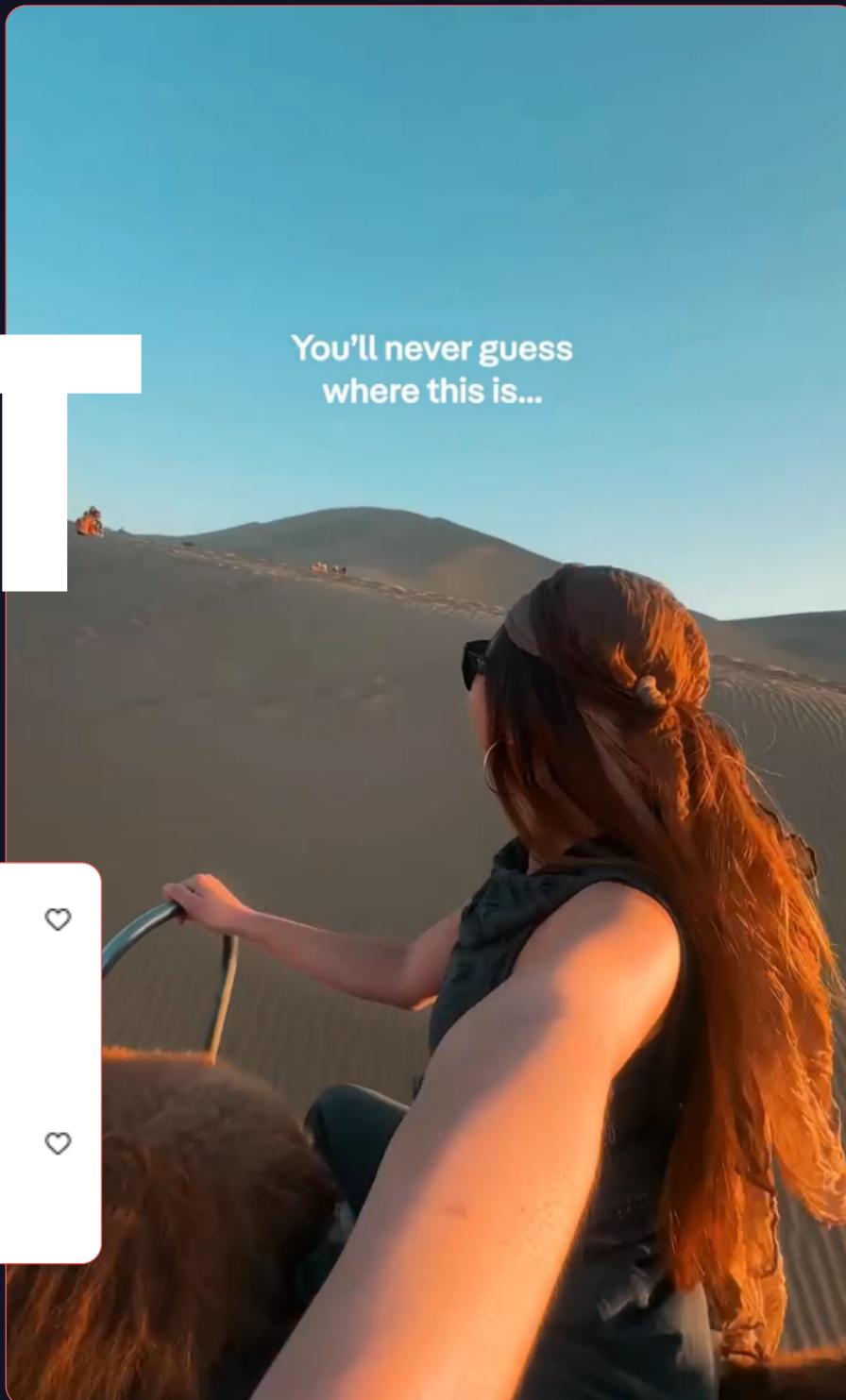


THE 2026 STATE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TRAVEL REPORT



THE NEW TRAVEL PARADIGM

The travel industry is at an inflection point. What was once speculation is now reality: social platforms and creator-led content are no longer supplemental, they are the primary drivers of travel discovery, inspiration, and booking intent.

The influence of the creator economy extends far beyond travel. In the past 18 months, some of the world's most forward-thinking brands have restructured how they connect with audiences, reallocating up to 50% of marketing budgets toward creator-led content and authentic social media focused partnerships.

This isn't a trend, it's a fundamental reshaping of how marketing budgets are allocated.

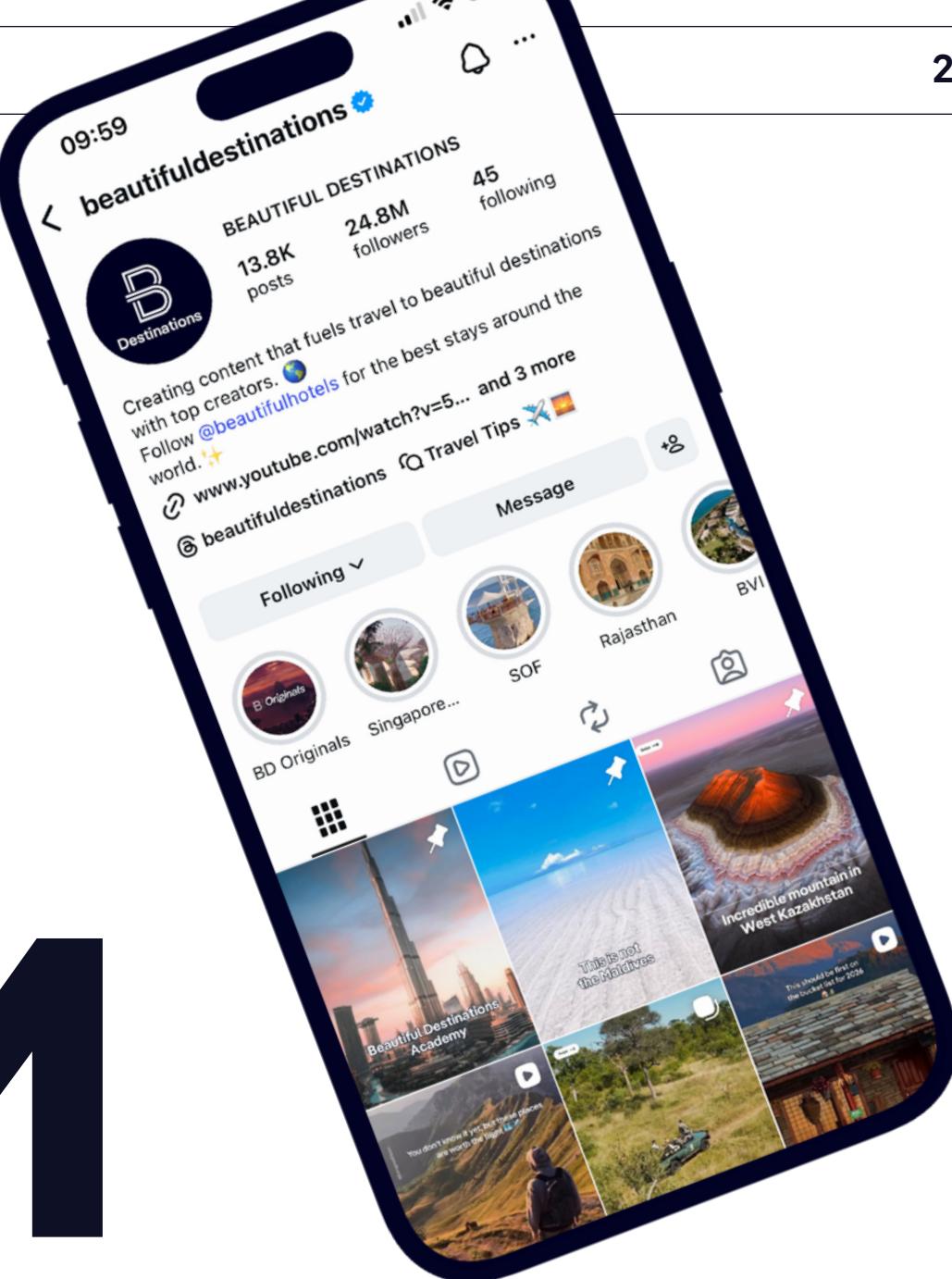
At Beautiful Destinations, our global community of 50 million travellers offers an unparalleled lens into this transformation. Every day, we help brands stay relevant in a landscape defined by cultural shifts, algorithmic change, and audience expectation. In this report, we explore how travel behavior is evolving, how content preferences are shifting and, most importantly, how these dynamics translate into measurable business outcomes.

The friction between "I want to go there" and "I'm going there" has virtually disappeared. As social commerce infrastructure matures, influence is evolving into instant commerce, where discovery, decision, and transaction now happen in a single scroll.

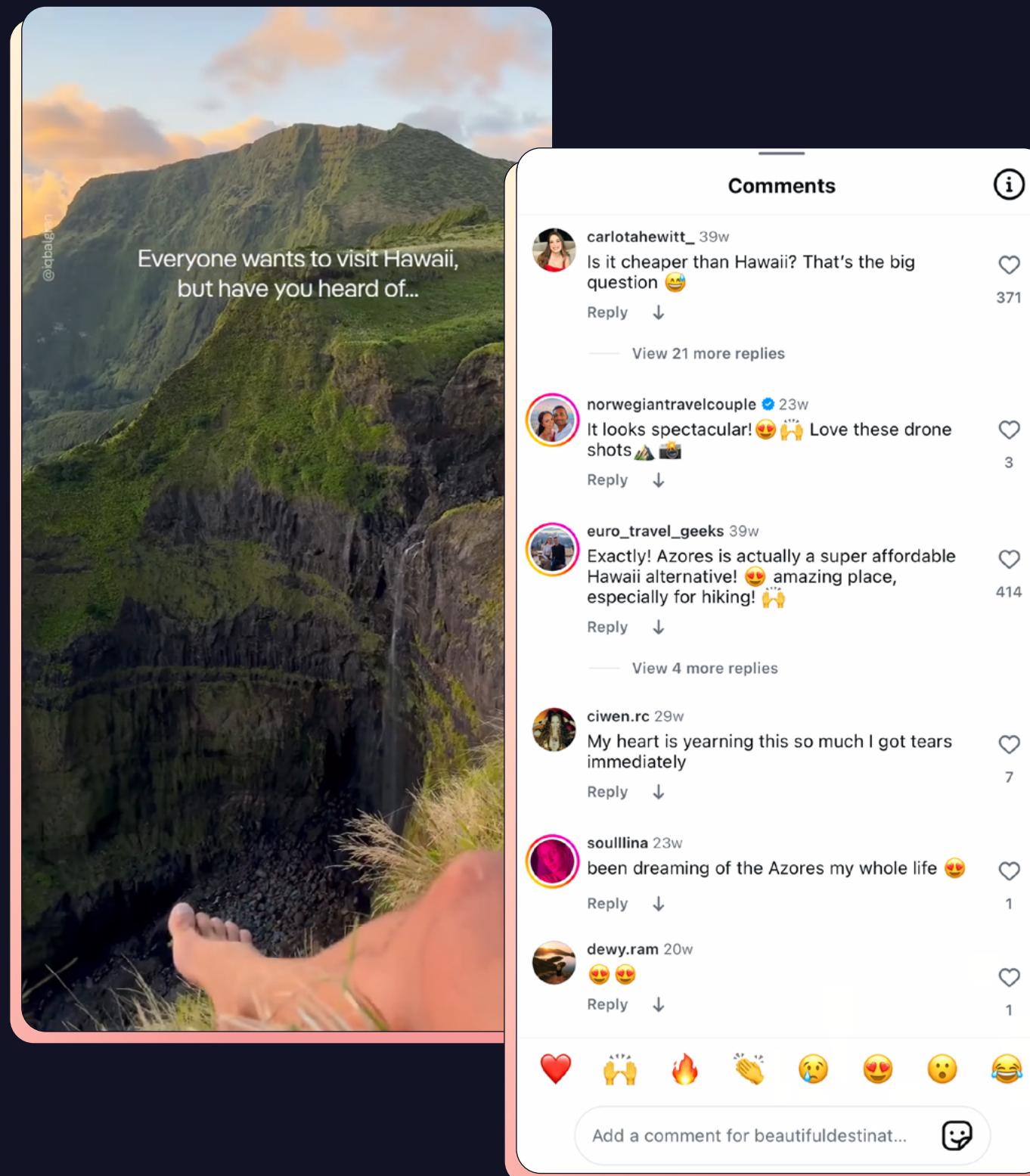
We are in a new era of travel marketing, where authenticity meets algorithm, where creators become commerce drivers, and where data-driven storytelling transforms destinations into must-visit experiences.

This report is built on an analysis of Beautiful Destinations cross-platform data across the last three years. Thousands of pieces of world class content, billions of social interactions and millions and millions of travellers who began their journeys with us.

I hope you find it useful,



METHODOLOGY



This report is built on a comprehensive analysis of 4,000 BD cross-platform posts published between 2022 and 2025. All posts were tagged using our custom metadata framework. This assigns contextual information to each post for different themes, such as; Journey Stage, Destination Style, Visual Style, Country, etc. This allowed us to evaluate content through both behavioural actions (how audiences interact) and a contextual lens (what the content depicts).

We also evaluated search-driven behaviour by analysing search queries and traffic-source data from our content. Each search query was categorised by intent, giving us a clearer view of how users discovered our videos, what they

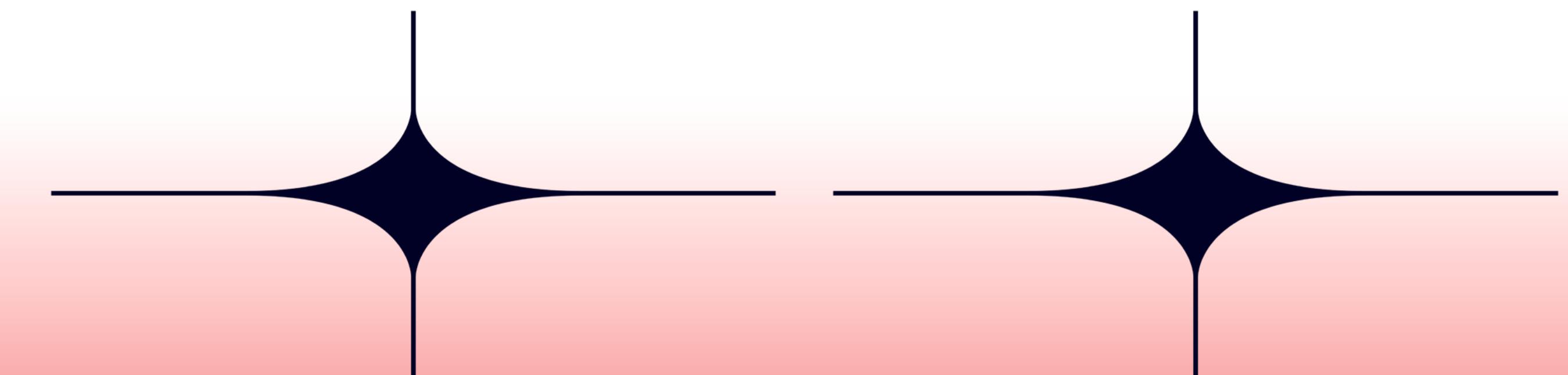
were looking for, and how different forms of search behaviour have evolved over time.

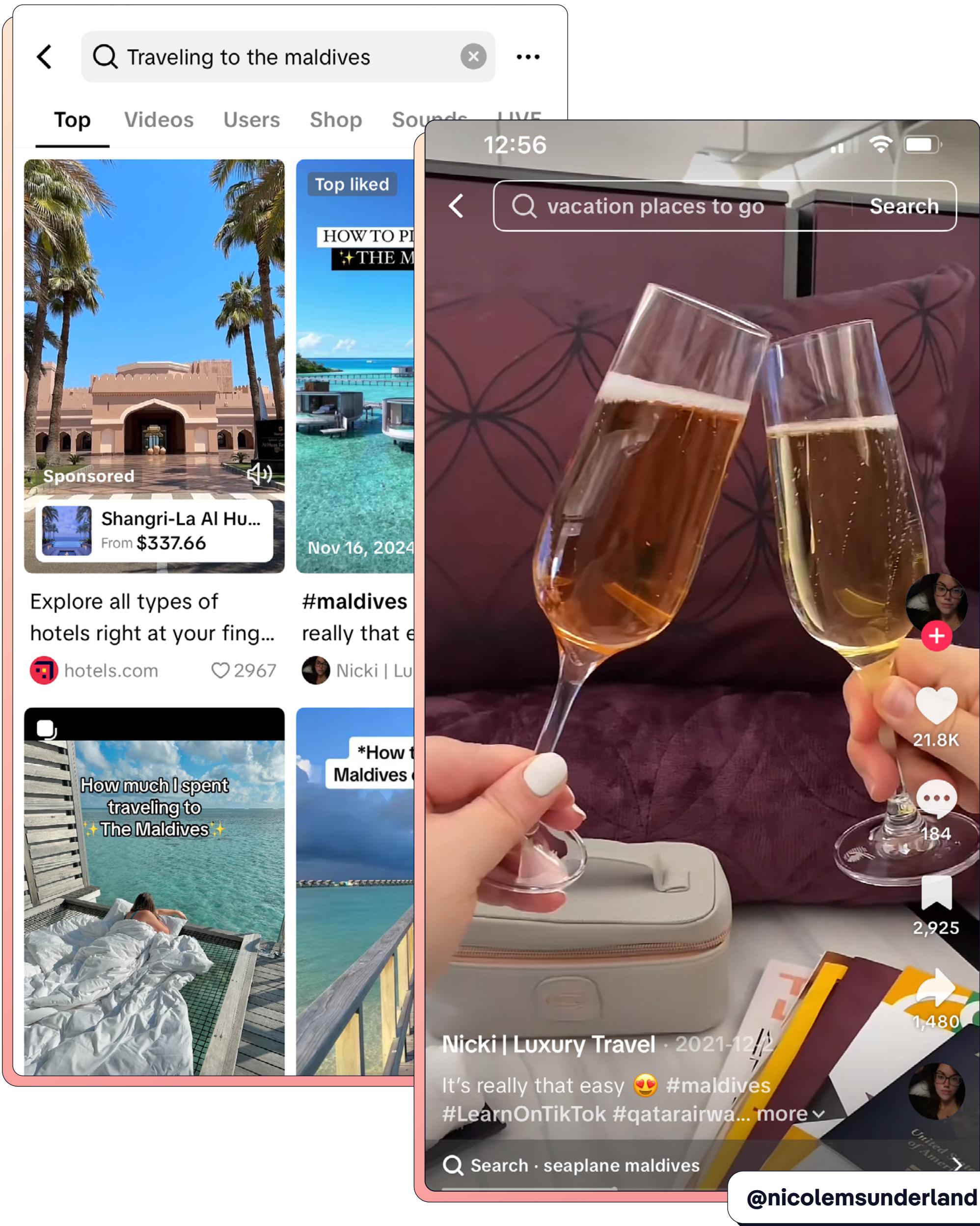
The analysis reflects how real audiences interact with our content across platforms, enabling us to understand what drives engagement, what inspires action, and how travel behaviour is evolving.

Our social media accounts represent one of the largest travel communities in the world. They generate huge amounts of data which we use to inform our research and our content.



DECODING THE MODERN TRAVELER



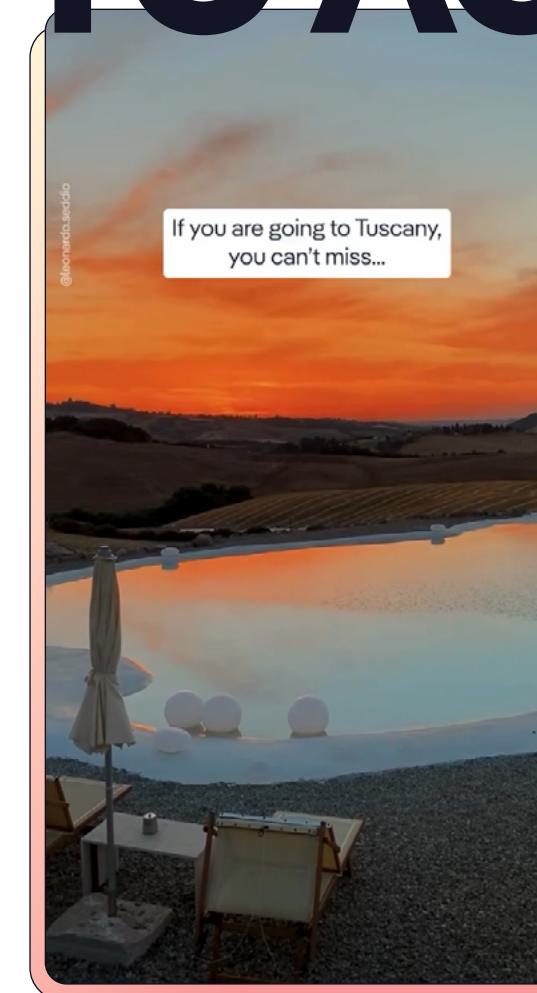
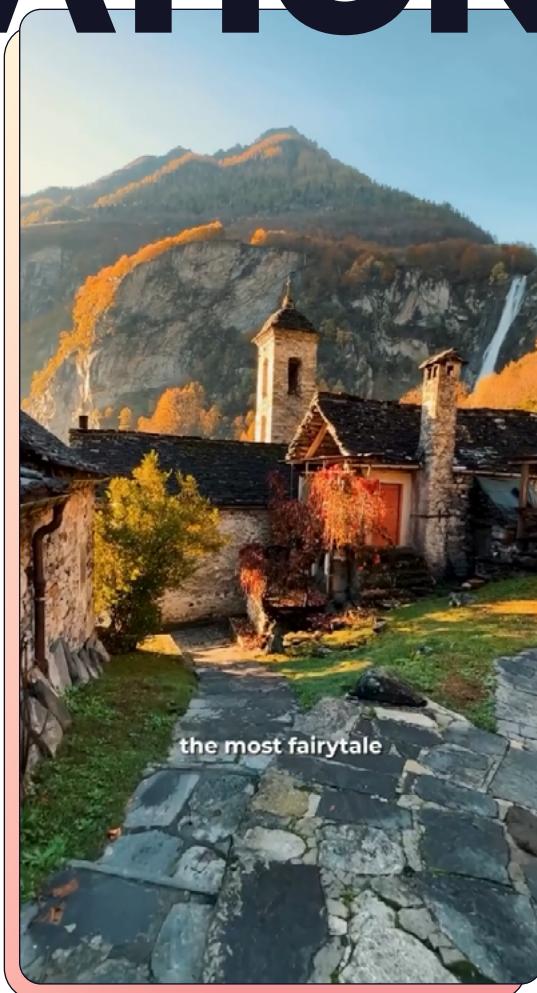


Travel remains one of the most meaningful ways people invest their time and money. Although the motivations driving travel have remained the same, how people discover, dream about, and decide where they go has changed more in the last 12 months than in the prior 12 years.

Today's traveller doesn't just consume content, they are more deliberate in how they find it, how they engage with it and how they use it to plan their next adventure.

We're using our data as a window into traveller intent, revealing how people move from dreaming to booking and how travel marketers build content to support this change.

THERE'S A CLEAR SHIFT FROM ASPIRATION TO ACTION



For years, travel content was about selling a dream. Today, it's about driving a decision. Our analysis reveals a clear shift in how travellers interact with content at different stages of their journey.

While **“Dreaming”** content still garners the highest overall engagement, **“Planning”** content now drives a higher rate of intent signals.

We're seeing a shift from travellers passively engaging for entertainment, to actively planning to reach an outcome.

Rather than just liking or commenting on content, travellers today are bookmarking and sharing content within their direct messages to other stakeholders in their decision making process. Rich video and photos in the DMs are keeping users on social platforms, as more and more travel planning occurs here.

This is also happening in B2B, as travel agents and tour operators are creating video itineraries for their clients through Instagram & Tiktok video.

+45%

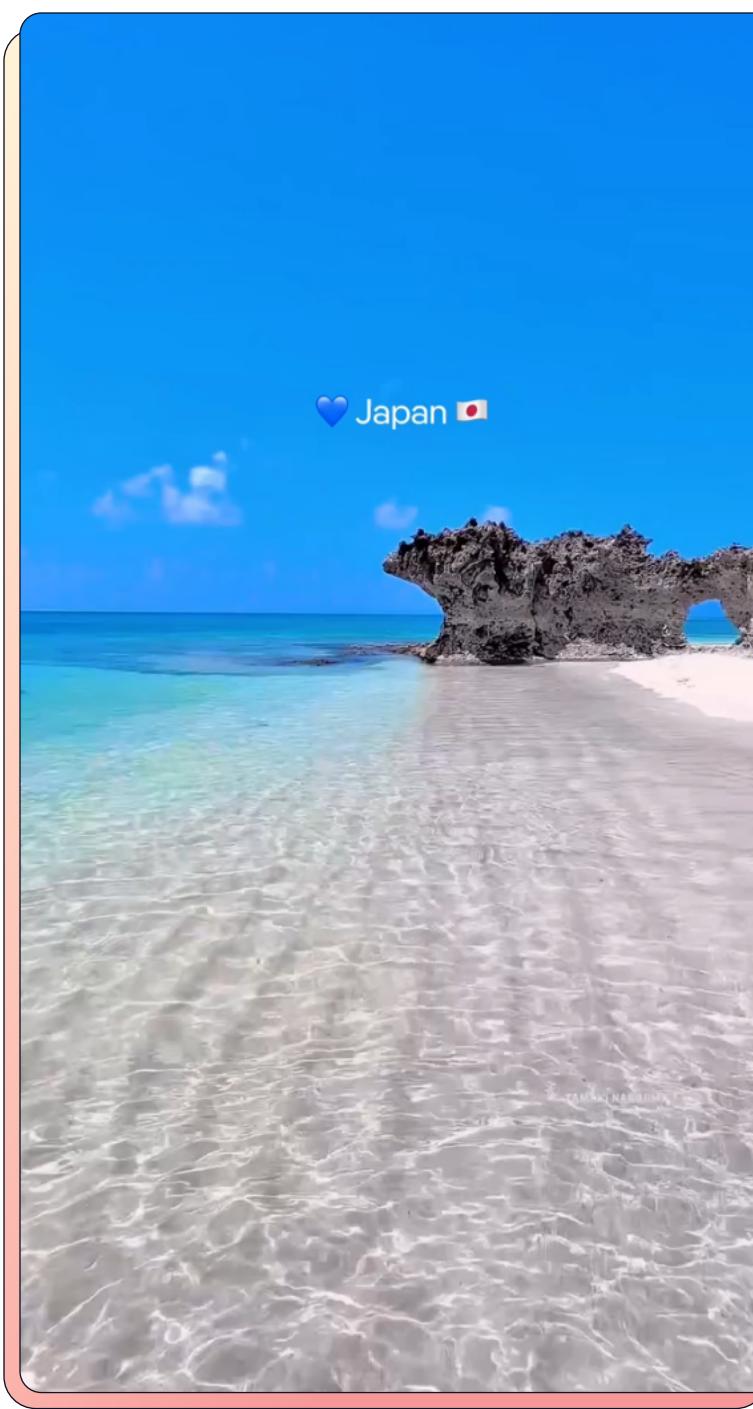
Dreaming content outperforms in ‘passive engagement’ by 45% (likes & comments)

+11%

Planning content generates more saves, signalling stronger travel intent and consideration.

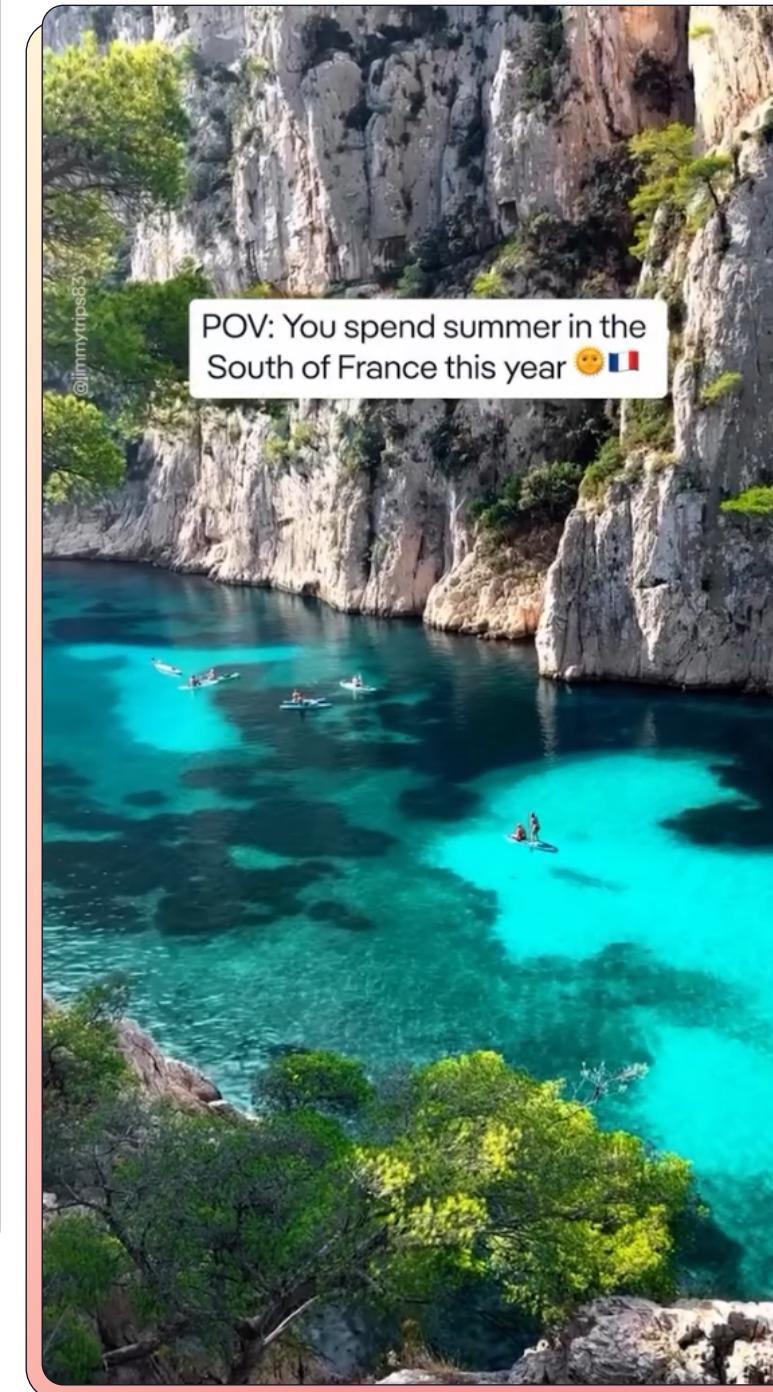
+17%

Experiencing content is shared more often, showing how on-the-ground storytelling drives advocacy and organic reach.



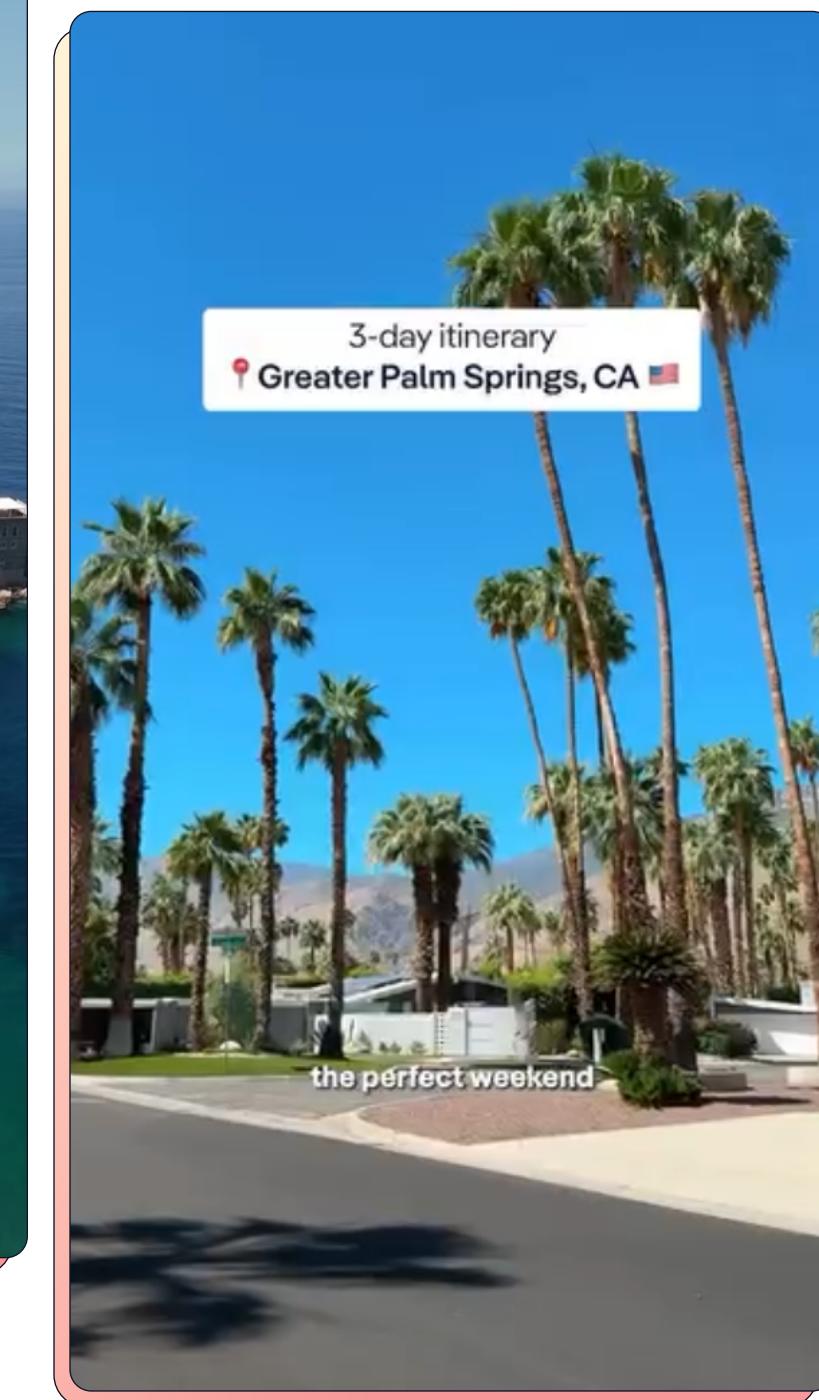
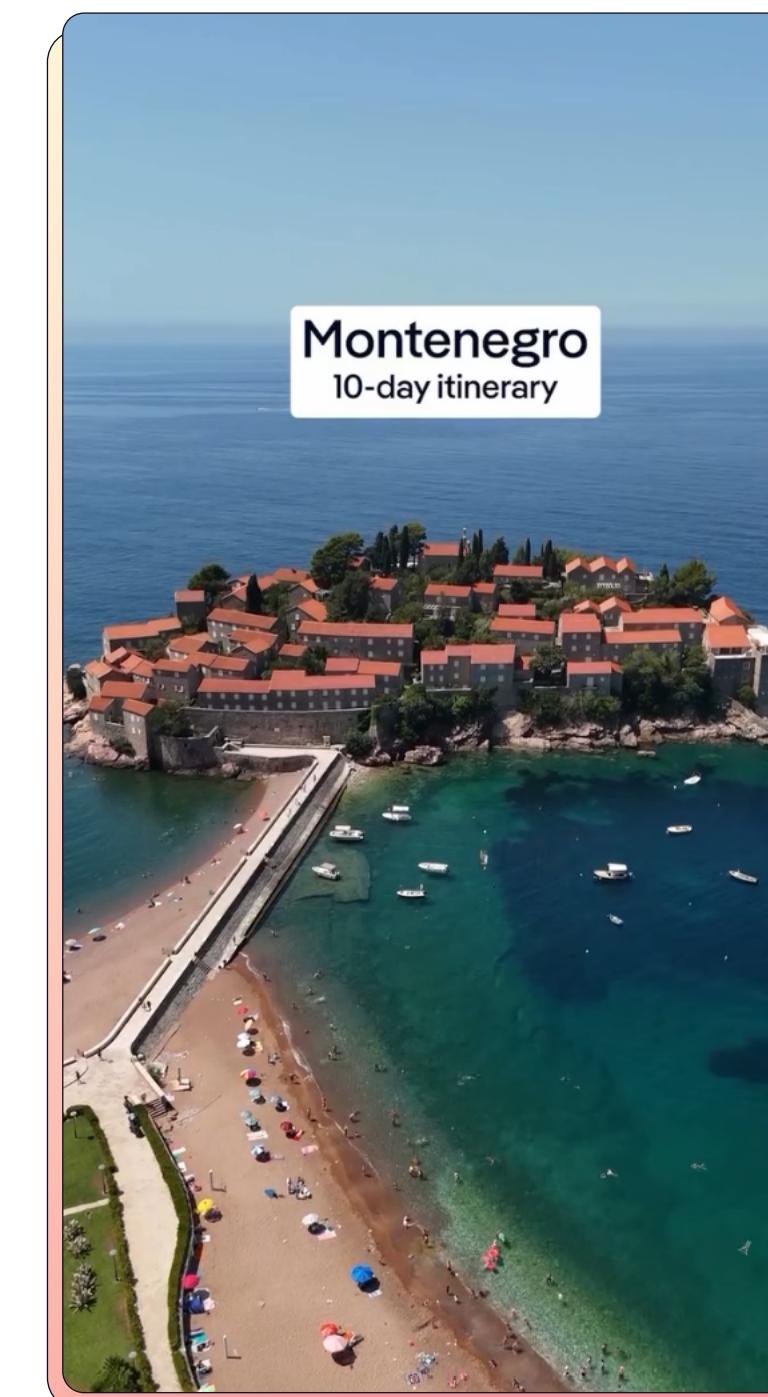
DREAMING

Emotional content that inspires. Shows the destination's essence in a digestible, aspirational way.



PLANNING

Helping the traveller make choices and decisions - where to visit, what to do, how to do it.



Different stages require different content needs.
Travellers outcome reflect this change.
From passive engagement at the dreaming stage to actively planning, saving and sharing.

SOCIAL SEARCH IS THE LEADING SOURCE OF TRAVEL DISCOVERY

Search is no longer a list of links, it's a visual conversation, and that conversation is increasingly happening on social media.

Our data shows a dramatic surge in the importance of search, in 2022 social search accounted for less than 1% of views. This has increased to 22% today and is now the fastest growing source of content views. It's become clear that social search is a major force in travel discovery.

This trend is even more drastic among younger generations. According to a Q2 2025 Pulse Survey from Sprout Social, 41% of Gen Z have a social-first search mindset, and nearly one in three are skipping Google altogether.

The way in which travellers are searching has also evolved. According to Propellic's "From Search to Purpose" Report (2025), travellers are shifting from short, keyword-based queries to natural, conversational prompts. The report found that the average AI-assisted travel search was 2x longer than a traditional one.

We're seeing the same behaviour across our social channels, travellers are asking questions, seeking recommendations, and expecting answers that feel more human.

12 words

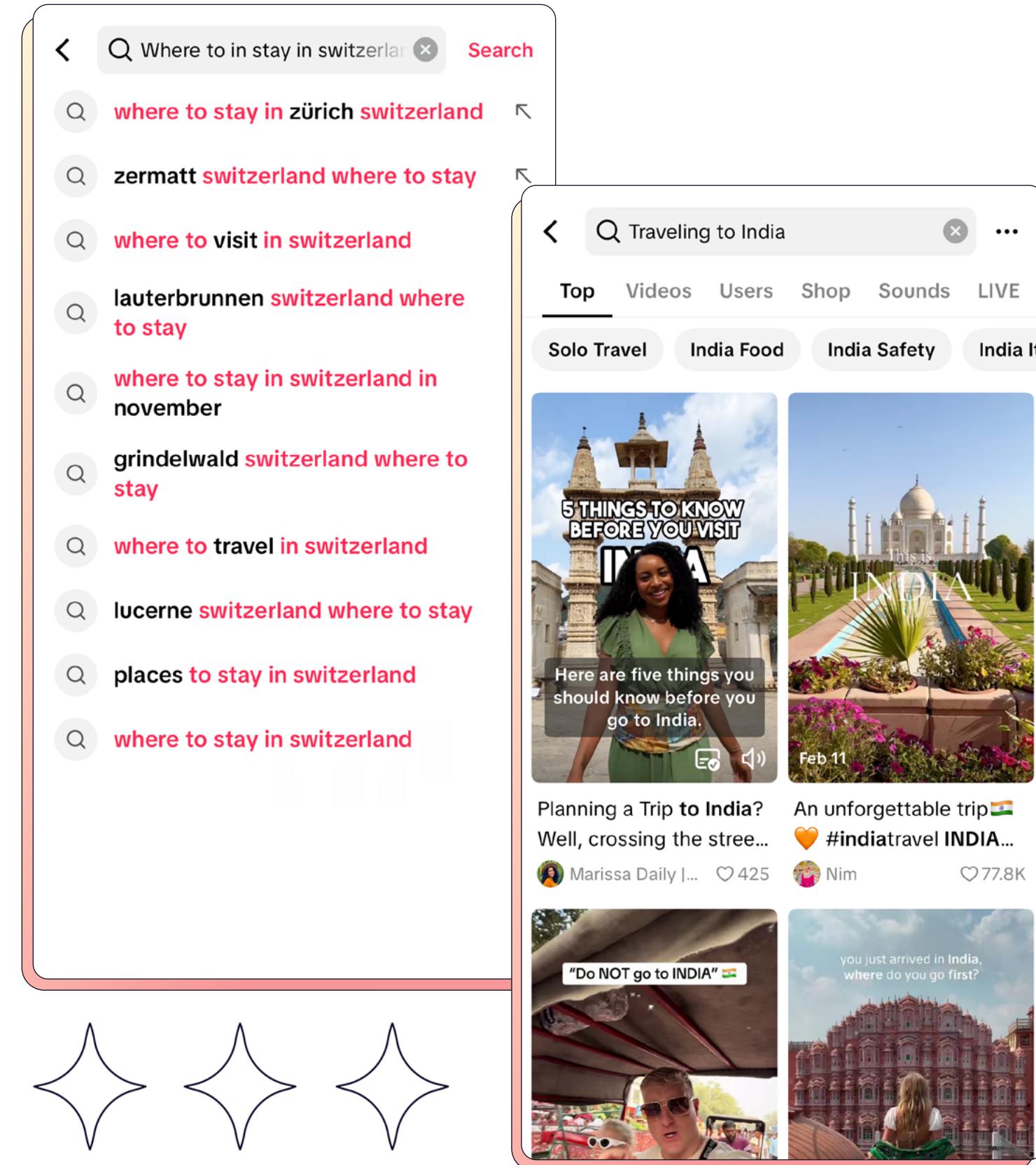
Average length of the top five search terms combined per post, showing how the adoption of AI has impacted how people search.

+9pts

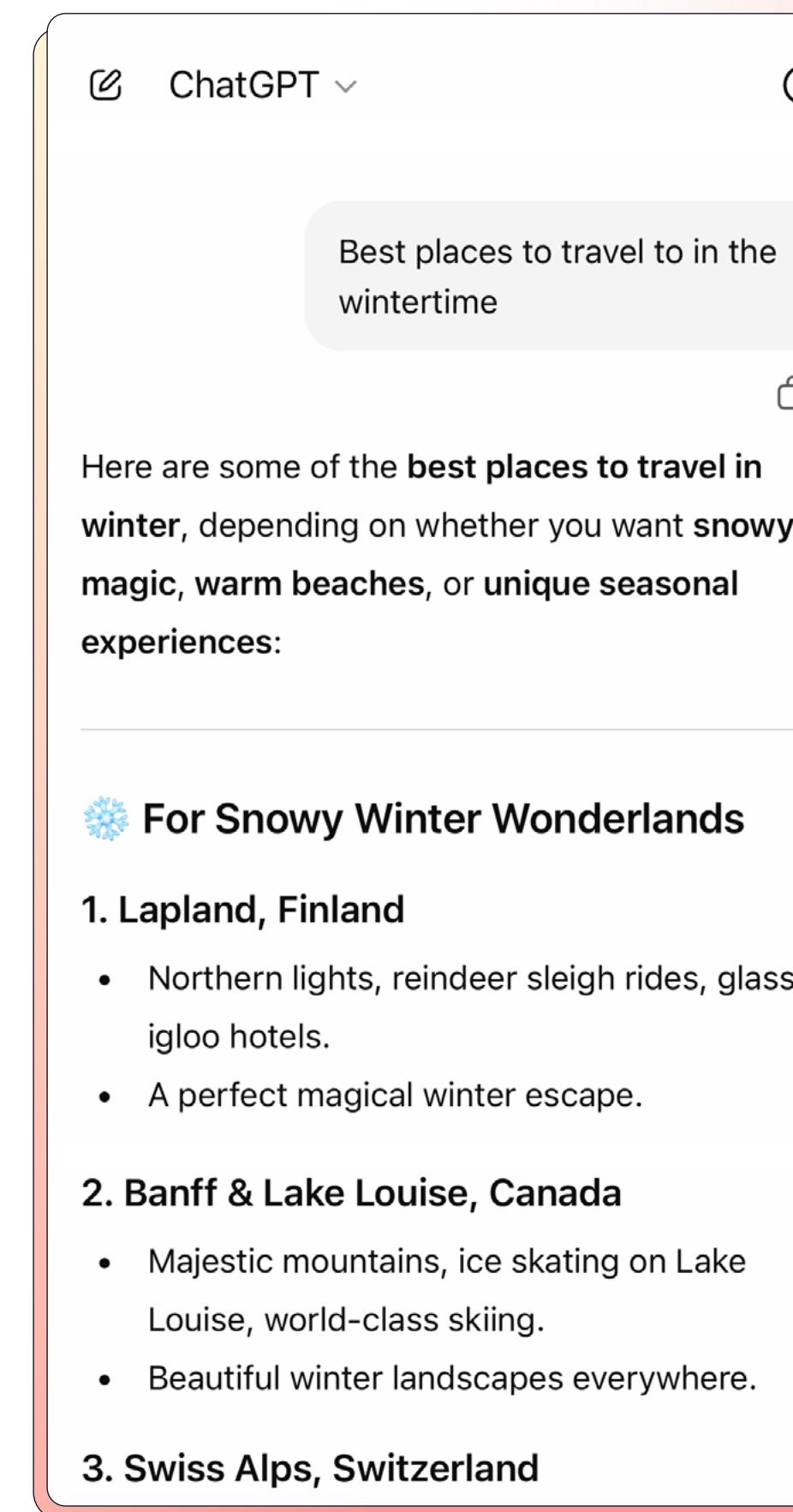
In planning-related searches since 2023, showing that users are turning to social platforms not just for inspiration, but for trip planning and decision-making.

1 in 4

Planning searches are about things to do, signalling a blend of inspiration and utility as social becomes embedded in the planning phase of travel.



AI CREATES THE FRAMEWORK



ChatGPT

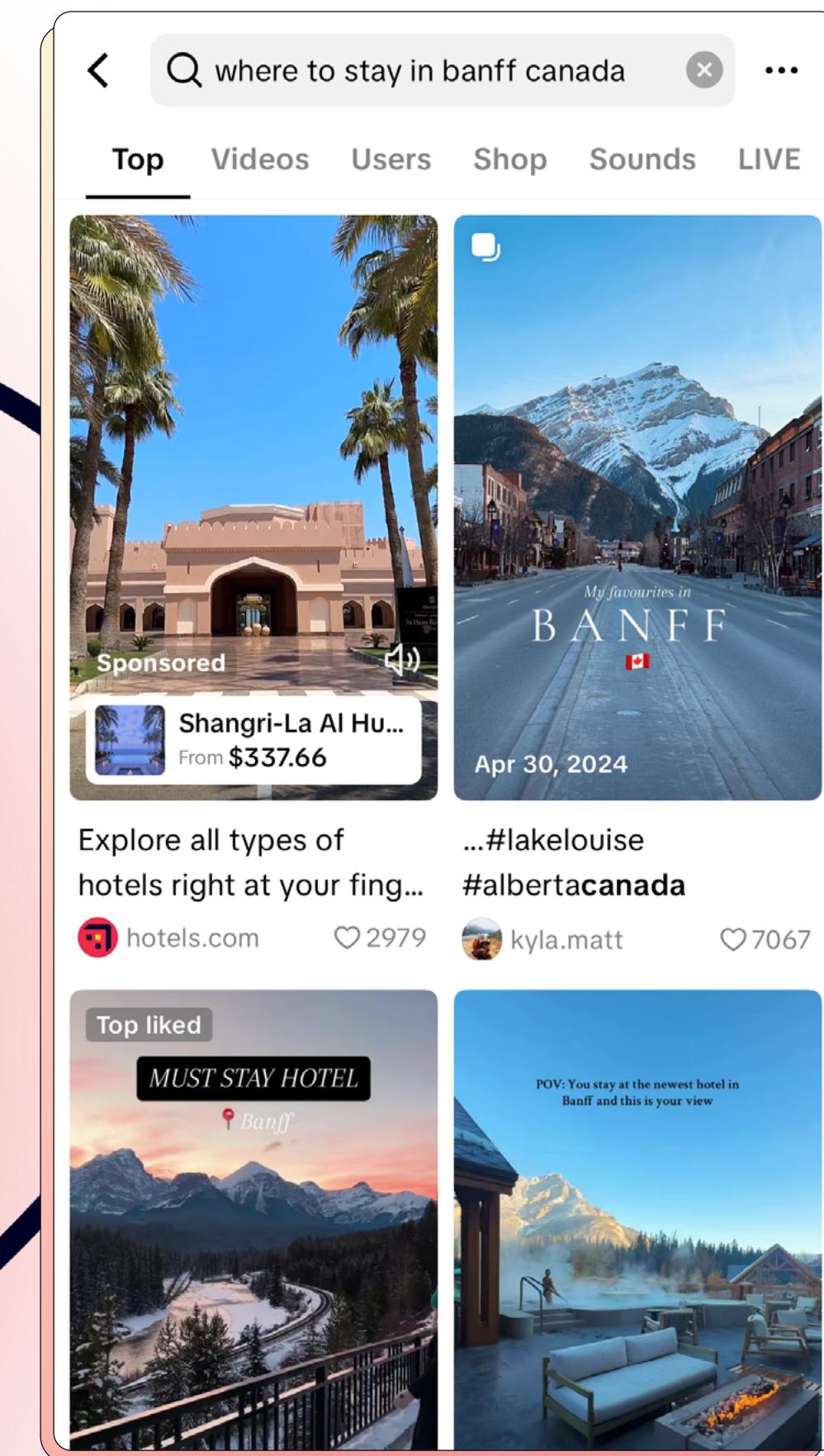
Best places to travel to in the wintertime

Here are some of the **best places to travel in winter**, depending on whether you want snowy magic, warm beaches, or unique seasonal experiences:

For Snowy Winter Wonderlands

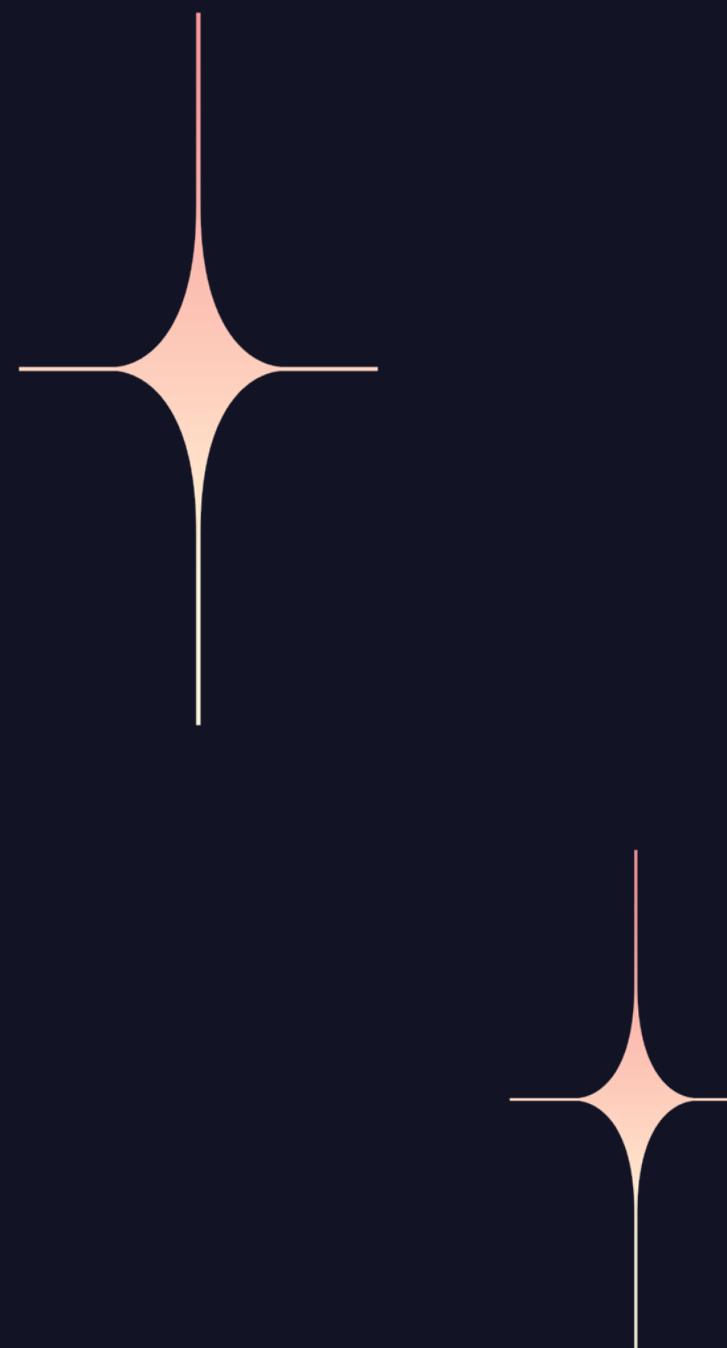
1. Lapland, Finland
 - Northern lights, reindeer sleigh rides, glass igloo hotels.
 - A perfect magical winter escape.
2. Banff & Lake Louise, Canada
 - Majestic mountains, ice skating on Lake Louise, world-class skiing.
 - Beautiful winter landscapes everywhere.
3. Swiss Alps, Switzerland

The integration of AI has created a new planning pattern in travel. Travellers are using AI to generate detailed itineraries with specific recommendations, then search for those exact locations and experiences on social platforms to validate them with real content.



SOCIAL BRINGS IT TO LIFE

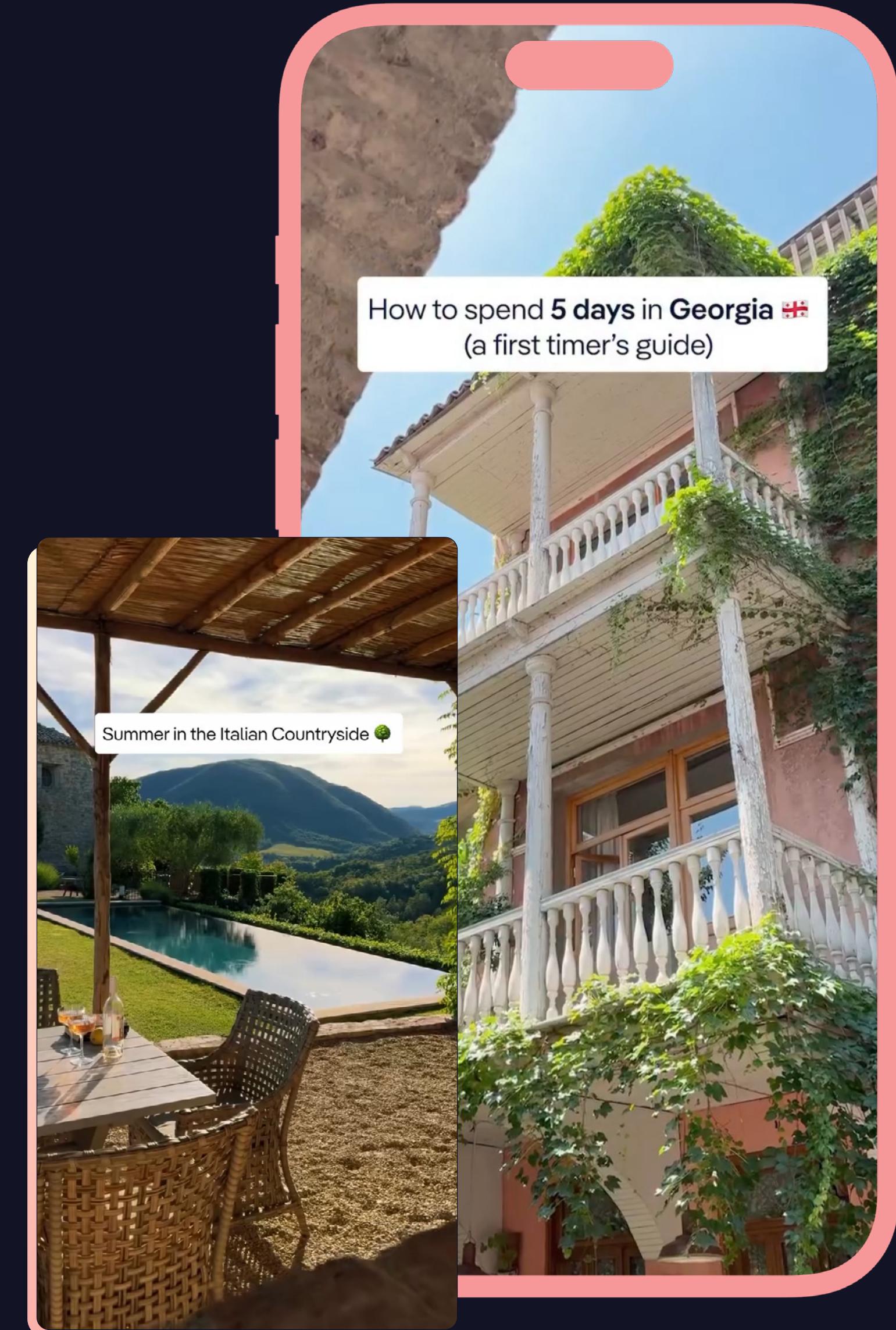
BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS' POINT OF VIEW



The modern traveller wants content that feels like it was made just for them. Brands that win here will stop chasing virality and start building specificity, creating stories that speak to traveller identities, answer exact questions, and are worth sharing because they reflect who people are, not just where they want to go.

Creator content is already adhering to this shift, acting as conversational guides where platforms surface content shaped by intent rather than algorithms alone.

A balanced strategy leads with aspiration and converts with utility. The opportunity for brands is clear, create content that doesn't just appear in feeds, but helps travellers discover, plan, and decide. Those who move beyond inspiration to deliver useful, searchable, and saveable content will capture both attention and bookings.



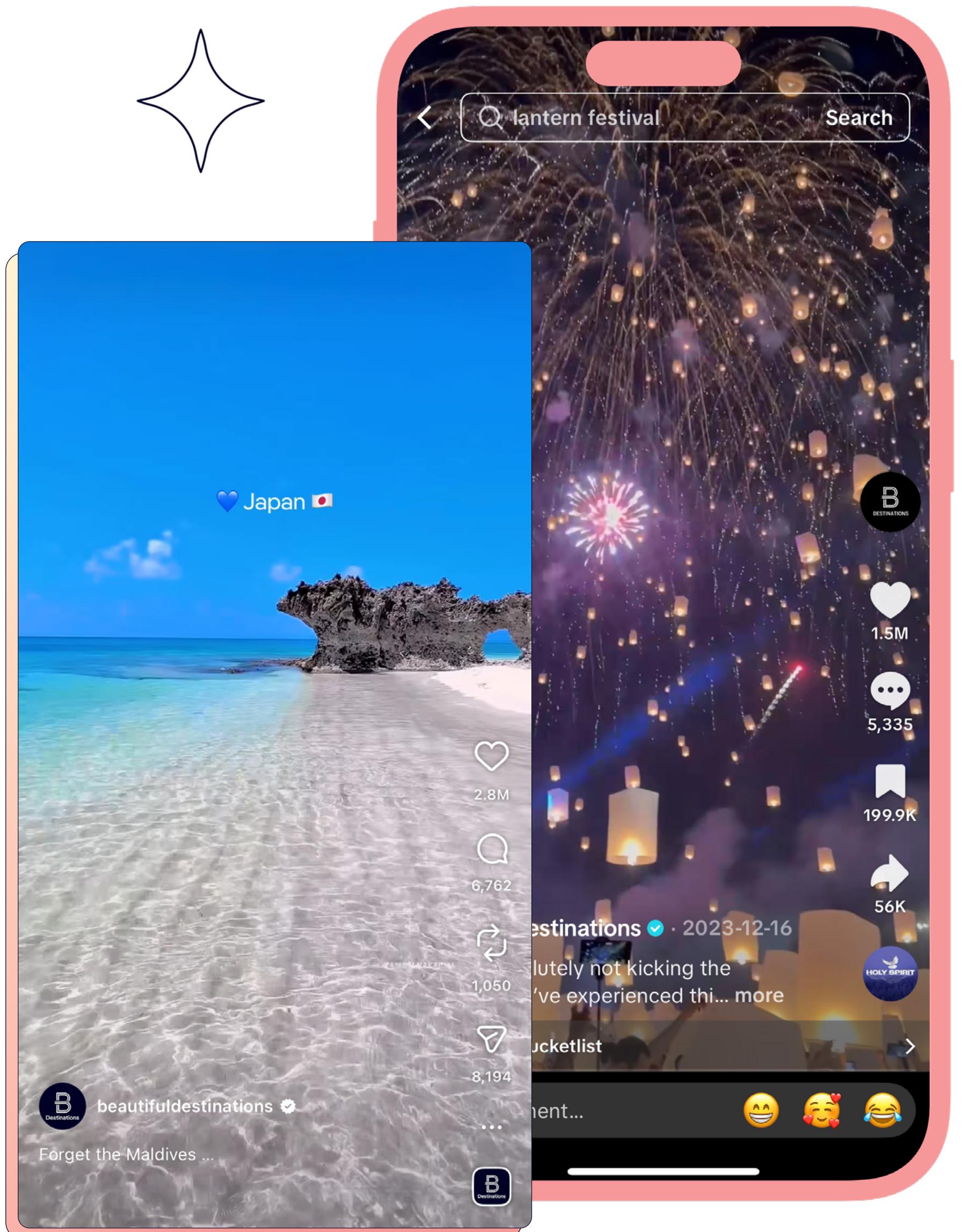
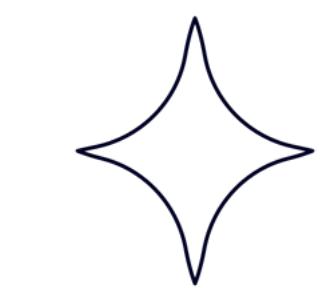
BEFRIENDING THE ALGORITHM



Platforms evolve, algorithms shift, and new features constantly reshape how people discover, engage with, and book travel. Through it all one truth remains: relevance moves at the speed of culture. Algorithm changes simply reflect this.

At Beautiful Destinations, our 50 million cross-platform followers give us a direct line to what travellers value. We don't try to game the algorithm. We use it as a focus group to understand where demand is growing. Every algorithm change is a signal from the audience, revealing how they want to travel.

In this section we unpack what's driving engagement, which formats perform consistently, the kinds of content that truly resonate and why we believe social commerce is a tsunami that will change the way travel booking happens forever.



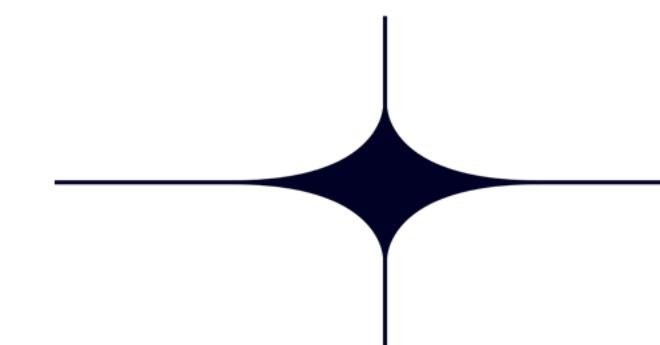
A SHIFT FROM PASSIVE LIKES TO ACTIVE CURATION

Social algorithms are shifting from rewarding passive signals (likes & views) to rewarding intent signals (saves & shares). The platforms are optimising for content people plan to act on. This shift is a clear signal that social platforms are maturing from entertainment channels into powerful utility tools.

TikTok is a game changer in travel marketing. The 2025 launch of TikTok Travel Ads is the clearest sign yet that the line between discovery and booking is disappearing. It's a move built on existing traveller signals...

84% of users watch travel content monthly viewers are **2.6x more likely** to book an experience after searching on the platform.

Source: *TikTok Marketing Science Travel Consumer Behavior Survey via Suzy, January 2023. TikTok Marketing Science Global TikTok as a Discovery Engine Study 2023, conducted by Material.*



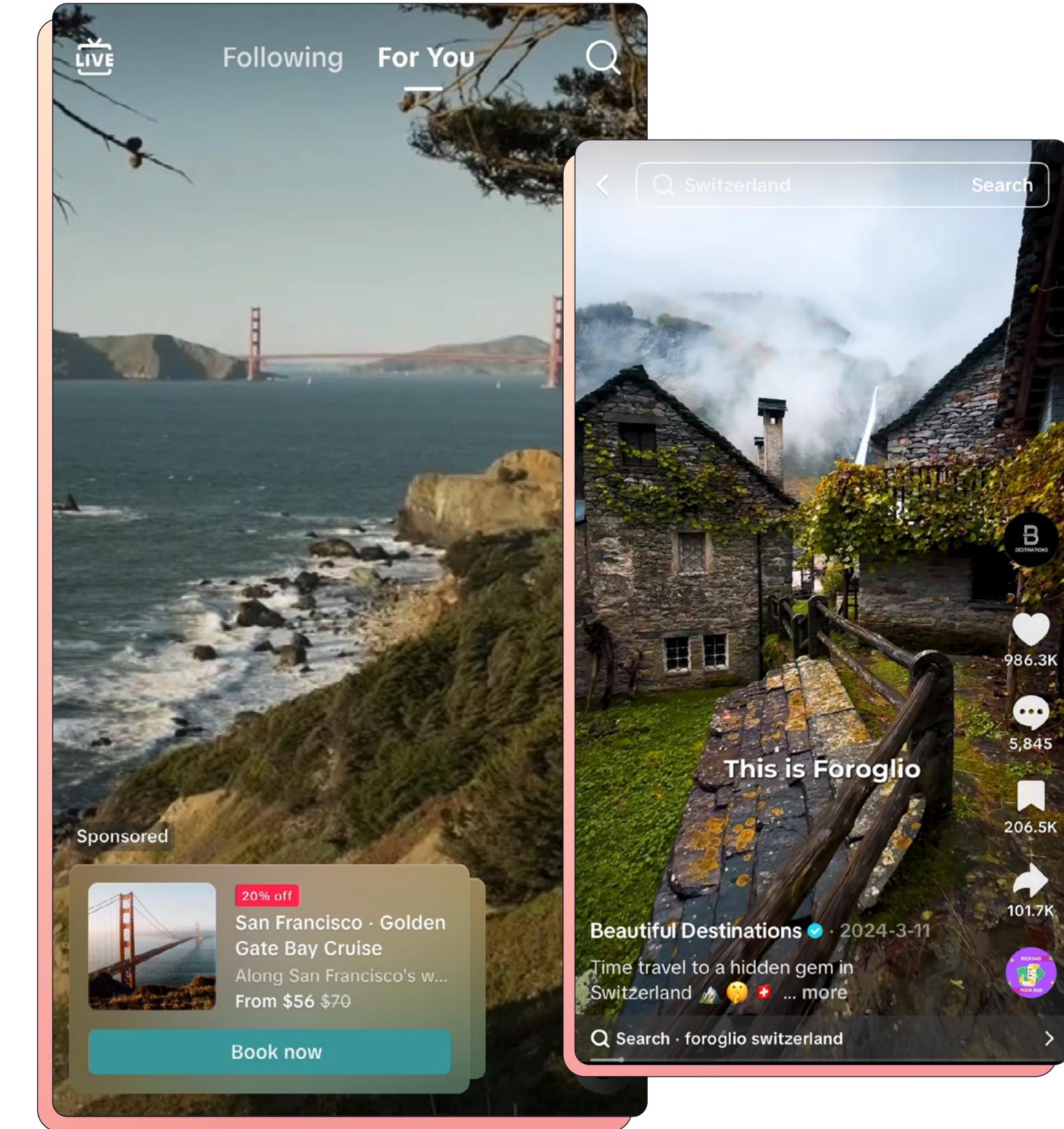
We're seeing this play out across our channels.
For travel brands the save represents an indication of future action rather than passing appreciation. When someone saves a post, they're implying "I want to go there." Algorithms now treat this as a high-value signal.

+200%

Instagram saves have tripled as a share of total engagement since 2022, while likes on the average post have fallen by nearly 10pts.

x3

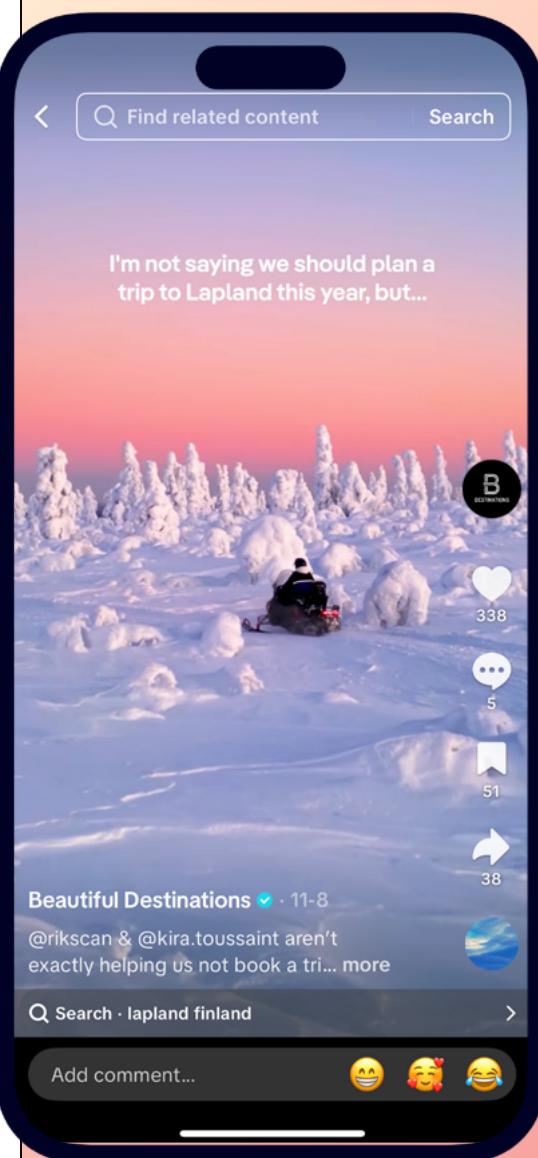
TikTok shares and saves are up 3x since 2022. Showing the algorithm now boosts content people return to, not just scroll past.



OUR DATA REVEALS WHAT'S TRULY DRIVING INTENT, THE KIND OF CONTENT ALGORITHMS REWARD AND TRAVELLERS RESPOND TO

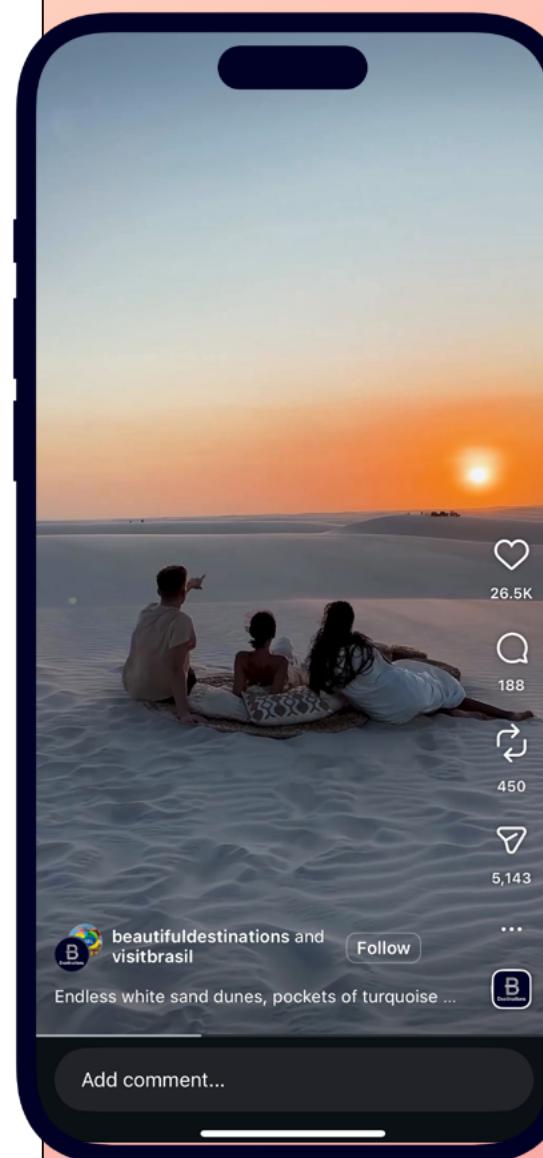
Short-form video is best for initial discovery

6-12 seconds is the sweet spot for discovery, driving an average engagement rate of 8.4%. Performance drops after 12 seconds, while clips under 3 seconds are too short to connect. The 6-12 second range delivers stories that are complete, digestible, and built for attention.



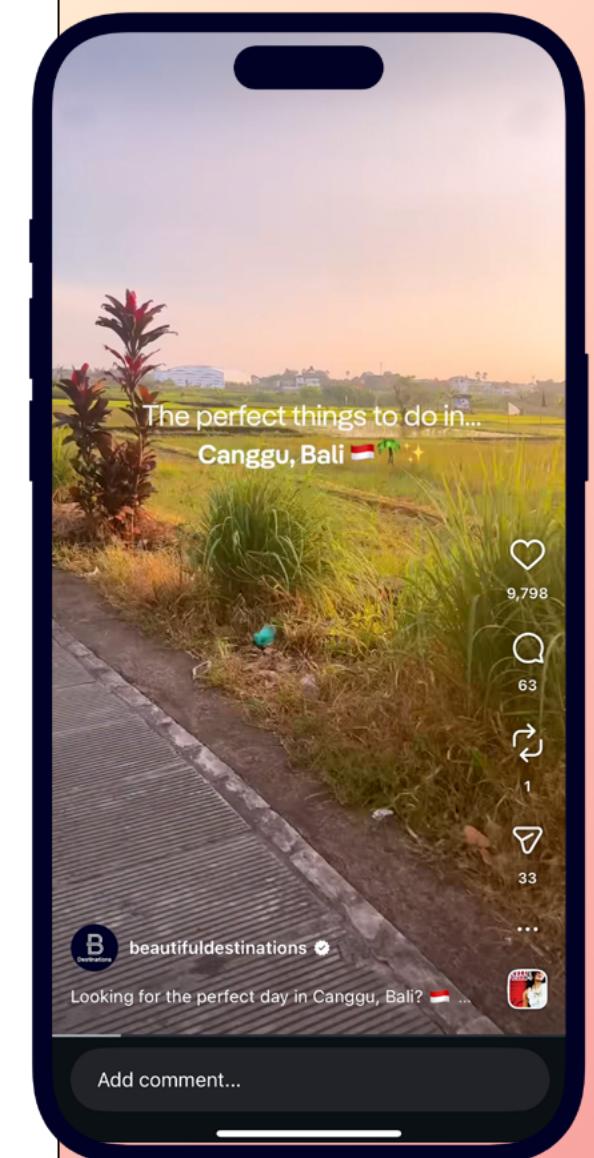
Reels reign as the top-performing format

Reels drive 2.5× higher share rate and +35% engagement versus static posts. However, we've seen a surge of activity around Carousels this year, with a 28% increase in saves - signalling deeper utility interest and intent.



Fast edits and overlays are losing impact

Quick-cut videos see the lowest engagement, as audiences favour slower, more considered storytelling. Posts without text overlays earn 26% higher engagement, proving that clarity and pacing drive connection.

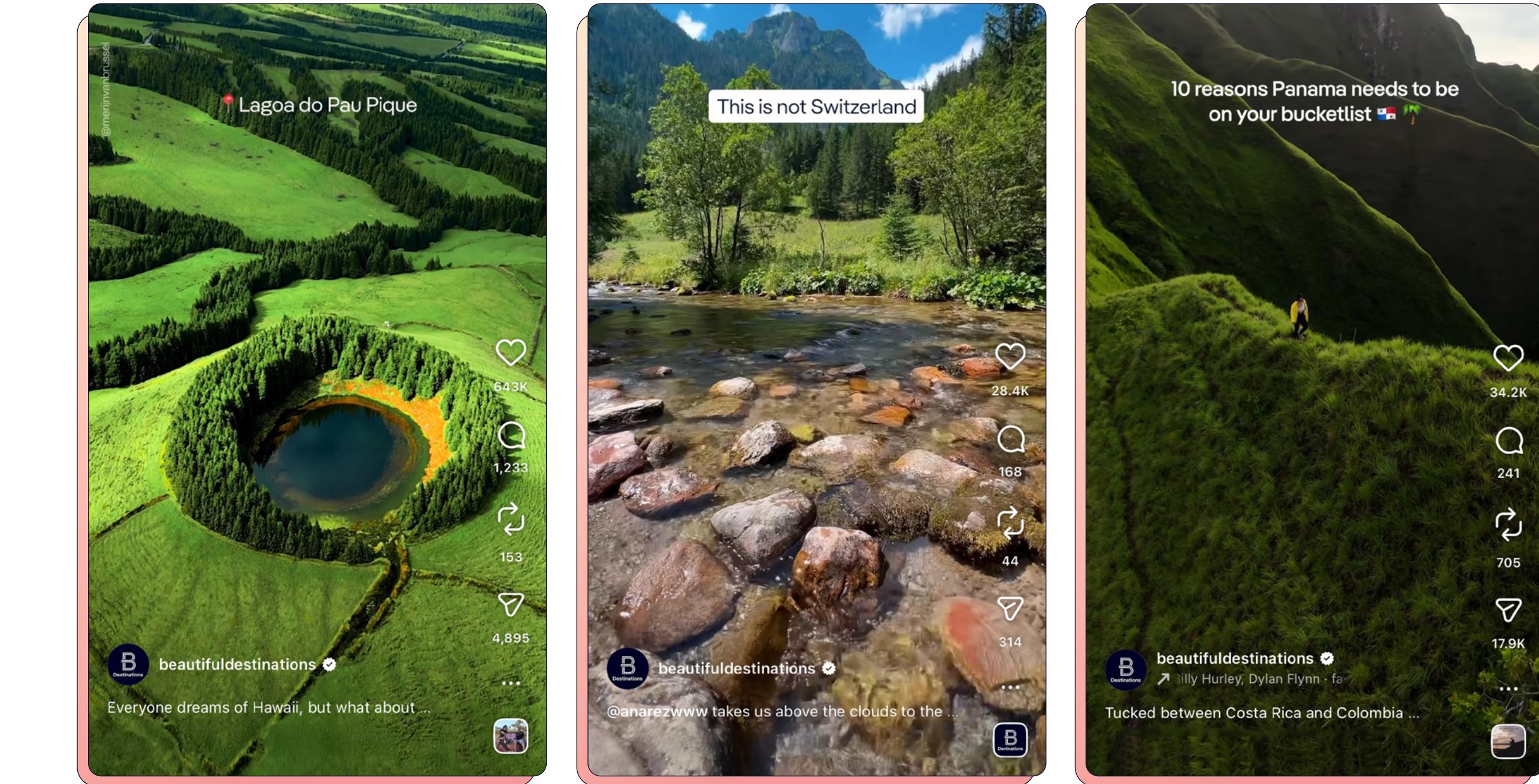
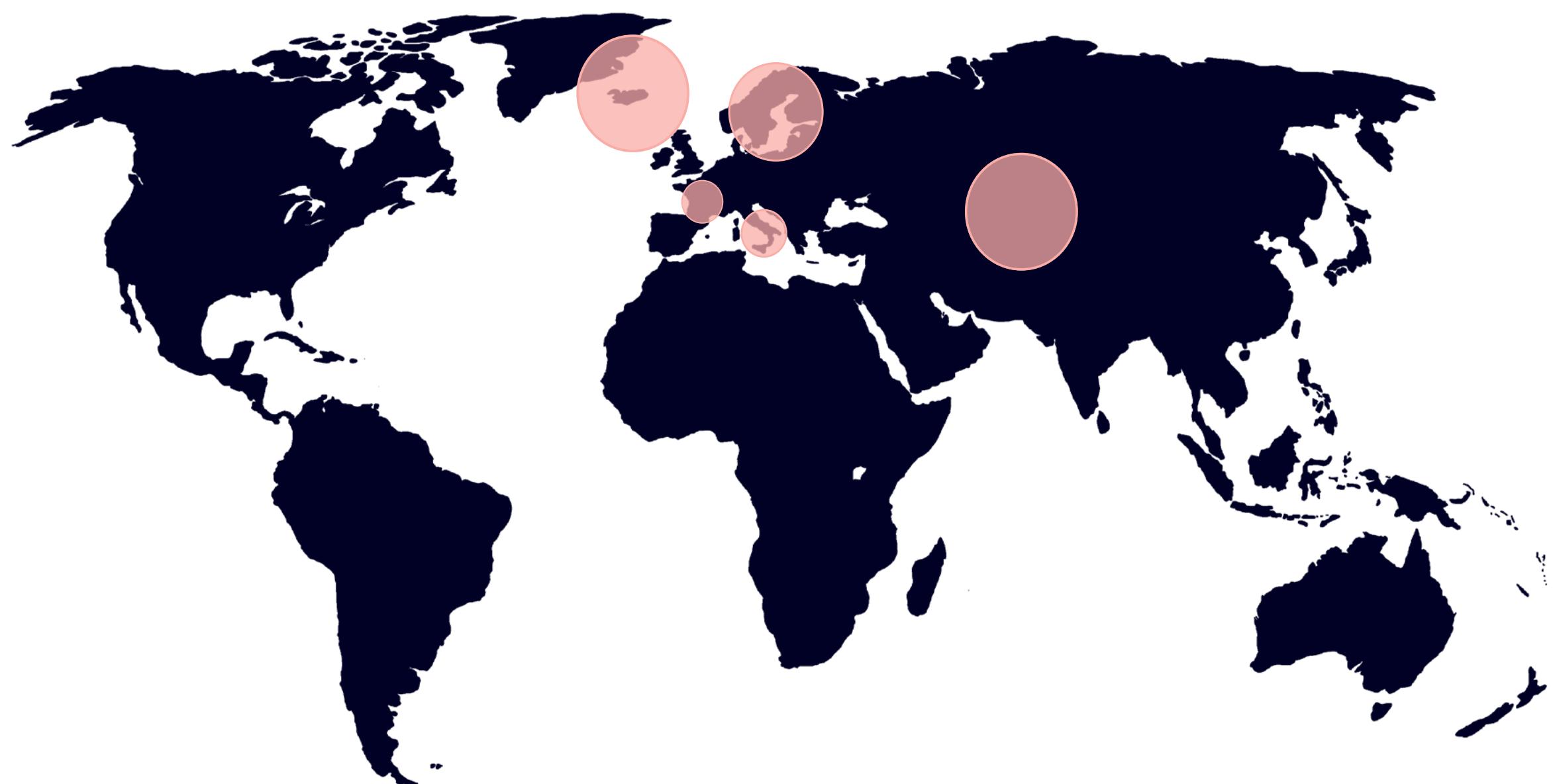


TRAVELLERS ARE SEARCHING FOR CALM

Travel content that feels grounded in nature is outperforming the more traditional 'postcard' content.

Content featuring forests, mountains and open landscapes drive engagement rates **27% higher** than urban and beach.

Audiences are drawn to open, natural settings; suggesting viewers are resonating with escape, calm and authenticity.

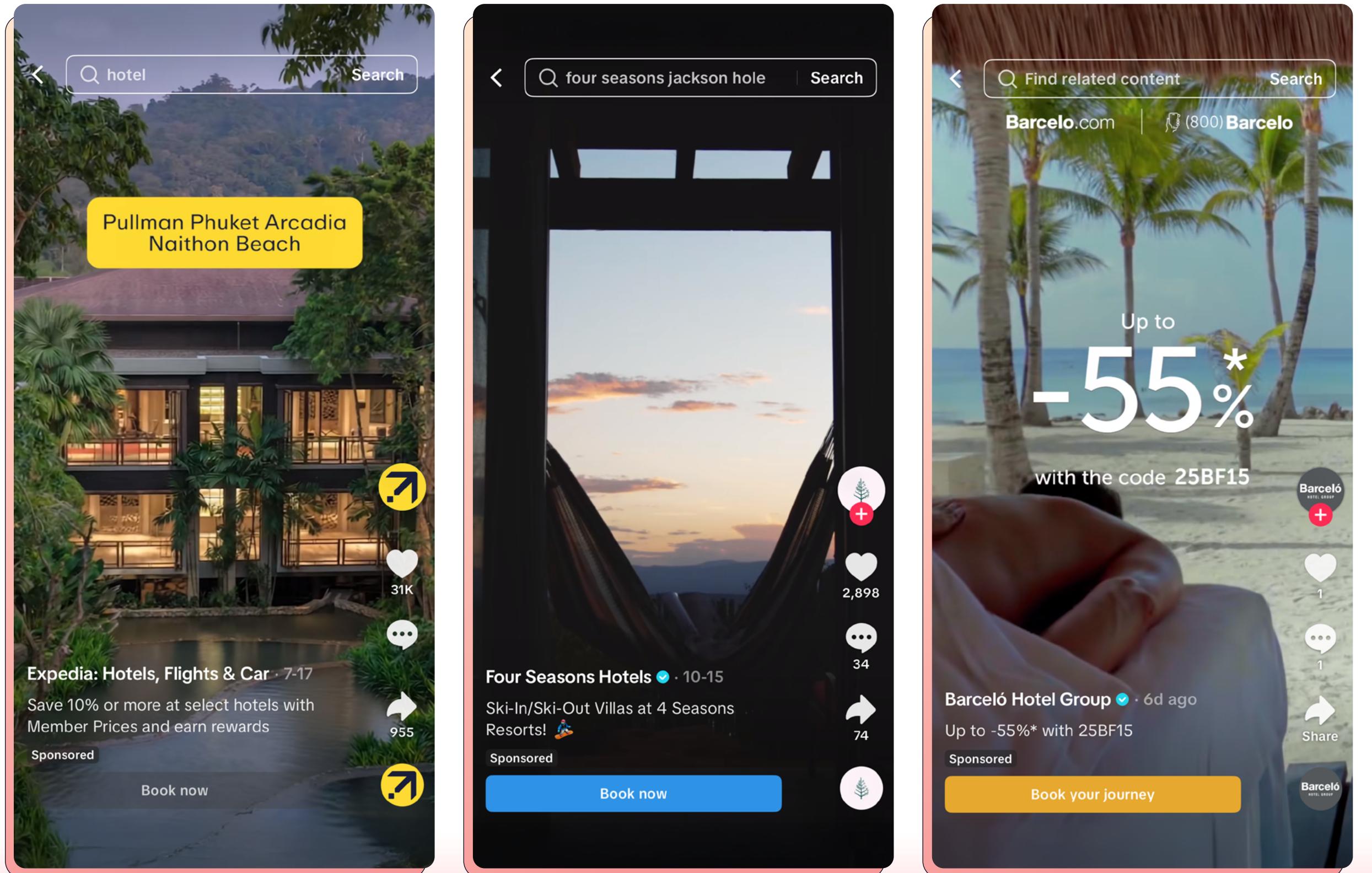
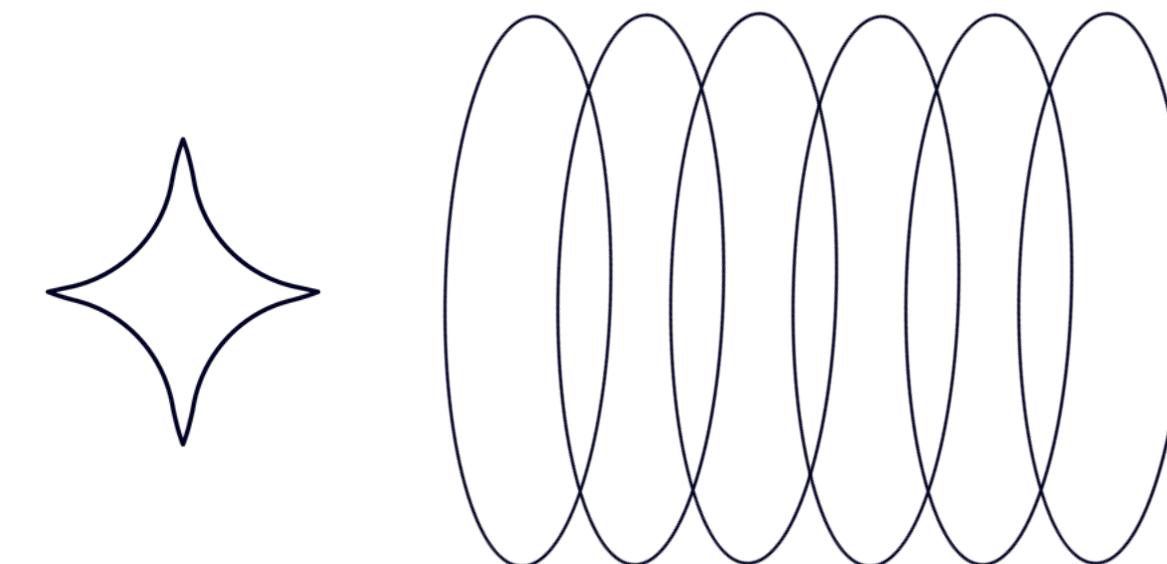


AND THEY ARE SAVING THE UNDISCOVERED

Social feeds are saturated with travel content, and both algorithms and audiences now reward what feels 'different'.

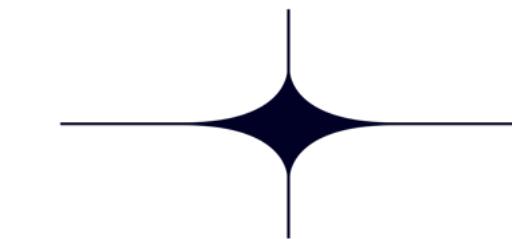
The destinations driving the highest engagement aren't always the most famous. Content from **Kazakhstan**, **Sweden**, and **Iceland** consistently outperforms classics like **France** and **Italy**, with higher save rates that signal stronger planning intent.

SOCIAL COMMERCE HAS ARRIVED IN THE TRAVEL SECTOR



This year, global players like Expedia and Klook unveiled the industry's first major steps into social commerce, following the blueprint proven on WeChat, Mafengwo, and other Chinese platforms where discovery and booking coincide.

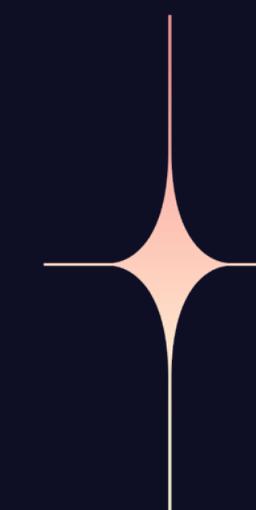
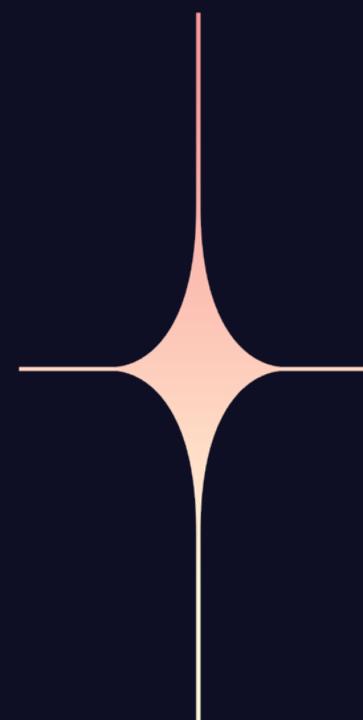
The infrastructure is here and is being rolled out by global platforms. TikTok Travel Ads launched in September 2025, and Booking.com integrated directly into TikTok, allowing users to book hotels without leaving the app.



But the shift hasn't fully arrived yet. Adoption is slow. The products are still evolving and the technology isn't seamlessly integrated.

We've seen this story before; fashion, beauty, and wellness have all gone through this evolution, and travel is next. The pace of change is fast, and adoption always follows.

BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS' POINT OF VIEW

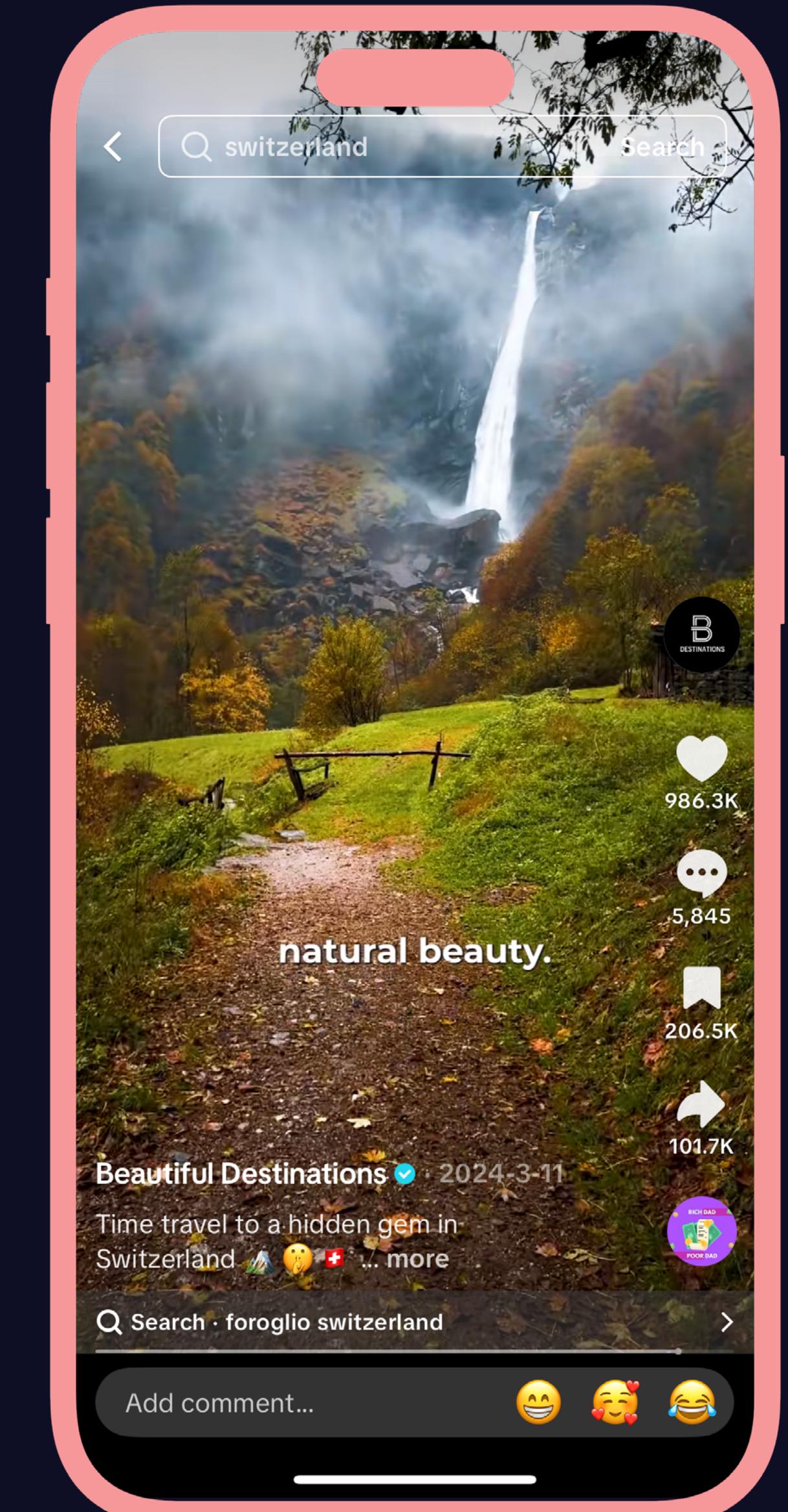


Relevant, world-class content will find its audience. Social platforms are ad driven models; they need great content to keep users engaged and the advertising dollars flowing.

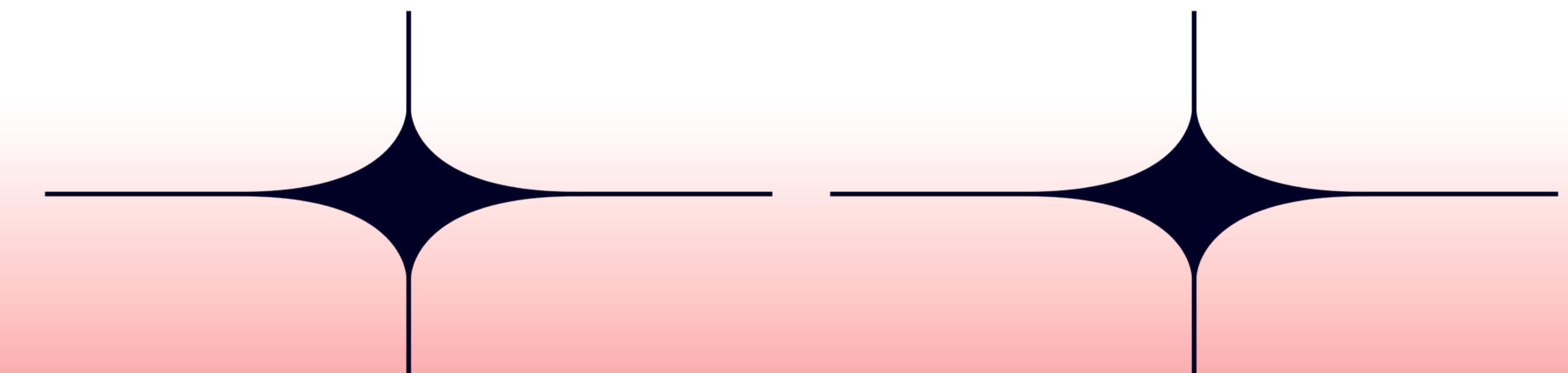
Brands can succeed here by treating the algorithms like their audience; listening, adapting fast, and creating with cultural relevance and authenticity.

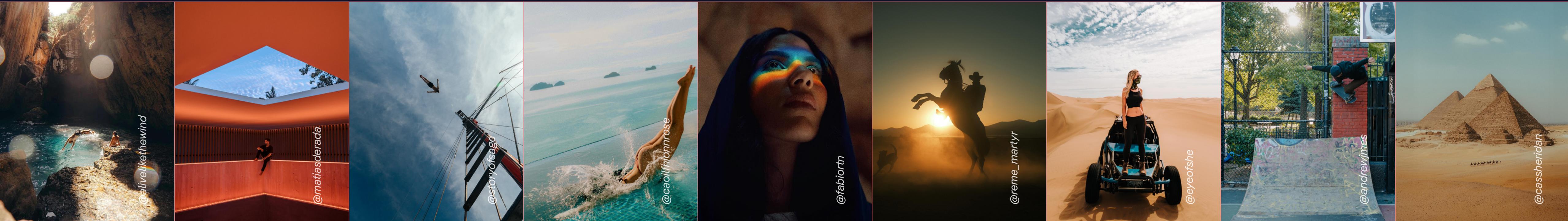
Understanding that a save is worth more than a like or new follower, that utility can be as powerful as beauty, and that the more compelling your content, the more likely it will be organically delivered to your audience.

Today, the algorithm rewards useful content, posts people save, share, and return to when they're planning a trip. It's not enough to just be beautiful, anymore. To drive business results content must be save-worthy, share-worthy, and built to solve real issues from real travellers.



THE AGE OF AUTHENTICITY





VIBE CULTURE

Polished postcard is out, **'VIBE CULTURE'** is in. Today's audience isn't moved by perfection, they're drawn to emotion, genuine connection, and places that feel alive.

Travellers aren't just planning where to go, they're looking for how it will feel. That shift from experience to emotion turns content into currency: it's not just the inspiration, but the spark behind decisions.

Our global network of creators embodies this shift. They're not typical influencers, but storytellers rooted in their communities, people who live, breathe, and understand the destination from within. Their voices bring credibility. Their perspectives make content feel real, not promotional.

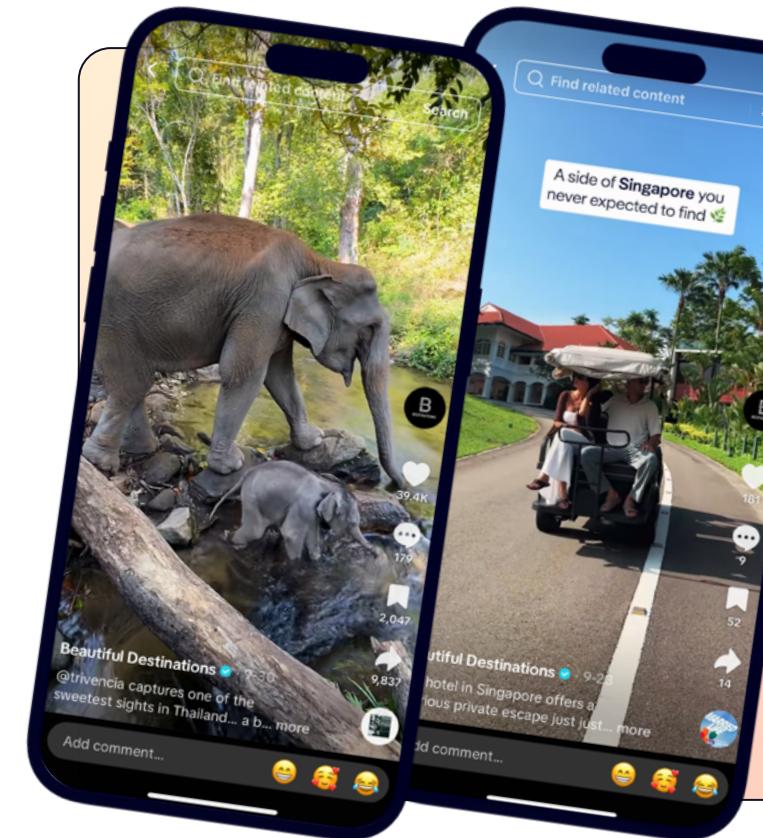
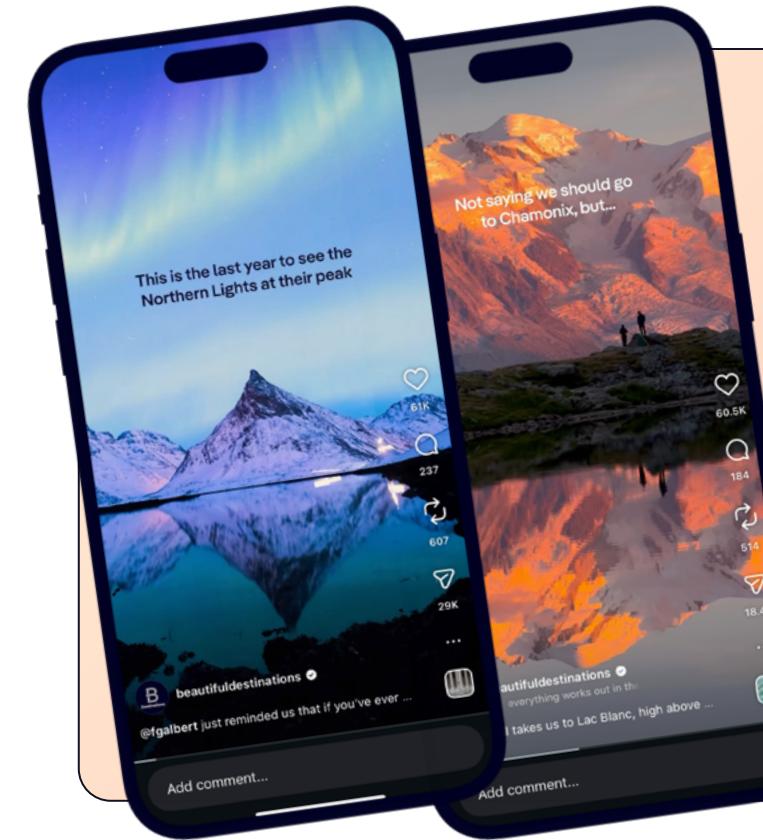
More than anything, traditional advertising content in travel is no longer working. It's expensive, slow to create and does not scale.

AUTHENTICITY OVER AESTHETICS

Content formats that feel most human (Vlogs, POVs, and personal storytelling) outperform their polished cinematic counterparts on social platforms, proving that the “vibe” now matters more than visual perfection.

This isn't just about engagement, it's about intent. Authentic content is more likely to be saved for future planning, proving that raw, human-centered storytelling is a powerful driver of action.

That said, cinematic content still performs strongly, averaging **6.8% engagement** on social, and excels on longer-form platforms like YouTube. The takeaway here is to build for platform nuances and adapt to traveller intent to maximise impact across every channel.



Authenticity Wins Attention

+30% higher engagement and +22% more saves; proof that real stories resonate and drive action.



Personal Drives Performance

Travellers connect most with stories that feel personal. Itinerary led, people focused content delivers an average 8% engagement rate, proving that human perspective drives stronger results.

Performance Follows Placement

Cinematic storytelling thrives on platforms built for immersion, like YouTube, where storytelling and production value have more space to breathe. Our long-form videos generate 5x more watch time per view than shorts.

PERSONAL DOESN'T MEAN PERFORMATIVE

AI is transforming content creation; helping generate voiceovers, refining copy, and stretching the value of a single shoot. But it can't replace real footage or real human perspective. Travellers are rejecting over-engineered, AI-generated content and gravitating toward stories that feel personal, human, and lived.

When we talk about personal travel content, we don't mean hosted, talking-to-camera influencers. We mean:

- Authentic voices from people who know a destination, not just visit it.
- Itineraries shaped by insight, not generic AI lists.
- Stories where the destination is the hero, not the backdrop.

The most powerful travel content lets the destination speak for itself, with human insight and connection guiding the way.



41%

of travelers say AI content is useful, but needs human input. Only 16% don't care how it's made.

Expedia 'Science of Wanderlust', 2025

56%

of US travelers say AI-generated images make them less likely to trust a listing.

Icelandair 'The impact of AI on travelers', 2025

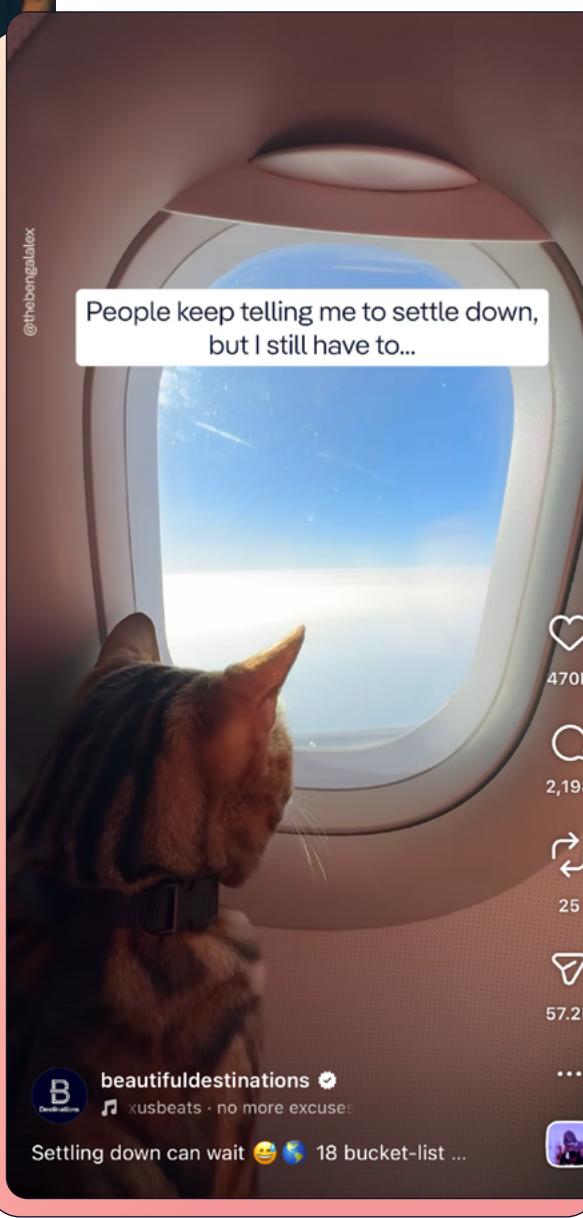
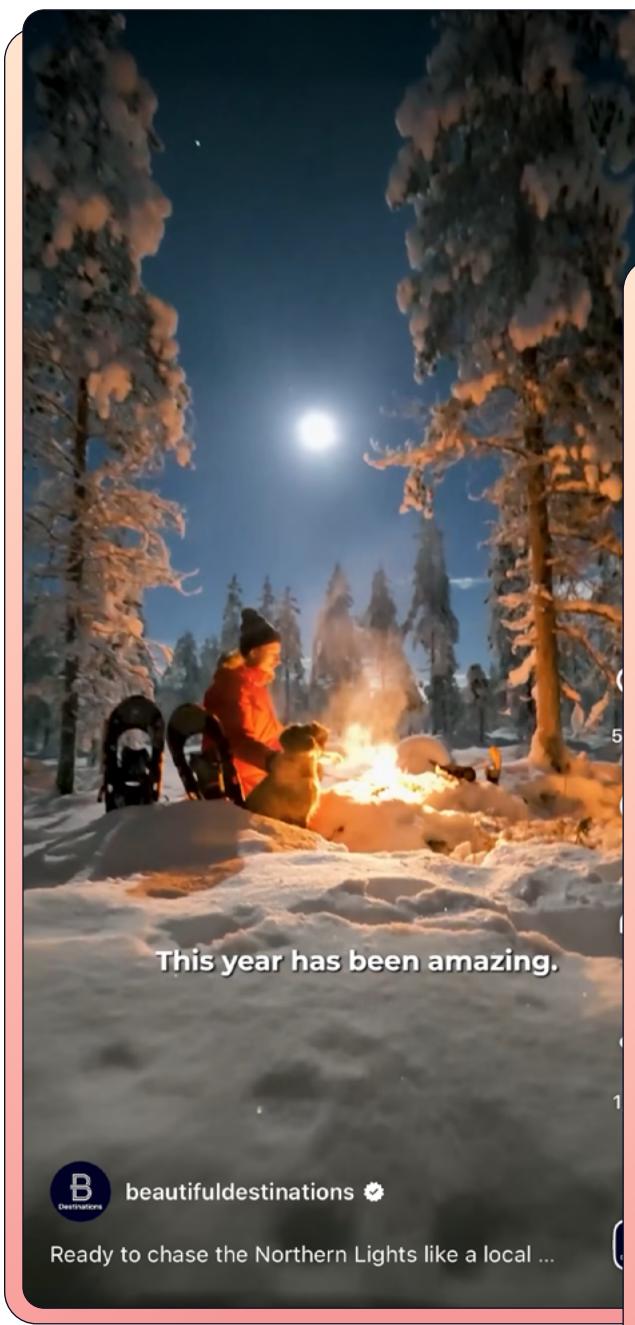
65%

of UK travelers have seen photos that looked "too good to be real." Only 19% would book if they knew the images were AI-generated.

Icelandair 'The impact of AI on travelers', 2025

We've analysed our highest-performing content to identify the key ingredients that drive authenticity and, in turn, engagement and action.

We call it the **V.I.B.E. Formula**, a strategic framework that turns data and creative insight into content that doesn't just show a destination, but makes people feel it.



V

Viewpoint

Adopt a first-person perspective. It's the shift from cinematic observer to active participant. Use POV and vlog-style shots that place the viewer directly in the experience, creating intimacy and relatability.

+30% average engagement

I

Imperfection

Embrace the unpolished. This means showcasing a destination in an authentic way, allowing the viewer to get a feel for the experience. This element builds trust and connection.

62% of our followers prefer 'authentic' content

B

Beat

Pace your content in a way that allows for viewers to engage and digest it, especially when it comes to utility content. Travellers are rejecting content that feels AI edited or overly produced.

Quick-edits/ fast cuts have the lowest engagement & save rates

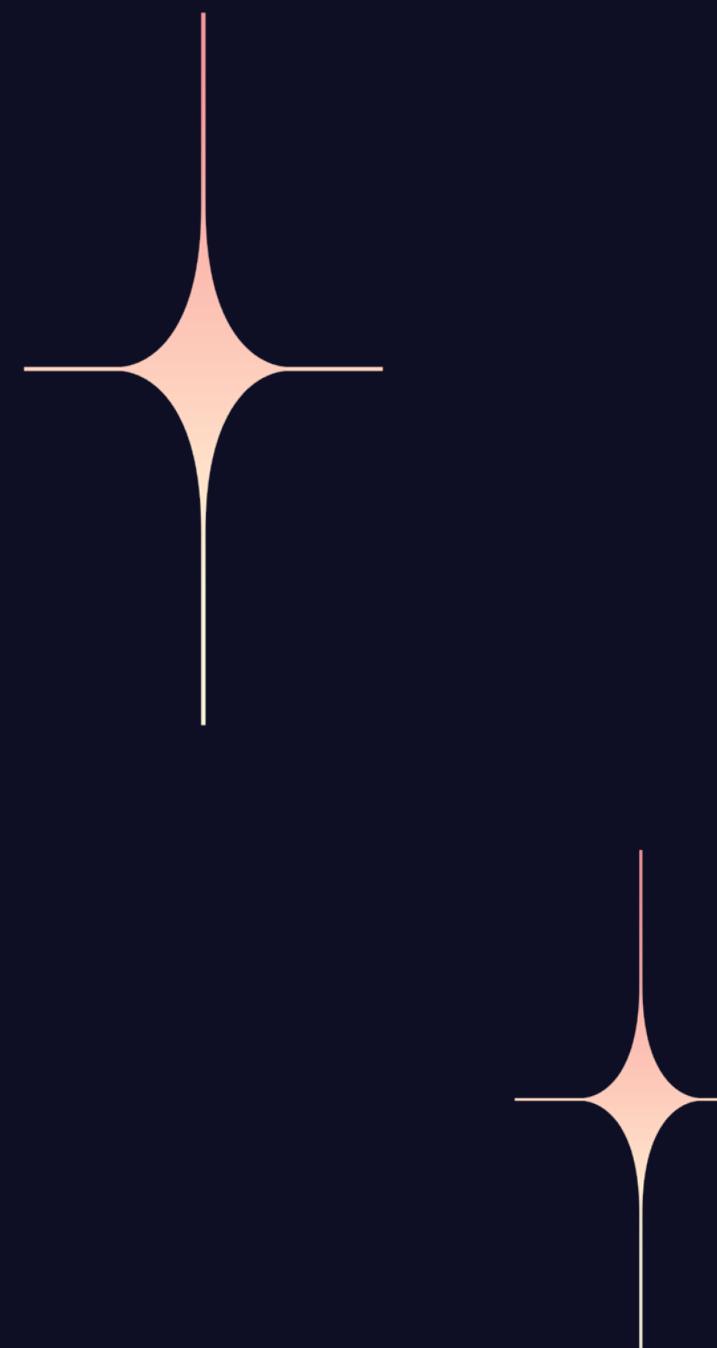
E

Essence

This is the outcome, the emotional takeaway your content creates. When you capture the essence of a place, you turn passive viewers into active planners.

Delivering 'vibe' becomes your value

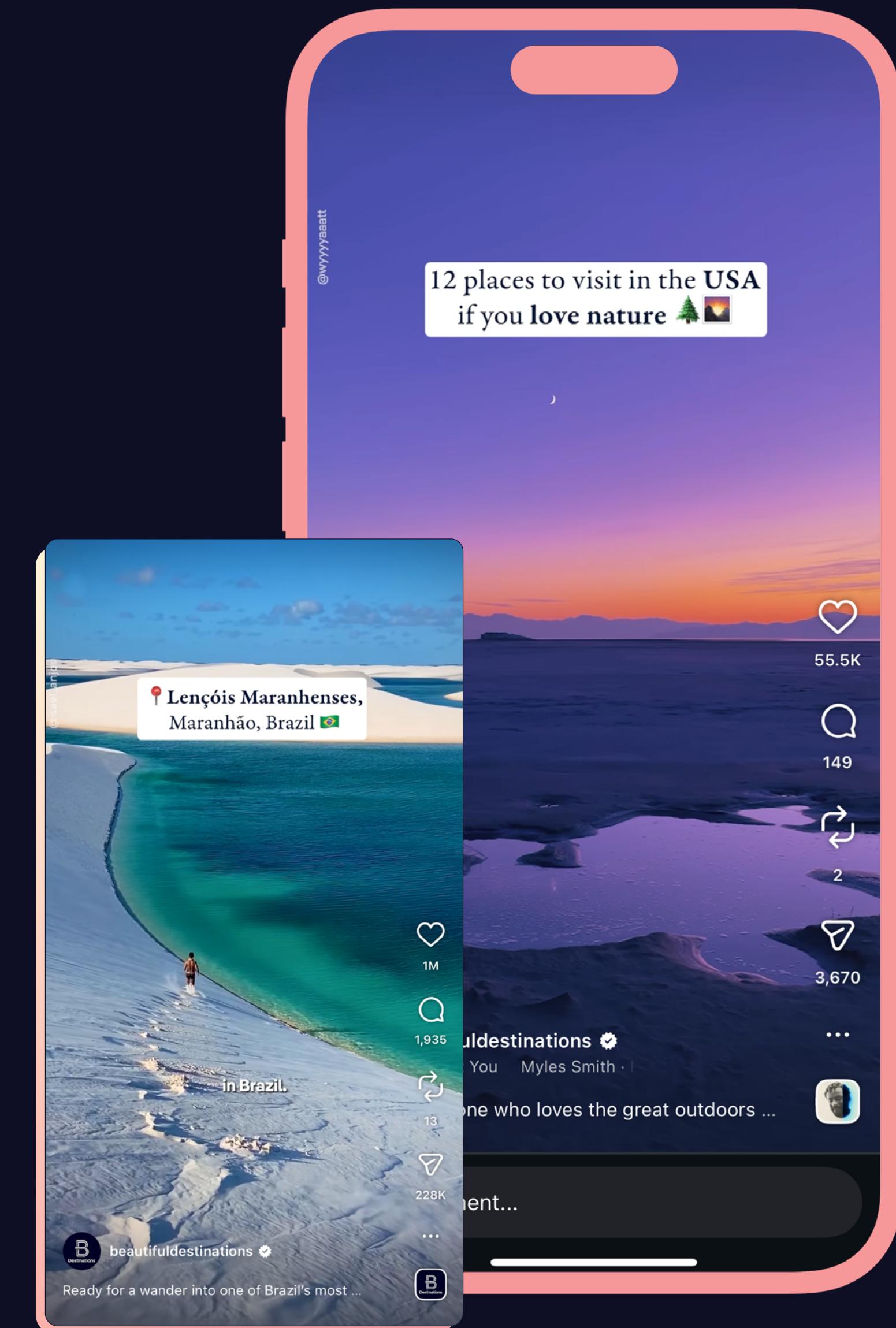
BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS' POINT OF VIEW



In the age of authenticity, vibe is your value. Brands that can make people feel the place before they step foot there win. Build content that feels authentic, entertaining and culturally relevant. Social platforms are rewarding participation over perfection.

Embrace the human, the spontaneous, the real. Use audience data to tell your stories and let what the audience values inform your creative, not the other way around. The most powerful content is no longer about showing a perfect destination, it's about sharing an authentic journey.

REMEMBER TO
BE PERSONAL



ON THE GROUND INSIGHT FROM THE FRONT LINE OF TRAVEL





Our creator network, with a combined following of **65 million** has become the new market forecaster - directly shaping how the travel industry communicates.

Their instincts surface emerging destinations before travellers click “book”, their content dictates what the algorithms favour next and their combined power puts destinations on the map.

The result is a dynamic feedback loop of culture, content and commerce which Beautiful Destinations is uniquely positioned to decode.

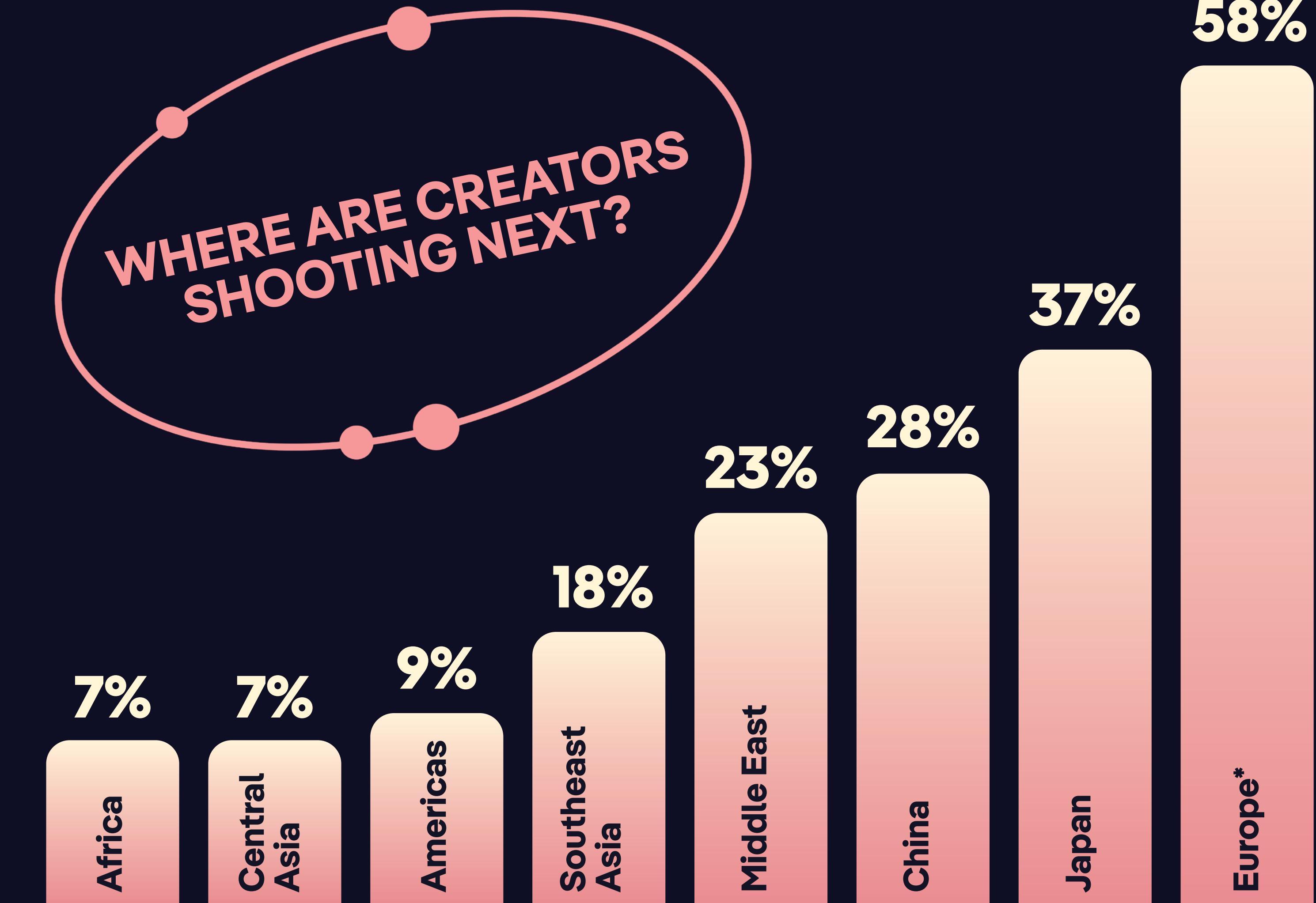
In this section we tap into insight straight from the field and the trailblazers shaping the next era of content.

THE NEW MAP OF DESIRE IS DRIVEN BY THE UNKNOWN

Travellers are turning away from overcrowded, over-Instagrammed hotspots in search of the unfamiliar. Our creators are leading that movement, with a growing number planning shoots in destinations once considered off the beaten path.

Nearly all our creators have directly driven tourism to lesser known regions, but their real impact lies in re-framing who destinations are for, breaking stigmas and unlocking new traveller segments.

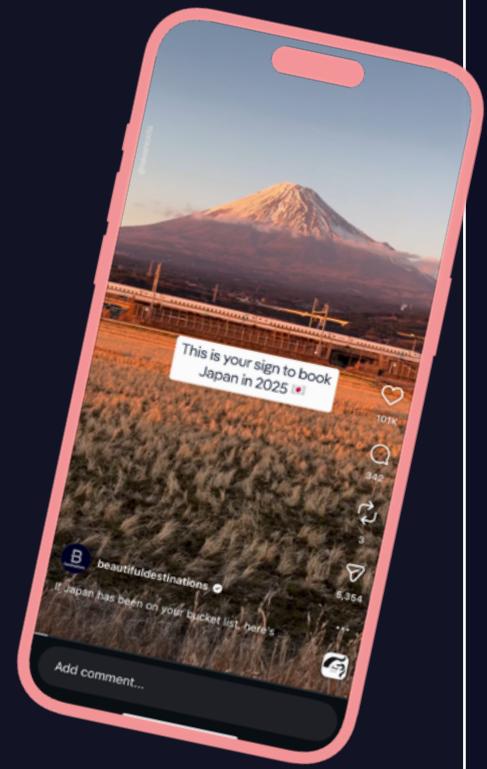
By mapping historical creator content against current destination data, we see a clear trend: when creators go first, travellers follow. This insight allows us to predict emerging destinations before they break into the mainstream.



*Europe remains a leader but the focus has shifted to lesser known cities (Gdansk, Bratislava) and nature destinations (Dolomites, Norway)

JAPAN

37%



Japan continues to dominate creator interest, but the focus has shifted from Tokyo and Kyoto to rural areas and lesser-known regions.

Where & What

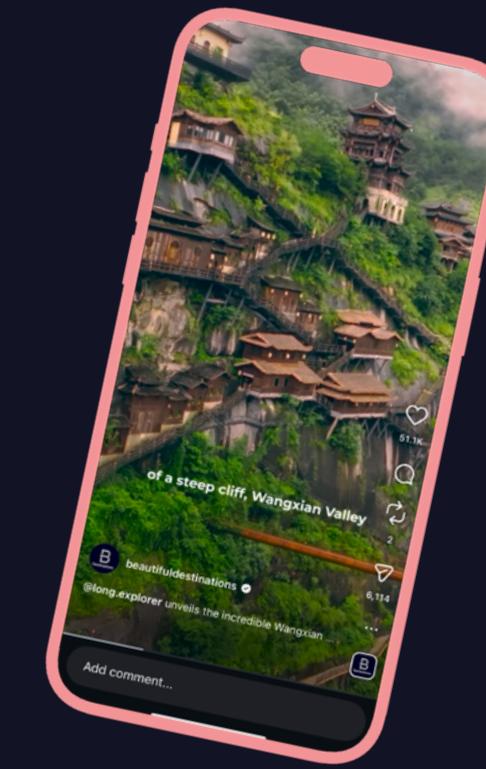
- Rural Japan & Kyushu
- Train travel experiences across the country
- Multi-city itineraries that go beyond the traditional tourist circuit

Why it's growing:

More direct flights, the popularity of train travel making it easy to navigate, and a total cultural shift in how Japan is perceived; from niche to mainstream.

CHINA

28%



China is the momentum story. Creators are not just visiting; they're planning extensive, multi-region shoots to showcase the country's diversity.

Where & What

- Western China: Yunnan, Guizhou, Gansu
- Major cities: Shanghai, Chengdu, Xi'an
- Showing the diversity of the country and blending big cities with more off-the-beaten-path spots

Why it's growing:

Creators are positioning themselves as cultural insiders who can reveal what guidebooks miss. The focus is targeting regions travellers don't know.

MIDDLE EAST

23%



The Middle East is fast becoming a creator hotspot, as content moves beyond big cities to showcase its lesser-known destinations.

Where & What

- Turkey, Jordan, Egypt
- UAE states
- Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in sport, generating creator interest for sports tourism.

Why it's growing:

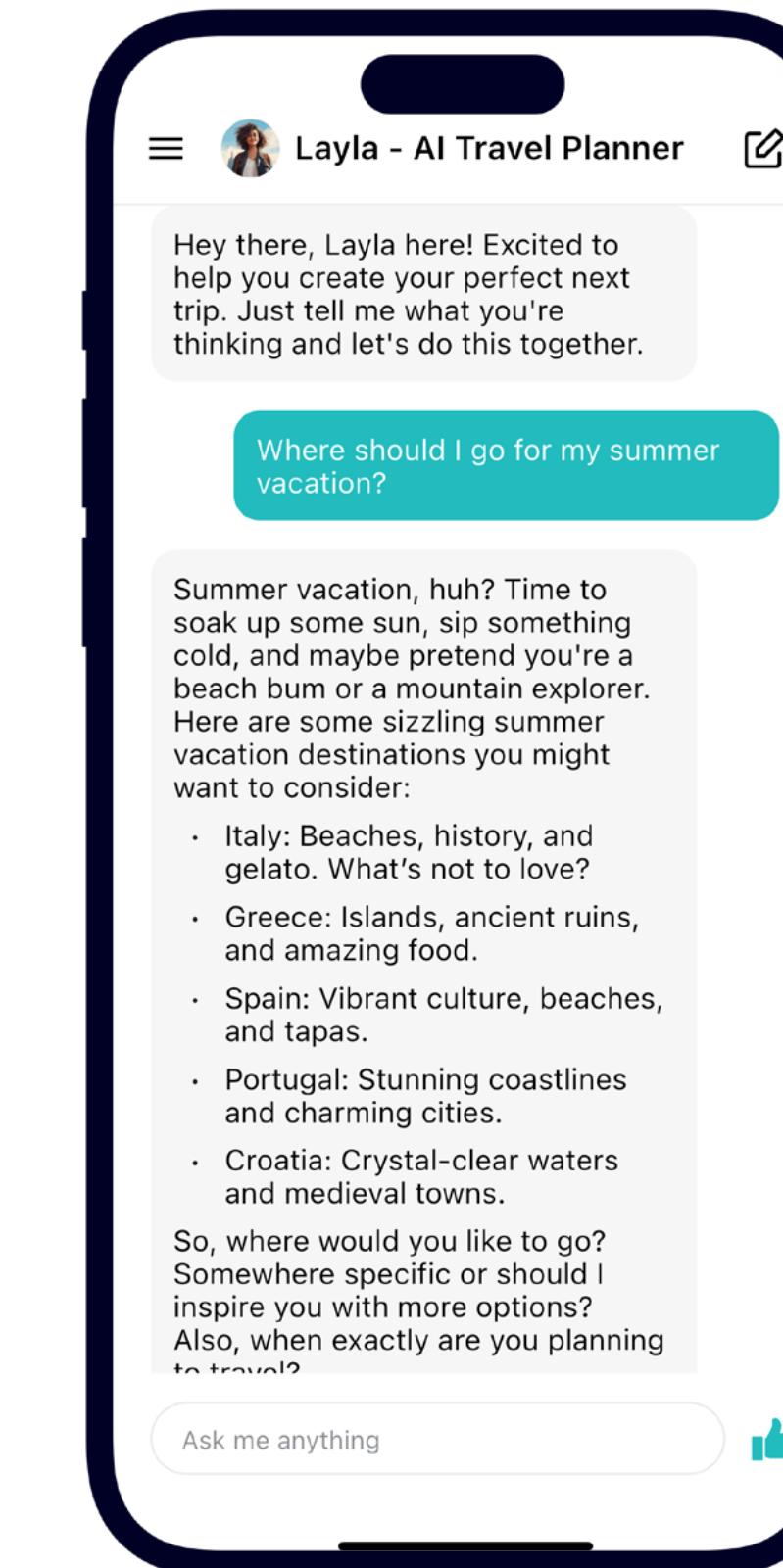
Improved infrastructure and a desire for places that feel exotic but accessible. Dubai has emerged as a creative base and a gateway to exploring the region beyond.

DMS ARE THE NEW TRIP PLANNING HQ

Audiences are now engaging with purpose, rather than scrolling passively.

This shift has turned DMs into the new trip-planning headquarters. Cross-platform DMs have increased **56% YoY** as audiences move from dreaming to doing, using social platforms and creators as their travel advisors.

Success lies in the balance between emotion and utility - in content that captures both how a place feels and explains how to experience it.



“Audiences have become more intentional. They’re still dreaming, but now they’re saving with purpose, curating future trips rather than just passively scrolling.”

“People now want more practical info. They save and share guides when I include how to get there, where to eat, what to see, and follow up with additional ‘how to’ questions.”

61%

of creators say their DMs and comments are now filled with logistics and planning questions.

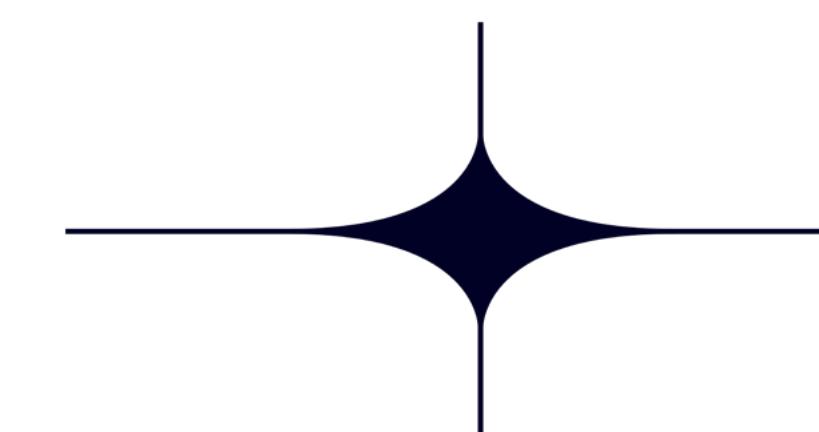
44%

of creators note a rise in utility-led content.

CREATORS ARE REDEFINING WHAT 'BEAUTIFUL' MEANS

Authenticity is resurfacing with our creators. It is consistently outperforming over polished 'dreaming' content and is steadily continuing to build momentum.

Importantly, this doesn't mean lower quality, it means blending a human element with high production standards. That's the sweet spot.



"Aesthetic with substance. People appreciate curated visuals, but they want them paired with personal storytelling or useful information. A beautiful shot of a cottage or spa now performs best when we share how it felt to be there or what made it special."

"Overall, what's working now is a blend of aspirational and authentic. Our followers still come to us for inspiration, but they stay and engage because we show the real emotion, warmth, and personality behind each experience."



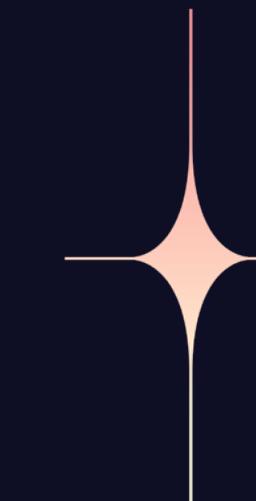
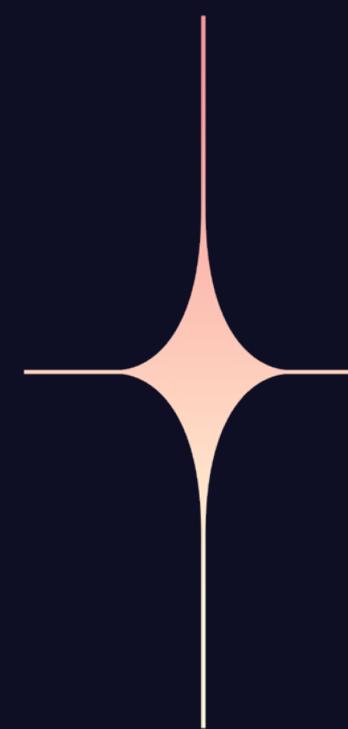
45%

of creators mention authenticity, realness, or raw storytelling as key to engagement.

35%

of creators reference emotional connection as key.

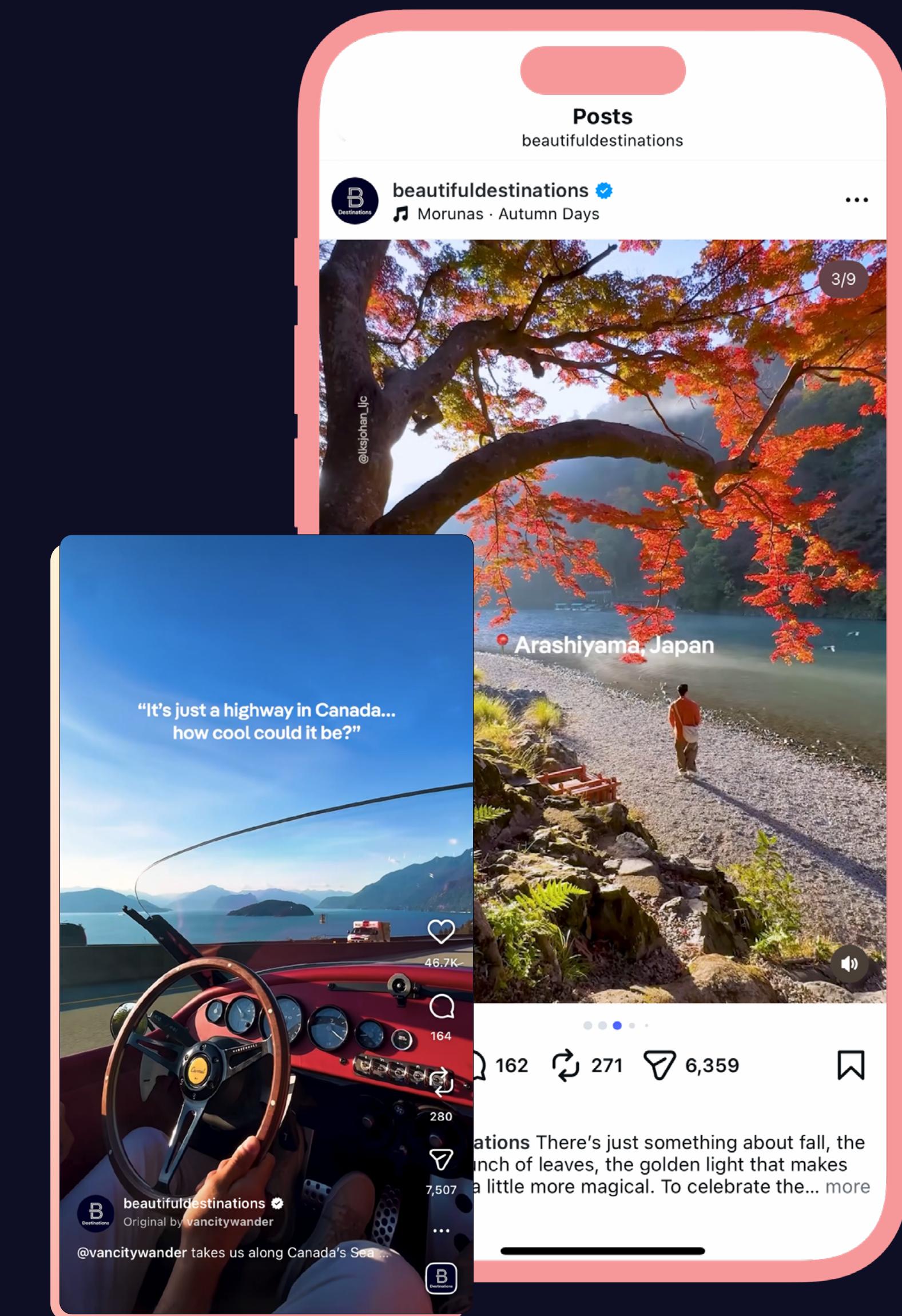
BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS' POINT OF VIEW



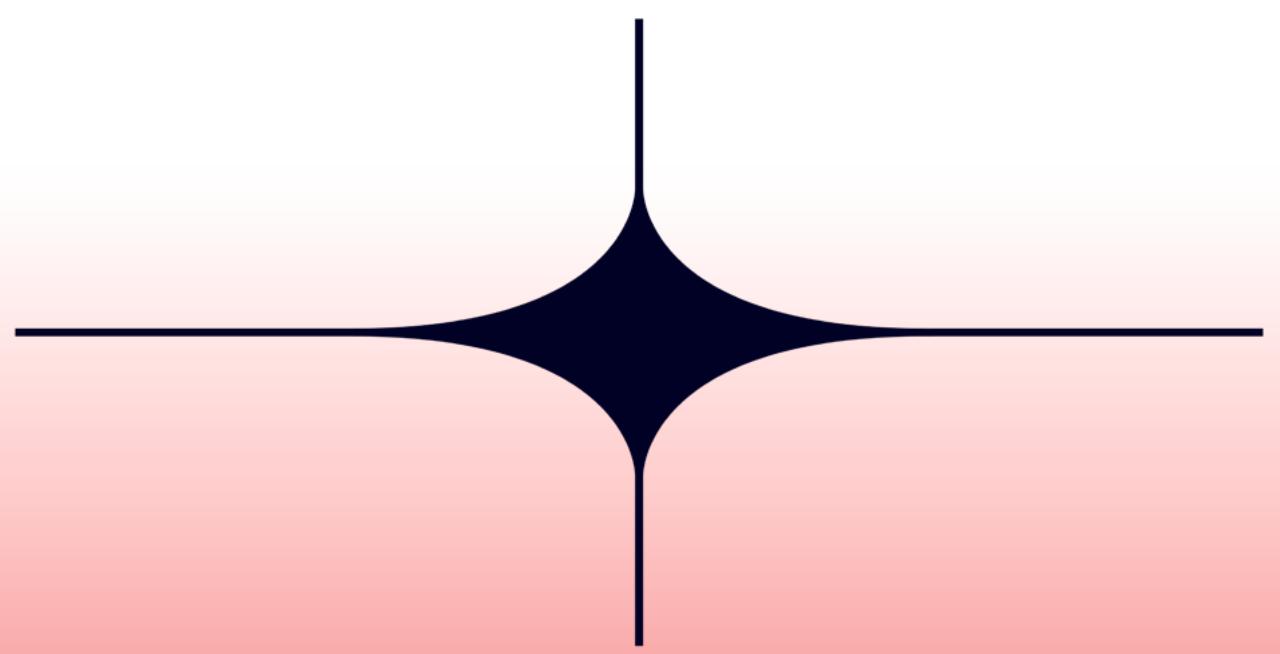
The next wave of travel is being written in real time by the creators on the ground who shape what people see, save, and book.

To win, brands must move beyond transactional partnerships and treat creators as strategic collaborators - trusted voices who build community, drive travel intent, and surface cultural shifts before the data does.

By combining their cultural intuition with our first-party performance data, global creator network, briefing process and post production, Beautiful Destinations turns real-time creator insight into foresight, helping brands stay ahead of what travellers want next.



BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS' BIG BETS FOR 2026, AND BEYOND...

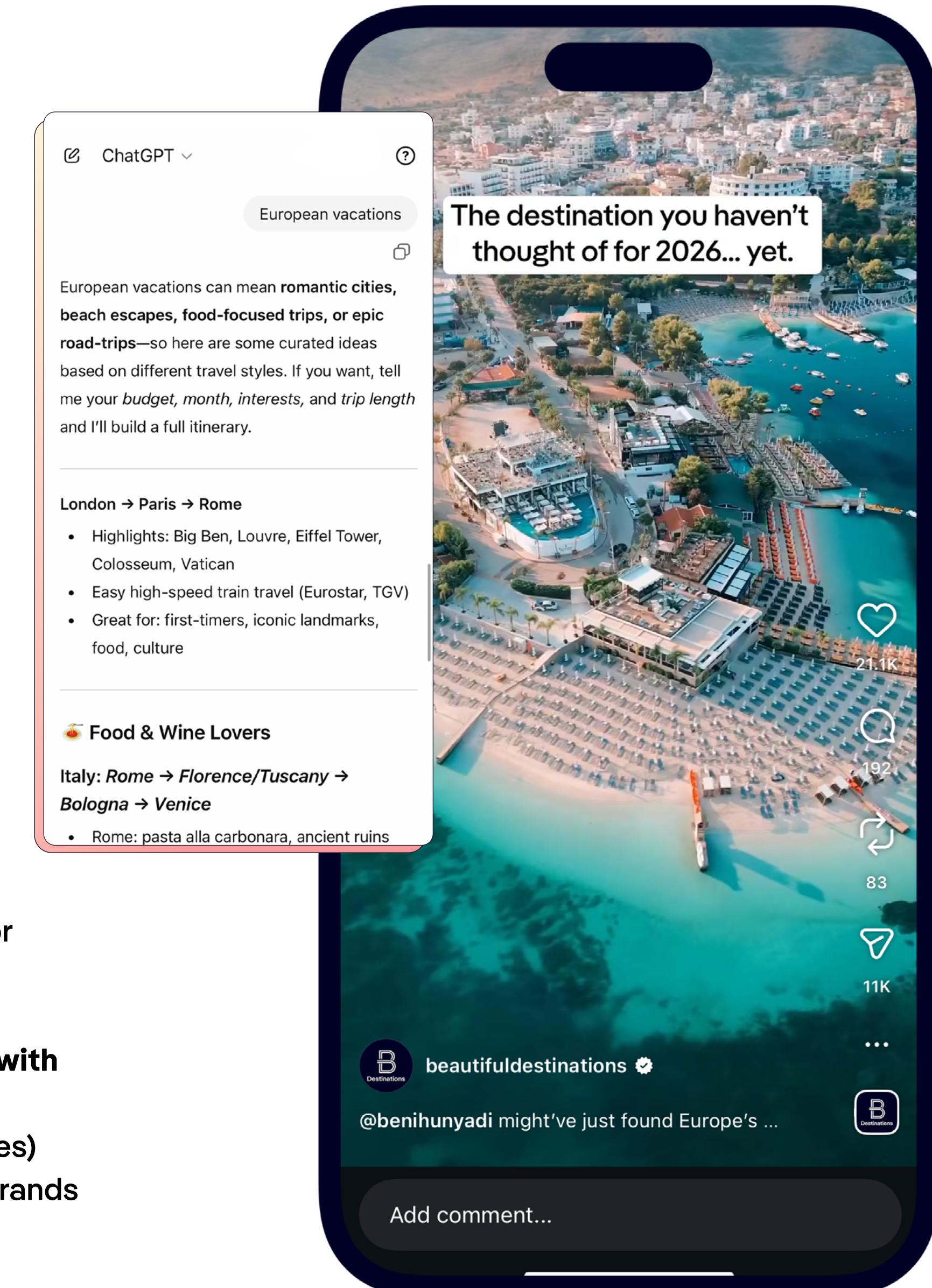




AI TRAVEL PLANNING HEIGHTENS NEED FOR AUTHENTICITY

AI will answer significant volume of travel questions, but it won't answer the most important one: “Will I love it there?” Social media will become the human proof point, the place where travellers validate AI recommendations by seeing real people in real places with content that is tailored for them.

Brand Action: In the next phase of travel marketing, creator partnerships aren't optional, they're business critical. Work with partners who understand the **business of the travel industry** inside out and **combine creative intuition with analytical depth** to guide smarter marketing outcomes. Build content that's both 'AI extractable' (facts, dates, prices) and emotionally resonant (vibe, feeling, experience). The brands that win will be **findable by AI and trusted by humans**.



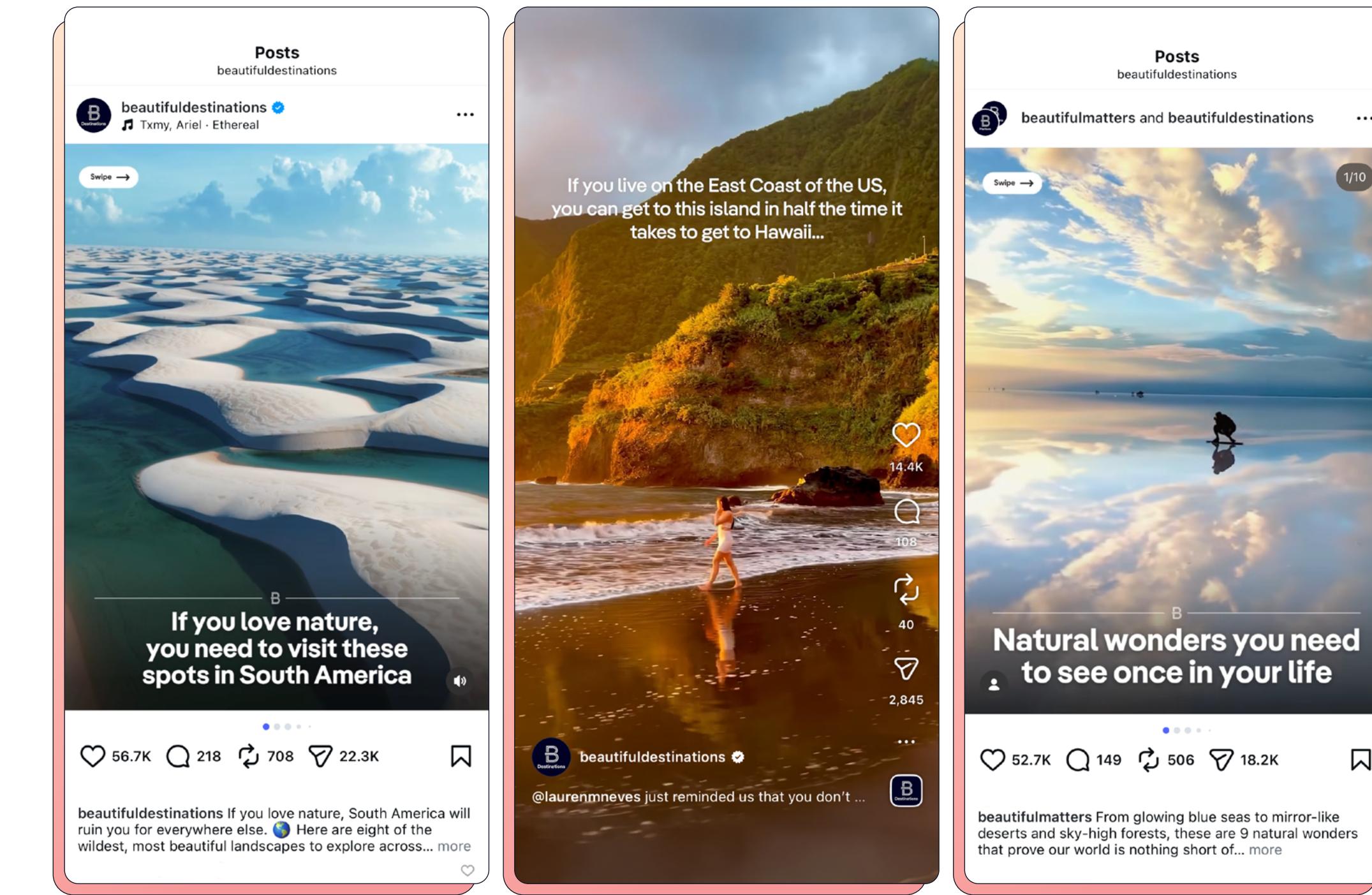


CONTENT SCALE WILL WIN OVER ONE OFF VIRAL MOMENTS

Audiences aren't looking for just inspirational content; they're looking for answers to hyper-specific questions. Brands will stop chasing one off viral moments and start building libraries of hyper-specific content. Scale will beat reach, and granular content will drive more bookings than broad campaigns.

Brand Action: Create a content library that answers specific traveller questions, rather than chasing reach with a few viral hits. Invest in SEO-optimised, searchable content that surfaces when travellers are in planning mode, not just dreaming mode. Most travel brands are still optimising for reach, but that's the wrong metric. Granular content will drive more bookings than broad campaigns.

Most importantly- make more content, more frequently, specifically for more platforms. The vast majority of travel marketers make nowhere near the amount of content needed to satisfy their customers desire.

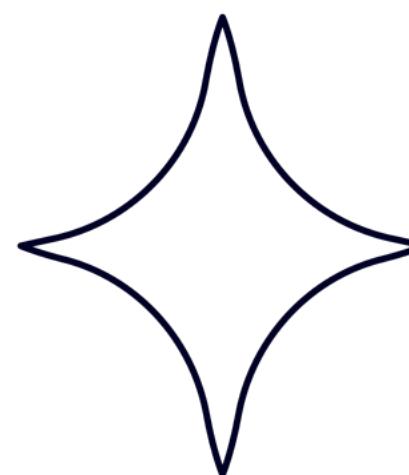
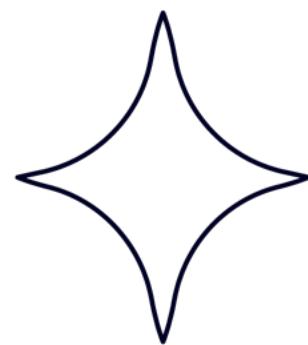
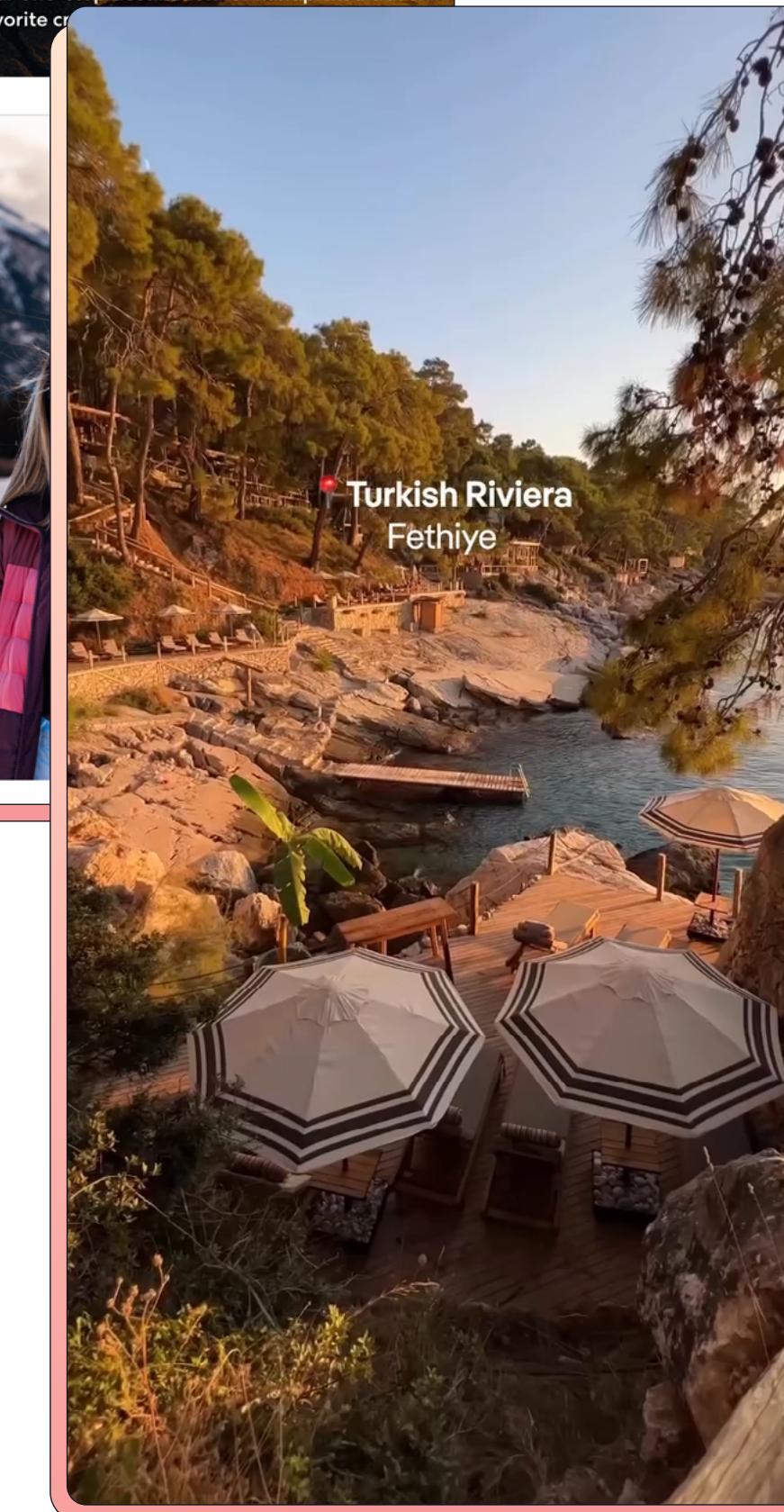
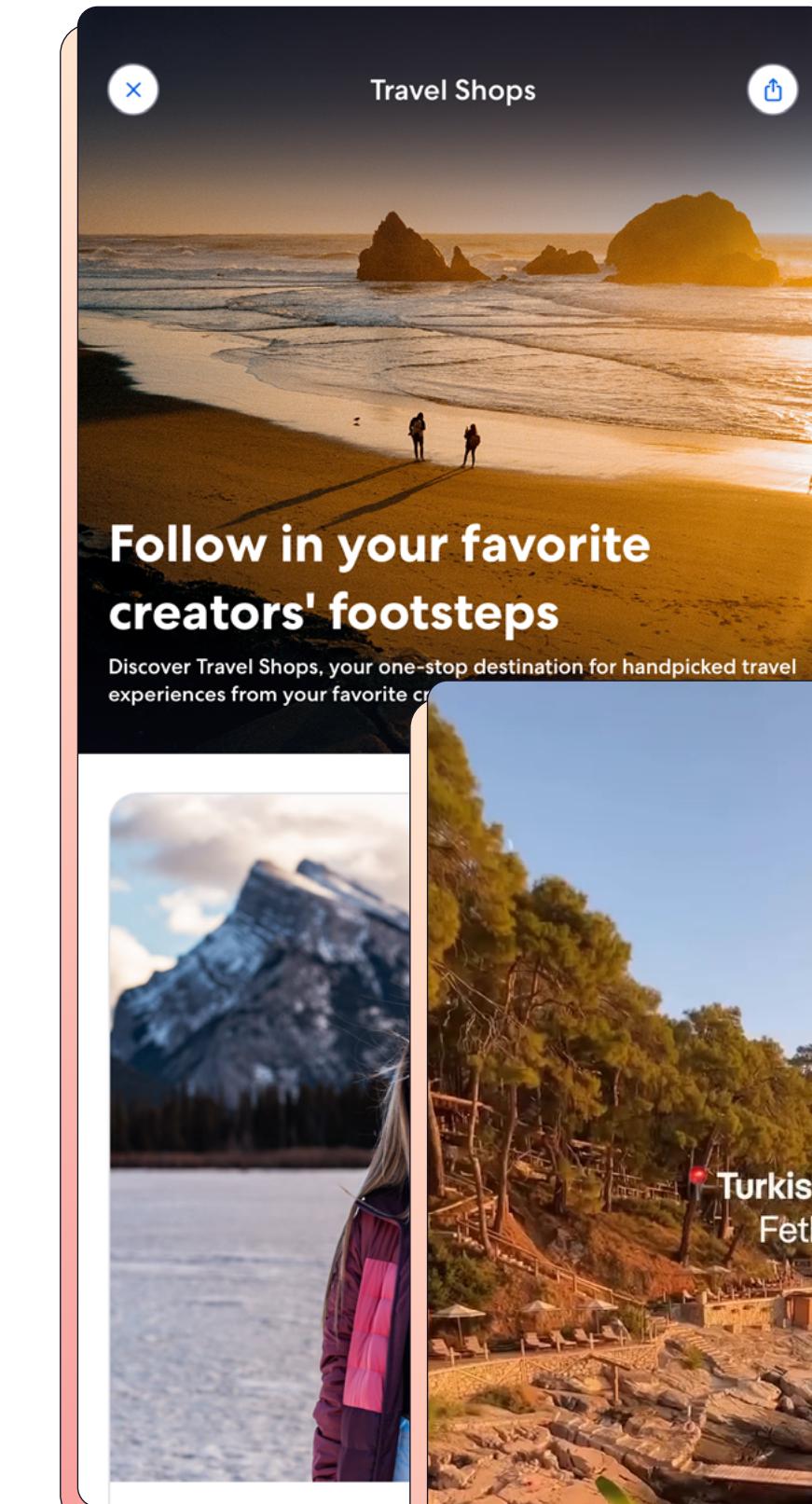




CREATORS BECOME COMMERCE ENGINES

The line between discovery and booking is fading. TikTok's Travel Ads and Expedia's Travel Shops are just the start, as other platforms will move towards seamless, full-funnel journeys that start in social media. Creator content will evolve further from pure inspiration to measurable conversion, powered by brand demand for accountability, platform innovation, and audience readiness to act the moment they engage.

Brand Action: Treat creator content as a strategic asset for commerce. Think about the customer journey and how you can make content for every stage of the consideration funnel. Build these content journeys with booking links, trackable actions, and integrated CTAs. The brands that master creator-led commerce won't just win attention, they'll win bookings from the next generation of traveller.





LET'S TALK

brands@beautifuldestinations.com

We are a multi-award winning travel marketing company with one of the world's largest and most influential online travel communities.

Our Socials:

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