

Calendar and Search Bring Place and Time Together - By John Bray

2006-11-30

One of the key tenets of Travel 2.0 is that (finally) the true power of the Web is being harnessed to support the systematic automation and online sharing of classic travel behaviors.

There certainly is nothing fundamentally "new" about sharing pictures, clipping out articles and notes and putting them in a folder, or asking your friends for their ideas on where to go on vacation; indeed these are as old as time.

With the pervasiveness of desktop calendar tools (e.g. outlook, notes), travel sites have provided the facility to allow consumers to download itinerary elements into calendars for some time (e.g., flights, hotel and car). Recently, innovative approaches have brought the calendar to the forefront of trip planning, allowing consumers to both ensure a better trip experience (by not trying to jam too much in), and coordinate planning details with others.

We've all had travel experiences where we simply didn't get to do everything we wanted to do. Sometimes this is merely the case of choosing to linger at one enjoyable experience a bit longer than planned. However, too often great opportunities are missed because the logistics of the trip dictate too much time to make all of the planned activities possible.

I vividly remember the return flight from my first trip to Europe, where I sat next to two folks from Germany who were coming to the United States for the first time. They had a guide book, were renting an RV and had planned to visit no less than 45 destinations during their 28 day journey from San Francisco to Miami. These were the showcase destinations (e.g. Grand Canyon one day, Yellowstone the next) and apparently they didn't comprehend the geographical scale of the United States. Whenever I remember this, I often wonder whatever my German travel mates ended up doing. Let's take a look at some of the players that are trying, in one way or the other to alleviate these types of problems.

One of the most popular tools in this genre is Yahoo!'s Trip Planner (<http://travel.yahoo.com/trip>). Trip Planner is a centralized resource for researching and planning a trip online, including both information found on Yahoo! Travel and the rest of the Web. Featuring the ability to tap a full set of mashup maps, destination guides, image storage, and trip-review journals, consumers easily can create and optionally share their trip plans with others. Besides all of the various bits of information that can be easily brought together, what makes this application really compelling is that the trip plan can be laid out in a calendar view so that activities can be organized along a timeline as well as a map, in order to help ensure that every step can actually be achieved. Once created, one can print out or download to a PDA their own customized travel guide to refer to during their travels.

With the theme of "connecting people with places," Home&Abroad (<http://homeandabroad.com/>) provides automated trip planning. Once you select a destination (e.g., Denver), theme (e.g., history, art), and trip duration in days, Home&Abroad offers a list of rated activities to choose from. After you have tagged your selections, the site factors in the average time that most people will spend at an attraction or event, and will generate an itinerary for you. Of course, you shuffle activities around, and insert others from different themes as well. After you have your itinerary in hand, you can save it, print it and share with others. Another convenient feature is a direct link from your itinerary to pre-populated search pages in Expedia where you can buy plane reservations, hotel reservations, even airport parking. Similarly, look for TripAdvisor's (www.tripadvisor.com) GoLists to extend from static lists to trip calendars in their upcoming redesign.

Group travel planning tools are including calendars as well. One site, TripHub (www.triphub.com), allows groups to create a shared schedule of events including dining plans, meeting times and locations, maps and other scheduled activities, even providing for simultaneous and overlapped activities so the group can split up (e.g., for shopping versus golf). TripHub formats the event schedule into a printable pocket reference of what is happening, when and where. While not specifically targeted at travel, Google's new Calendar is also very handy for coordinating group travel planning as well.

Taking the power of the calendar one step further, one company is integrating trip shopping right into your desktop. Portaga's (www.portaga.com) TripSync is a downloadable plug-in for Microsoft's Outlook that allows you to shop for travel from any appointment in your calendar. Once installed and configured with your preferred airlines, hotels, and car rental providers, TripSync works in the background to fetch rates and prices, as well as make the selected booking.

There are also a number of emerging social calendar tools (e.g., Renkoo, Skobee, Eventful) that are not necessarily focused on travel but helping groups of friends coordinate social plans (e.g., selecting a restaurant, club). Look for some of the innovative features (e.g., group voting) of these tools to show up in travel planning sites soon. One convenient feature that (so far) none of these sites provide that I would like to see is a budget feature, that allows me to add and subtract attractions and events from my calendar and see how much of my allocated trip budget is consumed.

Calendar-based travel planning tools provide enormous utility because they simplify travel planning and help one visualize the experience, avoiding pitfalls. Alongside their other Travel 2.0 brethren (i.e. tagging, photo sharing, social networking), they allow consumers to plan and successfully execute their complete travel experience, largely via improved transparency, instead of merely supporting the buying of travel products. Traditional travel providers would be well served to pay close attention to this fundamental consumer shift away from "finding the best prices" to "planning the perfect trip" and evolve their purview of customer services to meet this demand.

(C) 2006 PhoCusWright Inc., Sherman, CT USA +1 860 350-4084

All rights reserved.

www.phocuswright.com

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article25352.html>

© 1998 - 2007 Nevistas and the author.

Brought to you by Hotel News Resource

Distribute your news on our Network

See what all the buzz is about at:

http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news_account_info.html