

Duff on Hospitality Law

## Algorithms, Alliances and the Art of Booking: This Week's Travel Tech Shifts

By Greg Duff on 9.1.25 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Good Monday afternoon from Seattle . . . For those of you enjoying a long holiday weekend, Happy Labor Day. Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, August 29, 2025, is below. With the summer doldrums coming to an end, activity across the online industry has picked up starting with Booking.com's newly announced partnership with TikTok, which dominated industry headlines (and our many of our clients' attention) this past week. Enjoy.

- **Booking.com's Growing Interest in Social Media.** For the past several quarters now, Booking Holdings, CEO, Glenn Fogel, has made reference to Booking's increasing interest and investments in social media and AI. While many (this author included) focused largely on Fogel's statements on AI, Booking.com's newly announced partnership with TikTok provides some of the strongest evidence yet of Booking's efforts to leverage social media and to transition social media from a historically marketing focused channel (a source of traveler inspiration) into a booking channel. So, what does this newly announced partnership mean for hotels (and particularly, hoteliers' direct booking efforts)? I think it is too early to tell. Many questions remain about both social media and artificial intelligence and travelers' (across all ages and demographics) general willingness to use (and trust) either platform. For me, one thing is clear. Booking.com's latest announcement (which is only the latest in a growing list of newly announced partnerships between leading distributors and their new AI and social media partners) has brought back memories (not all good) of OTAs' early dominance of online search and the many bookings that resulted.
- **Acrimony Between Hoteliers and Booking.com?** Not sure I agree with this one, at least for the reasons noted in the attached article.
- **Ryanair and Booking Holdings Bury the Hatchet – For Now.** For years now, our Update has followed the acrimonious (and sometimes amusing) relationship between Ryanair and distributors. With this newest announced deal, Ryanair has done a complete about face in

its view of (and willingness to work with) the online platforms. According to reports, the newly announced deal features some unique deal terms (at least when compared to hoteliers' typical terms and conditions) – passengers who book through Booking.com will have access to their Ryanair accounts and Ryanair will receive passengers' actual contact information (not fictitious email addresses) through which Ryanair is able to communicate directly with passengers.

- **Google Continues to Add AI Capabilities.** In its latest round of AI-related announcements, Google has announced that AI Mode (which is currently available to users in the U.S., UK and India) is expanding to over 180 new countries and territories. Google Ultra AI subscribers will also soon be able to leverage “agentic capabilities” in AI Mode to search and make restaurant selections and reservations and other services bookings.
- **Agoda Launches “Ask Me Anything”(AMA) Property Bot.** Leveraging ChatGPT and the information it is able to access and use, Agoda has introduced a new AI chatbot on its website and mobile application that provides travelers detailed information about potential properties. The chatbot now answers 30,000 questions a day about Agoda's listed properties. Users of the chatbot can now avoid messaging properties directly with questions regarding their stay. Hoteliers take note – this latest functionality seeks to make available to Agoda users detailed property information that hoteliers may have never intended to make available through a third party platform. Content differentiation may now be more difficult than ever.

Have a great week everyone.

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### Have TikTok and Booking.com Just ‘Nuked’ the Travel Funnel?

*August 28, 2025 via PhocusWire*

Select U.S. users can now book hotel rooms through Booking.com directly on TikTok—and the platform has also launched TikTokGO for creators to earn travel commissions.

### Trip.com Group Unveils AI Trip Planner

*August 28, 2025 via PhocusWire*

During the company's Q2 2025 earnings call, chairman James Liang said AI remains central to strategy adding that OTAs are "uniquely positioned" to lead the development of travel-focused AI.

### Booking.com and Hotels Increasingly Go Their Separate Ways

*August 27, 2025 via PhocusWire*

The relationship with Booking.com has especially soured in Europe as the OTA faces a lawsuit from 10,000 hotels.

### **Ryanair CEO Talks Up Booking Deal in Fight with OTAs**

*August 27, 2025 via MLex*

Ryanair's CEO has hailed yesterday's deal on a framework for Booking to sell its flights as a victory for consumers and for the Irish low-cost airline. He also defended the Irish carrier's lawsuits against EU approvals for Covid-era bailouts for Deutsche Lufthansa, Air France-KLM and others. "I...

### **Airbnb Is the 'Best-Placed' Online Travel Agency to Fend Off AI Disruption: Bernstein Report**

*August 27, 2025 via Skift*

When it comes to potential disruption from the ChatGPT peer group, Airbnb's large proportion of direct traffic would be a buffer. On the other hand, Booking.com has been a leader over the years in adapting to new marketing channels and using them to advantage. All of the major ...

### **Booking.com Parent in \$9.5 Million 'Junk Fee' Settlement with Texas**

*August 26, 2025 via Claims Journal*

The parent of Booking.com and other travel websites will pay \$9.5 million to settle a Texas lawsuit claiming it deceptively marketed hotel rooms by omitting mandatory "junk" fees, enticing consumers with artificially low prices. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said on Tuesday the settlement with Booking Holdings is the largest ...

### **Ryanair to Put Its Fares on Booking.com, Priceline and Kayak**

*August 26, 2025 via Skift Travel News*

Several major online travel agencies, such as Booking.com, for years didn't have access to flights from both Ryanair and Southwest. That era has come to a close.

### **Google Expands AI Mode to 180 New Countries and Territories, Adds Features**

*August 22, 2025 via PhocusWire*

One of the new features include enhanced options for finding restaurant reservations, local appointments and event tickets.

### **Agoda Launches AI-Powered Bot to Instantly Answer Hotel Questions**

*August 22, 2025 via Korea Herald*

Digital travel platform Agoda has officially launched the Property AMA ("Ask Me Anything") Bot, an AI chatbot designed to provide instant answers to travelers' hotel-specific questions. This innovation aims to help users make quicker, more confident booking decisions by cutting through the clutter and ...