

AI, AIRLINES AND ALARMS- TRAVEL'S 2026 BUYER BEWARE



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EXPECT AI (Artificial Intelligence) to dominate the travel industry, especially after June 2026, but not exactly as you might think. I break down AI into **3 main platforms: 1: an information platform, 2: a referral platform, and 3: an advertising platform** to sway/convince users into various buying-advice scenarios. The one that I think will be a strong focus next, after consumers and businesses become relaxed with the **AI information platform** will be the bias and not necessarily correct **Referral platform** whereby Businesses with vested interests will be asked by AI machines to pay for advertising their product's, mostly inconspicuously with consumers unaware of this paid concept and them being steered into an environment of prepaid referrals and advice and products. I consider this an unsuitable environment. It will have AI convincing humans, like FACEBOOK and others, that high-spending businesses can subliminally sway consumers and businesses into a world of marketing and advertising. For example, within the travel industry, One World or Star Alliance member Airlines will pay to create a flight itinerary, thereby biasing those member Airlines. A cruise company may bias their vessels, a hotel chain may bias their hotels, a country may bias their tourist spots, a tour company may bias their products etc etc. Money has to be made from huge AI investments, so I think 2026 will see either blatant, but most probably subliminal, bias, and not necessarily good advice and referrals being delivered via many AI engines. The role of both the consumer and the travel advisor will be to tell the differences! The true experienced, expert travel advisor will be able to do so without the camouflage of bias, so they can still maintain human expertise, empathy, understanding, knowledge and services that no AI can replicate, so once again, AI BUYER -BEWARE! **The 3rd Platform**, being the **Advertising Platform**, will direct choices offered by the largest "advertiser" through their bias, eroding the authenticity of AI and any travel links as truly neutral.

EXPECT Travel Insurance premiums to rise with new PDS conditions as the world awakens to Insurance underwriters having to pay out close to 2 trillion \$ worldwide for war events, natural catastrophes, evacuations, and other non-related travel assistance and payouts. The advice here is make sure Insurance is paid and issued ASAP.

EXPECT more International "Do Not Fly" zones to appear and also "DO NOT TRAVEL" Countries to appear via the Smartraveller or other Government (not AI!) websites. As with any professional Travel Advisor, they tend not to rely solely on Australian Government websites but also merge other bona fide international websites, local operators' advice they connect with, other Government rulings and warnings with ATIA, IATA and other industry leaders' notices to advise clients before and during their travel. This extended ability to use, *in many cases*, multiple sources is a priceless benefit, as consumers should not rely only upon Smartraveller. I am not disrespecting Smartraveller, but I have many times been able to give clients advice about existing or pending travel warnings BEFORE Smartraveller issues any warnings or advice. Engaging and holding onto a professional travel advisor is very wise!

EXPECT MORE AIRLINE-INITIATED ISSUES: We need this to happen! Let us see a politician's travel itinerary, or that of other Government employees or members of the judicial fraternity, have their travel interrupted, cancelled, rudely altered, or affected by an Airline's lack of accountability, with elongated claims and maybe zero compensation! This seems to be the only way they will heed what consumers need to do to quickly introduce new Consumer Laws that have teeth, to heavily fine and legally place charges against Airline staff who breach Australian Consumer Laws, an airline's conditions of carriage, IATA and ACCC regulations and rulings. In some cases, Airlines should not be blamed for schedule changes, cancellations etc as weather conditions or verifiable mechanical issues can happen, but I am talking about the fictitious excuses or the airline employees' lack of knowledge or crappy services. In 2023, 2024, and 2025, governments promised new regulations, so in 2026, rather than drag their feet, let us see how they react when they are personally affected! It is so tiresome to have Australian travellers not protected as they should be when an Airline decides they are above the law, do not invoke the regulations they are supposed to adhere to and defy strict ACL, ACCC, ATIA laws or industry principles, let alone their own promises but handballing complaints to engage their lawyers to elongate simple cases that detract from shareholders dividends. In many cases, the Airline Board Members tend to turn a blind eye to consumer complaints that could easily be resolved, rather than depleting funds that could be better spent on improving airline websites, services, and staff training, instead of lining the pockets of lawyers. Setting up a well-informed Travel industry Ombudsman who legally enforces strong regulations with substantial penalties against Airlines, their staff, and Executive members is long overdue. **At this stage Lawyers make the money and travellers pay the price!**

EXPECT MORE SILLY AIRPORT ETC SECURITY ANOMALIES! I am advocating and hope that 2026 is the year that Airport and cruise Terminal Security areas get a wake-up call! It is about time they employed and trained Security Officers on what can be taken aboard Planes and cruise ships. Focusing should be to remove the stupidity of taking off our belt, your shoes, your water bottles, your laptop, masking tape, Gaffa tape, your pens, all of your internal clothes contents, your nail clippers, your cardboard nailfile, your hats, etc., etc. R U guys serious! I have experienced absolute inconsistencies within Australia and worldwide. In fact, at Cairo Airport in December 2025, I had to pass through 3 different Security areas to board one flight, and each, and I mean each, had different levels of X-ray scans, pat-down body

searches, and what could or could not be taken aboard. Each was different, and each had security breaches. Via one security channel, I wore an undetected underclothes money belt; via another, a pen in my sock (deliberately); and the other a neck chain with a sharp attachment. I passed through each. Upon arrival into BNE my simple GaffaTape was extracted from my bag only to be returned after 10 minutes it being referred for clearance by their senior Customs Supervisors because "you could have used this aboard to tie up a person" but I remarked that I could have used any of my pens to do worse damage or adapted a strangle hold on a person faster than using any tape! I was not being humorous but revealing the height of stupidity and lack of common sense. Worldwide security needs to be re-examined and used better to speed up the process, maybe employ fewer humans, but at least make travel more seamless. I understand that each Country has its own beliefs and standards, and that Airports and Airlines have their own standards, but surely IATA and CLIA can pressure them to be more consistent and logical. I will not expand here in detail on the gaps in the current security standards, but my 43 years of self-defence and Martial Arts training allow me to vent my anger and offer insight into an area I know well.

In 2026, the purported 24/7 services must be offered honestly. Many Travel companies -especially online via websites, big National Companies offer this thing called 24 x 7 travel services. Many are crappy and useless. I say this because I know this. Many do not physically work well via 24 x 7 but offer a referral service or ask to leave an "email" or "Phone message" or to quote a reference number or use an AI bot/chat online. Most also do not connect you, *if you ever are connected*, to a human who intimately knows the traveller's travel plans, needs, or personal data that could affect the travel being helped with. Is this false or misleading advertising, or is it allowable? Over the past 12 months, I have been asked to assist or advise travellers who have booked elsewhere, after some Radio chats I did or via referrals from my clients, only to discover that these travellers' path to contacting the 24/7 details I gave them. Ethically, I do not cross the line and cannot dissect other travellers' bookings, but the exercises were enlightening! I had no joy. The best advice I can give to travellers and even travel advisors is this. DO NOT offer 24 x 7 Emergency services if you do not deliver just that. That might require an advisor to get up at 4 am to assist a client or cancel a Sunday BBQ to follow up. I am not suggesting that a travel advisor must offer 24/7. I am just saying to be upfront and tell clients the days and hours you work, rather than giving false hope. **If you do offer** 24 x 7 services, then do so with honesty and good faith by applying professional fees that clients are aware of before they make any travel booking. Simply put, a person who just had a car accident, is at the airport check-in counter, or is in the hotel lobby, cannot wait 1 hr, 12 hrs, or whatever for a problem or issue to be resolved or for new travel requirements to be enacted. *Not all travel insurers know what to do, especially if time is of the essence.* Clients should research prior to make sure that human 24 x 7 services are offered if that is their want and not to rely upon marketing words that most online, toll-free Phone or other travel companies use. Clients need to research with a valid expectation to pay for such extraordinary services, noting that many Emergencies and After hours and rebooking fees are claimable via good quality travel insurance policies.

EXPECT MORE SPECIAL EVENT TRAVEL TO BE ASKED FOR. I have noticed that many clients like to incorporate an Event into their travel plans, if feasible. Many travellers can easily plan travel flights, accommodation, cruises and even extended holidays around events. This can be within an existing booking with add-on days, created from scratch with extended holidays, or even allocated to business meetings on either side. Examples I have used is having clients attend Taylor Swift and adding extra days or a Sydney Cruise whilst there, attending a sold-out Robert Plant concert in the Rome Opera house-adding extended stay in Italy and Greece and Turkey, seeing the Ballet in New York, attending the Singapore and Abu Dhabi Grand Prix with a cheap QATAR Airways Egypt package at the end, having Dinner at the Fat Duck London with a UK Tour extension, visiting Machu Pichu after a week in New Zealand to see the Rugby, visiting family in Canada with a simple Rockies Tour at the end as part of their family holiday. Creative thinking is important because it delivers greater value in travel, accommodating a traveller's lifestyle preferences.

BY MAX NAJAR - (C) 2026. ABOUT THE WRITER.

MAX NAJAR IS A LIFER IN TRAVEL, AND PROUD OF IT. HE BEGAN IN 1978, BACK WHEN TICKETS WERE HANDWRITTEN, RELATIONSHIPS MATTERED, AND GOOD ADVICE WAS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD. NEARLY FIVE DECADES ON, MAX REMAINS A TRUSTED TRAVEL DIRECTOR, MANAGER AND LIFESTYLE MANAGER, BLENDING OLD-SCHOOL SERVICE WITH MODERN PRECISION. BASED IN ADELAIDE AND REGULARLY IN SYDNEY FOR BOARD AND INDUSTRY COMMITMENTS, HE OPERATES THROUGH AXIS TRAVEL CENTRE UNDER THE PRIORITY PORTFOLIO TRAVEL BRAND. ACCREDITED AND CERTIFIED, WITH A UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE QUALIFICATION IN MEDIA AND RADIO ANNOUNCING, MAX IS ALSO A SEASONED RADIO GUEST SPEAKER WHO KNOWS HOW TO TELL A STORY AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW TO LISTEN. HIS PERSONAL MASTERCLASS TRAVEL MANAGEMENT IS BUILT ON JUDGMENT, DISCRETION, AND EXPERIENCE YOU SIMPLY CANNOT FAST-TRACK.

