

Duff on Hospitality Law

Slower Summer Week, Big Travel Tech Moves: OpenAI's Booking Agent and DirectBooker's AI Play

By Greg Duff on 7.21.25 | Posted in Online Travel Update

With summer in full swing, it is no surprise that this past week was another slow week in the online travel industry. Our recommendation? Enjoy this week's Update with a drink in hand by your pool or other favorite body of water. Enjoy:

- **OpenAI Launches Agent Mode.** On Thursday this past week, OpenAI officially released new functionality (ChatGPT Agent) that can search and book hotels, activities and flights on behalf of its ChatGPT chatbot users. Pro, Plus and Team users of ChatGPT have or will soon have access to the new agent with Enterprise and Educator users to follow. According to ChatGPT, the agent can create custom travel plans (using users' provided destinations and preferences) and itineraries complete with maps and hotel and activities bookings. Over time, as the agent learns of users' preferences, the agent will factor those preference into its proposed plans and itineraries. A [demo](#) released as part of the launch shows a user using the new agent to plan and book a trip for an upcoming wedding. In the demo, the agent uses Booking.com to review hotels' availability and rates and then book.
- **New Intermediary Seeks to Help Hoteliers Leverage AI Platforms.** DirectBooker, a startup backed former TripAdvisor CEO, Steve Kaufer, and ex-Google Travel head, Richard Holden, is building a B2B platform to feed rich (differentiated) hotel content (ARI) to AI platforms directly and allow hoteliers to bypass the emerging content stranglehold held by OTAs. What's the business model you might ask? Early indications from DirectBooker are that they are looking at traditional CPC or CPA models. Additional details about the startup's plans are available on the DirectBooker [website](#).

[OpenAI Launches ChatGPT Agent Mode: What It Could Mean for the Travel Industry](#)

July 18, 2025 via Skift Travel News

ChatGPT Agent could be a game changer for travel. It can make real bookings. But will people trust AI with their money, logins and bank details? OpenAI on Thursday unveiled a new

capability for its ChatGPT chatbot called agent mode, and it's more than just a smarter chatbot.

Former Heads of Google Travel and Tripadvisor Form AI Startup to Head Off Online Travel Agencies

July 17, 2025 via Skift Travel News

The idea of hotels partnering with ex-Googlers and DirectBooking trying to undercut OTA-like Tripadvisor's relationships with LLMs is not without its ironies. Still, the concept of hotels working more closely with LLMs and bypassing OTAs is one that could gain traction.