



Travel portals offer pictures of rooms and reviews to give visitors an idea of their facilities

Rooms with a view

HOSPITALITY Thanks to the Internet, booking a hotel room is so much more trouble-free

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One are the days when booking a hotel room was too much of a hassle. One either had to call up the hotel directly or go through a travel agent, and then there was always this element of doubt as to what one was getting. But not anymore. With most big hotels selling their inventory online, through their own websites as well as third party online travel portals, booking a room is just child's play.

Online bookings started big time with low-cost carriers selling on the Internet to save cost. Hari Krishnan, assistant VP (strategic alliances), *travelguru.com* agrees that the initial focus about a year back was on air bookings. "Even today, airline bookings remain our bread and butter," he says. People come to the website drawn by airline booking options but have now also started booking hotels online. "Today, our business focus is on hotels and we offer real-time booking for about 3,000 hotels on our website," he exclaims.

The growth in this segment can be gauged by the number of room nights booked per day. For *travelguru.com*, the figure stood at about 20-30 room nights a day last April (one booking equals to about 1.8 room

nights for them). At the moment, that figure has gone up to 500-600 room nights a day.

Makemytrip.com too has seen tremendous growth in its hotel bookings over the last year. "We have seen a growth of around 250 per cent in the last one year," says Amit Saberwal, VP (business development), *makemytrip.com*.

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Saberwal feels that in today's scenario, an e-commerce strategy is very important for all progressive hotels. Yield too, from online mediums, is better in today's high demand situation. "The yield from online hotel bookings is at least 15-20 per cent higher than yield from corporates or travel agents," he reveals. Most hotel chains these days have sophisticated websites, which also offer real-time booking. The Park is working on upgrading the online booking experience on their website. Rohit Arora, director (leisure sales), The Park, informs that 15 per cent of their

total business across the chain is from online bookings (both their own website as well as third party websites). The most interesting part though is the yield. He confirms that the yield is substantially higher through the online medium—it's a good 20-25 per cent higher, he says.

A lot of travel agents and tour operators have also started using this medium through products like Galileo Leisure, which was launched last year and already has about 1,000 registered users in India.

For someone who goes to these websites, booking hotel rooms is a more involving process than, say, airline bookings. Some portals like *travelguru.com* now have maps to locate a hotel in a city and even user reviews to get some much needed feedback on a property. Others offer pictures of the rooms and hotels, so you aren't left gaping when you arrive.

Corrigendum

In the story "Holidaymakers get demanding", published on Thursday, April 19, 2007, it was mentioned that "Cox and Kings, that reports a 100 per cent volume growth in its FIT category, last year started a sub-brand 100% Holidays to cater to the increasing premiumisation of outbound travel." The sentence should have been attributed to Thomas Cook instead. The error is regretted.