



Interview

TechTalk with Dr. Kaye Chon: A Pioneer of Asian Paradigm in Hospitality and Tourism

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“Depending on how you define smart tourism, there are many applications already existing I would like to define smart tourism at the micro-level, not necessarily transforming a city or destination.”

In an interview with *Journal of Smart Tourism* (JST), titled as “TechTalk”, Professor Kaye Chon (Dean and Chair Professor and Walter & Wendy Kwok Family Foundation Professor in International Hospitality Management in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University) shared his view on smart tourism. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How do you define smart tourism? Can you share your experience related to smart tourism?

A: I think we talked about smart tourism usually at the mega or macro-level. But there are many applications at the micro-level in operations or in businesses. Depending on how you define smart tourism, there are many applications already existing.

For example, a few years ago, when staying a hotel, we had to insert a card key to open the door. However, there is something called proximity access card. Now, we do not have to even insert the key, just scan the card. If it is difficult to find it in your handbag, we can scan the entire bag then that will open the door.

There have been many applications like this example. To my understanding, all these are smart tourism applications. I would like to define smart tourism at the micro-level, not necessarily transforming a city or destination.

Q: There are some courses related to smart tourism in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) at The

Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). What led you to make that decision?

A: A variety of information technologies have been evolving very fast in the hospitality and tourism industry. Along with several regions, Hong Kong becomes one of the fields of experiment in smart tourism development. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in Hong Kong are paying greater attention to smart tourism with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of the region as an international destination.

It is very important for us to continuously monitor the changes in the environment and then align our strategies with them. In the last 20 years since I was in SHTM, we revised our curriculum several times according to those changes, so this led us to make such decisions.

Q: Do you consider further developing the smart tourism-related courses, such as create a degree of smart tourism?

A: We are not necessarily aiming to develop smart tourism experts. Rather, we plan to make it as a specialization which can be chosen by students. Still, they are studying hotel and tourism management but understanding smart applications. That’s an aim of our plan for the upcoming bachelor’s degree.

Q: Which skills and knowledge do you think important for students to learn when they study ‘smart tourism’?

A: If students have a good understanding of artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, robotics, and digital transformation, do you believe that they would have a huge advantage in our field? If you ask me what is job in smart tourism, to be honest, I cannot think of one single job in that area. Although it sounds like this is a very smart industry, students have to think strategically.

For example, the understanding of AI can be associated with sales management. Let’s imagine there are two phone calls coming in at the same time. One person wants to make a reservation for two people for dinner. Another person wants three. Our brain has been trained to think that three is better than two. There’s 33% more revenue. However, this can be wrong when demand is so high. Since most tables are four people, the reservation for three people leads the restaurant to waste the one seat. On the other hand, the reservation for two allows it to avoid the wasting because the restaurant can simply divide the table into two parts and set it to two parties of two people each, increasing revenue by 25%. If you incorporate this logic into the reservation algorithm, you would create a smarter system. As

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inferred in this example, students have to think about a functional profession.

Q: As the last question, what advice do you want to give to this newly launched Journal of Smart Tourism?

A: In terms of journal development, you have to have a clear roadmap and devote yourself to monitoring the trends, and then screening the papers with a systematic review process.

On the other hand, the positioning of your journal will be the key: what would be the perception of people writing a paper in this journal? As mentioned in the first answer, I think smart tourism is much broader than what many people may think. If the topics are broadly set by including smart tourism and hospitality applications, perhaps there will be a greater audience.