

Outings Usability

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Report prepared by Anne Sawyer
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The most inspiring apps start with
user-centered design.

Executive Summary

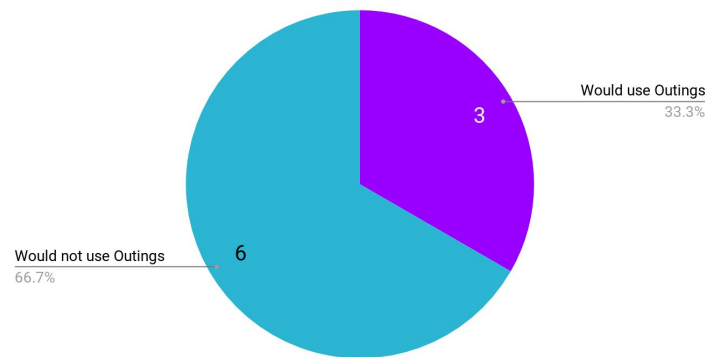
The Outings mobile application is a Microsoft garage project designed to help users discover beautiful and interesting places. To assess Outings' usability, a mobile guerrilla study was conducted to test the efficiency of its navigation, the effectiveness of its content, and overall user satisfaction.

Over the course of a week, moderators recorded 9 in-person sessions with first-time users who met screening criteria for travel habits and demographic diversity. Participants were asked to complete 4 tasks related to finding places near their current location and near a travel destination, as well as saving places and leaving a review for a place they've visited before.

Results demonstrated that while users appreciated Outings' visual elements, they also expected the app to provide them with more substantive content, easier navigation, more robust search capabilities, and fewer sign in restrictions.

Most significantly, many users did not seem to understand Outings' value proposition, which indicates a need to reassess its high-level design. Additional qualitative user data via formative testing and competitive benchmarking could provide the necessary insights to make Outings a truly inspiring experience.

First time user satisfaction



Top Positive User Comment

This actually might be good for thinking of something to do with the girls on the weekends, because we want them to be entertained. (P7, 2:51)

Top Critical User Comment

I don't see myself using this to actually plan a trip somewhere. It doesn't seem user-friendly to get the hotels and everything. (P2, 17:40)

Study Goals

1. Find out if users understand Outings' value proposition.

Do users know what the app is intended to provide? Is the user experience satisfying to first-time users?

2. See how easily users can navigate the app's primary features.

How discoverable and memorable is the app's information architecture?
Does it provide the necessary affordances to promote efficient navigation?

3. See how easily users can personalize Outings to suit their activity preferences.

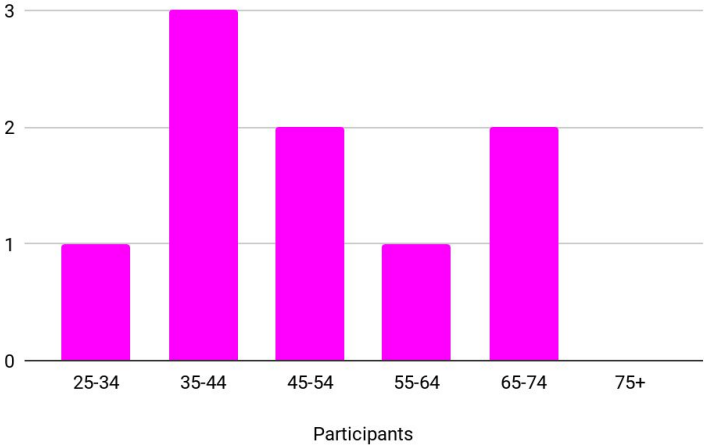
What kinds of personalization do users desire or find most helpful?

4. Determine whether users can use Outings to help with their travels.

What do users want from the app when they're looking to embark on a new adventure?

Participant Data

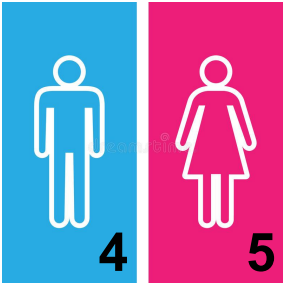
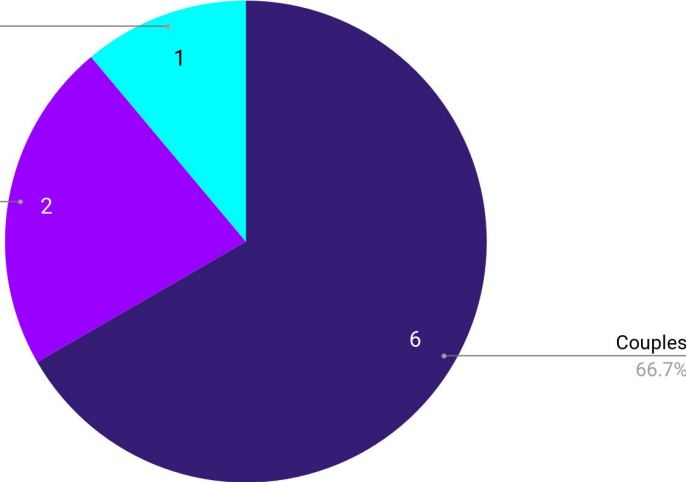
Age Distribution



Households

Multigenerational
11.1%

Couples w/ children
22.2%



Most popular free time activities

1. Hike or other outdoor recreation
2. See new things
3. Visit museums or historical landmarks

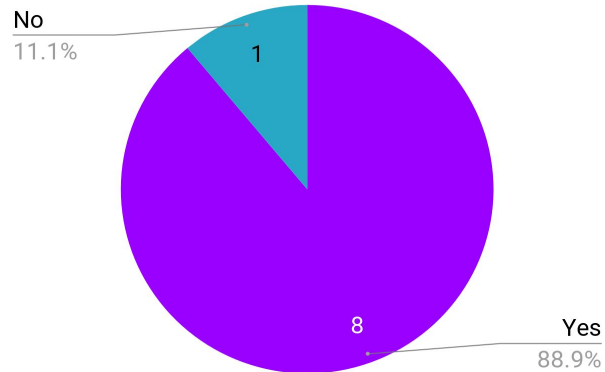
8 out of 9 participants travel out of town for vacation

5 out of 9 participants go on outdoor adventures at least once a month

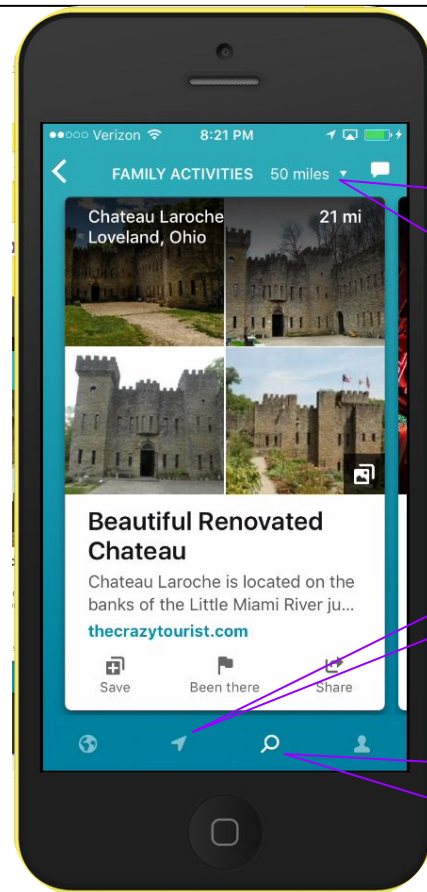
Task 1

It's a three-day weekend and you want to take a mini vacation with your family. Use the app to find somewhere within 50 miles of you that you would like to go.

Completed successfully?



- Most users did not notice that they could refine their search using the tag bubbles in the place cards.
- **3 users** experienced difficulty finding places. Android users in particular encountered bugs that prevented the keyboard from appearing, or the app from finding their location.
- **4 users** remarked that they wanted to see more practical information in the place cards: *Okay, this is a great park and everything, but is there somewhere to stay there? Is there any more information about it?* (P2, 5:09)



3 out of 9 users noticed or selected Family Activities as a topic, but none figured out how to browse nearby places by topic.

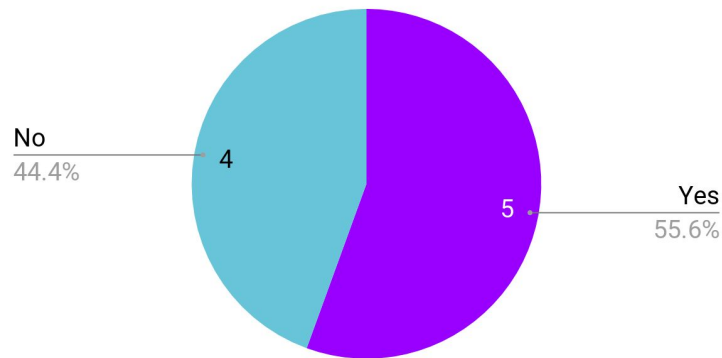
3 out of 9 participants used the location screen to find a place.

5 out of 9 users tried the search feature first: 2 bounced, 2 typed in their city, 1 typed in the distance.

Task 2

Find someplace in your city that you've visited before and leave a review.

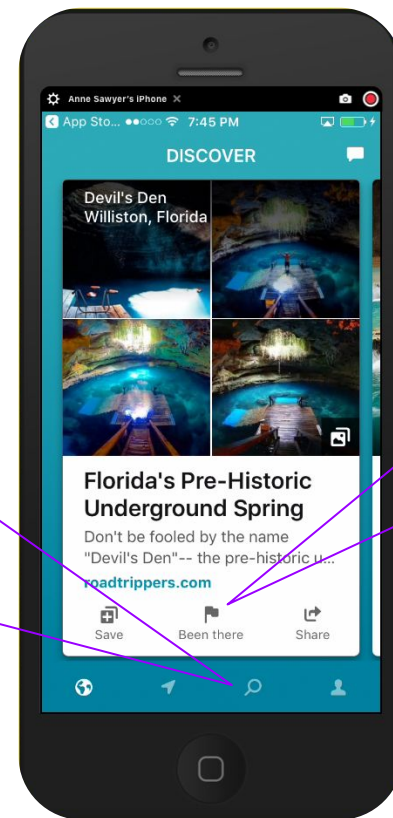
Completed successfully?



- Of the 4 users who did not complete the task, 3 demonstrated they knew how to do it, but were either unable or unwilling to sign into the app: *I just don't care to have all my stuff all over the Internet, to be quite honest.* (P9, 16:33)
- One user completed the task with difficulty, due to a lack of accessible results for people with mobility issues.

8 users chose to search for a place:

- 2 searched by place name
- 2 used the map
- 2 searched by city
- 2 browsed results from previous search

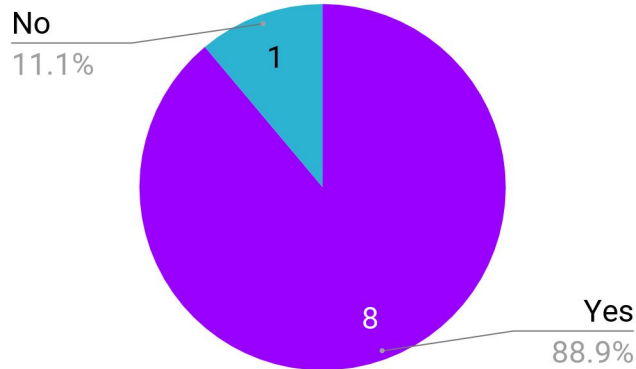


Even users who didn't complete the task found the correct path with ease.

Task 3

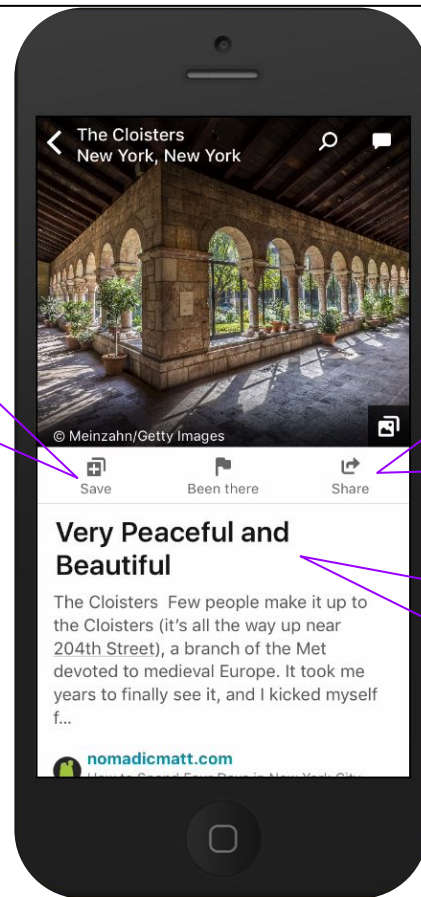
You are saving up for a vacation to New York, New York. Using the app, find three places that you would like to go to and mark them in a way that would allow you to find them again.

Completed successfully?



- **3 users** succeeded with difficulty, either due to sign in obstacles or confusion about the app's navigation icons.
- **5 users** remarked positively about content such as photos, reviews, maps, and seeing more unique NY attractions: *It's cool that I'm seeing things I wouldn't otherwise have known about.* (P4, 12:45)
- **3 users** were confused about external web content: *See, that's interesting to me, because now I'm wondering what that link will do. Is that link going to take me to a Google page?* (P3, 24:42)

Once they found a place, users knew what to do almost immediately.



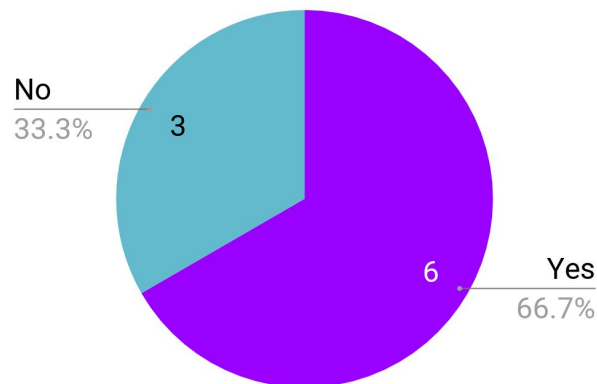
1 user found a workaround to signing into the app: he instead tapped Share and emailed himself links to 3 places.

4 users expected to be able to tap the headline and teaser text to read more about places.

Task 4

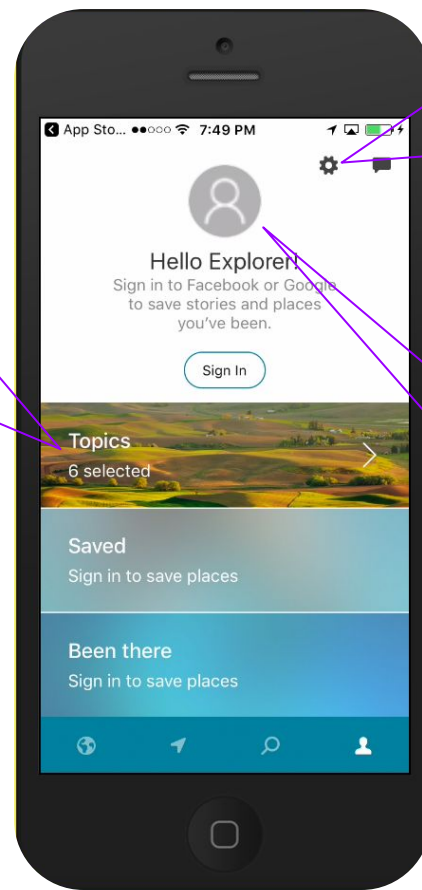
You've been using the app for a while and want to get better results that align with your interests. Find a way to personalize your account.

Completed successfully?



Criteria for the task required users to personalize their accounts by adding or removing Topics.

- **2 users** completed the task with difficulty and required prompting by moderators.
- Task difficulty may be due to user understanding of “personalize” not mapping very well to the task.
- **6 users** either had difficulty finding topics of interest, or were confused about the purpose and organization of topic tiles.
- Android users expected to be able to use the back button on their phone when they weren't sure how to go to a previous screen within the app.



3 users attempted to personalize their account by changing the app's settings (such as confirming their Home).

2 users expected their avatar image to be tappable, similar to Google's login screen.

Key Insight 1

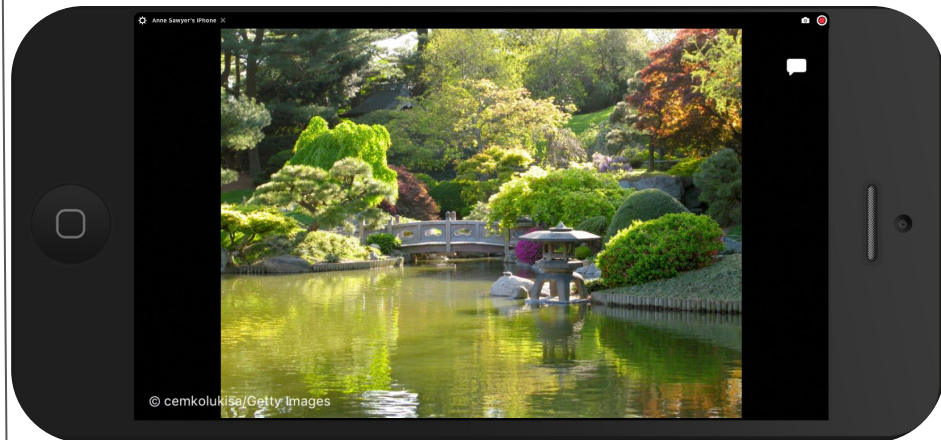
Users love Outings' visual elements

- Users love the visual appeal of seeing stunning travel photography, and Outing does a good job providing them with this. Moderators observed that participants were less inclined to read through articles and instead focused on photos of places.
- Visual signifiers conveyed swipe and tap gestures fairly accurately. In a few cases, such as when closing an enlarged photo, one-handed use may be challenging due to placement of the X button.
- Participants also found the visual aesthetic of place photos and topic tiles delightful. Comments included: *Ooh, that's pretty!* (P9, 4:22), and *Ooh, Belvedere Castle. All kinds of cool things come up.* (P5, 10:25)
- One user was particularly delighted by the instant visual feedback he received after saving a place: *The fact that it just bounces visually straight to my profile, there's no doubt that that's where my stuff is saved. So, that was very easy. Love that.* (P9, 20:30)

Recommendations

No major changes needed.

More interactive maps would add value for users.

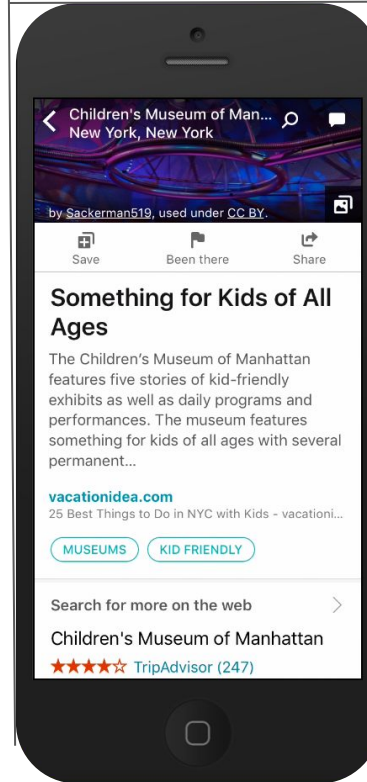


Key Insight 2

Users expect Outings to be able to help them plan a trip.

- The results of our study demonstrate that Outings is largely successful in helping users find beautiful places to go and interesting things to see.
- However, users also expect the app to help them plan their trip: *You can see fun things to see, but usually when my husband and I are looking for places to go we're also looking for places to stay there, even it's just a campground for our camper.* (P2, 7:07)
- Confusion about the app's purpose may adversely affect user adoption and retention.
- More than one user commented that they might use Outings to look for nearby excursions once they already had a place in mind, but not to find their main destination.

Recommendations



Conduct formative usability tests to evaluate design concepts and to establish a comprehensive content strategy.

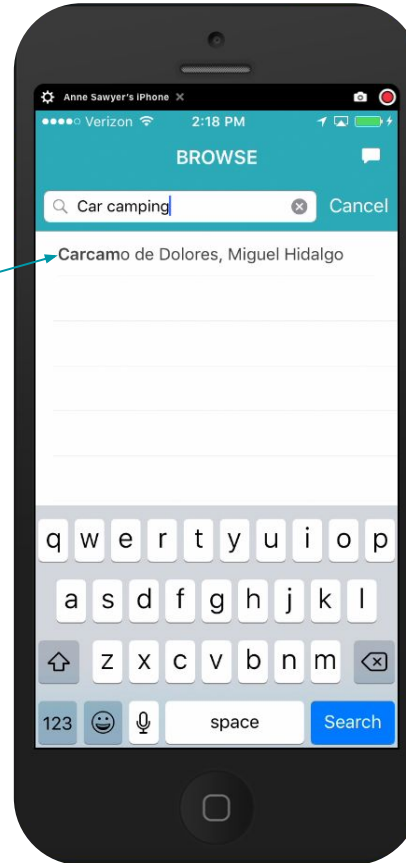
Add more internal content about places.

Add more practical place information, such as expenses, accommodations, and directions.

Key Insight 3

Users expect the search feature to work just like Google.

- Users were largely dissatisfied with Outings' search feature: *Here's the problem I see. I can either do their topics, which is like mountain biking or whatever, or I can do their destinations. But I can't do both.* (P3, 42:30)
- One user tried several keywords to find campsites before he figured out that Search only looks for the app's predefined topics or places.
- One user was shown several results for hiking destinations, even though she did not select hiking as a preferred topic due to limited mobility.
- A few Android users experienced issues related to their keyboards not appearing after they tapped to type a search.



Recommendations

Redesign the Search feature to more closely match user expectations for a semantic web experience.

Allow filtering by topic and location within the same search.

Allow users to choose whether to search or browse a taxonomy of topics.

Diagnose potential bugs in the Android version of the app.

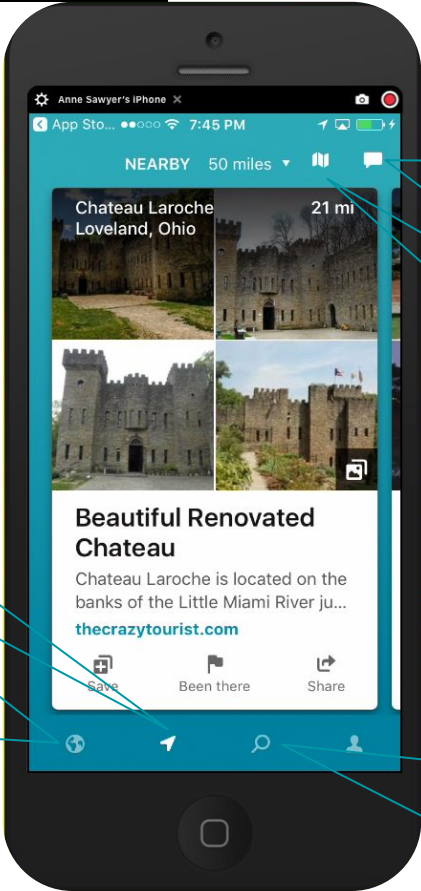
Key Insight 4

The meaning of some navigation icons is not clear to users.

Users had little trouble correctly identifying the **Person**, **Search**, **Location**, and **Settings** icons.

Most users recognized the **Location** icon, but 3 users expected it to bring up a map.

When users tapped **Discover** icon, they often weren't sure what it was for and where it would take them.



Most users bounced in and out of the **Feedback** icon as they tried to figure out how to use the app.

Many users were delighted to find the **Map**, even though they didn't know they were selecting it.

6 out of 9 users switched to the more familiar **Search** icon, rather than browse a feed of far-away and seemingly random destinations.

Recommendations

Redesign the Discover and Feedback icons to better communicate their purpose to users.

Reassess the Discover feed based on user preferences for location and topic content.

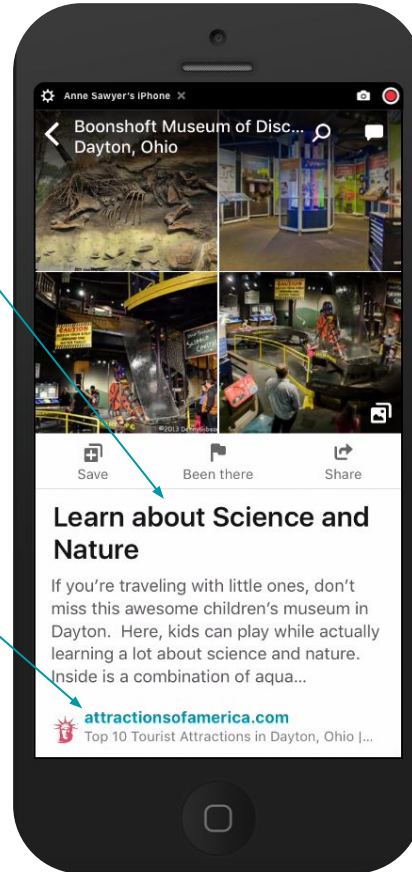
Remove the Map icon, and move the map to the Location feed.

Allow Android users to use their phone's built-in Back button.

Key Insight 5

Users expect content on place cards to be interactive and practical.

- 4 out of 9 users expected that tapping on headlines or teaser text would expand it within the card: *It looks like there's more writing here but you can't really read it.* (P2, 12:34)
- Some users felt that Outings' content wasn't tailored to their needs: *This app is trying to be too much. It doesn't know what its vision is yet, because it's ordering me up all kinds of information all from 3rd party sources, and not organized in a meaningful way.* (P4, 21:56)
- Other users seemed dissatisfied that the content was not internal to the app, but simply a "clearinghouse" for external web content: *So it seems like this thing is just working like an alternative form of Google search. It's just providing links to stuff, it's not actually providing the information itself.* (P3, 10:06)



Recommendations

Chunk content in a more reader-friendly way so that it's not cut off mid-sentence.

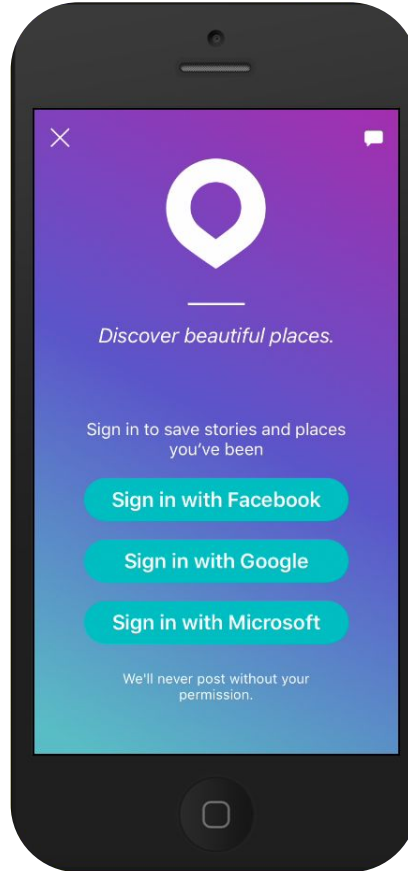
Add more internal content that adds value for the user.

Allow users to interact directly with the content.

Key Insight 6

Requiring Sign in is an obstacle to users.

- Users who place high value on privacy and anonymity may abandon Outings if they can't interact with the app without signing in: *So, I'd hit Been There, but now it wants me to sign in and I don't want to sign in.* (P9, 15:33)
- Signing in can also be an obstacle for users who don't remember their passwords: *Had I known that, I would have known what my password was. That's something I'm really bad at, but had I known I was going to use it, I'd have it with me.* (P5, 8:08)
- Some users didn't understand why they needed to link personal accounts in order to use Outings review and save features: *I don't want to open an app and then be forced to sign into something else.* (P3, 40:13)
- One user commented that he would set up a separate Google account to sign in with if he felt compelled to leave a review in the app.



Recommendations

Demonstrate to users the value of Outings before prompting them to sign in.

Give users the option to create a login for the app that isn't linked with other accounts.

Allow users to Save places and build Been There lists without signing in.