

## Research Experts findings

### Travel agents here to stay and US travel looks good

Travel agents are here to stay!

That, essentially, was one of the conclusions of a panel of experts assembled for the Visit USA Mid-Year Review at the Museum of Sydney on Tuesday evening.

The panel consisted of Quentin Long, co-founder of Australian Traveller Media; Lauren Quaintance, co-founder of Storyvation; and Carolyn Childs, futurist and co-founder of MyTravelResearch.com.

Moderator was Damien Francis, head of event content, Mumbrella.

Despite the advance of artificial intelligence, consumers remain hesitant to finalise transactions online when they involve a significant amount of money, and this is likely to continue whether a consumer is typing or using voice interaction via artificial intelligence.

Childs said she had recently celebrated 30 years working in the field of travel research.

**“I remember when the fax machine was going to replace travel agents!” she recalled, to audience laughter.**

Childs added that **consumers were still finding they encountered too much information; it was too complex and too hard to sift through. As a result, three out of five travel consumers went to a travel agent in Australia, which was among the highest proportion in the world.**

Quaintance spoke of a growing desire among travellers for “localdom” – getting to know locals and experience local customs – for authenticity and “transformative travel” rather than “fly and flop”.

“How did it change me?” was a question being asked by the modern traveller.

“.....Add to this the huge level of fake reviews online, biased reporting and the misuse of consumers credit card, travel and personal data online , and you can understand why the trust in a travel agent is swinging back to them”