



Whitepaper

# Digital Memories: Travel Trends in the Age of Social Media

August 2018

storyful.



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**The actual travel experience might be fleeting, but memories**—no matter how big or small—last forever. This is even more true for today’s digital traveler: Memories are shared with friends all over the world, travel decisions are made based on the recommendations of strangers, and opinions are shared on forums with thousands of fellow travelers.

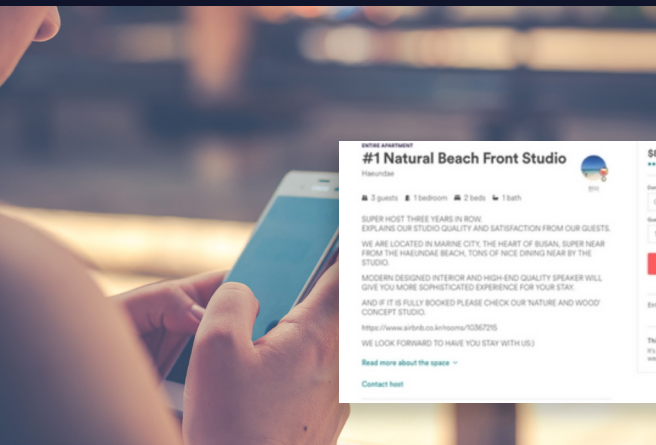
Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, as well as travel blogs and booking and review sites such as Airbnb or TripAdvisor, have significantly impacted the way people travel, and the decisions they make along the journey. According to the industry magazine Travel Weekly, **one in two travelers changed their original travel plans after coming across inspirational social media posts.**

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**For brands, new behaviors can be a great opportunity**—but can also pose risks. Travelers today have high expectations, and good service isn’t always enough. Restaurants are judged by how “Instagrammable” their food is, and hotels compete for iconic interiors guests will want to document. Conversely, a missing bar of soap in a hotel bathroom could result in a bad review on TripAdvisor, and a city or region without a dedicated hashtag campaign might lose the battle for attention.

Brands today can listen to travelers and understand their expectations, motivations, and frustrations. This will enable tourism boards, airlines, tour organizers, hotels and restaurants to offer experiences that suit the needs of a specific target group, and to be aware of conversations that might potentially damage corporate reputation.

# The Role of Social Media When Traveling



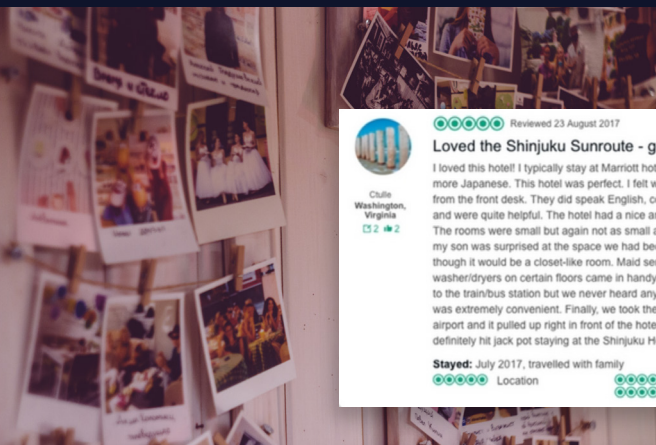
## Anticipation

Dreaming  
Research  
Preparation



## During Trip

Content Sharing  
Ad-Hoc Research and Booking  
Reviews  
Live Videos and Calls



## Post-Trip

Social Sharing  
Cultural Follow-Up  
Reviews  
Post-Holiday Inspiration



## The Three Stages of Memory Formation

The way in which memories are formed plays a vital role in molding our experiences. Typically, the human brain experiences and forms memories of travel in three sequential phases: anticipation, peak trip, and post trip. This memory formation cycle ultimately dictates how people plan their holidays, what they share on social media during their vacation, and finally, where and why they reflect on their experiences on public review sites.

It is not unusual for travelers to share pictures and take the role of a digital travel advisor long after a journey has been completed. Research from Google classified modern travel into five stages: **Dreaming, Planning, Booking, Experiencing and Sharing**. All these stages add to the memory formation process, as outlined below and on the next page.

- Anticipation Phase
- Peak Phase
- Post-Trip Phase

## The Three Stages of Memory Formation



“If you want to attract more travelers, don’t give them information. Give them inspiration.”

– Daniel Levine, Travel Trends Expert, Director of the Avant Guide Institute

### Anticipation Phase (Dreaming, Planning, Booking)

Every trip begins with a dream. Memory formation starts when a traveler anticipates the experience ahead. Travel anticipation also includes the planning, coordination and purchasing point. According to a 2016 survey by Ask Your Target Market, 64% of respondents said seeing social media posts about a specific destination made them want to travel there.

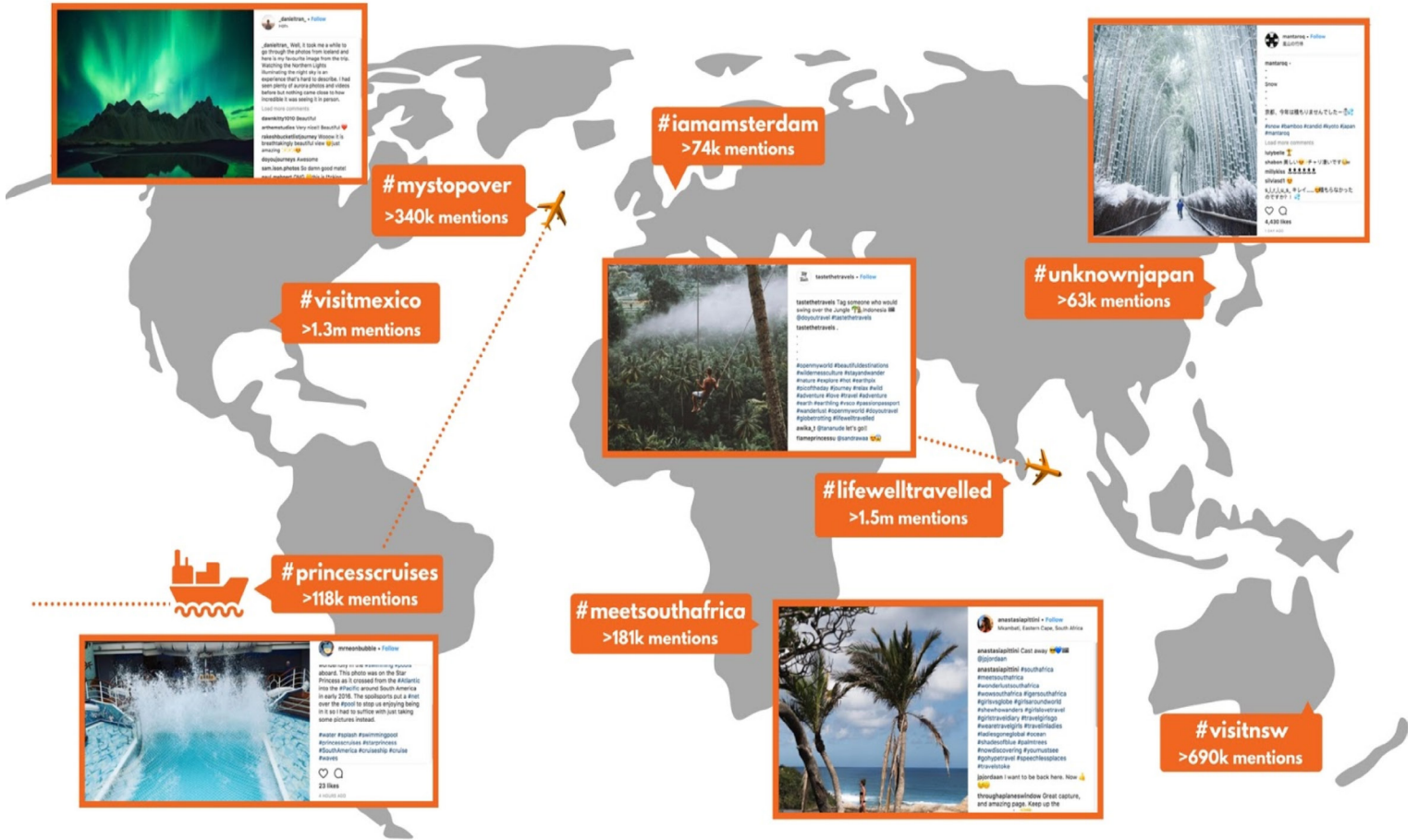
Social media has become even more relevant and trusted than the real-life advice of family and friends, with 52% of Facebook users saying their friends’ holiday photos had inspired their vacation choice.

Visual platforms like Instagram play a major role in inspiring users to choose a destination and plan activities. Hashtags make it easier to find posts from trending travel destinations or themes across social channels and—if

effective—can garner hundreds or even millions of mentions. TripAdvisor, Rough Guides, and Lonely Planet are just some of the platforms that offer advice and on-demand tools for travel logistics like accommodation, places to eat, or where to exercise. Popular travel blogs such as “One Mile at a Time,” (2.8 million visits in January) or “Nomadic Matt” (1.5 million visits), inspire fellow travelers, offering first-hand information such as safety tips, sample itineraries, and hidden local tips discovered on the authors’ own travels.

Users tend to perceive social media as a platform for “insider knowledge,” as opposed to traditional travel guides that share travel ideas with the masses. Hashtags like #offthebeatenpath (296k posts) or #hiddengem (468k posts) are popular and reinforce this perception.

# The Three Stages of Memory Formation



[All mentions are pulled from Instagram only].

## The Three Stages of Memory Formation

### Peak Phase (Experiencing)

Travelers in past decades had no choice but to disconnect. The digital traveler today is “always on,” thanks to the rise of smartphones and ubiquitous access to the internet .

An overwhelming 97% of millennials post to social media during their vacation to share experiences with friends and family. **On Instagram alone, 260 million pictures are currently tagged with #travel.**

User-generated content shared most often includes photos, live videos, vlogs, and reviews or blog posts. Delayed flights, airport amenities, and selfies in front of the flight schedule board are commonly posted on social media channels. Airports can increasingly leverage this trend, and can even become a “destination” for the shot.

Singapore’s Changi Airport is a social media favorite, due to features such as indoor gardens, movie theaters, universal charging booths, free gaming zones, and other Instagram-worthy airport amenities. Blogger “Bren on the Road” describes Changi Airport as the “Disneyland for backpackers,” adding, “Chances are you’ll have more fun in Singapore’s airport than you’ll have in actual Singapore.” At the time of writing, his blog post had 22,000 shares on Facebook, 253 shares on Twitter, and 45 on Reddit.





## The Three Stages of Memory Formation

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Virtually “checking in” to locations has become another integral part of traveling. Geolocational tracking features offered by most mainstream platforms allow users to “show and prove” their travel routes or indicate travel intention. Snapchat offers a similar option, allowing users to incorporate a geofilter into posts and even broadcast their location to the Snap Map.

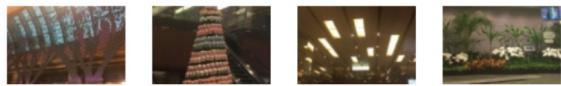
With the rise of applications that allow users to book accommodations on the go, the world is increasingly becoming a playground for our digitally driven thumbs. Thanks to home-sharing platforms like Airbnb, affordable and localized accommodation is readily available for spontaneous travelers. According to research, 65% of hotels are booked on the day of travel on personal smartphones. Instant booking implies that travelers expect instant responses and real-time confirmations.

★★★★★ Reviewed 2 weeks ago

### Fantastic Airport

It is easy to see why the Changi Airport in Singapore is a destination in itself. While we were only in Terminal One, what we saw was fascinating. The centerpiece of this terminal is the “Kinetic Rain” display. The “rain” is many copper raindrops that seem to dance. In addition, there are gardens, children’s play areas, free to use foot massager, and a host of other amenities. There are three other terminals. Terminal 2 is an entertainment hub, Terminal 3 is a “green terminal” with gardens, butterflies and foliage, and Terminal 4 has a heritage zone, entertainment corner, and sculptures. This is one airport you would not mind having your flight delayed. It’s easy to see why this airport is the world’s best international airport.

[Show less](#)



[See all 9 reviews by ITRT for Singapore](#)  
[Ask ITRT about DFS Singapore Changi Airport](#)



## The Three Stages of Memory Formation

### Post-Trip Phase (Sharing)

Coming home doesn't mean the trip is over. Memories, experiences and opinions are widely shared after a holiday. Post-travel nostalgia can last a few days, many months, or even years, and often sparks a renewed desire to travel that is triggered by good memories and the general wanderlust that many aspire to— particularly through social media show-and-tell.

Trends on social media such as #tbt (“Throwback Thursday”) facilitate sharing travel-related memories. Reviews of destinations, transport, accommodation or services are commonly written during this stage and can dramatically impact the image of a brand or destination. While the anticipation

and peak travel phases are usually limited to a shorter time span, post-travel sharing can last for longer periods. This provides an opportunity for brands to capitalize on travel memories. One way to spark interest and keep the travel nostalgia alive is the integration of foreign culture into domestic activities, as indicated in the chart below.

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Ethnic food      | Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Croatian, Fijian etc.  |
| Technology       | Chinese Powerpacks, Japanese Sound Princess (electronic device to cover sound of bodily function in toilets), Japanese full-body umbrellas |
| Culture          | German Oktoberfest, Chinese Moon Cake Festival, K-Pop & Karaoke  |
| Beauty & Fashion | Korean 10-step beauty regime, Japanese hair straightening, Dutch clogs, Australian UGG boots   |
| Service Industry | Japanese capsule hotels, Thai massage parlors, Indian eyebrow threading  |



## The Wisdom of the Crowds: Travel Reviews on Social Media

A recent study indicated that 95% of travelers read accommodation reviews prior to booking. Reviews can significantly impact travel decisions, and—whether good or bad—have an immense impact on travel service providers' revenue and reputation.

Positive reviews on social media can boost visitor numbers and significantly increase brand awareness. On the other hand, Go Fish Digital found that hotels risk losing up to 59% of customers if they get three consecutive negative reviews, and up to 70% for any more than three. A bad review isn't necessarily the end, however. Brands who are aware and react accordingly can still harness the power of social media: A study from TripAdvisor shows that hotels that respond to more than 50% of social media reviews increase occupancy rates at more than twice the rate of hotels that tend to ignore reviews.

- **The power of YouTube**
- **Airbnb and the importance of good customer service**
- **Pay-what-you-want walking tours**

## The Wisdom of the Crowds: Travel Reviews on Social Media



### Example 1: The Power of YouTube

When YouTube personality Vitaly “VitalyzdTV” Zdorovetskiy got kicked out of Boca Raton Resort and Club last New Year’s Eve, the Hilton-owned hotel likely expected him to turn to his nine million YouTube followers. What they didn’t expect was the massive impact Zdorovetskiy’s subsequent video rant would have on the hotel’s online ratings and reputation. In the video, Zdorovetskiy encouraged his subscribers to leave negative reviews of the hotel on various travel review websites. Traffic was rampant on Google Reviews and Yelp, where the hotel plummeted from a five-star rating to a lowly one-and-a-half stars. Yelp later removed the negative reviews they deemed suspicious and the resort currently has four stars.



Boca Raton Resort reviews captured on Yelp! by Twitter users @seanp6373 and @SMakvana, January 2018.<sup>14 15</sup>



## The Wisdom of the Crowds: Travel Reviews on Social Media

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### Example 2: Airbnb and the importance of good customer service

After experiencing what he called “two consecutive Airbnb nightmares,” travel blogger Asher Fergusson analyzed more than 800 online complaints about guest experiences at Airbnb. He found hundreds of fake listings and broken review links, and uncovered loopholes and scams. A big part of the evaluation focused on complaints about poor customer service on Airbnb. Fergusson’s research report trended briefly on Reddit, and stirred up a global discussion among travelers.

## The Wisdom of the Crowds: Travel Reviews on Social Media



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### Example 3: Pay-what-you-want walking tours

Like negative reviews, favorable reviews have an impact on the reputation and profitability of a brand. Reviews and recommendations helped to boost awareness for new models of commerce such as pay-what-you-want city walking tours. With over 750 five-star ratings on TripAdvisor, Bowl of Chalk's pay-what-you-want tour of London street art is currently ranked 16 out of the 742 tours in the city.



## Actionable Insights and Opportunities

As shown in this paper, social media has significantly changed travel. The connectedness of travelers poses a risk for brands in the travel industry, but it also presents a huge opportunity. Through social media, businesses can inspire their customers, respond to questions and concerns instantly, and build brand awareness and reputation. It's not a one-way conversation; brands can benefit from listening to what travelers have to say.

Listening to social conversations in the anticipation phase allows brands to understand where, when, and how users wish to travel, while monitoring conversations during peak and post-travel enables proactive and predictive strategies on brand-owned social channels. To be successful and stand out from competition, brands can seek to:

- **Understand the traveler**
- **Invest in a good reputation**
- **Monitor negative conversations—and react accordingly**

A hand holding a piece of bread over a lake with seagulls flying. The background shows a city skyline across the water.

## Actionable Insights and Opportunities

### 1. Understand the traveler

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#### Let the audience inform the experience.

Depending on the traveler group or social media platform, the main themes, motivations and pain points may be very different within social conversations.

Solo females, the elderly, or adventure-seeking travelers may present different needs and expectations. Listen to what focus groups have to say, and offer the experiences they are asking for.

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#### Example: RentAFriend

Solo travel is gaining popularity. However, once on the journey, solo travelers crave connections—and voice this need on social media. Brands who know about this can offer tailored services. Sites like [travelwithme.com](https://travelwithme.com) offer meetups and special interest packages for solo travelers, while travelers can “recruit” platonic friends through [rentafriend.com](https://rentafriend.com) to experience new places with a local.



## Actionable Insights and Opportunities

### 2. Invest in a good reputation

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#### Start a trend, and use momentum

According to one survey, 55% of travelers “liked” travel-related social pages when planning a trip. A highly visible brand could influence the 33% of travelers that change hotels, or the 7% that reconsider their destination. Hashtag campaigns can draw attention to a specific destination, service provider, or brand. **Mobilize travelers and leverage their social media expertise.**

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#### Keep communicating—and use the voices of others

Influencer marketing is popular across industries; by many advertisers, it is seen as the answer to ad blocking. Over the last few years, travel blogging has also exploded, creating a new category of influencer. Hashtags like #luxurytravel, #vanlife, and #NeverStopExploring are used for millions of posts.

Travel influencers are just as diverse as their audiences, and every blogger has his or her own style and focus. As a brand, keep in mind that relevance is much more important than reach. Pair with an influencer whose audience is both relevant and highly interested in specific products.

#### Example: Momondo

In 2016, Momondo announced “The DNA Journey” to promote a more open and tolerant world. Customers were encouraged to take a DNA test, and Momondo recorded their reactions. Nearly 170,000 people entered the competition, and the selected winners were rewarded with \$1,600 towards a trip to the countries of their roots. The campaign video has been viewed more than 17 million times on Momondo’s YouTube channel

#### Example: Contiki

Contiki, a travel company “for the young, wild and free,” partnered with influencer Devin “SuperTramp” Graham for its Contiki Legends campaign. Graham produces adventure and extreme sports videos and has nearly 4.9 million followers on YouTube—a perfect fit for a company that aspires to sell “trips of a lifetime” to 18-35-year-olds. The campaign was incredibly successful, with Graham’s “Cliff Jumping Italy” video garnering nearly six million views.<sup>20</sup>

## Actionable Insights and Opportunities

### 3. Monitor negative conversations—and react accordingly

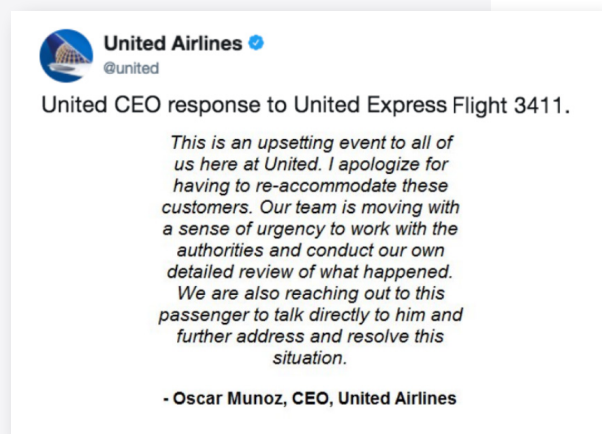
#### Example: United Airlines

In April 2017, video footage of a confrontation aboard a United Airlines jetliner at Chicago's O'Hare Airport sparked public outrage. The footage showed airport police pulling 69-year-old passenger David Dao from his seat and dragging him down the aisle. In a response on Twitter, United CEO Oscar Munoz apologized for "re-accommodating customers" on an overbooked flight—but didn't take responsibility for the way the passenger was treated. The lack of empathy added fuel to the fire. It wasn't until almost a week later that Munoz offered his "deepest apologies for what happened." The company's poor response to a customer incident turned into a PR disaster, and wiped \$1.4 billion off United's market capitalization in one morning of pre-market trading.

#### Respond rapidly to build trust

Brand-related negative conversations can be the perfect opportunity to **build brand awareness, show responsibility and positively surprise consumers.**

In January 2018, Harvard Business Review analyzed 400,000 customer service-related tweets that were sent to the five major US airlines and top four wireless carriers. When customers were approached six months after posting a negative review, most of them indicated that timely feedback and remedial action by the brand helped them to regain trust.

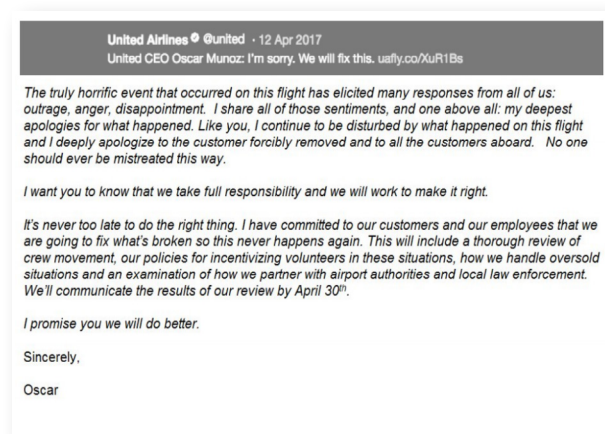


**United Airlines** @united

United CEO response to United Express Flight 3411.

*This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.*

**- Oscar Munoz, CEO, United Airlines**



United Airlines @united · 12 Apr 2017  
United CEO Oscar Munoz: I'm sorry. We will fix this. usfy.co/6uR1Bs

*The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened. Like you, I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard. No one should ever be mistreated this way.*

*I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right.*

*It's never too late to do the right thing. I have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what's broken so this never happens again. This will include a thorough review of crew movement, our policies for incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. We'll communicate the results of our review by April 30<sup>th</sup>.*

*I promise you we will do better.*

Sincerely,  
Oscar

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