

Twenty years of receipts.

I spoke the dot-com circuit in the nineties, then left to spend two decades actually building the business I talk about. **This is me back on stage**, with operating evidence instead of predictions.



Michael Kovnick

FOUNDER • PUBLISHED RESEARCHER
CULTURE DISCOVERY VACATIONS

Comdex, Internet World, ISPCON, CeBIT, plus a run of radio. Then Michael left corporate life and built **one of the largest small-group tour operators in Europe**, running across eight countries on an anti-extractive model that keeps more than 70% of guest spending local. He documented the whole thing in **a 19-year operating study published on SSRN**, with a DOI and open to scrutiny. The talks come out of the ledger, not a framework he read.

SIGNATURE KEYNOTE

Anti-Luxury: Why Taking Things Away Made Us More Money

A personal story, Los Angeles wealth to Italian simplicity, backed by data on affluent travelers walking away from amenities. Then the business case: anti-luxury earns higher margins and keeps guests longer.

ALSO SPEAKING ON

01 The \$250M Lesson: Right About the Market, Wrong About My Own Company

I called the bubble in 1999 and turned down the VC who wanted to take us public. They funded a competitor who exited at \$250 million.

03 From 18 Residents to 850,000 Visitors: What Went Wrong and How to Prevent It

Two Italian villages, one thriving and one hollowed out. Includes a Sustainability Removal Test for spotting the performative kind.

05 Aim at Yourself: Why Every Generation Fights the Future

From my forthcoming book. Every generation meets its disruption by defending what it built. I watched it in 1999 and I see it around AI now.

02 The Half of Your Business AI Is About to Eat

AI will commoditize transactional travel within five years. A framework for automating that half and making the human half louder.

04 Nobody Remembers the Thread Count

Why traditional hospitality metrics are going obsolete, and how the shift to transformational experiences produced a 42% return rate.

06 Nine masterclasses and workshops

Strategy and leadership, digital and marketing, operations and guest experience. Including the zero-commission transition and the 42% formula.

42%

guest return rate,
vs 5-8% industry

70%

of guest spend
kept local

100%

partner retention,
20+ years

300%

growth since
the pandemic

KEYNOTES 60-90 MIN • HALF OR FULL-DAY WORKSHOPS • UNIVERSITY LECTURES • ENGLISH OR ITALIAN

TRIPADVISOR HALL OF FAME

MAGELLAN GOLD AWARD 2025

BEST OF EBUSINESS, COMDEX 2001

CERTIFIED TRAVEL INDUSTRY EXEC

No published rate card, and an honest number inside a day.



Reduced for academic institutions, non-profits, and destinations putting real sustainability policy in place. Based in Italy, travels worldwide, and delivers virtual keynotes from a dedicated studio.

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