**Transcript**

**FARISYA:** First, let's start with an introduction. A brief bit about yourself: age, occupation, and how often you travel.

**ILY:** Hi. My name is Ily. I'm turning 33 in February. I'm an IT project manager. And how often do I travel? Well, that depends. I would say ==once every quarter, but usually with one big trip every year.== Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, are you usually traveling solo or else?

**ILY:** Yes. I think of all the trips since I started traveling—and I mean actually traveling—in 2016, which is without my parents, for work, for vacations, and leisure. So, 2016 is when I really did it on my own. Out of all those trips that I've done from 2016 up till now, I would say it's ==only less than five times that I actually went with someone else. Yeah. But for the most part, it's solo.==

**FARISYA:** Is your travel usually overseas or just in Malaysia?

**ILY:** Ah, it's all around, whether in Malaysia or, you know, international travels. I do stuff alone, yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, you prefer international over local traveling?

**ILY:** I would say ==I prefer international travels because I grew up in many parts of Malaysia, so I have seen Malaysia. I wouldn't say as a whole, but I have experienced things in Malaysia.== But I do enjoy seeing the outside world a lot more. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, what is usually the reason you travel?

**ILY:** Family, for one. ==I would say family is usually the biggest push factor.== I've got family across the globe, in Europe, in Australia, in the West and East. I have family here and there. So, I think for me, if it's a big trip, it's usually to see family and then do something else for myself. Especially if I'm traveling to the West, if I'm traveling to Europe, I would

have to go see family and then do something else for myself, like a solo trip and stuff like that. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** When you're traveling, how important is budget versus the quality of the experience?

**ILY:** Maybe if you asked me when I was younger, I would say budget is important. But even when I was younger, I found workarounds around it. In the sense that you don't have to sacrifice your budget as much to experience things. For me, it also depends on a person's preferences. I know some people go for holidays and want to go on a cruise or a specific shopping trip. I don't do that. What I enjoy is cultural experience. I like walking around. I like sightseeing. I don't necessarily have to go for extravagant things to enjoy a holiday or to travel. So, for me, you need money for the budget, but I know some people are very particular about where they stay throughout that period of time. For me, if I were to get a single room in a hostel, it'd be fine. I mean, I'm a bit too old for bug bites and everything already, but if I were to get a single room in a hostel with an en-suite, then I'm sorted. I don't need to stay at a five-star hotel.

**FARISYA:** Because some people are very particular about it.

**ILY:** Yeah, but for me, I'm fine. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, do you prefer popular tourist spots or hidden ones?

**ILY:** I think it's a bit of both. Especially if you're traveling to places that have historical monuments. When I was in Italy earlier this year, I made sure that I went to the Vatican City because of how monumental it is as a religious symbol. It's like the Mecca for Christians, you know? I think you have to do it. So, touristy things, yes, but I also appreciate a good hidden gem. It's just a matter of how I plan my time to make sure that I have a good balance of the historical monuments, the hidden gems, the food, and the walking. Because I like to walk. I want to be able to explore the city, not just as a tourist, but I want to be able to see the place the way the locals see it. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** Oh, that's a good one, yeah. So, how do you usually plan a holiday? What apps or tools do you use?

**ILY:** I have a central Word document that has an itinerary of how I plan and how I want to do things, which includes my flight schedule in and out, the flight number, the flight details, what time I have to leave the house, and what time I have to be there. But when it comes to the actual travel itself, when I'm already there, I don't have a set schedule as to what time I have to be in every single location, unless it's something that I've already bought a ticket for, like a particular sightseeing or a tour. Then I would understand having a set time. But for the most part, before I go, I usually have a list of places that is in my "wish list" that I want to go to. Then, when I arrive, I have a look around, see the weather, see the situation there, and then I start planning things. When the wish list is a priority, then I would say, "Okay, this first day I just want to walk around. And then maybe the second day I want to do Vatican City. And the third day I want to chill, eat, go to Naples," for example, you know? There's a basic idea to it, and then there's also foundational stuff that has to happen, and then there are things that I can say, "Okay, I'm feeling lazy. I can check this off the list. It's not that important." So, yeah, having that sort of prioritization in my itinerary. In terms of apps, I always book my flights directly. Bookings for hotels are always through Agoda. I think I like Agoda better than Booking.com. So, flights will be direct, bookings from Agoda, financials like money through Wise, and then whatever the local transportation stuff is, like for instance, in Italy, it's Italo, and then in Ireland, there's the Irish Rail app. Yeah, whatever the local transportation is. I think that's all. Google Maps just gets me around, yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, meaning that once you have arrived at that destination, you walk around, and then you plan your day-to-day schedule? Is that right?

**ILY:** Yeah, but I have a wish list that I kind of slot in as I go. In the morning, when I start the day and I feel how I feel, you know, if that day I'm really tired from all the walking, then I'll just say, "Okay, I'm just going to take an easy morning. Go to the restaurants that I want to go to that I've listed out." I'll pick it out from that particular list, yeah, based on my mood. And that's one of the best parts about solo traveling because you don't

Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, is there any frustration or surprise when you travel?

**ILY:** Oh, yeah. I think one of the most interesting surprises that I've gotten was actually in Vietnam. That was the first time that I traveled backpacking on my own, and I was flying back from Ho Chi Minh City to KL. There were no issues from KL to Ho Chi Minh, but from Ho Chi Minh back to KL, they didn't allow me to go in because they didn't accept my ticket. The reason is because of my first name and last name. On the ticket itself, I wrote Ilyana Nazira Rozaini and I didn't put "Binti" because I was putting first name, last name. In Malaysia, it's fine if the "Binti" is in the middle or the last. I think I put my "Binti" at the first and not at the last. I don't know, I put it at the last and not at the first. But when they looked at my passport, my last name is Rozaini, not Binti Rozaini. So, I made a mistake there. They didn't allow me. I was backpacking at that time, right? I didn't have a lot of money, coming to the end of the trip. So, I had to pay an extra amount of money to get the details changed. But that's how low-cost airlines work anyway. So, that was the surprise, yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, meaning that overall, you're not bothered about traffic or anything related to that?

**ILY:** No. No. I didn't do the road, no. I mean, I would sometimes, but mostly, no.

**FARISYA:** So, what about the weather?

**ILY:** I think I know the weather quite well. I mean, you can't really control the weather. I've lived in Thailand during the monsoon. So, you really can't tell about the weather. I'm pretty chilled about the weather. Some things just happen.

**FARISYA:** But did you check before you traveled?

**ILY:** Oh, yeah, usually. I mean, yeah, I would check. I just have to pack accordingly. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, how about an unexpected festival?

**ILY:** Yes, I booked flight tickets to Bali and then only realized that the day I landed was the night before Nyepi. Which means the day after, it would be extremely quiet. No businesses could run. Data was down, internet was down, only Wi-Fi was available. But I kind of just embraced it. I needed the quiet time anyway. But if it was a family trip or something, then I think it would be a bit of a shock, because I didn't realize that there was Nyepi. I didn't even see the disclaimer there. Yeah, I guess I unintentionally ignored it.

**FARISYA:** Oh, do they have a disclaimer?

**ILY:** Usually on Agoda, they'll put the Nyepi calendar down there, all the way down, but not on the selected days. I would have appreciated it if they put, on the day that I chose it, and then they know that there's a public holiday or a Nyepi day to come up, a pop-up, instead of me having to scroll all the way down in the "For Your Information" section, "This is the calendar for Nyepi for the next five years," you know. I would have appreciated that, yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, usually, if you plan a trip, how long would it take for you to plan the whole trip?

**ILY:** I can go as early as planning for the year before, and I can go as late as a week before. I can be very unexpected when it comes to traveling.

**FARISYA:** So, if you were given one or two days, what expectation would you set?

**ILY:** <mark>For a trip? If I had one or two days to plan things? Just buy the flight ticket and everything else, figure it out on the way.</mark> I mean, I've done that before, so I'm not really that surprised. Especially because, back when I was working between 2016 to just before COVID19, getting a call from your boss and saying, "Hey, I need you to fly out to Bangkok tomorrow," and then, "We've got to meet the clients," it was so normal for me. So, the thing about turning things around quickly and just packing a bag and heading out for the next city is normal. Yeah, relatively normal for me.

**FARISYA:** So, if you were on your way to a hotel, and then suddenly the hotel called you, "Hey, the hotel you booked has been canceled due to a system issue..."

**ILY:** Just go on Agoda and find the next available thing. Okay. Yeah. I'm quite chilled in that sense. I mean, I would panic if I didn't have money. I think really, if you have money, everything can... exactly. That was actually one time when I didn't have a hostel booked at my next location. I was already on the bus. I was on a three-hour bus ride from Mũi Né to Đà Lạt, and I didn't have a hostel yet in Đà Lạt, and I just booked it an hour before I reached Đà Lạt. You always have something. You'll definitely find something. If not, you just sleep at the hostel lobby.

**FARISYA:** So, what barriers or frustrations do you face when searching for a reliable travel platform online?

**ILY:** Oh, I think it's when people put, like, when you have filters, you say, "Okay, I want to go to KL." And they have location tags. I feel like sometimes those location tags are not really reliable. They're not really in the areas that I want to actually look at. They can tag it at one place and, technically, it's not there, you know? Technically, it's outside of it. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, it's outside the radius?

**ILY:** Yeah, that was supposed to... yeah.

**FARISYA:** What does "off-peak" mean to you when traveling?

**ILY:** Oh, off-peak season, you mean? Off-peak season means it's the season where people don't usually go because it's usually for weather reasons. For example, off-peak season in Phuket is between, I would say, around May till August, because it's monsoon season. The monsoon starts from Bali, going up. So, here's Malaysia, and this is Indonesia, and then this is Thailand. So, it goes from down here, then goes up. I think it's something like that. So, it hits Malaysia first, and it goes to Indonesia, and only then goes to Thailand. And after Thailand, it comes back to Malaysia again. Malaysia's monsoon is like, I think it's October until January, right? October to January. Then in

January it will go to Bali, and then after that, after Bali, then it goes to Thailand. So, you don't stay in Indonesia, go to the Jakarta side, and then go to Thailand.

**FARISYA:** So, from your perspective, I can see that you didn't do much research online during the off-peak season.

**ILY:** Yeah, because I feel like you can always... I think for me, you kind of don't want to go during off-peak season, but you want to go towards the end of an off-peak season where the weather is slightly better, but at the same time, you don't want the crowd and you still want a cheap price. I think that's the key to it. Going to Europe at the end of winter, before spring. Oh, that's the best time to go, because it's not too cold. It's still cold, but it's not crazy, crazy cold, and people are not there yet, you know? And everything is just melting. Yeah, I think that's the best season. I always go towards the end of the off-peak season. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, meaning that you didn't use an app or tool to identify the less crowded destination?

**ILY:** No, I think it's just understanding seasons and understanding monsoons. So, I don't really need to go through that. Unless I'm not sure, I would just Google it, like, "When's the best time?" I think I have used ChatGPT before to just kind of plan travel calendars, like, you know. I think ChatGPT kind of knows its thing. So, it's just like recommending what the areas are. Sometimes I say, "Oh, if you had an opportunity for a seven-day trip to this particular place, considering the weather, what would you do?" I would prompt it that way. But this year's trip, the Ireland, Italy trip, I did attempt to do it, and it tried to help me with it as well, but I didn't find it extremely helpful. Because in the end, it gave me some recommendations of things to do, but I really went with myself. So, I think if anything, ChatGPT really helped me a lot with my outfits. Like, knowing what to pack. Because when I searched for the weather, I saw that it's not as cold as Ireland, but it's still cold enough that I need layers. So, thankfully, I sent some clothes back to KL, because I wanted to free up some space. I prioritized my clothing thanks to ChatGPT. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** Think about the most useful features in an app when you plan to travel. For flights, are you using the website, their own platform, or Agoda itself?

**ILY:** I actually... <mark>I think there was an app that is available but didn't really kick off well or something.</mark> And it was actually an all-in-one platform with itinerary and photo collection as well. <mark>I think what would be great is a one-stop center for everything: scheduling, collecting memories, planning, alerts, wallet—perfect. Especially, like, "Okay, here, you have an upcoming trip. Reload your wallet now," and have a currency tag to it. A Super App, that's what I'm saying.</mark> Imagine Grab, but for travel. You have everything inside, right? You have the wallet feature, you have the linked account feature, you have the scheduling, and you have the booking. But I think Grab doesn't have exploring; it doesn't have a search engine for travel. I mean, it has a search engine, but that search engine is only for things that are within. <mark>Okay, so if there's a plug-in to a flight, if there's a flight feature and analysis in there without having to redirect me anywhere, not having to leave the site, it would be great.</mark> Because I think right now, Agoda, you can book your flight, I think. Right? I don't want Skyscanner where I have to leave the platform to get to another one to buy it.

**FARISYA:** So, if you're introduced to a new booking tool or a centralized app, would you use it straight away or do you prefer to see others using it too?

**ILY:** I would explore, but I probably wouldn't buy it. But I wouldn't say no to exploring, like, at least have a look into it. Yeah, and then see if it fits, and then give it a try maybe for a small trip, and see if it works.

**FARISYA:** So, whose opinions influence your travel choices the most?

**ILY:** <mark>Mine. I watch stuff, I do watch YouTube reels of places and if people give travel hacks here and there, like, "Never choose your flight seats until you're at the counter, because you'll never know, you might get an emergency seat which gives you extra leg space."</mark> Yeah, travel hacks are fine. And I watch people like Mark Wien and look at places to eat and stuff like that. But ultimately, I rarely care about what people think

about my trip because, like I said, that's the best part about solo travel. You don't have to listen to anyone. Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, how much do you rely on reviews, ratings, or local recommendations?

**ILY:** Okay, that is an important thing. ==So, when I book a hotel, I usually look at the reviews, the latest ones. I look at reviews on the booking app, and I look at the reviews on Google. That is one thing I really, really do. I compare. Price being cheap is fine, but then the review must, must, must be good—latest reviews, yeah.==

**FARISYA:** So, from that, how important are verification features? I mean, like, a verified visitor or tourist?

**ILY:** Yeah, ==that's important to me because I need to know. If somebody were to drop a shitty review, I need to know when that happened, is this person legit, and what element is it? And then I'll cross-reference it with other reviews and see if there's any reoccurrence on different platforms or multiple platforms. That, I will do, yeah.==

**FARISYA:** So, like I mentioned before, the new platform, after you go through it, would you trust that platform like, use it straight away for your plan or just wait for someone else?

**ILY:** I will probably read the app review. If it's really new, like if I have to put money in there, like a transaction happens within, I'll probably look at the app review and see if it's really reliable or not, and what the update is. For instance, if you book through Agoda or Booking.com, there are millions of other people who have used it before, and millions of other hotels that accept bookings from Booking.com and Agoda, right? But since this is a new platform and I'm trying to, I must confirm that, "Hey, do you accept this particular platform? Can I make reservations through this? Is that okay?" I would have to ask the hotel, "Can I make a booking through here?" Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, like verification straight away to that.

**ILY:** Yeah, because it's new. I mean, unless it's like, if other people have not used it, I will do it. Yeah. I mean, like, not often, but sometimes.

**FARISYA:** I see. Next, how comfortable are you with AI-based suggestions on a platform?

**ILY:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. <mark>I think if a travel thing has an AI capability, it's good.</mark> But maybe not for doing all the bookings, though. Like, if one person were to prompt it and say, "Okay, do all the bookings for me, I'm just going to pay a final amount and verify," I'm fine. That's your choice, but the flexibility has to be given to me as an end-user. But if it's a recommending thing, and it's like, 'Proceed to book' and a 'Yes' or 'No', and I get to click, and then when I'm done, it brings you back to, 'You want me to book this', then the next one, 'You want me to book that', then 'Yes, yes, yes', 'No', 'Okay', 'Would you like me to book other things?' then, okay, then I get an assistant. <mark>The AI acts like a travel agent and an assistant for me, I'm fine with that.</mark> Yeah.

**FARISYA:** What kind of features would make online holiday planning easier for you?

**ILY:** <mark>I think a good AI assistant would be great at this point in my life. Just something that can help me with the planning but doesn't necessarily have such a stringent model that I have to follow.</mark> Like, if I can choose what I want and don't want to do within that period of time, then it would be great.

**FARISYA:** So, it would be great if you had a dashboard with AI that shows recommendations, something like that, too, right?

**ILY:** Yeah, <mark>like I said, if there was a Super App AI thing, perfect.</mark> A consolidation of my favorite apps would be: Agoda, a flight aggregator like a Skyscanner, but I can book within and not have to deal with the consequences of booking through a third-party application. Because, you know, when you book flights through Agoda, and there's a flight delay or any issues with your flight, you've got to take it up with Agoda. You can't go directly to the airline. If you make noise in front of the Malaysia Airlines counter over your Agoda booking, Malaysia Airlines is going to say, "No, that's for you to deal with Agoda." <mark>So, I want the privileges of direct booking. That is why I never book my flights from third-party sites, because if any issues arise, it's difficult. I don't mind hotels, but yeah. So, I want in the app are, Agoda, Flight aggregator with direct access to flight</mark>

==highlight==books and no third-party issues with the booking, Wise currency converter or bank and a wallet, Google reviews consolidated aggregator, Maps, Travel itinerary (After I have booked everything, everything gets consolidated into an itinerary. Perfect.), With a wish list or checklist of things for me to pack based on weather (a personal assistant), And machine learning with the pattern of how I always travel, too.== Understanding, maybe after a few times, what are the things that I always pack and the things that I don't pack. So that, like, "Hey, in case you missed it, it's going to be quite rainy. Pack an umbrella or a poncho." And all these recommendations of places to eat. For example, in an itinerary, "Hey, we looked at your itinerary, and lunchtime is still blank. Would you like some recommendations? What do you feel like having?"

**FARISYA:** Wow. I told you, it'd be so good.

**ILY:** Yeah. Can? Idea, right? Yeah.

**FARISYA:** So, that's the end of our interview. Thanks, Ily.

**ILY:** I appreciate your questions. It's quite good, though. Yeah. I quite like it.