



AI is Changing How Travellers Search & Book

WITH DEAN WARWICK

Agenda for Today

Welcome & Why This Matters (5 mins)

Introduction of hosts and session purpose.

Why AI is transforming traveller behaviour and bookings.

The forgotten P - "Place" when you don't have a physical product

What is AI? (10 mins)

Simple definition and real-world examples.

Interactive Poll: "Where have you seen AI in action?"

What is an LLM? (10 mins)

What Large Language Models are and how they work (in simple language).

Analogy: Librarian vs Research Assistant.

AI Search vs Traditional Search (10 mins)

Key differences: keywords vs context, 10 blue links vs direct answers.

Tourism Example: "Best tours in Queenstown" in Google vs AI Overview.

Why Tourism Businesses Should Care (10 mins)

AI-driven search is influencing bookings.

Visibility in AI results = future revenue.

Look at what's coming with AI mode (Demo)

Quick Demo (5 mins)

Live example of Google AI Overview or ChatGPT answering a travel query.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps (5 mins)

AI is here to stay.

Start preparing for AI visibility now - Tips.

Q&A (5 mins)



Disclaimer – Before We Dive In



The information I'm sharing today about AI search ranking and what might help in the future comes from my personal observations and opinions.

Let's be clear, no one has all the answers when it comes to AI LLMs or algorithms. This field is constantly evolving, and my thoughts are based on what I've seen and interpreted.

Consider this a discussion starter.



Dean Warwick – Search Specialist

Hi, I'm Dean, an SEO with a love of coffee, animal documentaries and behavioural science.



My favourite AI tools:

 NotebookLM

 MISTRAL
AI_



 Suno

 Gemini



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AI Search Results

Google's CEO Sundar Pichai is on record saying that AI results will "just be how search works".



We know the direction for the future of search...



Why AI is Transforming Traveller Behaviour & Bookings

Artificial intelligence is quietly reshaping every step of trip planning

Algorithms now watch live flight prices, weather, and even your loyalty-point balance to suggest the perfect moment to book; chatbots like Air New Zealand's "Oscar" and Expedia's Virtual Agent turn a basic, non-specific request—"long weekend in Queenstown with hot pools" into a ready-to-buy itinerary.

Visual tools such as Google Lens let a traveller snap a beach photo on Instagram and instantly see flights, hotels and reviews for that exact location.

The Result

Fewer comparison tabs, faster decisions, and bookings that feel tailor-made for each traveller.

Virtual Agent



Today

Virtual Agent

Hi, I'm your Virtual Agent 🖐️ How can I help?

Just to let you know, I sometimes use AI to answer your questions. Also, this conversation may be recorded to help improve your experience.

To get started, type a question, or choose an option below.

12:23 PM



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Place the overlooked “P” in many cases

In tourism, “Place” is no longer a brochure rack in an i-SITE; it’s every digital doorway where a traveller can stumble upon, plan, and purchase an experience. For a Milford Sound cruise operator, Place is the top slot in the Google Things-to-do module that appears the moment someone searches “top day trip attractions Queenstown”.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "top day trip attractions queenstown". The search bar is at the top with the Google logo on the left and a "Sign in" button on the right. Below the search bar, navigation tabs include "AI Mode", "All", "Maps", "Images", "Forums", "Short videos", "Things to do" (which is selected and underlined), and "Tools".

Under the "Things to do" tab, there is a section titled "Sponsored · Tickets and tours :". It displays a horizontal carousel of seven sponsored tour cards. Each card features a scenic image, the tour name, price, provider, and a star rating with the number of reviews.

Tour Name	Price	Provider	Rating	Reviews
Mt Cook Small Group Scenic Day...	\$250	Viator	4.9 ★	(382)
Mt Cook & Tasman Glacier Day Tour	\$250	GetYourGuide	4.8 ★	(332)
Mount Cook Scenic Day Tour	\$250	GetYourGuide	4.8 ★	(203)
Glenorchy and Paradise Half-Day...	\$189	Viator	4.9 ★	(362)
Half-Day Group Tour to Glenorchy...	\$89	Viator	4.5 ★	(58)
Milford Sound Coach and Cruise...	\$245	GetYourGuide	4.7 ★	(2.6K)
Mt Cook Day Small-Group Tour From...	\$249	Viator	4.8 ★	(4)

Below the sponsored tours, there is a section titled "Top sights in Queenstown". It displays a horizontal carousel of four sight cards. Each card features a photo of the location, the name, rating, and price.

Sight Name	Rating	Price
Kiwi Park Queenstown	4.5 ★ (1.7K)	\$61.50
Queenstown Gardens	4.8 ★ (1.5K)	Open · Park
Coronet Peak	4.5 ★ (2.4K)	Ski resort
Deer Park Heights Queenstown	4.6 ★ (639)	Open · Tourist attrac... \$75.00



Dean, there are too many AI terms to learn!

SEO LLM
GEO
AEO RAG
AGI





What is AI?



What is AI?

Put simply Artificial intelligence is just software that gets better at a job by studying examples instead of following a rigid, pre-written script.

Note: Algorithms have a fixed set of rules, they do have variable parameters but are not the same.

It powers many everyday tools; some you wouldn't even think about.

Netflix picks shows you'll like, your phone recognises your face, Google Maps dodges traffic (THANKFULLY) but lately the spotlight is on one type of AI called "large language models"



Where have you seen AI in action?

Option	Example shown on screen
A. Chatbots	Airline, telco or bank web-chat
B. Smart recommendations	"You may also like..." on Netflix or Spotify
C. Dynamic pricing	Airfares that change hourly
D. Voice assistants	"Hey Google, what's the weather in Queenstown?"
E. Image recognition	Unlocking your phone with Face ID

Can you think of any others?





What is an LLM?



LLM - Large Language Model

When most people say AI these days, they are generally referring to a large language models like ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek or Claude etc.

So, at their core what are these? What's the underlying model that powers this technology.

It's a prediction model.

Don't get me wrong there's so much learning and data that goes into this, but it simply predicts the next word.

Let's see if you can get the same answer as ChatGPT.

What is the next word in this sentence - The car is?



Large Language Model - Temperature

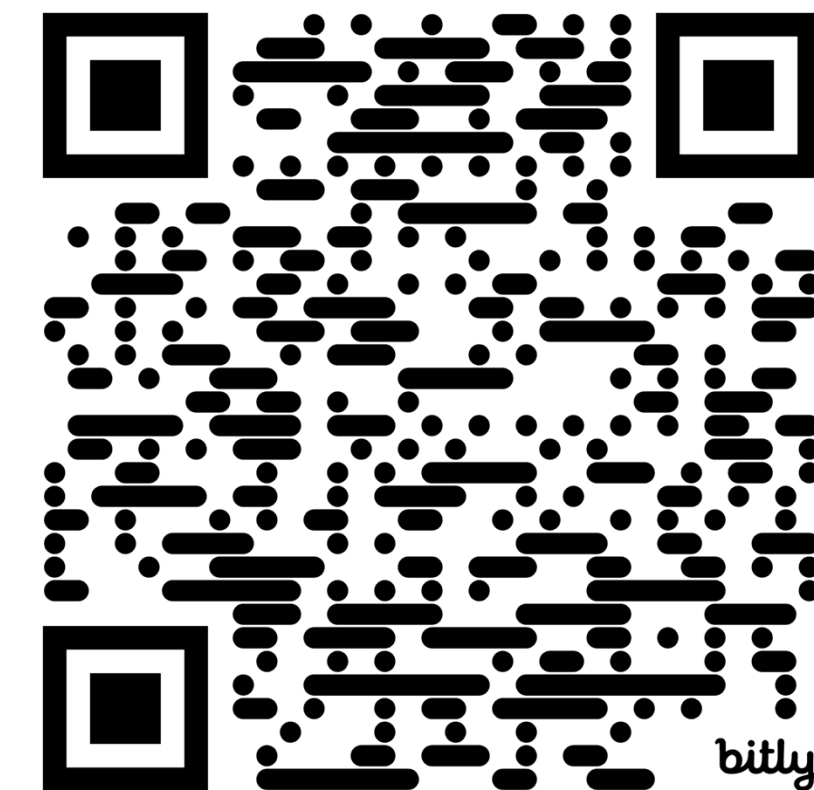


What is the next word in this sentence - "The car is"

Thought for 5s

red

Not sure why ChatGPT needed to think for 5 seconds about the question
but here we are...



Librarian vs Research Assistant

Traditional search tool (Librarian)

Quickly finds and links to existing information (like websites, documents, or databases) but doesn't interpret or summarise it.

it's great for up-to-date facts (e.g., "2025 NZ election results").

An LLM (Research Assistant)

Generates original responses by predicting text based on its training data. it can explain, analyse, or draft content (e.g., "Summarise Tourism New Zealand's 2024 – 2028 Strategy") but may occasionally "hallucinate" or lack real-time knowledge.

Use the Librarian for verified, current data and the LLM for creativity, summary or simplification.



LLM – Large Language Model

With LLM's there's a knowledge cut off. They get around this with RAG.

April 2023:

Some more recent versions of GPT-3.5-Turbo were trained with data up to April 2023. 

September 2021:

The initial GPT-3.5 model had a knowledge cutoff in September 2021. 

Be careful of hallucinations – Ask for citations and fact check!



RAG – Retrieval Augmented Generation

Large Language Models can fetch more information (model dependant) if they don't have it in their learning / training data.

This is how they have the All Blacks score you missed out on watching, the latest iPhone release or your gym class time change for next week.

It's up to date because it can go and fetch it from the web.

Where do they get the information? – Your website, Google, Bing etc.





AI Search vs Traditional Search



Traditional Search vs AI Search Engines

Google

SearchGPT●

Bing

yahoo!

perplexity

Copilot

What's the difference for ranking?



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Traditional Search vs AI Search Engines

Google

Bing

yahoo!

SearchGPT●

perplexity

Copilot

Keywords

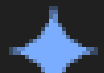
Context & Meaning





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Google AI Overview – “best tours in Queenstown”

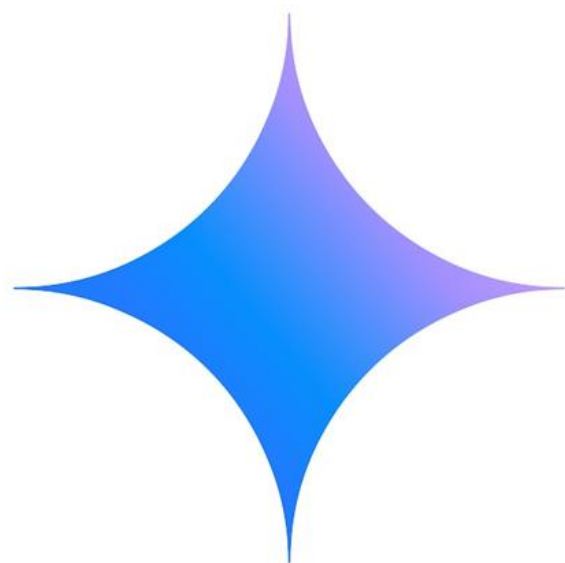



 AI Overview

Top tours in Queenstown include **Milford Sound tours (especially those with a fly-cruise-fly option), wine tours in the Gibbston Valley or through a hop-on-hop-off service, scenic helicopter flights for mountain and glacier views, Shotover Jet boat rides, and the classic TSS Earnslaw steamship cruise on Lake Wakatipu.** You can also find guided tours of **Skippers Canyon, Lord of the Rings tours in Glenorchy,** and various adventure activities like skydiving and bungee jumping. 



 +6






48 Hours in Queenstown New Zealand - The Best Thing...

YouTube · Riss Adventures

Fun Things to Do in Queenstown When You're...

4 Apr 2023 — Fun Things to Do in Queenstown When You're Not Sking...

Queenstown NZ



Dive deeper in AI Mode



Google AI Overview

AI Overview

Why Kaikoura TOP 10 Holiday Park is Great for Families

Modern Amenities:

This holiday park provides a comfortable and well-equipped base for families. 

Variety of Accommodation:

You can choose from motel units, cabins, or spacious tent and campervan sites to suit your family's needs. 

Central Location:

Being located in the center of town makes it easy to access local attractions and activities. 

High Rating:

As the only 5-star holiday park in Kaikoura, it promises a high standard of service and facilities for a great holiday experience. 

Things to Consider

- **Dog-Friendly Policy:** If you plan to bring a dog, you must arrange this with the park in advance to ensure they can accommodate your pet.

Website Content



Kaikoura TOP 10 Holiday Park proudly stands as the sole 5-star accommodation in Kaikoura, providing an exceptional holiday experience. There is a range of modern motel units, cosy cabins, spacious tent sites, and well-equipped campervan sites to choose from.

Please note that dogs are allowed on sites only with prior agreement.





Why Tourism Businesses Should Care



AI Driven Search is Influencing Bookings

Theres some fantastic research being done in the area of “how AI is disrupting every stage of the booking funnel”. I wanted to highlight a few things from the study:

Travellers leaned heavily on AI, using a variety of tools inside the AI Mode environment to build confidence in their choices. They expressed appreciation for options that were clear, definitive, and scannable, which they described as “no guessing” and “laid out”. Once a decision was made, they moved to an external website to make an actual purchase.

Other noteworthy outcomes from the study

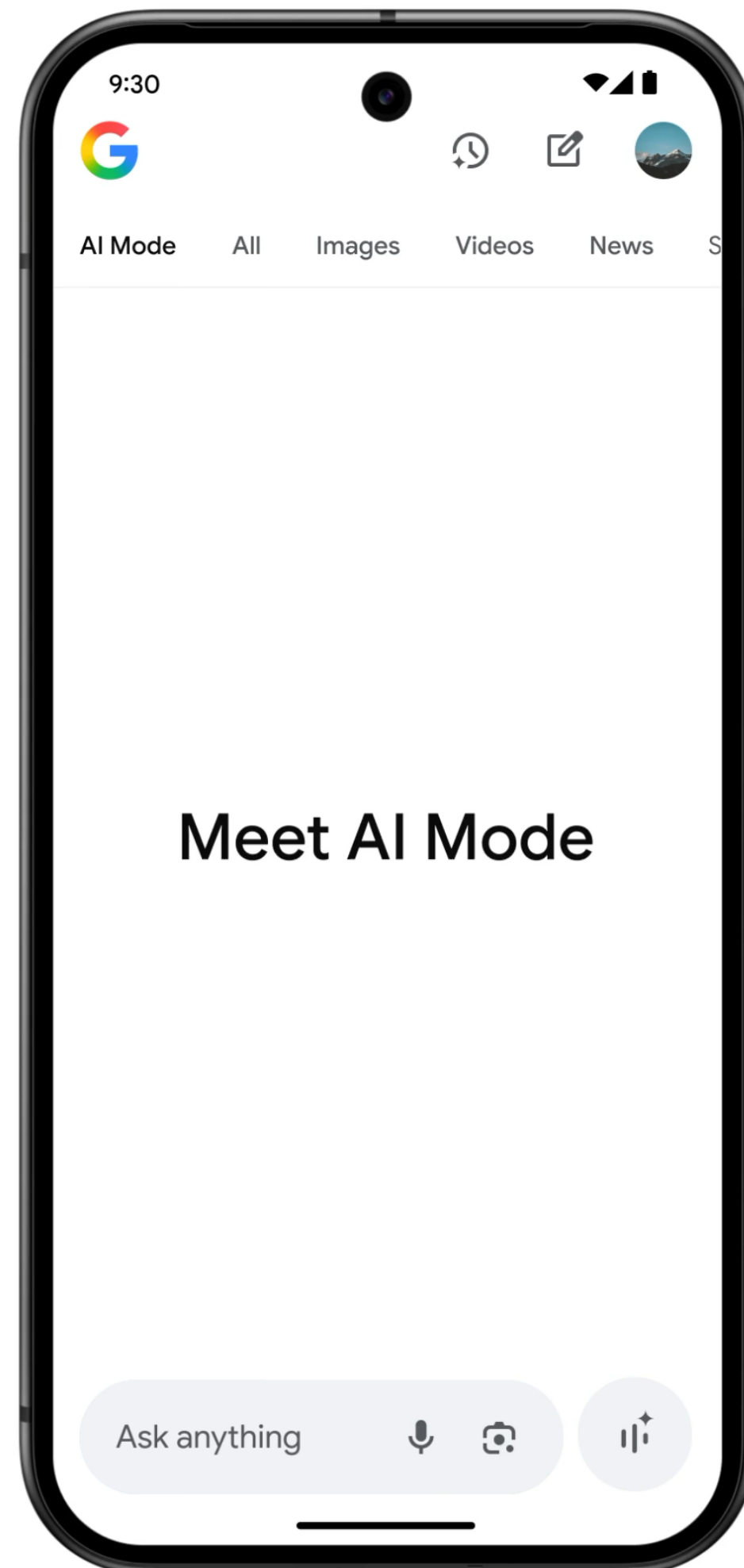
Users have high confidence in the accuracy and usefulness of the information provided by Google AI Mode. 4.3/5 Average post-task "I Trust the Accuracy" rating across all tasks.

Visibility, not traffic, is the emerging currency. Participants made their brand judgments directly from AI Mode outputs.

Research study: <https://www.propellic.com/research>



Google - AI Mode



Under the hood, AI Mode uses our query fan-out technique, breaking down your question into subtopics and issuing a multitude of queries simultaneously on your behalf.

This enables Search to dive deeper into the web than a traditional search on Google, helping you discover even more of what the web has to offer and find incredible, hyper-relevant content that matches your question.





ChatGPT Demo – Travel Query





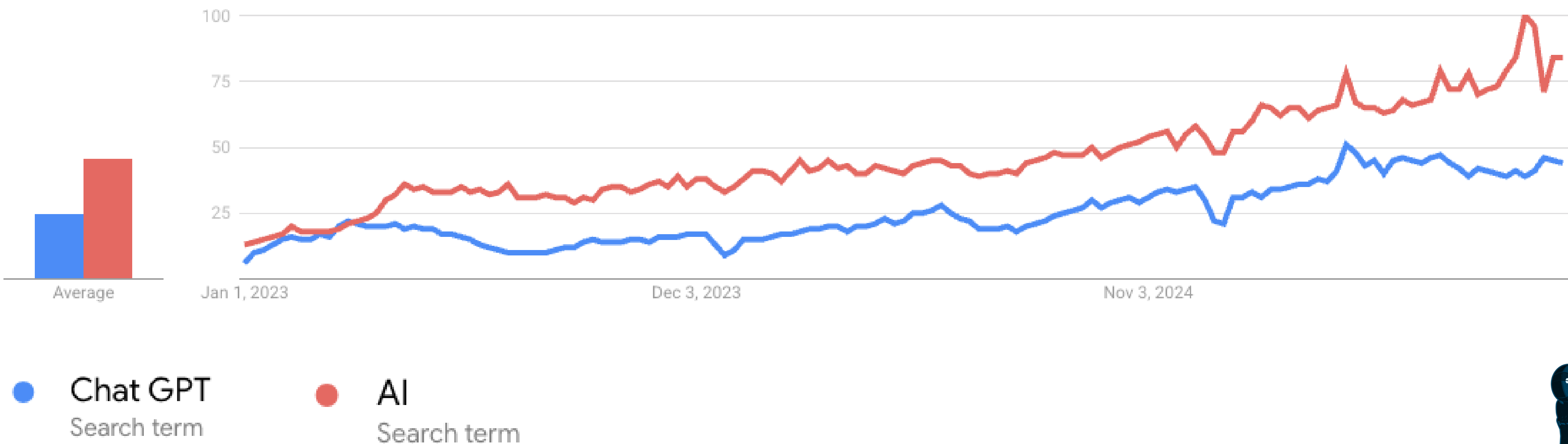
AI is Here to Stay



Google Trends – ChatGPT | AI



Interest over time 



ChatGPT Stats

OpenAI plans to hit **1 billion** ChatGPT users by the end of 2025.

Month	Weekly Users
November 2022	1 million
January 2023	30 million
November 2023	100 million
December 2024	300 million
February 2025	400 million
March 2025	800 million
April 2025	800 million
May 2025	800 million

Sources: [Reuters](#), [Semrush](#), [CNBC](#), [The Verge](#), [Techerati](#), [DigitalInformationWorld](#), [Bond](#), [Axios](#)

- In just 5 days, ChatGPT surpassed 1 million users.
- ChatGPT.com gets approximately 5.19 billion visits per month.
- More than 45% of its users are under the age of 24.
- With over \$12 billion in funding, OpenAI is among the most well-funded startups in history.





Prepare for AI visibility Now - Tips



How do I make sure I'm ranking in AI search?



Continue to do great SEO

...With a little more context than before.



Actionable Tips for Travel Brands



Optimise Your Google Business Profile (GBP)

Treat your GBP as your primary online storefront. Ensure it has up-to-date photos, reviews, and pricing, as users commit to one interaction type here and rarely move to another feature.

Create Conversational Content

Shift strategy from keyword targeting to providing unique, direct, authoritative answers in well-structured content chunks. This helps AI utilise your information and surface you in inline links.

Focus on the Handoff

Ensure the booking experience is seamless. Users are frustrated when details from the AI research don't pre-populate on the external site. This requires leveraging structured data, deep links, and APIs.

Amplify Brand Trust

Strong content that reads helpfully, like a guide, inherits the high trust users have in the AI, amplifying brand consideration during the long planning phase.



The Opportunity

Some of your competition have not got into this new way of thinking about SEO yet. Soon, they are going to be very behind. Yes, you still need all the technical aspects of the site tip-top, but the way in which the information is being displayed has changed.

The game is changing.





Your Questions



If you would be so kind...



5.0 ★★★★★ 16 Google reviews





Thank you for attending!

