

A Study of Online Hotel Booking Behaviors and Preferences of the International Visitors and Residents in Thailand

Montakan Chubchuwong

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality

Dhurakij Pundit University

Email: montakan.chu@dpu.ac.th

Received: February 18, 2021; Revised: June 7, 2021; Accepted June 17, 2021

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were firstly, to study the good attributes of online travel agencies, and secondly, to study travelers' behaviors and preferences in regard to the online booking method for hotel rooms. A qualitative method was used as a tool for data collection. Firstly, a literature review was conducted to find significant OTAs' attributes that impact consumers' satisfaction when making hotel reservations. Secondly, an in-depth interview using a semi-structured, opened questionnaire was used as a tool to obtain the travelers' online hotel booking behaviors and preferences. In total, 37 respondents including foreign visitors and Thai residents who had experience making hotel reservations and using OTAs at least two times were purposively selected as the samples. And they were interviewed during February – May 2019 in Bangkok. Percentage was used to analyze data. The results revealed the good attributes of online travel agencies and the travelers' behaviors and preferences in regard to the online booking method for hotel rooms.

KEYWORDS: Online Hotel Room Booking Behaviors and Preferences; International Visitors and Residents in Thailand; Online Travel Agency

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the marketing and selling of tourism products have gradually changed from conventional methods to online marketing or e-commerce. In the first quarter of 2015, individual leisure and business bookings showed year-on-year growth in bookings made by online travel agencies (OTAs) at 15.1%, brand.com 7.1%, and global distribution system (GDS) 1.1% whereas direct and computer reservation systems (CRS)

bookings decreased by 8.4% and 6.1%, respectively (Barthel & Perret, 2015). Chubchuwong (2018), found that bookings from OTAs had a strong impact on hotel sales revenue. The research indicated that individual business travelers from corporations and officials from the government sector are increasingly inclined to use OTAs because the room rates are more competitive. Barthel & Perret (2015), stated that the OTA segment is becoming a strong competitor to the individual

booking sector and distribution channels and has already taken a substantial share from traditional contracted booking channels, who are mainly wholesalers and tour operators. Gazzoli (2008) also stated that one of the main reasons for the success of OTAs was their ability to offer cheaper rates than those offered by hotels and their reservation offices.

It was revealed that small, and medium-sized independent hotels have gradually become more dependent on OTAs (Barthel & Perret, 2015). Despite the fact that hotel revenue has been seriously impacted due to the high commission rates paid to OTAs (Gazzoli et al., 2008; Barthel & Perret, 2015; Mest, 2017; Chubchuwong, 2019). Even though OTAs provide a lot of benefits to hotels such as real time online bookings and market exposure, the proportion of bookings that hotels receive from this channel need not be so large. Hotels should be able to create their own brands and conduct direct online bookings in order to reduce the commission cost. Independent hotels in Thailand enjoy a lot of benefits from OTAs, however, they also encounter several problems (Barthel & Perret, 2015; Mest, 2017; Chubchuwong, 2019). Some hotels have tried to find solutions while others have not. Independent hotels may be able to improve their direct online marketing by analyzing the strengths of their counterparts as well as studying the online booking behaviors and preferences of travelers.

Purposes

The purposes of this research were firstly, to study the good attributes of OTAs, and secondly, to study travelers' behaviors and preferences in regard to the online booking method for hotel rooms.

Benefit of Research

The research will benefit small and medium size hotels that would like to improve their online booking efficacy and volume by proposing practical recommendations based on the findings of this research.

Research Process

To study good attributes of OTAs, firstly, the literature review was conducted, after that the qualitative research method using in-depth interviews was made with the international travelers and Thai residents in Bangkok.

Literature review

Thai hotel industry

The hotel industry has long been the top foreign income earner of Thailand's tourism industry. In 2018, the revenue from the tourism industry was 1,831,104 million THB (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). In 2017 the distribution of tourist consumption expenditure was accommodation 29%, followed by shopping 25%, food and beverage 20%, entertainment 11.42%, local transport 9.93%, sight-seeing 3.83%, and miscellaneous 1.37%.

In 2018, there were 24,391 accommodation establishments in Thailand with 721,501 rooms. 98.9% of them had no foreign investment, and 86.2% of the total were small in size, with between 1 and 15 employees (National Statistics Office, 2019). The 2018 accommodation survey reported that 55.9% of Thai hotels faced problems of increased competitiveness (National Statistics Office, 2019). Literature reveals that small and medium-size hotels tend to have less competitive advantage when compared to large and international chain hotels. Large chain

hotels usually have their own computer reservation systems (CRS) for global room bookings. However, generally small and medium-sized independent hotels do not. Chubchuwong (2019) found that 45% of small and medium-sized independent hotels still do not have their own online booking channels. As a result, they tend to use OTAs to help increase their market exposure and sales. Abuelkassem (2016), stated that small and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) held a very weak competitive position against chain hotels. The weak competitive position was due to a number of operational shortcomings such as limited services and facilities, low quality service, and unqualified personnel. However, SMSHs do have some operational advantages that could enhance their competitiveness e.g. low prices, friendly service style, and an original accommodation experience. Brown & Kaewkitipong (2009), found that in terms of e-business use, Thai small and medium tourism enterprises (SMEs) were less able to utilize e-business technology. Moreover, the size of their business was found to be a significant factor in determining their performance, not only for comparison with larger travel agencies or hotels, but also within the SME sector itself. They suggested that tourism SMEs should pay more attention on strategic use of Information Technology (IT) in order to compete with their larger competitors and more IT skills education was needed.

Major global online travel agencies

In the past, the booking of hotel rooms was traditionally through direct reservations and conventional intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agencies, and meeting and destination management companies. However, in the past two decades, due to the growth and

development of the internet and electronic marketing, hotel bookings have gradually changed to online reservations. In the first quarter of 2015, there was an increase in reservations by OTAs at 15.1%, hotel brand.com 7.1%, and GDS 1.1% whereas direct bookings and CRS bookings decreased by 8.4% and 6.1% respectively (Barthel & Perret, 2015).

Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) is defined as an agency engaged in selling and arranging accommodation, tours, transportation and trips for travelers on an online platform (Hotel Technology Index, 2019). In the 1990s, online travel intermediaries were established (Barthel & Perret, 2015; Gazzoli et al.,2008) and have become the main global e-intermediaries.

Based on Barthel & Perrett (2015), the two most important OTA players are Expedia and Priceline. Expedia Travel Service was launched by Microsoft in 1996 in the USA, followed by its European counterpart, Priceline, in 1997 (Barthel & Perret,2015; Gazzoli et.al.,2008). Both platforms allowed customers to book their holidays online. Expedia gained first position in terms of worldwide gross bookings whereas Priceline was the largest OTAs by revenue.

Booking.com B.V. is part of the Price line group and was established in 1996. It was translated into 40 languages. It included 913,667 hotels in the network. Agoda Company Pte. Ltd. was established in 2005, and in 2007 it was acquired by Priceline. It has offices in more than 20 countries including Thailand. Agoda.com has more than 100,000 hotels in their network and the website has been translated into 38 languages.

The Relationship between Hotels and OTAs

Some literature revealed an unfriendly relationship between hotels and OTAs. Barthel and Perret (2015), and Chubchuwong (2019) mentioned the high commission demanded by OTAs. There were several tourism and hotel conferences that discussed the unsolved relationship problems between the two parties. Mest (2017), reported from the annual hotel conference on 11-12 October 2017 in Manchester, U.K. where an experienced hotelier led a panel discussion on the relationship between hotels and OTAs. He led a panel discussion entitled “Make love not war, embrace OTAs for a brighter future”. He said “what we don’t want is to agree that the current situation is the status quo, and just throw our hands up and say ‘it is what it is’”. This indicated that the relationship between hotels and OTAs was not good and hotels were in an uneasy situation.

Chubchuwong (2019), found eight problematic areas in regard to hotels using OTAs including price cutting, high commission, no-show problems, rate disparity, OTAs using wrong pictures, negative reviews, payment problems and other operational problems. Due to these unsolved problems, hotels should develop their own online marketing channels by incorporating as many features and benefits offered by OTAs.

The attributes of OTAs

In the past decade, numerous issues affecting OTAs. Patchamas (2017) studied the opinions and confidence of 400 Thai consumers in regard to hotel room booking via OTAs and found that the top five popular OTAs used by Thai people were Booking.com (32%), Agoda.com (30.5%), Traveloka.com (24.5%), Trivago.com (4.8%) and Hotels.com (3.5%). The research revealed that the highest

score of OTA usage was in regard to the convenience of payment by credit card or internet banking, followed by the convenience of booking by computer or mobile phone, instant confirmation, and the ease of making the reservation online. In terms of price, the highest scores were for ‘rates often adjusted and updated’ followed by ‘there are a variety of prices’, ‘prices are cheaper than booking with other channels’, and ‘the price is suitable for the level of the hotel’. As for the product, ‘the hotels on the OTAs meet expectations’ followed by ‘the name of the website is easily remembered’, ‘there is a variety of hotel information’, and ‘the information of the hotel is interesting’. In regard to promotions, the highest score was ‘receiving the promotion via email’, followed by ‘early bird booking discount if pay now’, and ‘other special deals such as collecting points for loyalty’.

Tsang, Lai & Law (2010), studied customer satisfaction in regard to OTAs and found four dimensions that significantly influenced online customers’ overall satisfaction and repurchase intention. The four dimensions were ‘website functionality’, ‘information quality and content’, ‘safety and security’, and ‘customer relationship’. According to the study, ‘website functionality’ was the most powerful factor in predicting customer satisfaction and repurchase intention.

Additionally, Park, Gretzel & Sirakaya-Turk (2007), examined the influence of perceived website quality on the willingness to use online travel agencies. In this study, six core dimensions were identified and empirically tested regarding their impact on behavioral intentions using a survey of 311 local residents in the United States. ‘Ease of use’ was found to be the most important

dimension in determining willingness to use, followed by 'information/content', 'responsiveness', 'fulfillment', and 'security/privacy'.

In another study, Kim, Kim & Soo Han (2007), conducted perceptual mapping of online travel agency and preference attributes. The data for this study were collected from the directories of seven universities through the online survey. The results revealed that 'low price' was the most critical, followed by 'security'.

Regarding customer reviews, Ye, Law, Gu & Chen (2011) explored the influence of user-generated content on travel behavior. They conducted an empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth on hotel online bookings. The research employed data from a major online travel agency in China and found that traveler reviews had a significant impact on online sales, with a 10 percent increase in traveler review ratings boosting online bookings by more than 5 percent. The results highlight the importance of online user-generated reviews for the tourism industry.

Chubchuwong (2019), studied the benefits and problems of using OTAs by independent hotels in Thailand. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the respondents' experience with OTAs. The respondents were 20 senior managers of independent hotels who had partnered with OTAs for at least one year. The research found that the top five popular OTA brands used by the respondents were Booking.com, Agoda.com, Expedia, Traveloka.com and Ctrip.com. The benefits of

working with OTAs for could be classified into five areas: 1. increased bookings and revenue, 2. increased distribution channels, 3. promotional opportunities, 4. flexibility on rate adjustment and 5. benefits for hotel operations. In addition, hotel managers mentioned that clients found OTAs to provide better convenience and lower price. In terms of convenience, clients could check hotel and room pictures, can read reviews, and do not have to pay deposits. In terms of price, clients could compare room rates and sales promotion before making reservations. However, the respondents also revealed a number of problems that they experienced from working with OTAs which are grouped into eight areas: 1. price cutting, 2. high commission, 3. No-show problems, 4. rate disparity, 5. OTAs using the wrong pictures, 6. negative reviews, 7. payment problems and 8. other operational problems. The study also found how of some of these issues were being solved by the hotels. However, regarding the high commission being charged by the OTAs, none of the respondents were able to come up with solutions.

Based on the literature review, it was found that the attributes of OTAs that positively impact customer satisfaction can be grouped together as shown in Table 1. They are ease of use, safety and security, lower rate, website functionality, customer friendliness, instant confirmation, website's information and content, customer reviews, room rate comparison, frequency of price updating and no advanced deposit required. These attributes should be studied and could serve as guidelines to improve direct bookings for hotels.

Table 1. Summary of preferred attributes of OTAs

Preferred Attributes of OTAs	Park et.al., 2007	Kim et.al., 2007	Gazzo li et.al., 2008	Tsang et.al., 2010	Ye et. al., 2011	Patchamas, 2017	Chubchuwong , 2019
Convenience/ Ease of Use	√			√		√	√
Safety and Security	√	√		√			
Instant Confirmation/ Responsiveness	√					√	
Customer Relationship/ Friendliness	√	√		√			
Website Functionality/ Fulfilment/Web Features	√	√		√			
Information and Content	√			√			
Can compare room rate							√
Do not have to pay deposit							√
Price and Frequency of Update						√	
Lower Rate		√	√				√
Reviews by other customers					√		√

The Advantages of hotel experience over OTAs

Even though OTAs are found to have online marketing advantages for hotels, in the last few years, tourism articles referred to the advantages of hotel experience over OTAs. Mest (2017) stated that hotels can enhance the quality of their relationship with guests during the stay because of what they

know about the guest before and after they arrive. Hence, they can demonstrate more value than the OTAs. These statements indicate that having guests physically staying at the property can enhance the Relationship with guests and can personalize

their experiences to provide maximum satisfaction.

It is undeniable that OTAs provide invaluable service to hotels based on the information from Table 1. However, hotels had expressed uneasiness about their relationship with OTAs, according to Mest (2017). This dilemma can be solved if hotels use OTAs to attract only first-time customers, while for repeat customers, they should try to get bookings directly through their own booking systems. By this way, hotels can obtain the benefits provided by OTAs, and also reduce the high-commission cost from the OTAs in the long run.

After the literature review, the qualitative research applying in-depth interviews were conducted.

Population and Samples

The populations of this research were international visitors and residents who had experience making hotel reservations and had used OTAs at least two times. The interviews were conducted in Bangkok during February – May, 2019. Each interview took about 30 minutes.

Instruments

This study employed in-depth interviews using a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire as an instrument to obtain information on online booking behaviors and preferences. In the questionnaire, there were two screening questions to ensure that the samples were qualified to answer. The first screening question was “Have you ever booked hotels through online travel agencies such as Agoda.com, Booking.com, Expedia.com etc.?”, and the second question was “If yes, approximately how many times have you ever booked hotel rooms with OTAs?” Items 3–9 were used to obtain information on hotel

booking behaviors as follows: “Which brands of OTA have you used?”; “When you use OTAs for hotel bookings, do you also look for or check the individual hotel’s website as well?”; “Why do you look at the hotel’s website?”; “If you can choose, do you prefer to book a hotel with an OTA or book directly on a hotel brand’s website?”; “Why do you do so?”; “In your opinion, what factors can encourage you to book at a hotel directly? (please list in order of importance)”; and “Other comments relating to online hotel booking.”. Respondents were also asked to provide information on their gender, age, nationality and profession.

Data Analysis

At the end of the project, 37 questionnaires were completed, and 3 incomplete questionnaires were excluded. The results were analyzed and the constant comparative method (Creswell,2007) was applied. The answers were categorized into groups. When additional comments which did not fit into the existing categories were received, new categories were created. Within each category, the common properties of the subcategories were listed, and the data were dimensionalized.

Of the 37 respondents, there were 25 females (67.6%) and 12 males (32.4%). Their ages were ranged as follows: 21 to 29 years, 20 people (54.05%), 30 to 39 years, 8 people (21.62%), 40 to 49 years, 7 people (18.92%), and 50 to55 years 2 people (5.54%). In regard to their origin, 17 people (45.95%) were Asian (Thai, Chinese, Taiwanese), 17 people (45.95%) were European (British, Swedish, Danish, Slovakian, Hungarian and Czech), 2 were American and 1 was Venezuelan (in total 8.10%). Table 2. summarizes the profile of respondents.

Table 2. Profile of respondents

Profile of respondents		
Gender	No.	%
Male	12	32.4
Female	25	67.6
Age	No.	%
21-29	20	54.05
30-39	8	21.62
40-49	7	18.92
50-55	2	5.54
Nationality	No.	%
Asian	17	45.95
European	17	45.95
USA	2	5.40
Venezuela	1	2.70

All respondents had experience using OTAs for their hotel room bookings. 30.55% had used OTAs between 2 and 5 times, 22.22% had used OTAs between 6 and 10 times, 30.55% had used OTAs between 11 and 20 times, 13.88% had used

OTAs between 21 and 30 times, and 2.77% had used OTAs more than 30 times. It can be seen that 70% of respondents had used OTAs for hotel room reservations more than 5 times. Table 3. shows number of times the respondents had used OTAs.

Table 3. Number of times respondents used OTA's

How many times have you used OTAs?		
	No.	%
2-5	11	30.55
6-10	8	22.22
11-20	11	30.55
21-30	5	13.88
>30	1	2.77

The most popular OTAs used by the respondents according to usage were Booking.com 83.78%, Agoda.com 48.65%, Expedia 21.62%, Hotels.com 18.92%, Ctrip.com 13.51%, Airbnb 10.81%,

Momonda.com 10.81%, TripAdvisor 5.40%, Trivago 5.40%, Qunar 5.40% and others were mentioned only once. Table 4. shows OTA brands used by respondents.

Table 4. OTA brands used by respondents

Which brand of OTAs have you used?	
Brand	%
Booking.com	83.78
Agoda.com	48.65
Expedia.com	21.62
Hotels.com	18.92
Ctrip.com	13.51
AirBnb.com	10.81
Momonda.com	10.81
Qunar	10.81

This research revealed that 70% of respondents using OTAs for hotel room bookings also checked hotel websites: 27.03% check hotel website every time;

10.81% most of the time; and 32.43% sometimes. Table 5. shows the frequency that respondents also checked hotel websites when using OTAs.

Table 5. Frequency of respondents checking hotels' website when booking OTA

When booking via OTA, how often do you also check hotel's website?		
	No.	%
All the times	10	27.03
Most of the times	4	10.81
Sometimes	12	32.43
Rarely	9	24.32
Never	2	5.40

The main reasons for researching individual hotels were categorized into five groups 1) checking price, 2) searching for hotel information, 3) checking a hotels' credibility, 4) checking payment conditions, and 5) when they cannot book with OTAs. In each group, the answers were described according to how the respondents expressed them in the order of the most frequently mentioned. The most important reasons for travelers to check hotel websites were to check and compare prices, and to check for discounts, packages and promotions. The second reason was to get more information about rooms, the location, the facilities, and transportation, to see more

pictures, and to get information about hotel activities such as cocktail receptions, and gourmet festivals. The third and fourth reasons were to check the hotel's credibility and payment conditions, and finally to see whether it was still possible to book directly because they could not book with an OTA.

For the question asking whether customers prefer to book the hotel with an OTA or book directly on a hotel brand's website, the results revealed that 24 respondents (65%) preferred to book with OTAs, and 7 respondents (19%) preferred to book with the hotel brand's website directly. There were 6 respondents (16%) who did not

give accurate answers and mentioned that it depended on the conditions. Detail was shown

in Table 6.

Table 6. Preferred channel for rooms online booking

Would you prefer to book with OTAs or directly with the hotels?		
	No.	%
With OTAs	24	64.86
Directly with the Hotels	7	18.92
It depends	6	16.21

For the 65% of respondents who preferred to book hotels with OTAs, the most important reasons were convenience, followed by price and method of payment. In regard to convenience, the respondents made the following comments: “booking with OTAs is easier and faster”, “can read the reviews of hotels”, “the information is in English”, “can access by app”, “can easily compare the prices, deals, and standards of many hotels and many destinations”. For prices, the comment was “easier to find the cheapest rooms”. For payment, the comments were: “easier to pay”, “some OTAs do not request a credit card to guarantee” and “can print out the reservation documents for visa purposes”.

For the 19% of respondents who preferred to book with the hotel directly, the reason was mainly convenience. This group of respondents said that it was easy, convenient and safe. Other comments were: “can talk to the hotels directly to solve problems”, and “can join the loyalty program”. For the 16% of respondents who did not give clear answers as to whether they preferred to use OTAs or to book directly with hotels, they said that it depended on conditions such as price, convenience, destination and familiarity. If it was a hotel they frequently use, then they would book directly through the hotel website, but for unfamiliar cities, they would use OTAs.

When the respondents were asked which factors would encourage them to book directly with the hotels, the most common answers were good price, better campaigns, and convenience in making reservations. Other reasons for booking directly through a hotel website included good website information, good payment conditions, good service, the availability of a loyalty program, good credibility, good cancellation policy and good marketing.

Based on the in-depth interviews of 37 international and local respondents, the results revealed that approximately 70% of respondents have used OTAs for hotel reservations more than five times on average, while the two most popular OTAs brand used were found to be Booking.com and Agoda.com. This is in line with Chubchuwong (2019) and Patchamas (2017), who stated that Booking.com is the preferred OTA because they do not require a deposit or payment upon making a reservation.

Among the respondents who had booked hotel rooms via OTAs, 70% said they sometimes, most of the time or always checked hotel websites. Since a large number of travelers checked hotel websites prior to making decisions, it would be beneficial for hotels to have their own online booking systems. Moreover, the systems

should be efficient and have features that meet the requirements of customers. When the respondents were asked about the method they preferred to use when making reservations for hotels, 65% stated they preferred to book via OTAs, 19% stated they wanted to book directly with hotels, and 16% were indecisive.

For those who preferred to book through OTAs, the reasons were because OTAs provide much more convenience and offer better rates and payment conditions. For those who preferred to book directly with hotels, the reasons were convenience and safety of hotels' bookings system and the ability to talk directly to the hotel staff. Respondents who did not give precise answers stated that it depends on which party offered better prices or convenience, and the familiarity with the destination that they were visiting. Some respondents answered that for the first visit, they preferred to use OTAs and for repeat visits they would book directly with hotels.

For the last question about the factors that would encourage them to make direct online reservations with hotels, the three most important factors were competitive prices and promotions, convenience in making reservations and other benefits. Other factors were ease of payment, the quality of websites and its content, good service, good credibility, good cancellation policy, the availability of a loyalty program, familiarity with the hotel, and lastly, they know someone or have a contact person at the hotel. One respondent stated that hotels must adapt to the fast-changing technology. Hotels that lack a

booking technology or a speedy booking process will lose clients.

Conclusion

In the past decade, the hotel room booking via global online travel agencies has been growing rapidly whereas the number of direct hotel bookings has been declining. Majority of travelers use OTAs to make room reservations because of the cheaper rates, instant confirmation and other benefits. It was found that even though OTAs benefited hotels in terms of increased reservations and global marketing exposure, they also brought several marketing and operational problems to hotels, namely rate disparity, price cutting, high commission and no-shows. Compared to large chain hotels, many small and medium-sized independent hotels have less global exposure and lack efficient online booking systems, making them rely on OTAs, which charge high commission rate. This unfavorable condition significantly diminishes hotels' revenue and profit. In order to alleviate this problem, hotels should have efficient online booking systems of their own. This research revealed the good attributes of OTAs and the hotel room booking behaviors and preferences in regard to online booking method of hotel rooms. For hotels that already have the systems, they should try to make them as good as OTAs'. Direct booking systems should be targeted particularly at repeat customers, while OTAs should be targeted at first-time customers. By doing this, hotels can receive invaluable services of OTAs, while avoiding financial and other problems arising from OTAs.

Recommendation

Hotels should have the following conditions, and their websites should visibly inform the potential customers accordingly.

1. An efficient online booking system

First and foremost, hotels should have effective online booking systems, which, nowadays could easily be purchased from many available vendors on an annual fee basis. The booking systems generally provide service such as direct reservation, comprehensive sales and revenue reports, and system maintenance.

2. Competitive price and promotion

Price and promotion are the most important factors that influence customers when making a booking decision. Hotel rates for all types of rooms should be competitive and on par with OTA rates; have regular and seasonal rate adjustments; be clearly stated with no hidden costs; have discounts for different occasions; include attractive promotions and packages for each target group of customers; and lastly provide discounts for walk-in customers.

3. Other interesting benefits

Other benefits are necessary to differentiate hotel and OTA booking. This research revealed that hotel rates are often undercut by OTAs, so it is necessary that hotels use other benefits as tools to draw customers such as early check-in and late check out; room upgrade; complimentary airport-hotel-airport transfer; and complimentary meals. However, it is suggested that new, creative benefits are designed to meet the needs of tourists in a period of changing behaviors and trends. Tourists may want to experience something

different from their home countries. Some special local benefits might include a complimentary Thai massage, a Thai cooking class, a spa session or a local tour.

4. Convenience of making reservations

Convenience of making reservations is the second most important reason when making the decision to purchase online. Online booking must be convenient, functional and provide instant confirmation without contact with another person. Websites should be easy to find and navigate and should offer good accessibility from smartphones and tablets.

5. Comprehensive website and information

Websites should use the English language, and also other commonly-used languages such as Chinese, Japanese, German, Russian, French, and Italian; have clear, attractive, and up-to-date pictures of all room types and facilities; provide information about the service standards and amenities and extra services; provide information about the hotel and the surrounding tourist attractions, events and activities; provide maps, locations and accessibility by various types of transportation; information on the distance from the airport; and lastly, available contact persons.

6. Good credibility

Hotel websites should provide information on its official rating, standard, client reviews, and satisfaction scores.

7. Good payment conditions

Hotels should have good and secure payment systems without credit card detail requirements to guarantee bookings. They

should also have the option to book now and pay later. However, they should have some system to reconfirm the booking with clients to avoid no-shows.

8. Good service quality and customer relationship

Hotels have advantages over OTAs because clients stay at the property. When hotels have guests in-house, they should study their behaviors and preferences and provide good and satisfying service. Research revealed that clients are more likely to book directly with hotels for their repeat visits if they have a satisfying stay and a memorable experience. Good customer relationship is a very important strategy to secure future direct bookings.

9. Good cancellation policy Hotels should have an easy cancellation policy and clients should have the possibility to cancel bookings without a fee.

10. Loyalty program

Hotels should offer membership benefits such as points or special discounts for repeat guests. This is particularly relevant for domestic markets, where repeat visits are more frequent.

11. Based on the literature reviews of the good attributes of OTA and the results of this study, 10 recommendations were proposed as guidelines for hotels that are seeking to increase their direct bookings through an online system.

References

- Abuelkassem, M. (2016). How can small and medium-sized hotels compete with international hotel chains? Egypt as a case study. *Tourism Review International*, 20(1): 57-70.
- Barthel, J., & Perret, S. (2015). *OTAs-A Hotel's Friend or Foe: How reliant are hotels on OTAs?* Retrieved on March 31, 2019 from <http://www.Hospitality.net.org/file/152005663.pdf>
- Brown, D. H., & Kaewkitipong, L. (2009). Relative size and complexity: e-business use in small and medium sized tourism enterprises in Thailand. *Journal of Enterprise Information management*, 22(1): 212-231.
- Chubchuwong, M. (2018). Impact of online marketing on the role of hotel sales manager: An experiential learning of hotel sales management students. *The Proceedings of the International Conference on Higher Education for Diversity and Global Citizenship . Bangkok, the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAHL)*.
- Chubchuwong, M. (2019). Benefits and problems of using Online Travel Agencies (OTAs): A Study of Independent Hotels in Thailand. *APHEIT International Journal*, 8(2): 20-33.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc. Singapore.
- Gazzoli, G, Kim, W.G., & Palakurthi, R. (2008). Online distribution strategies and competition: are the global hotel companies getting it right? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(4): 375-387.
- Hotel Technology Index (2019). *Definition of Online Travel Agency (OTA)*. Retrieved on February 19, 2019 from <http://hoteltechnologyindex.com/online-travel-agency/>.

- Mest, E. (2017). *Hotels, OTAs find limitations in failing to work together*. Retrieved on March 31, 2019 from <https://www.hotelmanagement.net/operate/hotels-otas-find-limitations-failing-to-work-together>.
- Ministry of Tourism and Sports. (2019). *Tourism Statistics 2018*. Retrieved on March 31, 2019 from <https://www.mots.go.th/News-link.php?nid=12417>
- National statistical office (2019). *The 2019 Hotels and Guest Houses Survey*. Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.
- Patchamas, P. (2017). *Opinions and confidence of Thai consumers towards hotel room booking via online travel agencies*, Master's Thesis, Bangkok, Dhurakij Pundit University.
- Park, Y., Gretzel, U., & Sirakaya-Turk, E. (2007). Measuring web site quality for online travel agencies. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 23(10): 15-30.
- Tsang, N.K.F., Lai, M.T.H., & Law, R. (2010). Measuring e-service quality for online travel agencies. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(3): 306-323.
- Verma, R., Stock, D. & McCarthy, L. (2012). *Customer preferences for online, social media, and mobile innovations in the hospitality industry*. Retrieved on February 19, 2019 from <https://scholarship.sha.cornell.edu/article>.
- Ye, Q., Law, R., Gu, B., & Chen, W. (2011). The influence of user-generated content on traveler behavior: an empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth to hotel online bookings. *Computers in Human Behaviors*, 27(2): 634-639.