

Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Update: Tripadvisor launches beta application to help travelers avoid crowds at public places; Southwest pursues claims against unauthorized OTA; Chinese OTAs actively pursue traditional hotel investments

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This week's Update contains something for everyone - currencies and payments, infringement claims and acquisitions. Enjoy.

Want to Get Away? TripAdvisor Can Help

("Tripadvisor tests tool to aid socially distanced travel," January 11, 2021 via Phocus Wire)

Tripadvisor has recently launched a platform that enables travelers to identify and avoid crowds at businesses and public places. The platform [Crowdfree.me](https://www.crowdfree.me), which was created by a team from Tripadvisor, Slack, Amazon Web Services and other technology companies, uses historic traffic data from cell phones to provide users "crowd" information by the hour and day of week for their chosen location.

Southwest Pursues Claims Against Unauthorized OTA

("Southwest Sues Travel Booking Site for Unauthorized Ticket Sales," January 15, 2021 via Bloomberg Law) (subscription may be required)

Last week, Southwest Airlines filed suit against online travel agent [Kiwi.com](https://www.kiwi.com), asserting breach of contract, trademark infringement, Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and unjust enrichment claims against the online travel agency (OTA) for its unauthorized selling of Southwest's tickets, scraping of Southwest's flight information and displaying of Southwest's trademarks. Suppliers are no strangers to these types of concerns. More information is sure to follow on this interesting case.

Chinese OTAs Continue Traditional Hotel Investments

("Online travel giants Meituan, Tongcheng actively invest in hotel groups," January 7, 2021 via

chinatravelnews.com)

Unlike their major OTA competitors (which have been long rumored to have interest in owning and operating traditional hotels), Chinese OTAs are no strangers to hotel ownership and operations. Online travel agent Tongcheng-Elong (backed by Tencent and Trip.com) recently acquired a majority interest in mid-sized Chinese hotel company Bolin Hotel Group. The investment is not the first for the OTA. Over the past few years, Tongcheng-Elong has invested in a dozen small- or mid-sized hotel groups and management companies. Tongcheng-Elong has also built its own branded hotels, launching its first eLong Hotel in Shanghai late last year. Furthermore, Chinese booking giant Meituan recently acquired a 20 percent interest in hotel chain, Dossen International Group, which was ranked (pre-pandemic) as the 12th largest global hotel group. Trip.com has also invested in several hotel groups, including a 7.4 percent interest in Huazhu Group, which was ranked as the ninth largest global hotel group. In October 2018, Trip.com introduced its own hotel management brand, Rezen, which claims to currently operate more than 160 hotels.

Other news:

Crypto.com's Latest Partnership with Booking.com is a Good Move

January 12, 2021 via Yahoo Finance

Cryptocurrency platform Crypto.com has teamed up with major online travel agency Booking.com. Announced last Monday, the partnership is the latest push to bring crypto mainstream by the Hong Kong company.

AirAsia Calls Itself an "OTA Challenger" Amid Big Digital Travel Ambitions

January 15, 2021 via Phocus Wire

AirAsia is forging ahead with its goal to challenge existing online travel agents in the Asia-Pacific via its AirAsia.com platform. The company describes itself as an "OTA challenger" and has set itself a target of 50 percent of revenue on the platform to be from non-AirAsia flights by the end of 2024.

Trip.com Says It's 'More Confident Than Ever' in China's Long-Term Travel Recovery

January 14, 2021 via CNBC

Online travel agency Trip.com is "more confident than ever" that China's domestic tourism will recover in the long run, Chief Executive Jane Sun said last Thursday. That's despite fresh lockdowns in the country as new coronavirus cases emerge.

Fetch.ai Launches AI Travel Agents to Reduce Hotel Booking Distribution Cost

January 15, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Fetch.ai has unveiled Autonomous AI Travel Agents to enable hotels to offer tailored accommodation services to customers. The U.K.-based smart ledger technology company believes its technology can bring distribution costs down for hotels as well as help protect them from security breaches.

Buy-Now-Pay-Later for Travel Service Affirm Valued at \$24B After IPO

January 16, 2021 via phocuswire.com

Last week, Affirm listed on the New York Stock Exchange , jumping almost 100 percent to almost \$100 per share from the initial public offering price. The buy-now-pay-later service, which has a strong connection to the travel sector, has a market capitalization of around \$24 billion as a result of the IPO.

Trivago Acquires Weekend.com

January 13, 2021 via Hotel Business

Trivago N.V. has acquired Weekengo GmbH and Weekend.com, a startup focused on finding travelers inspirational weekend getaway packages. The company is based in Germany. Under the terms of the deal, Trivago N.V. acquired 100 percent of the shares in Weekengo GmbH. The acquisition supports Trivago and Weekend.com's shared mission to bring travelers inspirational content, helping turn travel intent into exciting getaways, according to Trivago.

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Authored by

[Greg Duff](#)

[Principal|Seattle](#)

[206.816.1470](tel:206.816.1470) greg.duff@foster.com