

2017

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INDUSTRY
RANKING FACTORS
STUDY



Travel Ranking Factors Data Insights for Performing on Google



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About Searchmetrics

We are your pathfinder to content that uniquely matches user intent with the deep learning insights of the Searchmetrics Suite™ and Searchmetrics Content Experience™ platforms. Search has evolved into a data-driven field that requires powerful tools to guide companies through discovery, optimization and measurement of engaging storytelling.

There's only one search and content development platform that owns its data: Searchmetrics, the world's #1 SEO and content performance platform. We don't rely on data from third parties. Our historical database spans five years and contains over 250 billion pieces of information, such as keyword rankings, search terms, social links and backlinks. It includes global, mobile and local data covering organic and paid search, as well as social media. We have the largest global reach of any search platform, crawling the web every day in more than 130 countries.

Searchmetrics monitors and reveals the full business available to you online. We provide our customers with a competitive advantage and help them to identify new business opportunities by exposing the content consumers are engaging with on industry and competitors' sites. Our SEO Visibility Score – trusted by reputable media sources such as The New York Times, Bloomberg and The Guardian – reliably indicates your online presence.

We provide the insights our customers need to deliver results. Searchmetrics guides SEOs and content marketers with suggestions for creating content that improves relevance and boosts conversions. It shows the connection between social media links and overall engagement. And its analytics make clear which content performs the best and how an organization's content performs against its competitors'.

With Marcus Tober, one of the top 10 SEO minds in the world, leading Searchmetrics' product development, we have over 100,000 users worldwide, including respected brands such as T-Mobile, eBay and Siemens. They all depend on Searchmetrics continuing innovations to maximize their online performance.

If you have any questions regarding this whitepaper or the Searchmetrics Suite™, please do not hesitate to contact us at www.searchmetrics.com/contact/

Online Travel

Insights for Winning in the \$2.3 Trillion Market

"The more you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go."
Dr. Seuss, *Oh The Places You'll Go*

Truer words were never spoken for the world travel and tourism industry, whose direct global GDP contribution *reached \$2.3 trillion* in 2016, according to the World Tourism and Travel Council. It's an industry whose impact dwarfs the GDP contribution of automotive and chemical manufacturing. In the US alone, consumers jumped on planes, ships and automobiles *1.7 billion times* last year, while American business people took more than 450 million trips.

Key Players in the Online Travel Industry:

Online Travel Agencies (e.g. funjet.com, expedia.com, priceline.com)

News/Information Portals (e.g. faa.gov, flightstats.com, travel.usnews.com)

Price Comparison/recommendation websites (e.g. travelocity.com, kayak.com, booking.com)

Travel transport companies (e.g. rentalcars.com, europcar.com, southwest.com)

Hotel chains (e.g. marriott.com, radisson.com, caesars.com)

Platforms (e.g. airbnb.com, uber.com, 9flats.com)

Discount travel offer sites (e.g. cheaptickets.com, cheapflights.com, lastminute.com)

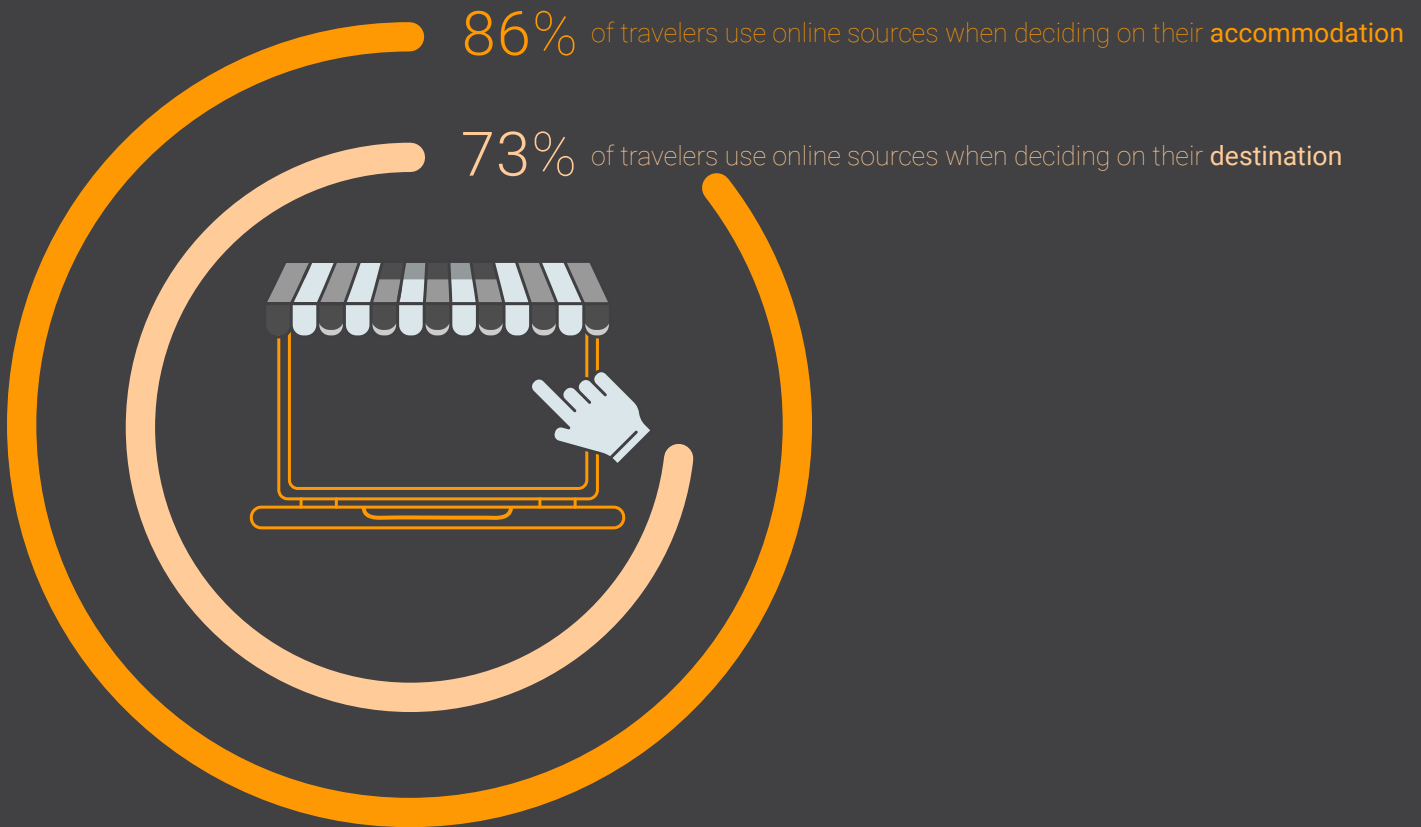
Travel inspiration (e.g. tripadvisor.com, anywhere.com, lonelyplanet.com)

60% of leisure travelers build their own itineraries

Mostly gone, however, are the days when people turned to the local travel agent to make their travel and lodging arrangements. Some *60% of those US leisure trips and 41% of business trips* were self-service – made online by internet-savvy consumers looking for the best stays, best weather, off-the-beaten-track locations, and some of the best bargains.

What does it all mean for travel-industry players? Being seen and found online represents an opportunity not only for deep-pocketed online travel agencies (OTAs) such as expedia.com and booking.com. Even boutique hotels and little-recognized service players can win share in the competitive marketplace, provided they're armed with the right strategies and follow Searchmetrics Ranking Factors insights into performing online.

This report will detail why the number of keywords, image count and word count of travel & tourism content is important to ranking on Google and other search engines. Understanding the fundamentals of ranking is the foundational step in helping your content perform online and in growing revenue in a crowded marketplace against entrenched players and new entrants.



Source: [tripbarometer](#)

Online Travel Agents are big; the market is bigger

Walk down any Main Street in America, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a local travel agency these days. Today, **95% of people read online reviews** before booking. People research online, book online, and they share their experiences during and after on sites such as [tripadvisor.com](#), Facebook, Instagram and others. Simply put, industry participants now more than ever must nurture their online presence to make sure they stay in business. The big gorillas are the major OTAs. Yet, their combined market share is expected to reach only 41% in 2020, according to a projection by [Phocuswright](#). This leaves plenty of space for rival price comparison, travel review and other industry sites, as well as the direct providers of travel services like car rental companies and hotel chains. To play a meaningful role online, these websites have to make themselves found on search engines like Google, which means knowing what distinguishes the best-performing URLs from those on Google's 2nd and 3rd pages. And they must learn how to tailor content to be relevant for users searching for travel-related keywords.

About the Study

An Introduction to Ranking Factors

This analysis is one in a series of Searchmetrics' ranking factor whitepapers that focus exclusively on one specific industry. If you've just tuned in, you can get started with our Ranking Factors 101:

What is a Ranking Factor?



Rebooting Ranking Factors



[Find out more about general ranking factors](#)

General Ranking Factors as a Benchmark for differing Industry Ranking Factors

For each of our industry studies, the general ranking factors, which were published in a separate whitepaper, serve as a benchmark. Whilst the general ranking factors and rank correlations provide an overview of which elements are generally the most important in terms of search, and how top-ranking landing pages vary regarding these elements, the general factors can no longer be considered equally relevant for all webmasters. Although there is a basic set of factors that can be considered a general requirement for rankings, ranking factors differ from industry to industry, and are therefore not generally applicable for all websites. Content demands based on user intent have simply become too differentiated. For this reason, the general ranking factors act as a comparative benchmark, providing context to the results. By comparing them with the general ranking factors, we can identify the ranking factors for which the travel industry has its own set of rules, and where webmasters operating in this industry should focus their attention or at least what they should be aware of.

About the Study

Ranking Factors for the Travel Industry

The following 10 search queries are examples of the keywords used for the analysis in this whitepaper. Of course, not all keywords included in the set are equally relevant for all travel industry companies. Nevertheless, the use of specifically selected data enables a much more precise analysis of the travel industry than would be possible with a generic keyword set.

- Airline Tickets
- Budget Rental Car
- Vacation Rentals
- Celebrity Cruises
- Things to do in Vancouver
- Last minute flights
- Vegas hotels
- Great Lake crossing
- Cheapest flights to Europe
- Disneyland Tickets



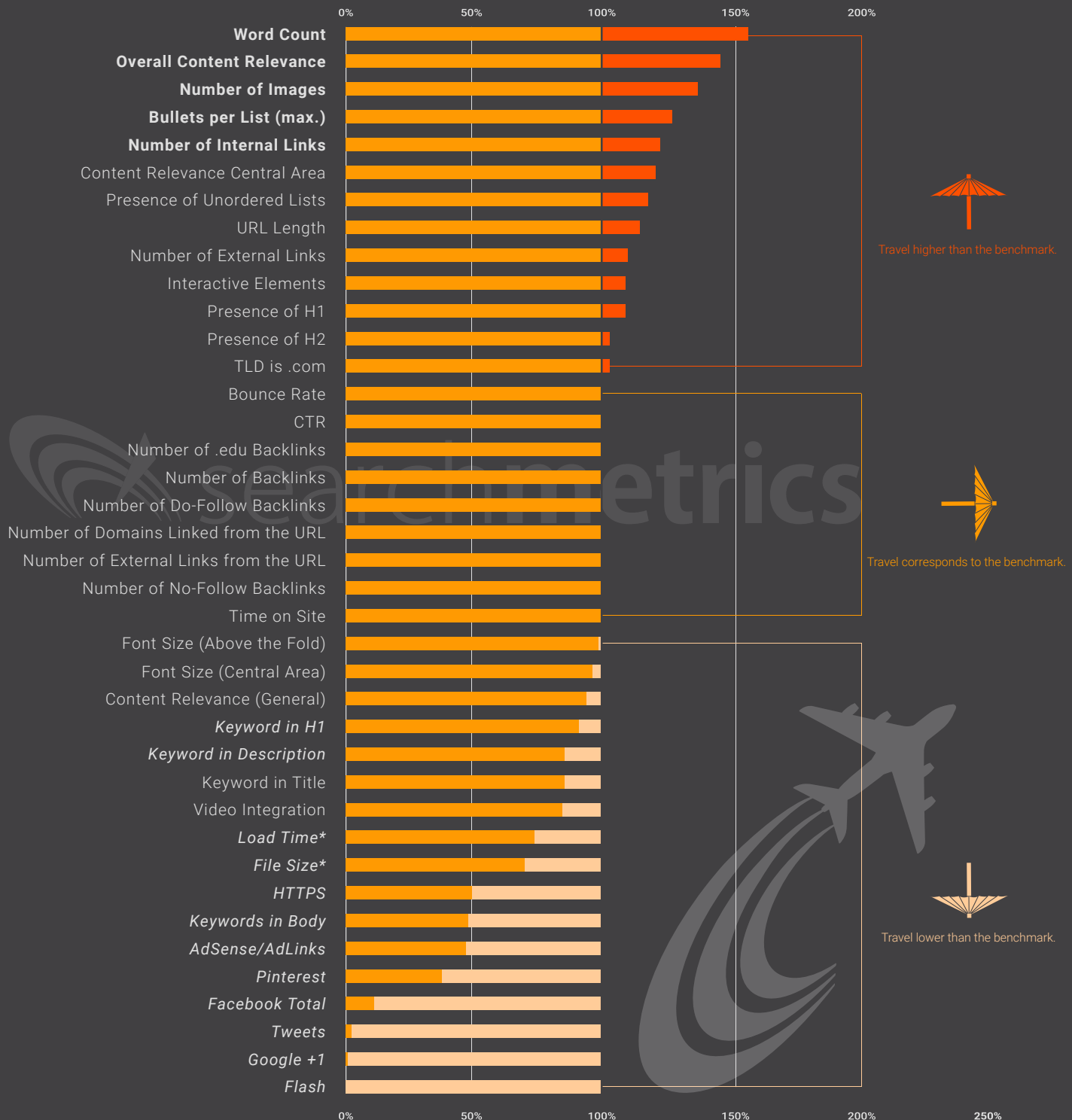
Industry-specific keyword set

To analyze the ranking factors relevant to the travel industry, we created an industry-specific keyword set. Whilst the keyword set for the general ranking factors contained search terms related to all topics and fields – and primarily included terms with a high search volume – the results for this industry whitepaper are based on a smaller, more distinct dataset. For this analysis, keywords were only included that are relevant for the travel industry. In some instances, there is an overlap between the industry keywords and those of the general ranking factors – but this is by no means always the case. The keyword overlap between this industry study and the general ranking factors analysis was only around 3%. Overall, the average search volume of travel keywords is much lower (around 5%) than for the search terms analyzed for the benchmark study. The use of a specially determined keyword set is essential because each individual industry – in fact, even each individual search query – has differentiated ranking factors.

Ranking Factors for the Travel Industry

Comparison of the Top 10 Average Values with the Benchmark in %

■ Travel
 ■ Benchmark (100%)
 ■ Travel higher than the Benchmark
 B Ranking Factors for Travel
 I Fun Facts for Travel



The data is based on a comparison of Google ranking factors for travel industry websites with the general ranking factors covering all industries (Searchmetrics Whitepaper December 2016). Download the whole whitepaper at: searchmetrics.com/travel2017

*Values inverted, because better optimized pages have smaller file sizes and faster load times

Analysis & Results

The Ranking Factors where Travel Stands out from the Crowd

RANKING FACTORS



Bullets per List (max.)



Keywords in Body



Number of Images



Number of Internal Links



Overall Content Relevance



Word Count

The most interesting factors for travel – and some “Fun Facts”

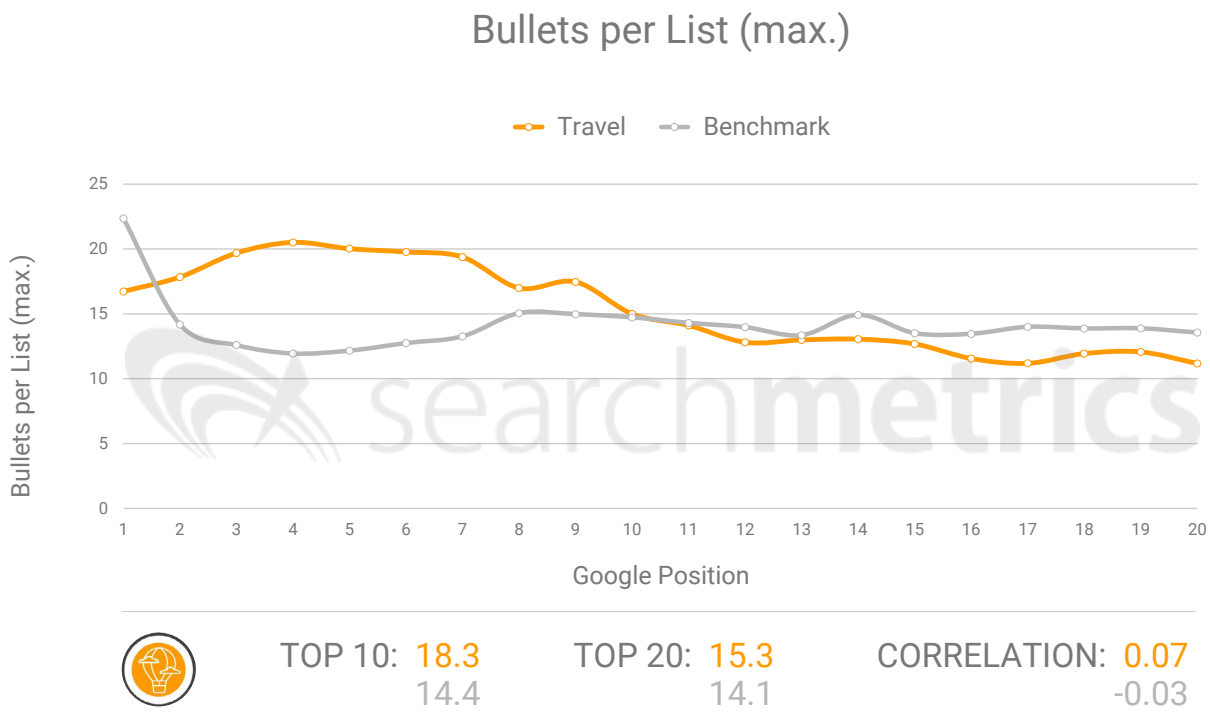
As ranking factors differ for each industry, it's not always the same factors that are the most interesting. For this reason, we have used our travel keyword set to first evaluate all ranking factors that were part of the general benchmark analysis. Based on these results, we have identified some ranking factors that are most interesting for travel websites from our perspective.

Moreover, we are looking at some factors that show a significant difference in values and/or trends, when comparing the travel results with the benchmark analysis, though these may not necessarily be true ranking factors. These are our “Fun Facts.”

Bullets per List (max.)



Lists on travel-industry websites have more bullet points than the average across all industries.



Bullets per List (max.)

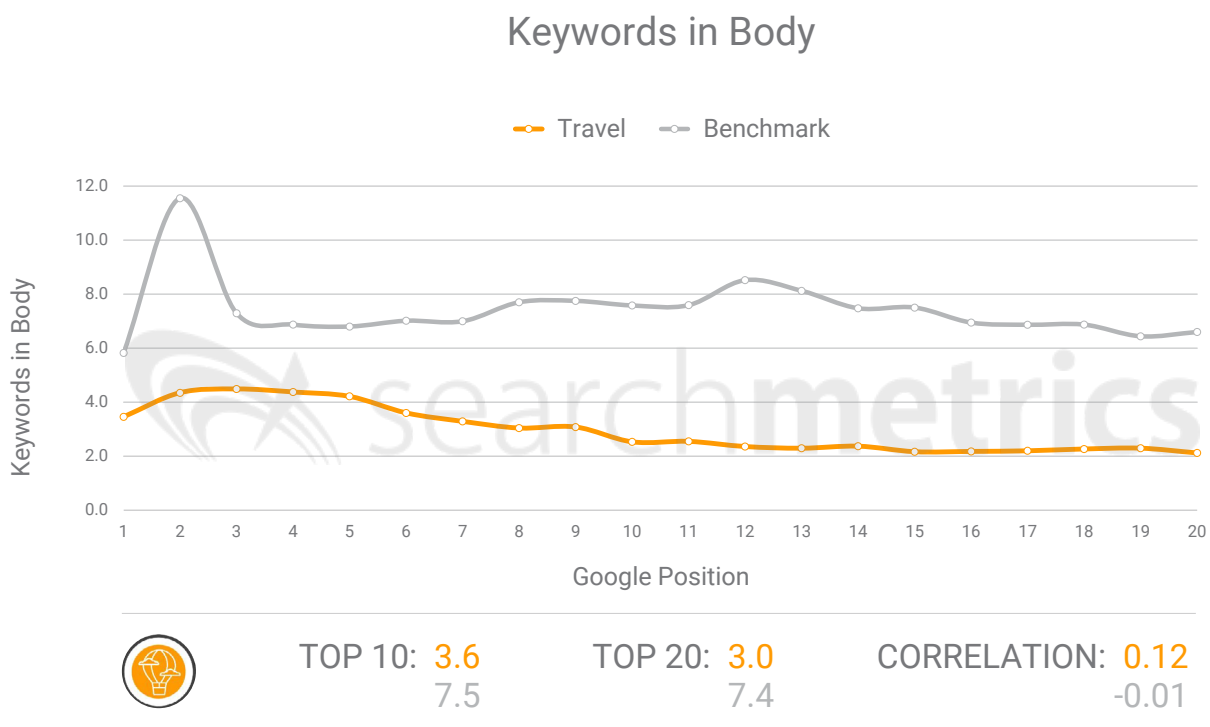
Landing pages that rank amongst the top 10 results on google.com for travel-related search queries, have longer bullet points lists than websites in general. This is true throughout the top 10 except for position 1. Travel pages in the top 10 have nearly four more bullet points (max.) per list than in our general study of ranking factors.

OUR ADVICE: Long bullet point lists are OK: Users visiting travel websites expect clear and detailed information on everything from hotel descriptions to holiday packages. This is particularly true of comparison websites and portals, where users like to be able to quickly assess the pros and cons of different options.

Keywords in Body



Top-ranking landing pages in the travel sector use the searched keyword far less frequently in the page body than the overall average.



Keywords in Body

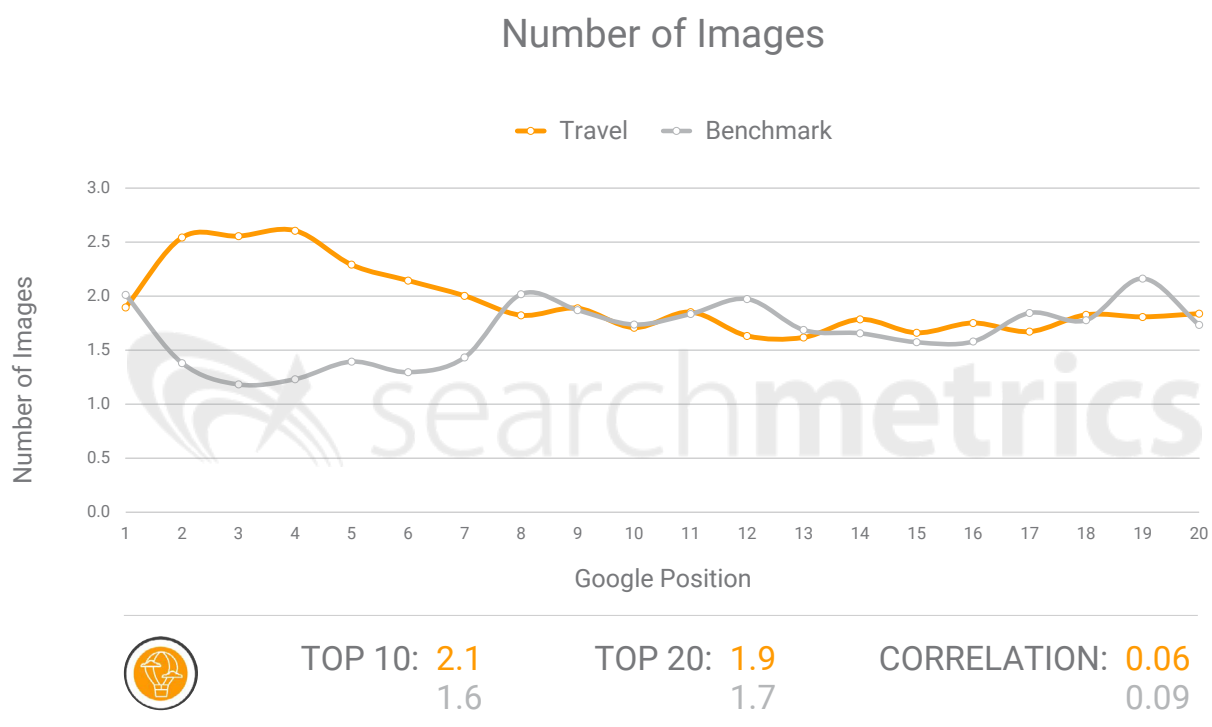
When compared with the general ranking factors, the analysis of top-ranking travel industry URLs shows that – across the top 20 search results – the searched keyword is found much less frequently in the body. For travel pages, the keyword is only used about 3 times, whereas the average across all industries is more than twice as high: 7.4.

OUR ADVICE: Create content that is holistic and comprehensive. Don't try to be relevant by relying on outdated SEO techniques. For travel websites, keyword stuffing is a dead end.

Number of Images



Travel-industry landing pages on Google's first search results page use 38% more images of at least 200 x 200 pixels than pages of other industries.



Number of Images

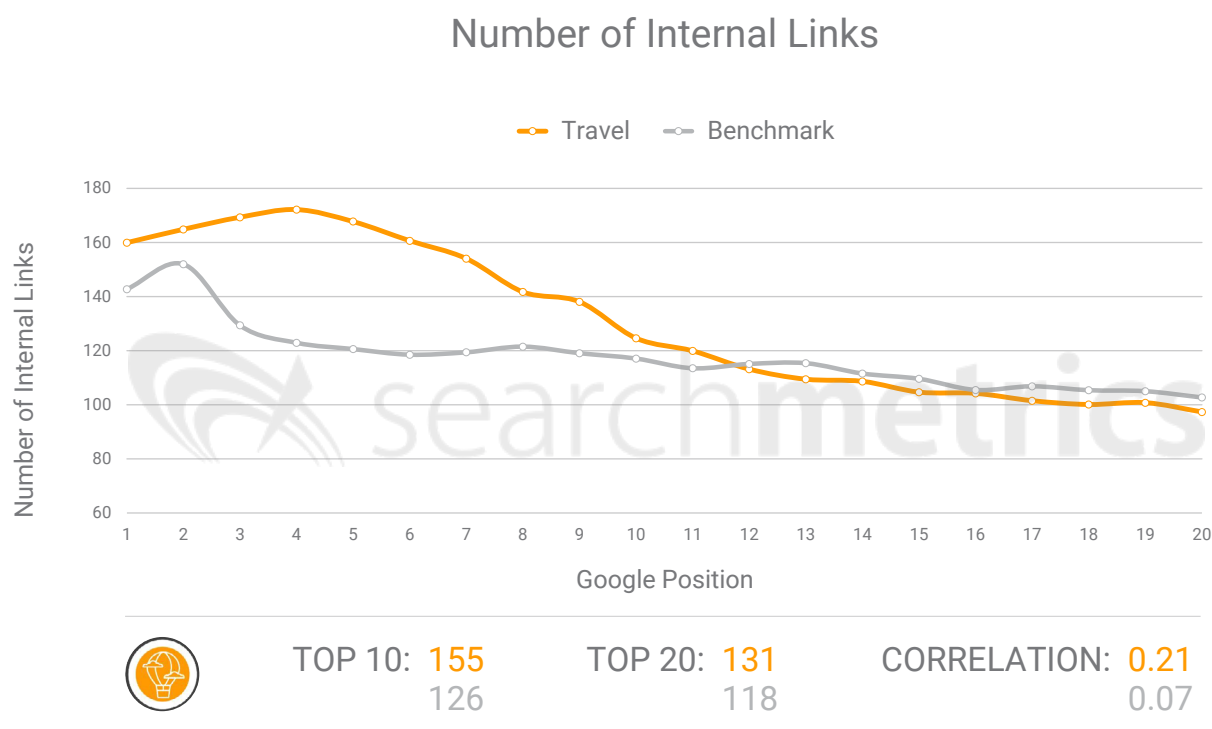
URLs ranking on the first search results page for travel-related keywords use an average of 2.1 images of 200 x 200 pixels. This is 38% more than the overall average, as measured in our general study of ranking factors. In particular, more images are found for travel pages on positions 2 to 7.

OUR ADVICE: Simply having more images than the average does not mean that travel pages should be filled with unnecessary pictures – images should be carefully selected and used where they enhance the text content. As travel pages also display higher average file sizes than pages on average, webmasters certainly should not shy away from using a good image if it will increase the relevance of the content.

Number of Internal Links



Travel pages on Google's first page use 23% more internal links than the overall average.



Number of Internal Links

Compared with many other factors, there is a strong correlation between a travel page's ranking and the number of internal links on the page: 0.21. The more internal links a travel page has, the higher up in the search results it is likely to rank, and vice versa. This is particularly true of pages in the top 10. Furthermore, the average number of internal links for top 10 travel pages is 23% higher than the average for pages ranking in the top 10 for our general keyword set. This means that the use of well-structured internal links, usefully guiding users to the information they are looking for on a domain, is of even more importance for travel websites than in other industries.

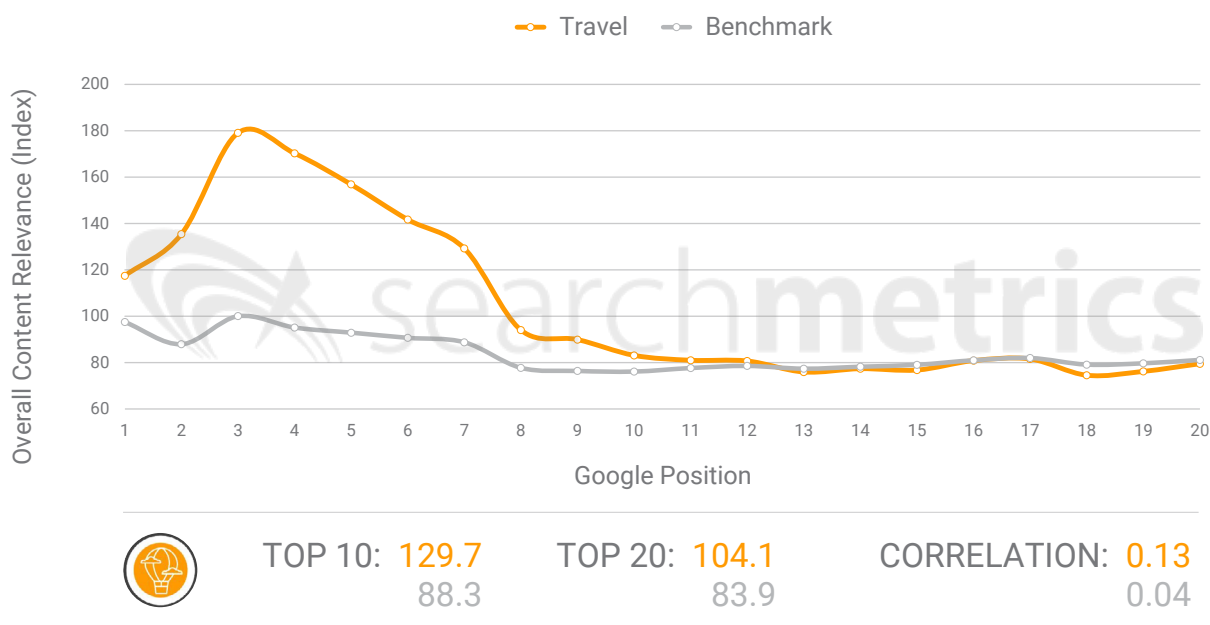
OUR ADVICE: Make sure that the different pages on your travel website are connected with a sensible, clear internal linking structure. Users interested in travel-related products often like to compare different options and get information on related subjects. Make this possible within your domain rather than forcing users to return to Google to conduct another search.

Overall Content Relevance



The content relevance of travel URLs on the first Google search results page is higher than for pages on average, when all industries are analyzed.

Overall Content Relevance



Overall Content Relevance

[Find out more about content relevance!](#)

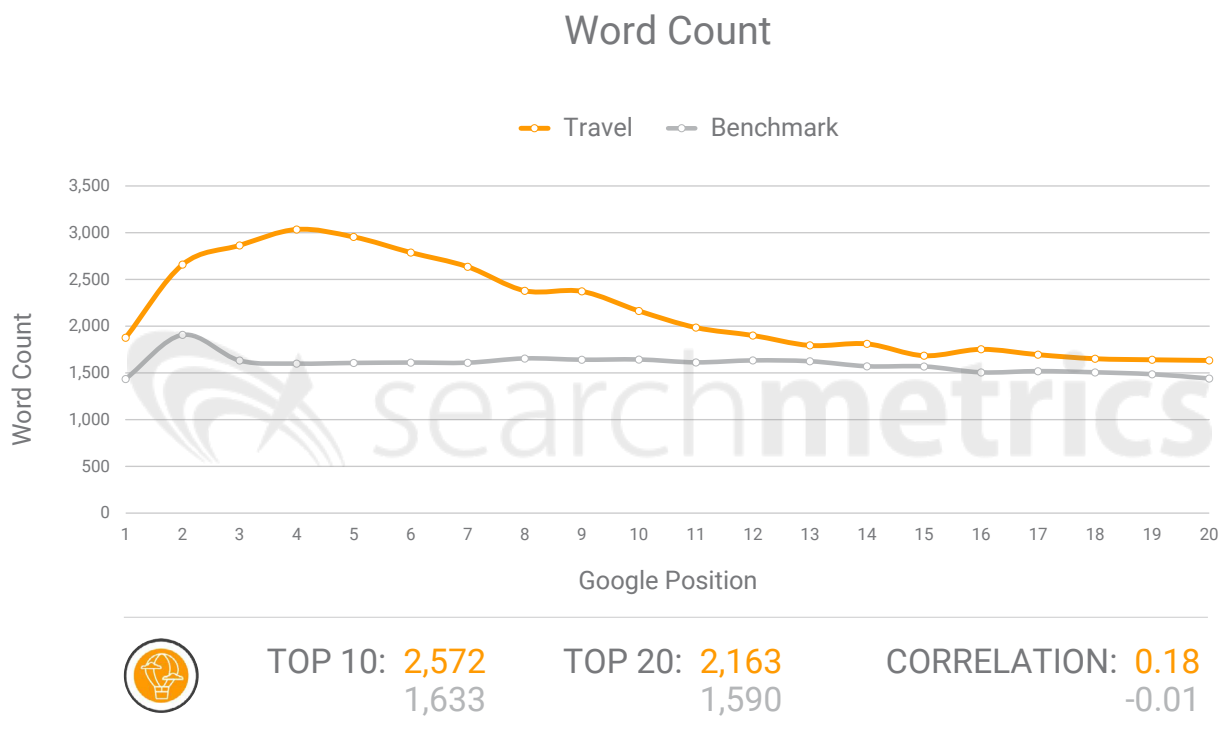
For the general ranking factors, we developed an index, for which the ranking position with the highest content relevance was given an content relevance score of 100. All other results were evaluated and scored in relation to this index. Travel industry URLs on the 1st page of Google.com have an overall content relevance score of 129.7 – well above 100. This means that they contain content that is considerably more relevant than pages on average. One explanation could be that pages ranking for travel keywords often have long-form text content, which can score highly for content relevance, whereas some keywords in our general set may be better served by image, videos or shorter texts.

OUR OBSERVATION: For pages looking to rank highly on Google.com, highly relevant text content is even more important in the travel industry than in our general ranking factors study.

Word Count



Top-ranking URLs in the travel industry have 57% more words than the general average measured across all industries.



Word Count

Particularly for URLs ranking on the first search results page, the word count for travel-industry pages is significantly higher than the value measured in our study of general ranking factors. Travel URLs in the top 10 have over 2,500 words on average, whilst the rate across all industries was just 1,633. Travel pages therefore have 57% more words than the benchmark average, making word count the ranking factor where travel pages have the highest rate, compared with pages in general. Furthermore, travel-industry pages have more relevant texts and include fewer instances of the searched keyword than the average of all top-ranking pages on Google.com.

OUR ADVICE: Don't be afraid to get wordy. If you write clear and comprehensive content for your travel pages, your content is more likely to be categorized as relevant – and more likely to rank higher. The precise nature of required content depends on the position in the sales funnel. Emotive travel stories may inspire at the top, whilst later on users want concrete details on services and conditions before finalizing a transaction.

Analysis & Results

The “Fun Facts” we observed for Travel

FUN FACTS



AdSense/AdLinks



File Size



HTTPS



Load Time



Social Signals:
Facebook Total,
Tweets, Google+1,
Pinterest

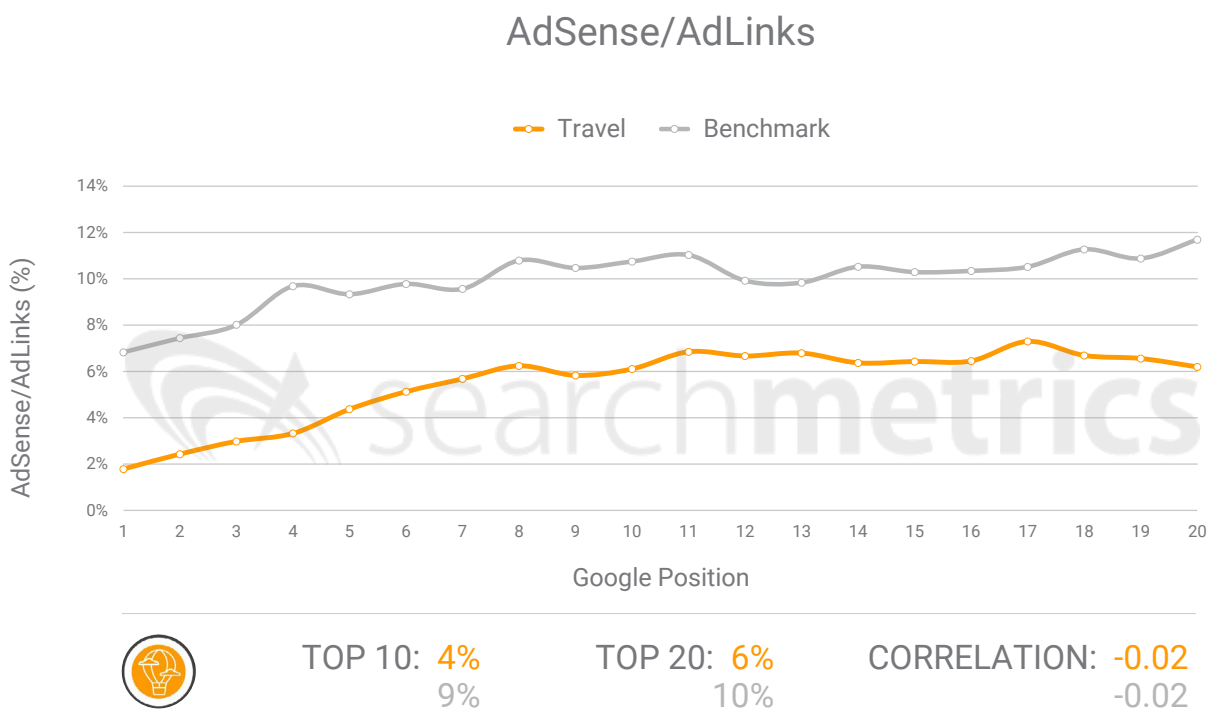
Fun Facts

In this context, “Fun Fact” means that these factors are obviously interpreted as not being decisive for ranking highly in google.com’s search results pages, according to our analysis of the online travel industry. However, we consider these factors to be worth mentioning because they show a significant difference in values and/or trends, when comparing the travel results with the benchmark analysis.

AdSense/ AdLinks



Top 10 pages in the travel industry are less than half as likely to use AdSense/AdLinks as pages on average.



AdSense/AdLinks

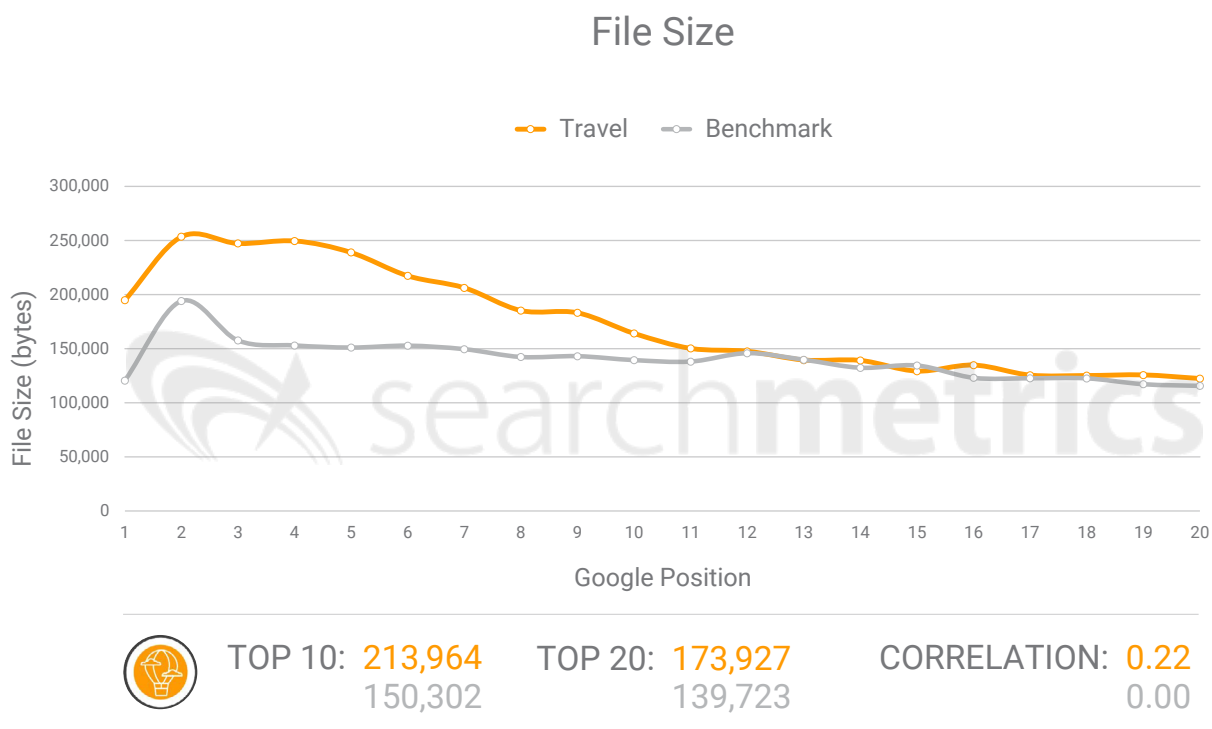
Whilst 9 percent of URLs ranking in the top 10 for our general keyword set make use of AdLinks or AdSense, the equivalent rate for the travel industry is much lower. Only 4% of pages that rank in the top 10 (and 6% of top 20 pages) for travel-related keywords have ads integrated into their page.

OUR OBSERVATION: AdLinks is not a ranking factor. However, be aware that most of the competition in the travel industry are foregoing ads. If you do have ads, you might want to think about how this could be negatively impacting the user experience and, by consequence, your Google rankings. If you have additional offers, you could consider placing them later in the booking process and keeping the landing pages found via organic search ad-free.

File Size



On average, travel landing pages are larger than the pages in our benchmark study.



File Size

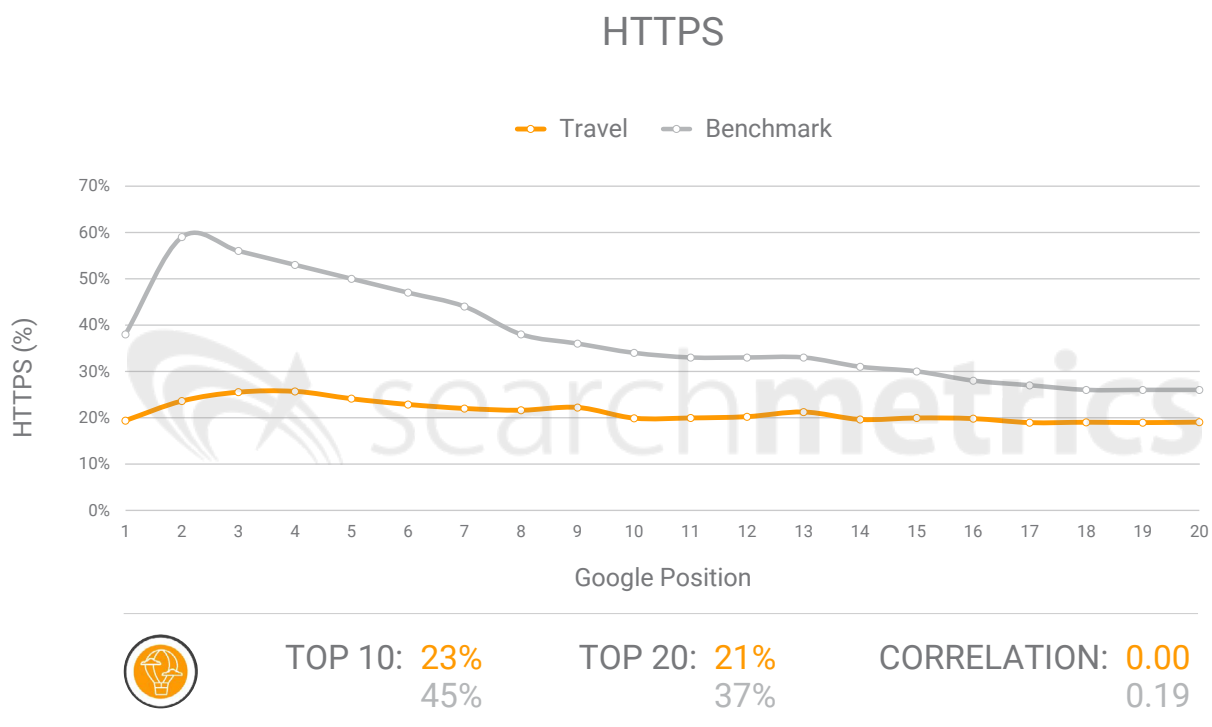
Whilst the general ranking factors for google.com showed an average file size of 150,302 bytes for URLs ranking in the top 10, the value for the travel industry is much higher. On average, travel URLs in the top 10 are over 40% larger. Interestingly, outside of the top 10, on positions 11-20, there is almost no difference in file sizes between the travel industry and the overall average.

TIP: Don't fret about the file size of your website. If it takes a larger page to provide the text and image content needed to adequately serve the user intent, then this is probably a trade-off worth making.

HTTPS



URLs ranking highly for travel-related keywords are less likely to use encryption than websites in general, when looking at high-ranking pages from all industries.



HTTPS

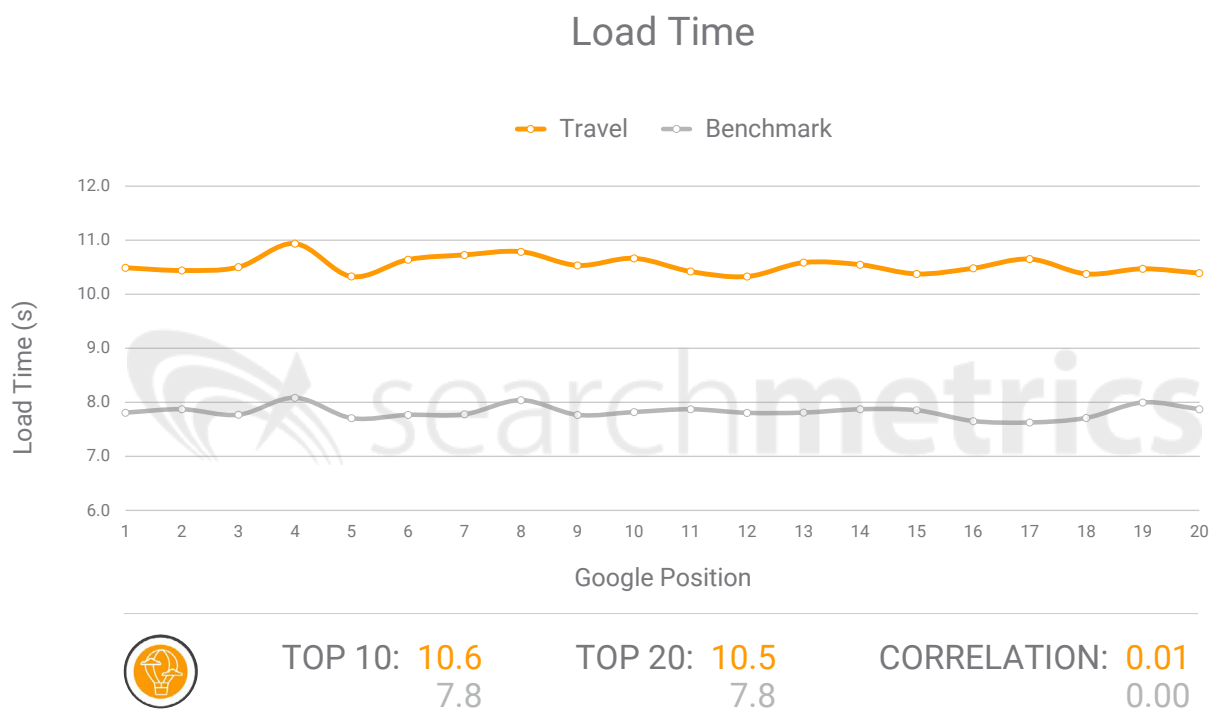
Whilst 45% of pages ranking in the top 10 for our general keyword set were found to use encrypted data transfer, just 21% of URLs on the first search results page for travel keywords use an HTTPS connection. URLs without HTTPS are likely to be landing pages for destinations, hotels or holidays. The actual booking process is usually conducted via a secure connection. These are likely to be landing pages for destinations, hotels or holidays. The actual booking process is usually conducted via a secure connection.

OUR OBSERVATION: Travel websites that provide all URLs over a secure connection may be able to gain a ranking advantage over the unencrypted competition.

Load Time



The average load time for top 10 travel pages is 10.6 seconds, more than 3 seconds slower than the overall average.



Load Time

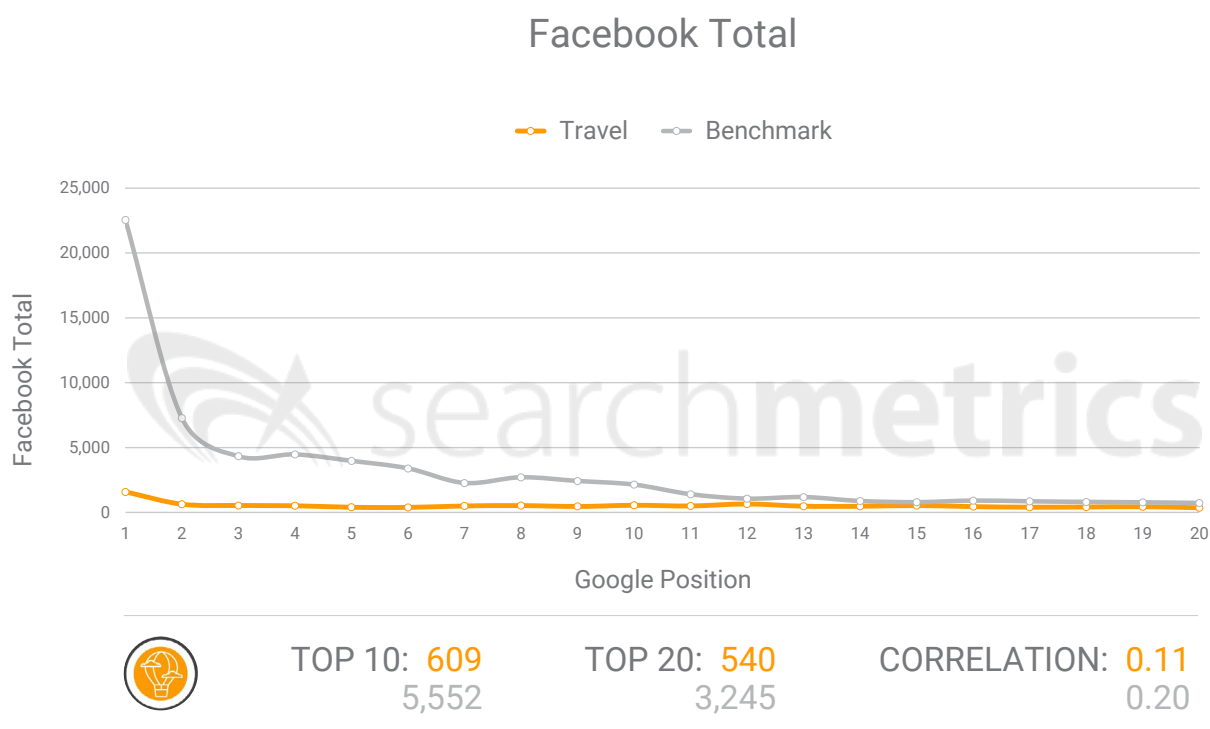
As well as having larger file sizes, travel websites tend to load more slowly than websites of other industries. This is an expected consequence of higher word counts and more images. On average, pages ranking in the top 10 for our travel-related keyword set take 10.6 seconds to load, whilst the overall average for our general keyword set was 7.0 seconds. This means that high-performing websites tend to opt for longer, more relevant content than for a super-streamlined page.

TIP: Technical optimization is always important. In the travel industry, it makes more sense to provide the required content than to excessively shrink the size of your URLs.

Social Signals



Travel websites have far fewer social signals than the overall average across all industries.

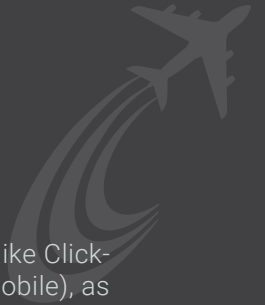


Social Signals

The number of social signals that top-ranking travel landing pages are able to generate is far lower than the values measured in our study of general ranking factors. Top 10 pages in the travel industry have just 11% as many Facebook likes and shares, compared with the overall average.

TIP: Website marketing via Facebook, Twitter etc. can involve a large investment – and is not necessarily an effective way of ranking highly on Google.com. On the other hand, given the lack of social visibility amongst travel websites, a successful social strategy could be a way to stand out from the competition, at least on Facebook, if not in the Google rankings.

Conclusions



Websites that want to rank highly for travel keywords have to pay similar attention to user signals like Click-Through Rate and Bounce Rate, as well as ensure a clean technical optimization (particularly on mobile), as in other industries. In addition, there are several factors where the trends in the travel industry differ strongly from the average values across all sectors. The main findings are:

RANKING FACTORS

- Lists on travel-industry websites have more bullet points than the average across all industries.
- Top-ranking landing pages in the travel sector use the searched keyword far less frequently in the page body than the overall average.
- Travel-industry landing pages on Google's first search results page use 38% more images of at least 200 x 200 pixels than pages of other industries.
- Travel pages on Google's first page use 23% more internal links than the overall average.
- The content relevance of travel URLs on the first Google search results page is higher than for pages on average, when all industries are analyzed.
- Top-ranking URLs in the travel industry have 57% more words than the general average measured across all industries.

FUN FACTS

- Top 10 pages in the travel industry are less than half as likely to use AdSense/AdLinks as pages on average.
- On average, travel landing pages are larger than the pages in our benchmark study.
- URLs ranking highly for travel-related keywords are less likely to use encryption than websites in general, when looking at high-ranking pages from all industries.
- The average load time for top 10 travel pages is 10.6 seconds, more than 3 seconds slower than the overall average.
- Travel websites have far fewer social signals than the overall average across all industries.

Travel websites have longer text with a higher content relevance than in our benchmark whitepaper. At the same time, the keyword density for high-ranking URLs in the travel industry is far lower than the overall average.

This clearly shows that useful, holistic text content – supported by the use of suitable images – is even more important for travel domains than for websites in general.

Comparison Table

The table summarizes the percentage differences between the top 10 averages for travel pages and the benchmark average values from the general ranking factors.

Ranking Factors	Top 10 Benchmark	Top 10 Travel	Comparison (%)	Correlation Benchmark	Correlation Travel
Word Count	1,633	2,572	157%	-0.01	0.18
Overall Content Relevance (Index)	88.3	129.7	147%	0.04	0.13
Number of Images	1.6	2.1	138%	0.09	0.06
Bullets per List (max.)	14.4	18.3	127%	-0.03	0.07
Number of Internal Links	126	155	123%	0.07	0.21
Keywords in Body	7.5	3.6	48%	-0.01	0.12

Fun Facts	Top 10 Benchmark	Top 10 Travel	Comparison (%)	Correlation Benchmark	Correlation Travel
Load Time (s)*	7.8	10.6	74%	0.00	0.01
File Size (bytes)*	150,302	213,964	70%	0.00	0.22
HTTPS (%)	45%	23%	50%	0.19	0.00
AdSense/AdLinks	9%	4%	47%	-0.02	-0.02
Pinterest	153	57	37%	0.19	0.21
Facebook Total	5,552	609	11%	0.20	0.11
Tweets	888	22	2%	0.17	0.18
Google +1	4,026	17	0%	0.17	0.19

*Values inverted, because better optimized pages have smaller file sizes and faster load times.

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whitepaper or the Searchmetrics Suite™,
please do not hesitate to contact us at
whitepaper@searchmetrics.com

