

Paws Inn – a hotel booking app just for people and their furry friends.

Final project for UX Design Institute – Professional Diploma

Duration of project: 6 months

Tools: Typeform, Miro, Figma, Invision, Sketch

Project Brief: Design a high fidelity prototype of a hotel app, along with detailed wireframes.



About

the app –

Introducing, Paws Inn, a hotel booking app tailored to pet owners. Paws Inn focuses on providing a fast and easy hotel booking service to users travelling with their pets.

the problem –

Hotel booking apps are perfect for people on the go. They should be simple, straightforward and have the capability to make a booking in minutes. All relevant information a user would want to see should be available and accessible. However, something simple can feel complex. Whether it's to do with the UI design or the lack of flow.

the goal –

To create a quick and hassle-free hotel booking experience for our users. To ensure that users can book their hotels in minutes, and are displayed with the relevant options without having the user filter their search too much.

Design Approach

research → analysis → design → prototype → wireframe

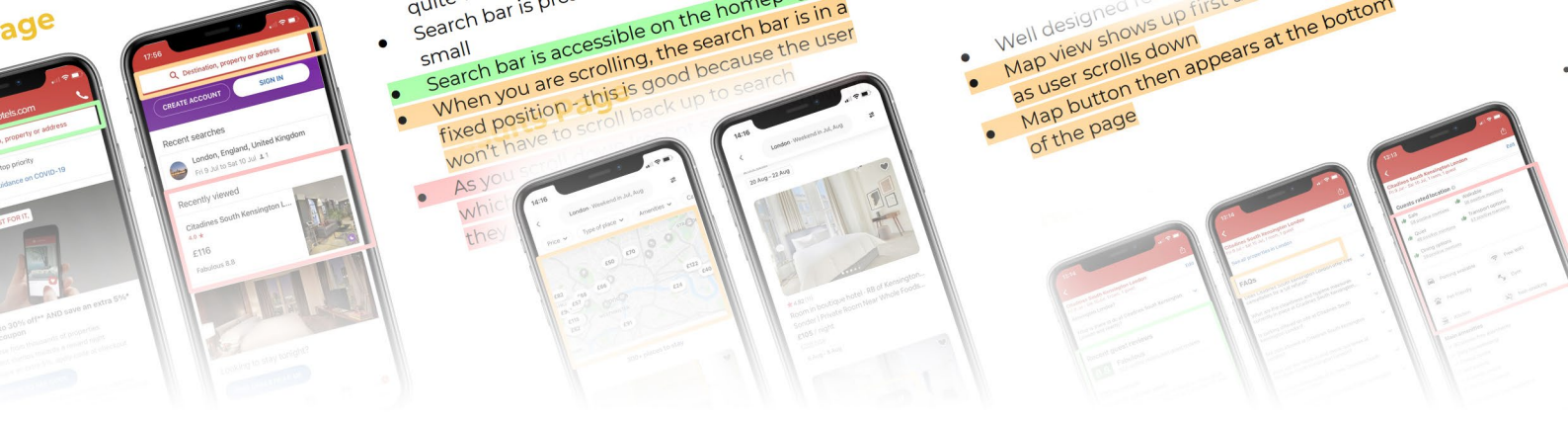
Research problems and relevant experiences faced by users through competitive benchmarking, surveys, usability testing and note-taking.

Analyse the results by creating a customer journey map and affinity diagrams.

Design the solutions to problems raised through a flow diagram and sketching screen states.

Prototype a high-fidelity version of the app with design solutions in mind.

Wireframe of the final design for developers to describe all screen states and flow.



Research

Competitive Benchmarking

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The first step to my research was to have a look at other hotel apps. I reviewed three apps, Hotels.com, Trivago and AirBNB. I chose to do these three as they were the top results when I was searching for hotels on the app store. I wanted to look at the most popular apps as I thought they would be the best at solving problems for users and are best designed for a good user experience.

the goal –

- To see how popular hotel booking apps solve problems that I wanted to solve.
- How I can use any negative experiences as a way to improve my app and not repeat the same issues.
- To figure out the conventions of the hotel apps and how they differ across different apps.

the focus –

My focus was mainly on the following screens:

- Onboarding page - what comes up first as the user opens the app
- Homepage - the layout of the homepage, what was put at the top, features etc
- Results page
- Hotel Page

final thoughts –

From this research, I was able to pick up on the typical conventions that hotel apps use:

- Search bar the first thing on a homepage
- Explore/recommendations of places to visit
- Map View/list view option
- Filters/sort
- Share + like button on hotel pages

One of the pain points were pop-ups that showed as you entered the app, for instance enabling notifications, location services, sign in - this was frustrating if I wanted to just quickly start searching.

However, these apps did have a user-friendly interface for me, they displayed all the relevant information and I was easily able to select dates for my stay. Out of the three apps, I much preferred AirBNB as the interface was very well designed and the booking process was much faster and simpler than the other two apps.

Online Survey

To deepen my research, I wanted to look into personal experiences by other people as well. I prepared an online survey and sent it over to my 10 participants.

quantitative insights –

- 90% of users had something to change about the app due to their negative experiences.
- 50% of users found certain features of the app useful in their hotel booking process.
- 30% weren't able to complete their booking because of difficulties using the app.
- 30% would change the UI design on the app for a better experience.

qualitative insights –

- Reviews and ratings of the hotel were useful for users to complete a booking.
- Adverts were a pain point - interrupted viewing.
- The presentation of images/galleries of the different hotels was a pain point - not easy to view or not enough provided for the user.
- Users would like the add-ons/extra page to be made simpler.

Doing an online survey made me understand the main pain points users face when trying to book a hotel through an app. From my research, I can see that well-presented images of hotels and hotel rooms were a recurring pain point for users. Also having reviews and ratings of hotels was a key part of decision making for users, therefore I knew that this was something I could not leave out when making my app. Furthermore, this showed that it can be very easy for a user to turn away from an app and not use it again if they face a single negative thing. From the app not being responsive, to having too many ads or unnecessary additions to the UI design can put off users. This made me want to opt for a design that's not going to have too much going on, but at the same time not too minimal.

Note-Taking

To get more substantial data, my next step is to get live user reactions and thoughts to hotel apps. Before doing my usability test, I completed a note-taking activity provided by UXDI. I watched two usability tests and took notes of relevant feedback from the users. This helped me to get used to taking notes as the user was interacting with two different hotel apps - Barcelo and The Doyle Collection.

Below are some of the interactions from the two users that I feel were pivotal for my decision making:

user one –

User Hotel App Usage:

- 👍 Refundable hotel - selling point
- 👍 Reliability, known brand, value for money & child friendly - important criteria
- 👍 Searches the area user was staying at - ratings & reviews helped
- 🔄 Usually compares - facilities, all-inclusive option, distance from airport and town
- 👎 Unknown brands was trusted less by user

Barcelo App Highlights:

- 👍 Homepage - attractive, puts user on holiday mode
- 👎 Drop down options show hotels first rather than location which is slowing down the users process
- 👎 Choosing a date to stay is slow as the month loads one by one
- 👎 Prices shown is GBP than euro - wants the desired travel location currency to show
- 👍 Tripadvisor rating and reviews brings more trust and reliability to the user
- 👎 Dislikes the add-ons - comes across as hotel trying to make extra money, slows down booking process

The Doyle Collection Highlights:

- 👍 Easy to find booking date due to scrolling calendar
- 👎 Confirming a booking date was a longer process – had to click 'done' every time – If user didn't press it they will have to select dates again
- 👍 Better description of location and hotel
- 👎 No ratings shown – user would have to research the hotel themselves

user two –

User Hotel App Usage:

- 🔄 Booking.com app used by the user previously
- 👍 Booking.com offers loyalty points – makes user want to use them more
- 🔄 User looks for best price, what hotel looked the nicest in photos, best amenities, modern looking hotels

Barcelo App Highlights:

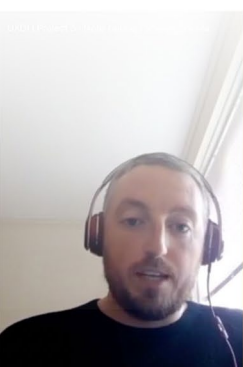
- 👍 The user had a good experience with the app
- 👍 Enjoyed the add-ons as they hadn't seen it on another app before
- 👍 It was user friendly for the user and straightforward.
- 👎 Search engine was a pain point as the user found the results on the drop down list to be unnecessary. The user intended to only search Barcelona, but Morocco was showing up too.

The Doyle Collection App Highlights:

- 👍 Images of the hotel stand out to the user
- 👍 Hotel description stands out – user appreciated hotel information
- 👎 User struggled to navigate through calendar to select dates – no arrows or scrollbar to show action
- 👍 Being able to swipe through the gallery of the hotel was better than booking.com where you'd have to click on the individual image to view them

Doing this note-taking exercise was extremely helpful to see user interactions with different and less familiar apps. I was able to gather many notes that helped me to decide on what my app should do, and not do. My main take back from this research was:

- ➔ Create a visually pleasing homepage for users to want to book through my app
- ➔ Have an easy search process for users – limit the number of taps so that the user can get to their results quicker (to avoid a date selection like The Doyle Collection app where users would have to click done after every selection)
- ➔ Provide TripAdvisor reviews to gain users trust as this will help for them to read real experiences and be able to make a decision according to that
- ➔ Allow user to change currency



KEY

Project 3 - Note-taking | Shweta Shukla

User Two:

- Booking.com app used by the user previously
- Booking.com offers loyalty points - makes user want to use them more
- User looks for best price, what hotel looked the nicest in photos, best amenities, modern looking hotels
- Any problems faced by the user were quickly noted

App Two: THE DOYLE COLLECTION



User Two:

- User able to navigate into the search engine
- User had to scroll to find barcelona
- Confusing to user that morocco comes up when searching for barcelona
- Slow process when finding the date to book hotel
- User drawn to trip advisor rating - stands out
- User uses map view to find seaside hotel
- User interrupted by black friday discount - unable to see X to close pop up straight away
- Black friday discount and login takes over the page - user has to scroll down
- User able to navigate through add-ons and select a deal
- User found app user friendly and simple
- Other locations showing up when searching for barcelona was unnecessary



Usability Test

The next part of my research was to conduct my own usability test. I chose two apps - Premiere Inn and Marriott Bonvoy - for the user to interact with and to give me their real and honest feedback. My usability test took place in person - a camera was set up, the phone screen was being recorded and I was doing the note taking.

From my previous research techniques, I was clear on what my intentions were for this usability test. I created a script to keep me in line with what to ask my user and what prompts to give to get the relevant feedback. My main aim was to ensure that the user felt comfortable enough to communicate whatever thoughts they have, while still staying in line with what I was asking/prompting them to do. As this was in person, I was able to take note of their behaviour and any hesitations they were having that they weren't able to communicate.

We went through the app step by step, starting from the homepage, and ending on the review page. As I was conducting this usability test, I took notes simultaneously and took further notes whilst watching the recordings. This allowed me to make more in depth notes and to pick out on anything I might have missed out on before.

Below I have listed a condensed version of my notes from the usability test.

User Hotel App Usage:

- Previously booked for leisure
- Booking.com and Expedia used to book flights + hotel together - preferred apps
- Most important criteria:
 - Pricing/budget
 - Location close to city centre
 - Cleanliness
 - Reviews and ratings
 - Close to attractions

Marriott Bonvoy App Highlights:

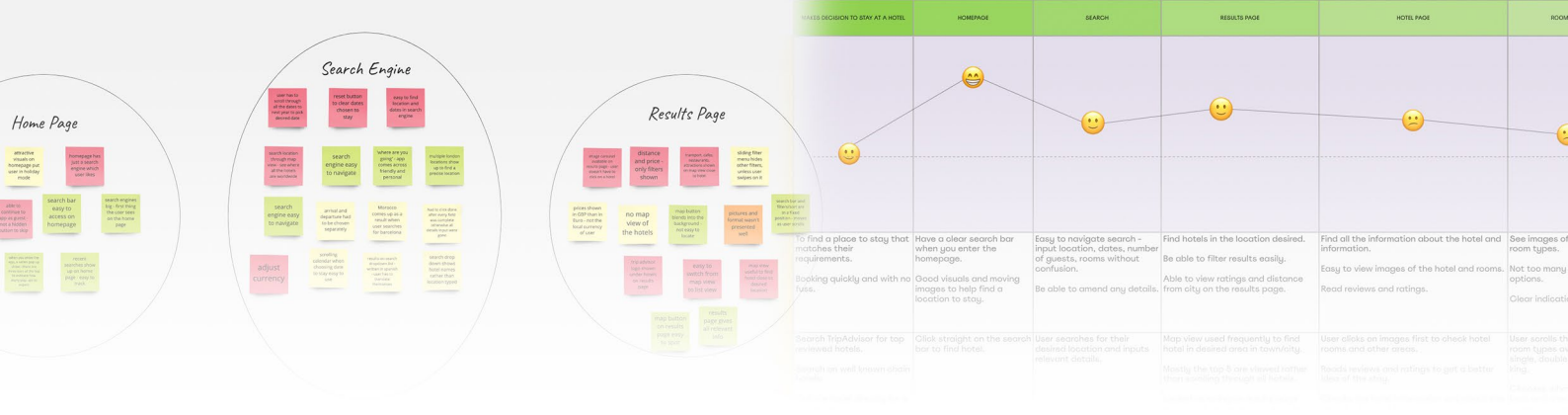
- 🌀 Overall was an average experience
- 👎 Too much information
- 👎 User had to click more to get to where they want
- 👍 Likes - map view
- 👎 Disliked - having to go back every time when couldn't find something or go back to previous page
- 👎 Not as easy to navigate
- 👎 Payment wasn't easy to notice
- 👎 Not expecting to see so many features - too many features for users liking

Premier Inn App Highlights:

- 🌀 Overall good experience
- 👍 Straightforward and easy
- 👍 Particularly liked - map view - shows destination, what's in the area, landmarks, restaurants/cafés, transport
- 👎 Dislikes - distance and price filter did not work at first until third attempt
- 👎 User would've liked if the app showed top locations to stay in London
- 👎 Expected to see - full reviews
- 👍 Surprised to see - breakdowns of price by night

Conclusion:

This usability test brought quite a few things to my attention. I can see how simple additions to an app can make a pleasant experience for the user. For instance, this user appreciates being able to see the location of the hotel through a map view. Not only that, but being able to view what is around the area the user will stay at - for instance, attractions, landmarks, restaurants, cafes and transportation. This makes the booking process quicker for a user as they can view everything in one app. If these features were not available, they'd have to search it themselves or even rely on calling the hotel (as mentioned by one of the users during my note-taking activity) to find out more. Providing simple features like this can make the user experience more reliable and trustworthy.



Analysis

Now that my research has been completed, the next step is to define the problem.

Affinity Diagram

To define the problem, I had to gather all my findings and notes to organise them all. At first, I physically began to write down all the notes onto sticky notes and stick them up on a wall, but it was getting too much so I had to switch to doing it online. I used Miro to create sticky notes of all the findings and group them into appropriate categories. I much prefer the online method as it looked a lot neater and was easier to group.

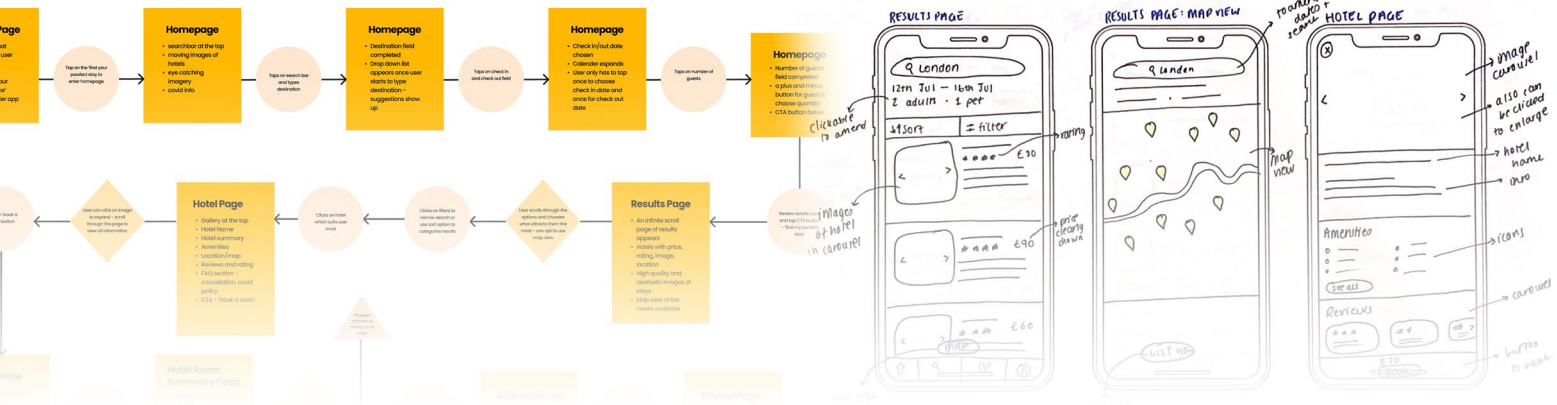
I decided to categorise the sticky notes into different screens on the app - eg. homepage, results page, search page - as this was how I structured my usability test, and how the usability test I watched was. I then colour coded the sticky notes so that it represents what notes are negative, positive, behaviour and goals.

Doing an affinity diagram was a great way to get a clearer structure of what my research helped me to achieve. Grouping them chronologically would be useful when it comes to sketching each screen, as I can look back to this diagram and find the right category.

Customer Journey Map

I then moved on to creating a customer journey map by using the affinity diagram. It was now time to analyse deeper into how the user experience was throughout the usability test. I created a graph to visually show how the experience went up and down and analysed their goals, behaviour, context and mental model.

What I found quite interesting was how the experience was average or below average. It shows a rollercoaster of emotions felt by the users - something that starts of pleasant, gets disrupted in the middle, and only gets better once the booking is made. The most unpleasant part of the journey was the add-ons page, due to users finding it disrupting or difficult to skip past. Add-ons can be useful for some users as they can provide extra packages to enhance their stay, the majority from my research didn't find the extra step pleasant. There are definitely many areas of improvement on hotel apps, and creating this customer journey map once again made these improvements more apparent for me to work on.



Design

The first two steps of this project are complete, and now it's time to design the solution.

Before I began to design anything, I reflected on what I have learnt from my last two stages. Below are the points of improvement and general conventions that I would incorporate when designing:

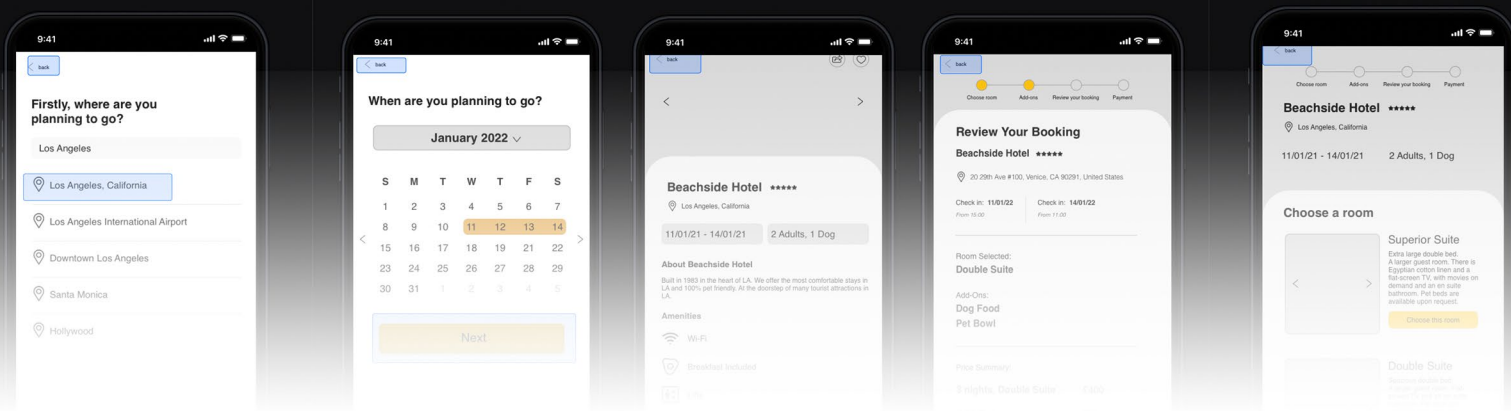
- Users like a visual appealing and a relevant homepage
- Make the search bar the main focus to get the user to start their search as they enter the app
- Keep taps to a minimum - user shouldn't have to do a lot to get to their result
- Pictures of hotel and hotel rooms are vital - slideshow format
- Must have TripAdvisor reviews
- Map view
- Hotel information
- Make any back/skip/close buttons apparent
- Allow currency change option so user can alter if needed

Flow Diagram

The first step of designing is to create a flow diagram. This is to create a clear structure of each screen state and what will happen on each screen. From the onboarding page, to the payment page. I first made a draft on paper, and clarified this structure on Figma. Apart from what the different pages will be, I also looked at any technical features, mental models, as well as the user action. This was the perfect way to visually present the flow of my app and to take note of any features I want to include.

Design Sketch

I first started with a sketch of my app. I found this extremely helpful as it was my first visual of my app flow. I sketched out what goes where on a screen. It took me by surprise how many of the design ideas I had in mind did not work well, however this was why I found this stage in particular very helpful because I could make any changes before creating my medium-fidelity prototype.



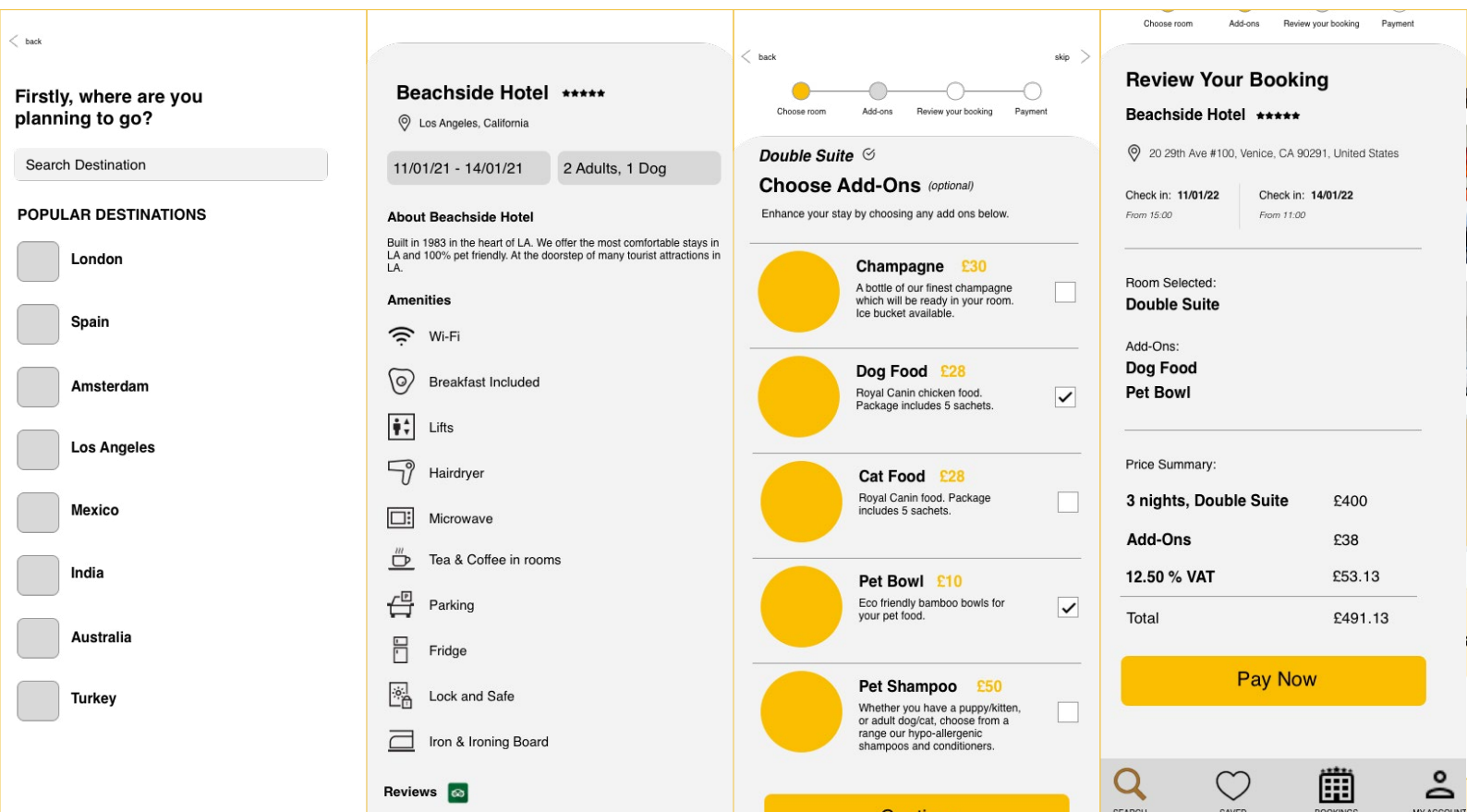
Prototype

Medium-Fidelity Prototype

After my sketches were complete and the structure made sense, I then went on to creating a medium-fidelity prototype of my app on Sketch. I designed the onboarding page, till the review page. This was helpful to see a digital version of my app, eventhough my focus wasn't on the visual UI design (eg. colours, fonts, images). I then used InVision to bring the prototype to life. This helped me to fix any issues to do with the way the app flows.

Scenario:

- Travelling to Los Angeles
- From 11th - 14th January 2022
- 2 adults and 1 dog
- Beachside hotel
- Double Suite
- Dog food + pet bowl for add ons



Wireframe

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Wireframing was the last part of this project.

Once the design was done, I created wireframes so that I could show what exactly needs to be done on the app. All the technical aspects of the app were annotated for the developers to take note of. The wireframes needed to be as descriptive as possible so that the app had the appropriate flow as well as the correct response when a user clicks on something.

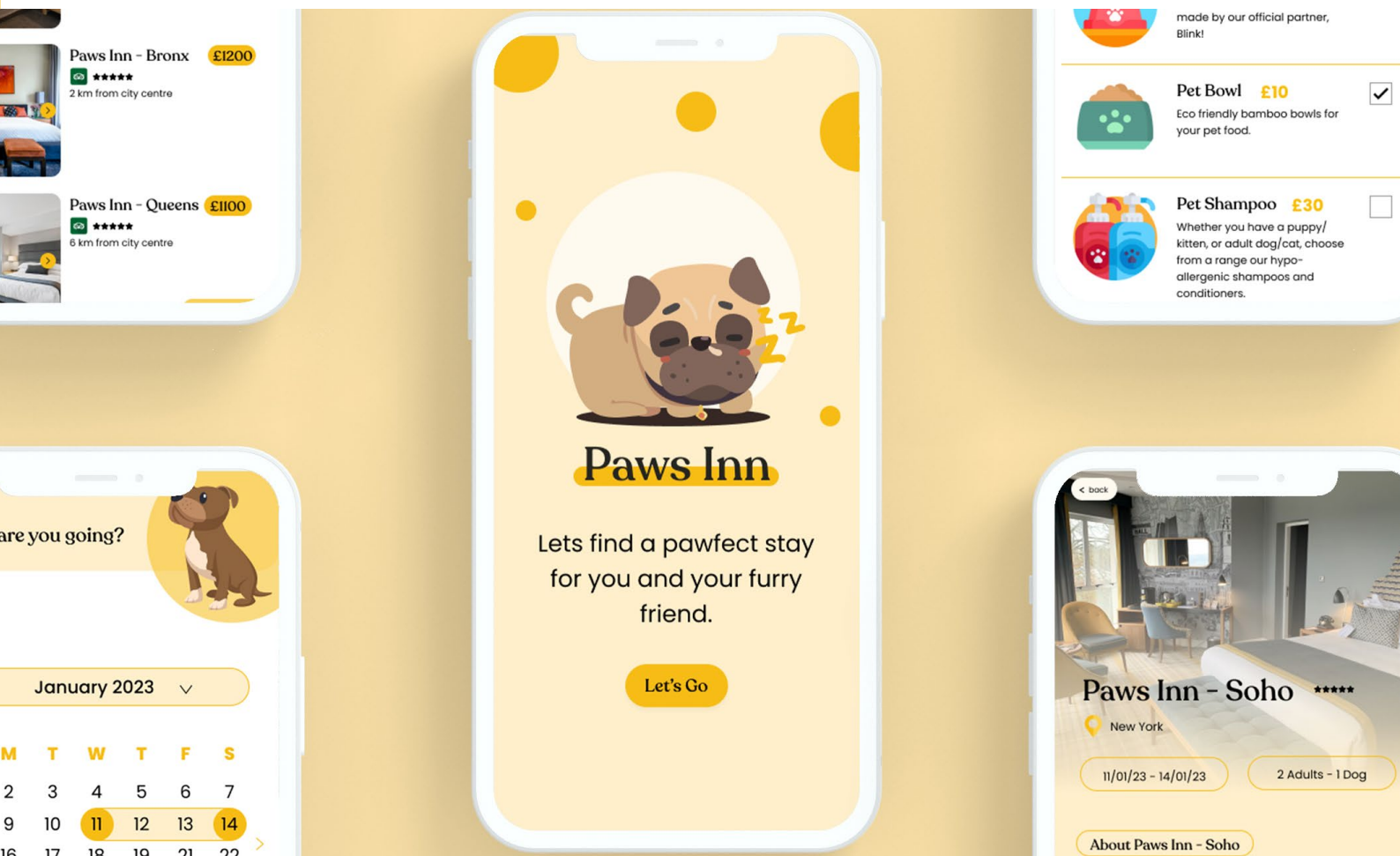
High-Fidelity Prototype

After submitting my last final projects, I decided to fix up my medium-fidelity prototype and design it with images and the colour palette I had envisioned. Creating a proper version of my app was a great way to see if the colours and layout of the different elements were apparent enough for the user, and visually appealing.

I created a logo, colour palette and chose logos/imagery to suit the tone and feel of my app. Once this was sorted, I began to put it all together and used my medium-fidelity prototype as a blueprint for my final design.

Scenario:

- Travelling to New York
- From 11th - 14th January
- 2 adults, 1 dog
- Paws Inn - Soho Hotel
- Double room
- Dog food and pet bowl add on



Reflection

This course/project has taught me many important and valuable skills when it comes to UX/UI design. It has highlighted the different methods and techniques that are used by UX designers. The journey to creating this app from scratch was challenging but opened my eyes to design trends and functionality.

One of the important lessons I learned was how crucial each step is, whether it is the research or prototyping. Each step has its importance, and should not be skipped. Without all the research, you are not only creating an app with biased opinions, but also an app that won't be solving problems that other users are facing. Doing each step is part of the process of learning and understanding the users, which will then aid in making the right problem-solving decisions.

Another thing I learned and enjoyed discovering was how after each prototype I designed/sketched, I found something to alter every time. For the user flow diagram, I made a basic outline of what is to happen on each screen. However, once I sketched it out, I saw how I needed more CTA's, or extra screens for the app to flow better. When I created my medium-fidelity prototype, I realised that the layout of each screen needed further adjustment, therefore when I made my final, properly designed prototype, I worked on making those changes. Each stage of this project helped to make my vision clearer and reach my goal - to solve user problems.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed this project. This course taught me methods that I would be expected to use in a real-life project and where to apply them. Designing the app was my favourite part, as this was the stage I could apply all my research and analysis to bring the product to life.