ALCOHOL AND HOSPITALITY – OPERATIONAL DECISIONS ON A MARAE

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ABSTRACT

The issue of alcohol in hospitality has always been a controversial one. In order to address this topic in the cultural environment of a marae (communal meeting place) with commercial hospitality facilities on a site regarded as tapu (sacred) and containing many taonga (treasures), this paper considers the operational implications of a decision by the kaumātua (tribal elders) not to allow alcohol to be brought onto the premises. The way in which this is communicated to guests and the impact on the management of the facility is discussed. The paper concludes with some suggestions for further research into the experience of visitors to culturally significant sites.

KEYWORDS: Alcohol, Hospitality operation, New Zealand, Marae, Employee, Food and beverage

INTRODUCTION

This working paper fits within the 'visitors, values, motives and experiences in a changing world' conference theme but its focus is on the operational impact of the management committee of a marae (Māori communal meeting place) listening to its kaumātua (tribal elders) and deciding to offer commercial hospitality – but without the service of alcohol. Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand/Aotearoa who according to legend arrived in New Zealand on one of a number of waka (canoes). Maori trace their heritage and identity back to one of these canoes. Their language, culture and customs are at the heart of New Zealand Aotearoa's tourism strategy. Visitors to New Zealand are often taken to a marae, a piece of communal land which is regarded as sacred and which provides a meeting place for religious and social events. They will be welcomed onto the marae and invited to a Powhiri, a traditional welcome ceremony, which usually takes place in the Whare Nui (meeting house) before going being invited to join in some food in the Whare Kai (the eating house).

This working paper considers the literature on three main themes: the nature of hospitality; alcohol in hospitality, and Māori culture and tradition with regard to visitors to their marae.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of hospitality has been extensively addressed in the past decade by a number of key authors. Of particular note are the contributions of Lashley & Morrison (2000), O'Gorman (2005; 2007; 2009), and Lashley, Morrison & Lynch (2007). They consider the historical, cultural and religious development of hospitality practices and conventions, and note the differences between domestic and commercial forms of hospitality celebrations. King (1995) notes that a successful organization will provide a hospitable environment to both its guests and the employees who are delivering the service experience, 'understanding their wants and needs and delivering them in a safe environment, with dignity' (King, 1995, p. 232). Doing so in an environment which routinely provides alcohol may be challenging.

The literature on alcohol in hospitality often takes the form of studies into the problems caused by the presence of alcohol for patrons and hospitality workers (Poulston, 2008; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006). In many countries a licensee is permitted to sell alcohol but is also required to refuse it to those who appear intoxicated (Robin, 1991). This leads to the paradoxical situation where hospitality operators show hospitality by providing alcohol and also by taking it away. Pizam (2010) dedicates his editorial to this topic noting that even in medical journals hospitality staff are often the focus of studies into alcohol problems. However there is little research in the hospitality academic literature on this topic. In a comprehensive review of human resource issues in leading hospitality journals, Lucas and Deery (2004) do not mention the issue of alcohol. In perhaps a similar way, the major societal issue of obesity is also rarely addressed in the literature (Small & Harris, 2012). The hospitality industry seems to attract employees who are often on the margins of society (Robinson, 2008; Casado, 1997; Wood, 1992), and Brymer, Perrewe and Johns (1991) suggest that excessive job stress may also play a part. Quick (1989) outlines assistance available to those wishing to address their problems. Recent support and alcohol prevention strategies have been proposed by Quinn (2010) through his organization arkglobal.org which seeks to support hospitality workers with a drug or alcohol problem. An interesting overview of the introduction of alcohol to New Zealand is provided by Stewart (1997).

Māori culture and tourism is discussed by Ryan and Pike (2003), Barnett (2001), Ryan (1997) and Zeppel (1997). The general tone appears to be a concern about and ambivalence towards tourism developments, focusing in some cases on the perceived dilution of authentic experiences, and the loss of control over their culture, heritage and taonga (treasures) in order to create a tourist experience (Tangihaere & Twiname, 2011). Deery, Jago and Fredline (2012, p65) also mention the issue of 'disruptive tourist behaviour' and raise the issue of alcohol-fuelled antisocial behaviour. The marae used in this case study is located in Auckland and is,

> 'the only ancestral marae on the central Tamaki isthmus which continues to exercise the customary obligations to host and welcome national and international visitors to Tamaki Makaurau' (www.ngatiwhatuaorakei.com, 2010).

Amoamo and Thompson (2010) warn that in postcolonial countries 'indigenous cultures' (p. 36) are often misrepresented for promotional purposes, although they recognize that there is always a 'fluidity of boundaries and cross-cultural mixing that occurs' (p. 49). They conclude by suggesting that Māori tourism operators are redressing the situation by their actions. However, at the same time researchers are urged not to forget that tourism operators are creating a 'tourism experience' for their visitors (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Ritchie, Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

METHODS

This paper uses an exploratory and interpretivist approach to gather qualitative data from a single case study (Yin, 2009; Woodside, 2010). This paper therefore makes no claims for generalisability but the authors believe that this is an interesting case study of an unusual commercial hospitality operation within a culturally prescribed environment. In addition to the literature review of secondary data, inital discussions have taken place with the kaumātua (elders) and management of the marae to ensure that the participants are involved in the design of the study, leading to a partnership which protects the stakeholders, as required under the Treaty of Waitangi and which AUT's Ethics Committee bases its guiding principles of partnership, participation and protection on.

RESULTS

Once the research has been completed it is expected that the results will show the ways in which staff and printed material explain the alcohol policy to visitors and users of the facility. It will also have explored the responses staff get to their explanation, and how they feel this policy affects the visitors'

enjoyment of the facility. Visitor comments on the policy will be sourced from the internet, from comments made in writing to the Management and from comments made to operational staff at the functions. Management and staff will also be invited to describe how they deal with people who decide to ignore the no-alcohol policy.

DISCUSSION

Making people feel welcome is challenging when they are out of their normal 'comfort zone'. Running a successful commercial hospitality operation therefore relies on providing guests with what they ask for. Making the decision not to allow alcohol on the marae impacts on the operation of a function. However, while the lack of alcohol may affect the enjoyment of some, for others it adds something special to a social situation. Studying the facilities and operation of the case study marae and its impact on guests and on the staff serving them provides an interesting scenario in a hospitality industry which is often marred by excessive alcohol consumption. As has been addressed in the literature review, availability of alcohol can lead to inappropriate behavior on the part of both customers and staff. The importance of studying such operations is also highlighted by Choi, Ritchie, Papandrea and Bennett (2012, p213) when they state that 'there is growing recognition of the broader economic value of cultural goods by academics, government policy makers and industry'.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper attempts to fill the research gap of the role of alcohol in hospitality. It does so by investigating the compromises and trade-offs that the Māori people make in order to meet their obligations under manaakitanga (traditional Māori hospitality) while at the same time showing an awareness of the expectations of others as to what are considered the key (ritual) elements of a 'celebration' or welcome. Its findings will interest those seeking to create tourism experiences where food and beverage play and important part in the overall experience, and how this might be achieved without causing harm to the cultural values or employees of the hosting organization. Further research will consider the visitor experience to a marae as a tourist or as a function guest.

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