

Google launches 'Hotel Finder'

WASHINGTON, USA: Google, which purchased a leading flight software company earlier this year, has launched a new tool for finding hotels.

Hotel Finder is an "experimental search tool" designed to help users locate and book hotels, Google software engineer Andrew McCarthy said in a blog post.

Hotel Finder, which is restricted to the United States for now, lets a user refine their choice by geographic area using Google Maps and select hotels using various criteria including price, the number of stars and user ratings.

Users can create a "shortlist" of options before deciding to book a hotel directly or through online companies such as Priceline, Travelocity, Expedia or Hotels.com.

Hotel Finder is the latest foray by the Mountain View, California-based Google into the travel sector.

In April, the US Justice Department gave the green light to Google's US\$700 million purchase of flight data company ITA Software.

The Justice Department's anti-trust division, however, extracted a number of concessions from Google and imposed conditions on the Internet search giant to allow the acquisition to go ahead.

Several online travel sites, including Expedia, Kayak and Travelocity, had sought to block the Google-ITA deal, claiming it would give Google too much control over the lucrative online travel market and lead to high prices.

Under the settlement with the Justice Department, Google notably agreed to let ITA customers extend their contracts into 2016.

Google has said the ITA acquisition will help it create new tools that will make it easier for consumers to search for travel, compare flight options and prices and drive more customers to online travel agencies.

Source: AFP