
CONCIERGE

What's hot around the region

HOW TO...BOOK ONLINE

Booking online is easy. All you need is a computer, a credit card and a PhD in Adobe installations. The greatest benefit to booking online is that you don't need to speak to a sales representative, reducing the chances of your booking being subject to human error by 50 percent. The downside is that unless you are Bill Gates, the chances of a human error rise significantly.

Just about anything can be booked online, and unless you are sure of what you want, you can spend several days surfing a myriad of confusing websites. Even a solid determination to book something cheap will inevitably result in something expensive. The reason is cheap companies generally don't have websites, expensive companies do and however hard you try to avoid them, everytime you type the word 'hotel' or 'car' or 'flight' you go there.

Booking online is a bit like a race. On the one hand there is you, and on the other the computer's time-out feature. Since you never know when the page might time-out, the booking must be done as quickly as possible. The time-out feature typically kicks in sometime after you enter your credit card details and before your booking is confirmed. This usually results in several bookings being made, something only discovered upon a close examination of a credit card statement months later.

The hardest thing about booking online is ascertaining the price, usually locked away on pages that are only accessible by declaring personal information such as credit card numbers and a date of birth. Often you have to pay before the price can be revealed. This results in gasps of dismay and simultaneous phone calls being made to the credit card company and the website (the latter of which, being virtual, rarely has a phone number and relies instead upon the easily ignorable email).

A certain amount of comfort comes from knowing that, once made, your reservation is almost impossible to reverse. However, the comfort is entirely the companies' since they can frequently cite computer error when explaining that your honeymoon has to be called off because of overbooking.

The greatest benefit to booking online is that it is ticket-less. All you need is the number, which you can get by printing out your email. Since pieces of paper are much easier to forget than tickets, most people turn up at airports without them. Conversations along the lines of, "Well, I know it had an X in," and, "No, wait, try this one: QZR3F" can be heard at check-in desks across the globe.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE BOOKING:

- Never make a booking in a rush: more haste less speed.
- Research is all – if you think you have found something too good to be true, it probably is.
- Booking online can be a bit like an auction: prepare yourself a budget and stick to it – it is easy to get swayed online.
- Make sure you fully understand what is being offered. Don't rely on pictures, which can easily mislead you.
- If you have any questions that are not answered on the website's FAQ page, don't hesitate to call them. Telephone numbers can usually be found at Contact Us.
- Before you confirm your booking, check, re-check and check again. Once made, it can be impossible to reverse.
- Don't rely on the company to confirm your booking. If you have not heard from them in 24 hours, contact them and enquire.

- Murray Garrard



SEX AND NYC

Ever fancied yourself as a bit of a Samantha? Proud to be as prudish as Charlotte, as career-mad as Miranda? Or do you suck on a cigarette and think of Carrie? In honour of the highly anticipated film released at the end of May this year, the Mandarin Oriental in New York is offering tailor-made *Sex and the City* Celebration Packages that let you indulge your inner city singleton status. Included is a whirlwind tour of the city's cinematic hotspots, including Carrie Bradshaw's favourite department store Henri Bendel, brunch at Pastis, a shopathon at Jimmy Choo's, all topped off by a Cosmopolitan in the hotel's lobby lounge where you can scan the crowd for a Mr Big of your own.

TRACK RECORD

If globetrotting is your thing, then this logbook is a nifty way to record your travels in addition to the millions of pixels you will anyway expend.

Small enough to slide into a pocket, purse, or the outside compartment of a backpack, Belgian publisher Morton,

Dian & Cook's *Globetrotter's LogBook #1 – Countries of the World* is not just the perfect way to keep track of your treks, it's a mini encyclopedia of sorts. There are quarter-page listings for every country of the world, with important stats, international calling codes, currency types and mini flags. Other sections let you keep tabs on vaccinations and up to 100 flights with space for the captain's signature and your seat number. Blank pages allow you to scribble your impressions of a dream journey, or glue in concert tickets, a dried flower petal, or a postage stamp, anything to jog your memory in the years to come. Order it from www.globetrotterslogbook.com and it will arrive at your doorstep in brown parcel packaging with vintage stamps, postmarks and your name personally scripted in heavy ink.

