

ONLINE BOOKING MADE EASY





Cover image:
Holmwood Guesthouse, Phillip Island

INTRODUCTION

At Tourism Victoria, one of our jobs is to make sure your business continues to thrive into the future. With the economic downturn affecting tourism operators everywhere, it's more important than ever for us to meet our customers' needs for fast, easy online booking.

Consumers are becoming increasingly web-savvy. The growth of online shopping websites like eBay and Amazon means they now expect to be able to book and pay for products and services at the click of a mouse. In fact, online travel booking is one of the fastest growing uses of the internet in Australia¹ while in Europe and North America, online booking already accounts for between 40 and 70 per cent of consumer travel turnover². However, the adoption of online booking by Australian tourism operators is comparatively low – less than 10 per cent of operators listed on visitvictoria.com have online booking.

At Tourism Victoria, we are committed to working with the Victorian tourism industry to accelerate the adoption of online booking. To help achieve this, we are supporting a new national platform for online booking called Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA). This will not only benefit individual operators, but also make for a stronger, more streamlined tourism industry that appeals to national and international travellers alike.

Topics covered in this brochure include:

- how online booking works and how it can benefit your business;
- how Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA) works and how it can help your business gain exposure across multiple tourism websites;
- how to implement an online booking system;
- the advantages of making your product bookable through visitvictoria.com

We hope this information will help you make an informed decision about whether online booking is right for you, and guide you through the next steps to getting your business online.

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¹ source: Nielsen/NetRatings 2008, ² source: Phocuswright 2009.

THE BASICS OF ONLINE BOOKING

Online booking makes it easy for your customers to book and pay for your product, and saves you valuable time in the process.

What is a 'real-time' online booking system?

A real-time online booking system is a simple piece of computer technology that allows your customers to instantly book and pay for your product over the internet, without any intervention on your part. Most online booking systems are very simple to install, and relatively cheap to run.

How will an online booking system benefit my business?

An online booking system will:

- Make it quick and easy for customers to view, book and pay for your product.
- Save you time and money in phone calls, emails, and manually managing all your bookings.
- If you're signed up to Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA; see pages 6&7), it will allow you to make your product bookable on multiple websites, meaning more exposure and more sales.

Did you know?

Sixty per cent of travellers say they book online when the product is available.

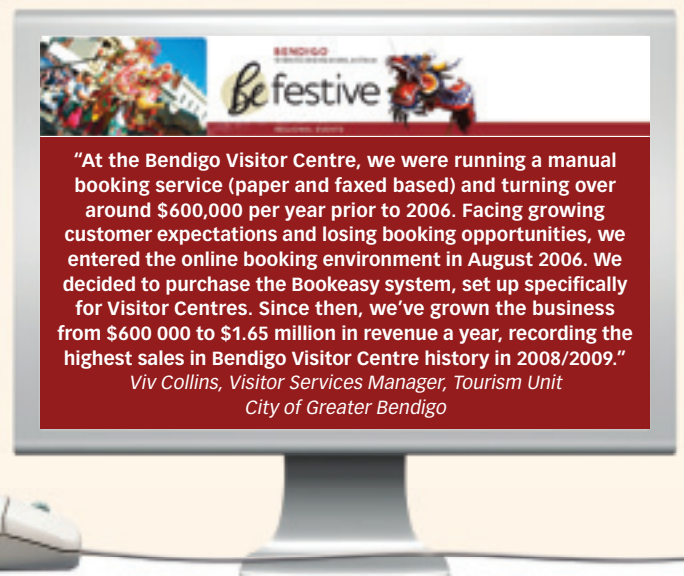
How does it work?

If you've ever booked air tickets online, then you'll be familiar with the online booking process – it's pretty much the same for most other tourism businesses and just as simple.

Here are the basic steps:

1. You enter the details of your inventory (that's all the accommodation and/or tickets you have to sell) into the system.
2. Customers view this inventory via your own website, or your distributors' websites (e.g. your local visitor information centre website) and search for available product.

3. Customers make bookings by simply clicking on the desired rooms and/or dates, and following the instructions.
4. Payment by credit card is automatically processed via a **secure** online merchant facility that can communicate directly with your booking system – money is transferred straight into your bank account.
5. Once payment is made and the booking confirmed, your inventory can be automatically updated across all websites where your product is sold.





Did you know?

Tourism Victoria in partnership with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse and the other Australian national, state and territory tourism bodies have developed the Online Tourism e-kit. This series of helpful tutorials are available for download at tourism.vic.gov.au.

CAN YOU AFFORD NOT TO HAVE ONLINE BOOKING?

Imagine you run the Ocean Views Luxury B&B in Blairgowrie, and Laura, a busy Sydney executive, is travelling to Melbourne in a few days for a conference. On the spur of the moment, she decides to stay on a few more days to explore the region, so she hops on the internet at 10.30pm to search for accommodation. Straight away she comes across your website and decides your romantic B&B sounds perfect, but just as she's about to book and pay with her credit card, she discovers there's no real-time online booking function. Laura doesn't have time to call you up tomorrow – she wants a booking confirmed and paid for tonight – so she hurriedly clicks back to the search results and selects the website of one of your competitors. Lucky for Laura, your competitor does have real-time online booking and, in a matter of minutes, she checks availability and cost, makes her desired booking and pays for it securely with her credit card.

Not so lucky for you, though – you've just missed a sale without even knowing it!



TOURISM EXCHANGE AUSTRALIA

Tourism Exchange Australia (TXA) makes it easy to sell your accommodation, tours and tickets on multiple travel websites.

What is TXA?

TXA is an open booking exchange that takes inventory and pricing from your online booking system and distributes it across many travel websites. It also automatically updates your inventory every time someone makes a booking.

Who's behind TXA?

TXA is a joint initiative of the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) and Australian technology company VCubed (V3) Pty Ltd.

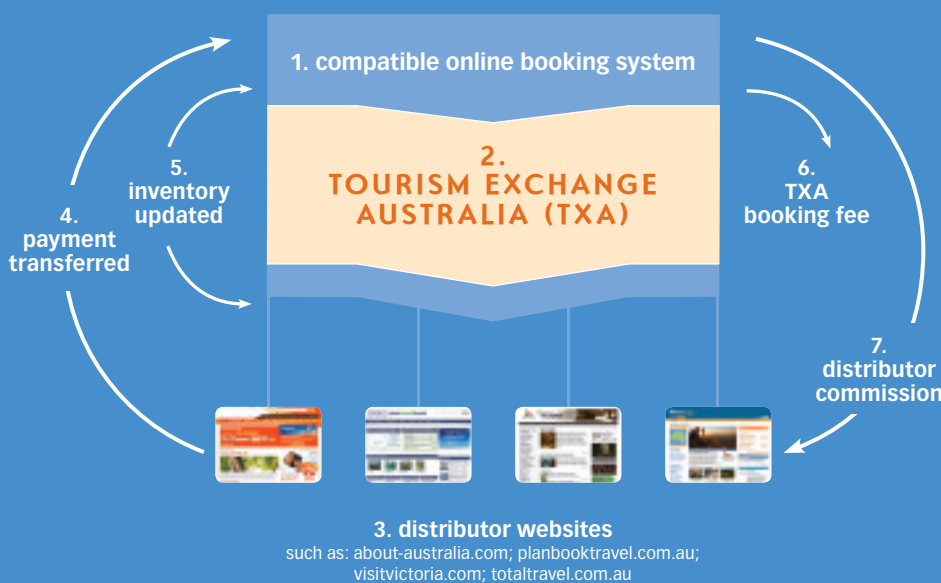


How does TXA work?

If you have an ATDW listing via visitvictoria.com and are running a compatible online booking system, by joining TXA you'll make all the information stored on your system (like rates and inventory) available to TXA distributors. This means customers can view and book your product from not just your own website, but many other travel websites as well.

What is a TXA distributor?

A TXA distributor is a third-party tourism website that on-sells Australian tourism products and services, such as events, accommodation and tours. Well-known examples include visitvictoria.com, about-australia.com and planbooktravel.com.au. TXA only partners with reputable distributors.



1. Jo owns the Ocean Views Luxury B&B in Blairgowrie. She installs an online booking system, into which she enters all her inventory (i.e. availability and pricing).
2. TXA gathers this information and sends it on to Jo's chosen distributor websites.
3. A customer visits one of the distributor websites, searching for accommodation in Blairgowrie. He finds Jo's listing, checks availability, then books and pays online by credit card.
4. Payment is automatically transferred to Jo's bank account via her online merchant facility and the booking is confirmed.
5. TXA automatically updates the inventory stored on Jo's online booking system, and on each distributor website, so it's ready for the next customer.
6. A 2.8 per cent booking fee is automatically deducted from Jo's bank account and transferred to TXA.
7. If a commission is charged by the distributor, it is also deducted from Jo's bank account (usually at the end of the month). Commission fees will vary depending on the distributor.

How will joining TXA help my business?

Signing up to TXA will help your business in two important ways:

It exposes your product to more people:

It's important to understand that travellers don't just go to individual tourism operators' websites to book accommodation or tours – they also like to search various distributor websites that allow them to easily compare different options.

By making your product bookable across many travel websites, TXA can significantly increase your marketability.

It saves you time:

If your product is already bookable on multiple websites, you'll know how complicated and time consuming it is keeping your inventory up to date. Every time a customer makes a booking, you need to log into each website individually and update your inventory accordingly. TXA has been specially designed to eliminate this problem by automatically updating your rates and availability – simultaneously and in real time – across all your distributors' websites.

How do I get my business on TXA?

Getting your business on TXA requires two simple steps:

1. *Register with ATDW:* If you're listed on visitvictoria.com, you will automatically be registered. If not, you can sign up for a listing on visitvictoria.com by calling our support desk on 1300 306 366 or register online at my.visitvictoria.com.

2. *Install an online booking system that's compatible with TXA:* Many off-the-shelf online booking systems are compatible with TXA, and more and more are being integrated every day. To date, compatible systems include *RMS, AOT, Discover Australia, frontdesk, Jewell Reservations Systems, Myfidelio, Respax and Seatem*. For the most recent list, visit the TXA website at atdw.com.au/tourism_exchange_australia.asp.

Once these two elements are in place, all you need to do is register with TXA. Call V3 on 1300 266 582 to find out more.

How much does it cost?

In Victoria, to list on the ATDW via visitvictoria.com costs up to \$250 including GST, per year.

To register with TXA is free, but you will be charged a 2.8 per cent booking fee on every successful online booking made through the system.

What about 'distribution commissions'?

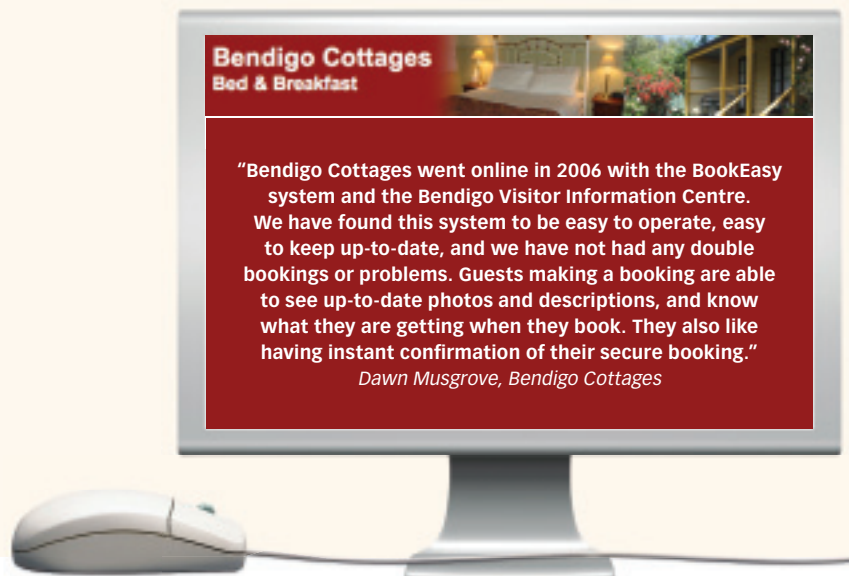
Most TXA distributors charge a commission for bookings made through their websites, which varies. TXA enables you to select which distributors can on-sell your product, so if you're not happy with a particular distributor's commission, you can simply opt out of their website.

What about over-bookings?

By automatically updating your availability across all your distributor websites – simultaneously and in real time – TXA eliminates the risk of over-bookings.

Want to know more?

To find out more about the benefits of TXA, how it works and what you need to do to sign up, please call 1300 306 366 or visit tourism.vic.gov.au.



SETTING UP AN ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEM

Setting up an online booking system should be simple and cost-effective – just make sure you do your homework.

How do I choose an online booking system?

There are many online booking systems on the market, all with different capabilities. Some are designed specifically for accommodation businesses, some for tours and events, and some for both.

When choosing an online booking system that's right for your business, you should:

Assess your needs:

Put together a checklist covering the kinds of things you'd like the system to do for you. A good example checklist can be found in Tutorial 34 on the Online Tourism e-kit. A link to the Online Tourism e-kit is available at tourism.vic.gov.au.

Ask for advice:

Ask your regional tourism organisation or local visitor information centre to recommend a system. Which system do they use? Are there any features you should absolutely get?

Review each system:

Once you've made a shortlist of suitable booking systems, compare each system in terms of cost, the level of support offered, and the reputation of the company. If you're planning to join TXA, it's also important to make sure the system can be integrated with TXA technology (visit the website at atdw.com.au/tourism_exchange_australia.asp). A good comparison of

booking systems can be found in Tutorial 35 on the Online Tourism e-kit. A link to the Online Tourism e-kit is available at tourism.vic.gov.au.

What equipment do I need?

If you already have a computer and internet connection, you don't need to buy any new hardware – all online booking systems can be run from your computer or directly online.

However, you will need to set up an online merchant facility so that credit card payments can be securely transferred to your bank account. If you're planning to join TXA, ask them to recommend one for you – they have negotiated some very competitive deals with a number of

banks. For more information call V3 on 1300 266 582.

Want to know more?

To find out more about the different online booking systems available, and how much they cost, go to the Online Tourism e-kit. A link to the Online Tourism e-kit is available at tourism.vic.gov.au.



BOOKING ON VISITVICTORIA.COM

Tourism Victoria has added TXA-powered online booking to its popular visitvictoria.com website. Signing up could mean significant benefits for your business.

How do I make my product bookable on visitvictoria.com?

If you're already listed on visitvictoria.com, all you need to do is sign up to TXA and 'opt in' to having your product sold through this channel.

If you're not listed on visitvictoria.com, call our support desk on 1300 306 366.

How much does it cost?

A product listing on visitvictoria.com costs up to \$250 including GST, per year but the site doesn't charge any distribution commission. You only pay the 2.8 per cent booking fee per successful booking as charged by TXA.

Do I have to join TXA to keep my listing on visitvictoria.com?

No. However, without TXA, you will not benefit from having live pricing and availability displayed alongside your product information.

You can still have a 'book now' button on your listing without joining TXA, but this will simply link back to your own booking website.

Want to know more?

To learn more about the benefits of listing on visitvictoria.com, or how signing up to TXA can add value to your existing visitvictoria.com listing, go to tourism.vic.gov.au or call the support desk on 1300 306 366.

Did you know?

In 2009, visitvictoria.com received approximately half a million visits per month!

(source: Google Analytics).

The left screenshot displays the 'Book accommodation online' section of the website. It features a search bar at the top and a table of listings. The table has columns for Name & Rating, Contact details, Price, Link to book, and Region. The listings include Musk Manor (5 stars), Nyamba Bed & Breakfast (5 stars), Tuki Retreat (3 stars), and Station House Daylesford (3 stars). Each listing has a 'BOOK NOW' button and a 'Default Confirmation' link.

Name & Rating	Contact details	Price	Link to book	Region
Musk Manor ★★★★★	10 School Rd Preston VIC 3042 03 9449 4034 View website Show on a map	\$150.00 to \$1,200.00	BOOK NOW Default Confirmation	Deerfield & the Pheasant Ranges
Nyamba Bed & Breakfast ★★★★★	20-22 Fyfe Ln Kyeamba VIC 3444 03 5422 3581 View website Show on a map	\$170.00 to \$800.00	BOOK NOW Default Confirmation	Deerfield & the Pheasant Ranges
Tuki Retreat ★★★	Stony Hill Strathairn VIC 3364 03 5243 6233 View website Show on a map	\$200.00 to \$400.00	BOOK NOW Default Confirmation	Deerfield & the Pheasant Ranges
Station House Daylesford ★★★	23 Roper St Daylesford VIC 3462 03 5422 3581	\$70.00 to \$99.00	BOOK NOW	Deerfield & the Pheasant Ranges

The right screenshot shows a detailed view of the Nyamba Bed & Breakfast listing. It includes a large photo of the property, a map showing its location, and contact information: Address: 20-22 Fyfe Ln, Kyeamba VIC 3444, Phone: 03 5422 3581, Fax: 03 5422 3581. There is also a 'BOOK NOW' button and a 'Default Confirmation' link.

NEXT STEPS

For more detailed information on online booking, TXA and visitvictoria.com, visit the following websites to download some handy resources.

Tourism Victoria

Your window to tourism and travel industry news, advice and resources.

www.tourism.vic.gov.au

Tourism Exchange Australia

The official site for Tourism Exchange Australia with all the latest information available from this site.

www.atdw.com.au/tourism_exchange_australia.asp

Australian Tourism Data Warehouse

The ATDW system is a central distribution and storage facility for tourism industry product and destination information from all Australian States and Territories.

www.atdw.com.au

Online Tourism e-kit

The online tourism education e-kit is an initiative of the National Online Strategy Committee and is funded by all Australian State and Territory tourism offices. Follow the link from the home page to download parts or all of the e-kit.

www.tourism.vic.gov.au

Join our database

If you would like to receive regular email updates from Tourism Victoria please subscribe to our database by completing and mailing the postcard included in this brochure or visit tourism.vic.gov.au and register online.

Disclaimer:

The information presented here is of a general nature. The advantages of providing an on-line booking service to consumers are not guaranteed to bring about an increase in bookings for individual operators.

FAQs

I like speaking directly to my customers. Won't an online booking system compromise my customer service?

No. Research shows that 60 per cent of travellers prefer to book online when product is available⁴. In Europe and North America, where online booking is more established, online bookings account for between 40 and 70 per cent of consumer travel turnover⁵.

Customers clearly want the ease and convenience of booking online.

However, if certain customers prefer to ring up and book in person, you can still make that option available to them. An online booking system is simply an alternative booking option that adds value to your business.

Will having online booking increase the risk of over-bookings?

If you're signed up to TXA, there is no risk of over-bookings. TXA automatically updates your inventory across all your distributor websites – simultaneously and in real time – so customers only ever see accurate availability.

Don't I need expensive new equipment to set up an online booking system?

No. If you already have a computer and internet connection, you don't need to buy any new hardware – all online booking systems can be run from your computer or directly online.

What are "distribution commissions"?

Most tourism distributors charge a commission for bookings made through their websites. These can vary considerably from distributor to distributor. If you're signed up to TXA, you get to select who can on-sell your product, so if you're not happy with a particular distributor's commission, you can simply opt out of their website.

Where do my visitvictoria listing fees go?

Your listing fee on visitvictoria.com goes straight back to your regional tourism board to help market your region. The 2.8% booking fee goes towards the cost of operating TXA.



⁴ source: Australian Tourism Data Warehouse, 2008; ⁵ source: International Visitor Survey 2008.

In 2008, 34% of interstate overnight leisure visitors to Victoria booked their accommodation online.

Source: National Visitors Survey,
Tourism Research Australia, Canberra, 2008

TOURISM VICTORIA

Online support desk 1300 306 366

