

How to work effectively with OTAs

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Every day, millions of travellers use OTAs and other online travel platforms to plan and book their holidays and business trips, to destinations all over the world. The OTA market is crowded and competitive, and the Tours and Activities sector is one of the fastest growing sales channels. OTAs offer a quick, convenient way to enter the market, but local operators need to do their research, understand their target market and choose the most appropriate OTA to work with.

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1. What is an OTA?

An OTA (Online Travel Agency) is an online marketplace selling travel products and services. Travel products and services include accommodation, flights, car hire, holidays, tours, activities, experiences, and tickets for visitor attractions. Travellers use OTAs to research their travel plans and to make bookings through the OTA platform, which are then transferred to the operator.

The term 'OTA' is often used to describe a range of online travel platforms including aggregators, metasearch engines, travel directories, comparison websites and travel marketplaces. They play different roles in the online travel industry sector. For the purposes of this report, an OTA means a business to consumer (B2C) sales channel. There are also business to business (B2B) OTA sales channels which handle bookings from resellers and wholesalers.

The table below outlines the three main types of online travel platforms which you should be aware of.

Table 1: OTAs and other Online Travel Platforms

	Category 1: Online Travel Agency (OTA)	Category 2: Online Travel Marketplace	Category 3: Aggregator (also called a Metasearch Engine)
Definition:	<p>An online travel agency markets and sells travel products directly to consumers.</p> <p>Large OTAs like Booking.com offer a range of different products – hotels, flights, car hire, tours, attraction tickets.</p> <p>OTAs in the Tours and Activities segment like Viator only sell tours, activities, experiences and attractions.</p>	<p>An online travel marketplace is a website where tour operators can list their business and market tours to consumers.</p>	<p>These large online platforms compare prices provided to them by different suppliers, including hotels, airlines and other OTAs.</p> <p>They are used by the hotel and airline sectors.</p>

<p>How they work:</p>	<p>Consumers make bookings on the platform, which are then transferred to the tour operator.</p> <p>Payment is usually made at the time of booking, but this is not always the case.</p>	<p>Consumers browse a wide range of different tour operators and/or tours listed on the website.</p> <p>If they decide to book, they are redirected to the tour operator website.</p>	<p>Users search for a flight or a hotel and the aggregator displays results in ascending price order.</p> <p>Users select a deal and are redirected to the hotel/airline/OTA website.</p> <p>Suppliers can pay more to ensure that their service is shown at the top of the page, even if it is not the cheapest.</p>
<p>Commission Fees:</p>	<p>OTAs charge you a fee in the form of commission on sales.</p> <p>Normally there is no fee to list your product.</p>	<p>Online travel marketplaces sometimes charge a fee to list a business/tour and take a commission on sales.</p> <p>Some platforms only charge commission for sales.</p>	<p>Aggregators are paid a fee when a user clicks on a specific deal.</p> <p>They also generate revenue from advertising.</p>
<p>Examples:</p>	<p>Booking.com Airbnb GetYourGuide Viator Kimkim Evaneos</p>	<p>Safaribookings TourHound TravelStride</p>	<p>Kayak Skyscanner Trivago</p>

Source: Acorn (2022)

In this report, the term 'OTA' refers to any relevant online platforms that SMEs can consider working with (Categories 1 and 2 above).

Aggregators (Category 3 above) are not used by OTAs in the Tours and Activities segment, and are not considered a suitable sales channel for SMEs.

2. What are tours, activities, experiences, attractions, and trips?

The OTA marketplace is large, diverse and complex. Tours and Activities are a smaller segment of the global OTA marketplace. Certain terms are used frequently in this sector, and these are defined below:

- Tour – a journey or route to showcase a place or destination, which may be themed (e.g. sightseeing tour, heritage tour, cultural tour, walking tour, gastronomical tour).
- Activity – adventure activities that a visitor takes part in, such as cycling or walking activity.
- Experience – experiences are created to give the visitor a unique and/or authentic insight into a local community, village, or way of life. They may also be referred to as a tour. Calling a tour an ‘experience’ is a way of differentiating a product from other similar tours on the market.
- Attraction – refers to individual locations that tourists can visit and spend time at. For instance, a local festival, or World Heritage Sites like the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, or the Pyramids in Giza, Egypt. They may also be included in a tour.
- Excursion – another word used for a tour, activity, experience and/or visit to an attraction.

There is cross-over between all of the above concepts. There is no predefined duration for a tour, activity or experience. It may last for a few hours, a day, several days or a week or more. OTAs sometimes focus on multi-day tours, or custom tours, or day tours.

In this report, ‘tours’ is used to refer to tours, excursions, activities, experiences, and attractions.

3. What does the marketplace for OTAs selling tours look like?

OTAs, online travel marketplaces and aggregators are very well established in the marketplace. Sales growth has been driven by the hotel and airline sectors over many years.

In the global travel and tourism market, online sales accounted for 60% of global revenue in 2017, compared to 40% by offline sales. By 2021, the share of online sales had grown to 65%. Online sales are forecast to account for a 74% share in 2026, according to [Statista](#).

In May 2022, Booking.com was the most visited travel and tourism website in the world, with 564.1 million visits during the month.

Source: SimilarWeb (31 May 2022). Most visited travel and tourism website worldwide as of May 2022 (in millions of visits) [graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from [Statista](#)

The Tours and Activities sales sector had a [global value of US\\$254 billion in 2019](#), according to travel research specialist Arival Travel.

Their report on the [Size and Structure of the Global Operator Landscape 2020](#) states that online sales account for about 17% of global value. Most online sales (14%) were made through traditional online channels like tour operator websites. A further 4% of sales were made through OTAs.

This means that offline sales of tours and activities accounts for a much large proportion of sales (83%). These are sales via traditional methods such as direct transactions in person, over the phone, in travel agents’ shops and through other resellers.

Although 17% may seem small, an analysis of the growth shows that bookings generated by OTAs grew by 21%

between 2018 and 2019, compared with 13% growth on tour operator websites and mobile apps. The reasons for OTA growth and their increasing importance in the tours industry were:

- Digitalisation continues to influence our everyday lives and OTAs are prominent in the marketplace. They attract considerable media interest and provide investor opportunities.
- Smaller tour operators are attracted to OTAs because they can use their platforms and expertise to reach a global and/or niche market quickly.
- As demand for experiential tourism and immersive, local experiences grow, more SMEs and local operators are entering the market, relying on online channels to help generate more sales.
- In turn, this leads to an increased need for OTAs to help travellers find the tours they want to do.

Now that the pandemic is behind us, the sales recovery in the tours sector will take time to reach 2019 levels again. By 2021, sales had recovered to 39% of those generated in 2019 (\$99.1 billion). Another consequence of the recent pandemic was an increase in digitalisation in the travel industry.

Tips:

Read more about the online travel market. [Arival](#) publishes some free research resources and is a good place to start.

Stay informed of how OTAs are distributed around the world. This article by Hotelmize, [Online Travel Agencies market share across the world](#), includes lots of interesting facts and trends.

4. What are the differences between OTAs in the tours sector?

It is important to understand the differences between OTAs that sell tours. Like all travel businesses, they seek to understand their target markets and differentiate themselves by specialising in a particular niche to appeal to their customers.

The chart below gives you an idea of how varied the marketplace is. Each type of OTA crosses over with at least one other, because most OTAs offer more than one type of tour. For instance:

- Viator is best known for selling day tours, but more and more multi-day tours are appearing on the platform as demand increases.
- European OTAs Civitatis, Musement and GetYourGuide are also better known for day tours, but are adding more multi-day tours to their platforms.
- Urban Adventures specialises in day tours, and city tours, and also offers food tours. They are good examples of operators offering themed tours. Some tours are also multi-day.
- Airbnb Experiences has positioned its business carefully to attract customers seeking immersive, community-led experiences.

Figure 2: Guide to OTAs in the tours and activities sector



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Have a look at these descriptions for more information:

- Core Global Market: these OTAs are the global market leaders. Expedia and Airbnb have branched out to sell tours through their specialist platforms, Expedia Local Expert and Airbnb Experiences. Tripadvisor (which owns Viator) is a travel review platform, price comparison site, and booking platform for tours and restaurants.
- Regional Market: a group of large OTAs with a regional focus. Trip.com and ClearTrip are the two largest

OTAs in China and India respectively.

- Specialists – day tours: this group of OTAs specialises in day tours, or part-day tours. Germany's GetYourGuide and Italy's Musement are among the market leaders. They also sell multi-day tours, but in smaller numbers.
- Specialists – scheduled multi-day tours: these OTAs specialise in selling multi-day tours that have scheduled (or fixed) dates.
- Specialists – custom (or tailor made) multi-day tours: demand is growing for personalised experiences and these OTAs work directly with customers to create a custom itinerary.
- Specialists – day and multi-day, niche activities: another large group of OTAs that specialise in niche products, such as adventure, community-based tourism (CBT), hiking/trekking, food and drink, wellness, and sustainable/responsible travel.
- Specialists – local tour guides: these OTAs connect travellers with locals who are experts in whatever subject interests the visitor – city tours, history, wildlife, café culture, adventure, and so on.

Understanding the type of customer and market for each OTA will help you to select the one that best fits your business plan.

You should also check that the OTA is allowed to operate in your country.

Before working with any OTA, it's important that you remember that OTAs are professional businesses and in order to succeed they ultimately need to be profitable within their sector. This means they have high expectations of all the suppliers they do business with, and as a supplier you will need to understand what their needs are.

Broadly speaking, your task as a supplier to an OTA is to provide:

- tours, experiences and/or packages their customers love;
- unique content that stands out;
- satisfied visitors who want to leave reviews;
- competitive prices that meet customers' expectations;
- repeat customers and/or referrals.

The OTA will, in turn:

- market your tour (or tours) to a much wider audience than you would be otherwise able to afford to reach;
- provide a user-friendly website for your customers to use that enables instant booking, payment and confirmation;
- sell more tours;
- send more potential customers to your website, if you have one, and if the OTA allows this in their terms and conditions.

The two case studies below are presented to help you learn about some of the biggest OTAs and online travel platforms.

- Tripadvisor and Viator are two important online travel platforms that you should be aware of. Tripadvisor is the second most visited online travel platform, after Booking.com.
- Airbnb has developed a very strong global brand; it offers unique rental accommodation and its tours platform, Airbnb Experiences, is becoming well-known for providing the high quality that customers of the brand have come to expect in the field of experiences.

They should be your first point of research.

A more detailed list of interesting OTAs is included at the end of the report, in the section called, [Explore OTAs specialising in tours and activities](#).

Best practices: Tripadvisor, Viator and Airbnb

Tripadvisor/Viator and Airbnb are two of the best-known OTAs in the world. The companies have created strong brands. These case studies give you an insight into their businesses and how you can work with them.

Case Study 1: Profile of Tripadvisor/Viator

What is Tripadvisor?



According to Tripadvisor, it is 'the world's largest travel guidance platform', helping travellers to plan, book and take tours. The services it offers are:

- More than one billion reviews and opinions on almost 8 million different accommodations, tours, airlines and cruises
- Price comparison for hotels, flights and cruises
- Booking of tours
- Reservations for restaurants

The platform is both a travel metasearch engine and an OTA, and it is one of the three most commonly used online travel platforms in the world today, along with Booking.com and Expedia. Listings are ranked using sophisticated algorithms based on positive reviews, the numbers of reviews, and other customer satisfaction factors. Find out more about [how to improve your chances of ranking higher on Tripadvisor and Viator, and entice more customers to book with you](#).

Tripadvisor has an extensive business model. It generates revenue in many ways. It collects commission on sales in the form of booking fees from hosts and suppliers. Advertising on the platform is a major source of revenue and Tripadvisor Plus, launched in 2021, is a new annual subscription service that offers discounts on hotels and experiences. Travel insurance, investments, subsidiary companies and acquisitions provide further revenue streams.

[Tripadvisor Insights](#) on the website provides a range of useful resources for suppliers, including 'How To' guides, and research on building your business through the platform.

Visit the other Tripadvisor sites:

- Tours and attractions tickets: [Viator](#)
- Restaurant bookings: [TheFork](#)
- Cruise reviews: [Cruise Critic](#)
- Holiday accommodation rentals: [Holiday Lettings](#)

You can list your business on Tripadvisor at: [Owners - Claim Your Free Tripadvisor Listing](#).

What is Viator?



Viator was acquired by Tripadvisor in 2014. This platform only sells tours. Listings made on the Viator platform are automatically added to the Tripadvisor platform. Travellers are able book the same tours through both platforms.

Viator is a platform for travel businesses of all sizes. These may be large or small tour operators, family or community-run tourism experiences, local tour guides or experts in a particular destination, city or region. Once signed up, suppliers gain access to a range of business management tools to manage their online tours and can

access their products easily and quickly.

Viator News is a section of the website dedicated to travel news and insights for travel businesses. Check out the [Viator Travel Trends Report 2022](#) for useful information about your market.

You can list your tour on Viator at: [Supplier Sign Up](#).

Travel Award Schemes

Both platforms operate travel award schemes which are useful marketing tools for suppliers. The [Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards](#), and the 'Best of the Best Things to Do Awards' are based on travellers' reviews and ratings of experiences, trips and tours. The [Viator Experience Awards](#) were introduced in 2022. They rank the world's top experiences based on the average review ratings, share of bookings that generate a review and number of bookings over a 12-month period. The awards produce winners across 11 regions.

Case Study 2: Profile of Airbnb Experiences

What is Airbnb Experiences?



Airbnb Experiences are tours hosted by local experts (hosts) designed to help visitors immerse themselves in local culture and enjoy a unique high-quality experience. During the pandemic, many experiences were offered online. All Airbnb Experiences are reviewed to ensure they meet certain criteria, and hosts (co-hosts and assistants) also need to observe additional terms and conditions.

Airbnb Experiences' unique selling point is that tours listed have to be 'unique'. What this means in practice is that e.g. a 'walking tour' should offer something that makes it different from a standard walking tour, such as a stop at a private viewpoint that is only accessible on this tour, or the tour is accompanied by a specialist architect.

More traditional tours are finding their ways onto the platform today as demand for them is very high, but the essence of providing a unique, high-quality tour remains the same. The [Quality standards for experiences](#) sets out the relevant standards and requirements.

Airbnb provides many other guides to help, such as [Create a unique Airbnb Experience](#), and the [3 Pillars of a Quality Experience](#), which offers practical advice on developing unique tours using real hosted examples.

Airbnb's commission rate of 20% is reported to be one of the lowest on the market today.

This helpful guide, [Airbnb Experiences \(2021 edition\)](#) has been produced to help tour operators assess whether they can list their experience on Airbnb Experiences and how to succeed. If you are already listed on the platform, the guide will also help you make the most of your relationship with the platform.

To join Airbnb Experiences, visit [Become a host](#).

Tip:

Browse the help guides on the Tripadvisor, Viator and Airbnb platforms to familiarise yourself with how they work and how local tour operators promote their tours.

5. What are the benefits and disadvantages of working with OTAs?

Before deciding whether to work with an OTA, you should carefully consider all advantages and disadvantages of signing up with an OTA. The table below may help you make your decision.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of Working with an OTA

Advantages of working with an OTA	Disadvantages of working with an OTA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OTAs offer an easy and quick route to selling online, which is useful if you don't already do this.• The platform provides easy access to a global audience which you may otherwise never have. It can be a low-cost way to test a new market.• OTAs take on all the marketing costs associated with your tours.• On many OTAs you only pay when you generate a sale.• The OTA brand can be a powerful marketing tool and may reflect well on your image.• Whether or not you can sell your tours online, the OTA manages all bookings and takes payment on your behalf.• If you have your own reservation and payment systems, these can usually be aligned with those of the OTA.• Online reviews on your tour pages on OTA sites can generate more direct sales. (Typically, direct sales are more valuable to your business than those generated by an OTA.)• Exposure on an OTA platform can help you build a professional reputation as a local tour operator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OTAs charge a commission on all sales. This varies, but is generally at least 20%. Commission rates have been rising gradually and are likely to continue to do so as the share and volume of bookings grow.• As a small operator, you are unlikely to be able to negotiate lower commission rates.• As a small operator, you may be in direct competition with private people who do not have a business but are able to list their tour on the platform. Usually they pay lower tax rates and can therefore charge less per tour.• If your OTA raises commission beyond what you can afford, you may lose an important sales channel overnight.• If you don't have your own reservation or sales channel manager (sales technology systems), you will need to manage OTA sales alongside direct sales to ensure customers are not overlooked or double-booked.• The OTA market is a fast-moving sector and highly competitive. If you rely on one OTA and it goes out of business, this could lead to problems.• Some OTAs restrict access to your customer details, which limits future interactions with those customers and your ability to build up a customer database.• Less brand exposure, because some OTAs will remove the name of your company from your listing.

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

6. Which OTA is best for you?

There is a five-step process that you can follow to make the right decisions when choosing which OTA (or OTAs) to work with, as described in the infographic below.

Figure 3: Process to select OTAs



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Each step is described in more detail:

Step One – Review and understand your own business:

- Make sure you know who your customers are and where they come from (i.e. your target markets), and what motivates them to purchase your tours.
- Review your tours to establish which are the most popular and why, whether you can build more tours or change existing tours to perform better.
- Undertake some competitor research into tours that may be similar to yours, locally or even regionally. That way, you can differentiate your tour in some way to help to establish a **USP (unique selling point)** and identify gaps in the market.
- Review your management systems, as it is important that your business is well-managed. How do you organise your diaries, your staff and guides, your tour schedules and training?
- Make sure your budgets and financials are up-to-date and accurate.

Step Two – Assess the OTA

- Make a longlist of OTAs that interest you. Include the biggest in your target markets as a first step. Examples: GetYourGuide (Germany), Musement (Italy), Tripadvisor (UK), Civitatis (Spain), Trip.com (China), MakeMyTour (India).
- Add specialist OTAs that match your profile to the list, such as those targeting travellers seeking Adventure, Local Tour Guides, City Tours, Activity-based, CBT, and so on.
- Include any that are based in your destination – many travellers make spontaneous decisions once they have reached their destination and may prefer to choose a locally-based OTA.
- Explore the profile of the OTA to ensure that it fits with your target market. The OTA should promote tours that are compatible with your offer.
- Check that you are able to list your tour with the OTA from your destination. Some OTAs may have regional limitations.
- Look at marketing initiatives – how will your business be displayed? Can you feature your logo and/or branding? Will there be a link to your website? In Europe, OTAs are legally required to state the name of the tour operator that conducts the tour.
- Familiarise yourself with how to list your business/tour. There is usually a clear link on the Homepage to ‘Become a Supplier’ or ‘List your Tour’ or something similar. For instance, **Become a Supplier** (GetYourGuide), **Apply to Host** (Much Better Adventures) and **Work with Us** (Insight Guides).
- Read all the instructions on how to join the platform carefully, to ensure that you understand what they are asking you to submit. Some OTAs will ‘assess’ your business/tour to check that you meet their requirements before accepting you.
- Do contact them and ask them questions about anything that you are not sure about. OTAs will want their relationship with you to be a success and will therefore be keen to help you and give you advice.

Step Three – Calculate the financial implications

- Find out what commission the OTA charges. This is likely to be in the region of 20% to 25%.
- Work out the profit margin you can expect to achieve through the OTA. Work out all your costs for running the tour (overheads, staff) to be sure you will make an operating profit. Consider the sales, cost and profit ratios of operating a tour to compare different commission levels against direct sales.

Table 3: Example Sales, Cost and Profit Ratio Chart



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

- Does the OTA expect you to offer 'seasonal offers' or a 'best prices guarantee'? Can you afford to do this?
- Remember, you may not charge more for your tour on an OTA platform than you charge for a direct booking. This is known as 'undercutting' and generally is not allowed by OTAs.

Step Four - Review and understand the terms and conditions

- Find out about the OTA's customer cancellation and refund policies. For instance, if they allow customers to cancel up to 24 hours in advance, will that have an impact on your tour, especially if you have to pay in advance for certain items that are essential for the tour, such as transport and food?
- What are the implications for you if you need to cancel a tour for any reason? Are there financial consequences? Do they have a list of acceptable reasons for cancellation and if so, are these reasonable or too strict for you to manage?
- Does the OTA have a probation period for new suppliers? If so, is that acceptable, particularly if you will need to make a financial investment upfront?
- Who will handle customer support - you or the OTA? If you are responsible for this, are you able to meet their needs within the cost?

Step Five - Compile a shortlist

- Once you've completed your research, make a shortlist of the most suitable OTAs.
- Do not try to do too much at the start. Start with one OTA, maybe two. Make sure you invest time and energy to get the partnership working well before you sign up with others.

Tips:

Read some online guides on working with OTAs to help you work through this process. Examples include, [Treksoft's 3 Steps to working with OTAs](#) and [Arival Travel's How to work with OTAs](#).

Download the report [A consumer's perception of OTAs](#) to see how OTA brands are perceived around the world.

7. Preparing your product for selling through an OTA

Every OTA positions itself differently to attract its target customers. That means you also need to do your research before you prepare to sell your product through the OTAs you want to work with.

Decide which package to offer

Decide which tour is best to list on the OTA that you choose to work with. Choose a popular tour that you expect to sell well and that is suitable for the OTA's market (or users). If you work with more than one OTA, you may consider listing different tours on each platform.

Build your package

Once you have decided on the tour to list, the elements you need to consider are:

- Pricing – make sure you include all elements when setting the price of the tour, including product development and marketing, staff costs, transportation, supplies/product costs like food/meals, any entry or guide fees and commission rates to OTAs. Try checking prices for similar tours that have been rated highly by customers to see what they charge and what they offer.
- Legal implications – you should know what these are, both in your destination and as set by your sales partners.
- Seasonality – bear in mind the high and low seasons in your destination as this might have an impact on your pricing if you lower your prices to attract more customers during quieter periods.

Draft written content for different OTAs appropriately

OTAs usually provide guidelines on how to prepare suitable content for the platform. You should study these guidelines carefully so that you can write copy that appeals to their target market, which is also yours. In all cases, good quality, inspirational images (and videos if appropriate) that accurately convey and communicate what a customer can expect, are essential.

This helpful guide, [Presenting tours on different platforms](#), provides lots of useful advice and explains how each platform (Tripadvisor/Viator, GetYourGuide, Expedia and Musement) needs a different approach to content.

Build a relationship with the OTA

OTAs want to develop good relationships with their suppliers so they can generate more sales and satisfied customers. You should use this to your advantage.

Your region may have its own representative or account manager. If so, contact them and ask for their support in setting up your listings. They are the experts in their platform and their advice will be important.

Keep in regular contact with them and ask them for their advice to help you sell more tours – this can make a big difference to your sales.

Monitoring and evaluation

You should regularly assess what tours are selling well, and on which platform. That way you can step in to make changes as appropriate, to maximise sales performance on each channel. Most OTAs have a range of online tools to help you do this.

Don't rely on OTAs for all your sales

Getting a tour listed on an OTA platform is relatively easy, quick and convenient. It can be tempting to rely on OTAs for all your sales. However, it is important that you do not rely on them for all your online bookings. If you become too reliant on one sales channel and something goes wrong – the OTA goes out of business or they put their commission, for example – you may lose that sales channel very suddenly.

Direct sales are the most lucrative sales channel, as you pay no commission to a third party. Direct sales are sales that you make through your own website or from walk-ins to your offices (if you have one), or over the phone. You should try to maximise this type of sales.

One way of encouraging a direct sale rather than a booking through an OTA is to offer a customer something which OTAs do not. This could be a complementary transfer from their hotel, a free guidebook, or something similar.

If you have a website, you should make sure that it is up to date, the information and pricing are accurate and that it looks attractive and inspirational. Check your website or ask someone else to, to see where you might be able to improve it. There should be lots of 'calls to action' on your website – these are large or bright buttons that catch the user's eye, like 'Make an Enquiry', 'Book Now', 'Contact Us' and so on.

Make sure that your website is optimised for mobile devices. The proportion of people making bookings on their phone or tablet (mobile devices) has overtaken bookings by desktop/laptop. If your website cannot be viewed easily on a phone, users are likely to find another provider.

If you have no website, consider building one. There are many options to choose from, and some are free.

Use your social media platforms to drive traffic to your website. Post items regularly, ensuring that you link them to blogs, news, special offers and other interesting topics on your website. Create a schedule for publishing Facebook posts, Instagram stories and Tweets (depending upon which platforms you use) so that you keep on top of your social media activity. The more you communicate with your potential customers on social media, the easier it will be to drive traffic to your website.

Tip:

Check out the CBI study [How to be a successful business online](#) for more detailed advice about preparing good content and getting and managing your business online effectively.

8. Managing your bookings, online sales and multiple sales channels

As your business grows and you increase the number of sales channels you use to attract more customers, managing schedules and customer bookings will become more difficult. You will need to be very well organised and skilled in using spreadsheets and other digitalised office systems to keep on top of things.

Getting this wrong can lead to double bookings, missed bookings and disappointed customers. At worst, it can affect your reputation, as research has shown that dissatisfied customers are more likely to leave a negative review than satisfied customers are to leave a positive review. The article '[The Secret Ratio That Proves Why Customer Reviews Are So Important](#)' offers some interesting insights into how people are likely to behave following either negative or positive experiences.

Specialised tour operator booking systems with integrated e-commerce are now widely used across the travel sector by both large and small tour operators. The infographic below shows how digital sales technology connects the businesses of supplier and seller.

Figure 4: Digital Sales Process from Customer to OTA



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

The definitions of 'online booking systems' and 'sales channel managers' are as follows:

- A reservation (or booking) system enables suppliers to take bookings both online and offline and take payments online. It displays availability and pricing instantly, in real time. The ability to 'Book Now' is a powerful incentive for customers.
- A sales channel manager connects the reservation system to any/many OTAs (if they are compatible) and your own website (if ecommerce is enabled), automating the whole process for your business and your customer.
- Sometimes these are separate systems; other times they are integrated.

Whether or not you are able to take bookings and payments online, it is a good idea to work towards digitalising your business processes to help you manage your day-to-day operations more efficiently.

The benefits of digitalisation are clear - it makes your business more professional. Instant confirmation

increases customer satisfaction and confidence. The challenges are also clear – there is a cost to digitalisation and you will need a website that can be optimised to link with the software you choose.

Tips:

Research some of the companies that supply the tourism sector with online sales solutions, such as [Treksoft](#) and [Bokun](#). This will help you understand the implications for your business.

Contact a developer to discuss the options for optimising your website for ecommerce.

Review the digital processes in your business to see how you can improve. For tips on digitalisation, read the CBI report [Tips to go digital](#). Check the sections 'Use the right tools' and 'Establish a digital marketing strategy' to help you prepare to work with OTAs effectively.

Consider optimising your website to take bookings and payments online. For tips on taking online bookings and payments, read the CBI report [How to implement online payment](#).

9. Overview of OTAs specialising in tours and activities

This list of 90+ OTAs, all of which were operating in July 2022, offers a broad snapshot of the market at the current time. The focus is on OTAs that offer tours, ranging from day trips to multi-day trips and holidays. The market for OTAs that specialise in tours is much smaller than the OTA market for accommodation, flights and other transportation.

However, as the OTA market for tours and activities has grown over the past decade, market leaders such as Airbnb, Booking.com and Expedia have quickly spotted the potential for selling experiences through their platforms as well as traditional travel services.

This listing has been segmented as follows:

1. OTAs with a global reach that provide a full range of travel services including flights, hotels, car hire, activities, and attractions.
2. OTAs which mainly offer short day or part-day tours.
3. OTAs which mainly offer multi-day scheduled and/or tailor-made trips, tours and holidays.
4. OTAs which connect local guides with visiting tourists.

There is usually some cross-over between types, but in particular between types 2 and 3. For instance, Viator offers both day and multi-day tours. Therefore, each OTA has been categorised according to the main type of tour it offers.

Major OTAs on the Global Marketplace

GLOBAL OTAS

[Booking.com](#) (Global)
[Cleartrip](#) (India - not accessible in the UK)
[Expedia](#) (Global)
[Google Things to Do](#) (Global)
[Kayak](#) (Global)
[MakeMyTrip](#) (India - not accessible in the UK)
[Orbitz](#) (Global)
[Trip.com](#) (China)

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

OTAs with Regional/Local Focus

REGIONAL/LOCAL OTAS

Regional

[KKDay](#) - targets markets in the Asia/Pacific regions.

[IndyGuide](#) (Switzerland) - specialist booking platform for local guides, drivers and tour operators in underrated destinations, mainly Central Asia

[Thrillophilia](#) (India) - specialises in providing adventure travel in 15 Asian countries, the most popular being India, Dubai, Thailand, Singapore and Bali

[Local Adventures](#) (Mexico) - specialist booking platform for local experts and travel professionals in Latin America

Local

[Sawwah Travel](#) (Jordan) - promotes local, authentic and genuine travel experiences

[ViaVii](#) (Jordan) - local OTA working with 40+ hosts in several destinations in Jordan, the Middle East and Europe

OTAs Selling Day Tours

DAY/PART DAY TOURS AND ACTIVITIES

General

[Airbnb Experiences](#) (US)

[Ceetiz](#) (France)

[Civitatis](#) (Spain)

[GetYourGuide](#) (Germany)

[HeadOut](#) (US)

[Klook](#) (Hong Kong)

[Musement](#) (Italy)

[Tripadvisor](#) (US/UK)

[Urban Adventures](#) (UK)

[Veltra](#) (Japan)

[Viator](#) (US)

Food Tourism

[Cookly](#) (Singapore)

[EatWith](#) (US)

[Resirest](#) (Netherlands)

[Traveling Spoon](#) (US)

Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

[I Like Local](#) (Netherlands) - an impact travel marketplace that specialises in immersive travel experiences to help local communities become economically and socially independent in 19 countries in Africa and Asia

[Lokal Travel](#) (US) - cultural and sustainable trips focus on local communities

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

OTAs Selling Multi-Day Tours

MULTI-DAY TOURS

Scheduled multi-day tours

OTAs

[Backpacker Deals](#) (Australia)
[Bookmundi](#) (Denmark)
[Exploriada](#) (UK)
[Global Journeys](#) (Australia)
[Isango!](#) (UK)
[Project Expedition](#) (US)
[Rakuten Travel Experiences](#), formerly [Voyagin](#) (Japan)
[TourHub](#) (UK)
[TourRadar](#) (US/Australian)
[Tours4Fun](#) (US/China)
[Tripways](#) (US)

Online Travel Marketplaces

[Adventure.Travel](#) (US) - a directory of more than 400 adventure tour operators
[Ethical Travel Portal](#) (Norway)
[iExplore](#) (US)
[Real Adventures](#) (US)
[TourHound](#) (UK)
[TourScanner](#) (Germany)
[TravelStride](#) (US)

Custom/tailor-made multi-day tour planning

[Baboo](#) (Mexico)
[Better Places](#) (Netherlands)
[Designer Journeys](#), formerly [Tripfuser](#) (Australia)
[Elsewhere](#) (US)
[Evaneos](#) (France)
[Insight Guides](#) (UK)
[KimKim](#) (US)
[Mister Trip](#) (Germany)
[Reco](#) (from [Tripadvisor](#)) (US)
[Touplane](#) (Germany)
[Travel Local](#) (UK)
[Trip Connexion](#) (France)
[We Design Trips](#) (Austria)
[Zicasso](#) (US)

OTAs in niche segments

Accessible Tourism

[Wheel the World](#)

Adventure Tourism

[Cancun Adventure](#)

[Explore-Share](#) (Belgium)

[Manawa](#), formerly Adrenaline Hunter (UK)

[Much Better Adventures](#) (UK)

Cycling Tourism

[Motourismo](#) (Germany)

Ecotourism

[Clean Travel](#) (Australia)

[Eco Companion](#)

[Emotion Planet](#) (Belgium)

[FairAway](#) (Germany)

[Kind Traveler](#)

[Kynder](#)

[Not In The Guidebooks](#) (UK)

[Positive Travel](#) (Switzerland)

[Responsible Travel](#) (UK)

[Uptrek](#) (Israel)

[Yugen Earthside](#) (France)

Food Tourism

[Winerist](#) (UK)

Safaris

[Safaribookings](#) (Netherlands)

[Safari Deal](#) (UK)

[Safarigo](#) (Hong Kong)

[Safarisource](#) (South Africa)

Sailing

[GetMyBoat](#) (US)

SAVE Tourism

[Backpacker Deals](#) (Australia)

Walking Tourism

[Bookatrekking](#) (Netherlands)

Water Sports

[Thermal](#)

Wellness Tourism

[Book Retreats](#) (US)

[Retreat Guru](#) (US)

[Tripaneer](#) (Netherlands)

[Vacayou](#) (US)

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

OTAs Connecting Local Guides with Tourists

OTAs CONNECTING LOCAL GUIDES WITH TOURISTS

Context Travel, formerly Vayable
CityUnscripted (UK/US)
GuideAdvisor
Hi, Hi (Netherlands)
Like a Local (Netherlands)
Lokafy (US)
Private Guide
Shiroube (France)
Tourist Link
Tours By Locals (Canada)
With Locals (US)

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Table 8: B2B OTAs

B2B OTAs

BeMyGuest – large Asian aggregator of attractions, tours and activity products. Also designs tech solutions specifically for Asian market
Shore Excursioneer – one of the largest providers of shore excursions to cruise lines worldwide

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Tip:

Download this shorter list of 22 OTAs on the market in 2021, [A complete guide to all the OTAs](#), compiled by Xola Consulting.

10. How to stay informed on innovations in the OTA market

The OTA and online marketplaces are fast-moving and new developments are frequent. Keep an eye out for innovations in the tours and activities online marketplace. Here are some of the most recent innovations.

Google Things to Do

[Google Things to Do](#) was launched in 2021. It is a search function for tours and enables tour bookings through participating OTAs. OTAs that are compatible with Google's digital connectivity include most of the major ones such as Civitatis, GetYourGuide, Klook, Trip.com and Tripadvisor/Viator.

How it works: when a traveller searches for a specific attraction or point of interest (like the Great Wall of China, or Niagara Falls in the USA) bookable tours are shown on the Google business profile page alongside general information, admission prices and other details. See the examples below. You can see which OTA is promoting the tour.

Figure 5: Experience listings on Google Things to Do



Source: Google

To list a tour through a business listing like this, providers need to connect with Google digitally. For SMEs this is best done through approved partners like OTAs or specialist tourism digital support partners such as [Treksoft](#) and [Bokun](#).

Google does not charge any listing fees - you will, of course, pay commission to the OTA for sales.

Do some research. Are you located close to a major attraction? Does it have a Google attraction profile, like the examples above? If you work with an OTA and your tour is close by, find out if you can add a listing to join Google Things to Do. Google is the world's largest search engine with an 86% market share, and a listing on such a prominent site will reach millions of travellers who search for travel-related content every day.

Stay informed on new business practices and commission rates

In late 2021, Viator launched a new programme, Accelerate, to test a new, higher commission rate that allows suppliers to have their tours displayed higher up in the search results. Only products rated 'good' or 'excellent' are allowed to join the programme, and they appear in advertisements across the Viator platform as 'promoted experiences'.

There has been both positive and negative feedback regarding the scheme. Many operators reported a significant increase in bookings, as much as 228% over 30 days. However, smaller operators with smaller budgets may be negatively impacted, particularly those who have worked hard to get to the top of the rankings and will now lose their ranking to another who has paid to get there and may not offer similar quality.

Others express concern that the practice could result in consumers losing trust in Viator as a platform by recommending experiences for profit, rather than due to good reviews.

Stay informed about business practices in the OTA market so you have all the facts at hand when deciding who to work with. This will help you understand whether this type of practice will help or disadvantage your business.

Tips:

Read more about Viator's [Accelerate](#) programme.

Read what others are saying about Accelerate. These articles are a good place to start: [Viator tests new commission rate, raising scepticism with operators](#) and [Viator Introduce Accelerate](#).

Set aside some time to do your own research online. For example, find out commission rates, or find out what the latest innovations in the online travel agency market are.

Explore new niches such as not-for-profit OTAs like Touriosity

Touriosity, a not-for-profit OTA in the tours market was developed during 2020 and launched in June 2021. It was a commission-free OTA, charging a small annual fee of between US\$150 to US\$250 to join, which is used to market and maintain the website. When it launched, 300 operators signed up within a week and 1,500 tours were listed on the site. Sales were mostly made through operators' Facebook pages using widgets to enable online bookings.

It was created from the idea of helping small, local operators recover after the pandemic. It was successful for some suppliers but not for those who were still suffering from lockdowns, travel restrictions and lack of consumer confidence in travel. After the first year, most of the original businesses were not able to afford to re-subscribe and some were no longer in business. The OTA was discontinued.

However, it is possible that another not-for-profit OTA will emerge at some point. Stay informed about any developments in the OTA market so you can take advantage of opportunities. Find out more about the [Touriosity story](#).

Tips:

Subscribe to relevant publications for the tourism sector or tourism research organisations, which often publish free resources. Examples include [Skift](#) and [Arival](#).

Tourism digital marketing agencies and businesses specialising in tourism technological solutions are also good places to find research and resources. Bookmark the resources or blog pages of [Tourism Marketing Agency \(TMA\)](#) and [Redzy](#).

This study was carried out on behalf of CBI by [Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited](#).

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