A Hotel's First Impression Passes Through a Platform Now Under Investigation

PREPARATION · SIGNALS · ACCESS · SPACES & MOVEMENT · OCTOBER 2026

In October the European Commission opened proceedings over scams and paid listings on Booking.com, and the Budget announced overnight levy powers for mayors.

PUBLIC BRIEF

5 MINUTE READ

What happened: a platform under investigation and a levy power with no rate.

In October two announcements reached the part of a stay a guest meets before arriving: how a hotel is listed, and what a night may cost. Neither had settled terms by the end of the month.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION / BOOKING.COM

On 21 October the European Commission opened formal proceedings to assess whether Booking.com may have breached the Digital Services Act. Booking.com has been a Very Large Online Platform since 25 April 2023. Opening proceedings does not prejudge the outcome, and the Commission says it may accept commitments from Booking.com.

SOURCES 1 AND 2

THE THREE AREAS UNDER EXAMINATION

Fraudulent listings and phishing scams are two of them. For phishing, the Commission will focus on how reservation and guest data is shared with accommodation providers and on the design of Booking.com's messaging service. The third is paid listings: providers can raise their visibility by paying a higher commission, and the Commission will examine whether users can clearly recognise these as advertisements.

SOURCES 1 AND 2

THE BUDGET / OVERNIGHT VISITOR LEVY

On 28 October the Budget announced powers for mayors and strategic authorities to introduce an overnight visitor levy. The speech did not set out a rate. Travelling for Business reports the chancellor saying it starts from 2028; The Caterer reports from next year. The speech did not address whether business stays would be exempt.

SOURCES 4 AND 5

VERIFIED PATTERN / Both announcements are about terms that are still open. Booking.com says it is co-operating fully with the Commission. The levy has a power and no rate.

SOURCES 3 TO 5

What was announced, and what remains open.

Three statements were made in October. Each one describes a stage, and none describes an outcome.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Announced formal proceedings · open: any finding, any commitment from Booking.com, and any deadline

BOOKING.COM

Stated full co-operation with the Commission · open: the outcome on paid listings, scams and data sharing

THE BUDGET

Announced a levy power for mayors · open: the rate, the start date and whether business stays are exempt

THE NEON LACE READ

A guest meets the listing before the lobby and the price before the room. In October the first was under investigation and the second had no figure. Neon Lace reads both as terms of arrival that were still being decided by someone other than the hotel.

WHAT IT MEANS

What this means for a hotel before the guest arrives.

Three readings, each limited to what the October sources state.

01 A hotel that appears on Booking.com is presented to guests through listing practices the Commission has said it will examine, including paid listings.

02 The Commission will look at how reservation and guest data is shared with accommodation providers, which places hotels inside the scam question as well as the platform.

03 A visitor levy adds a line to the cost of a night once a local authority sets a rate. No rate has been set, so there is no figure to quote.

WHAT TO WATCH NEXT

COMMISSION OUTCOME

Whether Booking.com offers commitments, or the Commission reaches a finding.

LEVY RATE AND START

Whether a rate is set, and which of the two reported start dates holds.

BUSINESS STAYS

Whether business stays are exempt from the levy, which the Budget speech did not address.

WHY IT MATTERS

Both October announcements concern what a guest meets before arriving. One sits in front of the Commission and the other has no rate. Neon Lace will follow both.

SELECTED SOURCES

Evidence behind this brief.

This is a public editorial reading, not a complete account of platform regulation or visitor levies. It follows two developments from October 2026.

1

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, PRESS CORNER

Commission to investigate how Booking.com combats scams and fraud under the Digital Services Act

Reference IP/26/2223, 21 October 2026

2

PPC LAND

Booking.com faces EU probe over scams and paid listings not labelled as ads

ppc.land/booking-com-faces-eu-probe-over-scams-and-paid-listings-not-labelled-as-ads/

3

TRAVEL WEEKLY

Booking.com faces in-depth Brussels probe

travelweekly.co.uk/news/bookingcom-faces-in-depth-brussels-probe

4

TRAVELLING FOR BUSINESS

Budget 2026: overnight visitor levy powers and business travel

travellingforbusiness.co.uk/news/visitor-levy-mileage-rate-business-travel-budget/

5

THE CATERER

What the 2026 Budget means for hospitality

thecaterer.com/news/what-does-the-2026-budget-mean-for-hospitality

WHAT TO REMEMBER

Opening proceedings does not prejudge the outcome. The levy has a power and no rate.

NEON LACE

Perspective, before it becomes opinion.

Market Intelligence Brief / Preparation · Signals · Access · Spaces & Movement / October 2026

A concise public reading of what changed, why it matters and what Neon Lace is watching next.