



# EMBARK: TRAVEL, TECH AND TRUST PODCAST - EPISODE 4

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

**Anshul Gupta:** Welcome to our fourth episode for embark, where we talk about travel tech and trust. Today's episode will focus on the connected stay and what it means for both leisure and business travelers, as well as front office employees at hospitality companies. For today's episode, we have Gonzalo Carpintero, Vice President of Operations, EMEA, and Head of Business Transformations at Radisson join us, alongside Miguel Flecha, Accenture Travel Lead for Europe. And we also have Helen Hickson, Accenture Global Mobility Lead along with, we have Jonathan Sullivan, our Accenture Cloud, First Industry Captain for Travel, sharing his thoughts with us today. And I am Anshul Gupta Accenture Travel Industry Lead for Advanced Technology Centers in India.

Let's get going. Let's embark. Let me start with Miguel. Miguel, do you want to share your thoughts on the connected stay and the traveler experience to begin with?

**Miguel Flecha:** Thank you, Anshul. Uh, yes, of course. Um, well the travel industry, it's all about experiences, right? As travelers, we all expect personalized and frictionless experiences. We want everything to be simple and easy, more emotional, and less transactional. This is what makes an experience memorable and makes us loyal to a travel brand. And this is, as you said, and surely applicable to both leisure and business travelers, leisure travelers expect that unique experience tailored to their needs while business travelers expect simplicity and convenience.

This is not a new trend in the industry, but it's also true that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated some of these trends. Travelers are now more worried about their health and safety. And touchless experiences are now more important than ever. Technology adoption has

accelerated, and that makes this transformation easier. And also, sustainability is one of the top concerns for travelers. But this is not an easy transformation. This is not just about the visible part of the experience, but the invisible part. And, therefore, operations is key.

There is also a challenge to scale this to thousands of properties, or integrating this with the CRS and PMS technology, or how to handle this transformation towards the franchise model. The good thing is that today we have this great panel of experts to discuss about this exciting topic. And hopefully we will have a great point of view on how we can help the hospitality industry transform the in stay experience.

**Anshul Gupta:** Thank you, Miguel, and absolutely we're going to have a great point of view here. Let me expand upon what you were mentioning about your traveler experience. Let me ask Gonzalo to start with, uh, what does the new leisure and business traveler expect from a connected stay? Now this connected stay could be a hotel stay, event, third spaces, whatever it may entail.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Thank you. Well, I think. First of all a trend that was probably stopped by the pandemic, like the leisure is going to come stronger than before, because I think that flexibility in the work environment is going to help as well. Many travelers that probably are coming as leisure travelers that are requiring to work, right? Because they have that flexibility for a Friday, for a Monday, for Tuesday who knows, right? I think that's going to change a lot the way, um, these traditional leisure traveler is expecting the hotel to behave. Um, at clear case for us is the ability to provide those leisure guests a place to work. Uh, that's what we call in Radisson 'hybrid rooms', right? Um, we have



already implemented that in 111 hotels. This means that what we want is to make feel that any customer, regardless the purpose of the trip can perform, uh, the work experience in the hotel. Without the necessity of going down to the lobby, they can do if you want, or they can have. a, fruitful, um, video call for instance, in the room, without the traditional problems that we normally experience. For the reason, we are investing at the end in hardware and connectivity to allow our guests to decide. Right. That's one thing. The other element to be connected is definitely how hotel companies need to really make an effort into connect to the rest of experiences, and um, experience providers, if you want around destinations. Of course, the key element is how to display those choices to your guests in the right time. Um, and in the right way now. So connect your loyalty program, your guest engagement platform, uh, with the rest of the experiences in the cityscape. We have mobility experts here. How, how cool it would be that you could book any mobility solution in the city from your hotel app, regardless if it's a skateboard it's an Uber. And then the other aspect, and I think is critical is the ability to combine all these things. So, a place to work, a connected environment with all the experiences in the city. Restaurants, so culinary, uh, cultural, mobility, um, in different packages.

And I think our industry has to make an effort into combine much better what is for instance, um, a meeting traveler, so a congress attendee, that can extend the stay with the family to a stay for a weekend easily, so how do you create that experience for a congress a congress attendee, by having probably a promo code where easily they can extend the stay in the same room? Seamlessly just to, uh, stay for the weekend and even for the next Monday, because they can, uh, work, remotely from our hotel and they can have the best choice for a flight back home. Now these are, to me, the most interesting trends in the individual travelers. And I don't want to make a specific claim on leisure or business. I think in the long term, less. In meetings and events, I think clearly. Uh, hybrid meetings, is not anymore any innovation. Anyone, any of us in the industry are creating the best experiences.

I think it's still platforms are not perceived as secure as they are in reality by companies. So what we have been, um, feeling is that there are

some big corporations that have concerns about security when they are using some of the platforms we are using, for instance Zoom rooms, or other companies. And how these platforms are being able to connect with the different choices of the different companies. And then, the other feature, more in the future, I think the real immersive experience for having meetings and this requires a much more advanced technology regarding holograms and really, um, going to the next level now into this technology. I think these are trends that would be much more present in the future. And I don't think they are going to be substituting the current demand, they will be complementing the current demand. That's my, my view.

**Jonathan Sullivan:** Actually, I just have a question for, for how Helen and Gonzalo can make that work for me as an employee of Accenture, how do we make that easy for me to do what Gonzalo wants to sell me and what I really want to do, um, when I'm having to mix business and leisure?

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** We are, we are right now, some having interesting conversations. And one of the problems many times is for instance, the internal policy of, uh, your companies. And I say companies, not just Accenture, when, for instance, we want to engage with you prior to arrival. So it's a typical case where you are using your TMC normally to book.

And there is a lot of privacy concerns about the companies you are using your email to contact me for check-in at a hotel. We are all used to receive these kinds of notifications from our TMCs to start your flight, to start the check-in. Why not allowing me to start engaging in the travel for them from the hotel company, if they have the technology to do so. So I think it's still, we have, um, a trust problem I would say. Anshul Gupta: I'll quickly circle back to Miguel. and ask him on the radically different things possibly can be done for business and leisure travelers.

**Miguel Flecha:** So, uh, thank you Anshul. So I believe there is a, is an important point that we have not, uh, commented about. Gonzalo commented about providing a remote worker with the right, uh, technology and the right setup. But if we think broadly about that topic, the question around, how can we provide, for



example, to a segment like the digital nomads. With the right experience to actually, um, capture a new business and a new opportunity, and we need to do a kind of strategic exercise to understand also from a product perspective, how we want to approach the experience that we want to provide to these new kinds of travelers to make sure that we succeed in the market. And this is going to be very relevant for both business and leisure travelers. I agree with Gonzalo that we shouldn't make the distinction but I think that this is more, the conclusion.

**Anshul Gupta:** Thank you, Miguel. Probably this is the right time for us to also look at a little bit from a technology standpoint. And let me share my thoughts on how can technology support the connected stay experience for business and leisure travel. And obviously, you know, technology can always amplify what is needed by the business.

Let's also compare travel to other industries. So, for example, in Accenture, we have the group insurance and many, most of the companies have a group insurance and employees also have an optional coverage to buy. Similarly, a lot of companies have tie-ups with retail partners. So we get, you know, options in terms of retail buying. We could do one special discount or contracted rates.

Maybe in future, what might happen is TMCs like Carlson Wagonlit to Expedia Egencies of the world may start promoting leisure offers to employees based on their business trips. So that's the true leisure that might be coming in and corporates get a fees discount. Um, you know, TMCs are happy because they are getting more business. Employees are happy because they are able to extend their business trip with leisure trip as well. Wherever that's a trend that we are looking at.

From a technology standpoint, two key things need to be done. One: power of the ecosystem needs to be leveraged for innovation. Innovation that's happening in all different places, big and small in established and emerging companies. Innovation is everywhere. The second thing that needs to happen is power of data for personalization has to be brought up just to expand that a little bit. The habits of travelers while on business and while on leisure are very different. Now this is very tricky. The same

person is behaving differently. The, the business side of the traveler may demand absolutely consistent performance, consistent experience from the hospitality company. Whereas the leisure traveler may expect, you know, some good surprises, some delights, uh, every time. Now doing this will require a lot more complex technology to come into the picture. I don't want to be sitting and finishing my, you know, unfinished work by the swimming pool and being offered a beer because only I was sitting next to the swimming pool or if I'm working in the lobby. Uh, and I am reading my favorite novel. It's my leisure time and just enjoying it. I wasn't offered anything as a snack or a drink at that point in time. And I feel it wasn't a personal gesture. No, it becomes a lot more complex and technology probably can help, but it will require a huge deal of evolution.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** I have a different view on what you just said first. Let me, let me explain from company's perspective. Uh, to the, to your last part, I think the key is to allow the guests the flexible access to the needs. I think we are many times complicate ourselves trying to anticipate with the guests needs. You put very two good examples. If I allow you via the mobile phone with the hotel app or with a guest engagement platform to simply call for a drink, you will not be disturbed because the teams will be understanding that you have the choice to ask a drink whenever you want, without the necessity of being disturbed. Just to put a very good example. I think we must understand it's impossible to predict every use case. And what we must do is to allow platforms that allow our guests to choose freely. Between experiences or in hotel and outside hotel. To your first point. I understand what you say about the, the TMCs, but I think in the future, the best way to solve these kind of multi package or the complexity of distribution of multipurpose trips is more through the loyalty programs of the different companies or partners, for instance, like central and Radisson and working together.

**Miguel Flecha:** I agree with you. Gonzalo let me actually step in just one second, because I think that we need to look at this from the angle of the traveler, right? And I think the traveler is willing to have more control on the way they first book the experience and having all the flexibility to actually decide how they want to blend the different steps of their experience.



And this could, in some cases, as we are discussing, come by blending a business and leisure on the concept of bleisure. But then also on how the industry really, really needs to adapt to deliver, to that, uh, expectation from the traveler, which is actually about keeping the control and keeping the flexibility: when I want to be disturbed, and when I don't want to be disturbed. Or when do I have that flexibility to change something from my experience, because for whatever reason, my plan may have changed and I need to have control. And this is all about the digital technologies for sure. And this is all about the loyalty program as Gonzalo said to serve as the vehicle to actually establish this direct connection and interaction with the customer, and to make the customer empowered, to actually control and decide what they want to do with their experience.

**Anshul Gupta:** This is the time Helen, I would want to invite you to share what you think is happening from a business travel standpoint and what you are seeing, changing or being expected.

**Helen Hickson:** Yeah, thank you. I mean, just a quick one on that last point. What I particularly like about the process, you know, Gonzalo mentioned. So, you know, bleisure it's something that, uh, it's complex for us in terms of, you know, how do we make sure that we have to distinguish between the two elements of the trip? And so, you know, in Accenture, one of our goals is to achieve net zero emissions by 2025. Um, you know, we're not alone in making those commitments, many leading firms that are stepping up. Um, and you know, we also need our hotel partners to do that, to reduce emissions and to equip our people, to make climate smart decisions so that we can report the carbon associated with our hotels stays and also better understand our hotel partners' green offerings and their actions to power their facilities, renewably.

Um, this kind of data is also part of our, um, drive to influence the way in which, um, people make smart choices and how they would, you know, select their stay like they do currently in terms of price and competitiveness in that area. Um, and with that, comes the next point, really, which is transparency and communication. How they're acting in a responsible manner. And this means that, um, we need to be engaging, um, in meaningful ways. One of the best things we did

at the onset of the pandemic has created dedicated, uh, COVID travel guidelines site for our people to access the latest information. And we partnered with our suppliers to ensure hotel safety protocols were front and center. And that was a real reassurance for our people, um, to see firsthand the specific actions that our suppliers were doing. So the types of things that get travelers confidence and assurance when booking and traveling.

**Anshul Gupta:** So Helen brought up a few interesting topics. You had mentioned about, uh, trust and transparency. She did mention about health and safety. She also brought up an interesting topic on sustainability and emissions. Gonzalo what would be your thought on what can be done in order to get the changing business travel landscape, what new product services can be brought out?

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** I think it's about the ability to create those, those packages, right. That, um, that we'll be able to connect, um, both experiences, uh, leisure and bleisure right. Um, I think, going into the hybrid room, uh, product, and the ability to work from your hotel. I think we need to be much smarter in redefining our pricing strategy. For instance, if you are going to stay, or if your initial purpose of the trip is a stay, you know, for the weekend, why not creating a smart pricing package where you can stay Sunday night, which is normally the emptiest night for urban hotels, you can stay at a very, very competitive price and you can make a late checkout so that you can work from your room. And then you can take a more competitive price flight on Monday afternoon. So being more flexible as hoteliers in offering aggressive packages, where we know we have a space, no, so that the customer feels more attracted. There is a lot work to do with OTAs.

And the other aspect, really, really a way to go is I think airlines are doing this better than before, no? It is helping our guests to connect with experiences in the city in the moment they do the check-in. Of course, sometimes you are doing your check in way before the arrival date, right? So you cannot, you don't want to think what you are going to do. But that, that's why it has to be a seamless experience from the moment you book, you have the choice and then your company, the hotel company, that rise from this case keeps connected with you via



WhatsApp via Facebook messenger, via SMS. And why not being able as well to check in your luggage at the hotel lobby, right? This is something extremely useful for, uh, for, um, for a leisure traveler. Um, we will know what is our last day, right of the trip. When we need to carry our bags. That's a total pain that we could really avoid with better collaboration between different travel industry players: airlines, handlers, hotel companies. And why not governments as well when it comes to ID management requirements. So that's what I think both is mixing experiences, um, putting at the disposal and then working together, um, as an industry, really, looking at the traveler as we see our guests, or as an airline see, a passenger right, is a traveler. And, um, we all are interested in to have the best experience. So, this is where I see the, the largest status of improved.

**Anshul Gupta:** Yes. And definitely several areas you brought up Gonzalo. Before I get to you Helen, I would really want to hear what Miguel had to, uh, add to that. What can be done by the hospitality companies to be closer to the travelers?

**Miguel Flecha:** I think it's mostly about simplicity and convenience. So, um, so we need to make sure that the experience that as an industry, we provide to a business traveler is really simple. Right? So normally business travelers are not expecting to interact with anyone, right? So, it's a quite convenience focused model. And then I think that from the new business traveler perspective, the remote worker and so on, it's all about being in the environment, where the worker is, right? So if this is about being properly integrated with the productivity tools that the traveler is using, that's definitely a positive impact. So if I'm planning to, uh, to have a meeting in another city and I receive an invite on my Outlook for example, or my Microsoft Teams. And then the tool can automatically provide me with all the information or the options I have to travel to that destination because they have identified that I'm based in Madrid, but the meeting is in Brussels and that makes my life easier. That's going to be I would say probably a killing value proposition because being part of the environment where the business traveler is and making their life easier it's going to be a, I would a must in the post-pandemic model and situation.

**Anshul Gupta:** Thank you, Miguel. And Helen, really curious to know your perspectives from a corporate travel standpoint.

**Helen Hickson:** I concur with Gonzalo and Miguel have said really, um, you know, our people are very much looking for a simpler, convenient and frictionless experience. And you know, that is, when we look at the context now, there is a lot more complexity in terms of, of travel, the travel landscape. And so, you know how we can bring technology to bear, to make that a better experience, a touchless experience so that we can go through, you know, check-in using our on smartphones and be able to get on the plane, um, into your rental car, into your hotel room with expedited, check-in, check out and virtual payments. Is continuing to be, you know, what our travelers will want and see. And, you know, certainly personalization and being known is it's very much, um, also front and center, not having to repeat the same, um, information, if you stay at the same hotel, but you feel known, for example, your laundry service requests or your access to the gym or, or whatever that may be. Um, I think it's, it's something that makes a difference for a business traveler: you know, just removing that friction. Um, I suppose, my responsibility for what is quite a large, uh, hotel program at Accenture, another area for improvement, I would say, not related specifically to travelers is payments. So, you know, I think overall the hotel industry has been tied in, in terms of alternative payment options. Um, certainly central bill is very clunky at the moment. Um, but improving that or having some sort of digital wallet, would really be ideal.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Helen, let me jump in because you are raising an excellent point. I think I cannot agree more with, uh, even from the other side. So I'm really happy to listen to you in identifying these aspects. In order to provide you the best experience possible. We need to, to have access to two main things. We need to know if you are one of our customers, you don't need to be a loyal customer. So I know that, so I I'm ready. And it doesn't matter if you book through your TMC or if you book with your family, or if you book through an OTA. To me, this should be irrelevant. Today, I'm not there. And it's not because we don't want. I think it's because still... we need to, as I said



before, to overcome this trust, um, barrier.

**Helen Hickson:** Yeah, I think it's, you know, I said, I absolutely take the point, Gonzalo, but I, you know, I think it's finding those secure ways in order to share that information. How can we use the latest technology in order to equip our travelers, to be able to share the information that they want to share and at the point that they want to share it and for you to have the ability to receive that information as well in a secure way. And I think that would then, you know, on both sides build, build the trust.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Absolutely agree with you. Anshul Gupta: Thank you, Helen, Gonzalo, for bringing up the fantastic points. And, uh, uh, certainly when we look at what can be done from a business travel standpoint, from a hospitality standpoint, the expectations from the business travelers, there's definitely a lot more to be done. A lot more to be desired. Now, in order to bring out the experiences that we were just talking about, whether it was bleisure or segregating business versus leisure, there is some focus that definitely is required on the front office employees as well. Gonzalo, what will be your thought on anything differently that needs to be done from their perspective?

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** A lot of things! First, um, in hospitality in general, but front office, mostly, they need to understand that there is going to be a hybrid way to work. With chatbots and artificial intelligence and the traditional service attitude. Um, that's a very big change we need to do in hotels.

We are bringing in Radisson technology to help to combine all the different platforms or channels rather where they, where a guest, can message you. You can text you, um, uh, thought out the customer journey to be able to handle them effectively. But this requires a complete change in the front office team, because right now the trip is a starting before the arrival, right? Because if people are more connected, people will be demanding you more things before. So do you need to be ready to interact with those platforms like never before.

Uh, linked to that and linked to this kind of hybrid mode where chat bot, artificial intelligence and, and automation will be able to help you a lot, right? Because many simple questions will be

solved automatically without the necessity of, you know, picking up the phone at reception, allowing you to focus in more value added tasks. The more technology we are embracing, like checking online, kiosks, QR codes to pick up your, et cetera, the more we need to transform our front office teams in concierges. But I don't mean the traditional concierge that we are used to see in five star hotels. I mean the attitude right where the important aspect is not the transactional element is not to check you in. I don't need people to check you in. This is wrong. This is just due to our current systems. What I want is an engaged employee that smiles, that welcomes you, that is able to help you with what's going on in the city, with anything you may need. That's hospitality. Hospitality is not opening a software and just check you in and handing over the key to you. This is just an admin process. So the more we kill those technology- related pain points, the more those employees will be transforming into concierges: into people that will have much more information at hand, because that's why I'm linking this with the prior, uh, questions about connecting experiences in the destination with the travelers, and then the link is the employee. This is the work, or this is the new task of our employees at the front office. Be much more connected regardless of the purpose of your trip. Be ready to help you with things at that are not related to transactions, right. And related to service and to experience. It is a big change but it's a change that will happen. Yes or yes.

**Anshul Gupta:** Okay, thank you so much Gonzalo now, um, as we come towards, um, you know, um, concluding our discussion today, just last 10 second response I need from, uh, Gonzalo, you, Miguel and Helen. What do you think is the one thing that will have the biggest impact on bringing back travel? I start with you Gonzalo

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Need to meet.

**Anshul Gupta:** Yes, absolutely.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Face-to-face of course.

**Anshul Gupta:** Yes.

**Gonzalo Carpintero:** Just that. As simple as that. Yeah.



**Helen Hickson:** I think that's right. I mean, I think it's the confidence of those, uh, traveling and, uh, our confidence as a travel program to, to allow people to travel as well .

**Anshul Gupta:** Miguel?

**Miguel Flecha:** And it's from my side, it's, it's the need, you know, reconnecting. Even if it's from a business perspective, from a personal and family perspective, from a friend's perspective, we need to reconnect with others. And we are lucky to work in an industry that is going to facilitate that. And I think that's going to be very relevant in the next months.

**Anshul Gupta:** Completely agree. What was going through my mind on this particular question was. The fundamental thing travel is the human subject, truly human. Um, insurance is not, manufacturing is not, telecom is not. Most of the other industries are not. But travel is truly an industry of human experience. Even business travel, corporate travel, all of that. And it'll always be dear to travelers and to all of us.

With that it's been a great discussion. And I personally enjoyed a lot talking to all of you. I would like to thank Gonzalo, Helen, Miguel and Jonathan for joining us today and sharing their perspectives on the connected stay and the future business travel experience.

Thanks for listening. I hope you will tune in again next month. When we talk about travel tech and trust.

Thank you.