Your guide to Booking Travel Online
1.0 Introduction

More and more people are choosing to book travel online but what are the benefits of this system? And how should you go about using it?

In this guide, we look at everything you need to know about booking holidays or transport on the Internet. We will cover:

• How and why to book travel online
• How to stay safe when booking online travel
• How to save money with online travel bookings
• Where to go for the best deals on online travel
• How to book holiday extras – such as travel insurance, currency and airport parking – online
• An overview of major travel companies and websites
• An overview of booking different transport methods online (coach, flight etc)

We also have a handy FAQ section at the back of the guide to help answer any immediate or pressing questions you may have.
Why book travel online

The main reasons people turn to the Internet to book travel is because it’s better value for money and they enjoy building their own holiday. You’ll find many benefits from booking your holiday online and these are outlined in the following sections.

2.1 High-street travel agent versus online booking?
Booking holidays online can have many advantages over using high-street travel agents. These include:

• Convenience: as you’re not required to visit a physical store, online holiday bookings are far easier to fit into your schedule and mean that those with mobility problems don’t have to miss out on the holidays they deserve

• Control: you can research various destinations and resorts from the comfort of your own home with online bookings and won’t feel pressured to accept the holiday being offered by a travel agent

• Affordability: booking online can offer significant discounts on price which means you can afford a bigger holiday or more spending money – you can also compare prices easily to ensure you’re always booking the best deal

• Time: the process is generally much quicker when booking holidays online as you are not restricted to travel agent opening hours

• Flexibility: online bookings can often be cancelled or amended with ease and offer a range of payment options or additional features – such as the ability to book holiday extras – and that means more flexibility over your choice of holiday

• Simplicity: online booking systems are designed to be easy to use and travel websites such as Expedia.co.uk, LoveHolidays.com and TravelRepublic.com allow you to search their entire database and filter the results to your requirements so that you can easily find and book your perfect holiday
2.2 Benefits of booking holidays online for over 50s

While everyone can benefit from the advantages of booking travel online, those over 50 could stand to gain from specific perks. As well as benefitting from discounts aimed at your age-group, some travel sites waive single traveller supplements to make holidaying alone less expensive.

Companies which offer specific benefits to the over 50s include:

- Travel 55: offer regular discounts on their holidays which include coach trips, short breaks and worldwide holidays
- Hazelwood: offers a 5% discount on holiday bookings at their UK holiday parks if one member of the party is over 60
- Center Parcs: offers a 20% discount on villa rental if one of the party is over 55
- Solos Holidays: offer affordable holidays for solo travellers over 50; they group their holidays by age range so you can book onto a trip with like-minded people of a similar age to help you get the most out of your experience
- Archers Holidays: offer bookings with no single supplement charges for solo travellers
- Best Western Hotels: offer at least a 10% discount on bookings to over 55s
- Jet Airways: offer concessions on basic adult fares (economy class) to those over 65 on sectors within India and operated by Jet Airways
- Orkney Ferries: offer discounted passenger fares to those over 60 as well as concessionary rates for registered disabled passengers in possession of a blue badge and their associated vehicles
- National Express: offer savings of up to 1/3 on all coach travel journeys – including airport runs – to over 60s with a Senior Coachcard which costs £10 a year (plus £1.50 post and packaging to send it to you)
- Cruise Cheap: can offer discounted senior citizen rates on cruises booked where one member of the cabin is over 55
Now you understand the benefits of booking travel online, let’s look at how to get the most out of it.

3.1 Types of travel you can book online
With so many travel websites on the Internet, there is no limit to the types of travel you can book online. Common options include:

- Package holidays
- Do-it-yourself breaks
- All-inclusive resorts
- Self-catering apartments
- Hotel accommodation
- Camping holidays
- Ferry travel
- Coach travel
- Domestic and international flights
- River and ocean cruises

Most travel websites cater for popular holiday destinations as well as a number of more exotic locations.

If you are planning to visit places off of the usual tourist trail then you may have to visit a specialist website.
3.2 Main travel agents/travel booking sites
There are many websites which you can use to book a holiday. The main ones include:

**Travel agents**
- Saga http://travel.saga.co.uk/holidays.aspx
- Expedia http://www.expedia.co.uk/
- Thomas Cook http://ww1.thomascook.com/
- Thomson http://www.thomson.co.uk/
- First Choice http://www.firstchoice.co.uk/
- Direct Line Holidays http://www.directline-holidays.co.uk/faq/booking-online
- Ebookers http://www.ebookers.com/
- LastMinute.com http://www.lastminute.com/

**Airlines**
- Aer Lingus http://www.aerlingus.com/en-gb/

**Cruises**
- P&O Cruises http://www.pocruises.com/
- Royal Caribbean http://www.royalcaribbean.co.uk/
- Iglu Cruise http://www.iglucruise.com/

**Ferries**
- P&O Ferries http://www.poferries.com/
- Brittany Ferries http://www.brittanyferries.com/
- A Ferry http://www.aferry.co.uk/

**Coaches**
- Shearings http://www.shearings.com/our-holidays/coach-holidays/uk
- National Holidays http://www.nationalholidays.com/
- Edwards Coaches http://booking.edwardscoaches.co.uk/

**Hotels**
- Trivago http://www.trivago.co.uk/
- Hotels 4U http://www.hotels4u.com/
Comparison

- Travel Supermarket http://www.travelsupermarket.com/holidays/
- Go Compare http://www.gocompare.com/holidays/
- Skyscanner http://www.skyscanner.net/
- Kayak http://www.kayak.co.uk/
- Trip Advisor http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/

3.3 How to get the best deals when booking travel online

As there are so many websites which you can use to book your travel, it is important that you do everything you can to achieve the best deal possible. There are many ways in which you can do this and the following steps should be followed whenever you book a holiday, hotel or flight online.

- Check for deals
The first thing you should do is check for advertised deals to you preferred location or with a specific company. Most travel agents and holiday booking services offer regular discounts to coincide with seasonal price changes and other factors so you may be able to bag an early bargain if you know where you want to go.

- Compare online
Next, you should compare different holiday deals and packages online. There are many websites which can help you do this but Kayak, Skyscanner, Travel Supermarket and Go Compare are the obvious options.

All of these websites work in similar ways. Simply input the details of the travel you intend to book and you’ll be given a list of results based on this search. You can filter the results by numerous criteria and arrange them by price to find the best deals.

All of these sites are free to use too. This means that when you see a price that you like for your holiday all you have to do is click on that selection and you’ll be automatically transferred to the travel operators’ page where you can complete your booking and make any necessary payments.

- Read reviews
Before finalising your book, it is advisable to check your selection is a good one. Trip Advisor is well known for providing comprehensive user reviews of hotels, tour operators and attractions.

Visiting the website and typing the name of your hotel, flight company or destination will return plenty of results which can help inform your choice and provide inspiration over what to do once at your destination.

The site also provides their own list of recommended hotels and holidays in popular locations which are well worth a look if you’re not sure where to stay. You should also look out for key recommendations – such as the Traveller’s Choice Awards – which will be mentioned in Trip Advisor’s overview of the hotel.
The site will also clearly display any special rate offers which are currently being offered at set hotels which can help you to cut costs. These offers may be presented as discounted room rates, a free night in a hotel when you book in for a set period of time or even free breakfast included in the cost – as the below example highlights.

3.4 How safe are online travel bookings?
There used to be a lot of suspicion about paying by credit or debit card online, but as the practice has become more widespread, there are more things in place to ensure you’re payment is secure.

You can stay safe when booking online travel in the following ways:

Browser
When you are buying holidays online, you should ensure that the link is secure. There are three key things to look out for:

- A padlock symbol in the address bar
- The web address begins with https:// rather than just http://
- The address bar (or part of it) should turn green.
Websites
As well as checking the safety of websites in your browser, you should also follow these steps to stay safe online:

- Only use reputable websites from companies you have heard of
- Check the date stamp on the website (usually printed at the bottom of the page)
- Check for a valid contact number and address and test the number if you’re suspicious

Card security
If you pay online using a credit or debit card, you will normally be asked to enter another password or security code to authorise the transaction. The main schemes that do this are:

- Verified by Visa
- MasterCard SecureCode

The purpose of this is to stop unauthorised transactions from going through. If you were making the card transactions in person then you would be asked for your PIN number to verify the transaction but when shopping online you do not provide this information. Only need the details printed on the card are needed so in order to stop unauthorised people using your card this additional layer of security is used.

The first time you come across one of these schemes, you will be asked for your card details and personal details before setting a password. Thereafter, you will be required to enter your password or specific characters from it in order to proceed with a transaction.
This extra security level applies to all online payments and transactions you make and does not just apply to holiday bookings.

4.0 Booking holiday extras
As well as booking transport and accommodation online, you can also pay for optional extras including travel insurance, airport parking and car hire as well as buy currency.

4.1 Booking travel insurance online
You can get holiday or travel insurance from a wide range of financial institutions, including:

- Insurers
- Banks
- Building societies
- Supermarkets

With banks and building societies, you may find that travel insurance is provided for free on certain accounts. These are generally accounts which you pay a set fee for each month and receive a number of bonuses such as free travel insurance, car breakdown or mobile phone insurance.

Current examples of these accounts include:

- Halifax Ultimate Reward Current Account – offers worldwide family travel insurance
- Nationwide Building Society Flex Plus – offers worldwide family travel insurance
• Natwest Select Silver Account – offers European travel insurance (inc. winter sports)
• Royal Bank of Scotland Select Premium Account – offers worldwide travel insurance

There are a number of comparison sites, such as GoCompare and MoneySupermarket that make searching for the best value policies much quicker and easier and you can also search for other current accounts which offer benefits on their site too – simply fill in one form with your details to get a list of quotes from insurance providers.

Make sure you opt for an appropriate level of cover for your holiday and consider whether single trip insurance (which covers the one specified holiday) or annual cover (which covers holidays or tips made over a one year period) is best for you.

4.2 Buying currency online

Buying currency online can also make sorting your holiday a little easier and once again there are many sites which offer this service as well as many different formats in which you can buy currency. The main options are listed below with a brief summary of their benefits:

**Cash currency**

Many services allow you to buy foreign currency in cash. This can be either posted to you or sent to a local branch of the seller for you to collect (usually a bank or Post Office). The benefit of buying online is that you get greater visibility over the exchange rate and don’t have to carry a large sum of English money with you to buy it in person.

**Currency cards**

Currency cards are similar to credit and debit cards in the sense that they represent a set amount of money. You pre-load these cards with the amount of money you want in the specified currency and can then use it whilst on holiday in the same way you’d use a credit or debit card back home. There is usually no charge for using currency cards and they are much safer to carry around on your holiday too. They may also be referred to as travel money cards.

**Travellers cheques**

Travellers cheques offer an extra layer of security when taking foreign currency on holiday with you. The cheques must be double-signed by you while presenting photo ID to redeem them at the bank and that means that any lost or stolen cheques should not be able to be cashed – allowing you to reclaim your money. You reclaim these at a bank in your destination and can cash them all at once or bit by bit in order to budget your holiday spending.

As well as being able to buy currency in numerous forms online, you can also get it from numerous places. Some of the most common examples are listed below:

General services: Post Office, Travelex
Supermarkets: Tesco Bank, M&S Bank, ASDA Money, Sainsbury’s Bank
Travel agents: Thomas Cook, Thomson
Banks: HSBC, Halifax, Barclays, Natwest
4.3 Booking other holiday extras online
When you make a hotel, travel or holiday booking online you will usually be given the choice to add holiday extras such as airport transfers, hire cars, airport parking or even extra luggage allowances. Although these may offer good deals, you may be able to find a cheaper price by booking separately. Make sure you research the options online using comparison websites and select the cheapest option.

NB. Although you will be asked if you want to add holiday extras to your travel booking at the time you make it, you can add them at a later date if you wish to compare prices first. All you need to do is log-in to the travel website you used to make the booking and open the booking.

Airport parking is a bit more complex as there is both on-airport and off-airport parking options available. The latter is often cheaper but it will require a bus journey to the terminal.

Make sure you are comparing like-for-like when comparing prices to choose the right option.
5.0 Frequently Asked Questions

What is the luggage allowance?
Airlines are very strict about luggage allowances and restrictions. It will vary depending on which airline you’re flying with but should be clearly marked in your flight literature or on the website.

Typically, checked baggage has a 15-20kg limit while hand baggage can vary from 5-10kg, with maximum dimensions of 55x40x20cm.

How do I pay for my holiday?
Most websites are set up to accept payments from all major debit and credit cards. You may also be able to pay through secure payment services such as PayPal.

When do I pay for my holiday?
If you are paying for a package holiday, or flights and accommodation, most travel websites will give you a number of choices. The most common methods are paying a deposit on the day of booking, followed by a single payment a couple of weeks before you fly or by several smaller payments over a few months if booking your holiday in advance.

If you are paying to stay in a hotel, some will take a deposit and require the remainder on check-in or check-out while others will take the full amount at booking – this is particularly common if you’re getting a non-refundable rate.

Do I need a visa?
If you are a British citizen you don’t need a visa to travel to any EU member state, this includes popular holiday destinations such as Spain, France, Portugal, Italy, Germany, and Greece.

However, you will need to apply for a visa to enter Turkey, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt and many other countries. For a full list, please visit: http://www.thetravelvisacompany.co.uk/visas/

Always check visa requirements before booking your holiday and check the application time as some countries require you to apply for your visa in advance while others allow you to fill out a form online.
How do I check-in for my flight online?
Most airlines now require you to check-in online. This is a simple process, where you enter the details of the passengers on the airline’s website. You will then receive your boarding passes which should be printed and taken to the airport with you.

You can usually check-in online between seven days and two hours before flying.

For those without access to a printer, you can usually select an option to collect your tickets/boarding passes at the airport. This can either be done from the check-in desk or from self-service kiosks which allow you to print your tickets. Those who own a smartphone can also have the boarding pass sent to their mobiles instead of being printed.

Alternatively, many airlines still offer you the option to check-in in person at the airport.

NB If you have checked-in online but have checked baggage to be placed in the hold then you will need to go to the ‘baggage drop’ area on arrival at the airport. Those without checked baggage (i.e. hand baggage only) can go straight to security if they have checked-in online and have printed boarding passes.

Can I cancel my booking?
You are entitled to cancel your booking at any time but you may be charged for doing so. Most travel operators will allow you to cancel your booking and receive a full refund within a set period of time. This will vary between websites so you need to check it carefully.

After this period, you may be offered a partial refund on any booking cancellations you make. Some websites or travel companies may also deduct an ‘administration fee’ for processing your cancellation.

In some instances, such as when purchasing discounted flights, you may not be entitled to a refund once the booking is made. If you think there is a risk you’ll need to cancel or amend your booking details then you should select a different ticket type to avoid losing money.
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