

Five Things You Should Know About Buying Online

Few industries have benefited more from internet commerce than the travel industry. Travelers are now armed with a great deal of research – helping them make better vacation choices.

Many consumers believe that booking through an internet site will guarantee savings. This is not always the case, and much has changed since the first internet booking company opened its portals.

TakeOffeh.com walks you through some key points to consider before pressing the 'buy' button.



1. Not long ago, many of the vacation prices on the internet varied greatly – often appearing even lower than those advertised by the actual tour operator who packaged the vacation. However, a few years ago, tour operators leveled the playing field by prohibiting the practice of advertising their products at discounted rates. This does not mean an agent can't actually discount a package, it simply means you won't find large price discrepancies for the same package on competing internet sites.
2. Most travel retailers now have a booking system on their website to give the consumer the option of shopping on line 24/7. The beauty is you can also call and clarify issues with a live agent on the phone. This often provides a measure of security for those who are concerned about the legitimacy of a large impersonal website. This has brought back business to traditional agencies that saw business leaking to the big internet advertisers. While most big names are legitimate and provide some client support, it is a case of 'buyer beware' when the provider is completely unknown and may be based in another country.
3. Another thing most consumers may not be aware of is that there are relatively few internet booking engine providers in the marketplace. The smallest agency in the country may subscribe to the same distribution channel as the largest Canadian tour operator. For instance, one of the biggest booking engine providers in Canada is a company called Soft Voyage which has a virtual monopoly on searching and delivering pricing and inventory for a variety of vacation options. So spending hours searching for a price on a variety of websites will likely yield very similar information. You are better off finding a provider with good customer service you feel comfortable with.
4. Travel protection, which should be very important for consumers, is under provincial jurisdiction. Not all provinces have a protection plan in place, while others have established strong and long standing programs. Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have stringent agent requirements and excellent programs in place. Even if you reside in another province, if you buy from a retailer based in one of these provinces you are protected. On the other hand, if you are in Ontario, and buy from a Nova Scotia based agency, you are not protected. Smaller provinces have looked at the existing models and concluded that provincial laws which force credit card companies to reimburse clients for non delivery of service are sufficient.
5. The small print on the website where you are booking a hotel, car, or all inclusive vacation is important to read and understand. Before you finally submit your credit card information, you need to find out what the cancellation and change policies are. More than one person has lost their entire investment because of a zero cancellation policy. This is especially important to know when booking out of country properties you know little or nothing about. You will have a hard time chasing down someone who is anonymous and thousands of miles away. Better yet, make sure you get advice on insurance. It is likely the best travel purchase you will ever make.



By Ron Pradinuk

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