

10.2.e

Van: 10.2.e <10.2.e@booking.com>
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Aan: 10.2.e
Onderwerp: booking #2

Beste 10.2.e

Hierbij ook de draft versie van de brief aan Hotrec die ik eerder noemde - deze messaging is grotendeels geschikt om te delen.

Zie overigens ook de BEUC (Europese consumentenorganisatie) berichtgeving over vouchers vs cashback - <http://www.beuc.eu/publications/coronavirus-crisis-no-trade-between-consumer-rights-and-supporting-travel-sector/html>

Vriendelijke groet,
Inge

Dear Mr. Christensen,

Thank you for your letter, which we have taken with the utmost seriousness.

We are all living in extraordinary times. The travel industry is being tested. Travel bans across the globe have resulted in an almost complete standstill of travel. A crisis of this scale has never before occurred in our industry. We are facing something unprecedented, and we are in this together. Accommodations. Airlines. Car Rental companies. Attractions. Our competitors. Booking.com. Local businesses everywhere. No one is immune to this pandemic shock, but we all share one common interest: for the global travel industry to survive this crisis.

I would like to make very clear that recent decisions and measures we have taken had the long-term interests of our industry in mind. Our main priorities have been, amidst such rapidly-evolving global uncertainty, first and foremost the safety of our customers and partners, while simultaneously trying to assist consumers and protect our employees and our company. Our customer service centers are dealing with almost 400.000 calls, chats and emails per day to support our customers and partners during this crisis, which is far beyond what we deal with on our busiest days during the summer peak.

We are very concerned for everyone in the travel ecosystem: our partners who are struggling for business amidst the travel restrictions, as well as our mutual customers, who are restricted from travel and potentially facing financial struggles. We are working around the clock to figure out ways to help each group, and please remember: we only make money if our partners make money. However, as a platform we have to strike the right balance between the interests of consumers and partners. Harming either in any way is not in our combined short or long term interest. We strongly believe that we can only manage this crisis together.

Please let me also take this opportunity to give some context as to some measures we have taken to which you refer in your letter.

Force Majeure - Forced Circumstances

We continue to monitor the global situation, as more and more governments around the world implement regulations that restrict the movement of people. Taking these regulations into account, we have implemented Force Majeure procedures in many countries as per our GDTs which all our partners agreed to. This enables our mutual customers to postpone or cancel stays that may not be possible due to local government travel restrictions. Booking.com of course receives no commission for any stay cancelled under Force Majeure.

Monetary remittances vs. vouchers

Travel is in many cases one of the biggest yearly expenses of a customer. With the huge uncertainty many customers are faced with we know that customers prefer to have their money back. We believe that in these uncertain times, offering customers their money back is fair and this sentiment is shared by consumer protection associations across Europe. We are, however, always open for dialogue with the industry, consumers and regulators to find solutions that respect the legal framework and benefit all parties involved.

That said, we are focused on how best to reduce Coronavirus-related cancellations by encouraging date changes, while also devising new ways to reduce the operational workload we know date change requests are currently generating for accommodation partners. We believe that a flexible option to modify the date of a stay effectively results in a customer choice comparable to receiving a voucher for future use.

VCC Cards -Payment Processes -Self service cancellation tools

Given the unprecedented level of uncertainty at this time, with many customers unable to travel to or stay at accommodations and the associated high impact to our call-centres, plus the often short-notice operational workload resulting from cancellations and refunds, we have had to adapt quickly. That is the reason why we made a temporary change to some of our payment processes as well as introduced a self-service cancellation tool for customers. This will help reduce the backlog in customer service to ensure that we can answer our mutual customers' questions, as well as our partners', as quickly as possible.

This is a challenging time for everyone with a great deal of uncertainty which is why we are working around the clock to offer advice and support to our accommodation partners around the globe, and we encourage them all to continue to reach out to us directly like you have done with your letter.

Booking.com, like its partners, is dependent on thriving tourism. The main value we add for our partners has always been generating demand for them, to help them fill their rooms more cost-effectively than through traditional advertising. Even in this unprecedented situation, this is the best value we can offer partners. We are working very hard to bring to partners all the demand possible. Of course, in many countries, the number of travellers has reduced dramatically, but we are ensuring we can funnel even this limited demand.

We are working on a plan to stimulate travellers to start booking again once this crisis is behind us and it becomes safe to travel again. This will include Booking.com incentivising customers to book. As countries begin to show signs of recovery, we will also publish a Recovery Preparation Toolkit to help partners get back to business and back to growth as soon as possible.

Like all companies in the travel industry, our company is doing everything we can to weather this storm and ensure the long-term health of the global travel ecosystem. We truly believe that we all need to work together to overcome this crisis, and ensure travel is healthy again. We are fully supportive of fiscal relief and state aid measures for the travel sector from national governments and the European Union. Just as you did, we supported the European Tourism Manifesto via the EU Travel Tech Association and we call upon governments to take timely measures to ensure the survival of the European travel ecosystem of which we are a part.

I look forward to working with you and our accommodation partners to weather this crisis together and help get our industry back on track. 10.2.e 10.2.e, stands ready at short notice to discuss with HOTREC and your members the impact of this crisis and how to address our challenges together.

Yours sincerely

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