

## Online Reviews of Hotels and Restaurants Flourish

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Many of the reader-generated reviews of hotels, restaurants, destinations and other travel services on the Web may have started their lives as independent blogs by travel buffs. But they have consolidated into major online businesses, taking an ever-growing piece of the market from print guides.

The major sites are TripAdvisor.com, owned by Expedia, and IgoUgo, owned by Sabre Holdings, which also owns Travelocity. Both Expedia and IgoUgo staked their first Internet claims as sites where travelers could research prices and directly book trips. They now operate the review sites as separate businesses.

Like their parent companies, TripAdvisor and IgoUgo are fiercely competitive. TripAdvisor claims by far the greater amount of content, including reviews that are mostly anonymous. Igo-Ugo, on the other hand, requires its contributors to register, and its travel forums and other review material are usually accompanied by member profiles.

IgoUgo pointedly says this differentiates it from TripAdvisor, on which people with vested interests can plant phony reviews.

TripAdvisor acknowledges that an occasional review or forum can be manipulated by a crafty hotel or restaurant owner. But it says the sheer volume of offerings - and the growing sophistication of Internet travel site users - mitigates the problem.

'It's just very hard to stack the deck with this kind of volume,' said Stephen Kaufer, the co-founder and chief executive of TripAdvisor.com. 'On my screen right now, I have 859 reviews of the Sofitel Hotel in New York.'

Traditional print travel guides, whether in book or periodical form, are usually written and edited by travel professionals - some of whom regard the growing online travel review sites as interlopers that barged onto their turf like boisterous day-trippers piling out of their Winnebagos and plopping down next to the members of a beach club.

But Mr. Kaufer argued that online sites have advantages over written guides, including the fact that the Internet reviews are often more immediate and tend to be punchier than guidebook listings.

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