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Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Industry Updates: Key Interviews, Airline Policy Changes and New Travel Platform Launches

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This week's Update features a variety of stories, including interviews with two of the online travel industries major influencers, Ariane Goren of Expedia and Drew Pinto of Marriott. I hope you enjoy.

- **American Airlines' War with Tour Operators Continues**. Responding to American Airlines' newly (on May 13) enacted policies on cancellations and re-bookings, Tauck advised travel advisors this past week that it had stopped booking travel with American Airlines and other Oneworld members (including British Airways, Japan Airlines and Qantas). The policies in question impose a $50 cancellation fee on cancellations beyond the 24-hour booking window and a $50 cancellation / re-booking (aka churn) fee on two or more churns.
- **Southwest's Distribution Evolution Continues - Flights Will Now Appear on Google Flights**. It was just last week that we featured a store detailing Southwest's new partnership with Chase Travel, the first ever by Southwest to feature its flights on a third-party consumer facing booking platform. Now, Southwest is moving to Google. As of Wednesday last week, Southwest's flights are now featured alongside other airlines on Google Flights. Flights must still be booked directly with Southwest on the airline's website.
- **Lotte Card Is the Latest Financial Institution to Launch a Travel Platform**. Joining the likes of Chase and Capital One, Korean card issuer, Lotte Card (9.35 million cardholders), has announced the launch of a new travel portal offering cardholders the opportunity to search and book accommodations, flights and car rentals. The new platform will be powered by Hopper's B2B division, Hopper Technology Solutions (HTS).
- **Hoteliers and Real Estate Information Firm Seek Dismissal of Anti-Trust Case**. In one of several algorithmic price-fixing cases targeting the hospitality industry, the defendants (six hoteliers and CoStar) moved last week to dismiss the claims, arguing that there was no evidence that the defendants had conspired to fix prices through the hoteliers' use of CoStar's (STR) long-used benchmarking tools. As we noted in last week's Update, a similar price-fixing case against Las Vegas casino / hotel operators was recently dismissed.

Tauck stops booking American Airlines and its Oneworld partners

May 24, 2024 via Travel Weekly

Tour operator Tauck said its air desk has stopped booking American Airlines and other Oneworld alliance

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carriers because they have “implemented a new policy that makes it all but impossible for Tauck to offer refundable airfares.”

Southwest Airlines flights will appear in Google Flights results

May 23, 2024 via CBS News

Southwest Airlines fares are now appearing on Google after long being excluded from the search engine’s search results. The Dallas-based carrier had previously omitted its fares from searches on Google Flights and from online flight aggregators like Expedia.com, preferring for customers to find tickets mostly through its own website.

CEO Spotlight: Ariane Gorin of Expedia Group

May 23, 2024 via Phocus Wire

Prior to assuming the CEO role last week, Gorin held executive leadership roles at Expedia Group for more than 11 years, most recently serving as president of Expedia for Business since 2021.

Sabre launches new 'offer and order' platform for airlines

May 22, 2024 via Business Travel News

Sabre Corporation is introducing a new "offer and order" system to allow airlines to create more personalized content for customers. The new Sabre Mosaic tech platform will use Google's AI capabilities to increase the way that carriers can deliver individualized content to travelers, as well as selling more non-air travel products.

Marriott’s revenue and tech chief on travel retail ambition

May 21, 2024 via Phocus Wire

Marriott International chief revenue and technology officer Drew Pinto discusses the hotel giant’s strategy to replace its CRS, PMS and loyalty platform and its approach to newer technologies.

Korea-based credit card company creates travel booking portal

May 20, 2024 via Phocus Wire

The travel portal for Lotte Card customers will offer flights, accommodations and car rentals powered by HTS, Hopper’s B2B solution.

CoStar, hotels slam consumers’ 'fanciful' room pricing lawsuit

May 20, 2024 via Reuters

Commercial real estate information giant CoStar (CSGP.O), opens new tab and a group of high-end hotels have asked a U.S. judge to dismiss claims that they improperly shared data to keep room prices artificially high, calling the case “fanciful.” CoStar and six hotel operators including Hilton …

Do large airlines’ rewards programs hurt competition?

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May 19, 2024 via Travel Weekly

Do the loyalty programs of the Big Four U.S. airlines play a role in stymieing competition? The three discount airlines that participated in a May 10 joint DOT/Consumer Financial Protection Bureau hearing on airline and credit card rewards programs say yes.

Posted in Online Travel Update

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