

Duff on Hospitality Law

Travel's Balance of Power

By Greg Duff on 9.20.25 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Good Saturday morning from Seattle . . . Our Online Travel Update (OTU) for the week ending Friday, September 19, 2025, is below. For those of you asking why the list of stories has grown so long the past few Updates (and what happened to the bespoke, curated short list of must reads that you've come to expect), the short answer is artificial intelligence. While I do my best not to get caught up in the spectacle that AI has become, it would appear that we are entering an AI arms race as platforms and intermediaries of all varieties (including now, apparently, Airbnb) try to outdo the other. I'd also add that the onset of fall (and with it, the seemingly endless stream of industry events (this past week, the Skift Global Forum), investor conferences, etc.) contributes to the growing list of stories. Read with caution and enjoy.

- **Booking.com Expands Business Travel Offerings.** Booking.com's business platform, Booking.com for Business, announced this past week a new partnership with event planning platform, [Bizly](#). Users of the business platform can now access Bizly's global inventory of hotels, conference centers, private dining rooms and co-working spaces for meeting and event bookings. Bizly now joins other business travel service providers like Expensify, International SOS and Traxo in the Booking.com for Business marketplace.
- **Chinese Regulators Reviewing Trip.com's Auto Price-Matching Tools.** Chinese online distributor, Trip.com, has been "summoned" by Chinese market regulators over the distributor's alleged "unreasonable" operating practices. At issue are Trip.com's automatic price adjustment tools that adjust hoteliers' rates (or apply promotional discounts) whenever the distributor discovers competing platforms offering lower prices. Chinese regulators claim that these practices violate China's E-Commerce Law and Interim Regulations on Anti-Unfair Competition on the Internet. According to regulators, the summons was issued to ensure that Trip.com follows through on promised corrective changes.
- **Airbnb to Get Serious About Hotels.** Although Airbnb had previously announced changes to better position itself to re-enter the hotel market, comments by Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky this past Tuesday at the Skift Global Forum made clear the short term rental booking platform's objectives. According to Chesky, "[we] are now getting serious about

hotels.” In addition to the previously announced fee structure change (15.5% commission), Airbnb’s announced plans include a dedicated hotel interface. The new boutique and independent hotel offerings will be piloted in a few major cities, including New York, though timing of the pilots was not announced. The addition of hotels is one of several initiatives that Airbnb recently announced to drive faster growth.

- **The Growing (Disruptive) Influence of Social Media.** And dare I say, influencers?!? Argh. Research recently commissioned by [iSeatz](#) reveals that the traditional booking path is being turned on its head – particularly for younger travelers. The study surveyed 1000 American travelers over the age of 18. A few highlights . . .
 - 43% of respondents said that they were inspired by a loved one. No surprise. Younger generations, however, are many times more inspired by social media (52% of Gen Z respondents and 46% of millennials identified social media as their primary source for travel inspiration).
 - Younger generations are often more likely to use social media over traditional search for conducting travel research (45% of Gen Z respondents prefer social media and 27% go to social media first).
 - 40% of respondents said that influencers had a “significant impact” on where they travel and how they book (the number only grows larger with younger generations – 62% of Gen Z respondents said that influencers “impact” their travel decisions).

An interesting point, particularly for travel suppliers, is the technological infrastructure gap that prohibits users of social media to book directly within their chosen platforms. A majority of Gen Z respondents and millennials said they would book directly from a social media platform if the process was secure and seamless. Recent studies suggest that AI platforms suffer from this same technological challenge. The travel brand (supplier, OTA or other, yet unnamed industry outsider) that best (not necessarily first) solves this problem may be the ultimate winner.

Have a great week everyone.