



## Decoding short URLs

### Short URLs

While browsing the web, you have probably encountered references to web pages with a short and rather cryptic URL, like [bit.ly/3rZ7Xws](https://bit.ly/3rZ7Xws), [t.co/sJpSI7yCEb](https://t.co/sJpSI7yCEb), [ow.ly/R7LE50PYCHn](https://ow.ly/R7LE50PYCHn) or <https://tinyurl.com/yahndvxn>.

These are shortened URLs. They are not the real locations of the page you will read if you click, but they are shorthands. Bitly, Twitter/X, TinyURL, BL.INK, Zapier... are companies that allow you to use (for a fee - some have a limited free plan) a short URL under their domain name to point to a page with a more complicated path like <https://www.my-isp.com/myblog/the-page-i-want-to-share-with-my-neighborhood.html>.

Technically, they create a page at their site with a short name and use some code to redirect the reader's browser to the original page (they use a HTTP redirect (301) or a HTML meta refresh statement) .

Shortened URLs hide the actual destination of a click on the link, so they can be easily exploited by pirates to drive a user to a malicious or counterfeit site.

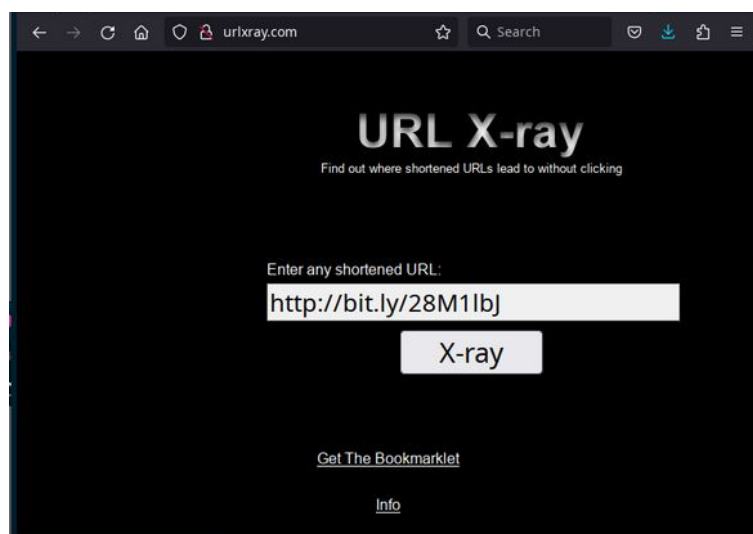
Note also that these aggregator sites gather statistics on the clicks, so it is not optimal for privacy; it is better to directly connect to the original site.



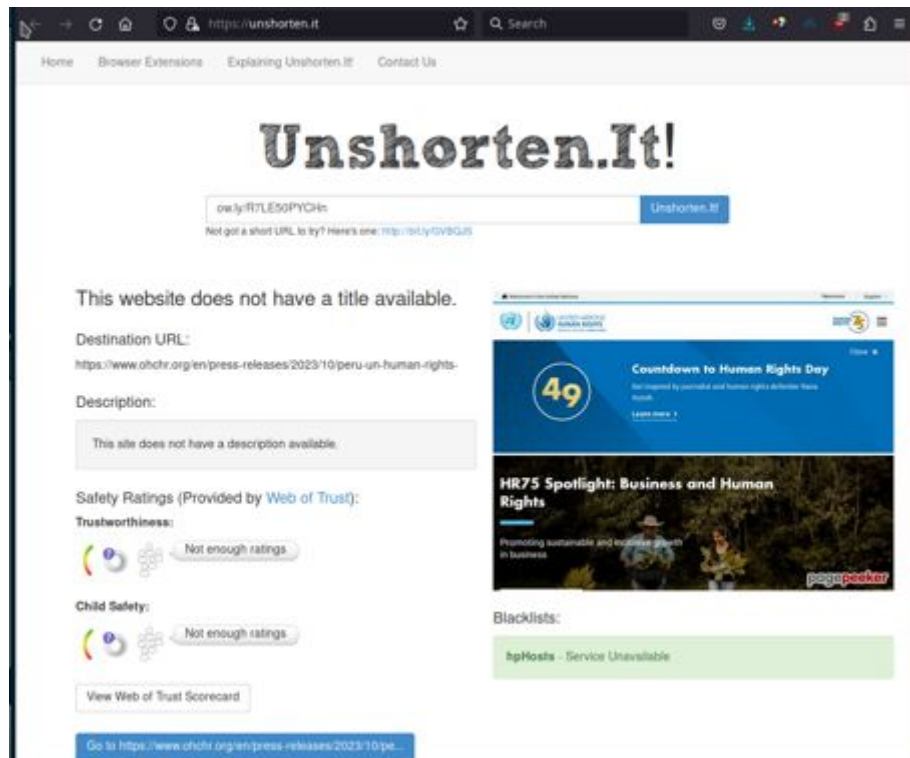
## How to decode short URLs

There are free websites that decode the shortened URLs for you without you actually accessing them.

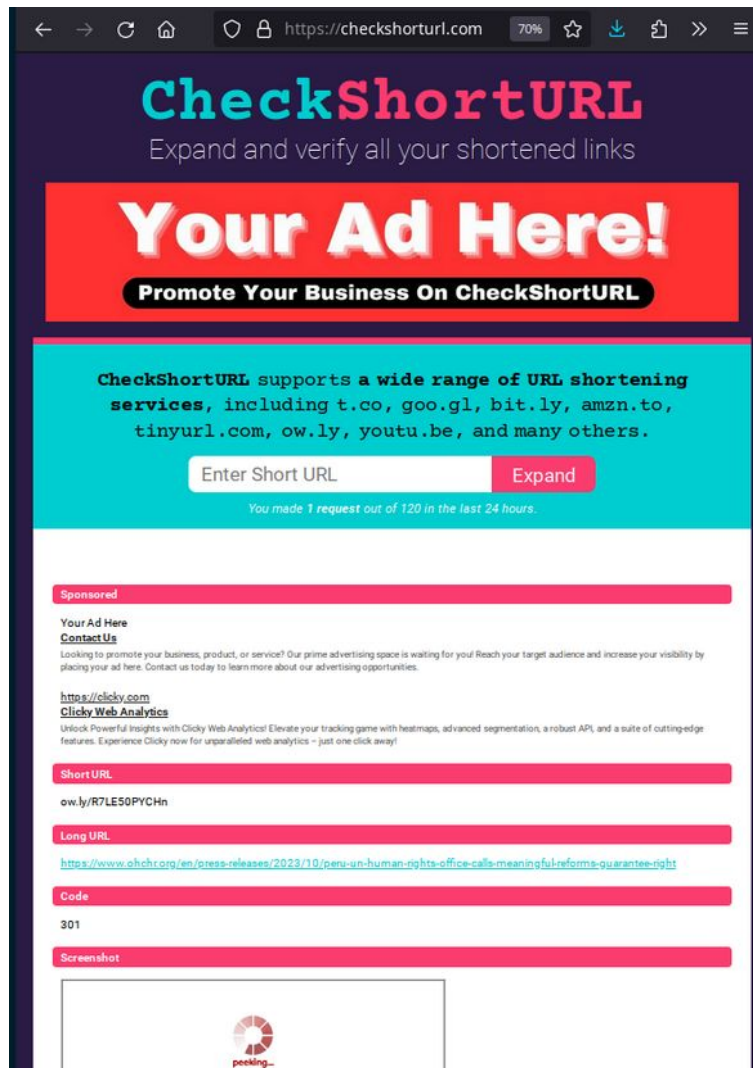
[urlxray.com](https://urlxray.com) is the most straightforward site. You enter the shortened URL and it displays the original one.



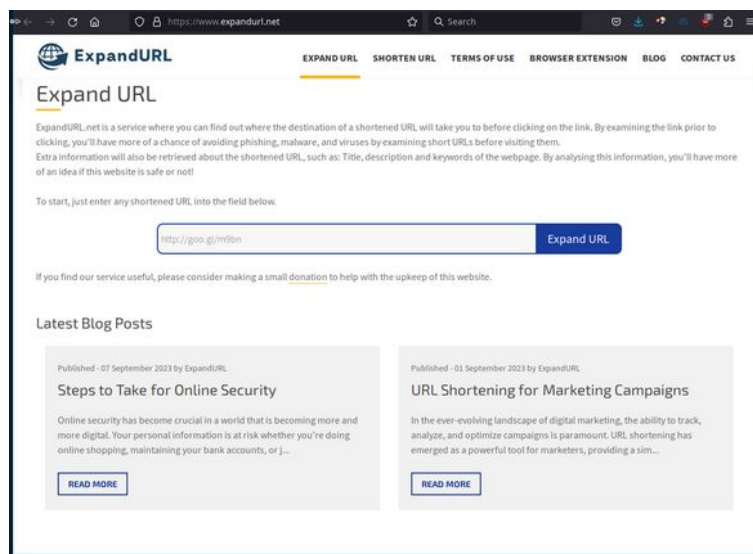
[unshorten.it](https://unshorten.it) not only expands the shortened URL, but it shows you a preview of the site and safety ratings



[checkshorturl.com](https://checkshorturl.com) does the job too, but with some ads and a more ... extravert design. It is less efficient as previewing the website and limits your free translations to 120/day.



[ExpandURL.net](https://expandurl.net) is also a simple site that creates and expands shortened URLs.



## Conclusion

Before clicking on a shortened URL, expand it with the help of one of the sites above, and check the real destination is what you expect.