

Unlock
Royal Britain

10 Day Tour from \$2199pp*

Highlights include:

- Touring majestic Windsor Castle
- Exploring Hampton Court Palace
- Relaxing seaside in Brighton
- Sightseeing in London, Portsmouth and Royal Tunbridge Wells

Unlock the
Flavors of Italy

11 Day Tour from \$2750pp*

Highlights include:

- Cooking lessons in Tuscany
- Regional olive oil tasting in Greve
- Dining at a local family winery
- Cruising along Venice's Grand Canal
- Sightseeing in Rome, Pisa and Florence

Unlock Madrid,
Seville & Barcelona

9 Day Tour from \$1999pp*

Highlights include:

- Exploring Plaza Mayor in Madrid
- Visiting Columbus' Tomb in Seville
- Private dining in a local hacienda
- Sightseeing in Madrid, Seville and Barcelona

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at leisure
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brand news

The Problem Solvers

As the competition heats up between travel sites, everyone's coming out with new booking, reviews, and rewards tools to win your trust—and transaction. But which ones make your life easier? **By Sean O'Neill**

Flash-Sale Clubs

THE PROBLEM: Sure, the discounts on sites like Jetsetter and LivingSocial are solid (50 percent off is common), but how good are the actual properties?

THE FIX: Incorporate real-world ratings. Last fall, TripAdvisor launched an invitation-only sale site, **SniqueAway**, that only promotes hotels with a minimum four-out-of-five-star TripAdvisor user rating. Each week, three new hotels are typically offered at discounts of up to 65 percent. A recent example: The Restoration on King, a luxury hotel in Charleston, S.C., had rooms at \$189 a night, up to 43 percent off regular rates.

Social Networking

THE PROBLEM: Reviews are only as useful as the users who generate them. And who *knows* who they are?

THE FIX: Amp up reviewer transparency. The 11-year-old travel community **IgoUgo** isn't new—and its 1 million user reviews don't come close to TripAdvisor's 35 million—but a new interface emphasizes trustworthiness. Reviews are written only by IgoUgo members (with clickable profiles) or come from larger online travel agents such as sister site Travelocity, which allows posts only by hotel guests, not anonymous commenters.

Customized Search

THE PROBLEM: You trust your friends' opinions on restaurants, hotels, shops, and more. So what are their favorites and how can you find them easily?

THE FIX: Enable like-minded linking. Four-month-old **Hotpot**, by Google, is a mapping tool that combines the best of Yelp, Facebook, and Foursquare. Rate the places you've recently visited on a scale of one to five, and then invite your friends to do the same. When you next trawl Google, the site uses your network as a filter, retrieving related results from the Web and putting the most relevant recommendations first.

Rewards

THE PROBLEM: It takes a gazillion points to cash in on a reward.

THE FIX: Add earning opportunities. By April, **Expedia** will have revamped its rewards program, making it one of the easiest to use we've seen. As before, users will earn a point for every dollar spent on hotel stays, redeemable with no blackout or expiration dates at 90 percent of the site's hotels. After the upgrade, travelers will be able to buy vouchers good for partial payment of a hotel stay; they'll also earn points when booking flights, which, oddly, you couldn't do before.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

*Prices shown are per person, land only, based on double occupancy. CST#2077132-20.