

# Online Travel

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## **Introduction**

The goal of this class is to do more than just cover how to find and purchase travel related bargains online, though that will be discussed. The ability to find obscure and affordable vacation opportunities is a great advantage of using the Internet it isn't the biggest asset available online. A large segment of today's class will be spent learning about online discussion and the use of posting boards, blogs, and file hosting sites to find real people's recent reviews, experiences, and pictures/videos. Hopefully this information, along with the ability to find excellent prices and interesting destinations, will make traveling an easier and more enjoyable experience.

**\*Note:** All links used in class are listed at the end of this handout

## **Shopping**

One of the biggest virtues of using the Internet for travel is efficiency, the same deals might be available by calling or searching through newspapers but being online gives access to so much information so quickly it's tough to beat by traditional methods. We will use several example web pages online today as a means of preparing for questions and interfaces you may encounter; neither the Bloomingdale Library nor I endorse any one of these

organizations over another, they are simply a necessary instruction tool and are chosen based on their value for demonstration. With that taken care of, let's talk about the various kinds of travel purchases we can make online.

### Air Fare

Probably the most common aspect of traveling sought out online, buying flight tickets online can be a fast and easy way to sort through the myriad different airlines, times, and flight options (layovers, seating options, etc.)

When shopping for air fare you can go directly to the airline's website, every airline has one, or use one of several bargain sites. With something as impermanent as flight prices it's impossible to say which technique will get you the best possible price, but there are ways to stack the odds in your favor. Take <http://www.kayak.com/>, this website goes to a number of other bargain travel sites and searches through their list of available flights. Other web sites, such as <http://www.priceline.com/>, <http://www.hotwire.com/>, and <http://www.expedia.com/> to name a few, provide excellent deals by arranging with airlines and other vendors to buy a chunk of unsold tickets at discounted prices. To get a feel for the shopping experience we'll perform a practice purchase from Kayak.com using the following steps:

1. Notice immediately under the Kayak logo how there are different links for Flights, Hotels, Cars, Cruises, Deals, Buzz, and more? This

is referring to the different shopping options available. For the moment we're interested in Flights – which is convenient since that's the default choice

2. Use the radio buttons (small circles that only allow you to select one of the options) to determine the kind of flight desired – the options are Round-trip [default choice], One-way, and Multi-city
3. From (city or airport) & To (city or airport) – in this section you can enter in the city you want to fly from or, if there's a preference, you can enter the specific airport code. Of course most of us don't know airport codes offhand so there is a list of them available by clicking on the word "airport".
  - a. If you enter a city name in the From section it will sometimes ask which airport you prefer or if any one is fine.
  - b. Notice the "show nearby airports" check box; this will bring up options from neighboring cities.
4. Leave/Return – this important section allows you to control the dates of the flights. For the most part it's a pretty standard form, type in the day and use the pull down menus to choose month and time, but travel sites offer a convenient extra – the pop-up calendar. If you left-click on the small square to the right of the date selection a calendar like

this:

The screenshot shows a flight search interface. At the top, there are three fields: 'Leave' with a date of 27 Jul 2007, 'Time' set to 'Anytime', and 'Return' which is empty. Below these is a calendar for July 2007. The calendar shows dates from June 27 to July 28. The date 27 is highlighted in red, indicating it is the selected departure date. The calendar also shows the days of the week (S, M, T, W, T, F, S) and the month names (Jun 2007, Jul 2007). There are also some other elements like 'Travel 1' and 'More s' visible.

will appear. Simply left-click on the desired date and the form will be filled in for you. How is this helpful? Imagine if you were planning on spending 5 days on vacation at the end of August, maybe you don't know off hand what the date for the last Thursday of the month is, or perhaps you're playing around with different possible times and the calendar saves you the trouble of bouncing back and forth between another application. Either way, it can be a great time saver and a nice way to make sure to buy tickets for the correct flight.

5. Travelers and Cabin are pretty straightforward, use the pull-down menu to select how many tickets are required and what cabin is preferred.
6. More Search Options – this brings us to an important point, many of these websites either require users to create an account or will provide more services to those who do. Creating an account with a website is almost invariably free and just takes a few minutes of filling in your

name, email address, etc. Benefits include features like the site remembering your starting location and other preferences, receiving emails about upcoming deals to your favorite destinations, and more advanced searching features. The major downside is you will get junk email from time to time. Some of the advantages Kayak gives members include the ability to choose a preferred airline and the ability to search amongst flexible dates.

7. Finally we left-click Search and the site begins to churn out results
8. When the results are listed it becomes a matter of clicking on the desired flight and following the prompts. Some websites will have you first select a desired departure flight then list the possible return flights along with the adjusted price for each option.
9. Because of the security involved in flying it is required during the purchasing process for you to list who will be flying so their names can be listed on the tickets. Other than that most information entered in is standard for purchasing something online (credit card #, address, etc)
10. A printable receipt will appear, and be emailed to you, but the tickets can typically be picked up electronically at the airport.

## Cruises

Shopping for cruises involves a lot of the same steps that come up when shopping for flights, choosing a destination, departure and return dates, and finding a preferred company to work with all transfer from our last exercise. However, there are several details and options that appear when searching for cruises you should be aware of.

- Destinations – search by the area that you want to cruise
- Ports – if there is one spot in particular that you really want to stop at (or leave from) searching by ports can be the efficient way to go about it
- Cruisetours – mixes land travel in with travel by sea (big on Alaskan cruises)
- Activities – you can use the elaborate listings quickly searchable online to select the cruise you want based on the activities you'd like to do.
- Ship Selection – since you'll be spending a lot of time at sea

All of these topics work with each other and certainly most travel agents or cruise companies can provide you with information covering these topics but it can be very difficult to sort through it all without the organization that the web interface provides

Another advantage to shopping for cruises online is by registering with a preferred company you will start to receive discount notices. Most of the time it won't be something that you're interested in but now and then you may find a short term deal on exactly the kind of trip you're pursuing.

These email notices come out frequently because cruises are often under booked and the cruise lines would prefer to sell tickets at a discounted rate than have the rooms sit empty.

### Hotels

There are websites providing excellent deals on hotels, [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com) for example, and very often the same websites we use for flights or package deals. It's most often a simplified version of picking a flight – just a matter of listing location and dates. Hotel websites will list features, amenities, maps, etc, and this is all very helpful; but the biggest advantage to picking a hotel online is being able to review what other people have to say about the experience. This will be discussed further in the next section.

### Tours/Activities

Organizing travel online doesn't end with the major elements of you trip, the Internet can be a huge help in finding things to do once you get there.

Whether you're looking for restaurants, parks, guided tours, afternoon cruises, or just tips on fun local spots, there's no better way to find this than

online. Google is probably the best tool for getting started but be sure to visit the destinations tourism page – this will usually list recommended restaurants and entertainment.

### Package Deals

Often websites will combine flight and hotels into a vacation package. This has the benefit of providing simplicity and savings but sometimes has the downside of limiting your options. One example of a website that handles packaging vacations well is [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com). They take each step individually – first pick the departing flight, then pick the return flight, then pick the hotel, and so on – which allows more customization than most pre-designed packages. The actual purchasing of this arrangement is no different than the purchasing of a flight; there are just a lot more printable receipts generated.

### Special Interest

Whether looking to hike across Europe, go wine tasting in California, kayak in the Caribbean, drive a dogsled in Canada, or take a train enthusiasts tour of Japan, there are countless places that will help to arrange this. At the beginning google.com remains your best tool but searching from the results it provides you'll find different agencies that handle every subset of travel interest.



## Road Trips

Road trip navigational guides:

- <https://maps.roadtrippers.com/trips>
- <https://roadtripusa.com/>
- <https://maps.roadtrippers.com/trips/14599610>
- <https://www.roadsideamerica.com/map/trip/favorite>
- <https://blog.travefy.com/2015/04/must-dos-for-your-i-80-road-trip/>

And of course [www.googlemaps.com](http://www.googlemaps.com) is a vital resource!

## **Apps**

There are many apps that take advantage of the mobility of smart phones to work dynamically with finding you travel resources, or that simply tie your phone into using their products. We'll discuss a few of these:

- Apps to access existing services (Ventra, Expedia, Kayak, Cheap Flights, etc.): These apps are intended to make mobile phone use sync up smoothly with online travel promotions.
- Apps for navigation or guidance (Waze, Google Maps, Spot Hero, etc.): These apps are designed to help you during your travels
- Apps for the gig-economy (Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, etc.): Apps that find services from other app users

- Apps for specific destinations (museums, national parks, Disney World, etc.): Apps with features designed to enhance your visit to your chosen destination.

## **Reviews**

Always keep in mind that your experience on the Internet may vary, most of these websites will censor themselves to a degree but as their content is contributed by members of the public there is always the potential for offensive images or language.

### Personal Reviews

It's always nice to get an unbiased review before committing to a major expense. Ideally you'd know someone who's stayed at the hotel you're considering, taken the tour you have in mind, eaten at the restaurants you're planning on visiting, or at least been to the city that you're about to spend a lot of money to visit. Unfortunately, this can't always be the case, but the Internet goes a long way towards remedying that problem. Thanks to the huge number of people online it's rare to be considering a trip that someone hasn't taken before and felt compelled to comment on. There are many places to read these individual reviews, [www.epinions.com](http://www.epinions.com) and [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com) are two of the most prominent examples, today we'll

be visiting [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com). When searching for a destination, attraction, hotel, or resort at tripadvisor you will receive:

1. Location results – links to the technical details regarding your search results, candid photos from the search, and a general overview of your results.
2. What Our Users are Saying – these are the tripadvisor travel reports. Some are a few lines long, others are a page or two. People will write summaries of their trips, quick impressions, etc.
  - a. Notice one of the best features of tripadvisor.com – the link provided to the reviewer’s account. This allows you to see how they reviewed other travel experiences to get a better feel for what they like and how they write.
  - b. A quick summary appears to the right of each review giving ratings on specific aspects of the location, who they recommend the trip for, when they were there, and more.
3. Forums on the location in question. A forum is an area to post short questions or messages, and respond to questions from others. Very similar to the discussion boards we’ll be identifying next
4. Don’t forget that many sites like this, including tripadvisor, require an account to be created to post reviews or make comments; but no

account is required to search for and read other members reviews or view member's photos.

## Discussion Boards

Many sites allow a more interactive means of finding out about travel options. Discussion boards encourage back and forth discussions and provide easy methods of asking the online community questions that usually are answered very quickly. Discussion boards often focus on a single topic or location, for example there's <http://www.intercot.com/>, which is dedicated to Disney vacation destinations. Note how the board is divided into different topics (showing here):



Forum	Last Post	Threads	Posts
<b>Guest Relations</b>			
<b>Information Kiosk</b> Our friendly staff is here to help you. Have a question on where to post a topic, a technical issue, or need some clarification on INTERCOT lore? This is the place for information about anything and everything INTERCOT!	<b>What happened to ...</b> by <a href="#">Melanears</a> Today 02:10 PM	896	4,533
<b>Theme Parks</b>			
<b>Theme Parks</b> The Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom. Have a question on when to go, how to attack the parks or what's a ride like... find it here.	<b>does future world ...</b> by <a href="#">JPL</a> Today 05:14 PM	4,919	74,167
<b>Nightlife, Shops &amp; Water Parks</b> Downtown Disney, Disney Quest, Orlando happenings, theme park and resort shopping, all the <a href="#">Waterparks</a> (Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon) and more!	<b>Coolers at the ...</b> by <a href="#">Pinoke68</a> Today 04:26 PM	866	6,802
<b>Resorts &amp; Dining</b>			
<b>Accommodations</b> Where to stay and general questions about Disney Properties or Orlando area resort options. For more resort information, <a href="#">click here</a> .	<b>Transportation from ...</b> by <a href="#">mousaholic</a> Today 05:06 PM	4,296	38,760
<b>Disney Vacation Club</b> Have questions about Vacation Ownership in the Disney Vacation Club? Share tips and information with existing or prospective DVC members!	<b>Can I Do This?</b> by <a href="#">mprewitt</a> Today 05:15 PM	783	5,421

which, when clicked, lead to individual questions – also called “threads”.

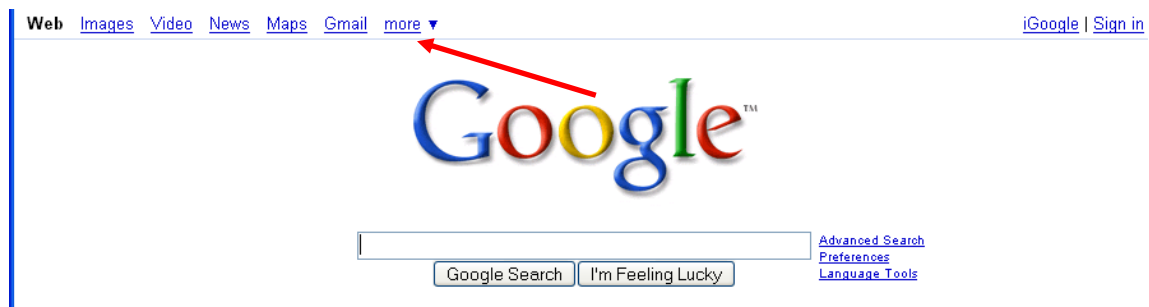
Each thread contains the original message and all replies to the question.

Sometimes this spans across several pages, which can be reached by following links at the bottom of the page.

### Searching Google & Blogs

We don't want to focus too much on the use of blogs since that's not really the topic of this class but it should be noted that the creation of a blog is another way that people can register their thoughts online. The easiest way to find a blog on the topic or destination of interest is to go to

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com), left-click "more" (shown here):



and choose "Blog search". Then enter the topic you wish to read about and left-click "Search Blogs". The results are always chancy since it's impossible to say how on topic people will stay, but it can be an effective method to track down a different review.

### Picture Archives

The final online method of researching a travel site is looking through photos that people have chosen to share. There are a number of sites that allow users to upload their pictures to them and then make them publicly

viewable. Today we'll visit google photos and see how these can be searched and viewed.

## **Links**

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>

<http://www.epinions.com/>

<http://www.kayak.com/>

<http://www.priceline.com/>

<http://www.expedia.com/>

<http://www.hotwire.com/>

<http://www.royalcaribbean.com/>

<http://www.hotels.com/>

<http://www.google.com>

<http://www.rei.com>

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>

<http://www.epinions.com/>

<http://www.intercot.com/>