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## AI and the Algorithm: How tech is shaping venue discovery

Exclusive Zonal and NIQ insights  
into the growing role of AI solutions  
in hospitality and consumers'  
research habits and priorities

**Zonal** **NIQ**

GO Technology Report, [October 2026](#)

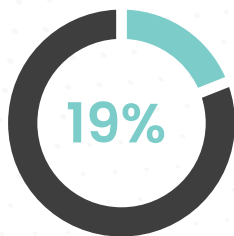


powered by **CGA** intelligence

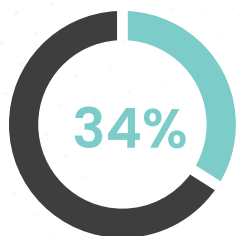
# AI and Discovery in Hospitality: Key numbers



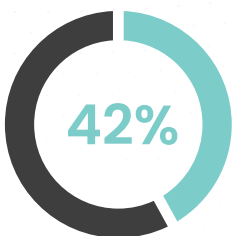
Of consumers would **consider using AI tools to plan a visit to pubs, bars and restaurants**



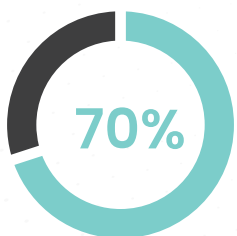
Of consumers **already use AI tools** when planning visits to pubs, bars and restaurants



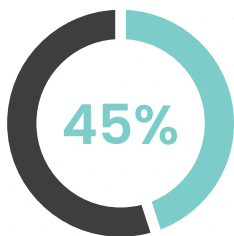
Of Gen Z use **AI tools to plan**



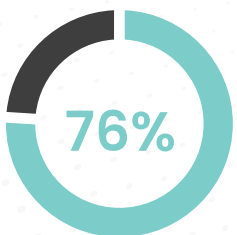
Of those who eat out **at least three times a week** use AI tools to plan



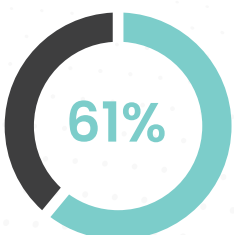
Of those using AI to plan visits make it their **sole or primary research source**



Of those using AI do so to **find reviews—the top purpose**



Of users entirely or mostly **trust AI engines and summaries**



Of business leaders think AI is **changing consumers' expectations**



# AI's arrival in hospitality

After a few years of steady adoption, Artificial Intelligence is beginning to enter the mainstream in hospitality.

That's the top takeaway from the latest GO Technology research, which finds that nearly one in five (**19%**) consumers use AI tools like ChatGPT or search engine summaries when they plan their visits to pubs, bars and restaurants. One in ten (**10%**) uses it during their visits.

For now, AI is a less important source of venue discovery than established methods like recommendations, which influence nearly half (**47%**) of consumers. Reviews (**32%**) and websites (**25%**) are more frequently used too. However, AI is catching up fast with other sources of venue research, like social media pages and accounts that consumers follow (**19%**).

Perhaps most significantly, while only 1-in-5 (**19%**) currently use AI throughout their hospitality experiences, half (**50%**) can see themselves using it in the future. As these tools become more prevalent in everyday life, this is a sign that a large and fast wave of adoption is on the way.

There are two more reasons why AI is so important. One is that its use is heavily dominated by younger adults (see page 4), who will be visiting venues for many years to come. Second, this is now a primary source of discovery for its users. Of those who use AI for venue research, a fifth (**20%**) use it to plan their entire visits, while half (**50%**) make it their first method before using other sources.

Longstanding discovery factors like word of mouth, guest reviews and social media aren't disappearing, and AI will be an additive to these forms of research rather than a replacement. However, with trust as well as take-up rising (see page 5), engagement will only increase.



## View from the leaders

NIQ's research of hospitality's leaders confirms the seismic impact of AI on consumers' behaviour. Well over two thirds (**71%**) agree that guests' venue discovery is increasingly driven by AI, while three in five (**61%**) think it is changing consumers' expectations.

Encouragingly, most leaders view AI as an opportunity rather than a danger. Only **13%** view it as a threat to their business, though **46%** haven't yet made up their minds.

While this indicates a good level of readiness for AI, many businesses in hospitality may not yet be fully equipped to adapt. Investment in tasks like Generative Engine Optimisation is vital to avoid being left behind in the rush to AI.

## AI: The new social media?

As we try to measure AI's impact on hospitality, perhaps the best comparisons are to be found with the transformations that social media brought about. Nearly a fifth of consumers say they use social media to research hospitality venues (**18%**) or products (**19%**)—a little short of spending decisions like media (**22%**) and clothing (**24%**), but a figure that shows how socials, especially TikTok and Instagram, are now embedded in purchasing. Before long, AI could wield even greater influence.

# AI in action: Five top targets for research

How do consumers actually use AI? GO Technology research shows that most are seeking staple information about a venue that would already be available elsewhere. Consumers aren't demanding an information revolution, but a means to reduce the snags and search friction that occurs when planning a visit. However, there is scope to see new use cases emerge, as people researching venues have a wide range of secondary queries that may not be so readily answered on websites or social media (see box). Here are the five top targets when they turn to AI.

## 1. Reviews (45%)

With nearly half of users seeking reviews, AI is fast becoming an alternative to platforms like TripAdvisor or Google Reviews. Pubs, bars and restaurants have long needed to encourage positive reviews and address negative ones, but they now face the additional challenge of ensuring that good ratings pull through to AI engines.

## 2. Prices (43%)

Wherever consumers look for information, prices are a key consideration, especially at times when spending is tight. While these are usually available on operators' websites, AI engines can quickly compare and contrast prices between venues—an attractive proposition for cost-conscious consumers.

## 3 Menus (38%)

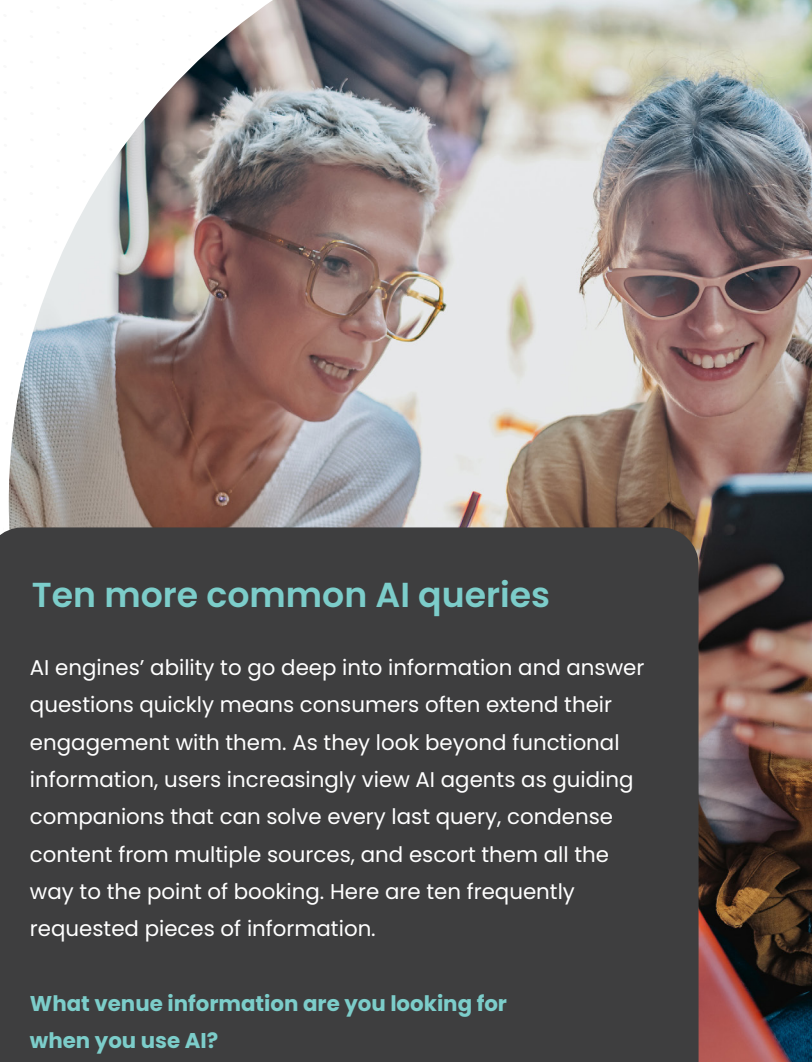
Menus are another piece of practical information that AI tools can neatly digest for browsers. Operators need to be alert to how menus are being presented by engines, and which dishes or drinks are prioritised in their results.

## 4. Opening times (35%)

Demand for opening times highlights the importance of ensuring that basic details about a venue are complete and up to date. Previous GO Technology research has shown how wrong information about a pub, bar or restaurant is a major frustration for visitors.

## 5. Deals and discounts (28%)

For price-conscious deal-hunters, special offers can make all the difference in venue selection. For venues where price is particularly important, getting this information near the top of an AI-powered summary should be a priority.



## Ten more common AI queries

AI engines' ability to go deep into information and answer questions quickly means consumers often extend their engagement with them. As they look beyond functional information, users increasingly view AI agents as guiding companions that can solve every last query, condense content from multiple sources, and escort them all the way to the point of booking. Here are ten frequently requested pieces of information.

### What venue information are you looking for when you use AI?

6. Booking processes (28%)
7. Travel considerations (25%)
8. Events and schedules (23%)
9. If the venue is accessible (22%)
10. If the venue is child-friendly (20%)
11. How busy the venue is (19%)
12. Other venues to visit nearby (18%)
- 13=. Allergen information (16%)
- 13=. If the venue is pet-friendly (16%)
15. Where to buy specific products (14%)

# Who's using AI?

## Five demographics of adopters

AI adoption is far from universal, so it's vital to understand who is most deeply engaged. GO Technology data reveals how usage skews heavily towards these five demographics.

### 1. Gen Z

Around a third (**34%**) of Gen Z adults use AI when they research hospitality venues to visit. That's nearly double the all-age average of **19%** and even further ahead of the usage levels of Gen X (**13%**). Usage falls away steeply with age, with just **5%** of the Boomer generation using AI to plan. Gen Z are also much more likely to make AI their only or primary source of research.

### 2. Regular visitors

There's a close correlation between the frequency of hospitality visits and the adoption of AI. This technology is used by more than two in five (**42%**) of those who eat out at least three times a week—a figure that is more than four times higher than among those who eat out once or twice a month (**10%**). Numbers are even lower for those going out every two to three months (**6%**) or every six months (**9%**).

### 3. High spenders

Guests who research with AI also tend to spend more when they go out. Nearly a quarter (**23%**) of those who spend an average of £60+ per head when they visit pubs, bars and restaurants say they are likely to use AI to find a venue, making them 4 percentage points more likely than average to do so. By contrast, only **14%** of those spending less than £5 a head are using AI to plan.

### 4. Londoners

As is the case with a lot of technology, consumers living in London are much more inclined to embrace AI. Nearly two in five (**39%**) use it when finding a venue to visit—more than double the rate of **16%** among those who live outside the capital. This reflects their relative affluence and more frequent eating out of Londoners compared to the rest of the country.

### 5. Social media users

GO Technology research shows a significant overlap between users of AI and social media. Followers on TikTok, Instagram and other platforms already spend a lot of time in digital spaces and trust the information they find there, so they are naturally more inclined to rely on AI too.

### In-venue use

While consumers primarily use AI before they go to a restaurant, pub or bar, it also plays a role during a visit.

For now, the number using AI in venues (**10%**) is much lower than those who use other forms of tech like self-service kiosks (**17%**), venue apps (**18%**), digital menus (**19%**) or venue websites (**22%**). This suggests that while AI research can help to eliminate frictions in planning, consumers see less value in it when they actually go out. Many will also be more inclined to switch off their digital activity in favour of socialising and relaxing.

However, as AI gets better at making personalised recommendations, its use in venues may grow. Two in five (**39%**) of those who use AI tools or engines do so to decide what to eat, and nearly as many (**36%**) turn to them for food and drink trends. This highlights the value of AI in open-ended research or inspiration-based tasks.

## The trust factor

As with any new technology in hospitality, AI must earn the trust of users. This has already reached good levels, with around three quarters entirely or mostly trusting AI engines (76%) and AI summaries on search engines (72%). Trust of AI engines is even higher among Gen Z (80%) and Millennials (81%), but it's far lower for older generations like Boomers (44%), who are less familiar with the technology.

Overall numbers compare favourably with the extent of trust of sources like social media pages that people follow (69%), reviews (68%) and websites (64%)—though recommendations from family and friends remain the most reliable source of all (88%). Despite questions about AI bias or false information in some quarters, most people believe these tools are dependable. This may also be because users are turning to AI to confirm information that is objective, or that they already feel to be true.

Of course, this leaves around a quarter (24%) of consumers who trust AI engines only somewhat, a little or not at all. Their trust may increase over time, though that depends on the developers who are building these tools rather than the operators themselves. This raises the difficult question of how brands can protect their reputation when so much of it is now in the hands of big tech companies.





## The view from NIQ

"Consumers have a huge range of technology at their disposal in hospitality, but AI-powered solutions might become their most powerful tools of all. While sources like review platforms and social media have their roles, many people view AI research as the ultimate all-rounder—a one-stop-shop for all the information they need when planning a visit.

If these tools make it easier for consumers to discover pubs, bars and restaurants, AI can be a positive development. But it brings with it some major challenges, including of how to ensure that outputs deliver accurate information, prioritise the right things and protect the reputation of the brand. AI is going to be a critical battleground for hospitality in the months and years to come, and businesses need to quickly understand how to win there."

*Karl Chessell, Director - Hospitality Operators and Food, EMEA, NIQ*



## The view from Zonal

"AI is rapidly becoming part of the customer journey. Consumers are moving beyond traditional search methods and are increasingly using AI to find recommendations, compare options and make more confident decisions about where to visit. It provides an easy way to find out different information in one place.

This shift presents a significant opportunity for operators to understand how customers are engaging with AI, and how to use it to enhance visibility of their venue. The businesses that recognise the transformative impact AI is having on venue discovery will be best placed to capture the attention of those who are visiting more frequently and spending more, reflecting that AI users are more valuable hospitality customers."

*Tim Chapman, Chief Commercial Officer, Zonal*



## About the report

This report is based on figures from Zonal and NIQ's exclusive GO Technology survey of 5,000 nationally representative British consumers in August 2026.

For more information about the research, please contact [info@zonal.co.uk](mailto:info@zonal.co.uk)