

The Use of Online Service Booking in Tourist Activity

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Abstract. This article analyzes the possibilities of booking services electronically via the Internet in tourist business. The author provides algorithms for booking hotels, airline tickets, and tours.

The article provides a practical characterization of the use of this type of service through the example of the tourist company OOO Anastasia.

Keywords: online booking system; electronic tickets; booking hotels; travel company; travel agent; booking tours via the Internet.

Introduction

Every year, millions of tourist arrivals are registered around the world. It is the use of information technology in tourist business that lets common people explore the world thanks to the simplification of the process of consuming the tourist product, which can come as a set of services in the way of tourist transportation, transfers, room and board arrangements, travel tours, etc. [13].

The adoption of online service booking functionality, from booking tickets to full-scale tours, has brought about the active development of Internet commerce within the tourist industry. Modern technology has turned electronic commerce into one of the major sales channels by complementing traditional “real-life” communication with the client and expanding the potential for providing personal distance services.

The use of online booking systems has made it possible for us to easily check on the availability of vacant rooms in hotels or seats on flights. It has become much easier for travel companies and travel agents to come up with a tour inclusive of the wishes of the client, receive instant confirmations, as well as stay competitive [4].

Materials and Methods.

This article relies on various sources: the fundamentals of tourist activity provided in a work by M.B. Birzhakov, a description of steps in booking travel tours from travel company websites (Booking.com, Agoda.ru, etc.), as well as examples from the tourist experience of OOO Anastasia clients.

This work’s methodological basis is the dialectical method. It also employs general scientific methods, such as systemic and comparative analysis, observation, and comparison.

Discussion.

Online booking systems are intended to help one search for and book travel tours via the Internet and effortlessly keep track of the status and progress of one’s bookings. Due to the rapid development of technology, old ways of receiving and exchanging information are being replaced by newer and more sophisticated ones. In the sphere of tourism, receiving information by telephone and booking via fax and email are becoming a matter of the past [1].

Booking hotels online

Here is the standard algorithm for online hotel booking:

1. The client enters the online booking system website and reads through the booking rules;
2. Next, one picks a hotel and, having made sure there are vacant rooms available and filled in all the relevant fields in a form, sends one’s order into the system by email;

3. The system automatically processes the order (except in non-standard cases) and sends a preliminary confirmation along with the terms and conditions of prepayment, and the client is placed on a waiting list;
4. Upon receipt of relevant guarantees from the client (a deposit, a letter of commitment, etc.), the agent makes a final confirmation of the booking;
5. A copy of the final confirmation is sent over to the hotel;
6. Then the booking information is entered into the occupancy schedule with a subsequent automatic change of the status of the hotel's room supply with the agent.

In cases when the hotel runs its own website, incoming orders are handled by the hotel's own booking service. In this case, the interaction procedure looks as follows:

1. The client enters the online booking system website and reads through the booking rules;
2. Next, one locates a suitable hotel and, having made sure there are vacant rooms available and filled in all the relevant information fields, sends the order directly over to the hotel by email;
3. The hotel's automatic control system automatically processes the order (except in non-standard cases) and sends a preliminary confirmation along with the terms and conditions of prepayment, and the name of the potential client is entered into the waiting list;
4. Upon receipt of relevant guarantees from the client (a deposit, a letter of commitment, etc.), the hotel makes a final confirmation of the room or seat having been booked;
5. The booking information is entered into the occupancy schedule with a subsequent automatic change of the status of the hotel's room supply on the website [5].

The advantages of booking hotels online include:

- Making instant payments for orders on the website;
- The client immediately receives a guarantee of check-in at the hotel's prices;
- The client can pick for oneself the length of stay, the room category, and a set of additional hotel services;
- There is no need for the hotel to get in touch with the client, since booking takes places automatically without administrator participation;
- The hotel establishes the size of quotes for rooms to be booked online, all the prices, and the availability of additional services;
- The system works autonomously around the clock 24 hours 7 days a week [6].



Our analysis of online hotel booking systems has revealed that the following systems are the most reliable to use:

- www.booking.com (recommended to those who plan on booking hotels in Europe);
- www.agoda.ru (booking hotels in Asia);
- www.hotels-and-discounts.com (booking hotels in the US);
- www.oktogo.ru, www.ostrovok.ru (good for booking hotels in Russia).

To compare the prices on these and lots of other sites, one can use the following special search services: roomguru.ru, hotellook.ru, etc.

Budget-oriented hotels and hostels can be booked on www.hostelworld.com [9-12].

Purchasing airline tickets online

At the moment, most airline companies provide services related to purchasing electronic tickets for their flights.

First and foremost, tourists want to know where online they can get the best deal for airline tickets. The most evident piece of advice would be to order tickets on the websites of airline companies. Having said that, one needs to take account of certain considerations. First of all, normally there are

several firms engaged in mass activity, so, before booking one's tickets, one needs to compare all airline offers available. Second of all, tickets are normally more expensive on airline company websites than on websites run by ticket agencies.

The most popular "air ticket offices" are Onetwotrip.com, Trip.ru, Ozon.travel, etc.

All these websites can provide one with affordable offers from any airline companies. And since ticket agencies place the major focus on sales specifically, it is much more convenient to use them than the websites of many airlines [7].

There is also a convenient server called i-TicketsFinder.ru, which is equipped with an automated system that enables one to search for and compare ticket prices from leading Internet websites engaged in the sale of airline tickets [8].

Figure 1 provides a diagram illustrating a typical online airline ticket purchase.



Figure 2. An example of booking airline tickets [3]

Here are the steps in the purchase of an airline ticket:

- First, one sets the ticket search parameters (directions, dates, number of passengers, etc.);
- The client gets a list of all available flight options along with the prices (these lists are normally provided in ascending order, i.e. from the cheapest to the most expensive tickets) and picks the most suitable option;
- The client is then taken to the ticket purchase page, where all the relevant information is to be provided (the passenger's name, etc.);
- The client pays for the ticket online (in certain cases, the client can elect to pay cash through ATMs);
- The client gets a flight receipt by email.

Information on passengers is entered into the airline's booking system, and the client will later on just have to present one's passport and flight receipt at the check-in counter.

When it comes to ticket agencies, the following fact should definitely be mentioned: prices on the websites of different air ticket offices vary and tickets for the same flights of the same airline company can differ considerably. Therefore, it is recommended that, to save money, one compare offers on different websites.

Booking travel tours online

Today, the popularity of the Internet is leading to its wide use in tourist business. In addition to ordering airline and railway tickets and booking hotels all across the world, one can also pick a full-scale individual travel tour online.

Computer booking systems used in developing tourist websites are distinguished not only by swiftness of performance but the ability to handle massive amounts of information for tourists.

Tourists can enjoy the following advantages of using a system of this kind:

- There are lots of various getaway offers concentrated in one place;
- The availability of information - 24 hours a day;
- The ease of comparing offers and picking an optimum getaway offer;
- Accurate and swiftly updated information on the number of vacancies in resorts, hotels, tourist campsites, and sanatoria in any country or region of the world;
- It saves you time – the tourist does not have to waste time going to the travel firm and talking to managers. It is much more pleasant to do it in the comfort of family and friends;
- The client gets an opportunity to study additional portal sections (“customer reviews”, “consultation”, “forum”, etc.), which can help one make up one’s mind concerning one’s choice, provide all the answers one may need, and dispel any doubts one may have;
- Booking via the Internet does not obligate the client in any way. It is a flexible and convenient instrument for communication. The client can get in touch with a travel agency manager and change the trip’s time and place.

Travel firms get the following advantages:

- There is less time needed to search for a suitable offer;
- The work of the manager gets optimized during the high tourist season;
- The opportunity to distinguish oneself, continue to be competitive with other travel firms, look more progressive, “advanced”, and dynamically developing [14-15].

The travel firm OOO Anastasia, based in the city of Sochi, provides services in the way of booking travel tours to anywhere in the world offline and online [16].

OOO Anastasia, as a travel agent, works with international travel companies, such as:

- Amigo Tours, a travel company that handles trips to the Czech Republic, Italy, France, and Austria;

- Pegas Touristik, a travel company that offers tours across Turkey, Egypt, Cyprus, Thailand, India, and Spain and specializes mainly in beach leisure.

- DANKO Travel Company, a travel company specializing in tours across Europe.

Here is a standard algorithm for a travel agent’s booking an online tour:

1. Registering the new user;
2. Choosing the tour;
3. Booking the order;
4. At this stage, once all the fields have been properly filled in, one has to press the “Recalculate” button. The system converts the amount into rubles. Then one presses the “Book” button. After that, the system comes up with a tracking number for the order. Using this number one can easily check on the status of the order and, if necessary, edit or unbook it.
5. Checking on the status of the order. In order to check the status of the order, one has to select “View the Order” and enter its number in the window. One will be presented with the latest information.

Figure 2 provides a diagram for the procedure for booking travel tours online.

There is also a module for editing tourist information, which lets travel agents edit tourist data: “Last Name”, “First Name”, “Middle Name”, “Passport Information”, etc.

If the travel agent’s telephone numbers, addresses, or banking particulars have changed, one should make relevant changes in the system in a timely fashion. For that, one needs to enter the “Editing Partners” section.

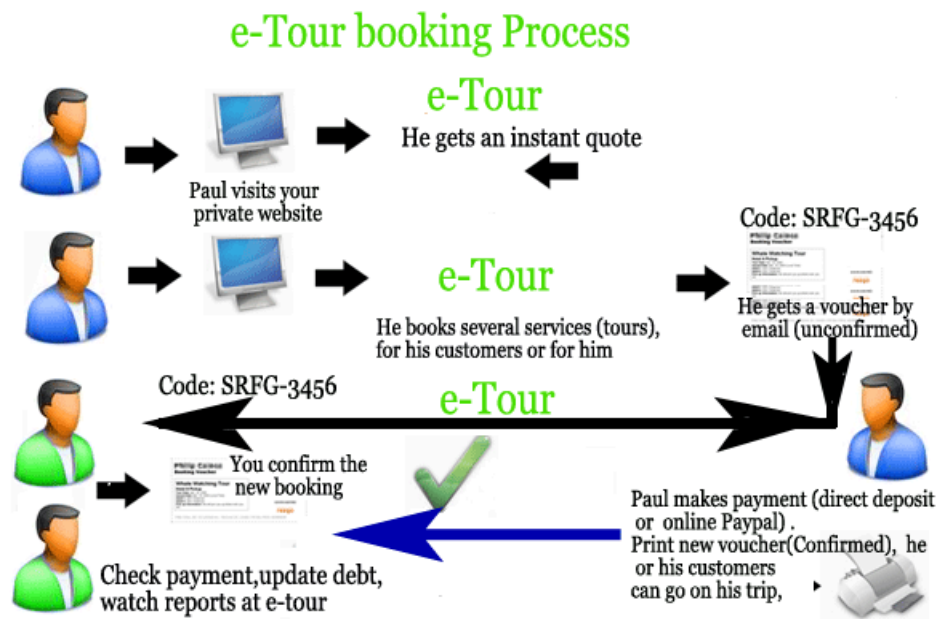


Figure 1. A diagram for the e-Tour booking process [2]

Conclusion.

No firm will be able to compete in the tourist market successfully without using the latest information technology.

At the present time, travel agencies are totally consumed by the desire to adopt electronic booking technology – the Internet is starting to have a massive impact on the development of tourist business all across the globe. Internet and computer booking systems are becoming full participants in the tourist market.

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