

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **OTA & Travel Distribution Update - Agoda Homes seeks to gain ground; Direct booking is best according to Australian regulators; TripAdvisor abandons its roots**

By Greg Duff on 9.28.18 | Posted in OTA Update

### **Agoda Homes Seeks To Gain Ground**

*("OTAs Booking Holdings' Agoda Takes a Distinctive Approach on Short-Term Rentals," Skift Travel News on September 21, 2018)*

For some time now, Agoda has featured short-term rentals on its website and application. The problem is that no one really knew it. Agoda is now trying to change that as it seeks to bolster its position in the short-term rental arms race. In recent months, Agoda has updated its Agoda Homes branding and has begun offering temporary discounts (5-20%). This is in addition to offering one of the industry's few short-term rental best rate guarantees. These efforts are apparently working as users seeking short-term rentals are growing 30-40% faster than users booking traditional hotel rooms. As Agoda (and Booking.com) continue to ramp up their short-term rental offerings and historically exclusive short-term rental sites continue adding traditional hotel rooms, it will soon be impossible to distinguish one online booking channel from another.

### **Direct Booking Is Best According to Australian Regulators**

*("Call hotels directly, top Australian regulator tells tourists," MLex on Skift Travel News on September 21, 2018)*

In a rare moment of candor, Australian Competition & Consumer Commission Chair Rod Sims told interviewers last week that travelers in Australia should steer clear of online booking sites like Expedia and instead contact hotels directly for the best deals. Sims' comments come as the ACCC confirmed that it was continuing its investigation into issues in the online travel industry, including the effects of previously accepted "narrow" rate party clauses.

### **TripAdvisor Abandons Its Roots**

*("TripAdvisor CEO on Moving From User Content Toward Professional Reviews," Skift Travel News on September 18, 2018)*

In an apparent break from its existing business model (the model that helped distinguish TripAdvisor and establish TripAdvisor as one of the most trusted travel sites), TripAdvisor

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announced plans last week to beta test a travel feed comprised of reviews and recommendations of travel bloggers, social media influencers and other travel professionals and publications. According to TripAdvisor CEO and co-founder, Steve Kaufer, the shift represents TripAdvisor's attempt to go "up funnel" and serve as an initial inspiration point for its millions of users. Look for these significant changes to be rolled out before year end.

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Other news:

### **Booking.com will give data to consumers in emerging markets to access its site**

*Phocuswright on September 20, 2018*

Booking.com has signed on to try a new blockchain-based data marketplace aimed at helping brands connect with users in emerging markets. Through its partnership with the new ODX, or Open Data Exchange, consumers will be able to access the Booking.com site without paying for data. The premise is simple: bring together publishers - any companies that rely on e-commerce - to buy data at scale and use it to provide free access to their site for consumers. ODX currently has more than 50 partners signed up across a variety of sectors, from travel and dining to entertainment, retail and home goods. In addition to Booking.com, travel partners include Asian hotel companies Red Planet Hotels, Zen Rooms and Artemis Place Makati, taxi-hailing app Hirna and bus booking platform Biyaheroes.