

Hospitality Brings the World Together

By Nikki Strickland

Ever since I can remember, I wanted to travel the world. I have an ever-growing infatuation with all of the places and all of the cultures that surround us, and it has been my goal since childhood to learn and experience more.

Growing up, I thought the best way to do that would be through journalism. I was going to follow the footsteps of Christiane Amanpour and travel around the world to find the best story angles. However, about halfway through my first semester at Virginia Tech, I realized that might not be the best way. A few months later, I changed my major to Hospitality and Tourism Management.

After taking one introductory class in hospitality, I realized that this is the base of all cross-culture relationships. Without hospitality, travel would not exist. Hotels, restaurants and visitor centers make it possible for us to see life through one another's eyes and to be immersed into one another's cultures. They make it possible to not only travel from continent to continent by plane, but to walk down the street and end up in Italy just by walking through the doors of an authentically-themed restaurant.

I am inspired by the strong culture in international restaurants. From the authentic food served, to the culturally appropriate decorations, I find that restaurants, both chain and family-owned, do a wonderful job of transporting their customers to a different place and time while they enjoy their food and service.

Through my future career in hospitality, I hope to draw on my own international experiences to create culturally immersive settings for other travelers and diners. This could be done in both restaurants and hotels, transforming otherwise ordinary occurrences into cultural experiences, through decorations, employee training and an overall commitment to authenticity.

It is my belief that we truly are a global community, and that food and a place to lay one's head are at the heart of it. Cultural understanding and acceptance can be gained through individual and commercial hospitality. It is my hope to one day contribute to that hospitality, and to make any visitor, foreign or local, feel welcome.