

Mistakes People Make When Booking Travel Through Third-Party Websites

(Courtesy of Caroline Bologna, The HuffPost)

Want to use an online travel agency to book your trip? Keep these facts in mind to make the process smoother.

Expedia. Skyscanner. [Booking.com](#). [Trip.com](#). Priceline. These days there are countless third-party platforms for booking flights, hotels, rental cars and other aspects of the travel experience.

While these websites can make the planning process feel more seamless and convenient, there are some potential drawbacks that are important to understand before you make any reservations.

Assuming They Have The Lowest Prices

Travel booking websites can be great for comparing prices across different providers and potentially finding exclusive deals. But you're often going to see the same costs across platforms — including the travel vendor's direct website.

"You should not assume online travel agencies have the lowest prices," said Phil Dengler, co-founder of [The Vacationer](#). "While coupons and other promotions can make it appear that you are saving a lot of money, you should always check directly with the airline or hotel."

When booking a flight, you should check the prices on the airline websites, as well as results on search engines like Google Flights. As you look for accommodations, compare rates on hotel websites and third-party booking systems.

"In many cases, hotels will guarantee the cheapest rate when booking directly with them. In certain situations, third-party booking sites will hide resort fees until the very last moment or put them in an easy-to-miss spot."

Losing 24-Hour Cancellation Options

"You should not book airfare with an online travel agency if there is a chance you may take advantage of the federal 24-hour cancellation rule," Dengler said.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has [mandated that air carriers allow](#) customers who purchased tickets at least seven days before a flight's scheduled departure to cancel their reservation and receive a full refund without penalty within 24 hours of booking.

"Unfortunately, the flight must be booked directly with the airline," Dengler noted. "That means third-party booking sites do not have to honor the rule, which means you could be out of luck if you are looking to cancel within 24 hours. If there is any chance you may need to cancel your flight, check with the third-party booking site before you book to see if they honor the 24-hour cancellation rule."

Not Reading The Fine Print

"Always read the fine print so that you know their return or refund policy," said Ciara Johnson, a travel blogger at [Hey Ciara](#). "For added protection, book with a travel credit card that has insurance in case something goes wrong. If you're not booking for a deal, it's always best to book direct on the company website. It's likely cheaper to book direct anyhow!"

[Ravi Roth](#), a queer travel expert and host of "[The Gaycation Travel Show](#)," echoed this advice. He emphasized being aware of any extra fees or troublesome policies regarding cancellations, itinerary changes and refunds, so you should make sure to read and save your confirmation email with the details.

"I recommend using trusted sites like Orbitz for hotels and Airbnb to book experiences. As for flights, I would try Skyscanner, but while booking, make sure to stick to the major airlines," Roth noted. "Sometimes folks can find a super cheap flight, but in the fine print, there is a charge for overhead and checked luggage. I cannot stress enough to read the fine print."

Missing Out On Loyalty Points

If hotel or airline loyalty points and status are important to you, using a third-party booking site might not be the best move.

"Many online travel agencies let you insert your frequent flyer number or hotel rewards number, but that does not mean you will earn status credit and points," Dengler explained. "Some airlines and hotels will allow you to earn status when booking with online travel agencies, but you should make sure first."

If you book through a third-party site, you likely won't be able to modify your reservation through the provider.

Trying To Modify Bookings Through The Travel Provider

"Third-party booking sites like Expedia, Priceline and Travelocity are also known as online travel agencies, and they are essentially middlemen between you and the airline or hotel," Dengler explained. "In other words, your reservation is with them and not the airline or hotel. That means you contact them for customer service instead of the airline or hotel."

So if access to direct customer service with the travel provider is a big deal to you, avoid these third-party platforms when making your reservations and use them as search engines for comparisons instead.

"While the larger online travel agencies have better customer service than the smaller ones, it is still better to talk to the source directly," Dengler said. "That is important for both reservation modifications and cancellations. If there is a possibility that there will be severe weather during your trip, I recommend booking directly since there is a real chance you will have to modify or cancel your itinerary."

Because canceling or making an itinerary change can be a bigger hassle through third-party platforms, make sure to pay close attention when you're making your reservation.

"Travelers should just ensure to double-check all of their information, such as travel dates, name and contact information when booking via third-parties," said Casey Brogan, a consumer travel expert at Tripadvisor.

Choosing A Travel Provider That Doesn't Allow Third-Party Sales

“Be aware that several budget carriers, [most notably Ryanair in Europe](#), technically don't allow third-party sales of their tickets,” said Marek Bron, a travel blogger at [Indie Traveller](#). “If you book their flights through a third-party anyway, then this is done through a work-around way that's not supported by Ryanair.”

As a result, making cancellations or changes through the third-party site might be more expensive or challenging than it would have been if you booked directly through the airline. Ensure you can actually get an official confirmation with your chosen air carrier or other travel provider when you book through an external system.

Not Reading The Reviews

Not all third-party booking sites and travel agents are created equal. As such, it's important to read the reviews of these services before making your reservations through them.

“Check reviews of these third-party sites, such as on TrustPilot, before booking as some of them are to be avoided,” Bron said. He advised paying extra close attention to mentions of customer service, as you might need this to handle changes or cancellations down the road.

“If working with a travel agent, ensure they have the right qualifications and double-check your reservations with the airlines and hotels,” echoed [Jessica van Dop DeJesus](#), a travel media specialist and blogger at The Dining Traveler. “Also, look into travel insurance and check with your credit card to see if they provide any travel insurance services.”