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The Privilege of Being Chosen

HOSPITALITY, CULTURE & HUMAN CONNECTION

By Nick Mazzi



*Being chosen is a privilege,
and we should make it felt.*

A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON HOSPITALITY

The Privilege of Being Chosen

Hospitality, cultural respect, and why Europe cannot afford to take its guests for granted

By Nick Mazzi, Founder and CEO, Divita DMC

A destination can be admired without making people feel welcome. A hotel can be beautiful without making people feel cared for. A journey can deliver every service on the itinerary and still leave something essential missing.

That missing element is often the feeling that our presence matters.

For Europe, this should be an uncomfortable thought. We possess an extraordinary inheritance of art, landscapes, food, architecture, and traditions. Yet an inheritance, however remarkable, does not relieve us of the responsibility to welcome the people who travel to experience it. Beauty can inspire a booking. The way we treat someone helps determine what that booking becomes.

The question is not whether Europeans are less polite than Asians. Neither Europe nor Asia has one personality, and a comparison between an exceptional resort in Thailand and an overwhelmed café in a European capital tells us very little. A meaningful comparison must consider price, staffing, ownership, visitor pressure, and the expectations of the guest. What deserves examination is how different hospitality traditions translate respect into behavior, and what Europe can learn without losing its own identity.

Hospitality begins with an unequal distribution of knowledge. The host understands the language, the systems, the customs, and the unwritten rules. The visitor may understand none of them. Even an experienced, wealthy traveler can become unexpectedly dependent when a transfer fails, a reservation disappears, or an explanation makes no sense.

The ethical responsibility of the host is to use that advantage generously. Clear information, patience, and practical help allow the guest to recover confidence. An impatient answer does the opposite. It turns unfamiliarity into embarrassment.

This is why manners matter beyond appearances. A greeting acknowledges someone. An explanation restores their ability to choose. A discreet correction protects their dignity. Courtesy is part of the way a society makes room for people who do not yet know how it works.

Philosophy offers a useful perspective. Jacques Derrida explored the tension between unconditional welcome and the conditions that inevitably govern real hospitality. Applied to tourism, this invites a practical question: how do we maintain necessary rules without allowing those rules to replace the relationship? A hotel needs policies, and a destination needs limits. The moral quality of hospitality also lies in how those limits are explained and applied. This is an interpretation of his philosophy, not a hotel management prescription. [1]

Japanese omotenashi offers one particularly valuable example of hospitality as deliberate attention. Its relevance extends beyond the familiar image of impeccable courtesy. Morishita and Kosaka's 2017 case study of Kagaya, a traditional Japanese inn, found that its service depended on focused training, communication across the organization, and feedback shared between staff and customers. Exceptional attention was supported by management practices. It did not simply happen because the staff were Japanese. [2]

That distinction matters. When we describe excellent service as something another culture does "naturally," we risk overlooking the work that makes it possible. Anticipating a need requires observation. Remembering a preference requires continuity. Responding gracefully requires both skill and permission to act.

Research in Thailand also suggests that hospitality cannot be reduced to a smile. A 2023 study by Manisa Piuchan, based on 11 interviews and 320 questionnaires from frontline hotel service providers, identified several components of Thai hospitality, including professional qualities, workplace culture and skills, cultural practices, and the hotel environment. It examined providers' perspectives, rather than proving that tourists universally prefer Thai service. Its value lies in showing how cultural expectations and operational practices interact. [3]

Those expectations can also create tensions. Nattana Leelaharattanarak's analysis of Thai service encounters discusses how social roles, economic power, and the cultural value of *kreng jai* influence communication. Respect cannot be understood simply by counting smiles or measuring deference. The relationship may contain constraints that are invisible to the visitor. [4]

Europe should learn from attentiveness without romanticizing submission. Excellent hospitality must preserve the dignity of the person delivering it. The ambition should be staff who are observant, capable, and respected, with the confidence to help and the authority to set reasonable boundaries.

Equally, guests do not all read the same behavior in the same way. For one person, constant attention feels reassuring. For another, it feels intrusive. Informality can communicate warmth or a lack of professionalism. Formality can convey respect or emotional distance.

A 2021 study by Alemán Carreón and colleagues analyzed Chinese and Western tourists' reviews of Japanese hotels. Within that dataset, Chinese reviewers placed greater emphasis on room quality, while Western reviewers responded more strongly to staff behavior. These are patterns in a particular set of reviews, not instructions for treating individuals according to their passports. They illustrate why a service culture cannot assume that its own definition of excellence is universally understood. [5]

The practical lesson is to ask, observe, and adapt. Cultural awareness should expand our curiosity about a guest. It should never become an excuse to stop being curious.

Europe has much to contribute to this conversation. Think of hospitality built around the knowledge of a local guide, the personality of a family hotel, or a restaurant

owner's pleasure in sharing a regional tradition. Such encounters offer something precious: participation in a place with its own character. Preserving that character matters. Visitors should not have to receive the same standardized welcome everywhere.

My concern is what happens when confidence in that character becomes complacency. A famous destination can begin to behave as though demand is guaranteed. The table will be filled. The room will be sold. Another visitor will arrive tomorrow. Under that logic, the individual becomes replaceable even while the business celebrates its occupancy.

I see this as a risk in mature, heavily visited destinations, not a proven description of Europe as a whole. But it deserves honest scrutiny. Commercial success can conceal relational failure. A guest may have come for the city and tolerated the hotel. A full restaurant may owe more to its location than to the quality of its welcome.

The shortcomings worth challenging are concrete: procedures explained with irritation, requests treated as interruptions, unclear charges, inconsistent communication, and problems passed between suppliers until the guest becomes the coordinator. None is uniquely European. None becomes acceptable because the building is historic or the view is exceptional.

Authenticity also needs a more honest definition. A restaurant can preserve its cuisine and explain its customs kindly. A guide can protect the integrity of a story while adjusting its pace. A hotel can refuse an unreasonable request without humiliating the person who made it. Local identity is richer than inflexibility.

However, a serious criticism of service must look beyond the employee at the desk. The OECD's Tourism Trends and Policies 2024 identifies longstanding workforce problems, including low wages, variable and long working hours, skills shortages, and difficulties attracting and retaining staff. These are international structural issues, not evidence of a uniquely European attitude. [6]

My conclusion is that businesses cannot demand patient, attentive care while organizing work in ways that make it increasingly difficult to provide. Training, realistic staffing, fair treatment, and authority to solve problems belong inside the hospitality budget. They are part of the product the guest is buying.

Local residents belong in this argument too. A place is someone's home before it becomes someone else's holiday. The 2018 UNWTO report on overtourism examined residents' perceptions in eight European cities and proposed ways to manage tourism for the benefit of both residents and visitors. It framed visitor pressure as a matter of planning and governance, rather than something solved by promotion alone. [7]

We should distinguish frustration with overcrowding from hostility toward an individual traveler. Residents have legitimate interests in housing, public space, and a livable neighborhood. Guests have a responsibility to respect local life. Tourism businesses and public authorities have a responsibility to manage the encounter. Asking everyone to smile will not resolve a badly managed destination.

What, then, should hospitality promise? In my view, confidence, recognition, fairness, and freedom from unnecessary friction. Guests should understand what they have purchased, know whom to contact, and trust that someone will take responsibility when something goes wrong. They should feel able to ask a question without becoming a nuisance.

This is also a commercial issue. In PwC's 2025 survey of 5,511 US consumers, 29% said they had stopped using or buying from a brand because of poor customer experience, online or in person. The same research found that 86% considered human interaction moderately or very important to their brand experience. These are broad consumer findings, not a tourism survey or a Europe versus Asia comparison. They nevertheless give businesses a reason to question the assumption that loyalty will survive indifference. [8]

For travel, the personal stakes can be especially high. A delayed answer may consume part of a short holiday. An avoidable mistake may interrupt an anniversary, a family reunion, or a journey someone has postponed for years. A refund can return money. It cannot recreate an afternoon.

This is where the subject becomes personal for me. My professional life has connected Europe, the United States, and Asia, first through international commerce and fashion, and now through Divita. That background is the perspective from which I ask these questions. I care deeply about what Europe offers, and I believe that pride should make us more demanding of ourselves.

At Divita, the principle I want to defend is simple: when someone travels with us, they are entrusting us with a portion of their life. Their time carries a value that cannot be explained by the price of a suite or the category of a car. Our responsibility is to understand what that time means to them and organize our work accordingly.

Listening is essential to that responsibility. We can hear a request for a private experience and immediately think about exclusivity. Listening may reveal a need for privacy, a slower pace for an elderly parent, or a family's wish to spend time together without interruption. The same booking can carry very different human meanings.

I would rather we ask one thoughtful question before a journey than deliver an elegant explanation after missing its purpose.

For tour operators, DMCs, and hotels, this philosophy has practical consequences. We should select partners partly by how they respond under pressure. We should communicate relevant preferences carefully, agree who owns a problem, and give guests a clear point of contact. We should examine repeated complaints for failures in our systems, and evaluate whether a resolution actually restored the guest's confidence.

We should also judge courtesy by its consistency. A visitor struggling with the language, a modestly dressed guest, and a returning client should all encounter basic respect. Luxury may purchase additional space, privacy, and access. Human dignity should never depend on the room category.

Europe does not need to abandon its personality to improve its hospitality. It needs to bring the care it gives to its heritage into the ordinary interactions through which visitors experience that heritage. There is room for regional character, professional boundaries, and a generous welcome in the same encounter.

What I hope we learn from other cultures is a willingness to examine our own habits. Does our confidence put a guest at ease? Do our procedures help them? When something fails, do they feel supported? These questions are more useful than deciding which continent is the better host.

People may cross the world to see what we have inherited. How we welcome them is what we contribute. Being chosen is a privilege, and we should make it felt.

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