

Duff on Hospitality Law

OTA & Travel Distribution Update - Dec. 15th, 2017

By Greg Duff on 12.21.17 | Posted in OTA Update

This week's Update for the week ending December 15, 2017 is below. Nothing too earth shattering this week.

[Google Now Featuring Travel Packages \[METASEARCH\]](#)

("Google now offers discounted tours and activities for bundling vacation packages," The Verge, December 14, 2017)

With each passing week, Google seems to introduce yet another new feature for those using the search engine (a/k/a metasearch site) to search travel related products and services. Google's latest features allow travelers to (1) evaluate whether flights or hotels should be booked now or later, (2) track changes to hotel room rates via email and (3) search, book and package with other travel components (via a third party provider) tours and activities. Anyone still doubting whether Google has big plans for travel?

[Misplaced Allegations of Collusion Between OTAs and Hoteliers \[OTA\]](#)

("Are Hotels and Online Travel Agencies Colluding on Keyword Bidding?," Skift Travel News, December 14, 2017)

Skift circulated an interesting article last week detailing a report from *The Capital Forum* that suggested OTAs' and hoteliers' common practice of agreeing not to purchase each other's keywords (and thereby protecting their valuable trademarks) somehow provided evidence of harmful (and perhaps illegal) collusion between the two sides. We couldn't disagree more.

[Expedia's Purported Airbnb Killer Not That Lethal \[OTA / SHORT TERM RENTALS\]](#)

("Expedia is offering an alternative to AirBnB, and customers say it's terrible," Consumer Affairs News and Alerts, December 12, 2017)

Although Expedia may boast of a short-term rental market share similar to Airbnb's, consumers' experiences with Expedia's short-term rental platform (VRBO) suggest that the two platforms are vastly different. The linked *ConsumerAffairs* article provides numerous examples of consumers' struggles with the short-term rental platform – unwillingness to relocate guests, failure to refund deposits upon cancellation, questionable billing practices, and unpredictable fees and charges.

Other news:

HotelTonight is revamping their rewards program with infinite levels

TechCrunch News, December 12, 2017

Last year HotelTonight launched HT Perks, their own twist on a hotel loyalty program. The program is level-based, meaning user “level up” as they meet certain tiers of lifetime spend in the app. It was generally well received but maybe a little under ambitious – it maxed out at level...

Airbnb To Use Virtual Reality To Let Guests Preview Rooms & Cities

Ubergizmo, December 12, 2017

When browsing an Airbnb listing, you pretty much only have the photos supplied by the host and the reviews of previous guests to determine whether or not this is a listing for you. However Airbnb wants to change that by making its previews slightly more detailed, and this will be...