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Online Travel Update: Booking.com announces new cancellation and deposit policies; Expedia offers discount rates to all of its travel agency partners; Agoda launches new booking tool; Amazon drops virtual experiences prices

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Unlike our short Update last week, this week's edition is filled with several important stories.

[Have a Unique Cancellation Policy? Not Anymore](#)

("Booking.com changes hotel cancellation and deposit policies," February 5, 2021 via Hotel Owner) (subscription may be required)

Last week, Booking.com announced plans to limit the number and types of cancellation, and advance deposit policies that its platform will support. The change takes effect on April 6, 2021. This is not the first time Booking.com has [announced](#) its own approach to cancellations regardless of the policies maintained by its hotel supplier partners.

[Expedia Expands its Affiliate Network](#)

("Expedia opens up discount rates to COVID-hit travel agency partners," February 3, 2021 via Phocus Wire) Thought it was difficult to monitor and manage the thousands of agents in Expedia's affiliate network? Just wait. Discounted package rates historically made available through Expedia's affiliate network will now be made available to everyone. Previously, the discounted rates had been available only to Expedia Silver or higher level members of the network. According to Expedia, the change was made to assist travel agents recovering from the ramifications of COVID-19 as demand for travel increases. Yes, that may be true, but the potential increase in bookings associated with the expanded network might also benefit Expedia.

[Meet GoLocal Tonight – Agoda's Newest Booking Tool](#)

("Agoda sees growing demand for last minute deals, launches new tool," February 3, 2021 via WIT)

The last-minute booking tool, which is expected to be rolled out this month across the Asia-Pacific region,

will feature heavily discounted rates (30 percent off standard rates) for same-day arrivals. Hoteliers should watch carefully whether existing rates are discounted for distribution through the program. Obviously, any decision to participate in the program must also be made in light of hoteliers' existing contract requirements, as rates for same-day bookings are rarely excluded from rate parity or best available rate requirements.

Amazon Drops Prices of its Virtual Experiences

*("Amazon Gets Aggressive With Promotional Pricing for Virtual Tours," February 3, 2021 via Skift)
(subscription may be required)*

Four months after the launch of Amazon Explore, Amazon is putting pressure on participating tour operators to lower their prices (with some experiences priced as low as \$10.00). Whether this is a sign of further things to come (including a rumored transition to in-person tours and experiences) for the online giant, remains to be seen.

Other news:

Hotel Direct Channels Gained Share of Bookings in 2020

February 2, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Hotels in many markets around the globe saw growth in the share of bookings coming through their direct channels during 2020. According to SiteMinder data based on gross revenue sources for all users of its platform across more than 20 of the world's top destinations, hotel websites maintained their top-five position in all destinations over the full year 2020.

Tripadvisor's Bokun Creates Activities Service With JTB Online Giant in Japan

February 5, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Online travel agency JTB is working with Bokun to give tour, activity and experience providers in Japan the tools to manage their businesses. The partnership between Tripadvisor-owned Bokun and JTB, the largest intermediary in the Japanese market, is aimed at establishing distribution connections through OTAs (online travel agencies) and other sellers for the country's wide array of operators.

Fully Refundable Vacation Rentals Get 4.2x More Bookings, Higher Revenue

February 5, 2021 via Phocus Wire

As owners and managers of vacation rentals vie to capture bookings from those willing or needing to travel despite the pandemic, data from Sweden-based Your.rentals - a provider of software for bookings, payment, channel management and listings - reveals a winning strategy: Properties that offer a full refund for cancellations get both a higher volume of bookings and higher average revenue per booking.

Facing Lawsuit, OTA Pulls Southwest Logo — But Keeps Selling Its Tickets

February 3, 2021 via travelweekly.com

The OTA Kiwi.com has stopped displaying the Southwest Airlines logo on flight search results following the filing of trademark infringement suit by the carrier last month. Kiwi, however, has continued to sell Southwest tickets.

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