The booking experience

Making the booking experience less stressful

It could be argued that there's no more emotive stage of any trip than the booking experience. Regardless of whether it's for work or leisure, there are set criteria the traveler is searching for with the anticipation that the results offered match their hopes and ambitions.

For families, wallet constraints are more personal rather than policy based. They'll want the best experience possible for the kids while giving mum and dad some downtime in the evenings (a hotel with babysitter services is a must). The honeymooning couple will need somewhere that makes the ultimate memory (and great Instagram content).
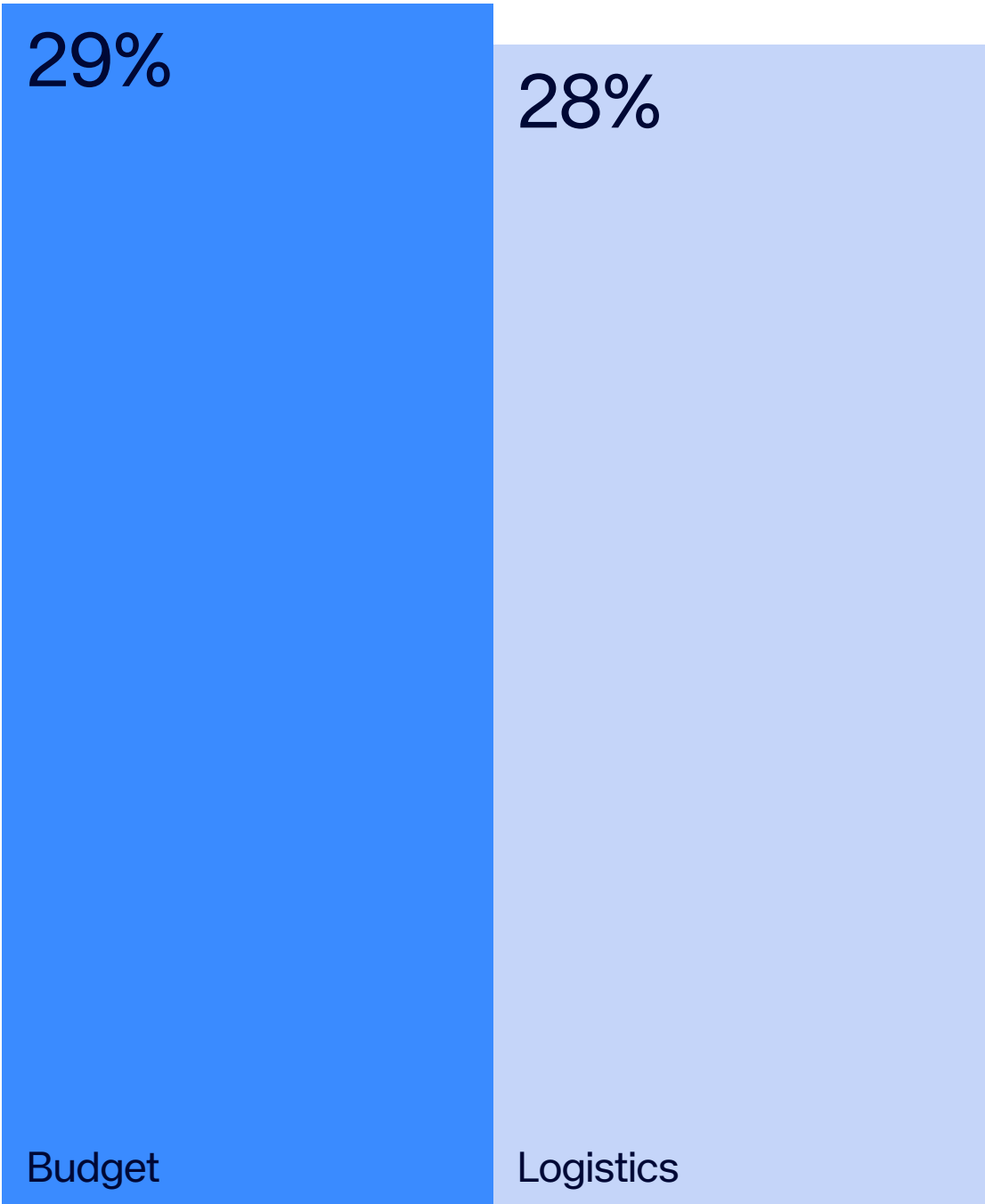

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Transforming to deliver on traveler aspirations

But with such ambitions and hopes come the apprehensions that they might not be realistic or that insurmountable barriers stand in the way. This is especially true when it comes to budget and logistics – indeed, research from Amadeus identified these as the two highest anxieties at 29% and 28% respectively.

While the travel and hospitality industries can't promise to fulfil every demand and ambition, they have to ensure that every relevant and exciting option is made visible. This is where transforming how travel works through technology comes into its own. It's a mindset that has driven the industry on for decades and continually delivers amazing experiences for millions of travelers. But it's not easy.

Apprehensions that ambitions and hopes might not be realistic or that insurmountable barriers stand in the way

29%

28%

Budget

Logistics

"The pace of change in the travel industry is daunting, to be sure. For example, between now and 2030, many aspects of travel retail and channel distribution will evolve substantially. Travel providers will adopt new technology platforms and new ways of working, and customers will react with new demands, and higher expectations.

"But none of this is new. The travel industry has endured changes of this magnitude at least twice in the past 30 years."

Dr. Dee K. Waddell

Global Head of Consumer, Travel & Transportation Industries, IBM
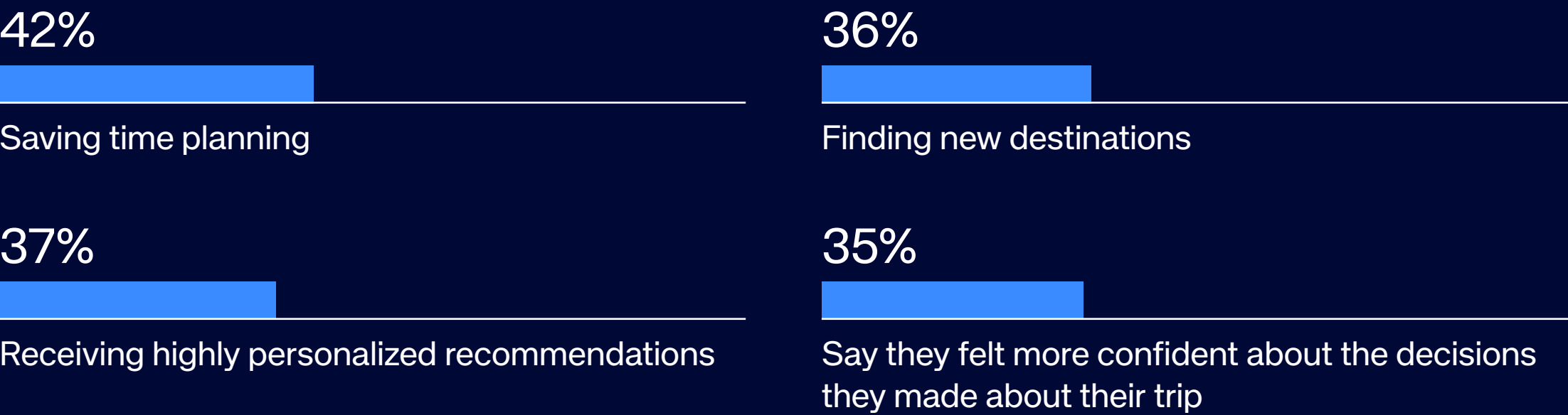
IBM

Traveler-first Generative AI

This theme of constant evolution and adaptation to traveler demand and expectation is central to the transformation journey the industry is currently on. You only need to look at the rapid advances in generative AI (Gen AI) to see how the landscape is changing – both externally in terms of how it's improving the whole booking experience, as well as internally within the industry to identify trends and emerging habits in customer demand.

Taking this first point, the traveler booking experience has perhaps never been better balanced. Gen AI-powered chatbots can answer basic, structured (and, increasingly, unstructured) inquiries from customers in real-time. This is freeing up human customer service operatives to handle those calls and queries which demand more analysis, are more complex, or which involve regulatory or compliance needs. Equally, they're able to act as the in-person support that many travelers want; not everyone wants to speak to an AI-generated chatbot, for example.
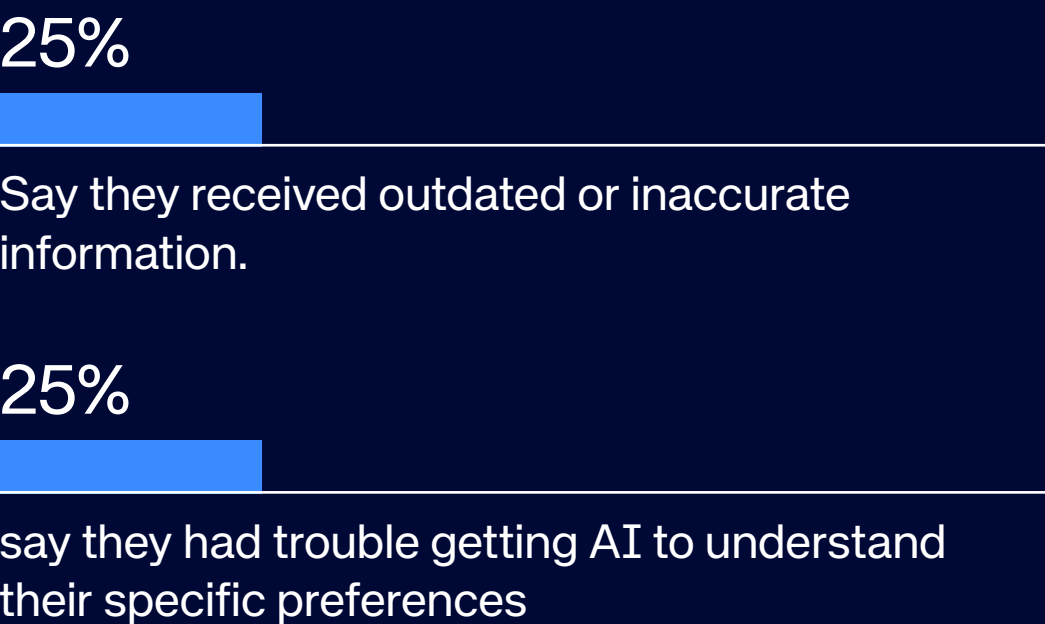
The use of Generative AI tools for travel research has risen by a significant factor over the last twelve months:

18%   **11%**

Today   Last year

A 64% year on year increase.

Of those who use AI to plan a trip, key benefits cited include:

42%

Saving time planning

36%

Finding new destinations

37%

Receiving highly personalized recommendations

35%

Say they felt more confident about the decisions they made about their trip

On the other hand, some encountered negative experiences.

25%

Say they received outdated or inaccurate information.

25%

say they had trouble getting AI to understand their specific preferences
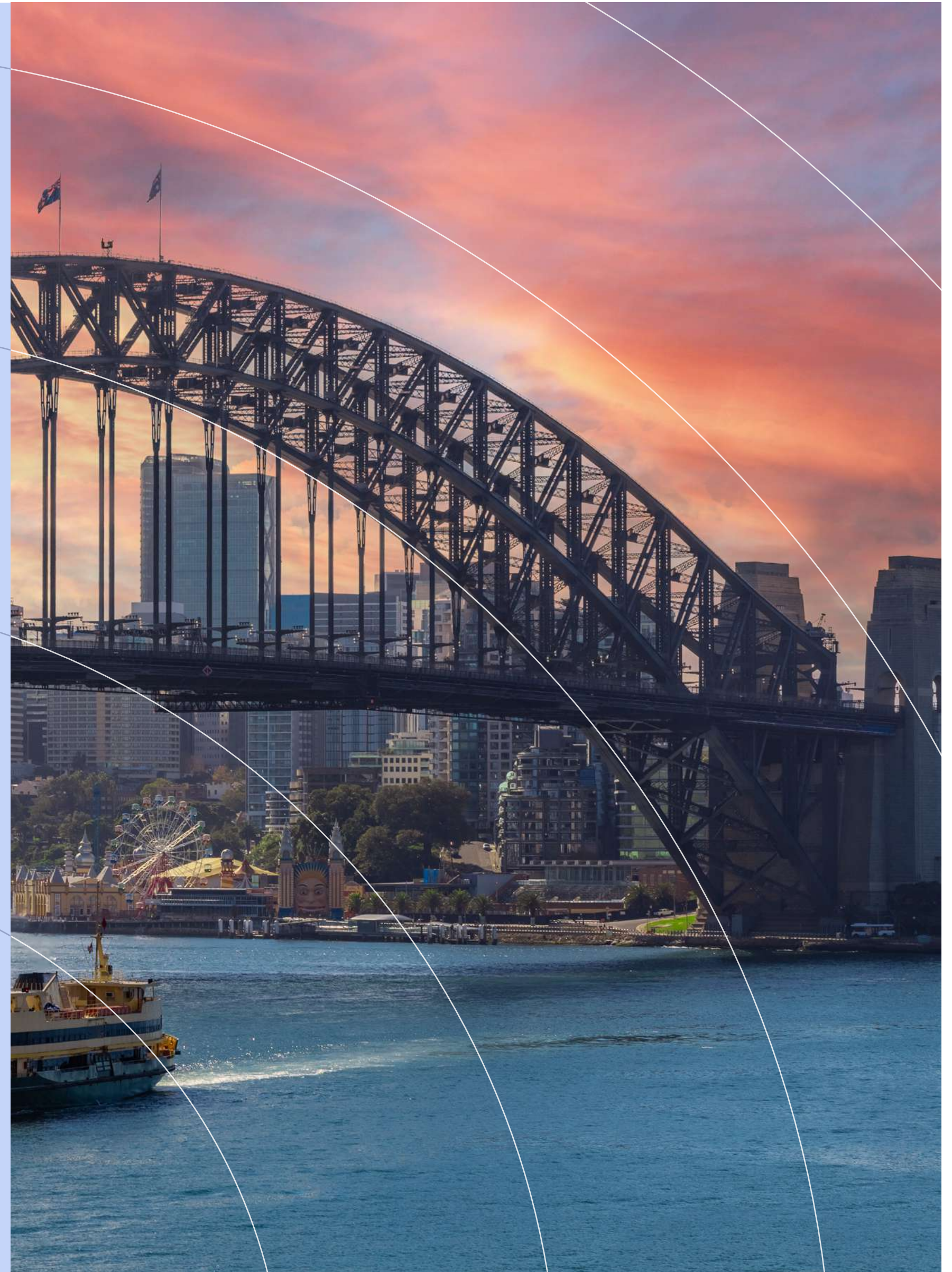
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"Travelers are as diverse in their anxieties as they are in their expectations. While some customer segments are pushing travel companies to innovate by embracing new applications and ways of engaging, others are intent on maintaining their established patterns of interaction."

This is a key point to remember throughout any strategic transformation program – the industry is here to serve one person: the traveler.

"Travel companies must learn to innovate in ways that serve the needs of all customer communities because standing still is never a viable option in a domain as dynamic as the travel industry."

Steve Peterson

Travel & Transportation Global Industry Lead, IBM

IBM

Data-driven strategic insight

The insights taken from the millions of bookings made by the industry each year are also being used to great effect. Through understanding trends and behaviors in booking, travel operators and the hospitality industry can develop new propositions and enhance those already on offer.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than with the rise in entertainment-related tourism. As an example, when the announcement of a worldwide tour from Taylor Swift was made, Agoda saw search traffic for the destinations involved increase by a staggering 500%.

"The global success of 'White Lotus' – a HBO TV show based on the exploits of guests and staff within a luxury hotel saw travel enquiries surge season-upon-season. To piggyback on the success, we've seen hotels host 'White Lotus' themed experiences such as weekend afternoon tea and bar pop-ups bringing the show experience to life.

"Our investment in technology is allowing our partners to take advantage of the opportunities from this growth in 'live tourism', but it's also highlighting macro cultural travel trends."

Andrew Smith
Senior Vice President,
Agoda

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Macro trend insight

These are of course global cultural examples, but sharing more specific data pays dividends across the board.

It's in this regard that the booking information supplied by B2C platforms such as Agoda can share market intelligence throughout the travel and hospitality sectors and allow everyone to adapt and ultimately benefit from it.

A virtuous circle

The advances in Gen AI for everything from booking and fine-tuning results to directing inquiries to the right operator (be it human or AI) is bringing unprecedented amounts of data back into the industry. This data delivers previously unimaginably granular insight into traveler demand and expectation.

The smartest companies in the travel and hospitality industries will turn this to their (and the travelers') advantage and use the findings to improve their own offerings and solutions. Iterative improvements naturally follow, reflecting the needs and demands of every journey.

This cycle, one fueled by transforming how travel works through technology, means the industry as a whole is able to fulfill its promise to deliver on the hopes and expectations of every traveler. It's an opportunity that can't be ignored.

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