

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **Online Travel Update: Marriott and Rakuten announce partnership; Sonder continues to expand distribution network; Expedia combines loyalty programs**

By Greg Duff on 10.15.21 | Posted in Online Travel Update

The latest Update features a variety of news, including stories regarding Expedia's planned roll up of its loyalty programs and Marriott's recently announced loyalty program partnership with Japanese e-commerce platform, Rakuten. Whether COVID or data privacy induced, the travel industry's renewed interest in loyalty programs – whether through traditional loyalty programs or now, subscription programs – is definitely something to watch. Enjoy.

### **Marriott and Rakuten Announce Partnership**

*(“In Marriage of Two Giants, Marriott and Rakuten Take Vow on Loyalty,” July 10, 2021 via WIT)*  
Marriott International and Japanese e-commerce platform (e-commerce, fintech, digital content and communications all linked through a rewards program) Rakuten Group announced a partnership recently that will provide members of the parties' loyalty program with benefits under each program. Under the partnership, Marriott gains direct local access to Rakuten's approximately 100 million members for promoting Marriott's hotel brands and offering travel experience customized for Japanese travelers. In exchange, Rakuten members – once enrolled in Marriott Bonvoy – will enjoy discounted member rates, opportunities to earn and redeem program points, and other member-only opportunities. Enrollment in Marriott Bonvoy will be via a simplified one-click process on the Rakuten platform. According to John Toomey, Marriott's Vice President of Sales and Marketing in the Asia-Pacific region, the partnership is part of Marriott's ongoing efforts to focus on local markets via partnerships and other collaborations with in-country partners. The announced partnership is scheduled to launch in phases, with the first phase starting late next month.

### **Sonder Continues to Expand Distribution Network**

*(“Hotel Engine to Offer Sonder Inventory to Business Travelers,” October 7, 2021 via Phocus Wire)*

Short-term rental company, Sonder, continues to add corporate distribution channels for its rental inventory. In July, Sonder announced that it was adding its inventory to the major global distribution systems and partnering with several well-known travel management companies

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and travel consortia. Recently, Sonder and the corporate travel booking and management platform, Hotel Engine, announced that Sonder's inventory will appear on the platform this month.

### **Expedia Combines Loyalty Programs**

*("Expedia Group to Combine its Rewards Programs Creating Mega Loyalty Platform," October 5, 2021 via Travel Weekly Australia)*

Expedia Group announced its plan to combine the loyalty programs of its various travel brands into a single loyalty program. Members of the combined program will be able to earn and redeem points on each of Expedia's brands – Expedia, Travelocity, Hotels.com, Orbitz and notably, Vrbo – for a wide variety of products and services – air, hotel, cruise, car rental, vacation rental and activities.

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Other news:

### **Data Privacy Laws Forcing Changes in Digital Marketing**

*October 6, 2021 via Travel Weekly*

As the digital privacy landscape shifts, experts say that travel companies will likely need to adapt their online marketing strategies accordingly. Although online privacy has long been a hot topic, concern over the protection of personal data has come to a head in more recent years, driven in part by regulation.

### **Google Agrees to Government Request to Pull Ads Linking to Fake Travel Sites**

*October 5, 2021 via CBC - Politics News*

On Tuesday, Google agreed to a request from the Government of Canada and changed the results that appear when travelers coming to Canada search for the ArriveCan app – an effort to protect travelers from paying unnecessary fees to phoney websites.

### **Asia's TruTrip Adds Refund Subscription Service for Hesitant Business Travelers**

*October 4, 2021 via Skift (subscription may be required)*

A Singapore-based corporate travel booking app has launched a subscription package that lets companies refund their trip – with no questions asked. TruTrip's new TruFlex feature provides an instant refund of at least 80 percent of incurred costs for travelers in the event of trip cancellations.