

Duff on Hospitality Law

AI at the Crossroads, Booking.com in the Crosshairs: This Week's Travel Industry Headlines

on 6.8.25

Good Sunday evening from Seattle . . . Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, June 6, 2025, is below. Like last week's Update, which featured a number of stories on Booking.com, this week's Update also includes several Booking.com stories and updates to stories we featured last week. I hope you enjoy.

- **UPDATE: European Hoteliers to Pursue Claims Against Booking.com.** Last week's Update included two stories detailing European hoteliers' planned class action litigation against Booking.com over its parity provisions. For those of you interested in learning more about the class action and the circumstances that led to hoteliers' decision to move forward against Booking.com, I'd encourage you to review the helpful *Skift* story below. For anyone considering joining the class action (or fielding hotel owner questions regarding joining the class action), a little context is important. The hoteliers complaining the loudest in these situations are typically independent hoteliers, most of whom because of the lack of leverage or resources are forced to operate under Booking.com's standard terms and conditions (including its many varieties of parity). Hoteliers benefiting from global, corporate-wide agreements with Booking.com (or any other large distributor, for that matter), in contrast, operate in a much different environment – an environment that may not be as compelling (and in fact, could be seen as detrimental) in the eyes of competition authorities or European judges. Something to think about . . .
- **Booking Holdings Stays Close to Potential AI Disruptors.** Still wondering how the major OTAs view generative AI? Recent comments by Booking Holdings' CFO, Ewout Steenbergen, provide further evidence of at least one OTA's perspective (and confirms what we've been seeing over the past several months). In an interview at last week's Bank of America Global Technology Conference, Steenbergen made clear Booking Holdings' ongoing efforts to remain close to the popular generative AI platforms. According to Steenbergen, "ultimately, those [generative AI platforms] might become more leads-generating platforms, replacing traditional search. And we want to be their really close partners in that."

- **Hilton's Contrarian View of AI in Hospitality.** Unlike many (dare I say, most) in the industry who are focused on AI and its effects on travel marketing and distribution (I include myself in this group), Hilton is taking a slightly different view and approach to AI. According to Chris Silcock, Hilton's President of Global Brands and Commercial Services, Hilton would rather focus on how AI can improve guests' on-property experiences – real time guest feedback, guest messaging and personalized messages and advance room assignments for the most loyal of loyalty program members. If the guest has a better on-property experience at a Hilton-branded property because of these new tools, so the argument goes, the guest will seek out future stays at one of Hilton's 26 brands.

Have a great week everyone.

Agoda Launches AI-Powered Vacation Planner for Indian Travelers

June 5, 2025 via PhocusWire

Online travel agency Agoda has launched an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered vacation planner for Indian travelers. The travel planner, from the Singapore-based brand owned by Booking Holdings, was built with Google's AI technology, Gemini and Imagen, and is available through the AgodaVacationPlanner.com site until June 30 as part of a marketing ...

Booking to Challenge EU's Etraveli Merger Veto at July Hearing

June 5, 2025 via MLex

Booking Holdings will counter the European Commission's decision to block its takeover of online flight reservation company Etraveli at a two-day hearing next month. In blocking the deal, the regulator alleged that Booking expanding its travel "ecosystem" would have increased its dominant position in the hotel booking market, leading to higher prices. The case is much anticipated for how the General Court rules on such a theory of harm.

Hotels Escalate Long-Running Battle Against Booking.com's Pricing Rules

June 5, 2025 via Skift

What began as a German court case is rapidly becoming an effort by hotels across Europe to seek financial damages from Booking.com's for two decades of pricing practices. Hotels have complained about Booking.com's contract terms related to pricing for about two decades, but their long-running dispute has shifted to seeking ...

Booking Holdings Hedges Google Disruption, Wants to 'Be Close' to AI Hyperscalers

June 5, 2025 via Skift

Booking Holdings CFO Ewout Steenberghe wants the company to "be close" to all of the major large language model developers to hedge its bets on the evolution of travel search. "We think it's really important to be close to that world to understand what is happening, be their partner, doing ...

Hilton's AI Strategy: Less Hype, More Guest Experience

June 4, 2025 via Skift

Hilton shows that AI's real value in hospitality may be behind the front desk, not in the booking path. Hilton believes that its best early opportunity to deploy artificial intelligence isn't by changing how travelers book rooms, but by improving the experiences that guests have. At the Skift Data + ...

OTA Marketing Spend Rose in Q1 2025

June 3, 2025 via PhocusWire

As Airbnb, Booking Holdings, Expedia Group and Trip.com Group continue to up marketing spend, PhocusWire looks at what they're saying about these investments.

The Limits of Artificial Intelligence in Travel Planning

June 3, 2025 via Travel Weekly

Is AI coming for tour operator and travel advisor jobs? That's the question Wayfairer Travel CEO Jay Stevens sought to answer when he tasked ChatGPT with planning his trip to Japan.

Booking Under Investigation in Greece Over Abuse Concerns

June 3, 2025 via Global Competition Review

Greece's Competition Commission is progressing an abuse of dominance investigation into Booking.com following an extensive preliminary probe into the country's online travel agency sector.

American Express Global Business Travel Transforms Corporate Travel With Powerful AI Enhancements

June 3, 2025 via Travel and Tour World

American Express Global Business Travel upgrades Egencia with advanced AI, delivering faster, smarter support and seamless travel management for business travelers worldwide.