



A Literary Essay on Artificial Intelligence in International Hospitality: Preserving the Human Heart of Service in a Digital World

By: April C. Abalos, PhD

Pangasinan State University – San Carlos Campus, Pangasinan

For many years, hospitality has been described as an industry built on people. Guests may remember the comfort of a hotel room or the quality of a meal, but what often stays with them is how they were treated. A warm welcome at the front desk, a staff member who goes the extra mile, or a sincere apology when something goes wrong can leave a lasting impression. As someone who teaches future hospitality professionals, I often remind my students that service is more than following procedures—it is about creating meaningful experiences. Today, however, the way those experiences are delivered is changing because of artificial intelligence (AI).

Not long ago, technologies such as AI-powered chatbots, automated check-in kiosks, and service robots seemed like ideas that belonged in the future. Today, they are becoming common in hotels, restaurants, airports, and tourism businesses around the world. Guests can reserve rooms through intelligent booking systems, receive recommendations based on previous travel experiences, and communicate with hotels without speaking to a staff member. These developments show that AI is no longer a concept for tomorrow. It has become part of the hospitality industry today.

From an operational perspective, the advantages are easy to recognize. AI can process reservations more efficiently, answer routine customer inquiries within seconds, predict demand during peak seasons, and even help managers decide how many employees are needed for a particular day. These improvements save time and reduce operating costs, allowing businesses to focus their resources where they are needed most. For hospitality organizations operating in highly competitive markets, such technologies can improve both productivity and customer satisfaction.

Yet, while these innovations are impressive, they also raise an important question: What happens to hospitality when technology begins to replace human interaction?

This is probably the issue that concerns me most as an educator. Hospitality has always been rooted in empathy, communication, and emotional intelligence. A computer can recognize keywords, but it cannot truly understand the emotions of a tired traveler whose flight has been delayed or a family celebrating an important milestone. A chatbot may provide accurate information, but it cannot replace the comfort of speaking with someone who genuinely listens and responds with compassion. Technology can certainly improve efficiency, but genuine hospitality still depends on people.

Another challenge involves preparing students for careers that continue to evolve. Years ago, hospitality graduates were expected to master customer service, food and beverage operations, front office management, and hotel administration. Today, employers also look for graduates who are comfortable working with digital reservation platforms, data analytics, customer relationship management systems, and AI-assisted technologies. This means that hospitality education must continue to adapt without losing sight of the human values that have always defined the profession.

I also believe students should understand that AI is not always perfect. Like any technology, it depends on the quality of the information it receives. Incorrect data, technical failures, or poorly designed algorithms can affect customer experiences. Imagine a guest arriving at a hotel only to discover that an automated system failed to record a reservation correctly. Situations like this remind us that technology should support employees rather than replace professional judgment. Human oversight remains essential because hospitality often requires flexibility, understanding, and the ability to respond to unexpected situations.

Privacy is another issue that deserves greater attention. Hotels and tourism businesses collect large amounts of personal information, from passport details and payment records to travel preferences and guest feedback. AI systems use these data to personalize services, but they also increase the responsibility of organizations to protect sensitive information. Students entering the hospitality profession should recognize that maintaining guest trust involves not only delivering excellent service but also handling personal information with integrity and care.

One encouraging aspect of AI is its contribution to sustainability. Many hotels now use intelligent systems to monitor electricity consumption, regulate room temperatures, reduce food waste, and manage water usage more efficiently. These innovations help organizations lower operating costs while supporting environmental conservation. Considering that many travelers now prefer businesses that demonstrate responsible environmental practices, AI has become an important partner in promoting sustainable hospitality rather than simply improving operational efficiency.

As I reflect on these changes, I believe the role of hospitality educators has become even more important. Teaching students how to operate hotel management software or reservation systems is no