

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **OTA & Travel Distribution Update: Travel booking startup turning traditional group booking upside down; Hoxton hotel chain introduces flexible direct hotel bookings; Booking.com's Genius loyalty program goes mainstream**

By Greg Duff on 11.27.19 | Posted in OTA Update

### **Startup Seeks to Turn Traditional Group Booking Upside Down**

*("Booking Startup Stayker Makes Room Blocks Less Risky for Planners," Skift Travel News on Nov 20, 2019)*

Launched last Thursday, [Stayker](#) seeks to disrupt traditional group sales and contracting. Rather than rely on traditional room blocks and all that they entail (e.g., room revenue commitments, cut-off dates and attrition), meetings planners using Stayker would bypass the entire rooms negotiation process (and related uncertainties) and instead offer their attendees a link to the new online booking platform. Attendees using the platform would then be able to view all available room inventory in the area (from multiple properties) and book wherever (and whenever) they want at the current rates (no negotiated group rates.) Should such a platform catch on, the group segment (and its associated revenue) could change dramatically. Group bookings would cover food and beverage and meeting space only. Hotels seeking to house group attendees would compete on an area-wide basis and market and promote their inventories (once again) through a third-party online intermediary. It will be interesting to see whether meeting planners embrace this new model. Stay tuned.

### **New Benefits for Booking Direct**

*("Check In, Check Out Anytime You'd Like at These Hotels," Skift Travel News on Nov 21, 2019)*

Booking direct? Want to arrive early or stay late? Meet "Flexy Time." The Hoxton hotel chain (with properties in London, Amsterdam, Paris, Los Angeles, Brooklyn and Portland) is the latest chain to announce flexible arrival and departure times. However, unlike its competitors that often condition the benefit on loyalty program status or payment of an additional fee, Hoxton is offering this benefit free to travelers who book direct on the hotel chain's website. It will be interesting to see whether these new booking "terms" or "conditions" begin attracting the attention of online travel agents and lead to terms and conditions parity claims.

**OTA & Travel Distribution Update:** Travel booking startup turning traditional group booking upside down; Hoxton hotel chain introduces flexible direct hotel bookings; Booking.com's Genius loyalty program goes mainstream

---

### **Booking.com's Genius Rates Go Mainstream**

*("Booking.com Extends Genius Rates To Other OTAs," Hospitality Net - Latest Industry News on Nov 18, 2019)*

Last week, Futurist founder and CEO, Simone Puerto, wrote an article warning hoteliers of Booking.com's plans to re-distribute Booking.com loyalty rate (Genius) across the Booking Holdings' portfolio of companies. Apparently, hoteliers not wanting further circulation of the agreed discount rates must affirmatively respond to communications from Booking.com announcing the change. Those who don't respond will be deemed to have consented to the re-distribution. Anyone participating in Booking.com's Genius program may want to look further into this.

For those of you celebrating this week, Happy Thanksgiving.

---

Other news:

### **Serko's Quest to Conquer the World With Its Artificial Intelligence-Powered Booking App**

*Skift Travel News on Nov 22, 2019*

New Zealand-based travel management company Serko has undergone some big changes over the past year and a half. The company in 2018 launched Zeno, its comprehensive booking app powered by artificial intelligence, emphasizing tech features and user experience.

### **Airbnb Tests Teaming With Google's Vacation Rental Business in the United States**

*Skift Travel News on Nov 22, 2019*

The decision won't impact either Airbnb or Google's business for now. But, in three to five years? It might indeed. After tossing its listings into Google's vacation rental product in Europe and Asia about a month ago, some of Airbnb's apartment and vacation home listings in the United States are now appearing in Google as well.

### **How Yapta CEO James Filsinger Maintains Culture While Growing Corporate Travel Startup**

*GeekWire on Nov 17, 2019*

When James Filsinger took over as president and CEO of Yapta, the Seattle-based online travel company had 15 employees. Seven years later, Yapta has grown more than fourfold, expanding to 70 employees. For the third year, the company is ranked among the 500 fastest growing North American technology companies and 15th in Washington state, according to [Deloitte](#).