

Getting Started with AI in Tourism

By Shane Giroux (ZU)

AI tools are now accessible to any small business with an internet connection. For tourism operators managing bookings, communications,

and operations with a lean team, they offer a meaningful shift: less time spent on repetitive writing tasks, more time on the work only you can do.

What these tools are — and aren't

What Has Changed

AI chat assistants like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot generate text by predicting the most useful response based on what you give them and what they were trained on. They are not searching the internet in real time. They do not know anything about your business unless you tell them. And when they don't know something, they don't say so — they fill the gap with confident-sounding text that may or may not be accurate.

Getting useful output: context, role, format

Most frustrating experiences with AI tools come down to underspecified prompts. Three things account for most of the difference between an output you'll rewrite and one you'll lightly edit.

- **Context** tells the tool who you are and what you're working with. The more specific you are, the less editing you'll need to do.
- **Role** tells the tool how to approach the task — the voice, the register, the assumed relationship with the reader. Without it, these tools default to a polished, generic marketing tone.
- **Format** tells the tool what to hand back. If you want three variations, ask for three. If you need a specific length or structure, say so explicitly.

Three places to start

Marketing and social content: High-volume, deadline-driven, language-based work is where AI saves the

most time. Social captions, email campaigns, listing descriptions, guest communication templates — a well-constructed prompt can produce a usable first draft in under a minute. The raw material is already in your head. The tool helps you get it out quickly.

Operational documentation: Every business carries institutional knowledge that rarely gets written down: onboarding procedures, checklists, safety briefings, communication standards. AI is effective here because you supply the knowledge and the tool organizes it. Paste in rough notes or point-form thoughts and ask it to turn them into a structured guide. Then ask it to flag steps where a newcomer would likely have questions. It reads your operation as an outsider would, and it will often surface gaps you've stopped noticing.

Strategic thinking: These tools have broad exposure to business strategy, pricing frameworks, and consumer behaviour. Before committing to a new package, pricing decision, or operational change, you can use an AI tool the way you'd use a knowledgeable colleague: describe the idea, ask for the strongest arguments for it, the risks you might be underestimating, and the questions you should be asking before you commit. You're still the decision-maker. You're just better informed.

Using these tools responsibly

Accuracy is your responsibility: If you didn't supply a fact in the prompt, verify it before it goes anywhere. This includes statistics, distances, safety information, and any

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claims about local history or culture. The tool generates confident text regardless of whether the information is correct.

Cultural and local context is yours to provide: AI models reflect the gaps and biases in their training data. Content touching on Indigenous tourism experiences, treaty land, or cultural practices requires careful review and, where the stakes are high, involvement of the right people. AI can help you draft. It cannot replace community knowledge or voice.

Keep personal data out of the prompt: Most AI tools process your input on external servers. Use AI to build the template or draft, then populate it with guest or staff information through your own systems.

One practical step before you start: when you create an account, spend two minutes reviewing the privacy settings. Most platforms let you turn off the setting that allows your conversations to be used to train the model. It takes two minutes and it matters if you're working with any business-sensitive material.

Where to begin

Take something you write from memory every season — a guest FAQ response, an arrival email, a packing list — and prompt a draft using the context-role-format approach. Compare it to what you'd normally send. Notice where it saved time and where it needed work. The operators who benefit most from these tools are not the most technical. They are the most willing to experiment.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Giroux

Shane is a Technology Director at zu.com, where he provides hands-on technical leadership and helps teams build and ship digital products with confidence. With over 20 years of experience across software development, management, and leadership, he brings a practical, end-to-end perspective on what it takes to design, develop, deploy, and support websites, applications, and integrated systems in complex environments. In his role, Shane guides technical strategy, standards, and mentorship, ensuring teams deliver solutions that are scalable, maintainable, and aligned to real business needs.

Shane is also an active leader in helping organizations adopt emerging technologies responsibly, including AI tools that support everyday work. He focuses on practical application: how teams can use AI to speed up content creation, improve consistency, and support better customer communication without compromising accuracy, privacy, or brand integrity. With experience spanning modern front-end frameworks (React, Vue, TypeScript), enterprise platforms (Drupal, Symfony), and Python-based development, Shane helps connect the possibilities of AI to the realities of implementation, governance, and long-term sustainability.

