

Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Update: Tripadvisor introduces virtual voice tours for Amazon Alexa; Airbnb Experiences continues to face challenges; TripActions succeeds with fresh approach to travel management

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As evidenced by our list of stories below, it was a relatively quiet week for online travel.

Tripadvisor Introduces Virtual Voice Tours for Amazon Alexa

("Tripadvisor creates virtual destination tour via Amazon Alexa," January 29, 2021 via Phocus Wire)

Working with tourism authorities in Abu Dhabi, last week, Tripadvisor launched what it claims to be the first virtual destination voice tour for Amazon Alexa. Users in the United Kingdom can summon the voice tour by asking their Alexa-enabled device "to explore Abu Dhabi." The voice tour is part of a larger campaign between Abu Dhabi and the review/distribution platform and, according to Tripadvisor, the feature will be made to other destination partners.

'Experiences' Continues to Challenge Airbnb

("Airbnb Experiences Is Still a Conundrum With Strategy Lapses," January 28, 2021 via Skift Travel News) (subscription may be required)

Given the disastrous effects of the pandemic on activities and experiences this past year, it is not surprising that Airbnb Experiences is proving to be a challenge for the company. Industry observers suggest, however, that Airbnb's challenges are more than pandemic related. Suspected problems include product offerings (local, curated experiences instead of tickets to popular destinations), supplier mix (small, local hosts instead of professional tour operators) and connectivity. As a newly minted public company, Airbnb will face increasing pressure to work out these challenges, which may require it to abandon some of its cultural foundations.

Travel and Expense Management Company TripActions Raises Another \$155 Million

("TripActions snags additional \$155M, valuation now \$5B," January 21, 2021 via Phocus Wire)

Despite claims by legacy TMC (travel management company) American Express Global Travel that innovation and innovators in the TMC space had stalled in 2020, TripActions is set out to prove differently. Last week, TripActions announced the successful closing of a Series E investment round at a valuation of \$5 billion. Notwithstanding the pandemic, 2020 was a good year for TripActions as it launched nearly 40 product enhancements and new capabilities. Corporate users now include Netflix, Wayfair and Accor. Co-founder and CEO Ariel Cohen describes his company's approach to travel and expense management as the "modern" approach - which leverages cutting-edge technology to deliver superior customer service (while generating margins unavailable to the legacy "old model" travel management companies (American Express, BCD and CWT)). With the corporate travel segment turned on its head because of the pandemic (and the widely anticipated long-term shifts in how people work and travel for work), it will be interesting to see what the long-term effect these technology-driven platforms will have on travel management.

Other news:

What's Next for Airline Distribution as IATA Pushes its Retailing Vision?

January 26, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Progress in the adoption of the New Distribution Capability (NDC) airline distribution standard is driving the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to lay out next steps. The organization says the NDC journey accelerated last year, despite the pandemic, with the 20 percent target for NDC bookings in the indirect channel hit around June, albeit for mostly domestic leisure bookings.

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