

The Billion-Dollar Fight for the Traveler

09.20.26

Good Sunday afternoon from Seattle . . . Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, September 18, 2026, is below. This week's Update (a short one) adds further color to the recently announced Marriott/Spotnana direct connection and follows up on a story we featured several months ago about the incredible aphrodisiacal effects of travel planning. Who says distribution geeks aren't sexy? Enjoy, but not too much.

What's Up with the Studies, Booking.com? Last year, we featured a [story](#) highlighting a study by Booking.com detailing the aphrodisiacal effects of travel planning. Now comes a second Booking.com study examining the relationship between travel and tensions between traveling partners. Highlights from the study include (a) 69% of travelers said that they would travel with a potential partner to test compatibility, (b) 32% of travelers believe that travel compatibility is important to a relationship and (c) my favorite, 21% have left a trip because of a bad travel partner. Apparently, planning a trip may turn on your partner, but behaving badly during the trip you just planned may cause your partner to abandon you.

Changes at Trip.com Could Have a Lasting Effect for China Hotels. In response to recently announced one time anti-trust penalties, Trip.com is making significant changes to the order and manner in which it displays China hotels. Perhaps most important are changes to Trip.com's ranking algorithm that will now place more importance on hotels' service quality and traveler satisfaction (which naturally leads to the question – shouldn't these two factors always be the most important considerations for all hotel ranking algorithms?).

Another Quarter and Another Increase in OTA Marketing. Airbnb, Booking Holdings and Expedia Group spent a combined \$5.37 billion on marketing related expenses in the recent second quarter. Booking spent the most – \$2.37 billion (up from \$2.14 billion in 2Q 2025, an 11% increase). Expedia also saw a large 10% YOY increase to \$2.12 billion in the second quarter. In recent statements, both companies noted that their marketing strategies continue to evolve as social media and answer engine optimization (AEO), at least for Expedia, have become areas of rapid growth as traditional search engine marketing has stabilized (important points for hoteliers to consider as they consider the broad IP licensing provisions found in most OTA agreements).

Have a great week everyone.

[Trip.com Group's Antitrust Reset Could Change How Hotels Compete on Its Platform](#)

September 16, 2026 via Skift

The fine will hit Trip.com Group's books once. The changes to its China business could last much longer.

[OTA Marketing Spend Rose Again in Q2](#)

September 15, 2026 via PhocusWire

While online travel agencies (OTAs) often tout their direct traffic percentages, the largest players continue to spend heavily on marketing.

[Booking.com Survey Finds Travel Disputes Can Test Relationship Compatibility](#)

September 14, 2026 via Hospitality Trends

Booking.com will offer limited-time "Turbulence Test" stays at nine partner hotels across the United States beginning Sept. 14, 2026.

[Marriott Brings Loyalty Into Corporate Booking Tools With Spotnana Deal](#)

September 10, 2026 via Skift

Marriott's best weapon for winning business travelers is its loyalty program. But until now it couldn't show loyalty information inside the booking portals corporations force employees to use. Spotnana says it can fix that.

Posted in [Online Travel Update](#)

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