BÓKUN

The guide you need to choose the right tour and activity operator software in 2023

Content

Author's note

On behalf of Bókun, I would like to personally congratulate you in taking the first steps into understanding how to effectively choose the right online management booking solution for you and your tour business. Here at Bókun, we know choosing the best solution can be a difficult task and that's why we wrote this guide: to give you the best-in-class tips when choosing an online booking system.

There are a number of factors to consider, such as cost, options available in the market, your company's current and future needs, goals, and the impact this piece of tech can have on your wider team. If you are still using manual processes, spreadsheets or outdated softwares that complicate your life, it may be the time to update your systems and operations.

Finding the best tour operator software can completely change the way your travel business operates and grows. It can easily save you vital time, allowing you to focus on what matters most: providing the best experiences for your customers and generating more revenue for your business.

We know that great tour booking systems are at the heart of every successful travel business. With tourism having made such a comeback in 2022, the question now is, does your company have the essential technology to meet the market demands and stay ahead of the competition in 2023?

Changing your booking system in the early stages of your tour business is easier, but the more established your company is, the more time and training might be required to make the switch to a new booking system.

So how do you know which online booking management system is the right one for your tour business? Here's your ultimate guide to help you choose the right online booking management system to take your business from surviving to thriving in 2023 and beyond.

Ioana Gaicea

Principal Marketing Manager

What is an online management booking system?

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The typical traveller today is not just researching about their trip online, but also preferring to book online, many times without any human interaction simply through their mobile devices or a website.

With [72% of travel sales](#) expected to be predominantly made online by 2025, having an online presence is clearly just the first step. The real opportunity lies in converting website visits into bookings and providing a smooth customer booking experience via a reservation system.

In nutshell, an online booking management system is a piece of tech and a reservation system that makes it much simpler for travellers to book and pay for your tours and activities online. Helping you meet them exactly where they are in their buying journey.

The more advanced (and ideal) solutions enable your tour business to do so much more: from streamlining processes and reducing admin work, to accurate reporting and getting you connected to thousands of resellers so you can easily boost revenue and sales.

The purpose of an online management booking system

If you are not familiar or using one already, we're sure you wondered at least once, 'Do I really need an online booking system? My guests book their experiences through the phone or via email and it works just fine'. If that's the case, then it's time to step into 2023 and understand where and how your travellers are booking these days.

If Millennials and Gen-Zs are part of your target audience, you might want to reconsider how to best attract them and most importantly how to get them to book with you. A phone call might not cut it.

In 2023 the consumption of social media will continue to be on the rise especially for the travel industry. Every week, 1M+ travel-related hashtags are searched on Instagram with over 37% of travellers using social media for travel inspiration. What does this mean for you? That you need to be online and discoverable to capture the demand. And an online booking management system will help with that.

Remember:

The key purpose of an online booking system is to help you capture new demand with the ultimate objective of bringing more bookings for your tour business. Here are some of our favourite advantages of having a reservation system:

- Streamline operation processes to make your life easier and reduce admin work.
- Deliver fantastic user experience for all your travellers. This will make them come back and book more with you in the future.
- Meet your guests where they're currently booking and capture the demand effortlessly with 24/7 online booking.
- Start building new revenue streams by connecting to numerous new partners.
- Understand how your business is performing so that you know what improvements need to be made to drive more bookings.

What features should I look for?

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The popularity of online booking management systems came to rise due to the increased availability of technology and the rapid growth in usage of mobile applications, which completely transformed the way travellers book experiences and activities. We want everything available at our fingertips.

Here are six key features that a booking software should have in 2023:

1. Your system should be responsive and easy to use

Whether you're a one-man business or a large enterprise you want a booking system that works with you, not against you. Take it from us: a user-friendly solution that is easy to use is even easier to integrate into your existing business operations.

It's important to choose a software that makes the entire booking process as smooth as possible for travellers. Your booking system should not add additional steps or overly complicate the customer journey, but rather provide an easy and seamless experience from start to finish.

2. Tools management and integrations

One of the key purposes of an online booking management is to improve the customer journey and make your life as a tour and activity operator much simpler. How? By effectively automating manual tasks and streamlining management functions, making them faster and more efficient.

When choosing your tour operator software, it's important to consider how it fits into your existing workflow and whether it integrates with other tools you already use.

The more customisable your software solution is, the better. Bókun can easily automate your processes so you increase efficiency in your operations:
- **Automatic communication with your customers** – instant confirmations, reminders, etc
- **The Bókun Mobile app** – your on-the-go portal.
- **Real-time availability** – never miss a beat again. Manage and keep track of your inventory at a single glance with Bókun serving as the master source of information.

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3. Online booking widgets – is your website bookable 24/7?

With the right online booking management system you will have access to a variety of booking widgets in order to provide a seamless booking experience and sell more. The core feature of an efficient booking tool is to ensure the online process has clear paths. You will need visible call-to-action (CTA) buttons.

Ideally you want to choose a platform that offers customisable booking widgets that can merge smoothly with your existing website. This shouldn't be too complicated and shouldn't require any coding either.

Bókun's Booking Widgets are the easiest way to make any website instantly bookable. If you have a website but can't take bookings online, this could help you capture bookings 24/7. Choose from several different options like booking buttons, product lists and booking calendars, easily generate the embed code and add it to your website.

4. The ability to unlock new revenue streams

You will want a booking system that can connect with other travel partners so you can be both a supplier and a reseller. Think about it this way: you can choose to offer your products up for others to sell or find complimentary products to offer alongside your own existing products.

You'll be unlocking new revenue streams and providing tailored experiences to your customers. The more organisations seek to sell your tours, the more tours you're going to sell.

With Bókun's largest B2B Marketplace you can easily connect to thousands of partners, such as: Musement, HotelBeds, Civitatis, Klook (and many more) that are hungry to sell tours and activities like yours. This means you will increase distribution and capitalise on your traffic by selling additional combo products on your website for a commission.

Bókun's Marketplace also enables smooth communication with your chosen partners so that you can easily work out contract details and start selling straight away.
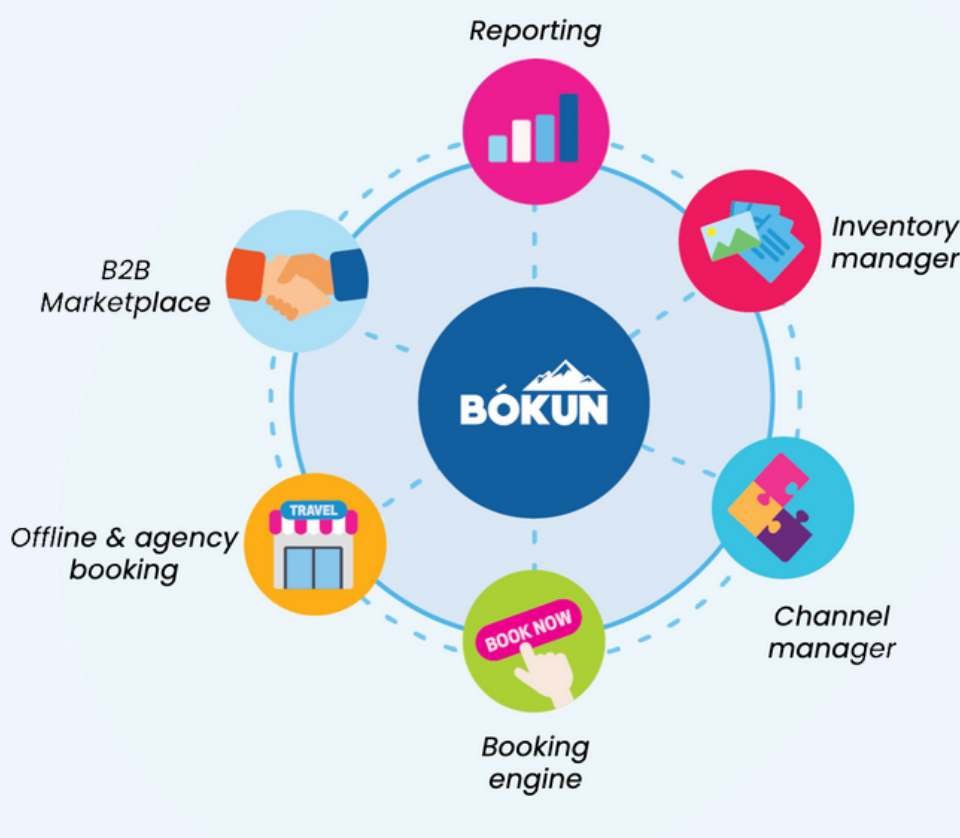
And let's not forget about OTAs. With Bókun you can connect and sell on all major Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), such as GetYourGuide, Tripadvisor, Expedia, Viator and many more.

5. Real-time availability and inventory management

A reservation system isn't only about adding an online booking function. You get to automate all booking-related tasks to run in the background. Even the payments can be processed or recorded down for any follow-up to save you lots of administrative headaches.

With Bókun's Channel Manager, you can distribute up-to-date inventory across multiple online sales channels automatically. Instead of logging on to every single channel to make changes, you update the product information on a single portal and distribute the changes everywhere in real-time.

This way, just like customers from any other channels, your website visitors can access accurate availability and not be disappointed with over-bookings.

6. Streamlined dashboard for reporting and sales

All your guest bookings and data should be easily available to you in your own dashboard in real-time. Ditch the spreadsheets with the right online booking management system and have smoothly synced data that for better informed decisions.

Whether you want to gather details about guests' allergies or assign staff members or access your daily manifest or produce in-depth reports about where, when, and how your guests are booking, your chosen online booking software should have the capabilities of capturing and generating the essential data you need to make your business powerful.

That's where Bókun comes in handy. You are able to easily see how well your business is doing. We have a wide array of powerful reports so you can track booking revenue, which channels are performing the best and which products are your top sellers.

The ultimate checklist to choosing the right solution

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Understand your business's needs and goals

Start by listing down all the reasons why your tour company might need a booking management system. Is it to grow sales, increase efficiency, automate processes, or take your business global?

Work with your team to define what the long-term objectives are and how you can achieve them with a booking management system. This will help put things into perspective and identify what your current pain points are.

Pricing and commitment

List down some non-negotiables: what are the features you need, what are the sign-up terms you absolutely will not agree to, and most importantly does it meet you available budget?

There are multiple reservation systems in the market that cater to different types, sizes, and their specific needs. You can find online booking solutions that cost almost nothing to some that could make you spend thousands of dollars.

At $49/month +1.5% fee for bookings, with Bókun Pro you will find everything you need to run and grow your business, for a very competitive price. Invest into a solution that helps you:
- sell directly online
- boost your reach via Google, online travel agencies and other resellers
- build new revenue streams, and
- increase operational efficiency.

Unique to Bókun: if you're intending to sell new tours and activities on Viator, a Bókun Pro subscription entitles you to **4 FREE** listing checks on Viator every month saving you $116.

Do your research

Once you've understood what your business's needs are, it's time to look at what options available in the market best match those. Considering the market size and just how many solutions are available, we recommend staying focused on 2-3 booking systems to avoid confusion.

Start your research by visiting their websites, social media pages, review customer testimonials, and thoroughly read through all of the pros and cons. Sites like Capterra or G2 can be very helpful as you can read verified reviews from numerous users.

Arival also offers depth insights into the best tour and activity operator solutions and Bókun has been selected as one of the best online management booking systems available in the market right now.

Start with a free trial or book in a demo

A free trial or a live demo can be great ways to get a sense of the features and capabilities of your chosen solution, as well as the ease of use and overall experience.

There are different trialling periods available based on the software you choose. This is our recommended option as you can easily experience the chosen solution first-hand and understand whether this is the right option for your business with no strings attached – as you can cancel your trial free of charge anytime.

A live demo can be extremely helpful as well as you get a guided overview of the product, and you can ask any questions you may have and then decide whether it's worth signing up for a trial.

Tip: When requesting a product demonstration, make sure to include all the relevant stakeholders, this way you ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the product and its potential benefits.

Don't forget about customer support

Responsiveness and great customer support are important factors when evaluating a tour software provider. The speed and quality of the support provided can have a significant impact on the overall user experience and most importantly the success of the implementation in your business.

A good way to gauge a software provider's responsiveness and support is to pay attention to their communication during the trialling or demonstration process. If they respond quickly and provide clear and detailed answers to your questions, that's a good sign that they will be responsive and supportive once you've made a purchase.

You can also check their customer support channels like email, phone and chat, to see how long they take to respond and if there is an option for an on-demand support.

From in-product guides, informative webinars, at Bókun we also have a detailed Help Center for step-by-step instructions that you can access anytime, and a dedicated team to answer your queries via chat.

Think when you should be implementing a tour and activity software

High season, when the business is busiest, is generally not the best time, as it can be challenging to find the time and resources to devote to the implementation process. The end of the high season, or usually the low season are often ideal times to implement a new booking system.

Additionally, it's also advisable to allow some extra time for testing and tweaking the system before the next high season. Having an efficient system can make a big difference in high seasons.
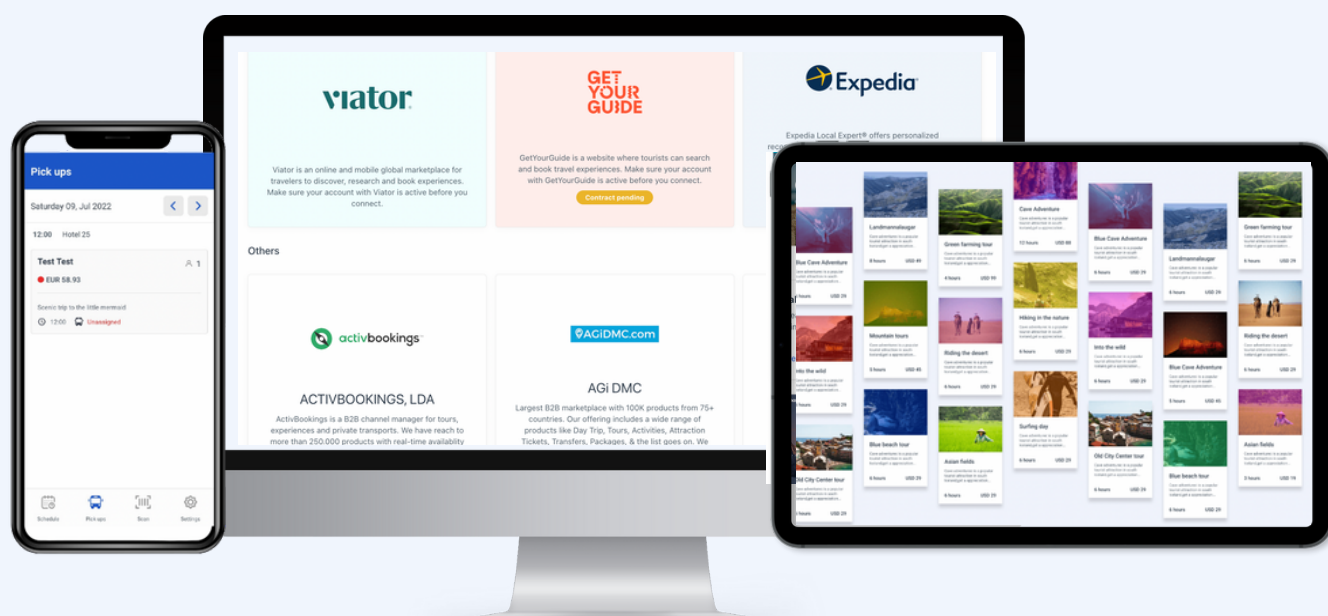
The Bókun solution

The Bókun solution

Investing in the right booking system is not an easy job, but once you have, it will make the world of difference. You will be able to reduce the amount of time you spend in the office dealing with admin tasks. Beyond that, you give your business the opportunity to grow by boosting bookings and revenue.

Regardless of the stage your tour business is, the team at Bókun is able to offer support and help to all operators. By using our ultimate guide to choosing the right tour and activity operator software, you'll be able to choose the best solution tailored to your business's needs and goals so that you are prepared for success in 2023 and beyond.

Ideally you will want a reservation system that can support your business now and in the future, instead of switching systems and redoing the setup all over again.

Look for a reservation system that is invested to help you grow beyond your day-to-day operations. It can be their product development, channels they connect with, additional good-to-have tools, partners and more.

At Bókun we continue to work on delivering the right tools to help operators scale in the long run. From improving OTA integrations, adding new Marketplace resellers and payment providers for online bookings, to app development and partnerships, our operators have plenty of opportunities to grow together with us.