



**The English National Park
Experience Collection**

AN INTRODUCTION TO BOOKING SYSTEMS AND ONLINE TRAVEL AGENTS FOR EXPERIENCE PROVIDERS

Introduction

The English National Park Experience Collection aims to support your business to develop tourism products which meets market needs, and help you to sell product to new markets. This is primarily by promoting your willingness to work with the travel trade, and giving you the skills and contacts to make this work. Many operators will approach you directly to build your product into new or existing itineraries. However, it can take time to build these relationships and for bookings to emerge.

The travel industry is fast-paced and changing, and modern consumers are increasingly booking experiences at short notice and in real time. This guide will introduce an important channel for selling experiences and demonstrate how increasingly sophisticated booking systems known as **channel managers** can assist you to grow your reach and manage resources.

Becoming Bookable, Commissionable and Available

To succeed in the international market it is vital that your products are bookable, commissionable and available:



Bookable

- The product is available to be easily booked in advance. It isn't just available to those customers who turn up on the day.
- It can be built into an itinerary delivered and sold by a tour operator (Business to Business sales)
- It could be sold directly to the customer (Business to consumer sales)

Commissionable

- Third parties with a large reach to relevant customers can sell your product on your behalf for a percentage fee between 10% and 30%.

Available

- The activities are ready to book in real time online
- and/or the activities can be booked directly by Tour Operators in advance through direct contact

Why work with Online Travel Agents (OTAs)?

- They enable you to place your experience in front of substantially more customers than you could achieve through your own website alone. OTAs work globally across multiple languages and regions.
- All the major OTAs are investing heavily in the marketing of Tours and Activities, as they seek to provide a 'one-stop shop' for customers travel needs.
- The OTAs have huge marketing investments in the global marketplace, more significant than any one supplier or destination could achieve by themselves. They have the opportunity to cross-promote tours and activities to customers they know are travelling to a destination already.
- They are also well-known brands, who have already gained the consumers trust. While an international traveller might be unsure about booking an activity with an individual provider in a different country, the use of an established OTA can remove this uncertainty.
- It takes time to develop relationships with traditional Tour Operators who have long lead times for product development. The process of listing with OTAs is much quicker.
- Having product available through OTA channels can boost your credibility with Tour Operators. It shows that your product is bookable, commissionable and available.



Who are the major OTAs?

There are four major global providers which dominate the market:

Tripadvisor Experiences (Viator)

- The largest OTA for tours and activities globally.
- Connects with your Tripadvisor reviews.
- Connects with a global network of 23,000 Viator Travel Agents

For more information: <https://www.viator.com/>

Expedia

- Products are distributed across 17 different language sites.
- Experiences sit under the 'Things to do' area of the website, and are shown to customers buying flights and holidays towards the end of the booking process.

For more information: <http://join.localexpertpartnercentral.com/>

GetYourGuide

- Germany based company providing over 30,000 tours and activities worldwide.
- Has a wide range of partnerships with Airlines such as Easyjet, KLM, Emirates and Lufthansa to cross sell products.

For more information: <https://supplier.getyourguide.com/>

AirBnB

- Specialises in experiences which are delivered by 'locals' in a destination. Generic tours and activities won't be accepted, the experience must place a strong emphasis on the host and be small group experiences
- A peer-to-peer platform, it is easy for anyone to start delivery of a new experience.
- The commission rate is lower than other OTAs (around 20% for experiences). But each experience should be exclusively offered to AirBnB (no mixing with guests from other marketplaces) and there is no connectivity with channel managers at present.

For more information: www.airbnb.co.uk

(These companies are listed here for information, they are not endorsed by the National Parks. Please do your own research before signing an agreement with them).

Signing up

Irrespective of whether you use a channel manager, you will need to register individually with each OTA and satisfy all their requirements. This can be a time consuming process, but once registered the administration required should be minimal.

Most OTAs will provide you with an account manager to support the registration process, to clarify their commission rates and answer any questions. You may be able to secure additional promotion of your experience through this account manager through



the OTAs own communication channels once your experience is established on the platform.

Look carefully at the cancellation policies guaranteed by individual OTAs. Most require that their customers can cancel experiences up to 24 hours in advance.

Most OTAs require you to provide evidence of your Public Liability Insurance certificate to protect their customers. Be prepared to upload this in the sign up process.

Commission rates

Rates for OTAs are currently between 20-30%. You only pay a commission when a booking is made. When you sign up with an account manager for each service they will explain the commission rate, you may be able to negotiate this.

Remember that effectively your marketing cost is replaced by your commission rates.

Top-tip - Booking windows

While many customers will look to book and plan their experiences far in advance, increasingly customers are booking at short notice. When listing your experiences with an OTA or channel manager, you will be asked to set a 'cut-off time'. This is the minimum amount of notice you need to prepare for a booking. For example, a customer may be able to book up to an hour before the experience starts.

To maximise bookings, consider keeping this cut-off time as short as possible. 38% of tours and activities booking are made on the same day or up to two days before the trip.

Using a channel manager

To widely distribute your experience to the maximum number of potential customers you may be working in lots of different ways:

- Selling direct to the customer 'on the day' via traditional advertising and print
- Selling direct to the customer through your own website and social media channels
- Selling through local accommodation providers nearby for a commission
- Selling through your local DMO (e.g. Cumbria Tourism, Northumberland Tourism)
- Selling through major Online Travel Agent's (e.g. Expedia)
- Selling through Tour Operators and DMCs (explained more in our Travel Trade guide)

Using many different channels can make management of availability and resources very challenging. You may already have a simple booking system on your website which allows visitors to book directly, but this may not distribute the experiences more widely.



To maximise the opportunities presented by all the different channels you may wish to consider using a **channel manager** specifically designed for tour and activities providers which allows you to manage and distribute your availability and bookings.

There are systems available which enable you to manage your availability and distribution through one system.

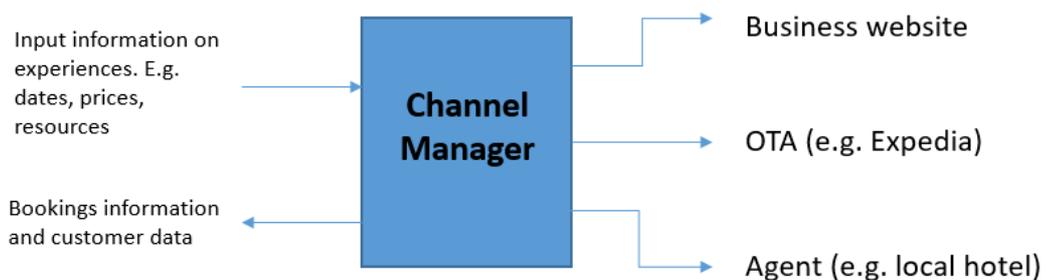
Some examples are:

- Trekksoft – www.trekksoft.com
- Rezdy - <https://www.rezdy.com/>
- Rezgo - <https://www.rezgo.com/>
- Bookingkit - <https://bookingkit.net/>

(These systems are listed here for information; they are not endorsed by the National Parks. Please do your own research before purchase).

Most of these systems operate on a subscription basis, and take a small commission on each booking to cover transaction costs (similar to a credit card fee). They will still require you to register and set-up accounts with all the OTAs you wish to work with.

They work by compiling availability data in one place which different channels can use to ensure you do not double book your resources. When a booking is made, the booking information is sent to the channel manager so that you only need to look in one place for booking data. Data is shared through an Application Programming Interface (API), you may see this acronym referenced in different places.



Many of these systems allow you to take bookings directly through the channel manager via your website, or allow you to sell directly to local resellers through a dedicated page (by offering them a commission to sell your products).

When selecting a system, look at the channels the channel manager already works with. But also look for the ability to integrate with new channels with an 'Open API' connection. Some larger travel agents and DMCs may want to connect to the channel manager to get inventory of product they can resell directly.



Don't forget your local DMO

It may be possible for you to connect your channel manager availability to your local Destination Management Organisation or tourist board to generate more sales from customers who have already chosen to stay in your destination.

Top tips – Maintain a balanced source of bookings

1. Do not depend on just one source of bookings
2. Never depend on just one market for bookings
3. Maintain a mix of high and low commission rates
4. Don't forget local and direct sales