**“Conversations On Turning 20”: From Bengkulu to the Boardroom: Caesar Indra On Traveloka’s Start, Resets and Future Impact**

When you get to the ripe young age of 20, you’re bound to collect lots of stories – not only about the past but lessons for the future.

As WiT marks its 20th year in 2025, we turn the spotlight on our community, our tribe pioneers and leaders, to tell their stories and share their views on the evolution of online travel and technology.

We ask them to look back on the past and their early days, reflect on the present and why this moment is pivotal for online travel and get them to imagine the future, the next 20.

This special WiT Studio series, “Conversations On Turning 20”, is the collective story of WiT.

As a Chinese saying goes, 以古为鉴，可以知兴替

“By using history as a mirror, one can understand the rise and fall of things.”

**Episode 18: Caesar Indra, President, Traveloka**

What happens when a bunch of scrappy young Indonesians try to digitize travel in a country where bank transfers were still done manually? You get **Traveloka**, now one of South-east Asia’s most influential travel platforms.

In this candid and deeply personal interview, **Caesar Indra**, President of Traveloka, retraces the company’s remarkable 13-year journey from solving offline payments to shaping the future of AI-powered travel in Asia.

**Key Takeaways:**

• **It Started with a Simple Question**  
“How do we make travel accessible to Indonesians?” What sounds like a basic mission turned out to be deeply complex, especially in a market lacking digital infrastructure. From building their own bank-transfer hardware to manually convincing airlines to come online, Traveloka didn’t just build a platform, it helped build an ecosystem.

• **Defining Moments That Shaped the Business**

* *The Early Years*: Getting taken seriously as young entrepreneurs in a risk-averse industry.
* *COVID’s Wake-Up Call*: Pivoting from “grow at all costs” to a disciplined, ROI-driven model.
* *The Meta-to-OTA Leap*: When customers started calling Traveloka for help even when bookings were made elsewhere, it became clear: full-stack service was the only way forward.

• **Why Indonesia Is Still Just Getting Started**  
  
Despite its growth, Caesar believes Indonesia’s travel market is far from mature. With most accommodation bookings still offline and travel activities just taking off, “We’ve barely scratched the surface.” Traveloka’s mission is evolving, from making travel accessible *to* Indonesians, to making *Indonesia* accessible to the world.

• **Sustainability and the Next Generation of Travelers**  
  
With over 40 million monthly active users, Caesar sees Traveloka as a platform for good. He shares how the company plans to promote lesser-known destinations, work with local communities, and surface sustainable travel options, “not just Bali, but beyond.”

• **AI, Personalisation, and the Future of Travel**  
Looking ahead, Caesar envisions Traveloka as a **personal concierge** powered by AI, anticipating needs, handling disruptions silently in the background, and offering hyper-personalised itineraries. “The winners will be those who make affordable, sustainable options visible.”

• **From Bengkulu to Building Bridges**  
Growing up in a small Sumatran town, travel changed Caesar’s life. Now, he wants Traveloka to change the lives of the next generation, by bringing more travellers to lesser-known destinations and creating economic ripple effects for local communities.

**Watch the full video to understand not just how Traveloka rose, but where the future of Southeast Asian travel is headed and why this region’s story is just beginning.**

**IT STARTED WITH A SIMPLE QUESTION. THE ANSWERS WEREN’T EASY.**

05:20.89

Caesar

Yeah, I think when started ah You know, we started 13 years ago and I joined shortly after. ah When we started, we had simple question, right? How do we make travel more accessible? How do we make the world accessible to Indonesians?

05:42.36

Caesar

And it's such a simple question, but very hard to answer ah because Indonesia itself is a developing economy. if you um I think 13 years ago,

05:54.97

Caesar

ah travel was hardlyily made ah travel booking was hardly made online. And ah we were very scrappy. So we had to be very scrappy because a lot of the problems are there, but there's no infrastructure to to to solve those problems.

06:12.29

Caesar

and uh you know we as a group had shared uh the empathy and appreciation appreciation of these challenges that happen uh early in the days and you know me personally i'm i was very excited you know coming out of a small town being able to ah ah work on solution together with the group to solve real problem that's faced by average indonesians and

06:43.36

Caesar

actually made real positive contribution to an imperfect place like Indonesia. we we employ the we we We were very hands-on and we had to build something that's very bespoke.

06:59.05

Caesar

ah For example, you know we as an online we are known as an online travel tech company, but not many people know that the first problem that we had to solve was around payment.

07:12.24

Caesar

So we didn't build that. So we had to build a hardware to scale bank transfer because um at the time, typical trends of transaction was done via manual bank to bank transfer.

07:26.13

Caesar

You give me like your your bank account and I would um i will transfer the money manually. But that one um usually is is very hard to and to know like who's sending the money.

07:37.15

Caesar

And can it's just very difficult if you have hundreds or thousands of transactions happening at the same time. So that's the first thing we saw. We built a hardware ah really to scale bank to bank transfer.

07:52.39

Caesar

And it turned out the solution was really successful, and we managed to scale our flight booking transaction at the time.

08:04.45

Caesar

um Later, you know, at the at the same time, i think we were a bit ahead of our time. So the challenges at the time was that um the banking infrastructure wasn't ready for online commerce, online travel booking.

08:21.64

Caesar

The airline infrastructure also wasn't ready because majority of their booking was offline. So I think for me, it really, it took a lot of my time to to share this vision, to make them understand, to paint a picture of the future and really convince them that, hey, you you you guys need to invest in this the the infrastructure. and And it's really I mean, um we cannot stop this anymore because the customers are are looking for it, right? they They really want to make booking online. And if you don't um invest on in this,

09:05.54

Caesar

ah a you won't be able to compete also with with with with the rest of the players. So it's it's really about convincing and educating them that it's important to build the infrastructure for them.

**DEFINING MOMENT #1: FROM “BUNCH OF KIDS” TO CHANGEMAKERS**

09:21.06

Caesar

You know, i think yeah you when you asked me about defining moment, ah you the first one I remember when we start. So we were 13 years younger.

09:33.24

Caesar

And we were just a bunch of kids. And i think a lot of airlines view us as, ah you know, just saw us as and these new kids on the block that create reasons for them.

09:47.26

Caesar

ah So it's very hard to be taken seriously. ah But to me, it was a challenge, right? So it's a challenge. You know, we we want you to be to know that this is serious. And, ah you know, we really want them to understand and really believe that we truly can create a positive impact to the industry.

10:09.71

Caesar

And ah so we worked really hard because none of us came from ah a family who has connection, you know,

10:20.28

Caesar

So for us, it's very hard to get through the door to to get to the right ah decision makers and you even get a meeting to the with be the right person. So we really had to work very hard and take our time to be able to get that recognition.

10:37.55

Caesar

But if we fast forward to today, you know i'm quite the I'm quite proud and and privileged that the government,

10:49.53

Caesar

the partners, airline accommodation, travel activities, as well as in the communities really view us as a changemaker in the travel and tourism industry.

11:04.16

Caesar

and And that's really, ah I mean, if you remember where we were 13 years ago, it's it's I really think we we've we've made a lot of progress

**DEFINING MOMENT #2: THE COVID SHAKE-UP CALL**

11:17.20

Caesar

ah So that's defining um moment number one. The second defining moment was COVID. And I'm sure you remember what happened.

11:28.22

Caesar

ah But for us, um up to Up until COVID, it was you know it was a time where capital were more capital was more accessible.

11:42.45

Caesar

um So we we our focus was really grow, grow, grow, right? So we wanted to grow at all costs. But COVID really changed how we operate as a company for good permanently.

11:56.31

Caesar

um When COVID happened, when travel stopped, we thought very hard how we can grow. Still grow fast, however, but in a sustainable sustainable way and um it's It's not easy, for for at least for us at the time. so that But that translated into permanent habit.

12:16.68

Caesar

To give you an example, how we allocate capital today, we try to we always try to allocate capital wisely to make sure that um every every dollar that we invest in um generate the right return on investment.

12:34.11

Caesar

So we we scaled back on some of the businesses that are not really relevant, for example, food delivery and and others, and really focus on on on on key businesses that matters to us.

12:50.59

Caesar

We also invested a lot in automation to in to to create a better user experience, and at the same time, reducing the cost of operations. And ah we've we've done we've invested heavily since COVID and still doing so until today.

13:10.45

Caesar

And lastly, we now always operate with you know financial discipline in mind. And you know all this habit was created during COVID. So that is the big defining moment for for for for me and also for Tribaloka as a whole.

**REWIND TO THE BEGINNING: WHY THE PIVOT FROM META TO OTA**

13:51.38

Caesar

yes Yeah, the reason we switched from Meta to ah to booking, I think there are there are a few reasons. The first one,

14:02.55

Caesar

when Indonesians booked through us as a meta, even though we directed to our partner, but they still call us if there's problem with the ticket.

14:13.18

Caesar

So we are still serving. So we we weren't really meta. We are probably a meta search, but with a customer service. right so and And secondly, um there were not many online ah customers or online players ah who are using the Metasearch service.

14:39.61

Caesar

So the airline ist wasn't ready to pay. yeah There were not many online travel agents at the time, so the business model was an the business model was a bit ah too early to to start at the time.

14:57.27

Caesar

ah Which is why we think, hey, why don't we ah help the customers to book on our platform? um And hence, you know I talk about the airline infrastructure, infrastructure so structure right?

15:11.17

Caesar

So even as a booking platform, the airline infras infrastructure wasn't ready at the time. So there's this this whole um this whole lot of back-end infrastructures that ah that wasn't ready to handle all this online travel demand, where we really had to play in a way play a role in in really shaping one by one.

**WHEN DID PEOPLE START TAKING YOU SERIOUSLY?**

16:04.97

Caesar

course. Of course, it didn't happen overnight, but I think i remember a conversation when I met airlines.

16:16.95

Caesar

they started saying, hey, about half of our planes are filled by ah people buying from Trevoloka. So that's really a you know ah proud moment when when they say that.

16:30.35

Caesar

we We actually bring business to you guys. So ah that's that's really a ah validation of our ah work and and in a way, but recognition of what we can do for for our partners.

17:01.29

Caesar

And you know um at the airport, I started seeing, at the time there was no, people had to print boarding pass, right? They got, sorry, not boarding pass, the e-ticket. They got used to, they they they they still they were still used to printing you know the paper ticket.

17:19.94

Caesar

And You can see when you line up to check in at the airport, you can see about half of them maybe bringing like Trepoloka printed tickets. So that's really like, yeah, a really moment where, you know, it's really a validation of what you are what do you do really is working.

**TRAVELOKA HAS INDONESIA: DO YOU NEED A BIG HOME MARKET TO BE SUCCESSFUL?**

18:37.82

Caesar

I really think that, you know, for a platform, having ah not necessarily home market, but really a scale in specific category and and sizable customer base ah for that specific category, that that really matters.

18:58.85

Caesar

ah So people know what your brand stands for. and For us, I think Traveloka, people know this is a place where you buy travel in in in Southeast Asia, flight tickets, accommodation um for travel activities. So so it's it's really, ah I think, it's really having ah sizable scale in specific category in one market that that really matters.

19:25.87

Caesar

that's That's what I believe.

19:27.51

Caesar

However, I think you know what we've been doing as a company, of course, now we are operating in eight markets in APEC.

19:41.75

Caesar

Of course, from there, then then you know we we we what what we did was trying to replicate what we did in Indonesia to other markets with localised, with local flavour and so on and so on. And and so far it's been quite working.

19:57.81

Caesar

and And yeah, we we are a big believer of of that approach localisation.

**FROM META TO OTA, FROM INDONESIA TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA, WHAT’S THE NEXT LEAP?**

20:35.52

Caesar

I think for Traveloka, we well, we've expanded from Indonesia only travel platform to now operating in eight markets in Asia Pacific.

20:51.08

Caesar

Most recently, we ah we serve you know we entered Australia ah last year and earlier in the year we entered Japan. um But that's where the i mean the that's where the opportunity is, right? Within Asia Pacific, there is growing so middle class segment who are eager to travel.

21:15.21

Caesar

And um But for us, we are still figuring out right now. It doesn't mean what work in Indonesia really works really works immediately in Australia.

21:27.92

Caesar

So ah we the way we we capture opportunities to understand what the local customer preferences and really tweak our solution based on the local local preference.

21:42.97

Caesar

So our playbook in Indonesia won't work in in Japan, so we will have to understand what japan Japanese travelers want and really tweak our offerings. ah in for For example, in Indonesia, we have been given the strength of our brand.

22:00.89

Caesar

we Our focus is really now on building and and strengthening our inventories. um talking to our partners airline partners accommodation partners travel activities partners the government to make sure we can present the the best selection and and most affordable travel products for for our customers but in japan we nobody knows traveloka so it's really about introducing our brand to the market it's about building credibility which is why we've been

22:37.01

Caesar

working closely with with with local partners as well as organizations like JETRO, the Japan External Trade Organization, to really um discuss with them how we how can we leverage our our platform to further their economy in and and and tourism.

23:01.31

Caesar

So, yeah, there's a lot of opportunity that can be captured through collaboration and understanding of each market.

**DOES MADE-IN-ASIA GIVE YOU AN ADVANTAGE IN EXPANSION IN THE REGION?**

23:25.73

Caesar

you ah Maybe. I think, you know, maybe I can speak on behalf of Trebloka. I think what what differentiates us i mean we are scrappy still uh and and that's what we like we are we we came from an environment where inra infrastructure is just not ready not there so i think being able to accept that imperfection maybe that difference set different set differentiate us from from the rest and we are willing to to uh

23:59.54

Caesar

to to really ah be flexible and and make adjustments to be able to cater the local market. Not sure if it's being Asian, but more like where we where we came from, how how we grew up as a company that really helped set us apart in entering the market.

**THE INDONESIA OPPORTUNITY: “YOU’VE BARELY SCRATCHED THE SURFACE”**

24:43.03

Caesar

um I absolutely agree. I think Indonesia, ah a lot of the the bookings are still happen, ah still happen offline. for For example, accommodation, online penetration is still, still like I can't remember the number, but it's it's there's still a lot of...

25:02.90

Caesar

There will be a lot of offline to online movement, so there's still room for growth in in travel. Travel activities is just starting, right? it's ah It's a new category. People are now used to make the bookings through online platform.

25:19.75

Caesar

and And, you know,

25:23.74

Caesar

And in terms of inbound, Indonesia is increasingly popular as as as a destination. um not not so So people start thinking not not only Bali, but there are actually more destinations in Indonesia to visit, like Yogyakarta,

25:42.33

Caesar

um sammaa bunling and so on and so on. And these are, um these are destinations where I think lies the opportunity and I mean for Traveloka to capture those inbound travelers, not only directly from our platform from Southeast Asia to Indonesia, but we also work with a number of partners to to our B2B business to share our inventory and and and they can sell to their own market and bring travelers to to Indonesia.

26:18.43

Caesar

So I truly believe I'm in Indonesia and there's still a lot of room for growth.

**YOU STARTED WITH THE MISSION OF MAKING TRAVEL ACCESSIBLE TO ALL INDONESIANS? IS YOUR NEW MISSION MAKING INDONESIA ACCESSIBLE TO ALL TRAVELLERS?**

26:41.60

Caesar

uh yeah yeah i never thought of that but of course right um which is why i mean we've been actively uh sharing our our inventories as well um in in markets where we operate outside indonesia we so So the way we work, we work with tourism boards also.

27:02.68

Caesar

the For example, the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia to bring in inbound travelers promoting destinations. We work with influencers to to promote new destinations. We have we actually have ah quite a sizable network of influencers.

27:19.21

Caesar

um and and um of course promoting alternative destinations so people don't just go to Bali but they are actually more a place to go.

27:30.48

Caesar

Not only Indonesia but we work with um and a number of ah tourism tourism boards ah like like we work with Finet in Vietnam TAT in Thailand to promote um less known destinations.

27:47.46

Caesar

So yeah, I guess that's a, that's, that's a, yeah, we never really

27:54.93

Caesar

so explicitly say that as a mission, but in fact, that's what we have been doing day to day.

**IF THE INDONESIA OPPORTUNITY IS SO BIG, WHY NOT STAY HOME? WHY SCALE AND RISK DILUTION?**

28:30.53

Caesar

Yeah, but that was, yes, yes, that was the first mission. Of course, now our mission is is is bigger than Indonesia. um i ah I think... ah

28:44.64

Caesar

I think, you you know, if you if you think from the customer point of view, Indonesian travelers, they don't just travel domestically. um Yes, we want to make ah travel accessible by Indonesians at the time.

28:58.93

Caesar

And now Southeast Asian travelers. But Indonesians and Southeast Asians, they travel beyond Indonesia. So so for example, in within Southeast Asia, ah they travel to Malaysia, travel to Vietnam, Thailand, and and hence um having presence in each of these destinations um also in a way serving this mission.

29:22.92

Caesar

uh we also uh of course not yeah we also work indirectly with our partners to be able to really make other destinations accessible by by um south asians such as you know european destinations uh american destination and so on so uh to make travel accessible it's not just from from the uh the the you know, the the source market point of view, but also there's also supply point of view where we need to be able to present a wide range of selections to make them accessible, ah to make it easier to book, to find, and ah most importantly, the price is competitive for them.

**THE NEXT 20: WHAT MAKES YOU EXCITED?**

30:20.93

Caesar

I think yeah ah we are as a company, we are managing for for the long term. ah We, in the long run, we want to make positive contribution and we believe it's important for us to contribute to make tourism more sustainable.

30:40.42

Caesar

and And I'm very excited about having trust tourism that is more ah responsible, more sustainable. You know, we as a platform can play role in there.

30:52.33

Caesar

ah We have millions of people engaged with our platform every day. We have more than 40 million monthly active users engaged in our platform. and we believe we can make a great ah we we can make an impact and really guide our customers in large scale, educate them about educate them about sustainable travel options, as well as presenting the options in our platform.

31:19.58

Caesar

um The winners, I believe, is there are those who can present affordable travel products to to to the customers, as well as those who make these sustainable travel options visible in the platform. So I'm very excited about that future.

**WHAT ABOUT YOUR KIDS (8 AND 13 NOW)? HOW WILL THEY TRAVEL?**

32:12.98

Caesar

Yeah, so, so um, yeah I think the it the behavior will be different from experience. I mean, for me, at as a child travel was luxury you know because travel was expensive um long time ago but today as think for our kids they are know they are savvy they more savvy uh they are as a traveler they they've they've seen a lot of places and travel are actually more affordable um so and and and

32:49.28

Caesar

to them they are not first-time traveler and they probably care more about they want more option they want more quality they are probably more aware of the impact of travel on on on on environment i would say these generations their generations are more informed thanks to social media so it will be a different way of travel i think You know, i would imagine as a platform, really understanding what this type of travelers want, being able to um create a hyper-personalized offer.

33:32.59

Caesar

That's very important. And that's where AI plays a role, right? You know, um truly understand what your customer what our customer wants and presenting the option that they are looking

REWIND TO THE START WHEN YOU HAD TO CONVINCE AIRLINES OF A DIGITAL FUTURE. WHAT ARE YOU TELLING THEM NOW ABOUT THIS AI MOMENT?

34:29.38

Caesar

I don't think we we haven't got to that point yet, ah to be frank. but What we are trying to build, i at least to as a platform, we are trying to make sure that the user what the user sees is personalized ah to what day they really are looking for.

34:51.64

Caesar

And we want to make travel as seamless as possible. So um the conversation we with our partners goes beyond just price transactions and commercial. right it it it It really touch you know um the post-travel experience. How do we handle disruption in travel?

35:11.99

Caesar

How do we make sure that customer experience is great? right that That's really what matters to us. you know in In the world of um AI, it's really about building using i to build a very personalized um platform in the future. So it's as if it's as as as if the platform is will be your personal concierge.

35:39.5

Caesar

so um we ah we we want travel disruption not becoming a headache for for customers and that really um and that requires a lot of conversation with our partners how do we handle you know changes in the itinerary and so on and so on so ultimately we are seeing a future where where um our customers don't have to worry if there is travel disruption in their in their in their travel.

36:09.87

Caesar

um The platform will take care for them. They don't have to call customer service. Everything happens in the back end. So hoping we can get there at some point.

**SO WHAT’S THE ROLE OF HUMANS IN 20 YEARS?**

36:32.64

Caesar

No, I think ah yeah that's a good question. I cannot predict the future. But I think a human, I think you know all this this emergence in AI, I really think they this is just a tool.

36:47.14

Caesar

And this is a new tool, that's a new technology. Human just needs to really know how to use this tool, right? change the the workflow, how how do you take advantage?

37:00.10

Caesar

It's just about learning new tools. so so human will still oh be there, maybe enhance, right? There will be more productive, smarter with the support of this new tool.

37:12.33

Caesar

Just like how we use Excel for the first time. I think it was called Lotus 1, 2, 3 if I remember. Yeah. And that's that's game changer, right? So so it's very similar.

37:24.98

Caesar

That's my opinion

**REWIND TO THE START: YOU BUNCH OF KIDS DISRUPTED TRAVEL 13 YEARS AGO. WHO WILL DISRUPT YOU 20 YEARS ON?**

37:50.28

Caesar

Wow that's so a difficult question. um

37:56.80

Caesar

What can disrupt our business? I think a new way of interaction might might the Well, we need to to understand the way ah this new generation interacts with now. They are getting used to a more natural language interaction, like chat GPT style interaction.

38:21.61

Caesar

And that's probably the emerging human computer interaction that we need to take into account and in in in the way we design our product.

38:37.84

Caesar

Yeah, and and yeah that if you ask me, yeah that's probably it. We are seeing, i I think we're seeing it's more natural for or human to

38:49.60

Caesar

to interact with computer with with app using natural language. It's becoming popular these days, so I wouldn't be surprised.

WHAT WILL TRAVELOKA LOOK LIKE 20 YEARS FROM NOW?

39:06.68

Caesar

Ah, that's a very hard question. ah Maybe yeah even five years from now, it's very difficult. but but we won But our platform, we think, will'll be a will act as a personal concierge for our customers.

39:27.11

Caesar

It will be hyper-personalized. As I said, the platform will know us better than we do and be able to help plan travel very quickly, very fast, ah make the right recommendation for seamless travel, managing travel disruption seamlessly in the background.

39:49.96

Caesar

ah so So travel will be a lot more personalized and seamless. you know Yeah, that's that's but that's yeah that's the future we are probably seeing.

TRAVEL CHANGED YOUR LIFE AS A KID GROWING UP IN BENGKULU, SUMATRA. HOW DOES TRAVELOKA WANT IT TO CHANGE THE LIVES OF THE NEXT GENERATION OF KIDS?

40:31.13

Caesar

I think you know the role that we've played is really uncovering destinations, right? In Indonesia, um they are if If you remember, if you if you if you know a long time ago, people know destination by word of mouth or maybe they read in newspaper, magazine.

40:53.02

Caesar

But what we are doing is actually showing more destinations by showing these new destinations to our customers. ah working with local partners um in in that community.

41:05.23

Caesar

We are bringing more travelers into that less popular destinations and by having travelers go there, it creates opportunity for the local people who then for them they can they can

41:27.13

Caesar

offer more over services to to the tourists. So our role here as a platform is really creating that, I would say, economic multiplier through in tourism, not only just for the same popular destinations like Bali, but there are other destinations, smaller destinations that we we we hope, I hope, that we can really create positive impact on