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WIT SINGAPORE THE HUMAN REVOLUTION

The Global Travel Tech Thinktank: The Possibilities & Responsibilities of Travel In The Age of AI and Tech

October 2, 2023

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The first Global Travel Tech Thinktank, held by WiT, Phocuswright and Phocuswire, covered the theme of “**How To Future Proof Travel: Resilience, Responsibility, Respect**”.

2022

A direct outcome of that Thinktank was the launch of the [WiT Travel Changers Awards in 2023](#) (supported by ATTIA) to recognise travel industry players who have built back better in line with recommendations raised at the Thinktank – five categories were recognised: [environment awareness](#), [local community engagement](#), [hidden gems](#), [generative tourism](#) and [diversity and inclusion](#).



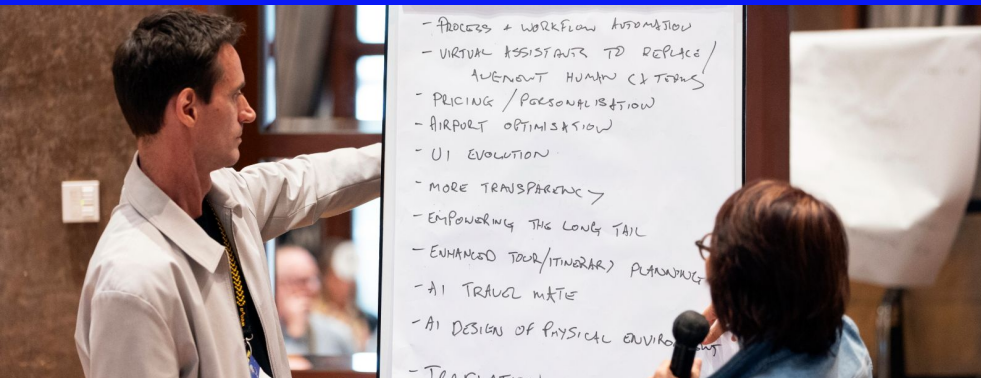
2023

The second Global Travel Tech Thinktank, held as part of WiT Singapore 2023, gathered close to **60 key industry leaders** from around the world to brainstorm the way forward for travel in the age of AI and tech.

Its purpose was to brainstorm ideas under the umbrella theme of “**The Possibilities & Responsibilities of Travel In The Age of AI and Tech**”.



Executive Summary



The Thinktank identified **9 main possibilities and corresponding hazards** of generative AI for the travel industry, as well as the **responsibilities and recommendations** for various stakeholders to address them.

Addressing over tourism

Generative AI could help to incentivize adjacent tourism spots, disincentivize poor usage, and use tech to decongest crowded destinations, but it could also raise privacy, bias, and algorithmic issues.

Pricing and load optimization

Generative AI could enable personalized pricing, optimal supply and demand match, sustainable computation, better forecast, asset utilization, upsell/ancillaries, and process optimization, but it could also face regulatory, data, competitive, and irrational pricing challenges.

Talent

Generative AI could enhance the industry's productivity, efficiency, and creativity, but it could also lead to job displacement, skill gap, and talent retention issues.

Empowering the long tail

Generative AI could facilitate the discovery, curation, digitization, training, and feedback of micro service providers, but it could also encounter challenges in data quality, consistency, incentives, and privacy.

Turbocharging product innovation

Generative AI could automate and accelerate large parts of design, coding, testing, and marketing processes, allowing for more experimentation and differentiation, but it could also generate spam, bias, and unsustainable outcomes.

Deep personalization

Generative AI could enable targeted travel recommendations, minimize fraud, streamline payments, and create customer stickiness, but it could also raise questions on data ownership, privacy, and transparency.

Building the connected trip

Generative AI could integrate and consolidate trip data, provide virtual concierge, match trip history and preferences, and manage disruption and communication, but it could also require a universal travel ID, data validation, and customer trust.



Inclusivity

Generative AI could improve the accessibility and experience of travel for people with disabilities, by crowdsourcing and validating inclusive data, and meeting sustainability and ESG goals, but it could also depend on the endorsement and participation of customers, local governments, telcos, DMOs, platforms, and hotels.

Predictions on anything and everything

Generative AI could enhance common and new predictive elements of travel, such as future rates, optimal times to book, best products or experiences, fraud or fake detection, but it could also be affected by natural disasters, market volatility, and incomplete data.

The Thinktank concluded that Generative AI opens up many possibilities for travel, but also poses many hazards that need to be mitigated.

The key is to **start internally, start small, and try it out**, while also **collaborating** with other industry players, governments, and regulators to ensure data protection, ethical standards, and social responsibility.



Key Takeaways



Generative AI and the speed with which it is unfolding will pose both **possibilities** and **hazards** in the **third digital age of travel**.

Age 1



Internet

Age 2



Social & Mobile

Age 3



AI
Cloud
Fragmentation



Thus it is imperative that our industry explores the many ways in which Generative AI can transform the industry, as well as discuss how we can **mitigate these risks**.



“Generative AI is at an inflection point where it’s becoming more **powerful** and **accessible** than ever before.

This technology creates new data, content, and ideas, mimicking human creativity and replacing static operational workflows.”

On The One Hand

It could unlock unprecedented levels of **personalization**, enhance customer experience, and streamline operations.

On The Other Hand

It could lead to job displacement, bias in decision-making, and give rise to privacy concerns.

A photograph of Darrell Chan, APAC General Counsel at Airbnb, speaking into a microphone. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a stage or event setting. There are green plus signs overlaid on the image.

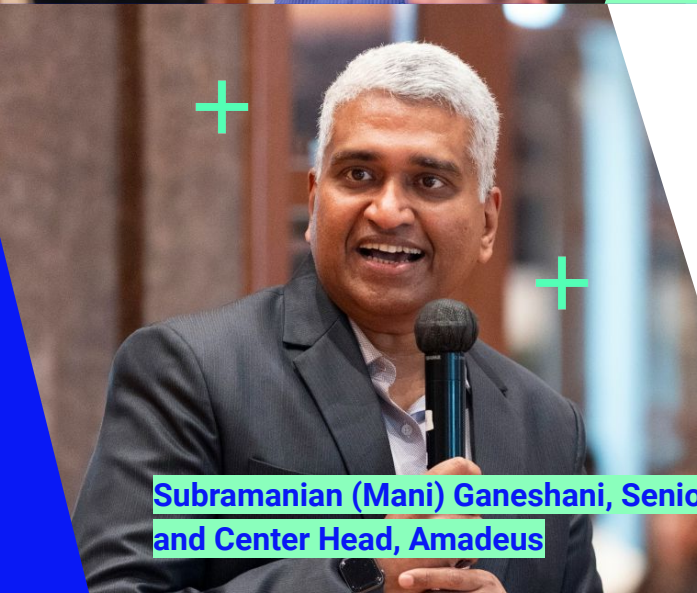
Darrell Chan
APAC General Counsel
Airbnb



Thien Kwee Eng

CEO, Sentosa Development Corporation

“It is essential organisations understand the **potential** and **pitfalls** of AI – to ask, what can AI do for our businesses, build an internal culture, train our people to understand the tech – what it can and cannot do, and experiment on use cases.”



Subramanian (Mani) Ganeshani, Senior Vice President - Travel Distribution Engineering and Center Head, Amadeus

“All of us are looking at Generative AI and its possibilities – how can we **hyper-personalise our offers** to travellers, create a Virtual Assistant for each traveller, enhance customer service, monitor and self-service our tech platform without human intervention, and internal productivity. This is the new wave and it brings with it many possibilities and possible solutions to existing problems.”



The 9 Themes: Possibilities, Hazards and Recommendations



Addressing over tourism



Talent



Empowering the long tail



Turbocharging product innovation



Deep personalisation



Building the connected trip



Inclusivity



Predictions on anything & everything



Pricing and load optimisation



Possibilities

- Incentivise adjacent tourism spots and reallocate distribution
- Disincentive poor usage
- Use Tech(Network/ Cell Signal Traffic) to decongest
- The government has an important role

Hazards

- Questions on privacy, big brother syndrome
- Problem of misinterpretation, bias, algorithm could go wrong, affecting cities that are not experiencing overcrowding
- Accuracy/error – misdirecting traffic to already overcrowded areas

Recommendations

- Travel Technology providers to come together and create a global repository of all the tourist locations that are environmentally in a sensitive state and incorporate this data repository in travel recommendations. This repository will take time to build, but can have a network effect and be enriched quickly.
- Travel industry to work with government and local bodies to solve the overcrowding challenge more holistically
- Incorporate AI in travel tech products to decongest over-crowded tourist destinations and promote alternate location tourism

“Citizens are up in arms in places such as Venice, Bali and Ladakh, and **telling tourists not to come.**”

How can we use AI and ML to manage traffic flow, widen the horizon and divert tourism?

It is important to get all of us together – including destination boards, local agencies, hoteliers – **to bring the goodness back to travel.”**

Subramanian (Mani) Ganeshan,

Senior Vice President - Travel Distribution Engineering and Center Head,

Amadeus





Possibilities

- Personalised Pricing
- Optimal Supply & Demand Match
- Sustainable Computation
- Better Forecast = Optimal Supply + Price + Margins = Sustainable Business
- Asset Utilization
- Upsell Ancillaries
- Process Optimization
- Create Feedback Loop

Hazards

- Regulatory complexities around pricing, e.g. antitrust issues
- Amount, Access, Complexity of Data
- Competitive pressure, Opaque Pricing
- Severity of error - Irrational Pricing /Inaccurate data
- Data Quality

Recommendations

- Load optimization can be automated
- Robust Frameworks to ensure clean data power models
- Increase the pace of adoption to show early wins
- Manage Regulatory environment to build sustainable margins and pass back value to customers
- Complete the loop

Responsibilities

- Brand responsibility is important
- Regulatory bodies can take responsibility
- Brands and hotel owners can take responsibility



Opportunities

- Twice the output or half the team
- Reduce Work Time
- More Conversation, less paperwork

Hazards/ Challenges

- Training & Recruiting
- Big Vs Small:
How to level the playing field and ensure all have access to tech and talent
- Create Opportunity Vs Widen Gap

Responsibilities

- Governments: Need a united framework & governance for how they're going to respond to AI
- Organizations & trade associations – Social responsibility; take care of the welfare; ensure there are clear guard rails
- Education institutions – redo the courses ensure there are multiple courses on AI that can be accessed by Grads and those who want to be reskilled aka executive MBAs
- Individuals – upskill /reskill opportunity

Recommendations

- Rebrand travel
- Recruit top talent with further loyalty program
- Create more value for the people
- Double down on upskilling
- Organisations take social responsibility to look after talent when being reskilled
- Education – redo courses and put special focus on AI
- Work with AI teams to redefine job descriptions
- Invest in growth areas
- Mundane/simple jobs could be replaced by AI opportunity to allow individuals to be more creative, and invest in areas AI can't be utilised
- Redirect money to high-growth opportunities, inspire

“The industry needs to reframe and brand to attract top talent, and work on how they drive careers and increase retention.”

Hermione Joye
Head of Travel, APAC, Google



Opportunities

- Simplify digitisation of micro service providers
- Facilitate access to training
- Create a secure environment that limits tech-related risks and manages consumer privacy

Recommendations

- Endorsement by Customers – local services standardised in terms of quality
- AI-Based Training for SMEs
- Personalization By communities
- Simplify Feedback Process - Consumers
- Loyalty Program Integration with Data Sources
- ESG Integration & Reliable Data facilitated by enablers

Challenges

- Data collection from long tail service providers
- Discovery of who the long tail service providers are
- Lack of digital expertises and data sets for small/medium size companies (SMEs)
- Curation
- Barriers to adoption as operators may fear technological adoption or lack of knowledge
- Lack of information on the customer side
- Lack of Consistency
- Lack of incentives to digitise or provide the data
- Privacy - SMEs may have weak information security measures

Responsibilities

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Travellers | • DMOs |
| • Local Government | • Platforms: Insta, Google Photos |
| – Public Incubator | • Hotels |
| • Telcos | |



Oscar Ramos

Managing Director, Orbit Startups

“AI enabled solutions will be critical to empower the long tail, but first the **data collection challenge** that limits the discovery, profiling and monitoring of micro service providers needs to be addressed.

AI powered technology can simplify the digitization of the micro service providers operations, facilitate access to training and create a secure environment that limits technology related risks and manages consumer privacy.”



Opportunities

- Finance
- Insurance
- Translation
- Personalisation
- Automated product development

Hazards

- Spam
- Long term sustainability of talent

Recommendations

- Text-to-Design, Text-to-Code and Design-to-Code tools are already here and improving rapidly allowing product teams to innovate faster
- For online companies, generative AI tools like these can be added to the production pipeline to accelerate and automate large parts of design, coding and testing processes
- Once these AI augmented product pipelines are in place, A/B and MV testing can be scaled both in terms of quantity and scope allowing turbo-charged product development



Ross Veitch
CEO & Co-founder, Wego



“AI could be tasked with coming up with a new product feature or marketing idea and then generating some ads or landing pages, picking some target users, running an online ad campaign, collecting campaign feedback and analysing the results.

We will very soon be at the point where you could **automate all of this end-to-end with only minimal human direction.**”



Opportunities

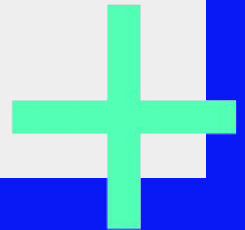
- Limiting friction will lead to higher conversions
- Targeted Travel Recommendations - Pre & Post Purchase
- Minimise Fraud
- Streamline Payments with Smart Spending to create customer stickiness

Responsibilities

- Governments
- Tourism Boards
- Telco
- Consumers

Recommendations

- Get clarity over who owns the data
- A preference wallet that customer controls, cloud-based
- No data should be sold to third parties even with consent.





Stephan Ekbergh
CEO, Travelstart

“We may finally be able to know **who our customer is**, instead of now where we are just guessing and everything is just a mess.”

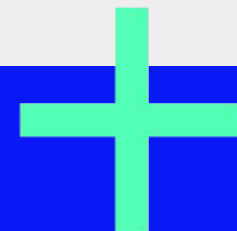


Opportunities

- Profiling of traveller - what is their social interest
- Identify events and opportunities
- Matching Trip History
- Virtual Concierge
- Behaviour history
- Disruption Management - Service & Communications
- Share location bot
- Gap Analysis

Recommendations

- Integrated Universal Travel ID (Could be blockchain,etc) but must be something that can be controlled by the travelers
- AI Consolidation of trip data: booking
- AI Trip - Consult with history profile - understand the pattern
- AI Comms- to capture info & complaints
- AI Events -better Service Sales



“We may finally have a chance to address the problem of **fragmented booking data**.

The winner of the Global Startup Pitch competition – *Legends* – is a great example of the type of solutions which will help us solve this challenge.

The **Travel DNA** concept is an exciting new approach to travel profile management.”

Johnny Thorsen

Vice President, Strategy & Partnerships

Spotnana

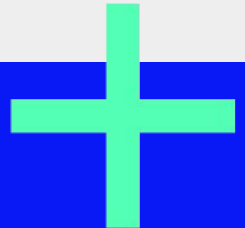


Opportunities

- Addressing People, Infrastructure & Amenities

Recommendations

- Crowdsourcing of inclusive data - People with disabilities can provide first hand accessibility data (eg. wheelchair-friendly pavement, braille signages etc) and easily upload online, and stitch together with the help of AI
- Ensuring accuracy of Data: Using AI to validate, verify, and update the information
- Meets Sustainability & ESG Goals





Yock Song Law,
Tribe Tours, Singapore

"Travel can be more inclusive for people with disabilities (PWDs) when we make wayfinding easier.

By empowering PWDs to provide **first hand data on accessibility**, we can feed open maps platforms like Google with the information they need to help everyone navigate the world with confidence."



Predictions On Anything & Everything

Opportunities

- Future rates and forecasting
- Optimal times to book
- More granular predicting group and segment spend or activity
- Predicting the best product or experience that would suit a customer, including where that product or experience lies
- Predicting fraud or fake purchases
- Real VS fake reviews, likes, subscribers

Hazards

- Natural disasters that cause false alarms or dissuade booking unreasonably
- Outcomes built upon numerous other predictions, which can cause bias and cause market volatility
- Choice, preference, and profiles based on an incomplete picture missing from customer comments and reviews

Recommendations

- Understand the myriad of data that need to be used for informed and sound predictions: historical data, real-time data, network data, validated data, and the way these interact in the context of data privacy and storage.

“AI can enhance common predictive elements of travel, and open new ones for both the traveler and company.

First, it is important to **evaluate what elements of travel should be predicted**, as everything that can be predicted shouldn't necessarily be.”

Eric Ricaurte
CEO, Greenview

LL

KAREN
BOLDA

al Counsel

Senior Vice President,
Product & Technology
Expedia GroupROSS
VEITCHCEO & Co-founder
WeTOM
KERSHAWChief Product &
Technology Officer
TravelportGIANNI
MARCManaging
Global Bu
for Travel
Google

Conclusion

It is clear the age of Generative AI opens up many possibilities for travel and there was no lack of ideas nor imagination as to what this new world could bring.

A panel on [“The Heart of Tech & Product”](#), held at WiT Singapore 2023, provided additional context. The key is to **start internally, start small and try it out.**

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President,
technology
+
up

Tom Kershaw
Chief Product & Technology Officer,
Travelport

“There are so many tools out there.

There used to be big barriers to entry to be able to do things in travel.

Now you can spin up systems and start to experiment with things with very little friction.

So I encourage everyone to do that and start to change the way we think about the travel industry.”

Privacy



“The type of data we deal with in our industry is extremely sensitive.
Amazon, they know my shoe size – whoop-de-doo – what are they going to do with that?”

We know passport numbers and all kinds of very important, sensitive information. And making sure that information is protected but still allows for seamless check-in and eligibility and those types of things is a very difficult balance.”

Tom Kershaw, Chief Product & Technology Officer, Travelport

Bias in Large Language Models

“One is fairness – preventing unjust biases.

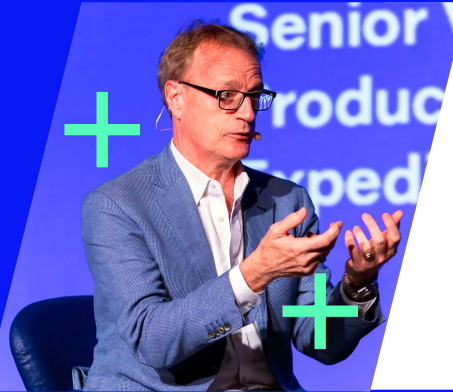
Do we understand what this model is doing and why it’s doing it?

And are we being transparent with both our travelers and our B2B partners about the impact of that?”

Karen Bolda, Senior Vice President of Product & Technology, Expedia Group



Collaboration Critical



“Regulation is both warranted and required.

I equate it to **sustainability** – if we get this right, the world will be a much better place. So it’s in all of our interests to do a better job ... so that collaboration within and outside the industry and also collaborating with governments and regulators is critical.”

Gianni Marostica, Managing Director of Global Business Development & Partnerships for Travel, Google

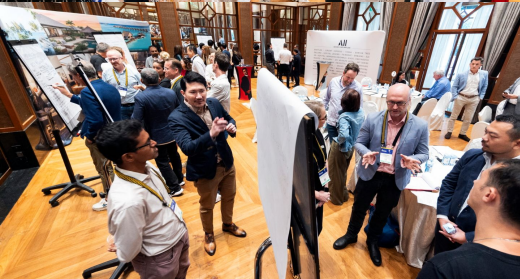
Mistakes – Who’s to Blame?

“Who is liable when it screws up?

Is it the customer for not paying close enough attention or the person who developed the agent in the first place?”

*Ross Veitch
Co-founder & CEO, Wego*





This Thinktank is a first step towards surfacing possibilities of AI, recognizing hazards and providing recommendations for the betterment of travel, and fostering **industry collaboration**.

The might of the **collective brain** and the **ability of humans to collaborate** are **superpowers** in the age of AI and the third age of digital travel.

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