

# Hospitality Insights

For a sustainable industry

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# Hospitality Insights

**Vision:** To communicate hospitality research to practitioners in the hospitality industry in order to inform their thinking, processes and practices.

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*Hospitality Insights* contains concise and accessible summaries of AUT's hospitality research. Our publication is aimed at a practitioner/industry audience, with a focus on relevant issues to help build a more sustainable hospitality industry for the future.

This journal will operate as a tangible vehicle for meaningful outreach with local and international hospitality communities. Our objective is to stimulate dialogue between academic researchers and industry practitioners, as well as other interested members of the hospitality community. We believe such a discourse can improve business practice, sustainability and workers' wellbeing, and lead to the creation of more healthy societies, whilst also engendering impact and uptake of academic research.

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# Editorial

**Alison McIntosh, Shelagh Mooney and David Williamson**

Kia ora and welcome to the latest issue of *Hospitality Insights*. The journal continues to provide open access to short, peer reviewed summaries of research for the hospitality industry and community. In this issue, discourse around the state of the industry, accessible hospitality employment and the notion of hospitality itself are presented. Topics include, firstly, the latest findings from the 2018 Restaurant Association Hospitality Report on eating out trends, employment in the industry, and the challenges facing hospitality business owners. Two papers consider how inclusive employment pathways are for disabled youth in the hospitality industry, commenting on the drivers and barriers to accessible employment. Also considered in this issue are the ways in which non-English-as-first-language employees select which language to use in hospitality service encounters, and the contradictions in cultivating a 'family' environment in accommodation service provision, while also excluding children. Finally, the notion of 'hospitable' training and experience delivery is considered in the context of nature-based wildlife tour guiding. Through the dissemination of these research findings beyond academia, we hope we can co-create dialogue that will lead to a healthier and more sustainable industry and hospitable workforce in the future.

# The rise and rise of dining out in New Zealand

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## Marisa Bidois

Marisa Bidois was appointed to her role as CEO of the Restaurant Association of New Zealand in 2011 and has now led the association for nearly seven years. Before becoming CEO, Bidois was professional development manager for the association's Auckland function facility, Taste, and looked after its employment relations and legal queries for four years. She has also worked outside of the industry, but always makes her way back because of the people from all walks of life who gather in the hospitality industry.



The 2018 Restaurant Association Hospitality Report [1] shows Kiwis are eating out more often, for a wider range of occasions. The latest report finds that nationwide sales for the hospitality industry have continued to grow, with takeaway food recording the highest growth.

In 2018, New Zealand's hospitality sector achieved record sales of over \$11.2 billion (year end, March). This represents sales growth of 3.6 percent over the previous year, which after two years of significant growth (8.2 percent from 2016–2017 and 9.7 percent from 2015–2016) settles at a more stabilised level in 2018. Conversely, EFTPOS data shows that grocery sales are continuing to slow, pointing to people eating out more often, replacing meals that may traditionally have been eaten at home. Over the past five years, there has been a slowdown in year-on-year supermarket sales growth from 4.9 percent in 2014 to 3.9 percent this year [2].

A recent My Food Bag and *Stuff* survey showed that only 52 percent of parents now eat at home every night. Statistics NZ data [3] shows that more than a quarter (26 percent) of all food spending is now at restaurants and on ready-to-eat meals, such as takeaway hot drinks and takeaway pizzas (compared with 23 percent in 2014). The takeaway/food-to-go sector is recording the highest growth. Sales for the food-to-go sector grew 5.7 percent in 2018. In dollar terms, this translates to an increase in annual sales of \$148 million. But it seems we Kiwis are still hooked on dining out, with restaurants and cafés the biggest winners and accounting for \$5.6 billion of all hospitality sales.

Consumer spending is highest in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. These three regions all have annual sales of more than \$1 billion per annum. The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) forecast an annual employment growth for the hospitality sector of 2.7 percent per annum through to 2026. For the period 2016–2017, however, the industry achieved employment growth of almost three times that, at 6.8 percent. The total number of people employed in hospitality is now just under 130,000, with more than 72,000 in restaurants and cafés.

Hospitality business owners rank their number one challenge as the lack of skilled employees, followed by managing wage costs. This competition for skilled employees has the potential to drive wage rises in some regions, although operators also look for creative ways to retain employees to ensure their labour costs are kept under control. Wages have the potential to rise beyond customers'

expectation of price rises, and that's a challenge and a balancing act that hospitality business owners must face. The challenge for hospitality owners to find staff is compounded by the number of new businesses opening every week, although to a certain extent this is offset by a comparable number of businesses closing. In 2017, while more than 2,700 new businesses opened, due to those closures, the volume of new outlets overall was an increase of 534 new establishments.

The hospitality industry has performed exceptionally well in recent years and, although 2018 sees more restrained growth, the industry is well positioned to face the challenges of its competitive operating environment. Although a more cautious outlook is expected for the remainder of 2018, there are also opportunities for operators – particularly for those that deliver an exceptional offering to customers and for those that embrace both changing consumer dining trends and developments in technology to help grow their businesses.

Highlights:

- Nationwide sales for the hospitality industry in 2018 (year end, March) increased by 3.6 percent, to exceed \$11 billion.
- The sales growth in 2018 carried across all sectors, excluding the clubs sector, with takeaway/food-to-go recording the highest growth of 5.7 percent.
- Regionally, revenue growth in the Bay of Plenty region was highest for the second year in a row at 6.8 percent, followed by Auckland at 5.1 percent.
- In 2017, the number of hospitality businesses nationwide increased by 534 to 17,328.
- The industry currently employs almost 130,000 people.
- The top challenges identified by the industry are a lack of skilled employees, wage costs, and building and maintaining sales.

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# Hospitality training as a means of independence for young adults with learning disabilities

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**Alison McIntosh and Candice Harris**

Dr Alison McIntosh joined AUT as professor of hospitality and tourism in February 2017. Her research focuses on issues of social justice and advocacy through tourism and hospitality in the pursuit of social change. Her recent work examines accessible travel, and hospitality training and employment for people with disabilities.



Dr Candice Harris is a professor of management and head of department (Management) in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law at AUT. Her main areas of research are careers and gendered experiences of work (paid and unpaid).



Employment is a core plank of independent living for people with disabilities and a key part of their identity and self-esteem. Nevertheless, it is widely recorded that people with disabilities have lower employment rates than the non-disabled, and continue to experience workplace discrimination. Workers with disabilities are generally found to have greater loyalty to the company, punctuality to the job, dependability, greater levels of cooperation and dedication, and lower turnover rates and absenteeism. Representing an estimated 10–19 percent of the general population worldwide, people with disabilities are seen as an untapped source of workers for hospitality labour [1]. Yet evidence shows that the hospitality industry has, so far, been a follower rather than a leader with respect to training and employment practices for people with disabilities compared to other industries [2]. Viewing disability as a product of the disabling wider social and attitudinal barriers around disability (known as the social model of disability [3]), there is an opportunity for the hospitality industry to contribute toward positive social change.

Given the need to change negative societal attitudes before there can be an increase in the employment of people with disabilities, there is an important need to examine representations of disability in hospitality training and employment. Representations are important because they set expectations around behavioural norms and can help break down barriers by influencing the perceptions of those who receive them. Applying a constructionist approach [4], this research examined how hospitality work and training is represented in the popular television documentary series *The Special Needs Hotel* as it relates to training for young adults with learning disabilities<sup>1</sup> – a group who are rendered more marginalised in employment than any other group of young people with disabilities. The three-part TV series, which aired on TVNZ in 2017, followed the experiences of young people with learning disabilities as they received hands-on hospitality training at the Foxes Hotel and Academy – a specialist catering college and residential training hotel in Somerset, U.K., that is also a fully operating hotel with paying guests (<http://foxesacademy.ac.uk/>). Over their three years of study, learners are trained in three vocational departments – house-keeping, food preparation and food service – before being prepared to apply for and seek hospitality employment.

The research found that the series positively presents hospitality training as a means of enjoyment and of ‘achieving independence’ for the young adults with learning disabilities, with coping strategies and accommodations used to ensure

the learners meet the necessary 'realistic expectations' and requirements of hospitality work. Through the intensive hands-on training, the learners are found to successfully acquire life skills, gain independence, find hospitality employment, and make plans for the future. However, this positive representation contrasts with the fear and realities of independence and struggles with the pressures of hospitality work for the trainees themselves (struggles that are both emotional and physical due to the nature of their disability). Our research highlighted that not all learners wanted independence, and often struggled with the training; for example, the stress and speed of service delivery, difficulties in communicating with customers, and having to work alone.

Lessons from this research provide the opportunity to review and vary what is expected of the 'look and feel' of hospitality work and service delivery in order to increase employment for people with disabilities. In particular, if left unchallenged, the stereotyping of the 'professionalism' expected in hospitality work and training can render people with learning disabilities as being and looking unprofessional as hospitality workers and requiring accommodation to meet the standards of 'doing hospitality'. There is a need to give greater attention to disability awareness training, including information geared toward working alongside employees with disabilities, and HR practices. There are challenges to employers about their attitudes toward employing people with disabilities and management of the physical and service environment with regards to how they can render it welcoming or unwelcoming for employees with disabilities. Above all, this understanding can open opportunities to review and realign hospitality employment and training with ethical and non-discriminatory principles and guidelines, which are essential if the employment of people with disabilities is to be improved. As this research concluded, the inclusion of people with disabilities can make the hospitality experience more diverse, personal, meaningful, unique and memorable.

The full research article can be accessed

here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278431917307351>

## Note

1. We use the terminology of the documentary series and recognise the varied, unique and highly complex nature of learning disabilities.

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# Gaining and sustaining ‘hospitable’ employment for disability youth

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## Richard Robinson

Dr Richard N.S. Robinson is Research Development Fellow, UQ Business School, The University of Queensland. Richard practiced as a chef before joining The University of Queensland in 2005. His research projects, often nationally and internationally funded, explore tourism and hospitality workforce policy and planning, skills development, identifying ‘foodies’ consumer behaviours and designing and evaluating education programmes. He holds a UQ Research Development Fellowship to investigate gaining and sustaining employment for disadvantaged youth.



As the hospitality industry globally suffers persistent skills shortages, organisations are increasingly looking to non-traditional labour markets to fill vacancies. Indeed, hospitality has a long tradition of employing from society’s margins [1]. Research has shown hospitality firms are more likely than other industries to hire people experiencing disability [2]. Therefore, hospitality has the need, the tradition and the capacity to implement and support lasting change in the employment of disability youth.

The Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which is overhauling the sector and transforming the way persons experiencing disability access services, is modelled on research demonstrating the broader economic benefits of greater inclusive workforce participation [3]. The scheme is also consistent with the fact that employment is the key to exits from disadvantage for most people of working age [4]. Yet Australia ranks 21st out of 29 OECD nations in disability employment rates [5]. These poor rates of providing inclusive employment are often levelled at firms’ unwillingness to hire applicants with a disability [6].

In late 2016, a disability services provider (DSP) and a registered charity partnered in a mobile coffee cart social enterprise to create open employment pathways for a group of disability youth previously employed in the ‘sheltered workshop’ model. A 360-degree ethnography combining interview and observational methods [7] was designed to investigate the holistic experiences of the youth and to gain insights into the levers and barriers regarding open employment. The agency/structure dualism framed the study, as it is recognised that agency is in itself not sufficient when its expression is constrained by an individual’s social deficits and the legacies of their entrenched disadvantage [8]. In all, five ‘baristas’ experiencing disability (across 10 interviews), 11 co-workers/managers from the DSP and the charity, and 21 customers comprised the sample.

Previous research has identified industry’s reticence to employ people with disability as a key barrier, despite ability and willingness to work [5]. This study, however, identified a complex range of structural factors inhibiting the agency of disability youth to self-determine towards open employment. These included a history of poor experiences in institutional settings (e.g. schooling and sporting), the safety and security of sheltered workshops, parental oversight and the staffing requirements of DSP social enterprises. Surprising individual-level factors were also manifest, including the inability to responsibly manage new-



found workplace independence and an absence of extrinsic motivators to work – given that the disability youth enjoyed financial security regardless of earnings.

This research challenges the conventional wisdom that organisations alone need to revisit their willingness, capacity and preparedness for providing accessible employment, and rather suggests that deep-seated structural factors, and their impacts on youth, require concomitant attention.

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# Linguistic labour: International hospitality employees' use of non-English native language in service encounters

David Williamson and Tingting Chen

Dr David Williamson is a senior lecturer in the School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology. He spent 18 years working in the hospitality industry as a hotel manager and restaurateur. His research includes work, employment and labour market issues in hospitality and tourism. David completed his PhD in 2017 – a history of employment relations in the New Zealand hotel sector, 1955–2000.



Tingting Chen graduated in 2017 with a Master of International Hospitality Management from the AUT School of Hospitality and Tourism. Her dissertation was titled, 'An examination of international employees' use of native languages in service encounters in the hospitality industry'. She

The enduring growth in the international hospitality and tourism sector, in conjunction with an increasingly globalised labour market, has increased the chances of tourists being served by staff using their shared non-English native language. Numerous studies have explored the use of native language in service encounters, with customer perceptions widely investigated [1,2]. However employees' perspectives of non-English native language use in the servicescape are under-researched. This study is a part of an AUT Master of International Hospitality Management dissertation. The study applied a qualitative methodology, interviewing eight international employees in New Zealand hotels with long-term experience of speaking their non-English native language in service encounters.

Results of the study indicated that employees are well aware of the demands for employers to provide customer-oriented service by speaking their non-English native language; however, in any service encounters with customers speaking the same native language, staff have a strong preference for initiating service communication in English. The interviews showed that this preference was a result of workers experiencing considerable concerns, stress and anxiety around the use of their non-English native language. Specifically, a complex series of considerations and decisions occur when staff are faced with customers who might want to use shared non-English native language, suggesting employees experience 'linguistic labour', similar to the constructs of emotional [3,4] and aesthetic labour [5].

Participants indicated that the choice of using non-English native language may be passive (i.e. following the lead of a guest who recognises the staff member as a fellow speaker), or proactive when workers recognise a customers' poor English and use their native language to minimise guest embarrassment. Given the complexity and distinctiveness of each service context, participants suggested they had principles that underpinned their choice of language in the service space. Firstly, that English is the default service language and should be used as such; secondly, that participants did not want to assume guests' ethnic/language identity and so avoided using their non-English native language; thirdly, participants avoided using non-English native language so as to not be identified as a particular ethnicity. Crucially, participants sought to avoid being ethnically/linguistically pigeonholed, because engaging in shared native language in the servicescape was perceived to lead to significantly increased customer service demands and thus increased workload. In essence, participants

now works and resides in China.



stated that using shared language in the service space immediately engaged cultural norms from their home countries that they would rather avoid; notably increased workloads, guest expectations of subservience and a perceived loss of status and respect for the participants.

The study makes an original contribution to management studies, showing that managers and owners should consider the impacts of linguistic labour on employees in the servicescape. What can appear as a simple request to speak a certain language can engage employees in a complex process of choices and considerations as they try to avoid the perceived work intensification that comes with speaking their non-English native language.

The full dissertation can be accessed here:

<https://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10292/10877/ChenT.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

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# What does a family environment mean within hospitality establishments?

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## Tracy Harkison

Dr Tracy Harkison is a senior lecturer in hospitality at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. Her research passions are hospitality education, the cruise industry and the co-creation of luxury accommodation experiences. This has resulted in the completion of her PhD thesis on how the luxury accommodation experience is created.



The exclusion of children from hospitality establishments is not new. Not all cultures or properties exclude children, but the cultivation and advertisement of a family environment at properties that do is a topic worthy of further consideration.

Some luxury properties are projecting a family environment while excluding children, which proposes a new definition of what a 'family environment' means and speculation about how such properties achieve this environment. The traditional view of 'family' has changed over time, and what is defined as family has also changed. One of these changes is that 'family' has morphed into 'families' in order to encompass new perceptions of the composition of the 'family' [1]. In addition, in many cultures, for example Italian, East Asian and Māori, the extended family rather than the traditional nuclear family is considered the basic unit [2]. The decrease or demise of the nuclear family is accredited to the rise in divorce rates, which has resulted in new forms of family units being formed. However, even though families are splitting and reforming after divorce, linkages through children remain [3]. The term 'families' is commonly defined as 'multigenerational social groups' comprised of at least one child and one adult [4].

While conducting interpretivist research on the creation of luxury accommodation experiences, qualitative data were collected from interviews with 81 participants (managers, employees and guests) at six luxury properties in New Zealand. Out of the six properties (classified as three luxury hotels and three luxury lodges), one did not accommodate children (a luxury lodge). Findings of the research revealed the theme of 'family' as important to all of the properties, even the property that was 'childfree'. This raises the question of whether children need to be present before a 'family environment' can be experienced within those hospitality establishments.

All the managers and employees interviewed in the research felt that guests wanted the feeling of being surrounded by family or of being part of a family. Managers and employees acknowledged that in lodges there is a smaller number of service personnel and, at the same time, a higher staff to guest ratio. The service personnel depend on each other and develop close teams, which are like families, in order to produce an outstanding experience for their guests. Managers and employees are closer to their guests in lodges due to guests dining on the premises two if not three times in the day, and managers often dine with

the guests in their capacity as hosts, enabling them to build relationships with guests by engaging in conversation during these times. Guests, themselves, felt that staff treated them like family or made them feel part of the lodge family. They also commented that there was a feeling of family between the managers and staff and that they displayed those family bonds.

It has been suggested that the exclusion of children from some hospitality establishments is perhaps so they can concentrate on the niche market of 'adult-only'. Advantages of this focus are that it is not necessary to provide amenities and activities that are targeted at children and a premium price can be charged for the exclusivity of being an 'adult-only' establishment. Adult-only hotels can be dated back to the 1960s when Club Med was targeting singles [5]. In the 1980s, the hotel chain Sandals started luring Americans to Mexico and the Caribbean with adult-only packages and specific catering for couples [5].

The research suggests that projecting a family environment is now being used by luxury accommodation providers as a metaphorical term about the intimate attention that can be co-created in the accommodation servicescape through accommodation staff forming 'special relationships' with their guests in order to personalise their service. In this light, perhaps it is time to reconsider the nature of family-oriented accommodation in the sector, and to investigate how properties offer a 'family-like' environment that makes customers feel 'part of the family' while excluding children.

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# Tour guide training for hospitable, nature-based tour experiences

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**Brooke A. Porter and Michael Lück**

Dr Brooke Porter is a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at AUT. Her research explores human interactions with aquatic spaces. She also serves as scientific adviser to The Coral Triangle Conservancy, in the Philippines and teaches environmental science at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy.



Dr Michael Lück is a professor in the School of Hospitality and Tourism, associate director for the coastal and marine tourism research programme at the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute at AUT, NZ, and founding co-chair of the International Coastal & Marine Tourism Society (ICMTS). His research interests include marine wildlife tours, the cruise industry, ecotourism, the

The term 'hospitality' has long been linked to accommodation providers and eateries, but the wider range of hospitality, and hospitable experiences, has received little attention from academics and practitioners alike. Although tourism and hospitality are undeniably linked, Lynch [1] notes that "in tourism, there is a curious neglect of welcome given its associations with the idea of universal hospitality" (p. 174). To this end, we argue that hospitality goes well beyond food and accommodation alone, and includes any host-tourist interactions, such as those between guides and tour participants.

Participants aboard nature-based marine tours are expecting to learn [2]. However, the guide's ability to 'connect' with their audience and provide quality learning experiences is not part of an industry standard. As a result, the expertise and personality of guides varies, as do their duties and their levels of training. Learning is a critical component of nature-based tours, thus placing significant responsibility on the guide in the creation of a hospitable experience. For nature-based wildlife tour operators in New Zealand (and globally), in many cases guide training efforts are a choice left up to the operators. While individual operators' needs may vary, previous hospitality research suggests that beyond fulfilling visitor expectations, appropriate training not only benefits guests, but also increases workplace satisfaction [3]. This paper discusses the need for guide training in increasing the hospitable experience aboard nature-based wildlife tours.

Through data captured in self-administered visitor surveys, we explored over 400 participants' perceptions of guide abilities related to a hospitable, or pleasant, experience [4]. Tour participants on swim-with wild dolphins tours were asked to rate the importance of items related to their on-tour experience. All items were rated on a five-point scale. Over 93% of the respondents thought that having a knowledgeable and helpful boat crew was important, and more specifically over 90% felt having a knowledgeable guide on board was important. Likewise, the majority of participants identified the importance of learning about various subjects, such as the natural environment (69%) and threats to marine life (66%) – a responsibility that falls to the guides and crew. Being able to understand the safety rules was of near comparable importance to the learning experience desires (86%), as was the cleanliness of the vessel (85%). Our findings demonstrated that in order to create a hospitable experience, marine tour guides must fulfil dual roles as crew and naturalists. The high values placed on educational and safety information emphasise the critical role of knowledgeable guides/crew aboard nature-based tours. While it is apparent that many guides

impacts of tourism, and aviation.



take pride in their work, with many furthering their knowledge during their personal time, the findings from our study highlight the importance of the guide's role in the overall visitor experience.

While some tour components, such as the safety messages, are matters of legal compliance (and clearly were of high importance to participants as well), other components such as fulfilling the educational desires of visitors should be carefully considered by operators. Our findings show that visitors place a high importance on tour components that are directly related to a guide's performance, personality and abilities. Options for operators include requiring a minimum qualification for guides (e.g., a bachelor's degree in a related field) and/or an investment in continuing and specialised education. In conclusion, guide training on the natural environment and conservation as well as vessel/marine safety is essential. More specifically, this means that operators stand to benefit from guide training that reaches beyond the factual information and includes interpretation techniques. This may seem like a large investment for operators; however, the findings from this research indicate that visitor satisfaction is dependent upon this investment. The role of guides aboard nature-based wildlife tours is central to the overall hospitable experience.

The original research on which this article was based can be accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2017.1353609>

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