BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS · NO. 23

Booking Travel Online

Flights, hotels, and check-in apps — booked with confidence and without getting scammed, in plain English

See the world — book it yourself

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For booking travel in 2026 · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to booking travel online — flights, hotels, and the check-in apps that get you to the gate. Read it in any order and at your own pace. It will help you search and book with confidence, pay safely, dodge the travel scams that are everywhere these days, and use the airline apps and mobile boarding passes that make traveling smoother. Websites change their look often; when a screen looks different, the ideas here still hold.

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PART 1

Before You Book

Why booking your own travel is worth the confidence it takes, what you'll need on hand, and the lay of the land. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Whoever is holding this book — this is for **you**. Maybe you've always had a travel agent or a son-in-law handle the bookings, and you'd like to be able to do it yourself. Maybe you're a snowbird or a visitor-of-grandchildren who'd love the freedom to plan a trip on a whim. Or maybe you've tried and found the websites confusing or a little frightening. Wherever you're starting from, you've come to the right place.

I'm Bill. For more than 30 years I've helped folks feel at home with their technology. Booking travel online is one of those skills that opens up real freedom — and, done carefully, saves money too. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it beside you: plainly, patiently, and with a careful eye on keeping you safe from the scams that, I'll be honest, are thick on the ground in travel.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

By the end you'll search and book a flight and a hotel with confidence, pay in a way that protects you, recognize and sidestep the travel scams, and use the airline apps and mobile boarding passes that make the trip itself smoother. The freedom to plan your own getaway is a wonderful thing to have.

The big promise: you can't accidentally book anything

A worry I hear often: "what if I press the wrong thing and suddenly I've bought a ticket to Timbuktu?" Rest easy. **Every booking makes you review and confirm — and enter payment — before anything is purchased.** You can search, browse, pick flights, and poke around all you like without spending a cent. Nothing is bought until you deliberately pay. So explore freely.

And you're never stuck alone. If you'd like a hand with a booking, call me at **(330) 200-8042** — no judgment, and I'm glad to sit with you through your first one.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What You'll Need on Hand

Before you start, gather a few things so the booking goes smoothly and you're never scrambling mid-way.

Have ready	Why
A credit card	The safest way to pay for travel — far better than a debit card (Chapter 11 explains why). Have it handy.
Your email address	Your confirmations and tickets arrive by email. Know how to get into your email.
Travelers' exact names	Names on the booking must match each person's photo ID exactly — including middle names as shown. Have everyone's details as they appear on their license or passport.
Dates and a rough plan	Your travel dates, and a sense of where you're going and for how long.
A passport (for abroad)	For any international trip, a current passport — check it won't expire too close to your travel dates.

TIP

Names must match your ID exactly

This trips people up and can cause real headaches at the airport: the name on your ticket must match the name on your government photo ID *exactly*. If your license says "Robert" but you booked as "Bob," or a middle name is missing, it can cause trouble. Book using your full legal name as it appears on the ID you'll travel with. When in doubt, use exactly what's printed on the ID.

CHAPTER 3

The Lay of the Land

There are two broad kinds of places to book travel, and knowing the difference helps you choose wisely — and safely.

Booking direct, vs. comparison sites

Where you book	What it is
The airline or hotel's own website	You book straight with the company — Delta, Marriott, and so on. Often the safest and simplest for changes and problems, since you're dealing with them directly.
Comparison / booking sites	Sites that show many airlines or hotels side by side so you can compare prices and times in one place. Handy for shopping around — just be sure you're on a *real*, well-known one (Chapter 10).

My honest recommendation for peace of mind

You can use comparison sites to *shop* and see your options — that's genuinely useful. But when it comes to actually *booking*, many folks (myself included, for simplicity) prefer to book directly on the airline's or hotel's own website once they've found the flight or room they want. If anything goes wrong — a cancellation, a change — dealing straight with the airline or hotel is usually smoother than going through a middleman. Either way works; direct is the simplest to untangle.

GOOD TO KNOW

Reach the real site by typing it yourself

However you shop, when you go to book, reach the company's website by **typing its address yourself** (like delta.com or marriott.com) or using its official app — not by clicking a link in an email, an ad, or a search result that might be a clever fake. This one habit, which we'll return to in the safety chapters, prevents the most common and costly travel scam of all.

PART 2

Booking a Flight

Searching for flights, reading the results, choosing wisely, picking a seat, and paying — step by step, with the pitfalls flagged.

CHAPTER 4

Searching for a Flight

Every flight-booking site works the same way: you tell it where, when, and how many, and it shows you the options. Let's walk through it.

The search form

1. Go to the airline's site (or a trusted comparison site). Find the flight search box, usually right on the front page.
2. Choose **Round-trip** (there and back) or **One-way**.
3. Enter **From** (your home airport) and **To** (your destination). As you type a city, it suggests airports — pick the right one.
4. Enter your **departure** and **return** dates by tapping the calendar.
5. Set the number of **passengers**.
6. Tap **Search**.

> **TIP**
>
> **Flexible on dates? You can save a lot**
>
> Flight prices swing wildly by day. Many search tools let you view a whole month or a price calendar to spot cheaper days. If your dates have any give — leaving a Tuesday instead of a Friday, say — glancing at nearby days can save a surprising amount. No pressure to; just know the option's there.

CHAPTER 5

Reading the Results & Choosing

The results can look like a wall of times and prices. Here's how to make sense of them and choose well — not just cheaply.

What to look at beyond the price

- **Nonstop vs. connecting.** A **nonstop** flight goes straight there. A **connecting** one stops and makes you change planes — often cheaper, but longer and with a chance of a tight or missed connection. For comfort, nonstop is worth a little more.
- **Total travel time.** A cheap flight with a six-hour layover may not be worth the savings.
- **Departure and arrival times.** Mind very early or very late flights, and what time you'll actually arrive.
- **The airline and the fare type.** The cheapest "basic" fares often forbid seat selection, carry-on bags, or any changes — read what's included.

HEADS UP

Beware the 'basic economy' trap

The lowest price is often a stripped-down **"basic economy"** fare that may not let you choose a seat, bring a normal carry-on, or change your flight at all — and that charges extra for each. For a few dollars more, the regular economy fare is usually worth it for the flexibility and a reserved seat, especially if you value sitting with your travel companion. Read what the cheapest fare *excludes* before you jump at it.

Watch the bag and extra fees

The flight price often doesn't include checked bags, seat selection, or sometimes even a carry-on on the cheapest fares. These add up, so factor them in when comparing — a slightly pricier fare that includes a bag can be the better deal. The site will show these fees before you pay; just don't be surprised by them.

CHAPTER 6

Seats, Details & Paying

Once you've picked a flight, the site walks you through the final steps. Take them slowly; there's no rush.

The final steps

1. **Enter each traveler's details** — full legal name (matching the ID), date of birth, and contact info. Double-check the spelling.
2. **Choose seats** if offered — a window or aisle, seats together for companions. Some fares charge for this; a basic seat is often free.
3. **Add any bags** you'll check, if asked.
4. **Review everything** on the summary screen — dates, times, names, total price. This is your chance to catch a mistake.
5. **Enter payment** (a credit card — see Chapter 11) and confirm.

Your confirmation

After paying, you'll see a **confirmation** with a **confirmation code** (a short string of letters and numbers), and the same arrives by **email**. This is your proof of booking and what you'll use to check in. Don't delete that email — in fact, Chapter 13 shows how to keep it handy for the trip.

> TIP
>
> **Review the summary screen like a hawk**
>
> Before you pay, pause on the summary page and check the **names, dates, and airports** one more time. Fixing a wrong date or a misspelled name is free and easy *before* you pay; afterward it can mean fees or a lost ticket. Thirty seconds of checking here saves the biggest headaches. If anything looks off and you're unsure, that's a fine moment to pause and call me before confirming.

PART 3

Booking a Place to Stay

Hotels and rentals — searching, reading reviews with a clear eye, understanding cancellation policies, and paying safely.

CHAPTER 7

Searching for a Hotel

Booking a room works much like a flight: tell the site where and when, and compare what comes back. You can book on a hotel's own site or a hotel-booking site.

The search

1. On a hotel or booking site, enter your **destination** (a city, or a landmark like "near Cleveland Clinic").
2. Enter your **check-in and check-out dates** and the number of **guests and rooms**.
3. Tap **Search**, and browse the results — each showing a photo, price per night, rating, and location.

Narrowing it down

Use the filters to focus on what matters to you — a price range, free breakfast, free parking, a pool, being close to where you're visiting, or a certain guest rating. Reading a hotel's location on the little map matters too; a cheap room far from everything may cost you in taxi fares and time.

TIP

Things that matter more as we get older

When comparing hotels, look beyond price for the comforts that make a real difference: an **elevator** (not just stairs), a **ground-floor or accessible room** if stairs are hard, **free parking** close to the entrance, and being near your actual destination. A slightly pricier hotel that spares you a long walk or a flight of stairs can be the real bargain.

CHAPTER 8

Reading Reviews & Cancellation Policies

Two things decide whether a hotel booking turns out well: the reviews you trust, and the cancellation terms you understand *before* you book.

Reading reviews with a clear eye

- **Look at the overall rating and the number of reviews** — a 4.3 from two thousand guests means more than a 5.0 from three.
- **Read a few recent ones,** good and bad, for the real flavor — recurring complaints (noise, cleanliness, a rude front desk) are worth heeding.
- **Take the extremes with salt.** A single furious or glowing review can be an outlier; look for the patterns.

The cancellation policy — read it before you book

This is the one to never skip. Hotels offer **refundable** rates (you can cancel free up to a point) and cheaper **non-refundable** ones (you pay now and get nothing back if plans change). For a firm trip, non-refundable can save money; but if there's any chance you'll need to change, pay the little extra for a **free-cancellation** rate. The policy is shown before you book — read it, and note the deadline to cancel without charge.

HEADS UP

Non-refundable means exactly that

A non-refundable rate is genuinely non-refundable — if a health matter or a family change forces you to cancel, you typically lose the money entirely. For older travelers especially, when plans can shift for health reasons, I usually suggest paying a touch more for a **free-cancellation** rate for the peace of mind. Read which kind you're booking before you pay; it's right there on the screen.

CHAPTER 9

Vacation Rentals & a Word of Caution

Beyond hotels, you can rent someone's home or condo through well-known rental sites — lovely for longer stays or families. They need a little extra care, though.

If you rent a home

- **Stick to the well-known rental platforms** and keep all your booking and payment *on* that platform — never pay a "host" directly by wire, check, or gift card outside it.
- **Read the reviews and the full listing** carefully — cancellation terms, cleaning fees, and house rules.
- **Be wary of a deal too good to be true,** or a host who pushes you to pay off the platform or hurry — those are classic scam signs (Part 4).

SCAM ALERT

Never pay a rental 'host' outside the platform

A very common travel scam: a "host" asks you to pay by bank transfer, check, or gift card *outside* the rental website — perhaps claiming the site is "down" or offering a discount for doing so. **Never do this.** Paying through the real platform is what protects you; a request to go around it is a bright red flag that the listing — or the person — is fake. When you pay outside the platform, you have no protection and no one to call.

PART 4

Paying & Staying Safe

How to pay so you're protected, the travel scams flooding the internet, and the simple habits that keep your money and your trip safe. The most important part.

CHAPTER 10

Spotting Fake Travel Sites

Travel scams have exploded, and they've gotten frighteningly good — criminals now build near-perfect copies of airline and hotel sites. Knowing how to tell real from fake is your best armor.

How the fakes catch people

- **Fake websites that mimic real ones,** often reached through an ad, a search result, or a link in an email — with a web address that's a slight misspelling of the real one.
- **Phishing emails** that look exactly like they're from the airline, hotel, or a booking site, asking you to "confirm" or "pay" through a link.
- **Deals too good to be true** — a luxury trip at an impossible price, pushed through social media or email, designed to lure you into paying for something that doesn't exist.

How to stay on the real site

1. **Reach travel sites by typing the address yourself** (delta.com, marriott.com) or using the official app — not by clicking links in emails, ads, or search results.
2. **Check the web address carefully** for misspellings or odd extra words before entering any payment.
3. **Be suspicious of deep discounts** and anything pushing you to hurry or pay an unusual way.
4. **Cross-check a hotel or rental** on more than one well-known site to confirm it's real.

SCAM ALERT

The reports are in the tens of thousands

This isn't a rare risk — consumer-protection agencies received tens of thousands of travel-fraud reports in the past year, and the fakes keep getting better with new technology. The single habit that defeats most of them: **go to the real company yourself by typing its address or opening its app, never through a link someone sent you.** If a travel "deal" arrives in your email or feed, don't click it — go look for it directly on the real site, where you'll quickly see if it's genuine.

CHAPTER 11

Paying Safely

How you pay matters as much as where you book. The right payment method is a powerful shield if anything goes wrong.

Always use a credit card

For travel, **pay with a credit card, not a debit card.** Here's why it matters so much: a credit card gives you the right to **dispute a charge** and get your money back if a booking turns out to be fraudulent or a company fails to deliver — the bank fights on your behalf. A debit card pulls money straight from your bank account, and getting it back is far harder. The credit card is standing between you and the scammers.

Safe-payment habits

- **Never pay by wire transfer, check, gift card, or cryptocurrency** for travel — these are the untraceable methods scammers demand, and no legitimate airline or hotel needs them.
- **Only enter card details on the real company's secure site** (reached by typing the address yourself).
- **Keep an eye on your card statement** after booking, and report anything you don't recognize to your card company promptly.

HEADS UP

Beware fake QR codes while traveling

A newer trick: scammers stick **fake QR codes** (those square scan-me patterns) over real ones — on parking meters, hotel flyers, restaurant tables, even at airports — leading to fake payment pages that steal your card. Be cautious scanning QR codes out in the world; when paying, prefer the official app or typing the address yourself, and if a scanned code asks for payment or login details unexpectedly, back out.

CHAPTER 12

Travel-Themed Phone & Email Scams

Beyond fake sites, scammers use travel as the hook for calls, texts, and emails. A few to recognize.

What it looks like	What to do
'Problem with your booking' email/call	Claims an issue with a reservation you made, asking you to 'confirm' payment or details through their link or line. Contact the company directly instead.
'You've won a free trip / cruise'	A prize you didn't enter, needing a 'fee' or your details. Delete it.
'Your flight is canceled — call this number'	A text with a number that isn't the airline's. Use the airline's real app or website to check.
The 'stranded grandchild' call	Posing as a grandchild hurt or arrested while traveling, needing money fast and in secret. Hang up and call the family member directly.

FROM BILL

When in doubt, don't click — ask me

If any travel message, call, or deal makes you the least bit uneasy, please don't act on it in the moment — ring me at (330) 200-8042 first. I'd far rather spend two minutes confirming a booking is real than see someone lose a vacation's worth of money to a clever fake. Checking costs you nothing; clicking the wrong link can cost a great deal.

PART 5

Check-In & the Trip Itself

The airline app, checking in from home, the mobile boarding pass, and keeping all your travel documents in one place so nothing's a scramble.

CHAPTER 13

The Airline App & Checking In

Once you've booked, the airline's free phone app makes the trip itself far smoother — and checking in from home saves you fuss at the airport.

Get the airline's app

Install the official app for the airline you booked (search its exact name in your phone's app store, and make sure it's the real one from the airline). Sign in, or add your trip using the **confirmation code** from your booking email. The app then holds your flight details, alerts you to gate changes and delays, and lets you check in.

Checking in

1. Starting about **24 hours before** your flight, the app (or the airline's website) lets you **check in**.
2. Confirm your details, choose or confirm your seat, and pay for any bags if needed.
3. You'll receive a **boarding pass** — which you can keep on your phone (next chapter) or print at home or at the airport.

TIP

Checking in early has real perks

Checking in as soon as it opens (24 hours before) can get you a better seat choice and, on some airlines, a spot nearer the front for boarding. It also means one less thing to do at a crowded airport. If the app feels like a lot, remember you can always just check in at the airport counter the old-fashioned way — the app is a convenience, not a requirement.

CHAPTER 14

Mobile Boarding Passes & Keeping Your Documents

A **mobile boarding pass** is your ticket to the plane, kept right on your phone — no paper to lose. It's wonderfully convenient once you're comfortable with it, and paper is always still an option.

Using a mobile boarding pass

- When you check in on the app, you can **save the boarding pass to your phone** — often into a "Wallet" app, or just kept in the airline app.
- At security and the gate, you **hold the phone's screen** (showing a square barcode) under the scanner. Turn your screen brightness up so it reads easily.
- No printing, no paper to misplace — it's always in your pocket.

But keep a backup

Technology can hiccup — a dead battery, a glitchy app — so for peace of mind, especially while you're getting used to this, **print a paper boarding pass too**, or at least a copy of your confirmation. Airports and airline counters can always print one. There's no shame in a paper backup; even seasoned travelers carry one.

TIP

Keep everything in one email folder or printout

Gather your trip in one easy place: your flight confirmation, hotel confirmation, and any rental or activity bookings. Many folks print the lot and keep it in a folder; others keep the emails together or use a free travel app that collects them. Whatever you choose, having all your confirmation codes and addresses in one spot — reachable even if your phone dies — turns travel from stressful to calm.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The freedom this gives you

Once you can book a flight, reserve a room, check in, and carry your pass on your phone, you've got real independence — the freedom to visit grandchildren, chase the warm weather, or take that trip you've been putting off, all on your own terms and schedule. That confidence is worth every minute spent learning it.

PART 6

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

How I can help, and a one-page summary to keep by the computer when you book.

CHAPTER 15

When to Call Bill

I've written this so you can book your own travel with confidence. But part of being truly helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you money or worry — here's my straight advice, no pressure.

Times it's worth a call

- **Your first booking** — I'll happily sit with you through searching, choosing, and paying safely for a flight or hotel, so you feel sure doing the next one yourself.
- **Setting up the airline app and mobile boarding pass** — and a paper backup — so the airport goes smoothly.
- **Checking a deal or site is real** before you pay — always worth a two-minute call if anything feels off.
- **Anything that smelled like a travel scam** — a too-good deal, a 'problem with your booking' message — call me before you act.
- **Organizing your trip documents** so nothing's a scramble at the gate.

What working with me is like

I come to your home, here in Portage County, and I work at your pace — plainly, patiently, with a careful eye on keeping you safe. That's been my way for more than 30 years.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a visit at **billshometech.com/book**. Bill's Home Tech serves Portage County, Ohio. No question is too small — and checking before you pay is always worth a call.

Thank you for letting me help you travel with confidence. Take your time, double-check before you pay, and remember I'm only a phone call away.

— Bill

CHAPTER 16

Your Travel-Booking Cheat-Sheet

Keep this by the computer when you book. The whole guide, boiled down.

Booking, step by step

1. Go to the real site by **typing its address yourself** or using the official app.
2. Search: where, when, how many; compare beyond just price.
3. Mind the fare type (basic economy?) and bag fees; read the cancellation policy.
4. Enter travelers' names **exactly as on their photo ID**.
5. Review the summary — names, dates, airports — before paying.
6. Pay with a **credit card**; save the confirmation email.

The safety rules

- Reach travel sites by typing the address or using the app — never a link in an email, ad, or search result.
- Pay only by credit card; never by wire, check, gift card, or crypto.
- Never pay a rental host outside the official platform.
- Be wary of deep discounts, urgency, fake QR codes, and 'problem with your booking' messages.
- When in doubt, go to the company directly — or call Bill before you pay.

For the trip

- Install the airline's app; check in about 24 hours before.
- Use a mobile boarding pass, but print a paper backup too.
- Keep all confirmations in one place, reachable even if your phone dies.

Write it down for each trip

Keep handy	
Flight confirmation code	_____
Hotel confirmation code	_____
My card company's fraud/number	_____

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

You've got this

You can now search, choose, and book flights and hotels; pay in a way that protects you; sidestep the scams; and carry your trip on your phone. That's the freedom to go where you please, when you please. Keep this guide handy, check before you pay, and remember I'm only a phone call away.