



# NEXT GENERATION

## The Global Travel Tech Thinktank: The Next Generation in Travel Tech

14 October 2024 | Oasia Resort Sentosa





The **Global Travel Tech Thinktank** is an exclusive, invite-only collaboration between **WIT**, **Phocuswright**, and **PhocusWire**, held alongside **WIT Singapore**.

### Past Themes:

**2022**

**How to Future-Proof Travel: Resilience, Responsibility, Respect**  
[\[Download Here\]](#)

**2023**

**The Possibilities & Responsibilities of Travel In The Age of AI and Tech**  
[\[Download Here\]](#)

**2024**

**The Next Generation in Travel Tech**

Generative AI, human-machine interfaces and their impact on next generation travellers.

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*“There is no textbook; I’d love to hire an AI expert to guide us, but we need to bring them from the future. We need to become those people.”*

**Idan Zalzburg, CTO of Agoda**



## Part 1: Key Takeaways

Idan Zalberg, CTO of Agoda, led the Thinktank's opening discussion, spotlighting major trends and challenges in the AI-driven evolution of travel.

### 1. AI's Transformative Potential

AI's ability to perform complex human tasks, such as summarizing content and interpreting language, brings unprecedented personalisation and operational efficiency.

*"All of these tasks that have been solely human are now something computers can assist with."*

### 2. The Challenge of Generative AI's Unpredictability

Generative AI's outcomes can be inconsistent, making it difficult to rely on traditional testing and controls. This demands a new reliability framework for AI-driven processes.

*"I write a piece of software and hope it does what I want...but it's unpredictable, sometimes providing completely different results."*

### 3. Improved Knowledge Sharing and Customer Support

AI has streamlined knowledge management across teams by referencing up-to-date documentation, enhancing team efficiency and customer experience.

*"The AI reads the documentation and helps those seeking support, which motivates teams to maintain clear and relevant documentation."*

### 4. Scaling and Iteration Challenges

Moving from AI prototypes to production-level deployment involves maintaining consistency, accuracy and reliability, especially in customer-facing applications.

*"It's almost frustrating; it feels like a short blanket where fixing one thing causes another to go wrong."*

## Part 1: Key Takeaways

### 5. Rising User Expectations for Personalisation

AI-driven tools raise travelers' expectations for human-like responsiveness, creating demand for highly adaptive, personalised interactions.

*"When you give people an AI interface, they expect human-like performance – to think for them, to adjust bookings, to truly interact."*

### 6. Industry-Wide Collaboration Is Critical

With no established playbook for AI at this scale, collaboration is essential to navigate the challenges and maximize AI's potential.

*"I'd love to hire an AI expert to guide us, but we need to bring them from the future. We need to become those people."*



## Part 2: Key Themes & Recommendations

With Idan Zalberg setting the tone for discussions and brainstorming, the Thinktank went into a **panel discussion**, followed by a **brainstorming session** with different groups. These are the key themes and recommendations that followed.

### Panelists

- Jonathan Tong, Senior Vice President, Head of South-east Asia, India Subcontinent & Greater China, Amadeus
- Adrienne Enggist, Senior Director of Product - Customer Experience and Platforms, Booking.com
- Amy Wei, Sr. Product Director at Trip.com Group, Founder of TripGenie/TrainPal by Trip.com
- Tan Bee Leng, Chief Commercial Officer, The Ascott Limited / Managing Director, Digital Ventures, CapitaLand
- David Liu, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Klook

*Moderated by Timothy Hughes, Corporate Development, Agoda (extreme left)*



# Theme 1: AI-Driven Personalisation – The Power and Limits

## Panel Insights

1. Concerns over hallucination remain in the discovery phase; the stage of itinerary recommendations is more challenging.

*“Given the infrequent touchpoints of an OTA, there is limitation in deeply understanding of the traveller’s preferences. There is also the challenge of ensuring that recommendations are both accurate and feasible.”*

**David Liu, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Klook(right)**

2. There is a need for flexible, composable UI that can adapt and reflect both successful and unsuccessful recommendations. The system must learn and adjust based on this feedback, making the process iterative and responsive.

*“The more guardrails we try to put on, the more we limit its ability to do the real magic that’s baked in with AI.”*

**Adrienne Enggist, Senior Director of Product - Customer Experience and Platforms, Booking.com**

3. Privacy issues are a concern, with people cautious to share data, unless they have consented and see benefits.



# Theme 1: AI-Driven Personalisation – The Power and Limits



## Group Recommendations

### **Enhance Supplier Collaboration for Data Depth**

Strengthen relationships with suppliers to capture high-quality, specific data.

### **Build Trust through Transparent and Verifiable Information**

Integrate a citation system for responses, showing data sources or verifications to reassure users that responses are grounded in real data, not model assumptions.

### **Prioritize High-Quality Data Over Volume**

Shift focus from generic data metrics to quality metrics that directly inform the user experience.

### **Utilize Localized, On-Device Models for Enhanced Personalisation**

Experiment with device-specific models to gather contextual, localized data that doesn't compromise user privacy.



## Theme 2: AI-Driven Workforce Transformation – Redefining Roles in Travel

### Panel Insights

1. AI is reshaping roles in customer service, enabling agents to focus on more complex and fulfilling work. This transformation goes beyond efficiency, it's about enhancing the quality of work life. This AI-driven shift elevates customer service from routine processing to a role that values skill and empathy.
2. AI is also transforming language translation within customer service, allowing for faster and more accurate translations across several languages. This is particularly useful in managing complex language pairs, like Japanese to Thai.

*"This collaborative effort allows the team to maintain high standards in customer communication, leveraging technology to amplify efficiency while retaining cultural accuracy."*

**Amy Wei**  
**Sr. Product Director at Trip.com Group,**  
**Founder of TripGenie/TrainPal by Trip.com**



# Theme 2: AI-Driven Workforce Transformation – Redefining Roles in Travel

## Group Recommendations

### **Define and Cultivate New Skills and Roles**

Invest in identifying and nurturing the specific skills needed for AI integration, with a focus on upskilling and reskilling existing employees.

### **Develop Clear Role Classifications for AI Integration**

Establish a clear distinction between business-critical and non-critical roles to ensure AI is applied appropriately without undermining key functions. Prioritize roles that offer the most impact through automation and human oversight.

### **Implement Feedback Loops for Continuous Improvement**

Incorporate feedback loops, allowing ongoing refinement of both AI applications and employee roles.

### **Assess Risk Levels and Transition Pace**

Balance the pace of AI integration with the company's risk tolerance.



## Theme 3: The Airlines' Evolution to Retail

### Panel Insights

1. While airlines are evolving, they won't be able to fully replicate the role of OTAs due to structural limitations, which restrict them from bundling products seamlessly.
2. However Generative AI will play a transformative role in the transition, enabling them to dive deeper into customer data to create highly personalised offers.

*"AI is already doing more than just calculate customer lifetime value – it's leveraging data and metrics to identify customer churn and taking action; for example, when a customer might be losing loyalty and take action to re-engage them to bring them back."*

**Jonathan Tong**  
**Senior Vice President,**  
**Head of South-East Asia, India Subcontinent & Greater China,**  
**Amadeus**



## Theme 3: The Airlines' Evolution to Retail



### Group Recommendations

#### **Implement Data Wallets to Give Customers Control**

Develop secure data wallets that allow customers to store, manage, and selectively share data with various industry players. Integrate AI to automate preferences and ensure ease of use.

#### **Use AI to Enable Cohort-Based Personalisation**

Leverage AI to provide personalisation through cohort analysis rather than specific personal data, respecting privacy while delivering tailored experiences.

#### **Develop Cross-Platform AI Agents for Post-Booking Support**

Design AI agents that handle post-booking tasks, including cancellations, amendments, and supplier coordination.

#### **Foster Industry Collaboration on Data Sharing Standards**

Encourage industry-wide cooperation to create flexible standards for data sharing, focusing on anonymized or cohort-based data to support customer personalization without compromising privacy.

# Theme 4: AI and the Democratization of Travel – Expanding Access Through Technology

## Panel Insights

1. AI allows travel players to expand access by interpreting “the fire hose of intent” customers bring to travel planning, enabling it to address specific segments such as the LGBTQ+ travellers or travellers with disabilities.

2. Capturing the unique long tail demands of users is challenging as platforms traditionally focus on the high demand mainstream funnel. For niche demand, it can observe patterns in browsing behaviour to identify interests.

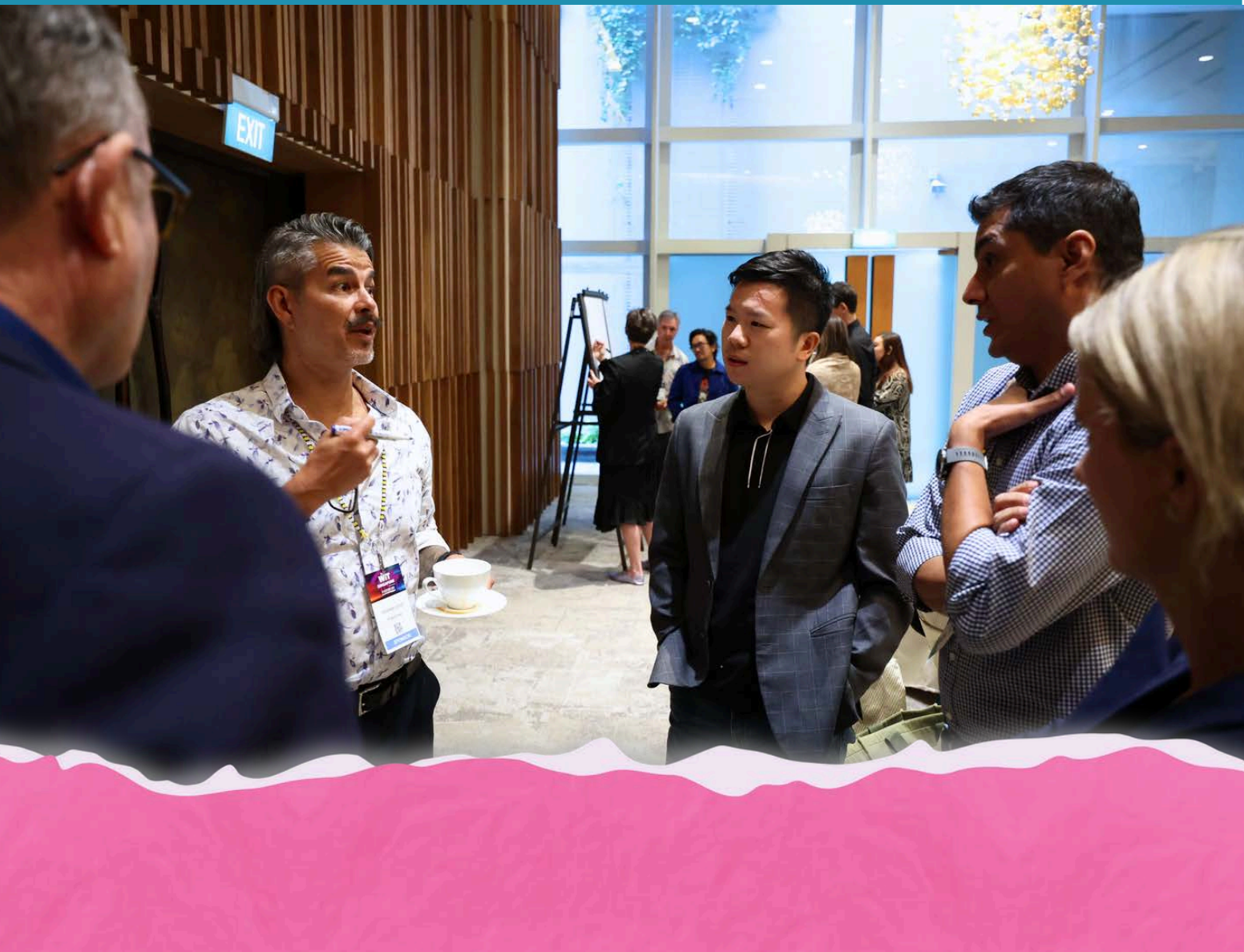
*“If we can interpret human language well enough to understand and infer causal relationships, we open up a new level of personalised travel experiences.”*

**Adrienne Enggist**  
**Senior Director of Product-  
Customer Experience and Platforms,  
Booking.com**

*“You can’t just ask users directly, but you can subtly infer needs through behaviour. By using advanced AI models to prompt users in a way that respects privacy, we can guide travellers toward options that resonate with their unique interests, helping to lower barriers to travel inclusivity.”*

**Amy Wei**  
**Sr. Product Director at Trip.com Group,  
Founder of TripGenie/TrainPal by Trip.com**

# Theme 4: AI and the Democratisation of Travel – Expanding Access Through Technology



## Group Recommendations

### **Establish a Unified Data Platform for Persona Management**

Consolidate user data across platforms to create a single source of truth for each traveler persona.

### **Implement AI-Powered Niche Segmentation and Personalization**

Use AI to categorize users into niche segments based on combined characteristics, such as pet owner, foodie, or LGBTQ+, and design customized content tailored to these nuanced segments.

### **Develop a Privacy-Centric Data Collection Strategy**

Implement measures that allow users to control their data and understand its usage.

### **Incorporate a Feedback Loop for Continuous Segment Refinement**

Use a feedback system that tracks the success and failure of segmentations, feeding insights back to improve accuracy and relevance of future recommendations.

### **Identify Correlations Across Segmentations for Broader**

Analyze correlations between user segmentations to anticipate new travel preferences. For example, users who favour European trips may be open to similar experiences in South America.

## Theme 5: AI In Charge of the Tech Stack – Gen UI

### Panel Insights

There is a future where AI takes a central role in dynamically controlling user interfaces, moving away from static, hard-coded websites toward flexible, composable screens.

*“We’re beyond just creating fixed websites; it’s about allowing machines to manage the UI in a hybrid mode.*

*AI’s control over the tech stack and user experience could redefine digital interactions, setting the stage for a more adaptive, responsive interface design.”*

**Adrienne Enggist**  
**Senior Director of Product-  
Customer Experience and Platforms,**  
**Booking.com**



## Theme 5: AI In Charge of the Tech Stack – Gen UI



### Group Recommendations

#### **Develop a Comprehensive Digital Twin Model**

Focus on building a robust 'Me+' digital twin model that integrates both known and unknown aspects of the individual, creating a more complete and interactive self-representation.

#### **Create a Context-Sensitive Tech Stack**

Design a tech stack that adapts to various contextual influences, incorporating elements like availability and fixed factors to provide a dynamic, personalized experience.

#### **Establish an AI-Driven Structure for Enhanced Capabilities**

Implement a hierarchical, AI-supported structure that defines supply and capabilities while considering user preferences and environmental influences.

#### **Harness AI to Identify and Expand Beyond Human Capabilities**

Use AI to push beyond basic human limitations, ensuring each part of the system has advanced capabilities that support a more enriched and capable 'Me+' experience.

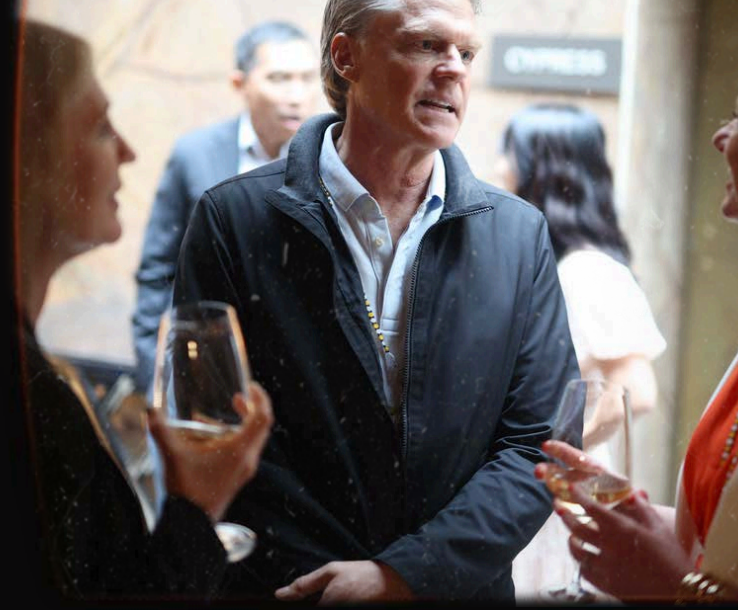


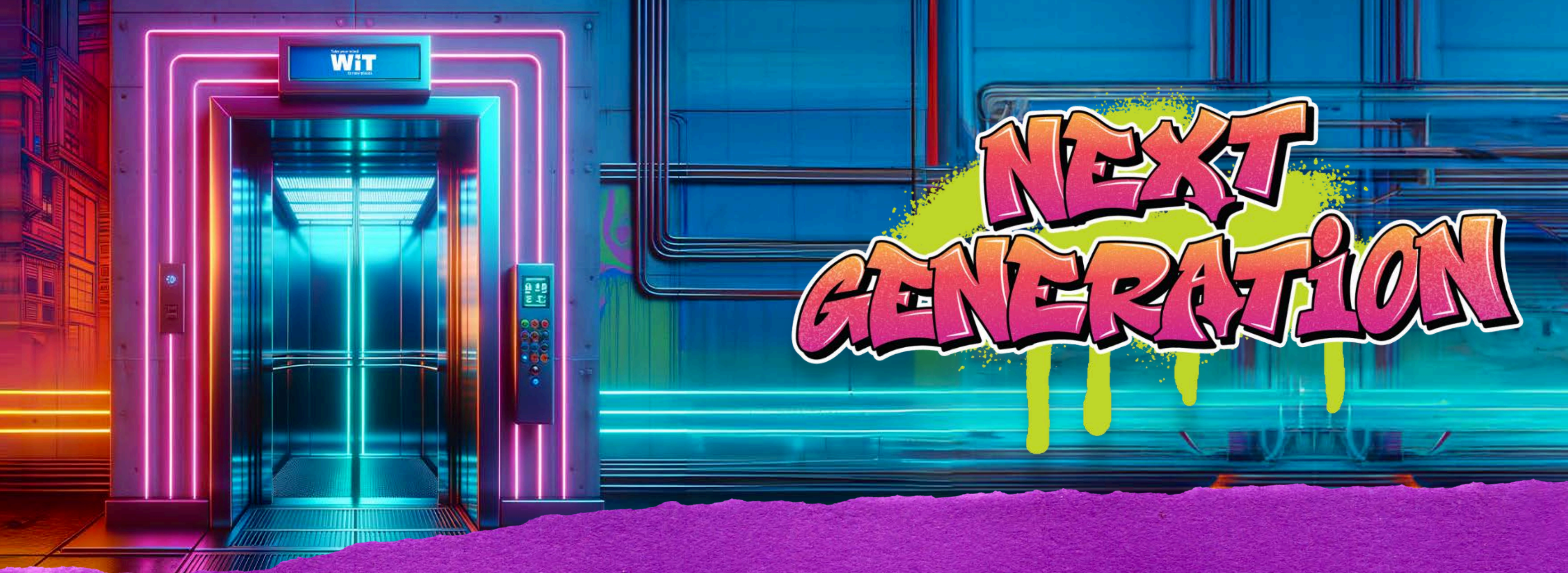
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## Conclusion

The Global Travel Tech Thinktank 2024 underscored the profound impact of AI in transforming travel tech, from personalisation to workforce evolution. However, challenges such as unpredictability, scaling issues, and privacy concerns remain.

By fostering collaboration, ethical practices, and transparency, the industry can maximize AI's potential, shaping a future where travel tech evolves in tandem with traveller needs and expectations.





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Organised By:



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