



AITO APPLAUDS INVESTIGATION INTO ONLINE HOTEL BOOKING SITES

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AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators, www.aito.com) welcomes the investigation - announced 27th October, 2017 - to be undertaken by the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) into the trading practices of the online hotel booking sites.

Says Derek Moore, Chairman of AITO: "Such online hotel booking sites, largely controlled by American interests, have seen exponential growth over the last five years. They now control virtually the entire market in hotel reservations – it is estimated that **80% of all hotel bookings in Europe are made through these sites***. It seems that many online brands across Europe are in fact now owned by just two or three of the main US-controlled players.

"AITO looks forward to the CMA conducting a full investigation into their interrelated behaviour, and will be submitting its members' views on how their big-company trading practices affect both SMEs and consumers.

"This investigation should, of course, have been instigated several years ago, before these online reservation sites had gained such a high level of control over the market. There seemingly isn't a shack in the hotel world that is not featured by them.

"It is AITO's strong belief that, with power and market dominance, should come a commensurate level of responsibility. Such responsibility is notably absent here, which is very disappointing. We at AITO urge the CMA to ensure that these super-large brands take stock of what they are doing and rethink their modus operandi, taking on board the importance of shouldering responsibility for their actions. Additionally, the sheer lack of transparency is worrying and does not serve well either the travelling public, the hotels featured on these sites or, indeed, the American companies' UK-based competitors."

AITO (www.aito.com) is an alliance of 120 specialist holiday companies, established 42 years ago. All AITO members are required to offer full financial protection to their clients via the appropriate industry bonding and insurance schemes - in excess of current legal requirements - and all aim to deliver tourism benefits to the host destinations with which they work. All also abide by AITO's Quality Charter.

Expedia owns **Hotels.com, Trivago.com, Venere.com, HomeAway.com and Travelocity.com. The Priceline group owns **Booking.com, Kayak.com, Agoda.com, OwnersDirect.com and Cheapflights.com**. TripAdvisor owns **HolidayLettings**. Together, it is estimated that Expedia, Priceline and TripAdvisor (all American) control 80% of the European accommodation market.*

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Press: For further information on AITO, or to interview Derek Moore, Chairman of AITO, please call Travel PR on 020 8891 4440 or email r.milne@travelpr.co.uk or s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk - or, out of office hours, call Sue Ockwell on 07831 126 356.