

# Building topsolotravel.com with 100% free data sources

A global solo travel platform is achievable using completely free APIs and databases—but only with careful source selection. Many advertised "free tiers" prohibit commercial use or impose restrictive limits. This exhaustive analysis identifies **verified 100% free commercial-use sources** across all 13 categories, reveals critical gaps that cannot be filled without paid services, and recommends an optimal free-only technology stack.

## The truly free landscape has surprising depth

The open data ecosystem provides remarkably comprehensive coverage for a travel platform. **OpenStreetMap** anchors everything with 100M+ POIs globally under the Open Database License (ODbL). **Government sources**—particularly from the US, UK, Canada, and Australia—offer robust travel advisories, health data, and park information with explicit commercial permissions. The **Wikimedia ecosystem** (Wikivoyage, Wikidata, Commons) delivers travel content, structured data, and images under permissive Creative Commons licenses. However, several popular sources advertised as "free"—including Equaldex, ReliefWeb, OpenTripMap, and iNaturalist—explicitly prohibit commercial use in their terms.

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## Venue and POI data: OpenStreetMap dominates

**OpenStreetMap via Overpass API** provides the most comprehensive free POI database globally, with unlimited commercial use under ODbL licensing.

**Access method:** POST queries to <https://overpass-api.de/api/interpreter> using Overpass QL syntax. No API key required.

### Sample query for restaurants near coordinates:

```
[out:json];
nwr["amenity"]="restaurant"]((around:1000,48.8566,2.3522));
out center;
```

**Rate limits:** Slot-based allocation (2 simultaneous connections per IP), 180-second default timeout. HTTP 429 returned when rate-limited, with 15-second queue timeout. [Overpass-api](#)

**Data available:** Hotels ([tourism=hotel](#)), hostels ([tourism=hostel](#)), restaurants ([amenity=restaurant](#)), cafes, bars, attractions ([tourism=attraction](#)), museums, historic sites. Fields include name, address, coordinates, phone, website, opening hours, cuisine type, and amenities—though completeness varies by region.

Source	Data Coverage	Commercial Use	Attribution Required
OpenStreetMap/Overpass	100M+ global POIs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (ODbL)	"© OpenStreetMap contributors"
Wikidata SPARQL	Landmarks, monuments, attractions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (CC0)	None required
GeoNames	11M+ placenames	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (CC BY 4.0)	Link to geonames.org
Foursquare OS Places	100M+ POIs (bulk download)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	Per terms
DBpedia	Wikipedia-extracted structured data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (CC BY-SA)	ShareAlike notice

**Wikidata** offers CC0-licensed structured data queryable via SPARQL at <https://query.wikidata.org>. [ITNEXT](#) [Wikidata](#) Rate limits: 60 seconds query time per minute, 5 parallel queries, 60-second timeout. [MediaWiki](#) Ideal for enriching OSM data with descriptions, images, and Wikipedia links.

**GeoNames** provides **10,000 credits/day free** (1,000/hour) for geocoding and placename data. [GeoNames](#) Registration required. Commercial use permitted with attribution. [GeoNames](#) Limitation: free tier caps radius searches at 30km and returns maximum 500 rows. [GeoNames](#)

## Accommodation data: OSM plus Wikivoyage fills the gap

No truly free commercial hotel/hostel API exists with comprehensive global coverage. The strategy combines OpenStreetMap extraction with Wikivoyage's curated listings.

**OpenStreetMap hotels/hostels:** Query via Overpass using [tourism=hotel](#) or [tourism=hostel](#) tags. [Wcedmisten](#) Available fields include name, address, coordinates, stars rating, contact info, and amenities (wifi, parking, pool). Price data is rarely included. Coverage is excellent in Europe and North America, moderate elsewhere.

**Wikivoyage accommodation listings** provide curated "Sleep" sections with hotel names, addresses, phone numbers, websites, coordinates, price ranges, and descriptions. License: **CC BY-SA 4.0**—fully commercial with attribution and ShareAlike requirements. [Wikivoyage](#)

### Extraction methods:

- MediaWiki API:** <https://en.wikivoyage.org/w/api.php> (1 request/30 seconds recommended) [Wikivoyage](#)
- Database dumps:** Monthly at [dumps.wikimedia.org/enwikivoyage/](https://dumps.wikimedia.org/enwikivoyage/)

3. **Pre-extracted dataset:** The [wikivoyage-listings](#) GitHub tool extracts **313,473 POIs** into CSV, GPX, or SQLite ([Practicalprogrammatic](#))

**What's NOT free:** Government tourism registries (UK, EU, US, Australia) publish aggregate statistics but not individual hotel listing APIs. Booking.com, Hostelworld, and Hostelling International have no free public APIs.

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## Restaurant and dining data requires regional supplementation

**OpenStreetMap** serves as the global baseline with `amenity=restaurant`, `amenity=cafe`, and `amenity=bar` tags. Cuisine types (`cuisine=italian;pizza`) exist on 40-60% of entries; opening hours on approximately 30%.

**UK Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) API** is completely free with no registration required:

(Food Standards Agency)

- **Endpoint:** <https://api.ratings.food.gov.uk> (food)
- **Coverage:** 500,000+ establishments in England, Wales, Northern Ireland
- **Data:** Business name, address, hygiene rating (0-5), inspection date, coordinates
- **Commercial use:** Permitted under UK Open Government License (Food Standards Agency)

**NYC Restaurant Inspection Grades** via Socrata API:

- **Endpoint:** <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/resource/43nn-pn8j.json>
- **Coverage:** 400,000+ inspection records, updated daily (P8105)
- **Commercial use:** Permitted under NYC Open Data terms

Source	Coverage	Commercial Use	API Key
OpenStreetMap	Global	Yes	None
UK FHRS	UK (500K+ venues)	Yes	None
NYC Restaurant Data	NYC	Yes	None
<b>Yelp Fusion</b>	PAID ONLY since July 2024	N/A	N/A
<b>Zomato</b>	Limited free (India-focused)	Commercial requires license	Required

**Critical gap:** No free global restaurant API with ratings, reviews, or comprehensive coverage exists. Yelp eliminated its free tier in July 2024, now charging \$7.99-\$14.99 per 1,000 calls. ([App Developer Magazine](#))

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## Safety and travel advisory data from government sources

Government travel advisories provide excellent free coverage for commercial platforms.

### US State Department:

- **JSON API:** <https://cadataapi.state.gov/api/TravelAdvisories>
- **RSS Feed:** [https://travel.state.gov/\\_res/rss/TAsTWs.xml](https://travel.state.gov/_res/rss/TAsTWs.xml)
- **Commercial use:** Public domain (US Government work)
- **Coverage:** All countries, 4-level advisory system

### UK FCDO:

- **API:** <https://www.gov.uk/api/content/foreign-travel-advice/{country}>
- **Commercial use:** Open Government Licence v3.0
- **Attribution:** Crown copyright acknowledgment required

### Canadian Government:

- **API:** <https://data.international.gc.ca/travel-voyage/index-alpha-eng.json>
- **Commercial use:** Open Government Licence – Canada

### Australian DFAT Smartraveller:

- **Endpoint:** <https://smartraveller.gov.au/destinations-export>
- **Commercial use:** Permitted with attribution

### Health data sources:

- **CDC Travel Health Notices:** RSS feed at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/rss/notices.xml> (public domain)
- **WHO Disease Outbreak News:** <https://www.who.int/api/news/diseaseoutbreaknews> (free, transitioning API in late 2025)
- **UNODC Crime Statistics:** Download at <https://dataunodc.un.org/> (free with attribution)

**Women's safety:** Georgetown Women Peace & Security Index covers **181 countries** with 13 indicators including intimate partner violence and community safety. Free PDF/data download, updated biennially.

**LGBTQ+ safety gap: Equaldex explicitly prohibits commercial use** ("Non-commercial uses only"). No free alternative with comparable coverage exists. Options include building a proprietary database from public legal sources or seeking licensing arrangements.

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## Maps and geographic data: self-hosting is key

For truly unlimited free commercial mapping, self-hosting OpenStreetMap tiles is necessary. Third-party tile servers restrict commercial use on free tiers.

**Leaflet.js:** 100% free JavaScript mapping library (BSD-2-Clause license). [Leaflet](#) No restrictions on commercial use.

**OSM Foundation tile servers** ([tile.openstreetmap.org](http://tile.openstreetmap.org)): Not recommended for commercial use—access may be withdrawn, no SLA, bulk downloading prohibited. [OpenStreetMap Foundation](#) [OpenStreetMap Foundation](#)

Tile Provider	Free Tier	Commercial Use
MapTiler	Non-commercial only	✗ Paid required
Stadia Maps	2,500 credits/month (non-commercial)	✗ Paid required
CARTO	14-day trial only	✗ Paid required
Mapbox	\$200 credit (depletes)	✗ Paid after credits
<b>Self-hosted OSM</b>	Unlimited	✓ Yes

**Recommended solution:** Self-host tiles using **OpenMapTiles** (BSD/CC-BY license) or generate tiles from OSM data using tools like [tilemaker](#). Requires server infrastructure but eliminates ongoing costs. [OpenMapTiles](#)

## Geographic boundaries:

- **Natural Earth:**  **Public domain**—countries, states, coastlines at 1:10m/50m/110m scales
  - **GADM:**  Academic/personal use only—commercial requires license fee
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## Weather APIs: Met Norway stands out for global commercial use

**Met Norway API (Yr):** The best truly free global weather API for commercial use.

- **Endpoint:** <https://api.met.no/weatherapi/locationforecast/2.0/compact?lat=51.5&lon=0>

- **Rate limit:** 20 requests/second
- **Commercial use:** Creative Commons license
- **Coverage:** Global forecasts
- **Attribution:** User-Agent header required

**Open-Meteo:** Excellent data quality but **free tier is non-commercial only.** ([Datos.gob.es](#)) ([GitHub](#)) Commercial subscriptions start at €29/month.

**Weather.gov (NWS):** Completely free, no registration, unlimited—but **US coverage only.**

**OpenWeatherMap:** Free tier (1,000 calls/day) requires credit card on file and charges overage automatically.

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## Currency and country data: fully free options exist

**Frankfurter API:** The best completely free currency API.

- **Endpoint:** (<https://api.frankfurter.dev/v1/latest>)
- **Rate limits:** None
- **Commercial use:** Yes ([Frankfurter](#))
- **Currencies:** ~33 (ECB-supported)
- **Historical data:** Back to 1999
- **Self-hosting:** Docker container available ([GitHub](#))

**RestCountries API:** Completely free and unlimited.

- **Endpoint:** (<https://restcountries.com/v3.1/all>)
- **Data:** Countries, capitals, currencies, languages, timezones, flags, borders, population ([Freeapihub](#))

**World Bank Open Data:** Free API with 16,000+ indicators including tourism arrivals/receipts, GDP, infrastructure metrics.

**Cost of living gap:** **Numbeo has no free API.** No comprehensive free alternative exists. Workarounds include World Bank economic indicators as proxies or building proprietary datasets.

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## Transportation data: GTFS feeds are the foundation

**GTFS (General Transit Feed Specification)** provides standardized transit schedules from **10,000+ agencies**

globally.

**Aggregator:** Mobility Database ([mobilitydatabase.org](http://mobilitydatabase.org)) replaced TransitFeeds—**1,327+ providers in 677+ locations**. Most feeds permit commercial use, but check individual agency licenses.

**OurAirports:**  **Public domain**—74,000+ airports worldwide

- **Download:** (<https://ourairports.com/data/>)
- **Data:** Airport codes, names, coordinates, runways, countries
- **Commercial use:** Fully free, no attribution required ([Datahub](#))

**OpenFlights:**  ODbL license—10,000+ airports, 5,888 airlines. **Warning:** Route data last updated June 2014. ([Openflights](#))

**Transport for London:**  Free API with 80+ data feeds, ([Transport for London](#)) 500 requests/minute, commercial use permitted under Open Government License. ([Transport for London](#)) ([TfL](#))

**Flight schedule gap:** No free commercial flight schedule/pricing API exists. OpenSky Network is non-commercial only. AviationStack's free tier (100 requests/month) prohibits commercial use. Commercial flight data requires paid services (\$50-500+/month).

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## Visa requirements: MIT-licensed dataset available

**Passport Index Dataset (GitHub):**  **MIT License**—fully free for commercial use.

- **Repository:** ([github.com/ilyankou/passport-index-dataset](https://github.com/ilyankou/passport-index-dataset))
- **Coverage:** 199 passports, visa requirements between all country pairs ([GitHub](#))
- **Data:** Visa-free days, visa required, e-visa, visa on arrival
- **Format:** CSV matrices in ISO-2, ISO-3, and country name formats ([GitHub](#))
- **Updates:** Community-maintained, periodic

**Wikidata visa data:**  CC0—query via SPARQL, variable completeness

**IATA TIMATIC:**  Commercial license only (industry standard) **Sherpa:**  No free tier—B2B partnerships only

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## Free content and images: strong ecosystem available

**Wikivoyage:**  CC BY-SA 4.0—**142,000+ travel articles** ([Wikimedia Enterprise](#)) with structured See, Do, Eat,

## Free image sources for commercial use:

Source	License	Attribution	API Limits
Unsplash	Unsplash License	Required via API	5,000 req/hour (production)
Pexels	Pexels License	Not required	200 req/hour, can request unlimited
Pixabay	Pixabay License	Show "Pixabay" in search	100 req/60 seconds
Wikimedia Commons	Various CC	Per-file license	Unlimited

**Reddit API:** ✗ **Free tier is non-commercial only** (post-July 2023 changes). Commercial access requires enterprise agreements (\$12,000+/year).

**iNaturalist:** ✗ **CC BY-NC default**—explicitly prohibits commercial use.

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## Translation: self-hosted solutions are truly free

**LibreTranslate (self-hosted):** ✗ AGPL-3.0—unlimited commercial use when self-hosted.

- **Languages:** 30+ including major world languages
- **Requirements:** Python 3.8+, 1-2GB RAM per language pair
- **Note:** Public API at libretranslate.com requires paid subscription

**Argos Translate:** ✗ MIT/CC0—open-source library powering LibreTranslate. Fully offline capable, 30+ languages.

**Tatoeba:** ✗ CC BY 2.0—millions of example sentences with translations in 400+ languages. Useful for travel phrase databases.

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## Experiences and activities: government APIs excel

**US National Park Service API:** ✗ **Fully free for commercial use**

- **Endpoint:** <https://developer.nps.gov/api/v1/>
- **Rate limit:** 1,000 requests/hour

- **Data:** 400+ parks with campgrounds, events, alerts, visitor centers, photos

**Recreation.gov RIDB:**  Free—103,000+ campsites across 3,600 federal recreation areas

**Europeana API:**  Free—55+ million European cultural heritage objects from 4,000+ institutions

**Smithsonian Open Access:**  CC0—5.1+ million images and 11M+ metadata records AWS Open Data Registry

**UNESCO World Heritage Sites:** Data available via UNESCO DataHub API—check specific commercial terms (free for non-commercial, commercial requires review)

**OpenTripMap:**  Paid for commercial use (\$19/month minimum) Medium

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## Critical gaps that require paid services

Several categories cannot be adequately served by free sources alone:

1. **LGBTQ+ safety data:** Equaldex prohibits commercial use; Equaldex no free alternative
  2. **Comprehensive restaurant reviews/ratings:** Yelp eliminated free tier; no global alternative
  3. **Flight schedules and pricing:** All commercial APIs require payment
  4. **Cost of living data:** Numbeo has no free API
  5. **Real-time accommodation availability/pricing:** No free source exists
  6. **Professional-quality map tiles at scale:** Free tiers prohibit commercial use
  7. **Comprehensive event calendars:** No free global events API
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## Recommended free-only technology stack

Based on this analysis, the optimal 100% free commercial stack for topsolotravel.com:

Category	Recommended Source	Notes
<b>POI Data</b>	OpenStreetMap + Wikidata	Cache aggressively, enrich OSM with Wikidata
<b>Travel Content</b>	Wikivoyage	Pre-extract using wikivoyage-listings tool
<b>Maps</b>	Leaflet.js + self-hosted OSM tiles	Requires server infrastructure
<b>Weather (Global)</b>	Met Norway API	20 req/sec, CC license
<b>Weather (US)</b>	Weather.gov NWS	Unlimited
<b>Currency</b>	Frankfurter API	Unlimited, ECB data
<b>Country Data</b>	RestCountries	Unlimited
<b>Travel Advisories</b>	US State Dept + UK FCDO + Canada + Australia APIs	Aggregate all four
<b>Health Advisories</b>	CDC RSS + WHO	Public domain
<b>Visa Requirements</b>	Passport Index Dataset (GitHub)	MIT license
<b>Airports</b>	OurAirports	Public domain
<b>Transit</b>	GTFS feeds via Mobility Database	Check per-agency licenses
<b>US Parks</b>	NPS API + Recreation.gov	Fully free
<b>Images</b>	Unsplash + Pexels + Pixabay	Follow attribution rules
<b>Translation</b>	Self-hosted LibreTranslate	Requires server
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	Europeana + Smithsonian	Excellent coverage

## Implementation priorities and attribution requirements

**Phase 1 (Core functionality):** OpenStreetMap POIs, Wikivoyage content, Leaflet maps, RestCountries, Frankfurter currency

**Phase 2 (Safety layer):** Government travel advisories (US/UK/Canada/Australia), CDC health, Passport Index visa data **Phase 3 (Enrichment):** Met Norway weather, NPS parks, Europeana culture, free images

**Required attribution block for footer:**

Data sources: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL) | Wikivoyage (CC BY-SA 4.0) |

US State Department | UK FCDO (OGL v3.0) | CDC | Met Norway | Food Standards Agency (UK) |

UNESCO | Europeana | Photos from Unsplash, Pexels, Pixabay

**Conclusion:** A comprehensive solo travel platform is achievable using exclusively free sources, with the notable exception of LGBTQ+ safety data, restaurant ratings, flight information, and accommodation pricing—areas where paid services or proprietary data collection would be necessary for competitive functionality.