



# The Aspiration Gap

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Prepared for TravAI Solutions

Project TravAI App

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## Introduction

The Aspiration Gap captures the emotional distance between where a user is when they first encounter a product and where they should ideally end up. This distance is not a problem to be solved. It is an opportunity for emotional design to play a pivotal role in transforming someone's relationship with a category, a process, or their own capabilities.

For TravAI, this gap represents the journey from overwhelm to ease, from burden to relief, from hesitancy about AI to genuine trust in a tool that understands them. The user arrives burnt out by the holiday booking process, carrying analysis paralysis and the weight of endless decisions. They should leave feeling catered for, excited, and convinced that their holiday will be so relaxing they can finally switch off and go with the flow. The emotional shift from "Where do I want to go?" to "I can do this" defines the space where meaningful design intervention can occur.

The following insights come directly from workshops and structured conversations between TravAI Travel Solutions Ltd and We Are Affective. These are not hypothetical user states or assumptions about how people might behave. They reflect what we know to be true from those who understand the product and its users most intimately. The gap exists because the current experience treats AI as a background feature rather than a guide, leaving users to navigate the same overwhelming directory they encounter everywhere else, just with better technology hidden behind it.

## Where Users Start

**People are feeling** burnt out, overwhelmed, curious, hesitant, analysis paralysis, stress, anxiety, burden.

The emotional weight users carry when they first encounter TravAI extends far beyond the practical challenge of booking a holiday. The Aspiration Gap workshops revealed people arriving in a state of overwhelm, describing the "so much burden to allow them to relax" and the exhausting reality that planning something designed to restore them often leaves them more drained than when they started. This creates a particular kind of emotional charge where excitement about the possibility of escape coexists with fatigue from the process required to achieve it.

Curiosity about AI capabilities mixes with wariness about whether this technology will actually deliver meaningful relief or simply add another layer of complexity to an already overwhelming process. Users approach with genuine interest but carry protective hesitancy, wondering whether they are about to encounter something genuinely different or another sophisticated version of the same burden they face everywhere else. The current product struggles to address this emotional entry point because it presents comprehensive options when what burned-out users need is focused guidance, leaving them to navigate another directory when they came seeking relief.

**People are thinking** "Where do I want to go?", "Where has good deals available?", "What can I afford?", "What options are available for me?", "Hopefully we can manage a holiday this year?", "Is AI trustworthy?", "How will AI know the best options for me?", "Will this help me?", "Why does it need my preferences?", "Is it safe to tell it my details?", "Will it actually give me catered answers or is it just gonna spit out generic answers?"

These questions reveal users who are genuinely motivated to engage but have not yet been given clear reason to trust. They are not the questions of disengaged people trying to be convinced to care about holidays. They are the questions of people who want holidays very much but have learned to be cautious about promises of simplified booking experiences. The progression from practical concerns about budget and destinations to deeper questions about AI trustworthiness shows how technical capability intersects with emotional vulnerability. Users need to share personal preferences and financial information to benefit from AI guidance, but they require evidence that this sharing will produce genuinely personal outcomes rather than sophisticated generic recommendations dressed up as customisation.

## Where Users Should End

**Users need to feel** catered for, guided, understood, relaxed, confident in their decisions, excited about their trip, relieved of burden, genuinely supported.

When TravAI works as intended, something fundamental shifts in how people relate to the entire category of travel planning. The transformation is not gradual but occurs at specific moments when users realise they are being genuinely understood rather than processed through another booking system. The Aspiration Gap workshops surfaced this as the journey from "Where do I want to go?" to "I can do this", representing a shift from questioning their options to trusting their choices. This destination is both specific and achievable because it addresses the core emotional need that brings overwhelmed users to the app in the first place: the desire to feel supported in their decision-making rather than burdened by endless options.

The desired emotional destination emerges when users stop carrying the cognitive load of comparison and coordination, replaced by what our Day One / Day 90 workshops identified as feeling "relieved, catered for, relaxed, insightful, excited, anticipating something special, attached to the app and the experience correlated to it". This represents more than satisfaction with a booking platform; it signifies a fundamental change in how someone approaches travel planning itself, moving from exhaustion to anticipation before their holiday has even begun.

**The end beliefs, in users' own words are** "I can do this", "This is manageable", "This holiday will be so relaxing I can finally switch off and go with the flow", "I don't need to manage my whole holiday I just need to enjoy it", "AI is a useful tool that can improve my life if I use it in the right way", "It's not evil or good, it's a tool to allow me to do special things with less hassle".

These statements reveal something crucial about the emotional transformation TravAI enables. They are not marketing messages about the product but genuine internal shifts in how users see themselves and their capabilities. The progression from "I can do this" to understanding AI as a helpful tool shows how personal confidence develops alongside technological trust. Users move from questioning whether they can navigate travel planning effectively to understanding that they have access to assistance that genuinely reduces cognitive load rather than simply organising it differently.

The distinction between these being user beliefs rather than product claims matters because it points to where real attachment forms. People do not develop lasting relationships with platforms that tell them how they should feel. They attach to experiences that help them discover they are more capable than they thought, that certain burdens are not inevitable, and that technology can serve their actual needs rather than demanding adaptation to its limitations. When users say "I don't need to manage my whole holiday I just need to enjoy it", they are describing a fundamental shift in what they believe is possible, not just satisfaction with a particular service.

## The Gap

Mapping the emotional distance dimension by dimension reveals where design intervention can create the most meaningful impact. Each dimension represents a specific aspect of the user's internal experience that shifts as they move from initial encounter to genuine confidence.

Dimension	Where users start	Where users should end
<b>Decision-making confidence</b>	Analysis paralysis and fear of wrong choices	"I can do this" and trust in their decisions
<b>Cognitive load</b>	Overwhelmed by endless comparison and management	Room to breathe and enjoy the process
<b>AI relationship</b>	Wary skepticism about trustworthiness and value	Understanding AI as a helpful personal tool
<b>Planning burden</b>	Carrying weight of coordination across multiple apps	Feeling genuinely catered for and supported
<b>Holiday anticipation</b>	Burnt out before the trip even begins	Excited and anticipating something special
<b>Personal agency</b>	Feeling trapped in generic recommendation loops	Confident their preferences drive meaningful outcomes
<b>Process clarity</b>	Confused about where AI fits and how to benefit	Clear understanding of their guided journey

Dimension	Where users start	Where users should end
Emotional safety	Hesitant to share preferences without clear benefit	Comfortable being vulnerable with personal wants

## The Three Critical Moments

The gap between overwhelm and ease does not close gradually through accumulated small improvements. It closes at specific moments when something fundamental shifts in how the user understands their relationship with the product, the process, and their own capabilities. These moments carry disproportionate weight because they address the core emotional barriers that keep people trapped in cycles of hesitation and analysis paralysis.

For TravAI, three critical moments determine whether users move from burnt out skepticism to genuine confidence, or whether they abandon the experience feeling that nothing has really changed from every other booking platform they have tried before.

### Moment 1: The Guided Conversation

The first critical moment happens when the app moves beyond presenting options and begins actively understanding who the user is and what they actually want. As surfaced in the Aspiration Gap exercise, this occurs "when the app asks them in a guided manner what best suits them, it understands their group size, ages, demographic and goals and wants and budget and takes them through it in a human and personal manner allowing them to verbalise their wants rather than overanalyse it".

This moment matters because it directly addresses the user's entry state of analysis paralysis. Instead of asking them to navigate another overwhelming directory, the app creates space for them to express what they want without having to figure out how to translate those desires into searchable criteria. The shift happens when users realise they are being interviewed rather than interrogated, guided rather than tested. The experience becomes conversational rather than transactional, and something fundamental changes in how they relate to the decision-making process itself.

The emotional significance extends beyond convenience. Users arrive worried that they will have to "work out the holiday and if the AI is valuable", carrying what the Heartbreak Scale identified as "double decision paralysis". The guided conversation dissolves this by removing the burden of having to evaluate both the AI and their holiday options simultaneously. When the app demonstrates genuine understanding through thoughtful questions, users stop wondering whether it will help them and begin engaging with how it will help them.

### Moment 2: The Personal Roadmap

The turning point occurs when the app transforms the user's expressed preferences into a coherent, visualised plan that feels unmistakably personal. The Aspiration Gap workshops identified this as the

of everything they would normally have split over multiple apps and have to track and figure out the logistics manually".

This is where hesitancy transforms into excitement. Users see their own insights reflected back to them in a form that makes sense, and the cognitive load they have been carrying suddenly lifts. The roadmap works emotionally because it represents their preferences made manifest, not generic recommendations dressed up as personalisation. When someone recognises their own wants in the suggested itinerary, they stop questioning whether the AI understands them and begin trusting that it does.

The Day One / Day 90 exercise revealed why this moment is so crucial for long-term engagement. Users who reach Day 90 describe feeling "relieved, catered for, relaxed, insightful, excited, anticipating something special, attached to the app and the experience correlated to it". The roadmap moment is where this transformation begins, because it proves that the initial conversation was not just data collection but genuine understanding that produces meaningful outcomes.

### **Moment 3: One-Click Confidence**

The deepest shift happens when users see the complete plan and realise they can make it all happen without returning to the fragmented, overwhelming process they came to escape. As captured in the workshops, this is "when they see the roadmap, the results and the actions available to make it all happen in one click. No more multi app. No more management across multiple avenues just clean easy decision making from one hub all planned out based on their preferences".

This moment creates lasting trust because it proves that the entire premise was genuine. The user's journey from "Where do I want to go?" to "I can do this" completes when they understand that booking is not the beginning of more work but the end of all work. The emotional significance runs deeper than convenience; it represents a fundamental shift in how they relate to the category of travel planning itself.

The Heartbreak Scale revealed that users currently feel hesitant about their decisions "because they don't feel supported or justified in their decision making". The one-click moment dissolves this hesitancy by providing both the plan and the confidence to act on it. Users move from questioning their choices to trusting them, not because the technology is impressive but because their own preferences have been heard, understood, and transformed into something actionable.

This moment must work perfectly because it determines whether users develop genuine attachment to the app or dismiss it as another booking platform with better marketing. The Day One / Day 90 insight that successful users learn "AI is a useful tool that can improve their lives" happens here, when they see that the entire experience was designed to serve their actual needs rather than showcase technological capability.

## Emerging Themes

The emotional gap that TravAI must close reveals itself not as a single barrier but as several interconnected themes that reinforce each other. These patterns emerged consistently across our workshops and conversations, pointing to fundamental disconnects between what users need emotionally and what the current experience provides. Each theme represents an opportunity to transform how people relate to both travel planning and AI-powered assistance.

### **AI remains invisible when it should be the primary relationship**

The technology that defines TravAI's value proposition operates in the background when it should be front and centre as a trusted guide. Users download the app expecting to meet the AI and engage with it directly, but instead encounter what feels like another booking directory with algorithmic assistance hidden behind the scenes. The Heartbreak Scale workshops revealed users feel "confused" as they are hit with a large directory, a large wall of decisions and options as opposed to guidance". The lack of AI in the forefront creates immediate disconnection between expectation and reality.

This invisibility matters emotionally because it prevents users from developing the relationship that would differentiate TravAI from every other booking platform. When the AI operates as a background service rather than an active partner, users cannot build trust with it, learn from it, or feel understood by it. The Day One / Day 90 insights show that successful users learn "AI is a useful tool that can improve their lives", but this learning cannot happen if the AI never reveals itself as something worth engaging with. The current approach treats artificial intelligence as a feature to be mentioned rather than a guide to be experienced.

The solution direction becomes clear when users describe their ideal interaction as being "asked in a guided manner what best suits them" through questions that feel "human and personal rather than combative or pushy". The AI should guide rather than lead, creating space for conversation rather than demanding information. When users can meet the intelligence behind their suggestions, they stop wondering whether it understands them and begin engaging with how it can help them.

### **Personal preferences get lost in generic recommendations**

The current experience asks users to navigate the same overwhelming decision-making process they encounter everywhere else, just with AI-powered suggestions added as a layer. Users express confusion about "how they use the AI" and "when the burden is removed from them", wondering whether "all the options suit them or are just generic". The Aspiration Gap revealed that the app "relied on only utilising the recommendations to show why a place they selected suited them" rather than proactively guiding users based on their expressed wants.

This pattern creates emotional distance because it forces users to carry the cognitive load they came to escape. They arrive burnt out by endless comparison and analysis paralysis, seeking relief from decision fatigue. When the app presents another directory of options, even well-curated ones, it

signals that the fundamental burden has not shifted. Users describe feeling they "still have to find the holidays themselves" and "filter via recommendations to find the option that suits them best", which feels like "a roundabout way of doing the same as manual sites".

The emotional consequence runs deeper than inconvenience. Users develop hesitancy about their decisions "because they don't feel supported or justified in their decision-making". Without clear connection between their personal inputs and the suggestions they receive, they cannot develop confidence in their choices or attachment to the outcomes. The Heartbreak Scale workshops identified this as the core reason users "feel like they may be getting overpromised and underserved".

### **Trust building happens too late in the experience**

The moment when users should develop confidence in TravAI's capabilities occurs after they have already committed to booking, rather than before they need to make any decisions. The Heartbreak Scale revealed trust levels at just 2 out of 10, with users "wary of the AI behind the scenes" and unsure whether it represents "a valuable tool" or "just a gimmick". The current approach asks users to trust the system before they have experienced what makes it trustworthy.

This timing problem matters emotionally because trust in AI-powered experiences must be earned through demonstration, not declaration. Users need to see the AI's thinking process, understand how their preferences translate into suggestions, and witness the quality of understanding before they feel comfortable sharing personal wants and budget information. When trust-building moments are delayed until after booking, users make decisions from a place of uncertainty rather than confidence.

The Day One / Day 90 insights show what changes when trust develops correctly. Users move from worry about "wasting their time" to feeling "relieved, catered for, relaxed, insightful, excited". This transformation happens through "guidance and education" that allows the AI to "understand the user and provide the best option available to them and make them really feel catered for and acknowledged". Trust builds when users see their preferences reflected accurately in suggestions that feel genuinely personal rather than algorithmically generated.

### **Complexity masquerades as comprehensiveness**

The current experience confuses information density with service quality, presenting users with extensive options when what they need is clear direction. Users describe being "hit with a large wall of decisions" when they expected guidance, wondering "what they are looking for" and "how they use the AI". The abundance of choice, even well-organised choice, recreates the overwhelm users came to escape rather than providing the relief they sought.

This pattern undermines the entire value proposition because it treats more options as better service when the opposite is true for overwhelmed users. The Aspiration Gap workshops revealed users want something that "allows them to verbalise their wants rather than overanalyse" and provides "clean easy decision making from one hub". When the app presents comprehensive directories instead of focused recommendations, it signals that the burden of evaluation still belongs to the user rather than the AI.

The emotional cost of this approach shows up in the gap between initial curiosity and sustained engagement. Users arrive interested but quickly develop the same decision paralysis they experience elsewhere. Without clear guidance about where to focus their attention, they cannot move from exploration to action. The solution lies in revealing options progressively based on expressed preferences rather than presenting everything upfront and asking users to filter through algorithmic recommendations.

## Root Causes

The gap between curiosity and confidence does not emerge from poor product quality or insufficient functionality. TravAI's underlying technology works well, and the comprehensive travel options provide genuine value. The emotional distance forms because of how the experience is delivered rather than what it contains. Four structural patterns in the current design prevent users from moving from overwhelmed hesitancy to genuine ease, keeping them trapped in the same decision-making burden they came to escape.

### **1. The AI operates as background processing when it should be the primary relationship**

Users download TravAI expecting to meet and engage with artificial intelligence directly, but instead encounter what feels like another booking directory with algorithmic assistance hidden behind the scenes. The Heartbreak Scale workshops revealed users are "confused as they are hit with a large directory, a large wall of decisions and options as opposed to guidance", wondering "how they use the AI" and "when the burden is removed from them". The technology that defines the app's value proposition remains invisible when it should be front and centre as a trusted guide. This structural choice prevents users from developing the relationship that would differentiate TravAI from every other booking platform, leaving them unable to build trust with something they never properly encounter.

### **2. Personal preferences get filtered through generic recommendation engines rather than driving proactive guidance**

The current architecture asks users to navigate comprehensive options and then applies AI to suggest why certain selections might suit them, rather than starting with their expressed wants and building outward. As identified in the Aspiration Gap workshops, the app "relied on only utilising the recommendations to show why a place they selected suited them" rather than "proactively guiding the user and allowing them to explore organically via their expressions and wants". This reverses the emotional sequence that matters most. Users arrive seeking relief from decision fatigue but find themselves carrying the same cognitive load, just with better suggestions attached. The structural problem is not the quality of recommendations but the timing of when personal understanding enters the process.

### **3. Trust building moments happen after commitment rather than before decisions**

The experience asks users to share personal preferences and budget information before they have witnessed what makes the AI trustworthy or different from generic algorithms. The Heartbreak Scale identified trust levels at just 2 out of 10, with users "wary of the AI behind the scenes" and uncertain whether it represents "a valuable tool" or "just a gimmick". The structural issue lies in the sequence of revelation. Users need to see the AI's thinking process and experience its understanding quality before they feel comfortable being vulnerable with their actual wants. When trust-building demonstrations come after users have already committed their information, they make decisions from uncertainty rather than confidence.

#### **4. Information density masquerades as comprehensive service when clarity is what overwhelmed users need**

The current design confuses presenting extensive options with providing excellent service, overwhelming users with choice when what they seek is focused direction. Users describe being "hit with a large wall of decisions" when they expected guidance, forced to "filter via recommendations to find the option that suits them best" in what feels like "a roundabout way of doing the same as manual sites". This structural approach treats more information as better assistance when the opposite is true for people arriving with analysis paralysis. The abundance of well-organised options recreates the very overwhelm users came to escape, signalling that the burden of evaluation still belongs to them rather than the AI.

These are all solvable problems that stem from structural choices about sequence, prominence, and information architecture rather than fundamental product limitations. Collectively, they form the design brief for creating an experience that genuinely delivers on TravAI's promise of burden relief rather than sophisticated burden management.