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Library Hi Tech News
Mobile app recommendations: travel apps
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Mobile app recommendations: travel apps

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LHTN's Guide to the Best Mobile Apps on Travel

Summer is a time when many people take the chance to escape on a much-needed vacation. As a librarian, whether you work in a public or academic institution, chances are you will be asked at one point or another where the travel books in your library are located. There is always the possibility that the travel books in need may already be checked out or that the patron will not have time to wait for an interlibrary loan request to arrive.

Planning a trip, from deciding where to go, where to stay and what to do, can be a simultaneously stressing and thrilling decision-making process. Whether someone is planning a trip to a familiar location or to a place they never imagined visiting, there are numerous mobile apps that can aid the most nascent to the most experienced traveler. In addition to including up-to-date travel guide books in library collections, librarians can also further assist their patrons with travel needs by recommending mobile travel apps. The following is a selection of suggested mobile travel apps to help meet the needs of your patron travelers:

Air BnB (Android and iOS)

Instead of staying in a boring hotel, why not make yourself at home and stay with residents of the city you are visiting. More and more choices are available, you see where locations are listed on a map, find out full information on accommodations with pictures and receive information about the house and price. Most important is that you can read reviews of others that have stayed there (and you are reviewed too by the host!) so there are less chances for surprises. The advantage of staying with a city resident is the guidance you will receive on the best places to visit, places to eat, places off the traditional tourist tracks and at the same time, hopefully make new friends.

Google Flights (Android and iOS)

A fairly simple, user-friendly app for flight searching. Search for one-way, round-trip, and multi-city destination flights. It is possible to also filter results based on various criteria such as price, stops, departure time, return time, flight duration, layover, airports and airlines. The Google Flights app is perhaps best for someone who has a specific location and time frame in mind for travel. However, if you need some time to compare your options, the app saves your search history, making it easy to review possible flight itineraries at a later date.

Hopper (Android and iOS)

Predicts price fares for flights. A color-coded calendar enables users to see when flights are at their lowest and highest fare. For those who have some flexibility when traveling, this particular feature gives a quick-glimpse sense of when flights are the most affordable. In addition, users can "watch flights" to track whether flight fees will increase or decrease. Once you start watching a trip, you will be notified of any price changes, as well as receive notifications for when you should book for the best fare.

While this app is quite useful, it should be noted that not all airlines share their data with Hopper, including Delta and Southwest Airlines. The company, however, notes that they are looking into building more relationships with other carriers to increase their coverage. For those who currently tend to fly United or American Airlines, the app provides a free, no-stress way to monitor flight fares and hopefully snag a great deal. Some airlines like United allow you to lock in a fare for up to a week for a nominal fee.

Kayak and kayak my trips (Android and iOS)

Kayak is an all-inclusive travel app that covers each step of the travel-planning process from finding flights, booking car rentals and hotels, tracking flight status, planning vacation activities, to building and storing an itinerary. One of the most brilliant aspects of the Kayak app is the ability to browse possible destinations on an easy-to-navigate map. This feature is ideal for the traveler(s) who are interested in exploring a variety of possible destinations. Further, it can help those working within a narrow price range see what locations are most in that specific budget. It is also possible to set a price alert for flights.

TravelZoo (Android and iOS)

TravelZoo compiles vacation packages from various sources, making it easy to browse through them on your mobile device. Vacation deals are grouped based on weekly popularity ("Top 20"), as well as general destination or themed trip reason (for example: "Asia and South Pacific" or "Golf & Ski"). For those who do not have a long leeway for travel planning or like a little spontaneity in their lives, TravelZoo also provides last-minute hotel and flight deals.

In addition, app users can choose a specific edition of the service to receive tailored travel deals and languages. Options include: USA, UK, Germany, France, Canada, Spain, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia and China. There, at this time, are no options for travelers residing in South America or Africa. Travel Zoo also sends alerts when special fares are available for a small window of time; imagine flying to Copenhagen for $149 round trip (RT) during off-season.

Trivago (Android and iOS)

Use the Trivago app to discover hotel accommodations that fit your needs. Filters include ratings, user satisfaction, price, distance, hotel room specifications and amenities. Easily compare prices and ratings posted by popular travel sources such as Expedia and Hotel.com. The map version of the app displays "sad face" and "happy face" icons for hotels based on user ratings. The app also provides hotel details including hotel website, phone number, address, payment methods, target audience (business or romance for example), as well as hotel features. Users can create an account to save their favorite hotels for later booking.

TripAdvisor (Android and iOS)

Users have access to tons of reviews and ratings of hotels, attractions, and restaurants posted by other travelers. These can greatly aid users when they are deciding between their must dos and can skips. Users can also save items and places of interest making the booking and itinerary planning process even easier.

TripCase (Android and iOS)

Users can forward their booking information to the app for auto import or manually enter information. It also offers the ability to share trip information and itinerary with others. Once you import a trip, TripCase provides a countdown to the trip date, local weather and suggested add-ons such as airport transportation services. TripCase makes it easy to create and modify a travel itinerary.

TripIt (Android and iOS)

Similar to TripCase, TripIt enables users to store itinerary plans as well as important information all in one location. Users can opt to share itinerary information with selected others directly through the app and/or also share trip information via social media. In addition, it is possible to add plans for a specific trip, such as transportation, restaurants and activities (theater, tour, etc.), to a Tripit account. These then get added chronologically to a trip's itinerary providing an overview of each day of your trip.

Users have the option to upgrade to track award points and receive notices regarding changes in flights. It is also possible to use the app to store emergency contact information, as well as important document information such as Passports and Driver Licenses.

Yelp (Android and iOS)

Though Yelp may have been initially established to provide a way for area residents to share and learn about local businesses, it is also a superb way for travelers to access reviews about restaurants, bars and nightlife. While an app targeted specifically at travelers will certainly also provide helpful reviews, those posted on Yelp have the added bonus of also sharing the thoughts of local users. Currently, Yelp has a presence in 31 countries throughout Asia, Australia, Europe South America and North America.

Other useful apps for travelers

Language and communication apps

DuoLingo: (Android and iOS). This free language app offers an interactive way to practice or brush up on a language before travel. The lessons begin with the basics and progress from there. DuoLingo features a variety of activities, including practice with pronunciation, to help language learners become more comfortable understanding, reading and speaking another language. The app is geared more toward someone who is interested in learning another language vs someone who has a main goal of being able to communicate while on a vacation. As such, DuoLingo may be best for those travelers who find that they are returning frequently to the same country or needing to communicate in a specific language other than their native one. It is also recommended simply for those travelers and persons who want to learn another language without having to pay costly class fees.

Google translate (Android and iOS). Google Translate is a convenient app for when traveling to countries where there is limited knowledge of both the written and spoken language. Users can take a picture of an item written in another language and the app will then translate the word/phrase/sentence. This function can prove quite convenient when traveling and trying to read signs or menus written in an unfamiliar language.

Google Translate offers assistance for those who need to communicate with others who speak a different language. When in "conversation" mode, Google Translate assists in the communication between people who speak different languages. To use conversation mode, choose the two languages you wish to translate between then tap on the microphone image. Next, double tap on the red microphone to indicate you want Google to listen for both languages and translate to the other. Though the translations are often literal, using Google Translate will aid conversations greatly. The app also allows you to save common/favorite phrases for easy reference later.

Phrasebook (Android and iOS). Phrasebook is ideal for the traveler who wants to learn the basics of another language. Phrases one can learn via the free version Phrasebook include "thank you", "excuse me", "nice to meet you" and "can you help me". Those who wish to learn some slightly more advanced phrases, such as those related to asking for direction or sightseeing, need to upgrade to a paid version of the service.

Maps

CityMaps2Go (Android and iOS). This app provides a variety of downloadable city and province maps from countries around the globe. Users can download maps for easy accessibility and browsing without the need for Wi-Fi access. Map icons for places such as hotels, food and shops aid in itinerary planning. The map view, when zoomed-in, displays a detailed city grid of buildings and streets. For those who are not as familiar or skilled with reading a traditional physical map, CityMaps2Go might make navigating an unfamiliar area a bit easier.

Maps.Me: (Android and iOS). Maps. Me also offers offline maps from locations around the world. Like CityMaps2Go, it is possible to easily view destinations on the map such as

attractions and hotels, as well as bookmark them. The main difference between the two apps is the format in which the maps are displayed. Maps.Me provides a map that is reminiscent to the type of physical map one might pick up before venturing out on a hiking trail or from at a visitor's center. Therefore, it might be best suited to those travelers who are comfortable reading maps in general.

Roadtripper: (Android and iOS). For those planning a road trip in the USA, the Roadtripper app can help you decide on your itinerary and travel route. Roadtrippers provides users with suggestions for hotel accommodations, attractions, points of interest and food stops.

These are just some of the numerous apps available via smartphones. Other sites to check out are Booking.com, particularly for hotels; Hipmunk, for airfares and hotels and email alerts when prices change; and Uber for low-cost travel within cities around the world. Do not forget that some countries and cities have their own apps that may prove useful. Hopefully, the above list will provide you with some suggestions to help patrons with their travel needs and maybe your own as well. Bon Voyage!

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