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AI Everywhere



The Hotel Yearbook
Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry

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Preface I: The Post- Human Traveler: Redefining the Guest

Zoltan Istvan

Public Figure in Transhumanism, Zoltan Istvan

Zoltan Istvan challenges the hospitality industry to think beyond its most basic assumption: that its guests will remain human. From life extension drugs and brain implants to humanoid companions and autonomous AI entities, he maps a transhumanist future that renders current notions of the guest experience — and the guest itself — genuinely obsolete.

For centuries, the hospitality industry hasn't changed much. Hotels, for example, typically provide people with a place to stay overnight in a safe, comfortable, and convenient setting. They haven't changed much because people haven't changed. After a long day toiling in a foreign place or exploring a new one, tourists want to return to a clean, safe place to regenerate.

But what happens when human beings fundamentally change? And I mean really change, like in the transhumanist sense. What happens to hospitality in a post-human existence? For example, what happens in the future when technology and modern science have eliminated sleep, something various companies are already working on in California, where I live? What happens when the need for food is eliminated from the human body because we now possess plant DNA and cells that allow people to photosynthesize energy from the sun, something transhumanists are already experimenting with?

The foundation of the hospitality industry is based on humans remaining humans. But as everyone can tell from how fast the world is changing, people may not remain so-called mammals much longer, almost certainly not by the end of this century. I expect some people to become cyborgs, digital avatars, cloned entities, humanoids, and even uploaded consciousnesses merged with AI.

So, how shall we approach the world of hotels and hospitality, something I am very keenly involved in as a professional speaker who constantly travels?

Let me take a step back, though, and fully introduce myself, so there is context for my wild forecasts and my lifelong love of travel. My first job out of college was with National Geographic, where I covered international stories as a reporter for their television channel and website. My stories ranged widely, from interviewing witches in Bolivia to covering the Olympics in Greece to risking my life filming war in Pakistan. I've had the experience of being attacked by pirates off Yemen, toured the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and fought for the forest in Paraguay. I even invented the sport of volcano boarding in Vanuatu, which went viral and is now practiced worldwide. In all, I've traveled to over 108 countries.

Despite my journalism career, today I'm best known around the world as a transhumanist, someone who advocates for merging people with machines and radical science. I've given talks all over the world, including at the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the UK Parliament. Additionally, my recent graduate degree at the University of Oxford focused significantly on Artificial Intelligence. Perhaps no other field is more transhuman than the way AI is upending our lives.

At the center of all my futurist work is a love for the novel, whatever is new, curious, and interesting. Much of the travel

and hospitality industries cater to those exact concepts, too. Without it, hotels would just be cages, protected from outside forces. Instead, many of the best hotels are fascinating, joyful experiences in themselves.

So how does the future pertain to such a thing? Let's start with what is likely to happen in the next 15 years, something not too far out, but enough to already plan for. For starters, AI is ushering in extensive new ways to combat disease and aging. Next year, it's quite likely that some of the very first life extension drugs will be FDA-approved, and people will start living statistically longer because of it. Studies in mice and other animals show that certain drugs can elongate life by upwards of 30%.

But that's just the start. AI is likely to uncover new drug molecules over the next three years that could double our lifespans, and eventually eliminate aging altogether. The number one goal of transhumanists, including myself, is not to die. Using science to stop this process will surely change our world soon. When I first got into transhumanism as a public figure, about 15 years ago, the longevity industry was worth a few billion dollars. Today, Bank of America suggests it could already be worth \$500 billion. Notably, a handful of billionaires, like Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and Peter Thiel, are actively funding longevity startups.

Considering all this, how does the hotel business change for a person who no longer ages? Does this mean there will be repeat customers for eternity? Loyalty becomes a far more powerful concept. Of course, certain hotels are already specializing in longevity hospitality, where staying at this kind of lodging is the main purpose, not just a place to stay overnight.

But transhumanism is about far more than just life extension. In Silicon Valley, where I make my home, Meta (Facebook's parent company) has spent billions on virtual reality, Elon Musk's Neuralink is spending billions to get people to upload their thoughts into machines, and OpenAI can give you best friend chatbots and maybe soon virtual partners too.

Blockbuster science fiction movies like Total Recall and Ready Player One have already introduced the public to a society overindulging itself with virtual reality. Hospitality becomes entertainment without leaving your couch. Hotels are virtual, yet they still charge money. Naturally, to run this type of business, there would be almost no overhead, especially as AI is likely to design and maintain everything, as is already the case in some instances.

Companies like Neuralink are actively conducting human trials, so that such virtual worlds are not just experienced through a headset you can put on and take off, but are always accessible to your brain through cranial implants. I have a chip in my hand that eliminates the need for car and house keys and can be used to locate me and pay at some stores. It may compromise some of my privacy, but I believe the convenience of using it outweighs that. In the future, I think everyone will get brain implants, as communication and access to AI will then exist directly in our thoughts. I imagine that within 15 years, this will likely be possible.

It's possible we could get the effects of staying in a top-tier hotel just by downloading the experience into our heads. In fact, like a drug, this might become very popular, just as people scroll on their phones endlessly or watch TV. At Oxford, my professor posed a challenging question: if you could be shot into space in a box and guaranteed to be happy forever, living in a programmed dream world, would you do it? A surprising number of people said "yes." This bodes well for the hospitality industry moving forward.

Here's something else that's going to happen within 15 years: humanoid companions. There are already places where you can go and meet sexual partners that are bots. Some fringe people are already marrying these AI bots. Probably within five years, unless you are using a magnifying glass, you likely will not be able to tell a humanoid robot from a real person. Surely many millions of lonely people will opt for this, especially as young people grow more isolated, according to studies. A dark but famous movie on the subject is called *The Stepford Wives*.

With this in mind, how will accommodation change if one member of a couple is not human? They don't need to eat, shower, use the restroom, or drink at the bar. But take this one step further: there are already millionaire AI bots roaming the web, making money with little or no human involvement. Within a few years, fully autonomous AIs will dominate the digital universe, potentially by the billions. Many of them will likely be far smarter and more creative than people, and they will host their own economy among themselves. These bots may even want vacations for themselves, and surely some will take physical form via robots.

Will the hospitality industry cater to this? Will there be civil rights issues, including moratoriums on such beings? Whatever happens, the hotel business will likely do better with more customers, regardless of whether they are human or not. Besides, many of these businesses will already be employing robots and AI assistants, adding another layer of ease to this new perspective on the hospitality industry.

Bear in mind, though, the future isn't just about bots. Perhaps more famous than any other scene in the *Star Wars* saga is the Tatooine bar scene with all the strange creatures that Han Solo visits. With CRISPR genetic editing and scientists already working on creating synthetic DNA, it wouldn't surprise me if it's not just robots vs. people, but robots vs. people vs. new, enhanced, hyper-intelligent creatures.

But beyond world wars and other existential planetary threats, regardless of who is what, it'll still be the economy that motivates nearly everyone. And if there's money to be made, then people will offer hotels and other mainstays of the hospitality industry.

In fact, I surmise that new fortunes will be made by being the first to target these emerging markets for AI vacations and virtual reality holidays. Additionally, existing markets and companies might gain publicity by being the first to open their businesses to such ideas.

Like it or not, we can't change how fast the future is coming. The way we think we understand the world will absolutely change within the next 15 years, and frankly, it could be unrecognizable by the year 2100. Rather than distance ourselves from the chaos that's coming, we should aim to open our minds, see where we can make some healthy profit, and generally just enjoy ourselves. After all, we are entering the most interesting time ever to be alive.

