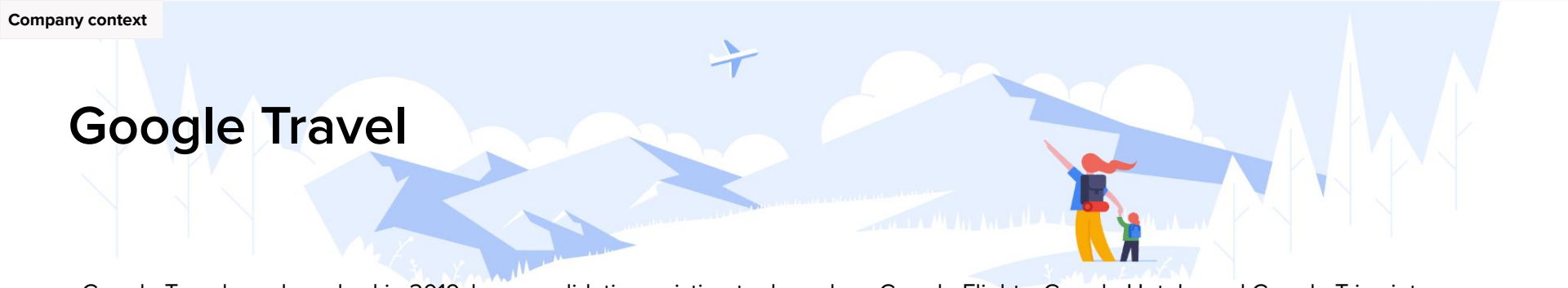


Google Travel

Revamp Project by Kirana Ananda

Google Travel



Google Travel was launched in 2019, by consolidating existing tools such as Google Flights, Google Hotels, and Google Trips into a single platform. Google doesn't report "Google Travel" revenue as a separate segment, but it's a massive part of their core advertising revenue, estimated in the tens of billions annually (potentially over $12B, even $18B in past years).

Company	Google
Product	Google Travel (https://www.google.com/travel)
Business model	Organizing the world's information and monetizing access to it, mostly through targeted advertising. Specifically for Google Travel, the revenue comes from referral fees from airlines, hotels, and online travel agencies (OTA).
Target audience	B2C market such as all types of travelers planning leisure or managing business travel.
Key business goal	Become the primary source for travel planning and booking, capturing users at the "inspiration" phase.

UX challenge: The user's goal is to plan a trip.

Users struggle to bridge the gap, raising cognitive load and creating fragmentation.

The Planning Phase

- Where users organize logic, budgets, and desires.
- **System 2:** slow, analytical, calculating, logical.

Tools



and many more...

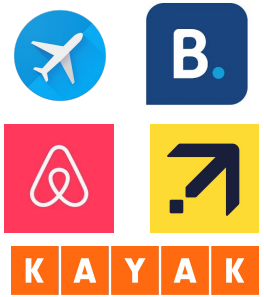
The Failure:

- Planning tools don't book. Booking tools don't plan. The user is left alone in the middle to manage the chaos.
- Some users may do a System 2 task (complex planning) using System 1 tools (sales-focused booking sites).

The Booking Phase

- Where users execute transactions and lock in inventory.
- **System 1:** Fast, urgent, "Only 1 room left!", emotional.
- **System 2**: Let's book it for later.

Tools



and many more...

How might we reduce cognitive load and fragmentation for users when planning a trip?

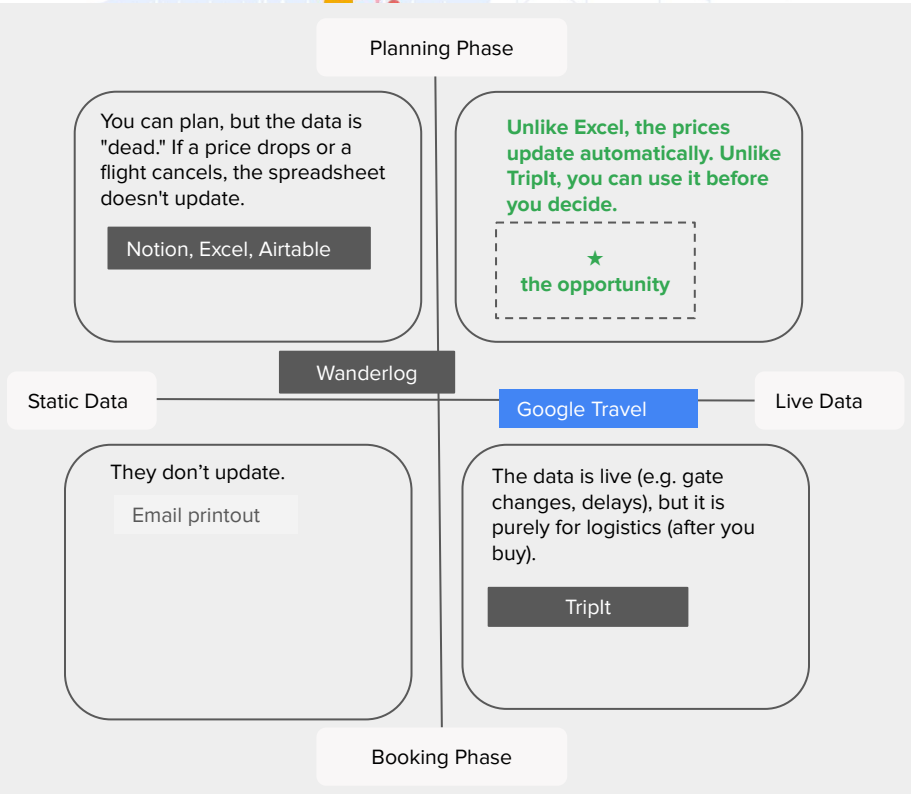


Discovery	Strategy	Execution
1. Competitive Landscape	3. Conceptual Components	5. Wireframes
2. Foundational Research (IDI)	4. Ideation Workshop	6. Usability Testing

Currently, the 'Live Planning' quadrant is empty.

direct competitors | indirect competitors

Feature	Google Travel	TripIt	Wanderlog	Notion/Airtable / Excel
Primary Value	Search & book	Post-booking organization	Visual itinerary	Custom organization
Drafting Plan	Non-Existent (must book to save)	Good (but manual)		Excellent (total freedom)
Price Tracking	Hidden (update received from Gmail only)	None		Manual entry
Cost Simulation	None (User does mental math)	Medium (Sum up only)		High (A financial model)
Group Collab	Low (Share link only)	Medium (View only)		High (Real-time editing)
Booking actionability	High (Direct links)	Low (Redirects)		None (Dead task)



Objective: To understand the cognitive and emotional friction points in order to design a seamless "Planning-to-Booking" workflow.

Research Questions

1. What emotional triggers prompt a traveler to start tracking a flight versus booking it immediately?
2. How do travelers react when their "mental model" of a trip (e.g., flight + hotel) conflicts with the "system model" (separate bookings), and what workarounds do they create?
3. What creates a sense of "confidence" or "control" for a traveler during the planning and booking phase?

Participant Recruitment Plan
(DETAILS ARE HERE)
Target sample size, N=16

1. Inclusion criteria
2. Exclusion criteria
3. Behavioral segments
4. Sampling strategy
    a. A mix of demographics
    b. 50/50 split of gender, geography, and platform
    c. Using hard, minimum, and soft quota for behavioral segments

Screening Questions
(DETAILS ARE HERE)
12 questions with some parts

1. Demographics exclusion
2. Trip validation
3. Behavioral segment validation
4. Tool & tech checks
5. Contextual classification

Discussion Guide
(DETAILS ARE HERE)
There are 4 parts:

1. Introduction and Rapport Building (2 mins)
2. Warm-up Questions (3 mins)
3. The "Management Pre-Booking" Phase (15 mins)
4. The "Tracking" Phase (15 mins)
5. The "Managing the Booking" Phase (15 mins)
6. Ideal Experience & Wrap-Up (10 mins)

Three key areas where current tools fail to match user intent.

The discovery gap

Users are willing to change destinations for value, but they have to manually hunt for alternatives because search tools are rigid.

> "It's about the theme, not the place. If I like to have beaches, I'll find alternatives that offer the same vibes."



Andrew, Spontaneous Explorer
M, 28 y.o.

The "anchor" vs the "whole"

Users plan non-linearly, but tools force a linear checkout process.

> "I don't book all accommodations in advance because what if I like the place and I want to stay one more day here?"

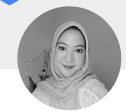


Andrew, Spontaneous Explorer
M, 28 y.o.

Total cost blind spot

The lack of "cost simulation" features is the driver of spreadsheet usage.

> "With spreadsheet I can calculate the estimated cost and make scenario about order of places and its price."

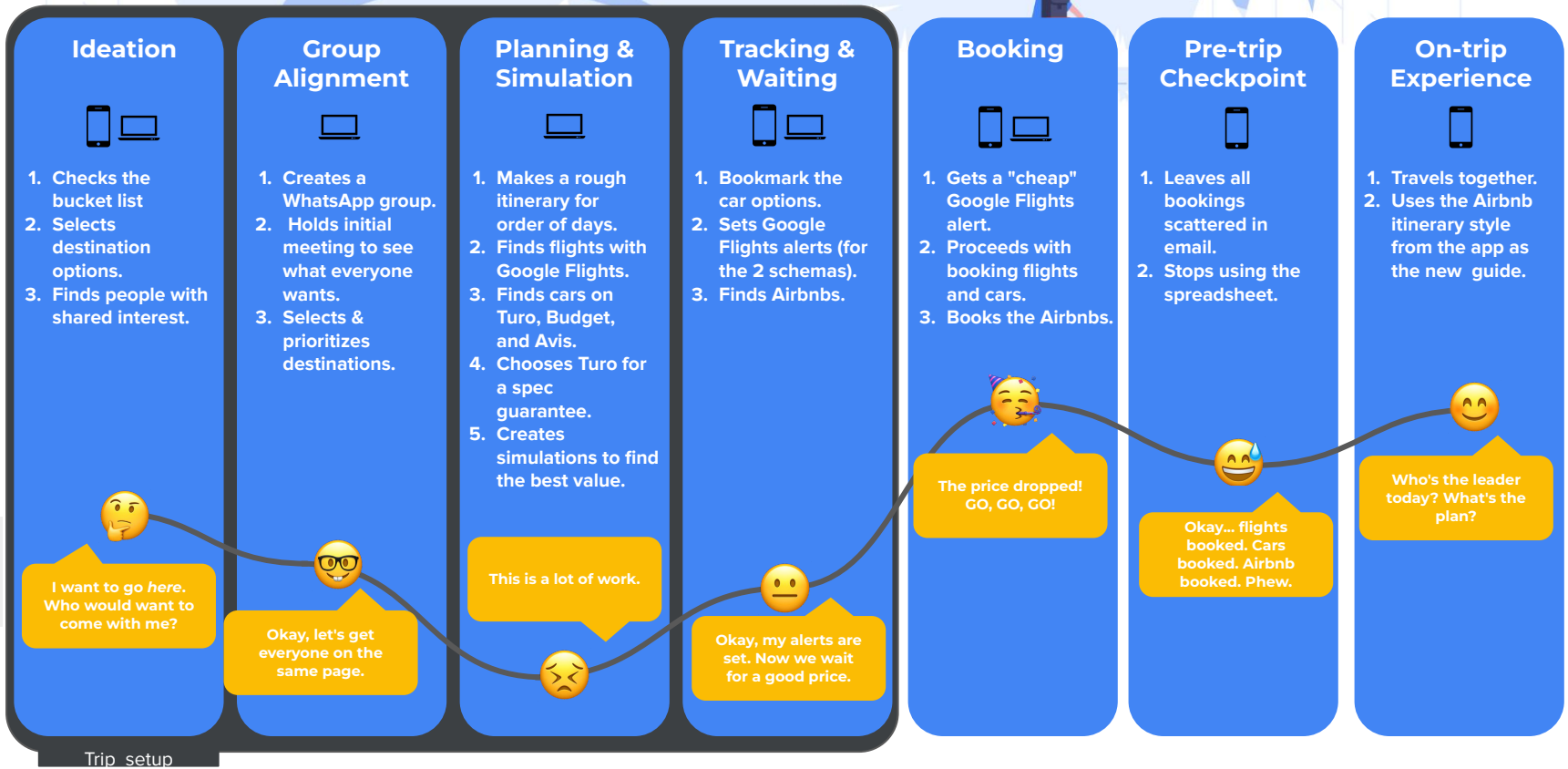


Iztya, Planner
F, 25 y.o.

3. Conceptual Components: Journey Map

Iztya, the Planner
Scenario: Given her entry-level job, Iztya is highly budget-conscious. She wants to plan an adventurous group trip using Google Sheets and Google Flights.

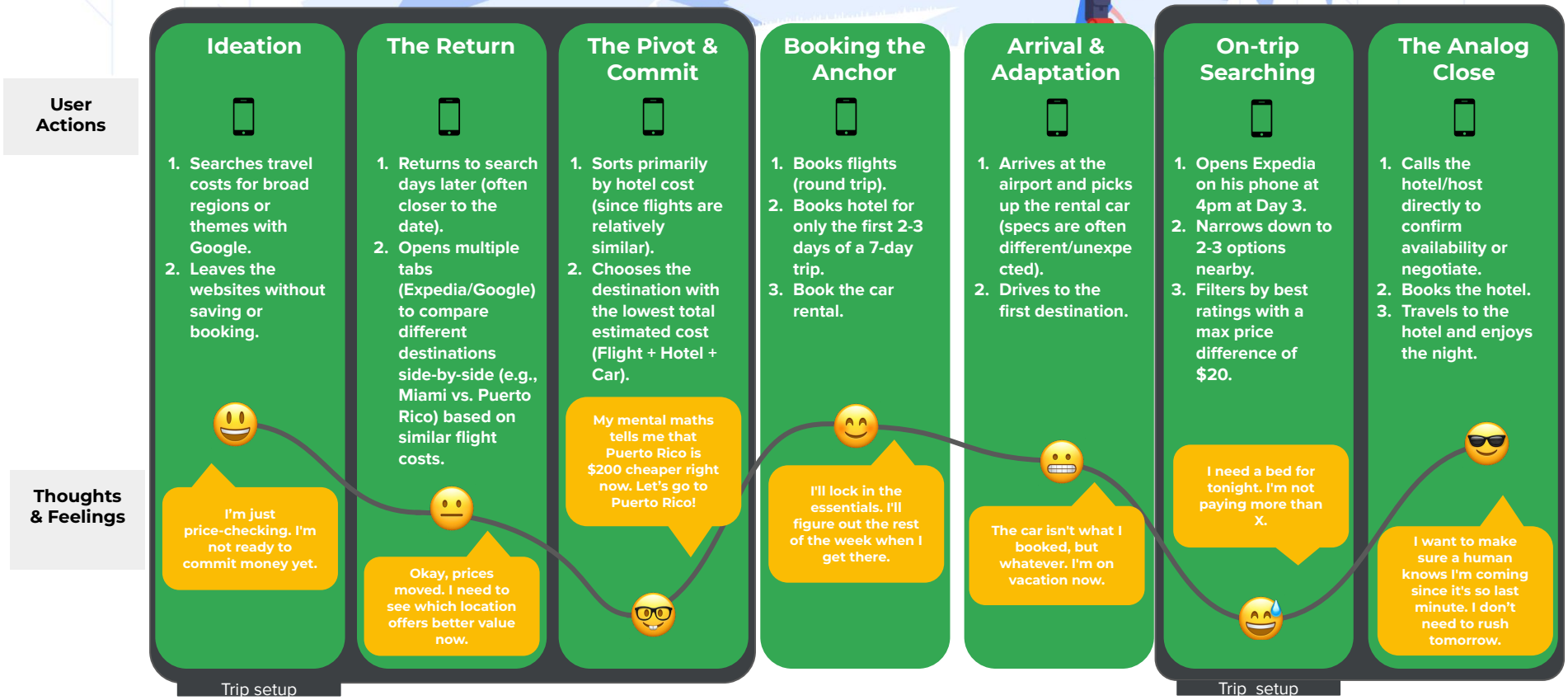
Expectations:
- Digestible, context-rich alerts, clearly labeled by trip, that show price trends to help her know when to buy.
- Expects a hierarchical, 'threaded' itinerary view to organize all bookings and plans by destination.

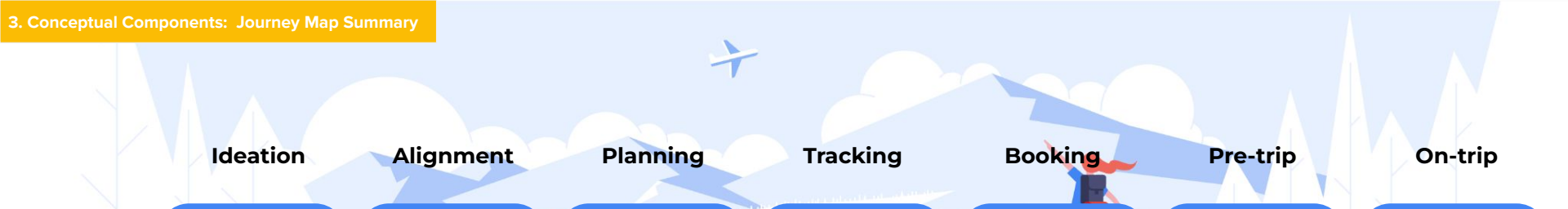


3. Conceptual Components: Journey Map

Andrew, the Spontaneous Explorer
Scenario: Given his background as an accountant, Andrew is value-focused. He wants to book a relaxing one-week birthday trip to beaches, finding everything on Expedia.

Expectations:
- Accessible price data without intrusive notifications or emails that create unnecessary urgency.
- A cost-benefit comparison across multiple destinations that fit his specific travel theme.





	Ideation	Alignment	Planning	Tracking	Booking	Pre-trip	On-trip
Iztya, The Planner	**Specific**: Starts with a clear destination.	**Collective Effort:** Creates WhatsApp group, negotiates with friends,	**Complex:** Simulations with spreadsheets.	**Active:** Sets alerts on specific "schemas"	**Total:** Books Flights + Cars + Airbnb all at once to lock it in.	**Chaotic:** Spreadsheet is done, info scatters into email clutter and Airbnb	**Structured:** "Leader of the day" follows the plan.
Andrew, The Spontaneous Explorer	**Thematic:** No specific destination yet.	**Skipped:** Travels alone or with a partner who doesn't care.	**Pivot**: Price comparison with mental model.	**Passive:** Hopes for a deal but doesn't aggressively track.	**Partial**: Books Flight + the first few nights; leaves the rest open.	**Chill:** Doesn't prepare. He just shows up.	**Dynamic:** Plans lodging day-by-day while he is there.
Opportunity for Google Travel	A "Saved & Discover" tab that handles locations and broad categories.	Google Travel needs a "Trip Dashboard" that can be strict but also flexible/editable on the fly. Google Travel might benefit from adding an Airbnb-like itinerary feature where users have hierarchical views and can create, edit, and share personalized trip schedules.			The system must understand that a trip isn't finished just because a flight is booked.		

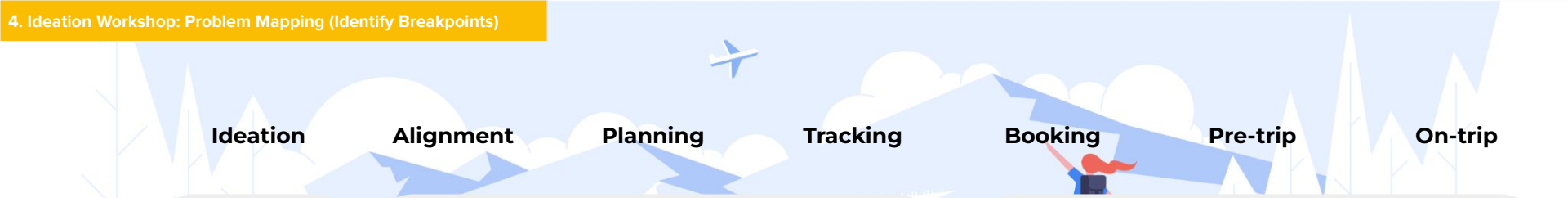


Pre-Workshop Setup
Time: 90 minutes.
Tools: whiteboard (or Miro), sticky notes, sharpies, paper.
Materials: competitive landscape, key themes, and journey maps from current research findings.



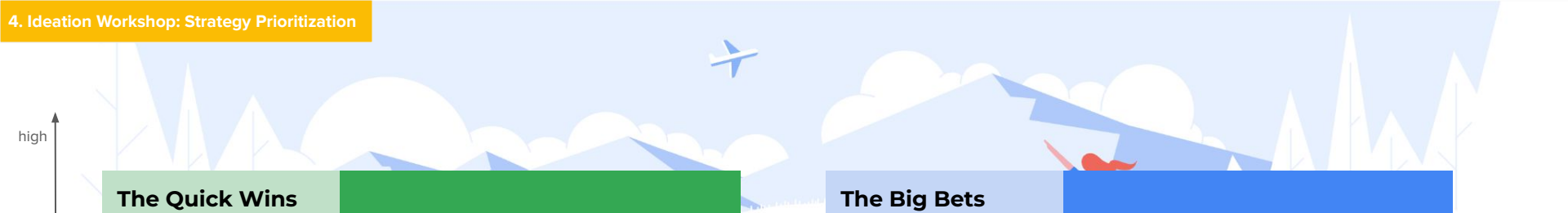
1. **Warm-up exercises (5 minutes)**
2. **Problem mapping (20 minutes)**
    a. Goal: Visualize the gap in the current user journey.
    b. Discussion: Looking at the journey map, where exactly is the gap? Why does the current market force users to fragment their workflow across multiple tools?
    c. Output: Identify breakpoints
3. **Ideation: Crazy 8's (15 minutes)**
    a. Goal: Generate rapid solutions for the personas.
    b. Activity: Sketch 8 distinct UI ideas in 8 minutes.
    c. The harvest: Review sketches, circle the top 3 concepts, and name them into "feature cards" with sticky notes.
4. **Strategy Prioritization (20 minutes)**
    a. Goal: Filter ideas based on user value vs. technical effort.
    b. Activity: Map the feature cards onto a 2x2 matrix.
    c. Decision: Defined the "Quick Wins" and the "Big Bet".
5. **Wireframes (20 minutes)**
    a. Goal: Visualize the prioritized solution.
    b. Activity: Detailed sketching of the Desktop version.
    c. Annotation: Used red pen to highlight the functionality and distinctive details.

4. Ideation Workshop: Problem Mapping (Identify Breakpoints)



	Ideation	Alignment	Planning	Tracking	Booking	Pre-trip	On-trip
What's missing in Google Travel?	• No shared inspiration board or group polling. • Limited "thematic" search; pushes specific destinations too early.	• No collaborative planning workspace. • No integrated booking for multi-component trips. • No consolidated trip dashboard. • Lacks clear cost-benefit comparison for alternative destinations. • Assumes full itinerary booking; doesn't support "anchor" bookings.			• Lacks "find a deal near me tonight" functionality.		
What's missing in the market?	Inspiration board with Google Maps, but is still fragmented as it does not connect to Google Travel.	[Check competitive landscape]			• Already provided by HotelTonight.com and Kayak • CTA already used by booking.com		

4. Ideation Workshop: Strategy Prioritization



User & Business Value

high

low

Effort

low

high

The Quick Wins

1. Anchor Booking Logic
Simply allow users to book a flight *without* nagging them to book a hotel immediately. Change the UI state from "Incomplete" to "Open-Ended."

2. The "Active Trip"
Auto-group searched items into a "Trip" folder, potentially turns to dashboards that auto-saves tracked flights/hotels and later evolves as itinerary.

The Big Bets

1. Complex Scenario Planner:
Building a tool that simulates "Option A vs Option B" with live pricing or with AI.

Fills-in

1. The "Trip Digest" Notification
Instead of sending an email every time a tracked flight changes price (which spams user), batch them.

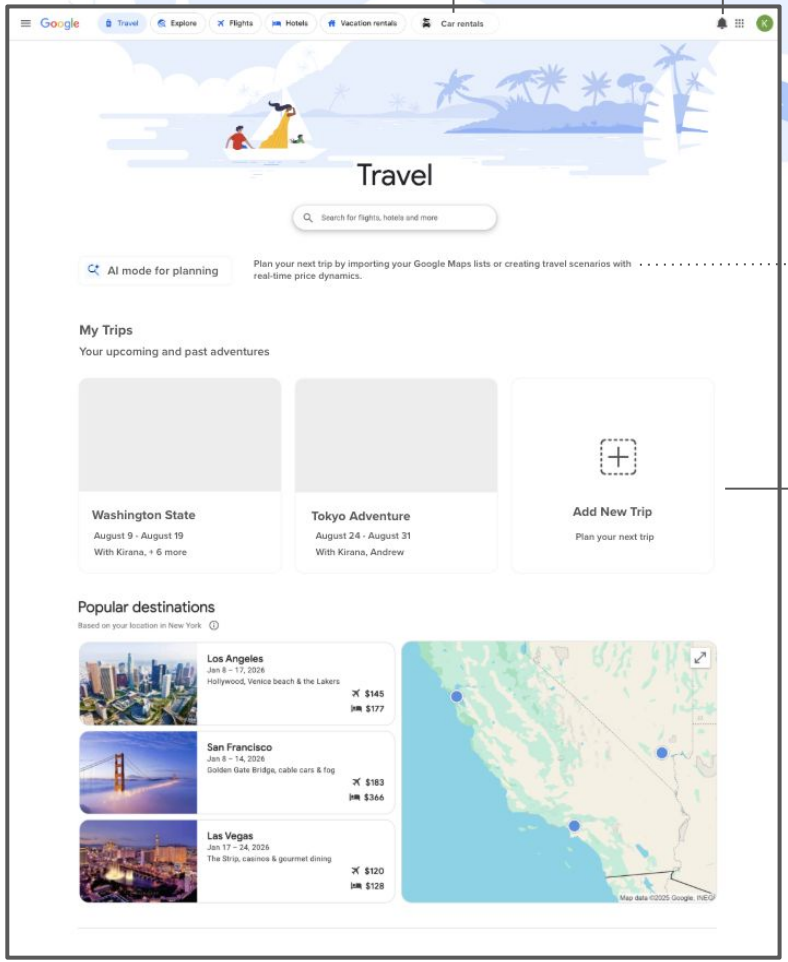
The Money Pit

1. Tonight Mode:
Requires location-aware logic and real-time hotel availability to solve a critical "panic" moment.

5. Wireframes: Desktop Mode

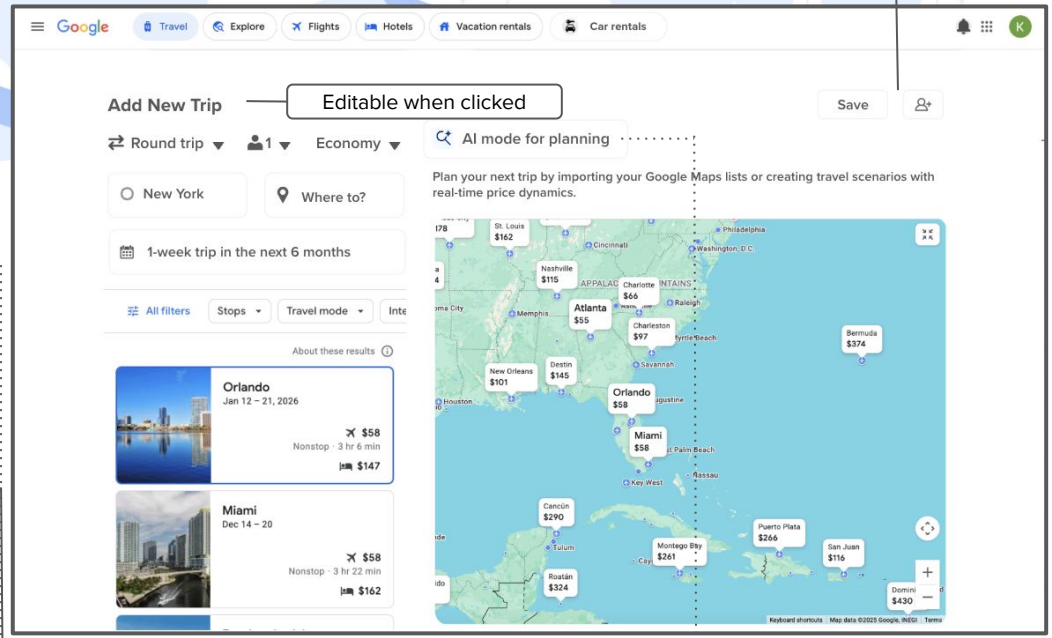
Homepage (W1)

Other features suggested



Homepage > Add New Trip (W2)

To save and/or share with others, if any.



This is the “**Active Trip**”, part of the Quick Wins strategy. If users click from here, it redirects to W2.

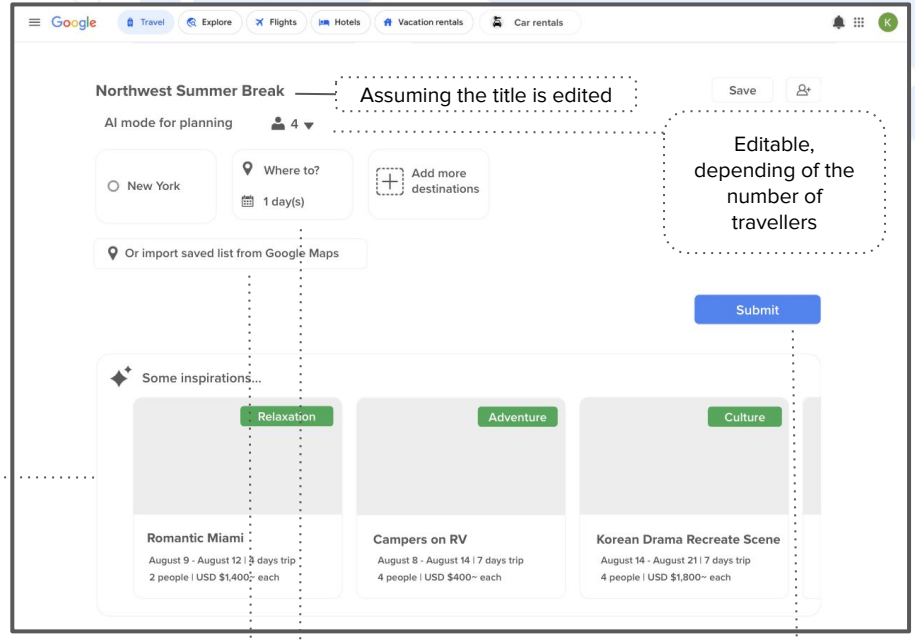
This is the “**Complex Scenario Planner**”, part of the Big Bets strategy. If users click from here, it redirects to W3.

User click here for “Complex Scenario Planner”. If users click from here, it redirects to W3.

Others unspecified here is already done by Google Travel

5. Wireframes: Desktop Mode

Homepage > Add New Trip > AI mode for planning (W3)



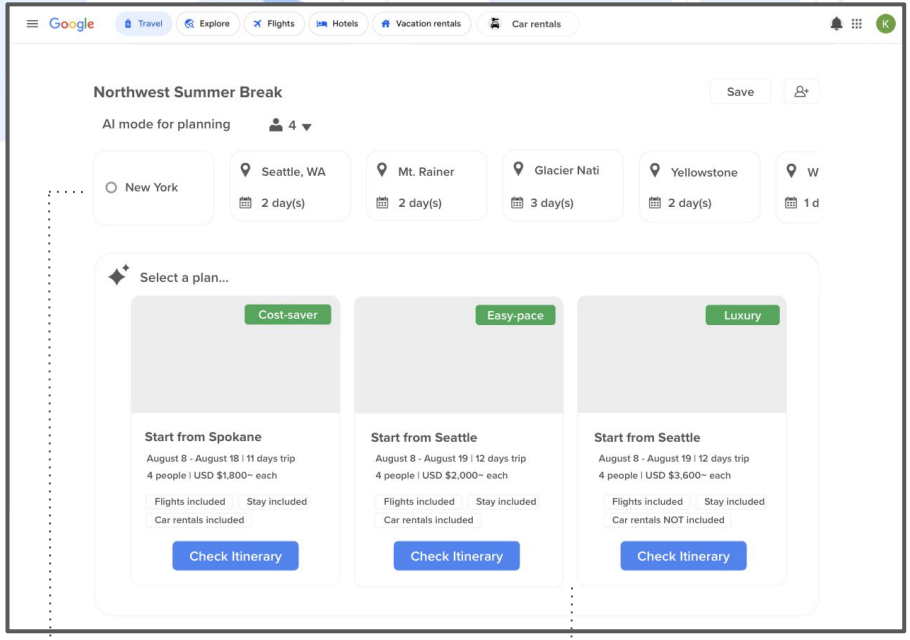
Serves as an inspiration point for users unsure where to go, with holiday-themed suggestions aligned to travel motivations [key theme: discovery gap].

Integration with Google Maps tackles the fragmentation issue.

This area is for users to type their destination. It incorporates the **[User Control and Freedom]** principle, allowing them to add additional destinations.

Click 'Submit' if user already satisfied with the itinerary. CLick this leads to W4.

Homepage > Add New Trip > AI mode for planning > Submit (W4)

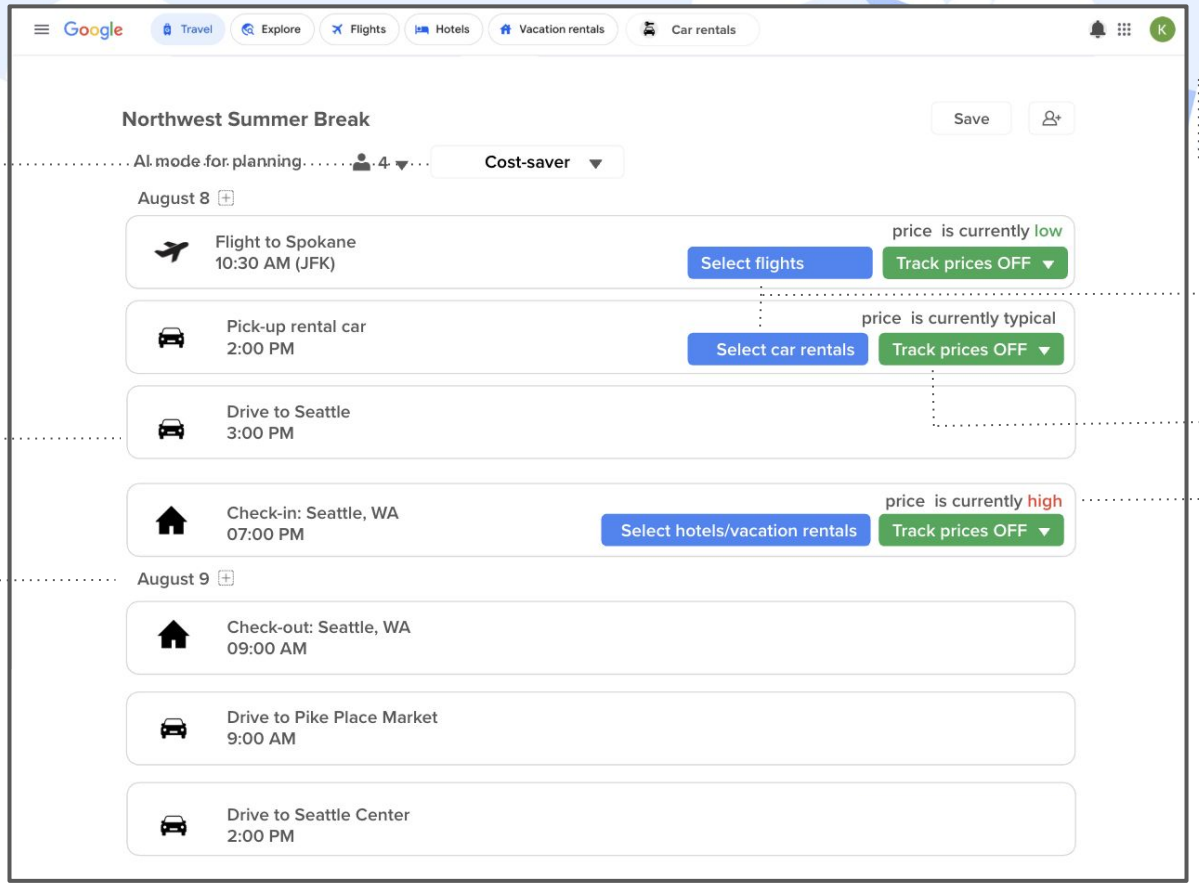


The destination inputs are here for user reference from the previous page..

Limiting the options to the 3 scenarios reduces cognitive load by minimizing the mental maths required across different model prices and reduces the time needed to make a decision, in line with Hick's Law **[key theme: total cost blind spot]** .
Users were previously forced to do mental maths to determine which configuration offered the best value. Because each model has different pricing, this make clear trade-offs without being overwhelmed by many price variations.

5. Wireframes: Desktop Mode

Homepage > Add New Trip > AI mode for planning > Submit > Check Itinerary



This indicates the plan the user is viewing.

Every blocks in the itinerary are collapsible and editable [**key theme: the "anchor" vs the "whole"**].

Add a personal itinerary, allowing users to modify it freely [**User Control and Freedom**].

Labels indicate activities supported by Google Travel, enabling direct selection and step-based status updates.

Track Prices label, allowing users to toggle price tracking ON/OFF.

Price status provides updates even when users haven't enabled price tracking [**Visibility of System Status**]

6. Usability Testing (Plan)

Objective: To evaluate if the new “Active Trip & Complex Scenario Planner” allows users to plan complex trips without resorting to external manual tools (spreadsheets/notes).

Format: Moderated remote usability testing (via Zoom/Meet).
Technique: Think aloud protocol (asking users to verbalize their thought process as they perform tasks).
Sample Size: N=5 participants (aiming for 3 "Planner" and 2 "Spontaneous Explorer").

Scenarios & Tasks

I will test 3 distinct flows that target our personas' specific pain points.

Task 1: The "Anchor" Booking (Target: Spontaneous Explorer)

- Scenario: "You found a great flight deal to Miami for your birthday. You want to lock in the flight price now, but you aren't ready to choose a hotel yet."
- Task: "Book the flight, but keep the trip 'Active' so you can add a hotel later."
- Success Criteria: User successfully books flight without triggering an error state or feeling the need to start a new search later.

Task 2: Building Scenarios (Target: Planner)

- Scenario: "You are planning a group trip to Tokyo. You have saved 3 flights and 3 hotels to your dashboard. You want to create two different options to show your friends: a 'Luxury Option' and a 'Budget Option'."
- Task: "Create two distinct trip scenarios from your saved items."
- Success Criteria: User intuitively uses the selection checkboxes and "Group" function without asking for help.

Task 3: The Comparison (Target: Planner)

- Scenario: "Your group is debating between the Luxury and Budget options. You need to know exactly how much money you save by choosing the Budget option."
- Task: "Compare the Total Cost of both scenarios side-by-side."
- Success Criteria: User identifies the price difference within the UI and does not attempt to open a calculator or write numbers down.

Success Metrics

Metric Category	Specific Metric	Goal/Benchmark
Quantitative	Task Completion Rate	>90% (Can they do it?)
	Time on Task	< 2 mins for Scenario Planner (vs. 10+ mins in Excel)
Qualitative	The “Spreadsheet Reflex”	Did the user reach for a pen/calculator? (Pass/Fail)
	Cognitive Load (SEQ)	On a scale of 1-7, how difficult was this task? (Target: > 5.5)
	Confidence	How confident are you that this Total Price is accurate?



Thank you