



From Theory to Practice: A Reflective Analysis of a Hotel Management Internship in a Japanese Resort

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Abstract

Background: Internships are a critical pedagogical component in hotel management education, serving to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical industry application. This report stems from a 12-month training internship at Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato, a family-oriented resort in Japan, undertaken to gain immersive experience in operational hospitality departments.

Objectives: The primary objectives were to acquire hands-on skills in Housekeeping and Food & Beverage Service, understand daily resort operations, apply customer service theory in practice, and analyze the resort's strategic positioning within the competitive hospitality landscape.

Methods: The internship followed a rotational training methodology. Qualitative data was gathered through direct participation, observational learning, and reflective practice across two key departments: Housekeeping (1 month, 20 days) and F&B Service (8 months). A situational analysis (SWOT) was conducted based on operational experience and organizational review.

Findings: The internship facilitated significant development of technical and soft skills, including SOP adherence, inventory management, and guest interaction. Key challenges identified were language barriers, seasonal workload management, and maintaining service consistency. Participation in major seasonal events provided crucial insights into large-scale hospitality operations. A SWOT analysis revealed the resort's strengths in family services and location, alongside weaknesses in facility maintenance and market diversification.

Conclusion & Recommendation: The internship was a transformative experience that enhanced professional readiness and industry understanding. It is concluded that immersive,



departmental training is essential for competency development. Recommendations for the resort include enhancing language support for international staff, diversifying market segments beyond families, and implementing a proactive digital maintenance system. For academic programs, pre-internship language preparation and structured reflective components are advised.

Implementation: The findings can be implemented by hospitality educators to design more effective internship curricula, focusing on pre-departure preparation and reflective assessment. Resort management can apply the operational recommendations to improve staff training programs, guest experience, and strategic marketing initiatives.

Keywords: hotel management, internship experience, hospitality skills, Japan tourism, service operations

Background

Internships serve as a critical bridge between academic theory and professional practice in hotel management education (Mohseni, 2023). They provide students with immersive, hands-on experience essential for understanding the operational complexities and service excellence demands of the hospitality industry. This manuscript presents a reflective analysis of a comprehensive 12-month internship undertaken at Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato, a renowned family-focused resort in Yuzawa, Japan. The report details the author's rotational training in the Housekeeping and Food & Beverage (F&B) Service departments, examining the responsibilities undertaken, challenges encountered, skills acquired, and key observations on resort operations. Furthermore, it evaluates the organization's market position through a SWOT analysis and concludes with recommendations for both the intern's professional trajectory and the resort's operational practices.

Organization Profile

Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato, established in 1992, is part of the Angel Hotel Group, operating as a "child-rearing support resort" (Angel Group, Inc., 2024). Located in Niigata Prefecture with convenient access from Tokyo, the resort strategically positions itself at the base of the Yuzawa Nakazato ski area, offering ski-in/ski-out access in winter and nature-based activities in summer. Its core mission is to create happiness and strengthen family bonds through shared vacation experiences (Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato, 2025). The resort holds the "Welcome Baby" certification and has received industry accolades, including the Jalan Net Award 2023 for top sales in its category (Angel Group, Inc., 2024). It offers 271 rooms in Japanese, Western, and hybrid styles, extensive onsen (hot spring) facilities, and a yearly calendar of themed seasonal events targeting families.

Methodology

The internship followed a structured, experiential learning methodology over 12 months from July to June. The placement was secured directly with Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato due to



its reputation for family-oriented service and dynamic event programming. The intern rotated through two key departments:

1. **Housekeeping Department (1 month, 20 days):** Engagement in daily room cleaning, public area maintenance, inventory management of supplies, and adherence to cleaning protocols.
2. **Food & Beverage Service Department (8 months):** Involvement in dining room setup, guest service, order taking, event catering, and application of food safety standards.

Data collection was primarily qualitative and reflective, based on direct participation, observation, supervisor feedback, and documentation of daily tasks in a provided logbook. Analysis involved thematic reflection on experiences, challenges, and learning outcomes to synthesize practical insights.

Findings and Internship Experience

Job Responsibilities and Skills Development

In Housekeeping, core responsibilities ensured guest room and public area cleanliness met stringent hotel standards, involving detailed cleaning checklists and inventory control. Transitioning to F&B Service, the focus shifted to direct guest interaction, managing dining operations, and supporting large-scale event catering. This rotation facilitated comprehensive skill development:

- **Technical Skills:** Proficiency in room preparation protocols, inventory systems, table service techniques, and food safety (HACCP) principles.
- **Soft Skills:** Enhanced communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and intercultural competency through daily guest and colleague interaction (Truckey, 2024).
- **Industry Knowledge:** Gained insights into resort operations, guest psychology, seasonal demand management, and the integration of sustainability practices.

Operational Culture and Challenges

The resort's culture emphasized a guest-centric approach, professionalism, and inter-departmental collaboration. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) governed all tasks to ensure consistency. Significant challenges were identified:

1. **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Communication with Japanese-speaking guests and staff required adaptation and proactive learning of key phrases (Today's Hotelier, 2025).
2. **Seasonal Workload Management:** Peak periods during festivals (e.g., Winter Festa, Christmas Festa) created high-pressure environments demanding exceptional time management and resilience.
3. **Maintaining Service Consistency:** Adhering to SOPs while personalizing guest service during rapid transitions between departments presented a continuous learning curve.



Strategies to mitigate these challenges included utilizing digital tools for task management, seeking regular feedback from supervisors, and fostering supportive relationships with colleagues for collaborative problem-solving.

Participation in Seasonal Events

A defining aspect of the internship was involvement in the resort's extensive event calendar. The intern assisted in executing:

- **Winter Festa ("YUKI YUKI Land"):** Supported outdoor F&B service for snow activities.
- **Christmas & Halloween Festa:** Managed themed catering and guest interactions for family-centered celebrations.
- **Summer Events:** Assisted in operations for nature walks and river activities. These events provided invaluable experience in logistics, crowd management, and thematic service delivery, highlighting the resort's strategy to drive occupancy through unique experiential offerings.

Key Observations

1. **Guest Satisfaction as Core Driver:** Every operational decision, from housekeeping detail to menu presentation, was ultimately evaluated against its impact on guest experience and satisfaction.
2. **Interdepartmental Synergy:** Effective communication between Housekeeping, F&B, and Front Office was non-negotiable for seamless guest journeys, especially during check-in/out times and event transitions.
3. **Sustainability Integration:** The resort actively implemented energy-saving measures and waste reduction practices, reflecting a growing industry imperative toward environmental responsibility.

SWOT Analysis of Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato

A SWOT analysis synthesizes observations of the resort's strategic position:

- **Strengths:** Award-winning family services, prime ski location, comprehensive on-site amenities, and strong brand recognition within Japan.
- **Weaknesses:** Inconsistent facility maintenance noted in guest reviews, a narrow market focus potentially excluding non-family segments, and high dependency on seasonal demand.
- **Opportunities:** Expansion into wellness and inbound international tourism, leveraging digital marketing and loyalty programs, and synergies with sister properties in the Angel Group.
- **Threats:** Intense competition from other ski resorts in Yuzawa, economic sensitivity of family leisure travel, and rising operational costs.

Discussion

The internship at Angel Grandia Echigo Nakazato offered a microcosm of the modern hospitality industry's demands. The experience validated theoretical knowledge on operational



management while revealing the nuanced reality of service execution. Challenges like language barriers are common in international internships (Jamarr Black, 2022) but provide a crucial context for developing adaptive communication skills. The seasonal volatility of resort business underscored the importance of flexibility and resilience, traits essential for hospitality careers.

The resort's success with a differentiated family niche supports Porter's generic strategy of focus, yet the identified weaknesses suggest vulnerabilities. The intern's direct experience with maintenance logs and guest feedback channels aligns with documented best practices for quality assurance in hospitality (Barten, 2024). Furthermore, the observed emphasis on sustainability initiatives reflects a broader industry shift toward corporate social responsibility, which is increasingly influencing guest booking decisions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This 12-month internship was a transformative professional development experience. It successfully translated academic concepts into practical competence, fostering significant growth in technical abilities, soft skills, and industry understanding. The immersive exposure to Japanese service ethos and large-scale event management has provided a distinct competitive advantage for a global hospitality career.

Based on the internship experience and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **For the Resort:** Implement enhanced language and cultural competency training for international staff to improve guest communication. Diversify marketing and package offerings to attract wellness and shoulder-season travelers, mitigating seasonal revenue fluctuations. Invest in a proactive, technology-aided facility maintenance system to address consistency issues noted in qualitative feedback.
- **For Future Interns and Academic Programs:** Encourage or provide basic Japanese language preparation before departure. Structure reflective practice into the internship requirement to deepen learning outcomes. Foster partnerships that allow for rotations in revenue management or sales departments to give a more holistic view of resort operations.

Transparency Statement: The author confirms that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Data Availability Statement: Author can provide data.

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