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WHY #BOOKDIRECT MATTERS TO YOU

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By **Sandy White**

When you imagine how those surfers would feel if they knew a shark was circling, you'll understand why #BookDirect matters to bed and breakfast owners. Why? Because they KNOW sharks are in the waters, and many need to wade in anyway. Keep reading to learn why #BookDirect matters to you, too.

What sharks? The giant, impersonal online travel agencies (OTAs) in cahoots with Google.

In what sense are they sharks? When someone books a B&B room on an OTA's website, the OTA takes a big bite out of what the customer pays — 15 to 18 percent (and up to 3 percent more if another third-party assists the booking). For example, on a

\$400 booking, the B&B owner gets nicked \$60 to \$72 as a commission to the OTA. For a small business, as all B&Bs are, that's a mouthful. And that's why #BookDirect matters to a B&B.

Is #BookDirect the same as booking online? Only if you are booking ON the website of the B&B or individual hotel.

How can I tell? In the page address field atop your browser, you should either see <https://NameOfBandB.com> or a secure booking site address with the B&B's name within the address.

Why would a B&B owner go into shark-infested waters? For the visibility. The OTAs are so dominant on the web, thanks in part to Google, that many B&B owners feel they have no choice but to wade in. Other owners have accepted commissioned bookings as just another cost of doing businesses.

Meet the sharks. They have names.

Can I #BookDirect on a website like Expedia or booking.com?
NO! They ARE the sharks!

Really? Really. Meet the sharks of online booking — defined as sites that take a commission if you book there — all of them worldwide in scope:

- Expedia Group owns, or has controlling ownership of, Expedia.com, Vrbo (previously HomeAway), Hotels.com, Hotwire.com, Orbitz, Travelocity, and Trivago.
- Booking Holdings, the other huge family, owns Booking.com, priceline.com, KAYAK, and agoda.com. (OpenTable, too. Do your favorite eatery a favor and make reservations directly.)
- TripAdvisor. It may have more than 900 million reviews, but that's not how the company makes its money. Scroll down.
- airbnb. While it's primarily a site for vacation rentals, many REAL B&Bs also list some or all rooms on the site for extra visibility. When you book on airbnb, it costs the

owner 3 percent of the booking, and it costs you between 5 and 15 percent as a “service fee.” Savvy travelers who find a REAL B&B room on this site avoid the fee by going to the bed and breakfast’s own site and booking there.

Nothing against the sharks personally. Everybody’s got to eat.

But isn’t



TripAdvisor primarily a place to read reviews? Think again. Founded in 2000 as a website for people to post travel-related reviews and to research places to go, TripAdvisor became an OTA worth billions when the site started partnering with the bigger sharks listed above to share commissions if you make a booking via TripAdvisor.

Here’s how you know a visit to TripAdvisor drops you into a sales funnel:

- When the first page asks you to share where you’re going.

- When you are asked to fill in your dates of travel. (Don't do it; they'll track you.)
- When you enter a search for B&Bs and get lists of hotels instead. Virtually all hotels partner with OTAs. Many B&Bs either do not or do so only at certain times of year.
- When you're scrolling endlessly down a business's TripAdvisor page and before you get to the reviews, you must pass two features, "Most Booked Properties in NameOfTown" and "You May Also Like," both showing photos, with prices, of hotels where TripAdvisor makes money if you book.
- When you've read a B&B's reviews and want to book but don't see a place to click to the B&B's website. TripAdvisor provides no links, no click-to-call, no handy buttons — unless the B&B owner pays for them.

How does Google connect to the sharks? Google helps feed the sharks when you search by name or location for B&Bs or hotels. Google steers unsuspecting travelers to its OTA partners. If Google can trace your path from a Google search to your booking on an OTA, Google shares in the commission.

This video shows how easy it is to fall into Google's sales funnel.

How To Book Direct 2021



Why #BookDirect matters to you: 6 reasons

Here's how it benefits you to make sure you're on the B&B's own website or booking calendar before you book a room — even if you find the B&B on a Google map or an OTA site.

- **The lowest prices** for the dates you select are found on the B&B's booking calendar. It's the B&B owner who sets prices seen on an OTA website.
- **All available rooms** for the days will be shown on the B&B's own booking calendar. Many innkeepers do not release to the OTAs their best or most popular rooms. Or, if they do, it's only during the inn's less-busy times of year.
- **All available dates** are shown on the inn's own reservation system. Many innkeepers who use OTAs withhold peak dates from the OTA, knowing those days will fill up without any third-party assistance.
- You might find **last-minute deals or packages** that lower the overall cost of your getaway. Innkeepers sometimes add freebies not advertised elsewhere. Or they offer a price cut on a room not covered by the inn's contract with the OTA. It seems worth a look, doesn't it?
- When you #BookDirect with the innkeeper, it's easy to **get personalized information** in answer to questions. Have you ever tried communicating with a property owner via an OTA's email system? The OTA watches over all exchanges to make sure the two parties are not trying to cheat the OTA out of its commission.
- **Changing a reservation** when you need to is much easier when you can deal directly with the innkeeper.

#BookDirect is more than a hashtag. It's a reminder of why #BookDirect matters to travelers and to the many B&B and boutique hotel innkeepers who welcome your business.

Please share with a friend.