

Duff on Hospitality Law

Rewriting the Travel Rulebook: AI, Accor and a Swiss Surprise

on 5.26.25

Good Monday morning from Seattle . . . For those of you who have served in the armed forces, thank you for your service. Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, May 23, 2025, is below. This week's Update features stories for everyone – leisure, corporate / managed and group. I hope you enjoy.

- **Accor to Launch New Event / Meeting Direct Booking Tool.** Accor this past week announced plans to launch a new direct booking tool targeting clients seeking meeting / event space and associated guest room blocks. The initial version of the platform (to be available later this year) will allow bookings of small room blocks (up to 30). The second, more robust version (which be available in 2026), will allow the booking of meeting / event space and larger room blocks. The platform will also allow users to connect with Accor's loyalty program, ALL Accor.
- **Swiss Regulators Cut Booking.com Commissions.** In an unusual ruling, the Swiss Price Supervisor determined that the commissions charged by Booking.com to Swiss hotels are "excessive" and ordered Booking.com to reduce its commissions by up to 25%. The ruling takes effect 3 months after becoming final and will remain in effect for three years. According to the Supervisor, the ruling is intended to improve the competitiveness of Swiss hotels. Not surprisingly, Booking.com has stated that it intends to appeal the determination, arguing that Booking is one of multiple channels that Swiss hotels can choose to use. Note that the ruling has a very narrow application – it applies only to hotels physically located in Switzerland. As much as hoteliers around the world like to see a similar result in their jurisdiction, such a ruling is highly, highly unlikely (maybe impossible).
- **Travel Features Prominently in Google's Recent AI Announcements.** At this past week's Google I/O 2025 developer conference, Google announced several AI enhancements to its industry-leading search engine and related products. As with most AI announcements, Google's demos of the new enhancements were heavily oriented to the travel industry. Among its many announcements and demonstrations, Google announced a new AI-enhanced search upgrade – AI Mode. With AI Mode (which expands on Google's existing AI Overview), users can provide the search engine detailed queries that require the search engine to complete multiple simultaneous searches. Users who wish to receive

personalized responses from AI Mode can grant the tool access to their Gmail accounts and prior website searches. Other related announcements included a new AI agent that allows AI Mode to complete web searches on behalf of the user. Initial uses of the agentic tool included event ticket purchases, restaurant reservations and local appointments (all completed via third party partnerships with Ticketmaster, Stubhub, Resy and Vagaro). Hotel bookings were not featured in the demos, but the application is obvious and cannot be too far behind. Google's new AI Mode is available to U.S. users now, with the agentic tools available later this summer.

Have a great week everyone.

Accor to Build Global Ecosystem for Direct Meetings, Event Booking

May 23, 2025 via Business Travel News

Accor plans to launch a meetings and events booking platform by 2025. It is working with leading meetings and hospitality technology providers and will roll out first versions by late 2025. The move looks to bring meetings into a direct-booking formulation, avoiding significant costs associated with participating in third-party marketplaces, but also tying meetings business to its loyalty program.

The Impact on Travel From Google I/O 2025 Launches

May 23, 2025 via PhocusWire

A look at how launches and updates, including AI mode and agentic AI, from the Google I/O 2025 event this week might play out in travel.

Swiss Regulator Orders Booking.com to Cut Commission Rates 25%

May 22, 2025 via PhocusWire

The regulator said the ruling was "necessary," as the parties were unable to reach an agreement after "intensive negotiations."

28% of Travel Managers Considering Switching TMCs

May 20, 2025 via PhocusWire

Travel managers cited issues such as inconsistent service and poor tech functionality in a survey conducted in March by GBTA, Direct Travel, Spotnana and Troop Travel.

Trip.com Group Rides AI, Inbound Boom, and Older Travelers to Strong Quarter

May 20, 2025 via Skift Travel News

Trip.com's inbound bookings soared 100% as China's visa-free policies lured more tourists. With AI and senior travelers fueling growth, the company's global comeback looks sharp and well-targeted.

The Venture Capital View on Generative AI in Travel

May 20, 2025 via Skift Travel News

Cara Whitehill, Vice President at Thayer Investment Partners, brings a bold investor lens to the Skift Data + AI Summit stage. As generative AI slashes the cost of launching and scaling startups, she sees a shift as seismic as the rise of SaaS and cloud computing. One that's not only ...

Google's New 'AI Mode' for Search: The Impact on Trip Planning

May 20, 2025 via Skift

This was Google's biggest group of AI announcements yet. With all the of the travel-related demos, the industry is clearly top-of-mind during development. Summarize Story Share Select a question above or ask something else Google announced several AI enhancements during its annual I/O developer conference Tuesday, with travel-related ...

ByteDance is Tearing Up the Online Travel Playbook

May 15, 2025 via WiT

BACK In an age where social media has become pervasive, it seems inevitable that holiday bookings would eventually join cat videos and influencer selfies in the endless scroll of your feed. Yet even the most seasoned industry observers might be surprised by the speed at which social commerce has turned ...