# The Design and Usability Analysis of Two Website Booking.com & Expedia

## Introduction

Nowadays, travelling is playing a vital role in our daily life. At the same time, online travelling developed rapidly. People can book airlines tickets or reserving hotel online, comparing the price and managing your trip activities. A good online travelling website provides the comfortable hotel with the reasonable price and helps customers mitigate risks of cancellation. Booking.com and Expedia are the largest online travelling websites around the world. More succinctly, they take the leading position in the market because of great functions and visualized design.

Booking.com. B. V, established in 1996, then is owned and operated by The Priceline Group since 2005. (Mlive.com, 2014) It is one of the largest travel e-commerce companies in the world, which is a travel fare aggregator website, providing services of flight tickets purchasing, rooms reservation and car renting. With a mission to empower people to experience the world, Booking.com lists approximately 1,400,000+ properties in 226 countries and books 1,200,000 room nights per day for customers with the travelling needs search. (Booking.com, 2017)

Expedia.com is initially launched in 1996 as the Microsoft property, now owned by Expedia Inc. The name of Expedia is the combination of Exploration and Speed. It is one of the fastest growing online travel website, with the slogan "Your Trip, Your Way" to offer flight tickets booking, hotel reservation, vocation package and other enjoyable services when you need during your trip. (Expedia Viewfinder, 2001)

In the following part, I will compare the English Version (US) of the Booking.com and Expedia.com, from visual design to usability, with two usability tests and relative suggestions.

# Design

## • The power of grid website resolution problem

Starting from the fundamental unit of the website design, the grid is a transparent framework for determining the placement of graphic elements, imagery and text, which is important for the consistency and clarity of website. For Booking.com, it has multi-column grid with the horizontal anchor. Also, the horizontal anchor functions as the first-level navigation, providing a clear outline for users who come into for the first time. However, the layout of block is not unified, with two or three columns in the right side also the left searching box is not aligned

with the segments in the right. There is a huge blank under the yellow search box, cutting of the consistency of the whole page(Figure 1). In terms of Expedia, it has the multi-column grid with horizontal anchor as well, but its layout is more structured, the contents of which are displayed with three columns, making the whole page neat and balancing website view. Nevertheless, Expedia search box is not aligned with the right advertising segment, breaking the website balance to some degree (Figure 2).

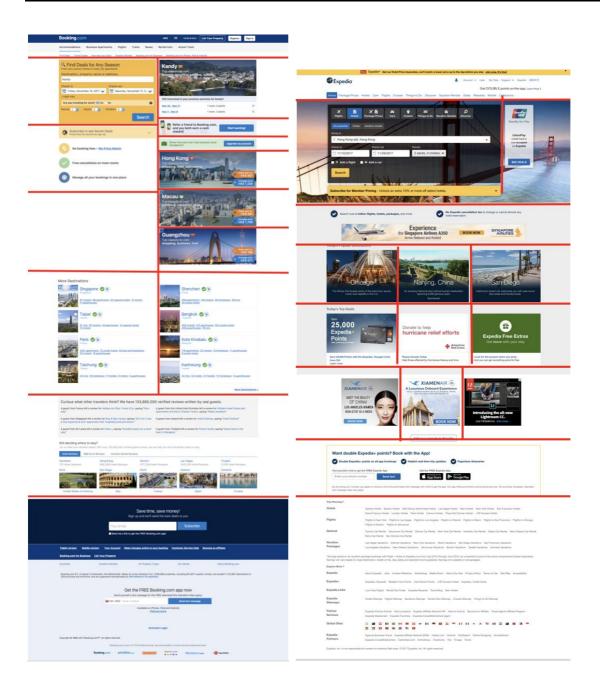


Figure 1: Grids in Booking.com

Figure 2: Grids in Expedia

Both of Booking.com and Expedia have a responsive setting in website, when we change the size of the browser, the website will change to the most appropriate form to display the information. Users have always found the search box and navigation bar no matter how small the website is. Especially for the Expedia, there is a pop-up message for downloading the

Expedia App when user minimizes the window to the mobile phone size. It is very convenient and user-friendly.

## • The importance of color

When it comes to the color used in website, it is important to draw users' attention and evoke the emotion of the website. For Booking.com, it exerts blue and white to design the logo, and put the deep blue as the theme color, creating a strong contrast to the white background (Figure 3). The color makes a stable and trustful impression on users.



Figure 3: Booking.com Logo and color scheme

Expedia uses more sombre dark blue palette to design the logo, with a white airplane and circular blue "globe". The dark blue combined with background color white to highlight this confident inspiration and convincible brand (Figure 4). When users move their mouse to the icons, it will turn into another color indicating your selection.



Figure 4: Expedia Logo and color scheme

Viewing the layout, we found that light blue, deep blue, white and yellow are the colors used frequently in the two websites, since the blue and white make the website content clear and easy to read, yellow is used to design the button then get attention from users. Green is used for stressing some selling points of the searching resulting page. However, Booking.com uses about six colors in one page, particularly combining the orange, red with green together. The color mix made the page view cluttered (Figure 5).

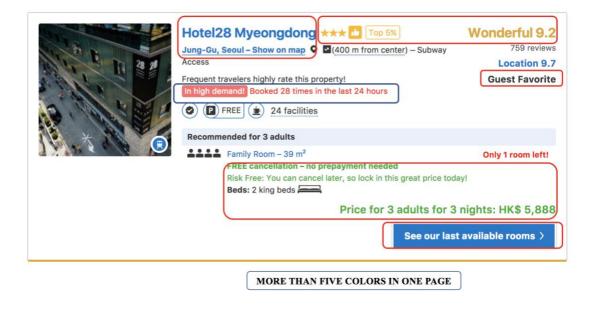
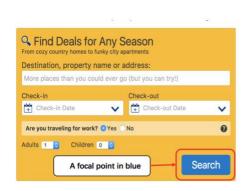


Figure 5: color mix of Booking.com in one page

Moreover, the search box in the navigation bar is designed in yellow to impress the target

audience. Booking.com uses yellow while Expedia chooses the transparent black to bring out the function and the contrasting colors in the button creates a focal point to get to where users are interested in the website (Figure 6).



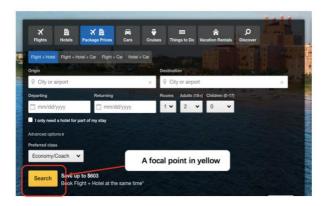


Figure 6: search box color: Booking.com-Yellow; Expedia-light black

#### Microsite

In terms of the microsite design, Booking.com and Expedia highlight the links on the homepage, helping people deeply explore into one specific service. In the microsites, users can find some details about campaigns and the specific service (flight, hotel etc.), such as the latest coupon, popular destinations or cars rental.

## • Writing for the web:

#### 1) Logical grouping of navigation

The logical grouping of navigation is significant for users when they search for some information or they are just new comers for the website. A well-designed navigation will help

to Booking.com, it has the global navigation on the top of webpage, sub-navigation box in the left side, then the site map in the bottom of the page. Additionally, a floating navigation bar in yellow will occur when users scroll down the website (Figure 7). Likewise, Expedia has the global navigation, search box and site map for user to visualize. However, no floating search bar for users to get the quick searching result in Expedia (Figure 8).



Figure 7: navigation bars in Booking.com





Figure 8: navigation bars in Expedia

### 2) Reading onscreen

Most of users prefer to scan the webpage in several seconds rather than read it step by step., Booking.com and Expedia build up their website by following the F-pattern. They put the navigation bar and large search box in the first two parts, adding some intensive contents into each column (Figure 9 & 10).

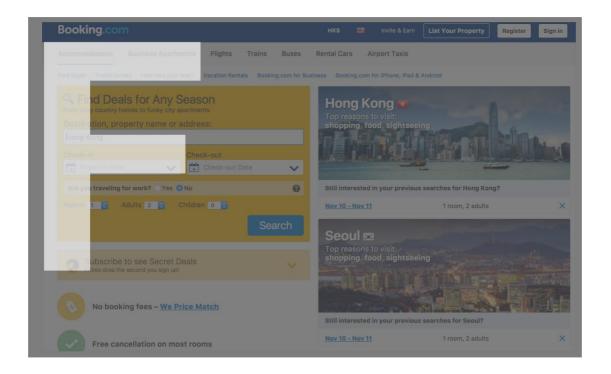


Figure 9: F-pattern in Booking.com

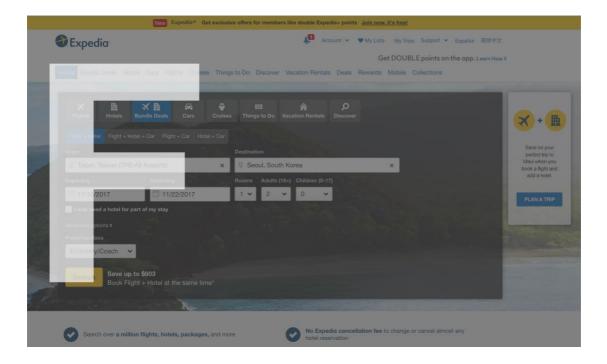


Figure 10: F-pattern in Expedia

#### 3) Website contents

Speaking to the content on the website, the two websites present with short texts and attractive

images for users to acquire useful information. However, the page of Booking.com is much longer than Expedia, people have to scroll down the mouse for several times. Likewise, the content in Booking.com is much too complex and elaborate than Expedia, which has short page view and simplified contents (Figure 11).



Figure 11: website contents

## • Typography

The fonts in website are of significance to improve the website readability and standardization.

Booking.com includes the sans-serif as their font applied into the whole website. Expedia also

has the sans-serif to design their website with some words bold, users feel comfortable when staring at the screen for a long time. Using black text on a white background is possible for optimal legibility.

# **Usability**

## • Content and Scope

When it comes to the content and scope of Booking.com and Expedia, both perform well in providing relevant content and satisfy the needs of a wide range of users. The two websites shared the same market and target audience. Their customers are from different aging groups and have needs for searching travelling information and booking hotel, flight or other trip services online. While Expedia has tried to expand the scope of functions for getting more potential users, such as Travel Package Prices (the combination with flight and hotel reservation), Things to do and so on, which indicates the far-ranging functions and services in the market. Booking.com is continuously focusing on the travelling information aggregation and improving basic services.

Regarding to Booking.com, it originated from an online accommodation reservation website,

so that their fundamental function is room booking. With a clear self-position, it then develops some supplementary services such as purchasing tickets of airlines, bus or renting cars for travelling, which are closely associated with the core function—travelling information aggregation and booking (Figure 12). Therefore, when users open the Booking.com, they can find many valuable recommendations based on metasearch. When users select one specific place, there comes with various links about the number of apartment, hotels, flight tickets (Figure 13). Besides, Booking.com also promotes the function named "Booking for Business", through which business users could book faster and easily manage their tasks on this platform (Figure 14). Then their microsites are well-designed in the uniform format with a large and eye-catching search box in the center of the page.



Figure 12: main functions/ services in Booking.com

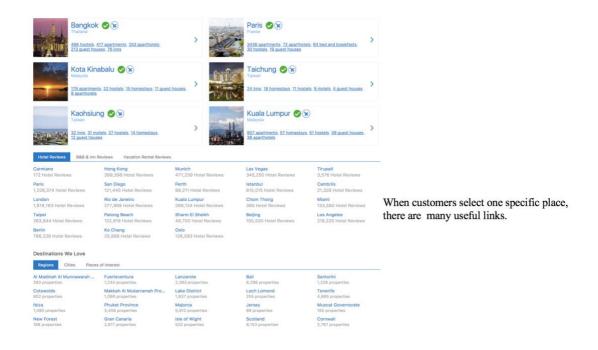


Figure 13: Links in homepage for recommendations

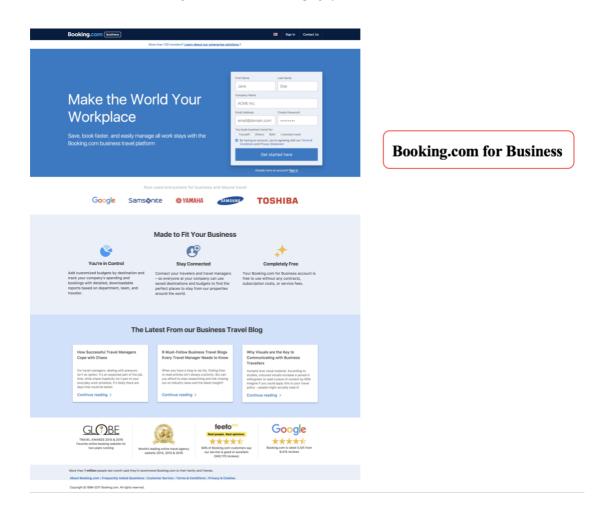


Figure 14: Booking.com for Business

What's more, Booking.com could offer the searching system based on the landmarks in the city, where users are able to filter the results through various conditions, such as public transportation nearby, landmarks, hotel, budgets or else, which is convenient for users to select the best one (Figure 15). As for Expedia, it was limited into fewer filter criteria such as the property class, hotel price and so on.

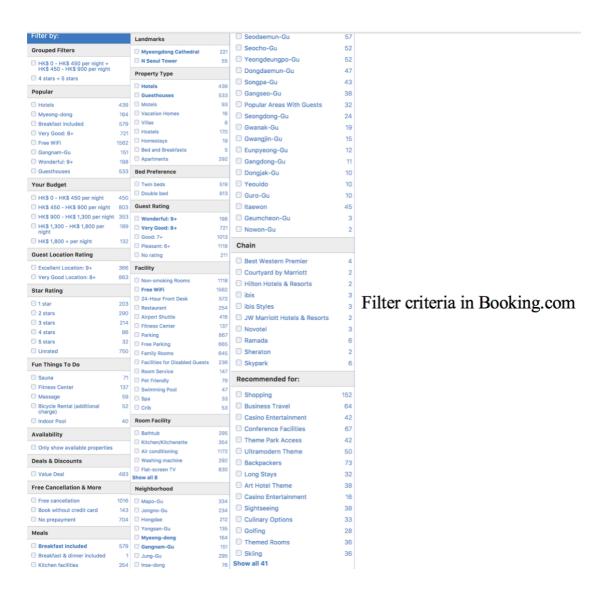


Figure 15: more detailed filter criteria in Booking

Referring to Expedia, it can be used to book hotel, airlines, rent cars, cruises and vocation package. The various functions (Figure 16) make it stand out in the market. For example, users can easily find the information they request on the dashboard (the search box) in a few seconds. As for the rest webpage, the top deals and application download promotion are displayed to users. The uniform layout combined with the succinct texts and numbers enable users to catch up the latest discount information and enhance their loyalty into the website (Figure 17). However, there is one part used to post advertisements, accumulating much space for irrelative ads, which is not wise for website development, because users might feel bothered and skip some important information or leave from the website immediately (Figure 18). Both of websites own abundant comments on hotel or flight, which originally come from guests before, beneficial for users to make a comparison.



Figure 16: main functions/ services in Expedia

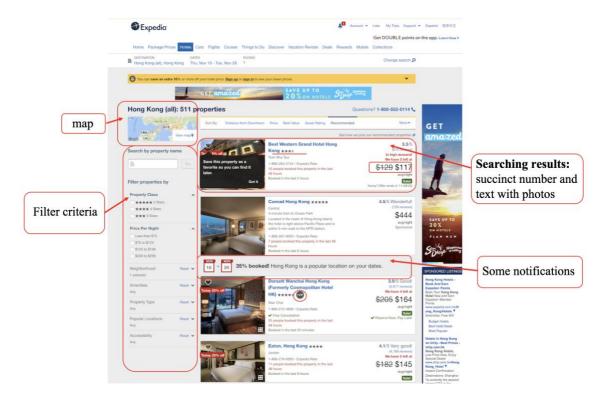


Figure 17: Uniform layout in Expedia

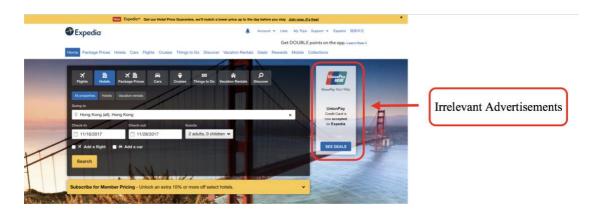


Figure 18: irrelevant advertisements in Expedia

## • Navigation

In terms of navigation, the layout and structure are different between Booking.com and Expedia.

Referring to Booking.com, it has the global navigation on the top of website, followed with a sub navigation bar in the second level, which are easy to find for users, especially for linked-

oriented users. For the search-oriented users, they could move to the search box in yellow, where they are likely to fill in the blank with keywords for more accurate search. When users scroll down the page, they will find a search bar suspending at the top of the page (floating search bar). In the bottom, there is a link-based site map available for users to know where they are (Figure 19).

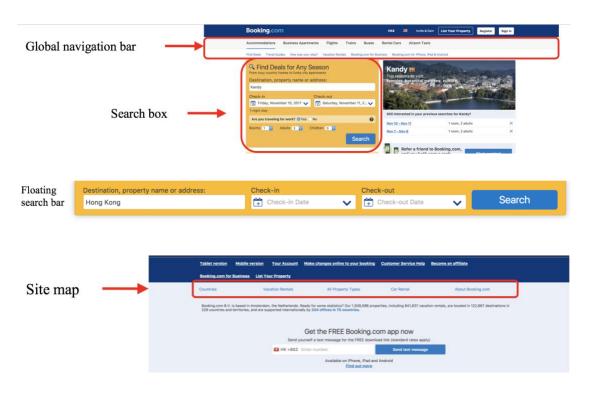


Figure 19: Navigation bars in Booking.com

But there are two issues. First, the service that is automatically selected when loading the website is "Accommodation". Users are first educated to the room reservation in Booking.com, therefore it lacks a general search box containing all items. Accommodation search might be placed into the microsite in case that users feel confused about the site structure.

The second issue is unstructured texts in the navigation bar. For example, the links about app downloading promotion and even interrogative sentence (How was your stay?) appear in the sub navigation bar, being difficult for users to grasp the main message and damaging the clarity and consistency of website. This problem also occurs in the following segments of the page (Figure 20).

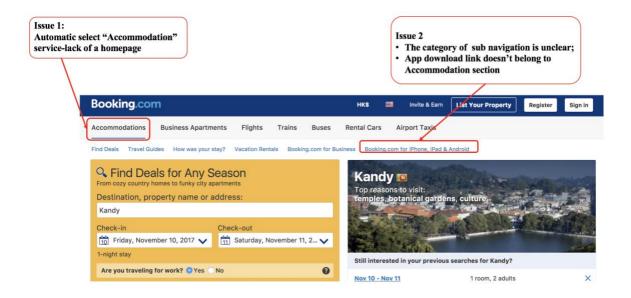


Figure 20: issues about navigation bar in Booking.com

The navigation of Expedia performs better than Booking.com. In general, Expedia has the similar global linked-based navigation bar placed on the top of website. Instead of the automatic selected service appearing in the homepage (Accommodation service in Booking.com), Expedia names this page as "Home", which incorporates the most general information for users to read. Underneath the first-level navigation, the black search-oriented

box provides sub navigation bar for users to get relative content, where the information is shown with the text and some icons. Besides, the bottom of website, there is a more precise site map in accordance with the front one (Figure 21).

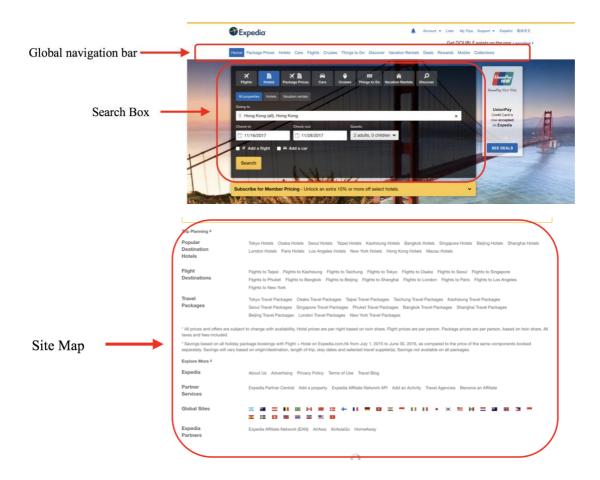


Figure 21: Navigation bars in Expedia

However, there are some issues shouldn't be ignored. Firstly, although the icons are helpful, the one named "Things to do" is a little bit obscured and inconsistent with the text. In addition, the general search function "Discover" is placed in the last of the sub navigation bar, with an inconspicuous color and small button. Search-oriented users might spend some time looking

for this important search box (Figure 22).

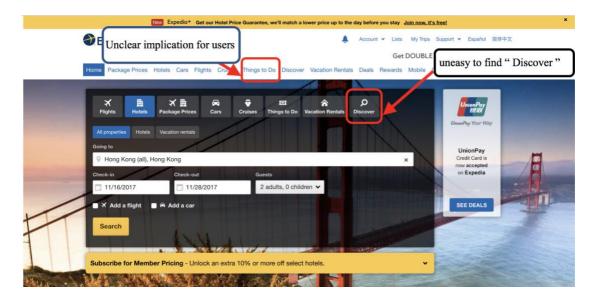


Figure 22: issues in Expedia

## **Usability Test**

## Background Summary

I tested the English version websites of Expedia and Booking.com with two representative users (Queena and Winnie). The two tests took place at the University Library respectively.

I used the Google chrome to open the websites for testing. Two users are New Media program students, who are at similar ages, educational backgrounds. one prerequisite is that neither of them have used the Booking.com or Expedia before.

## Methodology

In the process of usability test, I firstly give representative users about 1 minute to get familiar with the layout and basic functions of the two websites. Then the goals are asking users to test whether they could finish the procedure of online purchasing ticket and reserving hotel or not within the fixed time. So, I required them to assume they are going to visit South Korea for seven days trip, they are expected to use Booking.com and Expedia to reserve one specific hotel they prefer to and buy a round trip airline ticket from Hong Kong to Seoul. After rounds of actions, I finally asked about the satisfying aspects and problems on the two websites.

#### Test Results

The first test took place on 4th Nov. 2017. Here are problems she met in the Booking.com homepage. One is the white space underneath the search box cuts off the continuity of page flow and breaks apart the relationships between design. Another is the collision of color scheme used in the Booking.com homepage, that is, the search box color (yellow) clashes with the theme color (deep blue), resulting in an unsightly view. The rest is about meaningless title "How was your stay?" in the navigation bar. User couldn't figure out what service it provided (Figure 23).

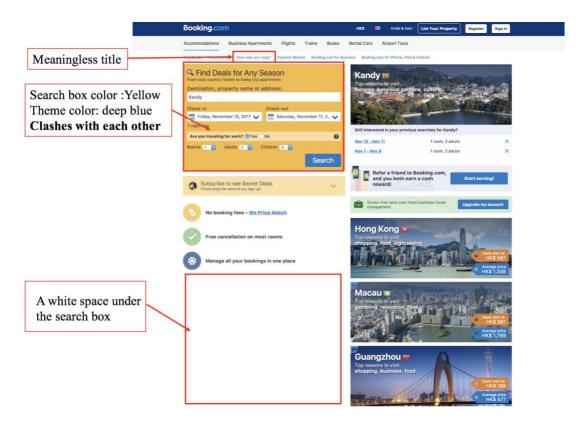


Figure 23: problems in Expedia from Usability Test 1

Next, user input the Seoul into the search box, then sorted the results by filtering criteria such as room facility, star rating in the left column. And she finally selected one appropriate hotel. After adding the hotel into the shopping cart, she filled in the personal information form and chose a way of payment from scratch. Eventually she reserved the room on Booking.com. In the process, she encountered three problems. First, she wanted to sort out the search results by landmarks, but spent a long time to find this item, since there are too many filter criteria, making it hard to find in a short period of time. Second is the fuzzy-logic website design. When user loaded the searching result page, there is a Dialog box

popping up to ask whether it is the first time to Seoul. After that there should be a recommendation lists, while nothing happened. So, the question has not any implication. The third is about the all contents narrow in the searching result page. Texts in different colors are squeezed in the long page, making customer feel tired and hard to catch key points when browsing the webpage.

Then user clicked on the link about "Flights" in the global navigation bar (on the top of website), a new page about flight opened. She input the place of departure, destination, timetable and number of travelers. Next, she selected the airline filtered by companies and price. During this time, she found the page skipped into another website provided by the third party rather than Booking.com (Figure 24). Process of payment is not guaranteed by Booking.com, which undermined users' trust to the website.

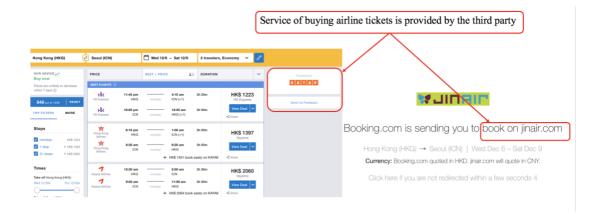


Figure 24: Flight service in Booking.com provided by the Third Party

After a short break, she tested the service of booking a hotel and buying tickets on Expedia. Put it briefly, she changed the mode from "Buddle and Save" to "Hotel" only, input the origin and destination into the search box, then filtered the results and went through the details about the hotel. User filled in the information form under the guide. Eventually she reserved the room on Expedia. Likewise, ordering an airline ticket is easy in Expedia. She just input the origin, destination. After comparing the price, she successfully finished the order flow. In this test, she found the time of website loading is too long, spending more than 15 seconds waiting for the results. Besides, she had to fill in many blanks in the phase of payment displayed in one single page, which are required to complete one time. Although she met many problems in the testing process, she still gave some positive feedbacks. Firstly, the well-designed information architecture and distinct layout of Expedia made her find the search and link navigation bar easily. Links like "Things to do", "Discover" and "Cruises" provided her with more choices for the trip planning. Additionally, Expedia has a clear and uniform searching result page with simplified icons in display, thus she could find out her favorite hotel quickly. Moreover, information such as available room, price, ranking and mini-map are shown on the top of the page while

things like hotel introduction and guest reviews are placed at bottom, highlighting the key information for users.

The second usability test took place with Winnie on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2017. With the similar procedure, she initially started from Booking.com with the steps of reserving the hotel in Seoul, then she found it difficult to catch the key points, since all information with small font size narrowed in the single page, while there is no any obvious guidance to help user. Furthermore, too many columns making information in disorder (Figure 25). Some information is for horizontal comparison, while others are for longitudinal comparison.

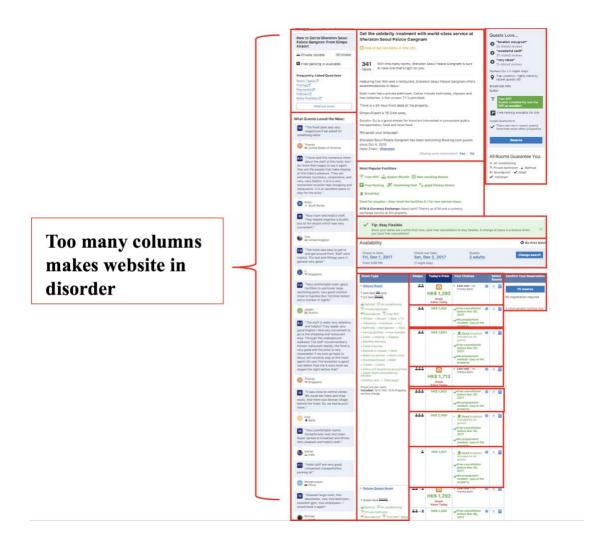


Figure 25: Too columns in Booking.com

She also experienced a test full of bugs in Expedia. One is about the error message notified that she input the wrong date, thus failed to filter any result. However, she didn't make any mistake in the searching process. When she added her favorite hotel into the wish list, she couldn't find where the wish list located since there is no any message about its location. Besides, a logic problem occurred when she was clicking on the guest reviews. For example, when she was going to view guests' comments on the hotel, she clicked on the link about

reviews, only to load the hotel general information instead of the detailed guest reviews. In turn, she said the airline ticket purchase looks similar, since all steps of ticket purchasing is smooth from her perspective.

She also mentioned some good points of Booking.com and Expedia. Firstly, Booking.com has a complete evaluation system for the convince of users when they are looking for the high-ranking hotels, which facilitates users' selection. Secondly, in contrast to Expedia with a long page to incorporate the personal information, Booking.com breaks it down into three-step procedure when filling in the information form, which is convenient. Thirdly, when she in Booking.com hovered the mouse on some simplified numbers or content, she could find elaboration of the item, enabling her to understand the details. Fourth, Expedia has a clear information architecture and direct layout, which helped user get to know where the search and link-based navigation bar located. Moreover, the wide row spacing made the content more distinct in the website.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the previous analysis, I could find that Booking.com and Expedia have great design

and excellent usability to some degree. Booking.com has abundant hotel and flight resources for reservation around the world, doing well in aggregating travelling information. In turn, Expedia has a visualized design, specific service classification and distinct information. However, some deficiencies need attention from the feedbacks of users in the usability test. Booking.com has a problem about unsymmetrical layout and complicated text description, resulting in an unsightly interface. As for Expedia, it has the logical problems in the site structure, some bugs occur in the process of test for users without understanding why, thus damaged user experience.

Here are some suggestions for the problems in the analysis and usability tests. For Booking.com, it is supposed to simplify the abundant information and apply the uniform design style including layout, paragraph formatting, icons and color, which helps customers understand the general content and get the focal point quickly. In addition, Booking.com should solve the confusing items in the navigation bar and optimize the logic flow of the website, therefore providing an uncluttered site structure with people who visit the Booking.com.

Regarding to Expedia, the primary thing is to optimize the flow of website and deal with bugs arising in the process of test, such as error notification for wrong date, and incorrect links to

specific pages. Furthermore, Expedia is advised to split the payment phase into three steps, making it readily comprehensible for users to act. Expedia should reduce the irrelevant contents and images to speed up the website's loading time as well.

What's more, users signified that they would like to find out more personalized recommendations in the homepage after browsing some products or service, which is common among E-commerce websites in China. This service depends on the big data and algorithms to analyze the interests and purchasing behaviors of users. In this way, Booking.com and Expedia could reach their customers and improve the user experience.

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