



TRAVEL TECH

From using virtual reality to emulate real-life destinations to deploying robots to map out marine life, new technologies are revolutionising the travel sector

WORDS WILL MOFFITT

“ think as an industry, we tend to just not think big, not step outside,” Philippe Brown, founder of the travel firm Brown + Hudson, tells me. “That’s one reason why the virtual and augmented reality thing is of interest. It’s pushing people’s buttons.”

Pushing people’s buttons seems to be Brown’s forte. Since 2007 he has sought to represent a different calibre of travel company; one that creates truly bespoke journeys for discerning individuals who expect something more than luxury and beyond extraordinary. Be it holding interviews with clients to discern their psychological makeup, or utilising cutting-edge scientific research, Brown + Hudson has never not been innovative. Now it is using ChatGPT to help plan and execute its itineraries. “It goes into the mix in the same way that we have a library full of books or we have the internet,” Brown says. “We have brainstorm, and we come up with crazy ideas.”

Brown + Hudson is dabbling with virtual reality too, sending its creative team and travel experts to brainstorm with some of the world’s top VR thinkers. In their capable, button-pushing hands, travellers could be permitted to roam the backstreets of Marrakech, or experience an adrenaline-soaked drive in a hypercar through Nürburgring, the notorious German Grand Prix racetrack, all by donning a headset.

For now this is all rather hypothetical and outlandish: a scenario yet to be fully fleshed out and realised, but you wouldn’t bet against it turning travel on its head. After all, VR is already being used by real-life resorts. Six Senses, Shangri-La and Soneva properties have all turned to tech to enhance the booking process, giving guests 360-degree virtual reality resort tours to entice them to book.

The brand behind the magic is Igoroom, the brainchild of James South, founder and CEO of Gecko Digital, a leading virtual reality agency in Asia in the hospitality