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Tourism and related services — Online travel agency (OTA) — Guidelines for online accommodation booking platform services

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Tourisme et services connexes — Agences de voyages en ligne — Lignes directrices pour les services de plates-formes de réservation d'hébergement en ligne

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 228, *Tourism and related services*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

With the increasing penetration of the internet and growth in the number of smart handheld device users, as well as the growing demand for convenient tourism, the global online accommodation booking market has continually expanded and the number of the online accommodation booking platforms has grown during the past decade. Based on statistics, it is predicted that the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2021 to 2026 will exceed 10 %.

While the online accommodation booking service industry continues to grow at an increasing rate, it is also facing many problems, resulting in failure to provide the promised services, which causes a large number of consumer disputes. Common problems include, for example, no room on arrival, impossibility to change or cancel a reservation, serious inconsistencies between the service description and the actual service, and the leaking of sensitive, private and financial data of the users.

It is necessary to create a global standard providing guidance on the online accommodation booking industry to promote the development of this industry around the world.

This document aims to:

— provide advice and guidance on online accommodation booking platform services;

— protect the rights and interests of users, providers and platform operators, by establishing a mutual trust mechanism among these stakeholders;

— promote the orderly and sustainable development of the online accommodation booking service industry;

— enrich existing standards and promote further standardized activities in the field of online travel agency.

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Tourism and related services — Online travel agency (OTA) — Guidelines for online accommodation booking platform services

1 Scope

This document provides guidance on the operation of an effective online accommodation booking platform to meet the needs of accommodation service providers and users.

This document is applicable to online accommodation booking platform operators, accommodation service providers and users.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 18513, *Tourism services — Hotels and other types of tourism accommodation — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 18513 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

3.1
online travel agency
OTA
person or legal entity that operates a platform that offers online intermediary service between travel service providers and *users* (3.6), providing search, comparison and transaction services

3.2
online accommodation booking platform
platform
type of *online travel agency (OTA)* (3.1) that offers online intermediary service between the *accommodation service provider* (3.4) and the *user* (3.6)

Note 1 to entry: For further information, see Reference [2].

3.3
online accommodation booking platform operator
platform operator
person or legal entity that operates an *online accommodation booking platform* (3.2)

3.4
accommodation service provider
provider
person or legal entity that offers accommodation services to the *user* (3.6)

Note 1 to entry: This includes all kinds of tourism accommodation services such as hotels, short-term rental accommodation services, campsites, hostels and holiday homes.

3.5
online accommodation booking
transaction by which accommodation is booked using an *online accommodation booking platform* (3.2)

3.6
user
consumer who accesses accommodation booking and related services through the *online accommodation booking platform* (3.2)

Note 1 to entry: *Accommodation service providers* (3.4) usually use the term "guests" instead of "users".

4   General principles

Platform operators should follow the principles in ISO/TS 42501, ISO 42500, ISO/TS 42502 and ISO 32111 with regard to:

a)   integrity;

b)   transparency;

c)   authenticity;

d)   accountability and authorization;

e)   accessibility and inclusion;

f)   respect for the interest of others;

g)   competence;

h)   protection of intellectual property;

i)   protection of security and privacy;

j)   efficiency;

k)   continual improvement.

5   Responsibility

5.1   Online accommodation booking platform operator

In addition to the provisions concerning competence set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 4.7, the platform operator should:

a)   be a legal entity holding the relevant valid business-related licences;

b)   have service locations, facilities and equipment commensurate with the business and scale it engages in;

c)   have sufficient management, technical and service personnel for the platform to function;

d)   have a stable information system and security environment to ensure the provision of services;

EXAMPLE   Platform operators ensure that providers can promote and sell their accommodation and users can search for, compare and book them on the platforms.

e) establish and improve relevant mechanisms to standardize online accommodation booking services. These mechanisms should be used to guide providers to fulfil their service commitments and protect the rights and interests of users. There should also be a security mechanism for electronic transactions to maintain the operation of platform transactions;

f) in addition to the provisions set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 4.2, 6.3.3 and 6.4.4, develop and publish the terms of use and guide users to read the terms in their entirety. The terms of use should include information reminding users of transaction risks, limitations of liability and exclusions of liability. When amending the terms of use, the platform operator should publish the changes on the platform. These terms should not unreasonably limit the platform's responsibilities, increase users' obligations and exclude users' legal rights;

g) in addition to the provisions set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 4.3, 4.5, 6.3.2 and 6.3.4, ensure that online accommodation booking services are as accessible, understandable and usable as possible for all users, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability;

NOTE   ISO 21902 provides further information about accessible tourism.

h) keep providers' information up to date at all times;

i) not set unfair trading conditions based on extensive data analysis such as browsing records, consumption habits and travel preferences;

j) fulfil any proposed service guarantees, such as best price, change and/or cancellation guarantees;

k) in addition to the provisions set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 6.4.6, develop and implement contingency plans for emergencies regarding platform operation, services and security management;

l) display the categories representing the different types of accommodation according to ISO 18513;

m) ensure that the final step to conclude the booking contains a prompt with only the wording "Book with a duty to pay";

n) ensure the provisions on ranking criteria set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 4.3, are followed;

o) be responsible, to the extent possible under the circumstances, for the employees and personnel of providers to which they have outsourced parts of their activities.

5.2   Accommodation service provider

Providers should:

a) be categorized according to ISO 18513;

b) present true, accurate, complete and up-to-date information, including photographs and other marketing information, and ensure correct and meaningful information descriptions, including key accessibility features (see Annex A for guidance);

c) not cancel an existing booking or a held booking without a justified reason or be unable to provide the rooms at all upon arrival; if any of these situations occur, the platform operator should communicate and coordinate with the users and providers to satisfy the needs of both parties involved at the earliest possible time and not leave it until the point of arrival at the accommodation;

d) refrain from demanding parity clauses in their contracts for antitrust and fair competition reasons.

6 Service provisions

6.1 Information service

6.1.1 General

Information provided by platform operators should be:

a) clear and concise (i.e. ideas expressed in a straightforward and easy-to-understand manner, without unnecessary words or complexity);

b) up to date and reliable;

c) available in different formats including alternative formats.

> EXAMPLE   Not only available in the form of text but also in audio, Braille or other formats.

The platform should also indicate the availability of additional information.

Providers should ensure:

— the availability of information about the accessibility of accommodation and services offered on their platforms;

— users can book an accessible room through their platform via an ordinary booking procedure;

— that once an accessible room has been reserved and confirmed, it is not given away.

Electronic content supplied by the OTA service provider, including web pages, billing information and emails, in applications such as marketing, bookings and reservations, should be designed according to EN 301 549.[7]

6.1.2 Information display

The accommodation information supplied by providers should be displayed accurately and completely in the relevant categories, for users to browse online conveniently (see 7.3).

In addition to the provisions set out in ISO/TS 42501:2022, 5.3, the list of information may include, for example:

— overview and photos;

— price;

— room types and size;

— availability;

— accessibility;

— facilities;

— house rules;

— payment option;

— reviews;

— location;

— surroundings;

— indication of additional fees such as tourist taxes, if applicable;

— refund policy;