

at home, work, or school just five years ago. How fast could they operate? What software did they run? How were they linked to information sources around the world? What you thought was fast and efficient back then is slow and cumbersome by today's standards; and computing technology is just one facet of the technological changes that will shape the future of the tourism industry. Maybe the changes in service delivery won't come quite this fast, but change will definitely come. As we saw in Chapter 5, operators pursue increasing efficiency and effectiveness in everything they do from service delivery to customer connectivity. Although every effort will be made to enhance the guest experience, the human touch will remain the hallmark of hospitality.

## Amplifying Guests' Experiences

A glimpse of what may be in store for hotel guests in the future can be seen at the Fairmont Vancouver Airport hotel, where it is no longer necessary for guests to check in at the hotel's front desk. Check-in takes place in the airline baggage claim area, and the hotel arranges for bags to be delivered straight to the guest's room. Guests are greeted with a comfortable and cheery room as check-in also activates room lighting and temperature controls that stay in an energy conservation mode until a room is occupied. In-room motion detectors make "Do Not Disturb" signs a thing of the past, because the housekeeping staff can now time their cleaning activities for maximum customer convenience and satisfaction when guests are out of their rooms.<sup>38</sup> And, there are even more changes on the horizon. According to Tad Smith, Senior Vice President, e-Commerce, for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.,

In [the future], your credit card will also have your frequent guest information imbedded in a computer chip. When you walk through the door of our hotels, you'll be automatically checked in, and your credit card will become your key. You won't have to stand in any lines at all. You're going to have an entirely personal experience in your hotel. Your computer screen will already be configured to your homepage with your e-mail waiting for you (p. 64).<sup>39</sup>

Hotel guests now can even check in and select their own room using apps on their smartphone and then use their phone as a room key and payment device. Hotels have also begun to employ robots to run errands for guests, such as delivering laundry and sundries.

Travelers seeking new adventures will have the opportunity to participate in a real Jules Verne experience as they enjoy an underwater odyssey. Jules' Undersea Lodge in Key Largo, Florida, currently provides the only underwater accommodations for undersea adventures. However, if architects and developers have their way, larger nautical hotels could be built at offshore sites in Hawaii, Mexico, and Sicily.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of the personal touch can be seen in other areas of the tourism industry. For example, travelers are rediscovering the benefits to be gained from the professional knowledge of experienced travel agents. However, now, rather than visiting brick-and-mortar locations, they are accessing these agents through the Internet or phone and the agents are working from home. Consumer satisfaction has led to growth in this segment of the industry and as the need for personalized service grows, so will the number of agents.

Research shows that as more technology is introduced into the service encounter, customers can become dissatisfied if they are placed in a position where they need to deal with technology and service staff at the same time. To solve this problem, it was suggested that service technology interfaces might be designed so that they can be either integrated seamlessly into customer-employee exchanges or that customers should be given both space and time to deal with the technology side of