

Topic | Online Booking

Tutorial 34

Online Booking Systems 101

This tutorial will help you understand online booking systems and review a number of tourism specific systems against certain criteria.

Reading time: 25 minutes

Prerequisite: None



This tutorial is part of the complete online education program, the Tourism e-kit.



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1. What is an online booking system?

Latest research suggests that 60% of travellers book online when it is available. As a tourism operator, you may therefore wish to enable your website to be booked online.

An online booking system is a technology that will:

- Display your availability in real time on your website and on the selected distributors' websites
- Accept payments from consumers on your own website without requiring human interaction
- Give you the opportunity to also make your product bookable on a variety of the selected distributors' websites (by joining the TXA)
- Update your inventory on your website and on the selected distributors' websites (optional) when a purchase is made.

There are many online booking systems available to Australian tourism operators. They are very simple to install and can be much cheaper than custom-built systems.

a) What are the benefits to my business?

The online booking system offers convenience as well as opportunities for exposure to new customers. It also means the booking system will automatically update your records without the need for emails and manually entering in guest details. Payment via credit card is processed online and the booking is confirmed with the guest. Online booking systems will save you a lot of time.

ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS PROVIDE BIG TIME SAVINGS IN HANDLING BOOKINGS, DATA-ENTRY, AVOIDING DOUBLE HANDLING OF DATA, AND STREAMLINING PAYMENTS.

They also allow you to display your availability on your website and offer reporting tools.

b) How much does it cost?

Online booking systems vary in cost. There are generally three types of costs associated with an online booking system:

Licensing cost:	Cost to use the system. It could either be a fixed monthly or annual licensing fee, a percentage of the value of the transaction (commission) or a combination of both. Usually includes support and upgrades to the system.
Installation and training:	Cost to install the system and to be initially trained on how to use it.
Support:	Cost for support once the system is installed. May be charged as "pay as you use".

We recommend you do the maths and take into account the different types of costs and contact the system vendor to verify the information.

c) Will it bring me any extra business?

Online booking systems can be compared to an online credit card machine: they are services that encourage and simplify a monetary transaction.

If your existing website is search engine friendly and its content is up-to-date, installing an online booking system will increase the chances for conversions (bookings) since you have made it easier for the consumer to book. They won't require an extra step (e.g. making contact with you by phone or email) in order to purchase and they can transact with you any time of the day or night.

If your website's content is not up to the standards of today's consumer and your site isn't search engine friendly, you may not see a significant increase in bookings. We recommend you first work on your website and search engine strategy to ensure your website is visible to the web searcher.

By installing an online booking system on your site and joining Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA) you will enhance the visibility of your product or service, as it will be bookable on a growing number of distributor's websites.

Installing an online booking system on your website may not provide you many extra bookings if your site's content and functionality does not respond to the needs of your online visitor. However, an online booking button and the TXA will increase the visibility of your product and therefore could increase your bookings.

d) Which system is best for me?

As the business owner and operator, you are best suited to answer this question. We have prepared this document to help you compare the system's features and functionality against your checklist of requirements. Whilst we can't guarantee its accuracy we will endeavour to maintain its currency through regular updates of information provided by the system vendors.

e) Channel Management - How do I manage over-bookings?

If you are currently selling inventory on third party sites (such as Wotif.com, lastminute.com.au) or via booking agents you will need to:

- Assess if the online booking system you choose offers a feature that automatically distributes and updates your inventory to third party websites. This feature is commonly known as "channel manager".
If your chosen online booking system doesn't offer a channel management feature or doesn't link to your desired third party website, you may need to manage over-bookings manually.
- If a channel manager is supported, you will need to check which third party websites the channel manager links to. Every online booking system is different and may not partner with the third party sites you use. Ask if the channel manager system can add your third party sites to its list of linked sites. The channel manager may already link to a range of additional sites you don't use - this will extend your reach into the market.

You may also require the channel manager to distribute individual rate plans (e.g. add-ons and specials to your preferred customers or wholesaler). If the channel manager does support individual rate plans:

- Find out how flexible the channel manager is by asking:
Does it on the whole inventory for each room type, or
Must room type inventory be split and a specific number of rooms allocated to each rate (this will be more time consuming to administer).
- Find out whether the channel manager updates each linked site with an individual rate plan, or whether it updates all linked sites with the same rate plan.

f) What equipment and support will I need?

To manage an online booking system you should not need to invest in any additional hardware. The system is either manageable from your computer or online directly. However, you will need to organise an online merchant account which will allow you to transfer the money securely from the online booking system into your bank account. Discuss the different types of online merchant accounts with your bank.

g) Will the online payments be secure?

If the system is hosted on the vendor's server there should not be a need for you to purchase an SSL certificate. An SSL certificate is an electronic key that will ensure the online transaction is secure.

If the system is hosted on your server (and not on the vendor's server) you may require an SSL certificate to secure the transaction between the customer's computer and your server.

We strongly recommend you discuss SSL and security with your vendor.

2. How do I choose an appropriate online booking system?

Please follow the steps below that have been designed to help you choose a booking system.

1. Assess your business needs. Every tourism operator is different and different systems offer different options. To do so, refer to paragraph a) below which will help you put together a checklist of what you would like the system to be able to do for you.
2. Then talk to your peers, regional tourism organisation, and local visitor information centre. Find out what system they are using and which ones they recommend. Ask for their opinion on different systems. What challenges they are facing? Are there any features that you should absolutely get?
3. Read section 3) which compares some of the systems in the Australian market, as it will help you focus on a smaller number that you can investigate further.
4. Use this as a guide only and make your own enquiries with the vendors to make an informed decision. The information in this tutorial is based on the online booking system vendor's website and the vendor's responses to our questionnaire so it might not answer all the questions on your checklist.
5. Please be aware that the list of systems is not exhaustive and there may be other systems you might want to consider. Not all systems in the list offer online booking

- from your own website.
6. If you review other systems, assess them against the criteria presented in section 3) below. Also check:
 - How long has the software been on the market and the company been operating for.
 - What type of support is offered.
 - The company's reputation: enquire with trusted industry and Google the company name and system name.
 7. If you are planning on joining the TXA, talk to the system vendor or the ATDW (txa@atdw.com.au) to assess if the booking system is, or will soon be, integrated to the TXA.
 8. Don't forget to compare the functionality of the system against your original checklist.
 9. Understand the charging model. Some solutions offer a lower upfront cost and charge ongoing commissions based on transaction values, others provide for flat ongoing fees but may charge more to set the system up. Pick the solution which best matches your business and cash flow.

a) Checklist of my requirements

Assessing your business needs first is crucial. To help you, we have put together a few points that should be on your checklist:

What functions do you want the system to perform (e.g. do you want it to pass information to your financial or property management system without having to re-key it)?

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What information do you need from the system?

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What will you need to change and add (e.g. changing specials, putting on specials, putting on add-on products)?

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Which channels do you need the system to support (lastminute.com.au, about-australia.com)?

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Which business type and size is the system designed for?

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Do you need the system to support packages?

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Do you need the system to be able to liaise with my website analytics program? (Strongly recommended)

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3. Comparison of booking systems

We commissioned an independent review of a number of online booking, property management, and other systems suited to small and medium tourism businesses. This list is not exhaustive.

The results are displayed in the following tables to help you compare each system.

a) Which system could suit my business type?

	BookConfirm	BookEasy	ChannelManager	Charts	eTourism	FrontDesk	Genkan	Globeres	Globekey	HiRUM	iHotelier	Jewel	Levart	Maxial
Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Large operators (more than 100 rooms)	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Booking Agents / Tour Desks / Visitor Centres		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hotel / motel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
B&B / hostel / guesthouse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Lodge / apartment / resort	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Day Spa	✓		✓			✓					✓			
Holiday & caravan park / marina	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Condominium	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Multiple properties	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Tour / event / attraction operator	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓	✓		
Year of release	2005	2002	2006	1998	2001	2005	2009	2002	2000	1996	2003	2000	2003	1998

	NetBookings	Netroomz	PatronBase	Procharter	Reservations7	Resonline	ResPax	Rezgo	RMS	Roamfree	Roomrez	ROS2006	Satin Front Office
Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Large operators (more than 100 rooms)		✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Booking Agents / Tour Desks / Visitor Centres	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		
Hotel / motel	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
B&B / hostel / guesthouse	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lodge / apartment / resort	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Day Spa	✓								✓			✓	
Holiday & caravan park / marina	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Condominium	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓		
Multiple properties	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tour / event / attraction operator	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	
Year of release	1998	2004	1997	2000	1998	2004	1999	2006	1998	2004	2000	2001	1996

	Seekom iBex	Siriusware	SiteMinder	STAAH	tourstogo.com	TravelRez	TryBooking	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Small operators (up to 10 rooms)	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Medium operators (10 to 100 rooms)	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Large operators (more than 100 rooms)	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓

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	Seekom iBex	Siriusware	SiteMinder	STAAH	tourstogo.com	TravelRez	TryBooking	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Booking Agents / Tour Desks / Visitor Centres		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Hotel / motel	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
B&B / hostel / guesthouse	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Lodge / apartment / resort	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Day Spa			✓			✓			
Holiday & caravan park / marina	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Condominium	✓		✓	✓		✓			
Multiple properties	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Tour / event / attraction operator	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Year of release	2002	1990	2007	2006	2005	2009	2008	1998	2006

b) Which system meets my requirements? (for accommodation businesses, visitor centres & agents)

	BookConfirm	BookEasy	ChannelManager	Charts	eTourism	frontdesk	Genkan	Globekey	Globeres	HIRUM	iHotelier	Jewel (JIBS)
Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	** ✓
List and search on room facilities		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
List properties by location or by type	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Add on sales	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Group check-in/ticketing				✓		✓				✓		✓
Waiting list management				✓	✓			✓		✓		✓
Integration with back office system (PMS, accounting, finance)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Real-time sales reporting	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export to MSExcel, Crystal Reports etc		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Property management system		✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	

All systems offer management and operational reports.

** Jewel offers two systems:

JIBS links with the TXA to provide accommodation bookings via Tour Desks and Visitor Centres;

JRS is an on line booking system for Tour Operators which also links to TXA via JIBS (refer c) below).

	Levert	Maxial	NetBookings	Netroomz	Reservations7	Resonline	RMS	Roamfree	Roomrez	ROS2006
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Online Booking Systems 101

Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	✓	***	✓	✓	^	✓	✓	✓	✓	^
List and search on room facilities	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
List properties by location or by type	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Add on sales	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Group check-in/ticketing		✓	✓		✓		✓			
Waiting list management		✓			✓		✓			✓
Integration with back office system (PMS, accounting, finance)	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Real-time sales reporting	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Links to website analytics package	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property management system		✓			✓		✓			*

All systems offer management and operational reports.

^ The reservation process is not 'real-time' booking. The operator is responsible for processing the guest's credit cards and notifying them with a final confirmation.

******* Online bookings using Maxial are only possible through third party websites.

You must purchase the ROS2006 PMS to obtain access to a number of functions, including reporting.

	Satin Front Office	Seekom iBex	SiteMinder	STAAH	TravelRez	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Web-based real time booking and payment from operator's website	^^	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ *	✓

List and search on room facilities		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
List properties by location or by type		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Add on sales	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Group check-in/ticketing	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Waiting list management	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Integration with back office system (PMS, accounting, finance)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Real-time sales reporting		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Data import / export	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Property management system	✓	✓			✓	✓	

^^ Provides bookings and secure payments only via an interface to a 3rd party Channel Manager. Updates of the room inventory are notified via email, and are not online.

* TravelRez is designed for medium/large agents, regional booking services, wholesalers and retailers

c) Which system meets my requirements? (for accommodation businesses also wanting to offer bookings for tours and attractions)

	BookConfirm	frontdesk	iHotelier	NetBookings	Roomrez	Seekom iBex	TryBooking	WebVantage
Web-based real time booking and payment from your website	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Add-on sales	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Group check-in/ticketing				✓			✓	
Integration with back office systems (PMS, accounting, finance)		✓	✓					
Real-time sales reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Manages multiple tour sectors		✓					✓	✓
Control over seating allocation					✓	✓	✓	✓
Control over fare/price structuring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Re-scheduling of tour/event	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Waiting list management						✓	✓	✓

All systems handle add on sales, as well as management and operational reports.

^ Provides bookings and secure payments only via an interface to a 3rd party Channel Manager. Updates of the room inventory are notified via email, and are not online.

d) Which system meets my requirements? (for tour / attraction / event ticketing businesses and agents)

	BookEasy Tour	Jewel (JRS)	PatronBase	Procharter	ResPax	Rezgo	Siriusware	TravelRez	tourstogo.com
Web-based real time booking and payment from your website	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓
Add-on sales	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Group check-in/ticketing		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Integration with back office systems (PMS, accounting, finance)		✓			✓			✓	
Real-time sales reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data import / export	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to website analytics package	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Manages multiple tour sectors	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Control over seating allocation		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Control over fare/price structuring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Re-scheduling of tour/event	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Waiting list management		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	

* TravelRez is designed for medium/large agents, regional booking services, wholesalers and retailers

e) Distribution to third party websites through a channel manager

The following table assesses the channel management functions offered (if any) and the range of links to booking provider and agent networks.

Note: currently this section applies only to accommodation providers

	BookConfirm	BookEasy	ChannelManager	Charts	eTourism	Frontdesk	Genkan	Globekey	Globeres	HIRUM	iHotelier	Jewel (JIBS)	Levart
Auto-distribution to 3 rd party sites	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Auto-management of over-bookings	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Distribution of rate plans	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual rate plan for each site	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Integrated with TXA		✓				✓						✓	✓

	Maxial	NetBookings	Netroomz	Reservations7	Resonline	ResPax	RMS	Roamfree	Roomrez	ROS2006
Auto-distribution to 3 rd party sites		✓	✓		✓	✓				
Auto-management of over-bookings		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Distribution of rate plans		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Individual rate plan for each site		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Integrated with TXA		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		

	SiteMinder	STAAH	Satin Front Office	Seekom iBex	TravelRez	Web Reservations	WebVantage
Auto-distribution to 3 rd party sites	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Auto-management of over-bookings	✓				✓		
Individual rate plan for each site	✓				✓		
Integrated with TXA							

4. Independent ranking of online booking systems





















We have also ranked the various online booking systems according to different criteria to help with your research and selection:

- The range and richness of functions offered by the booking system.
- The richness of the channel management and the range of links to booking providers offered by the booking system.
- The range of reference sites or case studies offered by the vendor.
- The degree to which the vendor's website clearly outlines all the functions the booking system performs.

Cost has not been taken into consideration.

a) Systems suited to accommodation businesses, agents & visitor centres

Online Booking System	Rating (Accommodation)	Comment
BookConfirm	👍👍	Good basic system, limited range of functions
BookEasy	👍👍👍	Very good range of functions
ChannelManager	👍👍	Suited to small/medium sites
Charts	👍👍👍	Good references and function range
eTourism	👍👍👍	Good channel management and range of functions
FrontDesk	👍👍👍👍	Strong on channel management and function range

Online Booking System	Rating (Accommodation)	Comment
Genkan		Good function range and website; for agents only
Globekey		Very good channel management, client base and reference sites
Globeres		Good references and channel management
HiRUM		Very good function range, good channel management
iHotelier		Strong channel management, functions and reference sites
Jewel (JIBS)		Very good channel management & range of functions; for tour desks & info centres only
Levart Booking Engine		Excellent channel management, function range and references
Maxial		For hotel desk; online bookings are not possible through the operator's website
NetBookings		Good function range; limited channel management
Netroomz		Good channel management and reference sites
Reservations7		Bookings are via web form (not real-time online booking)
Resonline		Good function range, website & references
RMS		Excellent channel management, function range and website
Roamfree		Strong channel management; good references & website
Roomrez		Good range of functions; poor website
ROS2006		Limited range of functions and reference sites
Satin Front Office		Web bookings and payments are not online
Seekom iBex		Very good channel management, references and function range
SiteMinder		Very good channel management, function range and references
STAAH		Good channel management; reference range limited

Online Booking System	Rating (Accommodation)	Comment
TravelRez	👍👍👍👍	For medium/large travel agents, regional booking services, retailers & wholesalers. Excellent functions & channel management networks.
Web Reservations	👍👍👍	Very good function range, and good references
WebVantage	👍👍	Good function range; website lacks clarity

b) Systems suited to tours and attraction businesses

b.1) Booking systems specialising in tours and ticketing ...

Online Booking System	Rating	Comment
BookEasy Tour	👍👍👍	Designed for tour operator's own website as well as booking agents. Good function range.
Jewel (JRS)	👍👍👍👍	Excellent range of functions and very good references
PatronBase	👍👍👍👍	Excellent website, references and functions
Procharter	👍	Specialise in adventure tours; poor website & references
ResPax	👍👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Very good functions and references
Rezgo	👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Good website and range of functions.
Siriusware	👍👍👍	Good range of functions
tourstogo.com	👍👍👍	Specialise in tours/attractions. Good website, limited range of functions
TravelRez	👍👍👍	For medium/large travel agents, regional booking services, retailers & wholesalers. Excellent channel management networks.
Trybooking	👍👍👍	Specialise in event ticketing, tours/attractions and registrations. Good function range and website.

b.2) Booking systems offering functions for tours and ticketing (but specialising on accommodation)...

Online Booking System	Rating	Comment
BookConfirm	👍👍👍	Good basic system
FrontDesk	👍👍👍	Good functions and website; no references for tours
iHotelier	👍👍	Limited tour functions
NetBookings	👍👍👍	Good function range and references
Roomrez	👍👍	Good range of functions; website lacks information
Seekom	👍👍👍👍	Very good website and function range
WebVantage	👍👍👍	Very good function range; website lacks clarity

If you are a vendor and would like to get your system evaluated and included on this list, please contact txa@atdw.com.au. The ATDW reserves the right to evaluate systems at its discretion.

5. Related material

a) *Related tutorials*

- Online booking systems: advanced