Online Booking Systems: Accommodation Vendor Selection Guide
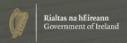
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1. Introduction

The EU Just Transition Digital Transformation programme aims to support the activation of direct online bookings and integrated third party distribution for accommodation providers, by activating an online booking system through the Booking Systems and Distribution workstream.

While an online booking system enables bookings to be made directly on your website, a 'connected' system can also transform your business in other ways. It can make your operations more efficient by streamlining or automating functions such as resource management, payments and refunds, or customer communications. And by bringing all of your sales and customer data together into one set of reports, it can help you monitor your performance and make informed decisions about your marketing and distribution.

With so many booking systems out there, choosing the one that's right for you can seem daunting. But this is an important decision and it's worth taking some time to look at your needs and the options available — so you can make an informed and well-considered choice.

Choosing a proven system from an established vendor allows you to benefit from the experience of specialist software developers and the combined investment of hundreds or even thousands of accommodation providers.

This document is intended to help you take your first steps towards selecting and activating an online booking system that meets the unique requirements of your business. It introduces some of the essential features that all accommodation providers are likely to require and provides lists of vendors whose software has been approved for activation as part of the EU Just Transition Digital Transformation programme.

Your choice of system will ultimately be based on your requirements, on how you intend to distribute your product, and on how you run your operations or reporting. You will need to identify the particular features that your business needs and conduct your own research to determine which system might be the best fit for you. Throughout this process, you will be able to draw on support provided by your Project Consultant.

2. Essential Criteria

In order to be eligible for support through our programme, a system should include certain **essential** criteria**.** These are features that accommodation providers are likely to need in 2024 - such as product information management, online bookings and payments, booking confirmation emails, and sales reporting. We have provided a list of these essential features below.

As part of the EU Just Transition Digital Transformation programme, we work with booking system vendors to determine whether their systems include these essential features.
Note that your requirements may be more sophisticated than the minimum features defined in this section - and you may also need your system to support a number of **situational** features such as those outlined in section 3.

Essential Feature	Description
'Product Information Management' (PIM)	Upload information about your accommodation products and allocations (including room types, descriptions, and prices).
Payment gateway (online payments)	Process payment transactions between you as the 'merchant' and your customers. Your platform should be capable of securely capturing and managing customer payment details and processing payments or refunds.
Website Integration	Allow visitors to your website to book your accommodation through a web browser. You (or your website developers) should be able to integrate this functionality with your website via methods such as booking 'widgets' or iFrames.
Channel Manager	Establish secure, automated connections to 3rd party resellers via integrated 'channel manager' software.
Customer Details	Stores information about customers who book through your system, such as their names, addresses, or email addresses.
Email Confirmations	Allows you to communicate with customers who book directly with you — e.g. to send automated booking confirmation emails when a customer has completed a booking through your website, or to send stay reminders or additional services prompts.
Reporting	Enables you to report the number of bookings, and revenue broken down by dimensions such as date, room type, number of guests and type, and booking channel (e.g. 'online').
Google Analytics integration	Allows anonymised data about online bookings (or other online transactions) to be shared with Google Analytics 4 via ecommerce tracking methods.

Essential Feature	Description
Help desk support	Includes direct support by 'help desk' staff to help you get set up on the system, onboard your products, and address initial technical issues when activating or integrating the system — e.g. when adding booking widgets to your website.
Accessibility	Meets internationally agreed standards (min. WCAG 2.1 Level A compliance) for website display and development.
Privacy	The system captures, processes, and stores customer information in compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the GDPR Compliance Statement and/or Privacy Policy is published online.

3. Situational Features

Depending on your specific requirements, you'll likely need your system to offer more than just the essential features listed in the previous section.

We refer to these as **situational** features — since they are specific to you and may or may not be required depending on your particular situation. Please bear in mind that these features may or may not be relevant to you and this is not an exhaustive list.

Given that every system should include all of the **essential** criteria, these **situational** features will likely play an important role in your decision about which system is right for your business.

Ultimately, you will need to decide which situational features you can or can't operate without - or which ones may help your operations run just a bit more smoothly. Please make sure you understand what each feature is and what it could do for you before flagging it as 'not required' or just 'nice to have'. If in doubt, please ask the booking system vendor for more information, or contact your Project Consultant.

Situational Feature	Description
Property Management System Integration	While you may already have a Property Management System in place, some online booking systems provide an integrated Property Management System or the ability to integrate with pre-existing Property Management Systems. Some key features of a Property Management System include:

Situational Feature	Description
	• Online check in and check out • Yield Management • Guest Communication • Room allotment • Room category management • F&B management
Website builder	Some booking systems also provide services for building, managing and maintaining your website.
Add-ons / Dynamic packaging	Include other products as add-ons for guests to customise their stay, such as extra services, retail, food and beverage.
Restrictions for Yield Management	This allows you to add restrictions on the number of rooms that can be booked at a specific rate. It can also allow you to apply rules so rates are not incorrectly assigned.
Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	Manage detailed information about your customers (including their past booking behaviour), define customer segments, analyse customer behaviour, and send personalised or targeted communications. Some systems include built-in modules, while others may be integrated with specialised CRM systems.
Promotional codes	Create custom discount codes that guests can redeem when booking direct. Promotional codes for specified group bookings to ensure same rates are applied.
Memberships	Sell memberships and offer different pricing or other benefits to members when booking online or interacting with you during their visit.
Gift Vouchers	Sell vouchers that customers can purchase to give as gifts to friends or families. Gift vouchers can also provide an attractive alternative to refunds in case of cancellations.
Continuing Support	Support is one of the most important factors that will determine how satisfied you are with your booking system — especially if you're new to online bookings or have complex requirements. Some vendors may point you to their online knowledgebase, offer support only during (their) business hours, or charge extra for one-on-one sessions. You will need to check the level of support offered by your vendor and ensure it is adequate to your needs.

4. List of Online Booking Systems

The table below lists the vendors whose systems already meet *all* of our essential criteria.

This list constitutes an open vendor panel for the Just Transition Digital Transformation programme.

This panel of approved vendors has been established to support and ensure the effective delivery of the Booking Systems and Distribution workstream. Participants will be supplied with a list of these vendors (below) and are required to select a vendor from the below list when procuring the services of a Booking System (subject to the below).

Applicants who wish to engage a vendor who is not a member of the panel should ensure that those vendors are admitted to the panel (subject to meeting the qualifying criteria) prior to engaging them to complete work as part of the EU Just Transition Digital Transformation programme. A vendor may apply to join the vendor panel by emailing JustTransition.Digital@failteireland.ie

Important Note: All information provided below is as supplied to us by the relevant vendors. Inclusion on this list does not constitute an endorsement of these systems by Fáilte Ireland and/or the EU Just Transition Digital Transformation programme. You are solely responsible for conducting your own research, following public procurement guidelines, choosing a system that meets your specific requirements, and selecting a vendor. Furthermore, you are solely responsible for discharging the vendor's fees. Grant payments in respect of the vendor's services/fees will be made in accordance with the scheme guidelines and/or the Investment Grant Agreement, based on eligible expenditure actually incurred and paid by you as the grantee.

Vendor	Vendor Website	Pricing Model
Accubook (Guestdiary)	Guestdiary.com	Subscription per month, based on number of rooms + commission
Aro	www.arodigitalstrategy.com	Bespoke per customer
Avvio / Allora	allora.ai	Bespoke per customer
Bookassist	Bookassist.org	Commission based with minimum flat fee (minimum of 25 rooms required)
Eviivo	eviivo.com	Subscription per month/annual, based on number of rooms
Little Hotelier	littlehotelier.com	Subscription per month, based on number of rooms
Mews	mews.com	Subscription per month/annual
Netaffinity	netaffinity.com	Commission with minimum flat fee
Room Racoon	roomraccoon.co.uk	Subscription per month/annual
Siteminder	siteminder.com	Subscription per month/annual, based on number of rooms
Vertical Booking	verticalbooking.com	Subscription - annual, based on number of rooms

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Fáilte Ireland