



CLICK, BOOK, GO:

HUMAN AND AI-GATHERED STORIES ABOUT TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY USE AMONG TRAVELERS AGE 50-PLUS

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Background & objectives

BACKGROUND:

- The travel industry is becoming more and more digital, with technology playing a vital role in how consumers research, book, and experience travel. Adults aged 50+ represent a significant segment of the traveling public. Nearly two-thirds (65%) plan on traveling in 2024, with an average spend on vacations of over \$6,500.
- While many older adults enjoy travel, there is a significant gap in their understanding of how to use technology for travel purposes. Does this segment have unique needs, wants, and preferences when it comes to using technology for travel?
- This research will explore and understand the technology used for travel among adults aged 50+ aiming to improve their travel experience, increase their engagement with digital travel services, and enhance their travel experience through better-tailored digital solutions and experiences. This research will capture stories through human-led and AI-led individual interviews.

QUALITATIVE OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Identify awareness and the types of technology most frequently used by adults 50+ for travel purposes across the three phases of travel: research/planning, booking, and experience.
- 2 Understand the challenges and barriers faced by older adults in using travel technology.
- 3 Gauge the satisfaction level with existing digital travel tools and services.
- 4 Understand how people are using tech to save money in all phases of travel.
- 5 Develop insights into whether travel technology is inclusive/age-friendly to meet the needs of the older traveler.

Screening criteria

Qualitative Caveat: *This qualitative research is based on a small sample size (20 participants) and provides a rich source of information sharing stories and giving direction to future research and next stages of development. This research is exploratory in nature. Any direction provided towards informing or shaping potential offerings will be on a high level only.*

20 interviews:

- 10, 45-minute human-moderated in-depth interviews (IDIs) via Discuss.io
- 10, Self-paced AI-moderated IDIs via Outset.ai

Qualifications:

Adults ages 50-plus

- Are planning to travel in the next 12 months (and have begun planning it) or have traveled in the past 12 months
- Non-rejectors of planning/booking their own travel (versus those who only book through travel agent or similar)
- Have used some digital tools in the past
- Mix of comfort with technology
- Mix of AI knowledge
- Mix of ages
- Mix of travel budgets
- Mix of income



This report is a supplement to the quantitative report “Click, Book, Go: Travel Technology use among Travelers age 50-plus” <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.827.001>



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary

MINDSET AND PROCESS FOR PLANNING, BOOKING AND EXPERIENCING TRIPS

- Older adults enjoy all different types of vacations ranging from heavily structured, experiential/cultural explorations, nature focus, activity-based, family/friend reunions, to complete relaxation.
- Technology plays a critical role for most adults when planning and booking travel, specifically to inspire trips, find cost-effective solutions, and manage as many details as they can ahead of traveling.
- Figuring out when to book flights and hotels to get the best price is a pain point, and those we spoke with are not aware of digital tools that could offer such monitoring.
- While traveling, tech tools are used for on-site navigation, real-time information, and adapting plans.

CHALLENGES WITH DIGITAL TRAVEL TOOLS

- Older adults are typically satisfied with existing digital tools. However, they can be overwhelming to use, given the amount of tools and information available.
- It's not always clear whether information online is up-to-date, or how to filter information to meet one's needs and personal preferences (e.g., pet friendly, safety/crime rate, military/senior discounts, accessibility, LGBTQ+ community-friendly). Some also fear filtering information will limit inspiration and overall possibilities.

Executive summary (cont.)







PERCEPTIONS OF AI RELATED TO TRAVEL

- Older adults have high levels of comfort and strong interest in using and learning about digital travel tools. They are open to a variety of educational formats, with videos/interactive formats being most preferred.
- Given older adults have limited experiences with AI, there is a lot of uncertainty on how it works and how safe and accurate it is to use. They recognize the potential benefits and convenience AI offers but can also feel a bit intimidated or unsure about their own ability to keep up with the rapid pace of development.
- For older adults to embrace, leverage, and trust technology, including AI, they need to be explicitly assured their personal and financial data is safe, they won't be tracked, and that information is accurate and up-to-date. Further detail on proof points (such as "verified user" or date of last update) may further help foster trust.
- Nonetheless, older adults are hopeful that AI can help provide a strong starting point for planning future travel. Many are open to the idea of AI acting as a modern travel agent, handling many details and providing personalized recommendations.



ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

Actionable takeaway: The ideal trip planning tool

					
User-Friendly Interface	Personalized AI Recommendations	Integration with Reviews and Blogs	Cost Savings	Comprehensive Itinerary Management	Experience Booking
<p>Intuitive and easy to navigate, catering to older adults' needs for simplicity and clarity.</p>	<p>Leverage AI to provide personalized recommendations based on various factors (e.g., user preferences, accessibility and mobility concerns, weather conditions, efficient transportation choices).</p> <p>Prompt the user with relevant questions as some don't know what to input.</p>	<p>Incorporate user reviews, pictures, and travel blogs to provide insights to fine tune the planning process.</p>	<p>Help older adults find and apply discounts (AARP, AAA, Military) as well as compare prices across different platforms, so they don't have to write down and compare.</p>	<p>Consolidate all travel arrangements into a single platform, allowing for efficient trip organization.</p> <p>Email itinerary for easy and seamless access to travel plans (as Triplt does).</p>	<p>Allow users to explore, plan, and book activities/restaurants directly through the platform.</p>

Actionable takeaway: Top tech concerns to address through education

LACK OF TRUST

- **Sources of information:** Is it one brand of hotels or excursions paying more to be featured in results? Want more transparency where results are pulled from. For example, some skeptical are that reviews are paid on certain sites
- **Privacy protection:** In case of hacking, continuous tracking after the trip, and uncertainty if AI company is reputable (e.g., who is benefiting from my data?)
- **Accuracy:** Are results currently accurate/valid? How frequently are they updated?

KNOWLEDGE GAPS

- **How to use it effectively:** What are AI's capabilities? Its limitations? Where do I access AI tools? Are they free? What do I ask it? Do I need to know how to code?
- **How to personalize:** Unsure how AI will provide recommendations for personal needs. Does it aggregate the norm versus catering to needs? Does it recommend local favorites and hidden gems?

TAKES OUT THE FUN

- **Loss of control:** If I enjoy travel planning, how can I keep the fun alive and remain "in the driver's seat" while still making the most of tech tools?

*How do we know that they're not going to give us misinformation or some type of propaganda, or give **misinformation** out through AI, or maybe use it for the wrong purposes.*

– Lana, 64, Human-led

*The only concern I have is **who's driving the AI**? Who is telling the AI what to do? I want every idea. I don't want just certain ideas and I don't want just certain companies or certain hotels or certain airlines, like **I don't want AI to have an agenda.***

– Susan, 59, AI-led

*I think there's **privacy concerns**. I mean I know that's just the way that we're going right now with online and pop-up ads and you search for something on Google and suddenly you have 20 emails about buying a new kitchen table.*

– Ellen, 65, AI-led

*I guess my biggest **concern is accuracy**. It's been proven that AI is not 100% accurate. So, there must be some ability to fact check it or to make sure it's only using reliable resources in its database of information.*

– Gary, 67, AI-led

Actionable takeaway: Key topics for educational materials

OLDER ADULTS WANT TO LEARN HOW AI COULD ENHANCE TRAVEL PLANNING BY:



Aggregating information from various sources to provide comprehensive and up-to-date travel insights



Streamlining transportation: e.g., suggest the smartest route if driving on a road trip, or if flying around the country



Being proactive in giving ideas that can then be researched and fine-tuned / unconventional ideas / be “dynamic”



Going one step beyond Google Flights and Kayak by **eliminating the need for constant price comparisons** and provide alerts for price changes



Building bespoke itineraries with a more integrated flow and consideration for mobility & accessibility needs



Being used as a comparison tool once personal research is completed to validate findings (not replace research)



Providing tailored recommendations for flights, routes, hotels, and activities, **including local favorites and hidden gems**



Saving time as planning is done faster, in one sitting vs. over time



Providing weather related recommendations and considerations (e.g., hurricane season)



MINDSET AND PROCESS FOR PLANNING, BOOKING AND EXPERIENCING TRIPS

Technology plays a critical role when planning and booking travel, but is less of a focus once travel is underway

Older adults want technology to:



Inspire destinations and trip types



Find **cost-effective** solutions without sacrificing convenience (e.g., layovers, extra stops)



Manage as much as they can ahead of time (e.g., rental car, tickets, etc.), to minimize anxiety and stress upon arrival

*With technology, you have complete access to your information. You have the ability to deal directly with airlines, hotels, travel and tour sites. **The major benefit is it gives you control.***

– Bob, 65, AI-led

*I use Yelp to look for reviews and how good various places are, like restaurants. We use **Yelp lots of times to choose restaurants, TripAdvisor for different kinds of hotels and things like that. But we don't use technology very much when we're traveling.** We mostly just enjoy the ride while we're there.*

– Gary, 67, AI-led

*I have huge **travel anxiety** for things that I can't control. I love being in control or knowing that I have handed off the control to something reliable. The days leading up to a trip, my anxiety goes way up, and that anxiety does not go down until the moment the aircraft leaves the ground. I can't control the weather. I can't control aircraft delays. Once the airplane is in the air, barring any sort of act of God that causes a malfunction, I'm going to land, and I already have my other things in place. I have my rental car, hotel, train tickets, So **knowing that there's a set schedule in place and there's no risk of having to wing**, it helps.*

– Tom, 50, Human-led

Aggregator sites are a common starting point, used to compare flight costs and availability

- Aggregators are often utilized to gather preliminary information on estimated flight costs, routes, and times.
 - Sometimes, price alerts are set up with Google Flights to keep older adults informed about airline pricing and comparisons, but a few track manually (on pencil and paper) which is hard, as information is inconsistent across 3rd party sites.

*I'll buzz through Orbitz, Travelocity, and sometimes Google flights, because they're not always all the same numbers. They're within a few dollars, but sometimes they're **not exactly accurate**, I find.*

– Craig, 56, Human-led

*I think TripAdvisor does the **best job of really condensing everything**, and we've had good experience with it.*

– Eric, 51, Human-led

*The **hardest part is the planning of the flights**. I just **have to write it all down and do my comparisons**. There is no online tool that can do that for you.*

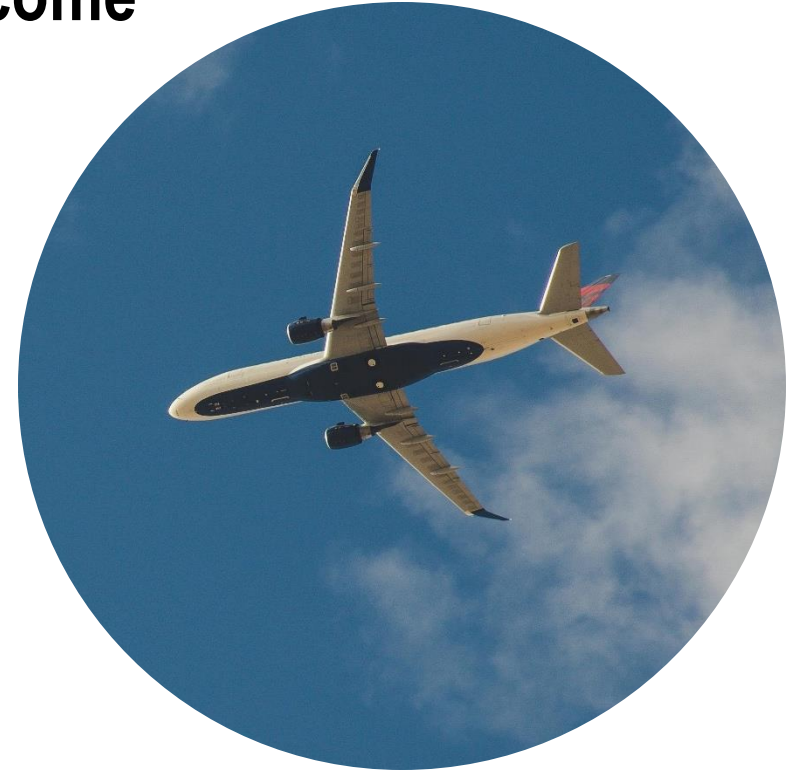
– Theresa, 66, Human-led

AGGREGATORS USED:



Booking begins with flights; once locked, hotels come second, followed by experiences

- Older adults report waiting to book flights until about 2 months before their trip to see if better deals arise.
- Triggers to book flights are often determined by:
 - tracking costs over time
 - watching prices increase
 - scarcity of seat availability on the plane viewing map
- However, older adults **would appreciate more certainty** on when is the optimal time to book to secure the best rates.
- Once flights are booked, there is a **sense of certainty and relief** that the trip is happening. Subsequently, hotels and experiences are researched more seriously.



*I wish I had a crystal ball knowing that the **price is not going to change or if it is**, the date is going to change so I can book it. In an ideal world, that's what it would be. Otherwise, it's just a crapshoot.*

– Jim, 70, Human-led

Activities are often researched in advance, but many prefer to make choices on-site

- Activities, excursions, local attractions, and museums are often researched at a high-level before trips (1 month – 2 weeks out), but most hold off on booking in favor of **flexibility** when on site.
 - Concerns exist around ability to get a refund with pre-booked experiences if timing doesn't work out when on-site.
 - In the case of popular tourist attractions, e.g., The Louvre, tickets are purchased ahead of time to secure slots and avoid long lines.
 - Restaurants are less frequently researched ahead of time, as some might want local recommendations, “off the beaten path”, when on site and prefer flexibility.

KEY ACTIVITY-PLANNING RESOURCES INCLUDE:



*I think **Tripadvisor does, for us, the best job of really condensing everything**, and we've had good experiences with it. We've probably used it the last seven, eight cruises. So now we're experienced, and we booked something every time on it even if it's just one or one or two excursions, but I think we're now pretty confident in it.*

– Eric, 51, Human-led

*The wonderful thing about TripIt is that **all of your reservations come into your inbox**.*

– Tom, 50, Human-led



CHALLENGES WITH DIGITAL TRAVEL TOOLS

Digital tools are viewed by older adults as useful, but can be overwhelming

Overall, digital tools have made planning, booking and experiencing travel much more efficient, however:

- Some are **uncertain** of what they are even looking for when starting to plan a trip
- Sample **itineraries would be helpful to inspire** research, but older adults are unsure where to find reliable resources that do that, unless the trip is all-inclusive (e.g., cruise) or heavily activity based (scuba diving/hiking)
 - As such, they need to **personally sift through reviews** to figure out the validity of the review (from context of reviewer) to determine what they want or don't.
- Also, finding **hotels with specific parameters/personal preferences** such as pet friendly, safety/crime rate, military/senior discounts, accessibility, LGBTQ community, is difficult and requires a lot of effort.

It has to be simplified. It complicates the travel experience.

And when I say complicated, it's that there's so much information out there...You get online, and there's eight million things to do in New Haven. And how do you narrow it down? Obviously, use filters of what your interests are, but sometimes that information can be overwhelming. I'm starting to forget what it was like before email and Internet, but we did it. But I would say those trips were probably a lot simpler.

– **Greg, 58, Human-led**

*I think it would be nice to **have all the discount options show up on some link**. Like, there's AARP, AAA, if you are a vet, it would be nice if you had something/were a member of this, that, or the other, then you can get a discount.*

– **Craig, 56, Human-led**

*I guess one of the big concerns that I'm going to places I've never been before and wanting to be sure that the place we're going to be staying is **safe**.*

– **Jim, 70, Human-led**

Digital tools can be overwhelming in all phases of the travel process

- When planning travel, it can be **overwhelming to discern whether information online is up to date**, whether there are better deals available, and if options being considered are the best choices (a mix of choice paralysis and FOMO).
- When **booking**, figuring out when to pull the trigger and book flights can be challenging.
 - Prices fluctuate and older adults desire a signal **notifying them when is the optimal time to book** to secure the best pricing.
- While traveling, **challenges** include **safety and security**, as some are hesitant to book experiences with **3rd parties** out of fear of scams and being hacked.





PERCEPTIONS OF AI RELATED TO TRAVEL

Older adults have high levels of comfort and strong interest in using and learning about digital travel tools, including AI

- Most indicate they are **very comfortable using digital** travel tools and services (most are a 5 on 5 pt scale)
- Nearly all express a strong interest in **learning more** about utilizing technology for travel needs (most are a 4-5 on 5 pt scale).
- There is **high interest in educational materials that would teach them specifically how to utilize AI for trip planning/information gathering.**

*I think using digital travel tool services - I would say **I'm very comfortable** and I would rate myself a five.*

– Renee, 52, AI-led

***I would be very interested.** Give me a five on that. I look forward to the progress of technology and in fact, I got a book a year ago regarding AI and it really helped me understand a lot more about what that particular technology is, and I'm really impressed.*

– Cheryl, 74, AI-led



A variety of learning formats are welcomed, ranging from online tutorials, short form videos, webinars, and articles via email



Video formats (e.g., online tutorials, webinars, virtual training sessions, videos) are most preferred for their visual and engaging nature



E-blasts are preferred by some for some as email is noted as a primary mode of communication



Concise **articles** with useful links are also felt to be helpful

*Web learning - anything that's a simple 15–30-minute process that would allow the company to illustrate what features to use would be very useful for me. **Video is my first choice, webinar is second.***

– Patricia, 66, Human-led

***Visual training session** is good because you can see it. Sometimes it's like a video and it's led by somebody, and I like that because you can pause it. You can write down notes while you're listening... as long as it's short and sweet. Online video tutorials are good also. I like it because it's visual.*

– Susan, 59, AI-led



*A well-written **concise article**, with links, as I hate wasting time.*

– Craig, 56, Human-led

Given limited experiences with AI, most desire more transparency into how it works

- Those familiar with AI see an opportunity for it to provide a starting place **but are skeptical** and admit they might not completely trust it.
 - Some suspect a need to **cross reference** AI recommendations to make sure they are valid and up to date.
- For **those less interested in AI for travel**, they feel it could **take the fun and excitement out of trip planning**, as some enjoy the involvement and hands-on experience in shaping the perfect trip.
- Either way, **the uncertainty of AI creates hesitation** to use it, as some are concerned they would be followed/tracked online.
 - Older adults want to be assured that their privacy is protected

*I believe they can combine **all the resources from different sites** and different apps and give you a more general or more precise way of doing things.*

– Stanley, 56, AI-led

*My **concern is the aggregation of information** about the thing I'm looking up or planning. It's really the sources of how it aggregates and puts those, reviews together. How does it pick out?*

– Craig, 56, Human-led

***I don't know a lot about AI.** I've tried Chat GPT a few times and been impressed with this output. **I don't know where it would be useful.** ChatGPT was useful to me, but I'm not sure that I can think of future travel-related needs.*

– Gary, 67, AI-led

*How do you know **if you can trust some things or not**, in planning stuff? That would be something to at least consider. Is it safe where they want to send me, that type of thing? But, I mean, anything that I would look at **AI, is going to be backed up by my own research.***

– Jim, 70, Human-led

While many are unsure how to best utilize AI for travel needs, they imagine it could especially enhance planning



AI will make it easier. It will save time. It would give me a sense of accomplishment and not trying to remember, you know, two weeks from now, I've got to do this. Or if I find a hotel that's cheaper, 24 hours before I am leaving.

– Lana, 64, Human-led

I would **hope it could deliver a highly detailed itinerary** that I could trust intuitively and not worry about researching every aspect of it to make sure it aligns with my needs.

I suppose if AI had existed/ChatGPT in 2020, I probably would have said, hey can you give me a **six-day itinerary** for hiking in the Swiss Alps, but I only stay in two towns. And I am pretty sure it would come back with an **interesting foundation**. But I **still would have gone out and read those individual travel blogs** to see how people experienced it.

– Tom, 50, Human-led

I envision giving it questions like, what airline has the best deal going to Memphis, Tennessee on this day, returning on this day? When I'm in Memphis, what hotels can I stay at that provide this or that? **So using it for resources, using it for ideas, and using it for map development.** In other words, showing me how to pick up public transportation or how to get Uber and how far away a certain restaurant is from the hotel.

– Susan, 59, AI-led



METHODOLOGY

Methodology Summary

[Travelers Age 50-Plus — Qualitative Study]

Population	United States General Population age 50+ who have traveled in the past 12 months or are actively planning to travel in the next 12 months. Cannot be a rejector of booking their own travel, must have used some digital tools in the past.
Total Sample Size	n= 20 (10 human-moderated in-depth interviews, and 10 AI-moderated in-depth interviews)
Oversample (if applicable)	N/A
Sample Source and Field Partner	Recruiting Partner: L&E Research Human-moderated IDIs platform: Discuss.io AI-moderated IDIs platform: Outset.ai
Margin of Error (if applicable)	N/A
Field Dates	The study was fielded from 7/15/2024-7/19/2024
Data Collection Method	Human-moderated in-depth interviews were given to 10 participants. Conversations were recorded via video and audio. AI-moderated in-depth interviews were given to 10 participants. Participants recorded their video and audio, while the AI-moderated communicated through written chat.
Survey Instrument	45-minute IDIs were conducted based on the discussion guide written by CMB and approved by AARP.
Weighting Procedures	N/A
Full Methodology Report	For more details on sampling, weighting, and other components of the methodology related to the quantitative report, see the full methodology report: www.aarp.org/traveltech50plus
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