

HBX Group, Wayra and NYU SPS look to virtual reality and metaverse for second TravelTech Lab innovation challenge

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- The TravelTech Lab by HBX Group is seeking startups specialised in virtual reality and the metaverse that help change the way travellers move, connect, and explore
- First time HBX Group will collaborate with both Wayra and the NYU SPS Tisch Center of Hospitality

Madrid, October 24, 2023.—[HBX Group](#), the leading B2B TravelTech ecosystem player, [Wayra](#), Telefónica's leading open innovation programme, and the [NYU School of Professional Studies \(NYU SPS\) Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality](#) have joined forces to launch the second TravelTech Lab by HBX Group innovation challenge to redesign the future of travel.

The companies, all leading innovation organisations in their respective fields, are calling on startups around the world, as well as affiliated students, to submit ideas on how emerging augmented technologies, such as virtual reality and the metaverse, can be adopted in the B2B travel arena to improve operational efficiencies and remove friction from the end traveller experience to create more enjoyable trips from the time they book to when they return home.

José María Pestaña, Chief Innovation Officer at HBX Group, said: “Bringing our innovation partners and the startup community together is a unique opportunity for us all to not only learn and share ideas, but provide a platform to bring about real change in the TravelTech arena. I’m excited to see what ideas are put forward and how we will be able to implement these to not only improve our tech capabilities but also inspire future trips for the traveller of tomorrow.”

This second TravelTech Lab challenge comes months after the inaugural contest and just eight months after the launch of the innovation hub, which is based at HBX Group’s headquarters in Palma, Mallorca (Spain). The first event attracted submissions from 65 startups from across the world including South Africa, Colombia and Spain. Of these, HBX Group is now collaborating with the three finalists.

Startups selected to join the TravelTech Lab by HBX Group will not only be given expert advice and guidance from industry experts, but they will also join Wayra's innovation ecosystem and work directly with HBX Group’s teams to develop collaboration opportunities. There is also a grant of up to €40,000 available from HBX Group to help bring their idea to life. All startups will be able to work with other like-minded entrepreneurs at Wayra’s 7 hubs in Europe and Latin America, as well as at HBX Group’s hubs in Mallorca and Madrid.

“It is a privilege for Wayra to strengthen our alliance and commitment with HBX Group- to make available all our knowledge of the international entrepreneurial ecosystem, and to promote technological evolution in the travel sector. It is a key element of our economy, as tourism is one of the most important engines of our country and corresponds to 20% of Spanish GDP,” said Andrés Saborido, Wayra Managing Director.

In further support of the challenge, NYU SPS hosted a students' hackathon, collaborating with industry professionals chosen from HBX Group's partners in the U.S. to refine their solutions and gain a deeper understanding of current pain points within the hospitality sector. The response was very positive, with 26 students taking part.

“The TravelTech sector is growing every day,” said Richie Karaburun, MBA, DPS, Clinical Associate Professor and Director of the Tisch Center's HI Hub Incubator Program. “We look forward to working with HBX Group and Wayra on this challenge to find the next augmented technology innovator who can help change and evolve our industry to create better travel experiences worldwide.”

For more information and to submit your idea, please visit the traveltechlab.net. Applications are open until 12 December 2023.

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About HBX Group

HBX Group is a global B2B TravelTech company that owns and operates Hotelbeds, Bedsonline and Roiback. We offer a network of interconnected travel tech products and services to partners such as travel agencies, tour operators, destinations, and hotels, as well as companies wanting to leverage the travel sector.

Our vision is to simplify the complex and fragmented travel industry through a combination of cloud-based technology solutions, curated data, and an extensive portfolio of products designed to maximise revenue. HBX Group is present in 170 countries and employs more than 3700 people around the globe. We are committed to making travel a force for good, creating a positive social and environmental impact.

More information:

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About NYU SPS Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality and Its HI Hub

The NYU SPS Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality, celebrating more than 25 years of academic excellence, is a leading center for the study of hospitality, travel, and tourism. Founded in 1995, the Tisch Center was established in response to the growing need for hospitality and tourism undergraduate and graduate education. Its cutting-edge curricula attract bright, motivated students who see to become leaders in their fields.

The Tisch Center launched the [Hospitality Innovation Hub \(HI Hub\)](#), which will foster entrepreneurship and creative solutions for the industries it services. The state-of-the-art facilities offer students, start-ups, and established industry partners and opportunities to learn, discover, innovate, and invest. For more information about the NYU SPS Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality, visit sps.nyu.edu/tisch.

About Wayra

Since 2011, Wayra is the main program to connect Telefónica with the entrepreneurial ecosystem around the world. It has seven spaces covering nine countries in Latin America and Europe, through which it invests and supports startups. Wayra invests in startups with the capacity to generate business with Telefónica, which are ready to scale preferably in one of the following sectors: Entertainment (Gaming and Video), IoT, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, eHealth, Fintech, Energy, Metaverse and Web3. Wayra always invests hand in hand with other VCs in startups that are controlled by the founders with a ticket of up to €350k.

Since 2022 we have started to manage capital from Telefónica Group companies through Vivo Ventures and Íope Ventures.

In these eleven years, Wayra has invested €68M in 870 startups and currently has more than 400 startups in its portfolio of which more than 170 work with Telefónica.

More information available at www.wayra.es

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