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Q: How can I avoid making poor decisions when booking travel on-line?

A: Of course, we're not fans of do-it-yourself travel... But, if you must, you need to do your homework:

There are many perils to on-line booking unless you absolutely know the resort & the area from from personal recent experience. (*The key word here is 'recent'!*) So, if you are going to shop for yourself, here are some things be mindful of:

Tip #1: Web Photos. Beware of the Photoshop Syndrome! Doctored photos that we personally know of include: Surrounding buildings are "photoshopped" out making this hotel in a congested spot look serene. A photo makes it look like the hotel is on the beach. (*There is a congested 6-lane street between the hotel and the beach.*) A pool view features swaying palms and an ocean vista. (*There is a 20 foot concrete wall blocking all but a very narrow view of the ocean... and no trees.*) I could go on and on!

Tip #2: More on Photos. Many resort pictures have been taken 15 or 20 years ago.

Tip #3: Beach Photos. A picture of a "quiet" beach taken early in the day when there was a total of 11 people present. By noon, this beach is always jam-packed.

Tip #4: Entries on Trip Advisor and similar "review" sites. A growing dilemma, as chronicled on NBC's Today Show recently, is fake testimonials. Some glowing reviews are posted by owners or staff of that property. Conversely, a scathing review may have been entered by someone at a competing resort. There are advertising companies now (reported by NBC) that actually employ dozens of off-shore people to post comments for their resort or hotel client resort.

Tip #5: Price. What room category is being quoted? In an alarming number of instances, a traveler who got a 'great deal' on-line winds up upgrading to a decent room upon arrival. The up-charge brings their actual cost up to, or greater than, what we might have quoted.

Tip #6: Price. Are taxes included? Are resort fees included?

Tip #7: Price. When you hit the "buy" button, did the price mysteriously go up a bit?

Tip #8: Price. The biggest fallacy of all... it's cheaper on-line. Apples-to-apples, it's usually not!

Being aware of these misrepresentations is good first step. From there, the solutions lie in "due diligence"! Take the time to seek out reliable information. Go ahead and enjoy the search but before you push the "Buy" button, ask around. Find a friend who's been there recently or find a travel professional for guidance.

Added Tips not directly related to web-booking:

Tip #1: Testimony from friends. On the day I wrote this, we had recommended a specific resort on Maui for a new client based upon numerous questions pertaining to their lifestyle and their specific desires for this particular outing. This resort sounded good to them, but a couple hours later they called to say some friends stayed at another resort on the same beach and loved it. Having booked numerous clients at that resort, we know it well. It is a marvelous property. However, it is undergoing massive renovations at this time. Not a good choice right now!

Tip #2: Your own past experience. You stayed at a beautiful, new resort 15 years ago and absolutely loved it. You want to go back. But, did you know the place has changed ownership twice in the meantime and is nothing like it was on your first visit?

Above, I mentioned asking a travel professional for help. They, or an associate, have "been there". And they get continual feedback from clients they've sent there. Find a good agent!

Whatever your approach, Happy Hunting!

If a resort that "looks great" appears to be a "really good deal" (cheap)...

... there's probably a very good reason.

Web-sellers base their existence upon price...

Travel Professionals are focused entirely upon value.