-cultural hospitality industry?
34. Why and how should the international volunteer tourism experience be improved?
35. What is the current and future impact of social media on hospitality and tourism?
36. How can fairs and festivals enhance the economic and cultural wellbeing of India?
37. Benchmarking innovations and new practices in rural tourism development: How do we develop more sustainable and responsible rural tourism?

Appendix 2:

Examples of innovative collaborations in applied research and publishing

Example 1: Does sustainable tourism offer solutions for the protection of the Amazon rainforest?
WHATT v2 n2, 2010, Theme Editors, Donald Sinclair and Chandi Jayawardena

Example 1:	Does sustainable tourism offer solutions for the protection of the Amazon rainforest?
Objective:	Examines the opportunities for sustainable tourism development in the Amazon region in association with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and its eight member countries.
Approach:	Used a WHATT round table forum to explore the challenges facing Amazonia and the possible solutions. This inputs to the theme issue investigation based on seven country case studies.
Participants:	Features expert analysis by eleven writers representing eight countries. The team were drawn from five ministries of tourism and three non-governmental agencies augmented by three academics.

Key features: Examines the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in the Amazon region in association with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and its eight member countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela). The development and peer review process included tourism specialists from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru and Suriname, participating Ministries of Tourism, the private sector and academia. Each team used the theme issue question to draft an initial report for review by their respective embassies in Brazil who in turn, used the initial reports to prepare presentations for discussion at a WHATT round table event. By drafting, reviewing, refining and discussing the key issues arising, it was possible to incorporate the views and perspectives of a large number of stakeholder representatives.

Outcomes: The theme issue summary article: 'Tourism in the Amazon: conclusions and solutions' offers twelve key suggestions for the sustainable growth of tourism in the region.

Example 2: What are the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in India?
WHATT v4 n2, 2012, Theme Editor, Vinnie Jauhari and Meghna Rishi

Example 2:	What are the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in India?
Objective:	Examines the ways in which India's hospitality industry could respond to the opportunities for growth.
Approach:	A round table discussion about hospitality industry challenges in India initiated by industry leaders and academics at the 5th International Conference on Services Management held in India.
Participants:	Involved inputs from international conference delegates and senior industry executives of large hospitality firms operating in India.

Key features: Examines the ways in which India's hospitality industry could respond to opportunities for growth. Among others, the issue explores the problems arising from rising human resource attrition rates, labour costs and guest expectations, overlapping brands, effective IT implementation, revenue management, marketing and the utilization of new media. Draws on extensive WHATT round table forum discussion with senior level hospitality practitioners. Additionally, industry leaders and academics from Asia, Europe and North America discussed the issues and challenges facing the hospitality industry in India at the Fifth International Conference on Services Management (Institute for International Management and Technology, Gurgaon, India, May 2011).

Outcomes: Provides a comprehensive response to the theme issue question: 'What are the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in India?' and a frame of reference for collaborative industry-education research and on-going trends analysis.