**“Conversations On Turning 20”: Stephan Ekbergh on Near-Deaths, New Life and Renaissance**

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 4: Stephan Ekbergh, Founder & CEO, Travelstart**

Born and raised in Sweden and now living in Cape Town, South Africa, this Swedish entrepreneur has had more near-death experiences than probably the number of years WiT’s been around.

A man ahead of his time, he got into the online travel business in the mid-1990s with Mr Jet – actually wait, before that, he built the largest consolidator in Sweden called International Tours. And wait, there’s another company he built called Final Call.

But it was the arrival of the Netscape browser that made him realise this was where the future lies and that’s when Mr Jet came into being, and then he got jetted off (fired in other words) by the investor. With $25,000 in his pocket, he wondered what he should do next – the last thing he wanted actually was to start another OTA – but then he got told by his wife that was the only thing he knew, and so he’d better do that.

Thus was Travelstart born. This is the whole story.

Video

**THE BEGINNING BEFORE THE START**

**08:58.31 - 11:28.43**

**NEAR-DEATH MOMENTS**

11:46.07 – 14:36.32

**NEW LIFE, NEW CONTINENT**

14:49.73 - But one one unexpected and positive thing was to launch in South Africa, which was... 15:51.97

**DOING BUSINESS IN AFRICA**

16:10.52 - 16:43.78

**THE COVID RECKONING**

16:55.96 – COVID, of course, came and we had to rethink what we're about. And I had to think about why am I doing this in the first place?

18:17.06

**BEST FUN YET**

18:29.17

So and I think that personally, i I'm turning 65, I've actually turned 65 this year and um and I think I'm actually having more fun than I've had in my whole working life right now.

18:45.63

Stephan Ekbergh

um And, you know, I live in the greatest city in the world. I work with some fantastic people. um and We do fun things together with Web & Travel.

**20 YEARS ON, THE RENAISSANCE AGE**

20:18.97 – 27:10.52