VISIT LAUDERDALE
EVERYONE UNDER THE SUN

Fantastic 5 Takeaways

First: The 5 W's	Who: Tracy Vaughan What: Phocuswright Conference 2025 When: Nov 18-20, 2025 Where: San Diego Why: We are a sponsor of this conference that rotates between the west coast (US) and Fort Lauderdale. It will be back at The Diplomat in 2026.
Fantastic Five Takeaway #1	The conference theme was "Game On" and was centered on the power of artificial Intelligence (AI). AI was essentially discussed in all sessions I attended, and the takeaway is that it is transforming how we book travel with a major trend towards AI that can plan, book and manage entire trips potentially threatening OTAs. AI becomes the operating system.
Fantastic Five Takeaway #2	I saw an example from Acai Travel, an AI centered start-up company, which presented its voice activated planning tool that works in conjunction with PayPal. It uses Large Language Models (LLMs), a new acronym for me, and is part of the "agentic" trend. The demo showed a Paris trip planned (voice activated) in less than 3 minutes where the agent suggests several hotels, makes preferred recommendation based on criteria such as view, price point, etc., and anticipates additional needs such as ground transportation and restaurants. All could be booked and secured with payment in this time frame. This notes the trend of the convergence of finance and OTAs as well.
Fantastic Five Takeaway #3	With that said though, there was consensus that AI still needs a human enabler that frontline staff provide with more personalized service versus completely replacing them. This point was reiterated by Barry Diller, Chairman of Expedia Group when asked if he was fearful of AI. He stated successful OTAs will lean into AI.
Fantastic Five Takeaway #4	Expedia Group presented their latest Trends research . . . key points. 10 mil searches/day, over a billion/month Top destinations in 2026 by search: Big Sky and Fort Walton Beach at #1 and 6 respectively, Japan, Vietnam, France, Canada, Mexico, Australia made the top 10. Sport related travel is trending with top tickets for sumo wrestling, curling, baseball, and Banana Ball. Hotel hopping is trending in major cities so travelers experience more than one hotel in destination. Set-jetting (movies/tv locations), reading and farm holidays are popular too.

Fantastic Five Takeaway #5	Lastly, another start-up venture called Data Appeal (part of the Almawave Group) has an agentic destination management tool that will transform how DMOs operate. Again, AI is pulling datasets to give insights to give real-time outputs/reports and even marketing plans.