AIR TRAVEL

Competitive Benchmark

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OBJECTIVES

The intent of this exercise is to observe and note how best-in-class websites and apps facilitate or hinder typical tasks that an airline traveler will perform online.

Goals of this assignment include establishing conventions, highlighting best practice, and looking for areas of improvement.

This will be achieved by comparing four (4) different travel apps, three (3) of which are airline apps and the last being an app for an aggregate travel site.

COMPETITORS

ASPECTS REVIEWED

HOMEPAGE

FLIGHT SEARCH

SEARCH RESULTS

KEY

GOOD PRACTICE

INDUSTRY STANDARD

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

HOMEPAGE

1 Stylized hamburger menu icon - not immediately apparent there is a menu there

2 Important notice given prominent position on screen but barely noticeable

3 Eye is drawn to white portion of screen but to main icons do not include 'Book now' - need to scroll to the right to locate. 'Book now' text is also not a bold ready-to-click button like 'Sign in' or 'Check in' which is surprising

4 'Book Flight' is not one of the available options in the menu that appears after clicking the hamburger icon

5 Contrast was used effectively to draw the eye to an area with buttons leading to common tasks

6 Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

7 Menu at bottom of screen and hamburger icon remains on screen when scrolling left/right or up/down
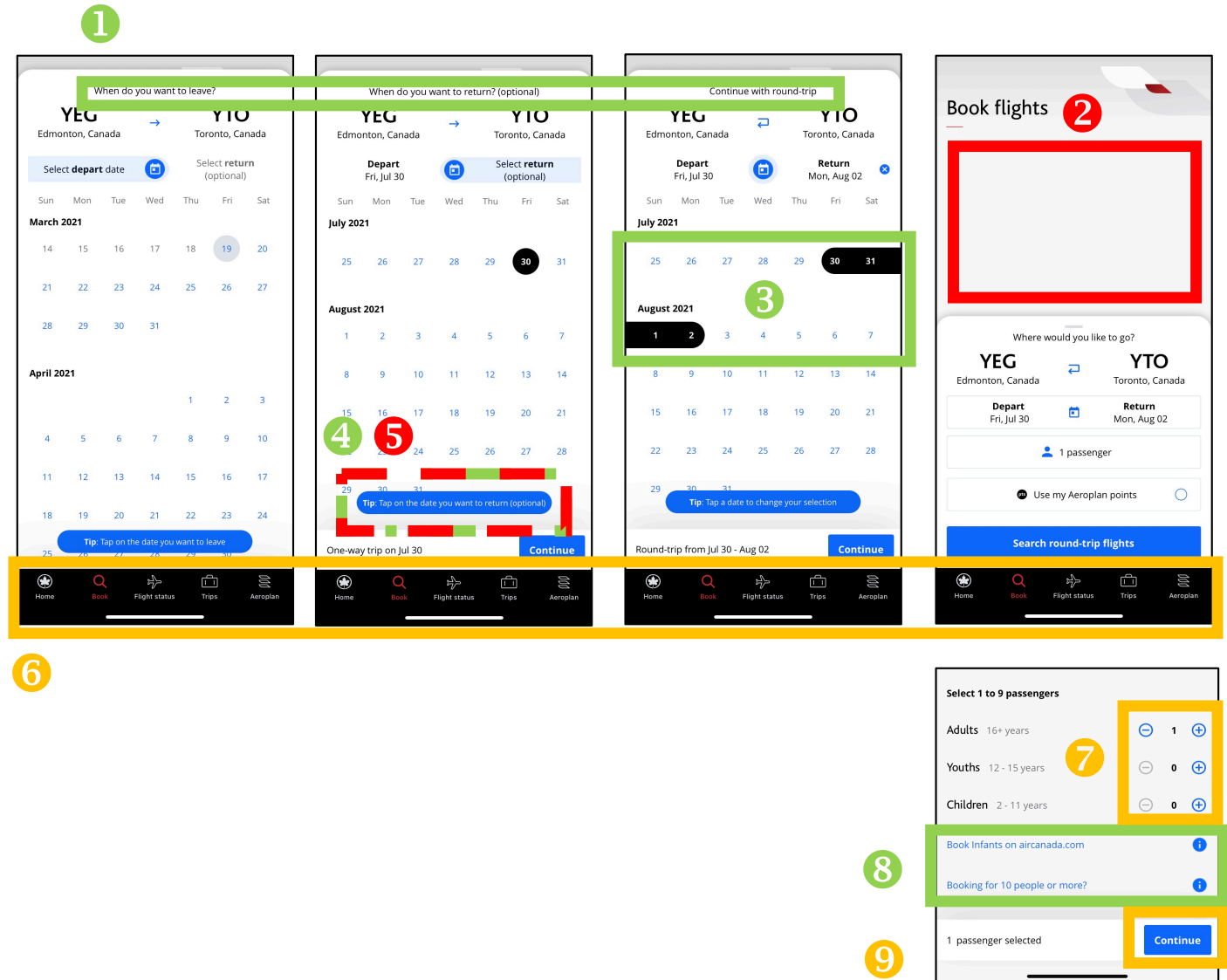

AIR CANADA
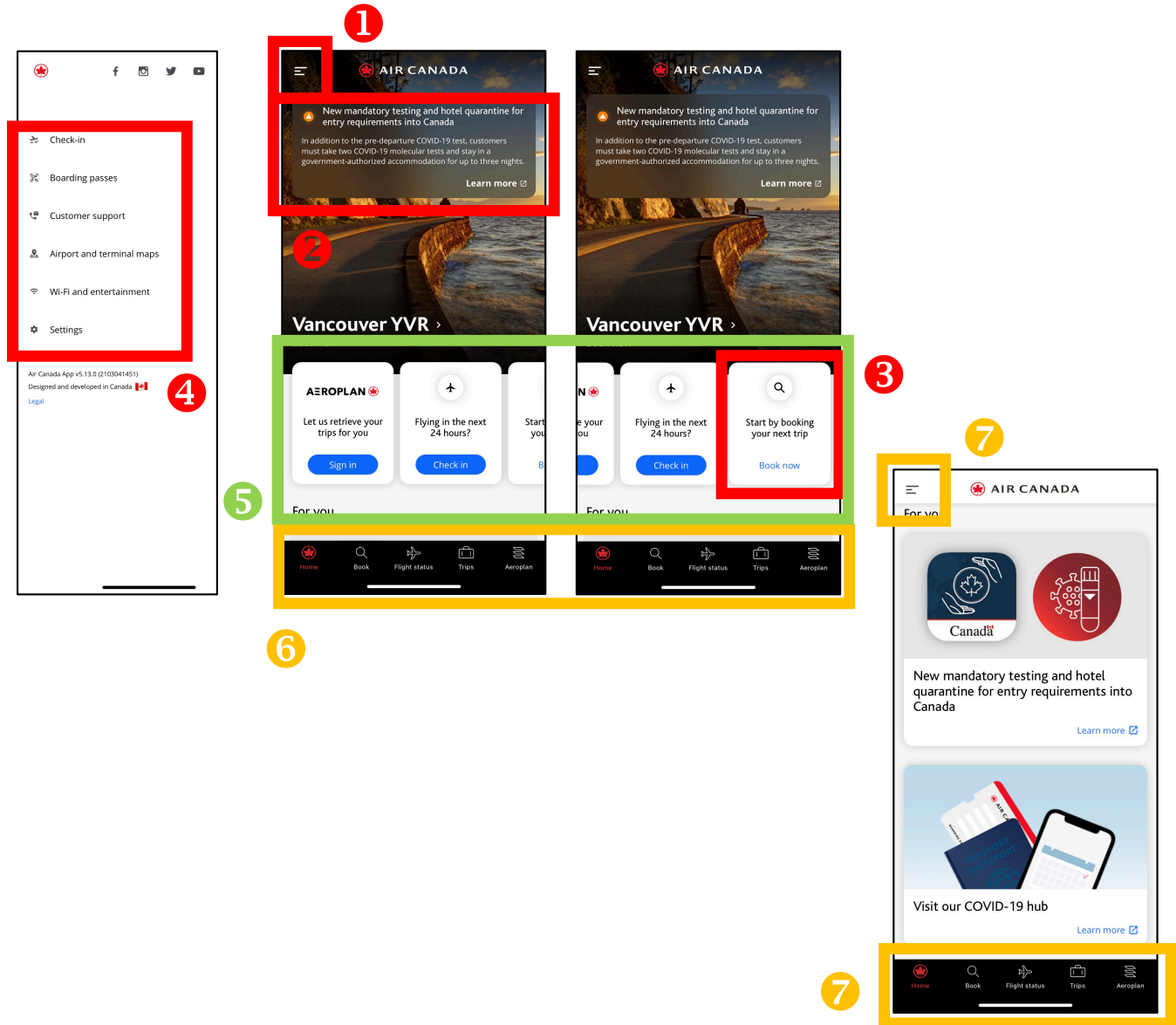
FLIGHT SEARCH

1 Eye is drawn to empty white space – distracting from goal/objective

2 Autofill with current location

3 Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

4 Illuminated icon to indicate which current step

5 Keyboard automatically available to prompt typing in departure city

6 Drop down with options appears based on text input


AIR CANADA
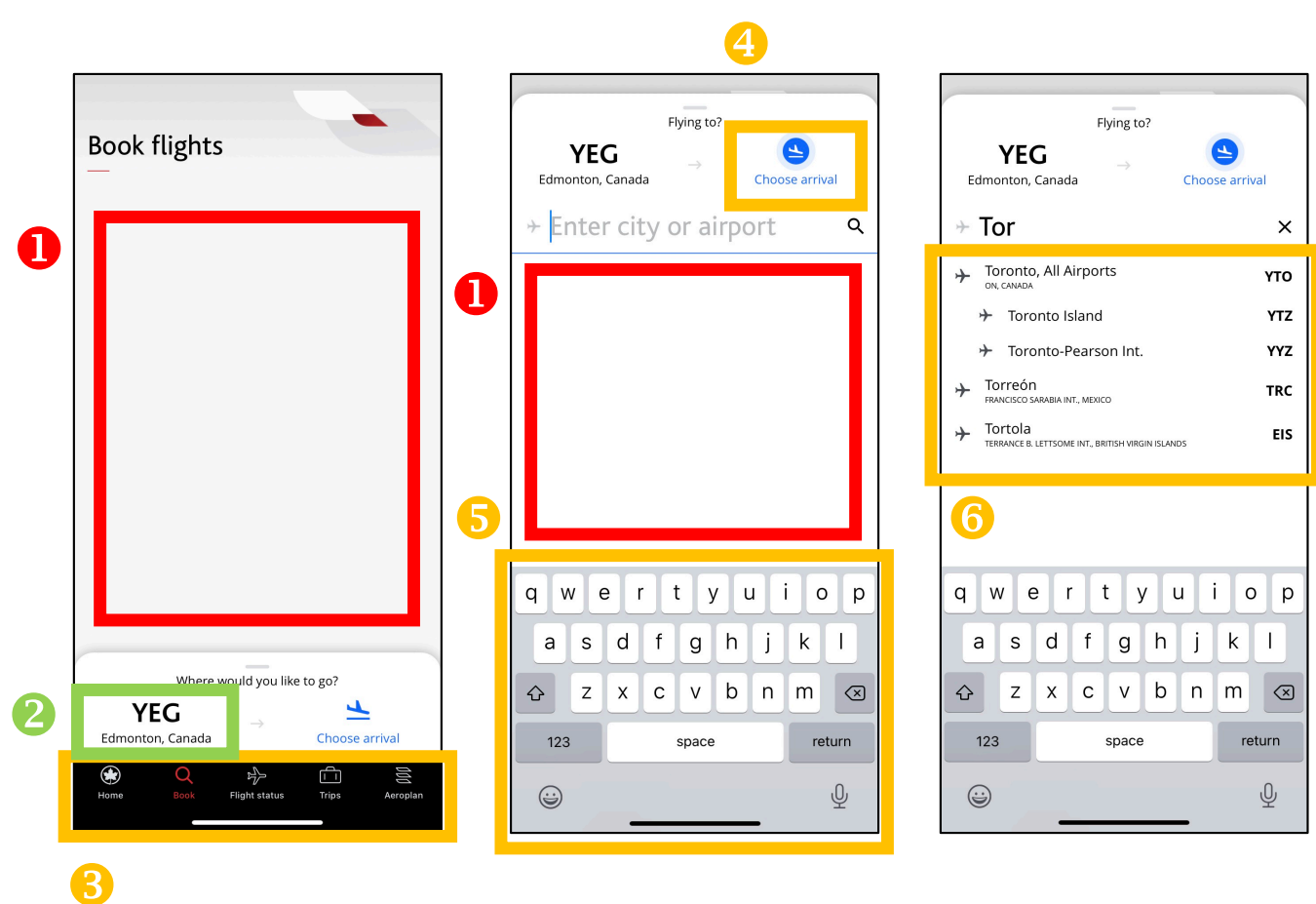
FLIGHT SEARCH

1 Questions at the top of the screen help orient user to which step in the process they are at

2 Eye is drawn to empty white space – distracting from goal/objective

3 Dates selected are highlighted boldly and clearly visible

4 'Tip' guiding user is easily visible and located in an area of the screen which is out of the way

5 'Tip' also repeated on subsequent screens after the action has already been performed; it also looks like a button

6 Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

7 Standard use of + and – icons to increase or decrease passenger numbers

8 Information items clearly visible due to different colored font and bold info icon

9 'Continue' button boldly visible

AIR CANADA

SEARCH RESULTS

❶ Graphic behind flight parameters makes text hard to read including if flights displayed are Economy or Business

❷ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❸ Eye is drawn to empty white space – distracting from goal/objective

❹ Standard use of ✔ and ✘ to represent option availability

❺ In addition to standard use of greyed our or highlight to indicate if a button is available, text beside describes what needs to be done and what is being confirmed

❻ 6 different fare options available grouped into two categories which is too many options – plus lowest Business Class fare is less costly than highest Economy fare which is confusing
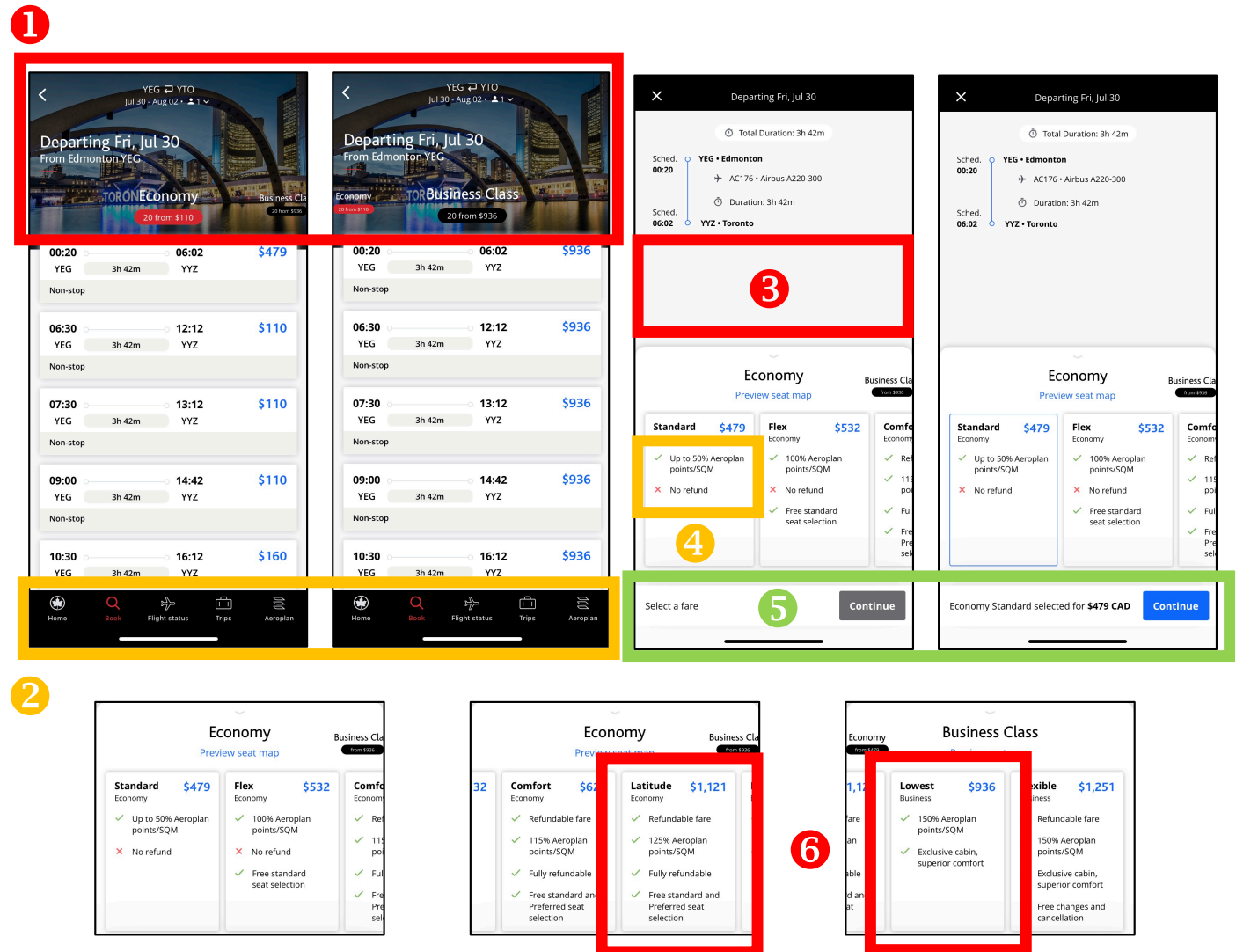
HOMEPAGE

1 Important announcement presented prior to home screen for best visibility – button for more information is clearly visible

2 'X' to close message is clearly highlighted using contrast and follows standard iconography

3 'Book a Flight' is easily located and 'Where would you like to go?' is a friendly yet professional way of prompting the location of the button

4 Features fares not visible without scrolling down

5 Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

6 Automatically detects location to provide relevant featured fares
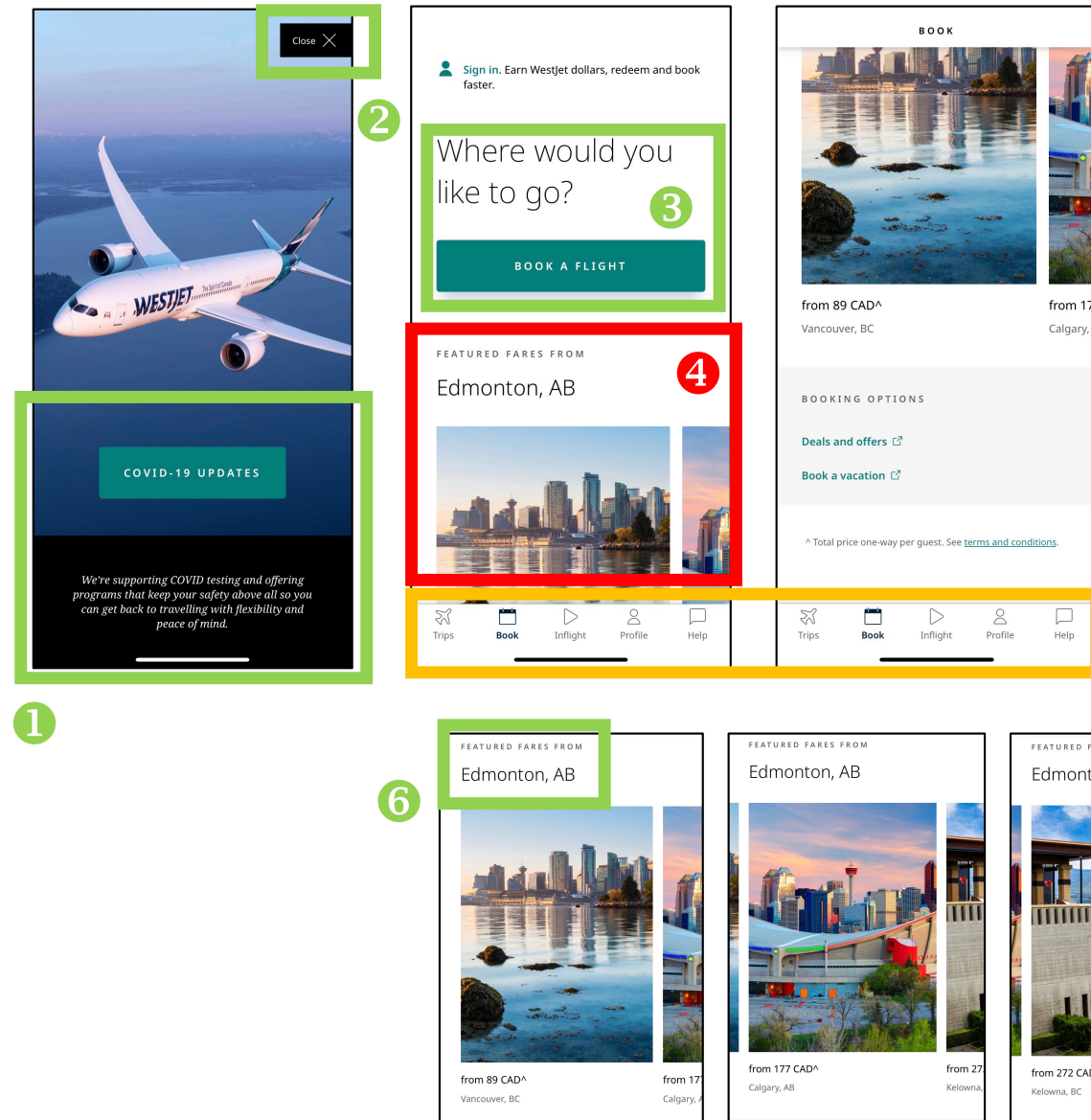
FLIGHT SEARCH

❶ Autofill with current location

❷ ⊘ icon used in addition to greyed out button to indicate step is incomplete and 'Get Flight' button not yet available

❸ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❹ Standard use of + and – icons to increase or decrease passenger numbers

❺ Standard use of color to indicate button can be selected

❻ 'Nearby' airports may be useful for departure city but much less so for 'Going to' – it is less likely to travel to destination that are within a 3-4 drive like Calgary than to further distances

❼ Keyboard automatically available to prompt typing in departure city

❽ Top drop-down option is not the option that most closely resembles what was entered in the text field

FLIGHT SEARCH

1 Standard use of color to highlight step in the process

2 No indication that numbers are dollar values or which currency they pertain to

3 Yellow tag icon is clearly understood to represent sale flights – handy information and execution is subtle

4 ⃠ icon used in addition to greyed out button to indicate step is incomplete and 'Continue' button not yet available

5 Standard use of 'X' to indicate Close function for a window – 'Close' text not required to still convey the same meaning

6 The two different shades of green and tiny icons do not help emphasize which dates are departure and return dates – more contrast would be better

7 Standard use of color to indicate button can be selected
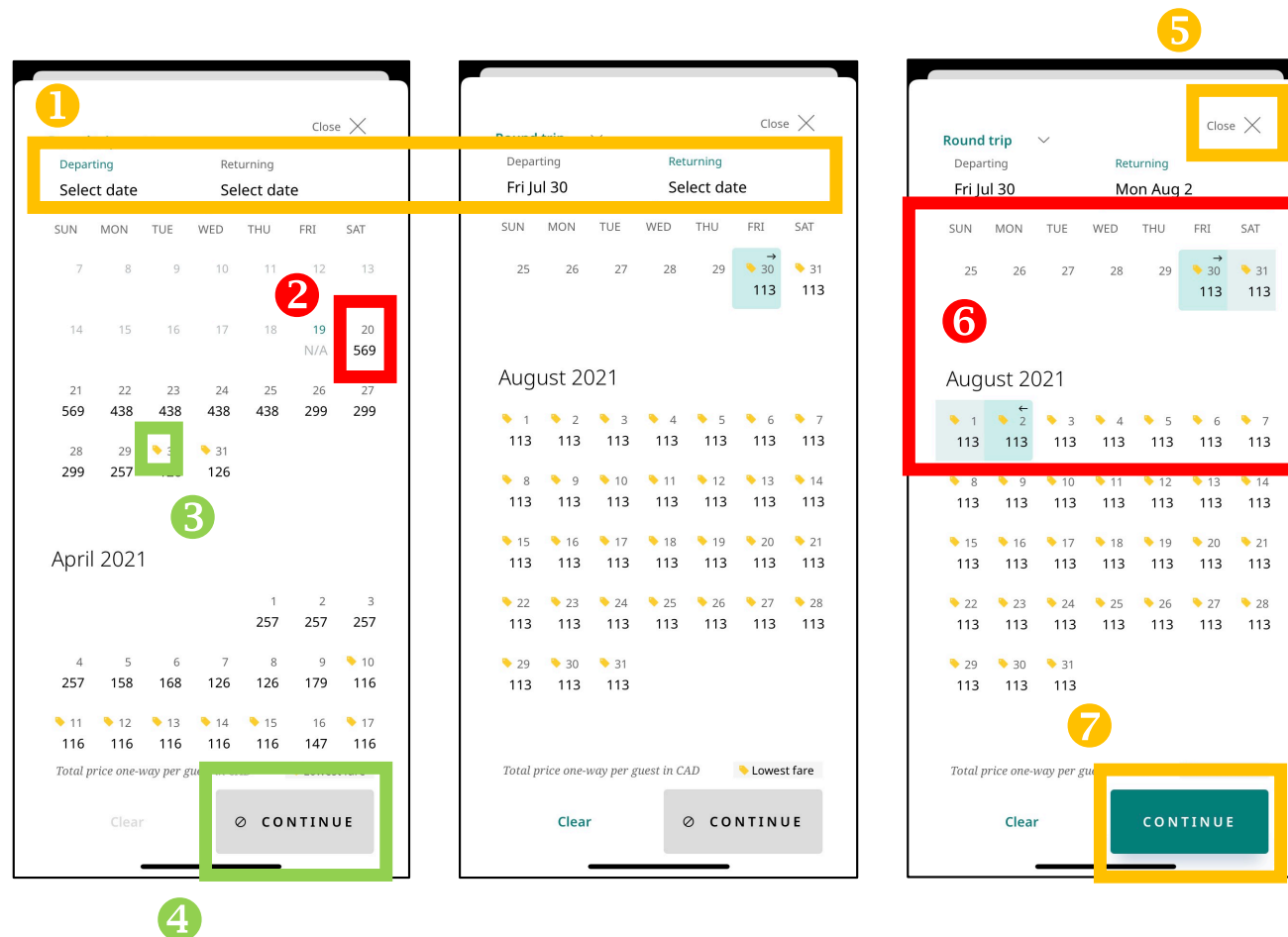
WESTJET 25

SEARCH RESULTS

❶ Most visible part of search results screen shows no flights

❷ Ability to see prices for flights a day before and after – formatted in a way similar to what users are used to seeing on airline websites

❸ Airport codes are used instead of city names – average traveler might not have codes memorized and departure; and arrival times are visually very far from each other

❹ Only two prices are immediately visible – if a user does not click 'View' they will not see that there are 3 Economy and 2 Premium fare options (total of 5 different prices)

❺ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❻ Standard use of ✔ and ✘ to represent option availability

❼ Standard use of color to indicate button can be selected
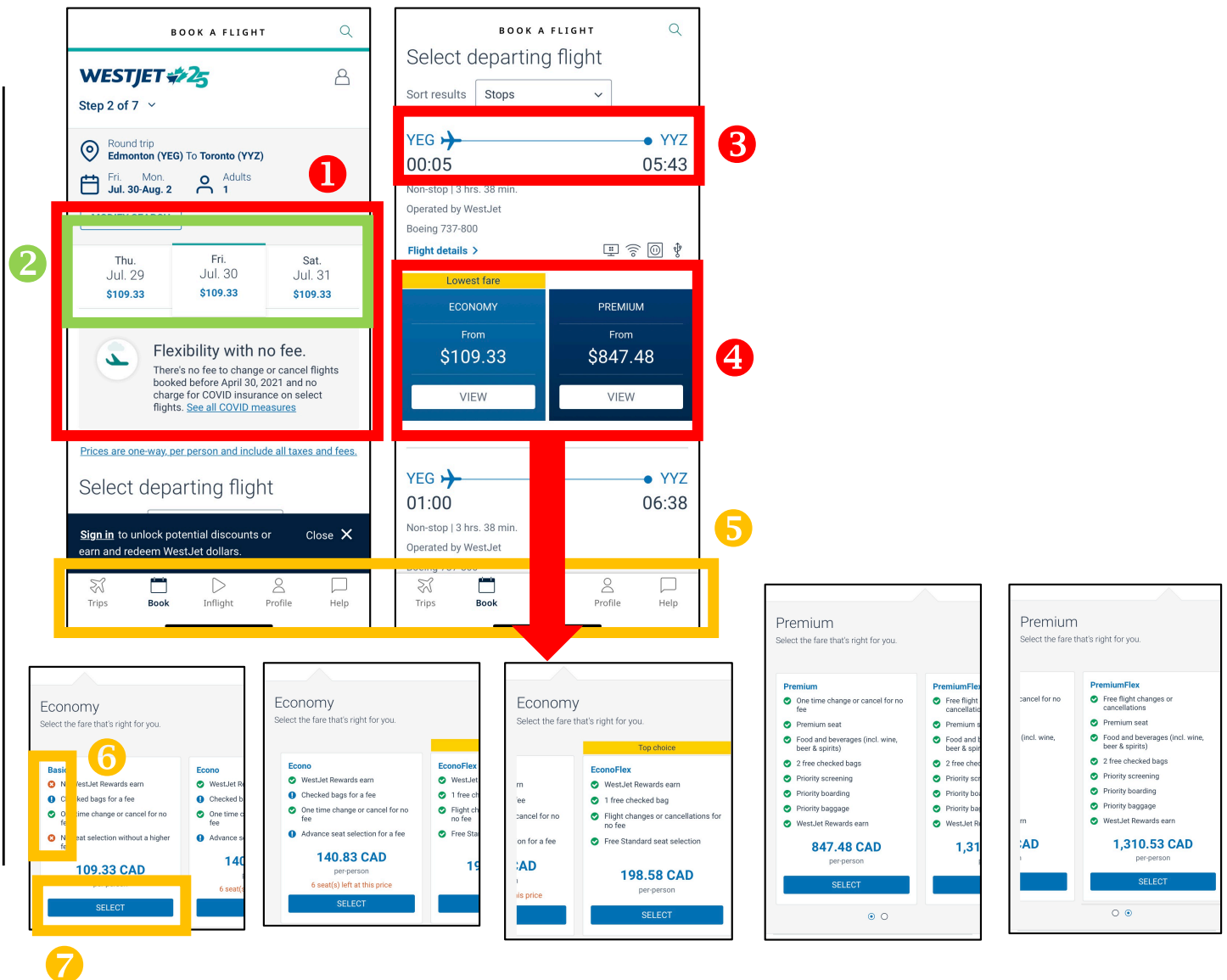
SEARCH RESULTS

❶ Standard use of ✔ and ✘ to represent option availability

❷ The fact that the airline is asking the customer if they sure they want to go with the Basic far is off-putting – makes the user feel like they are being questioned about their intentions

❸ The fact that "Upgrade to Econo for $31.50" is highlighted indicates gives the impression that the company is subtly pressuring the customer to spend more money

❹ By turning the check-box the same color as the background of the error message is a successful subtle way of indicating what information is missing

BOOK A FLIGHT 🔍

Restrictions apply for choosing Basic ✕

❶

| ✔ Included | ✘ Not available |

$$ Available for a higher fee

	Best option
	Basic	Econo
Flight changes or cancellations after 24-hours of booking	✔	✔
Accrual of WestJet dollars and tier benefits	✘	✔
Eligible for a cabin upgrade at check-in for a fee (space permitting)	✘	$
Advance seat selection	$$	$

❷
By choosing the Basic fare, I understand that **I cannot:**
- change or cancel my flight more than once, without a total loss of funds
- change my automatically assigned seat at check-in without paying an additional fee, regardless of tier status
- earn WestJet dollars or Travel Bank and that this booking does not count toward my WestJet Rewards qualifying spend

❸
Upgrade to Econo for $31.50

OR

Continue With Basic

Trips   Book   Inflight   Profile   Help

❹

⚠ Please confirm that you've read and understand the restrictions of Basic.

By choosing the Basic fare, I understand that **I cannot:**
- change or cancel my flight more than once, without a total loss of funds
- change my automatically assigned seat at check-in without paying an additional fee, regardless of tier status
- earn WestJet dollars or Travel Bank and that this booking does not count toward my WestJet Rewards qualifying spend

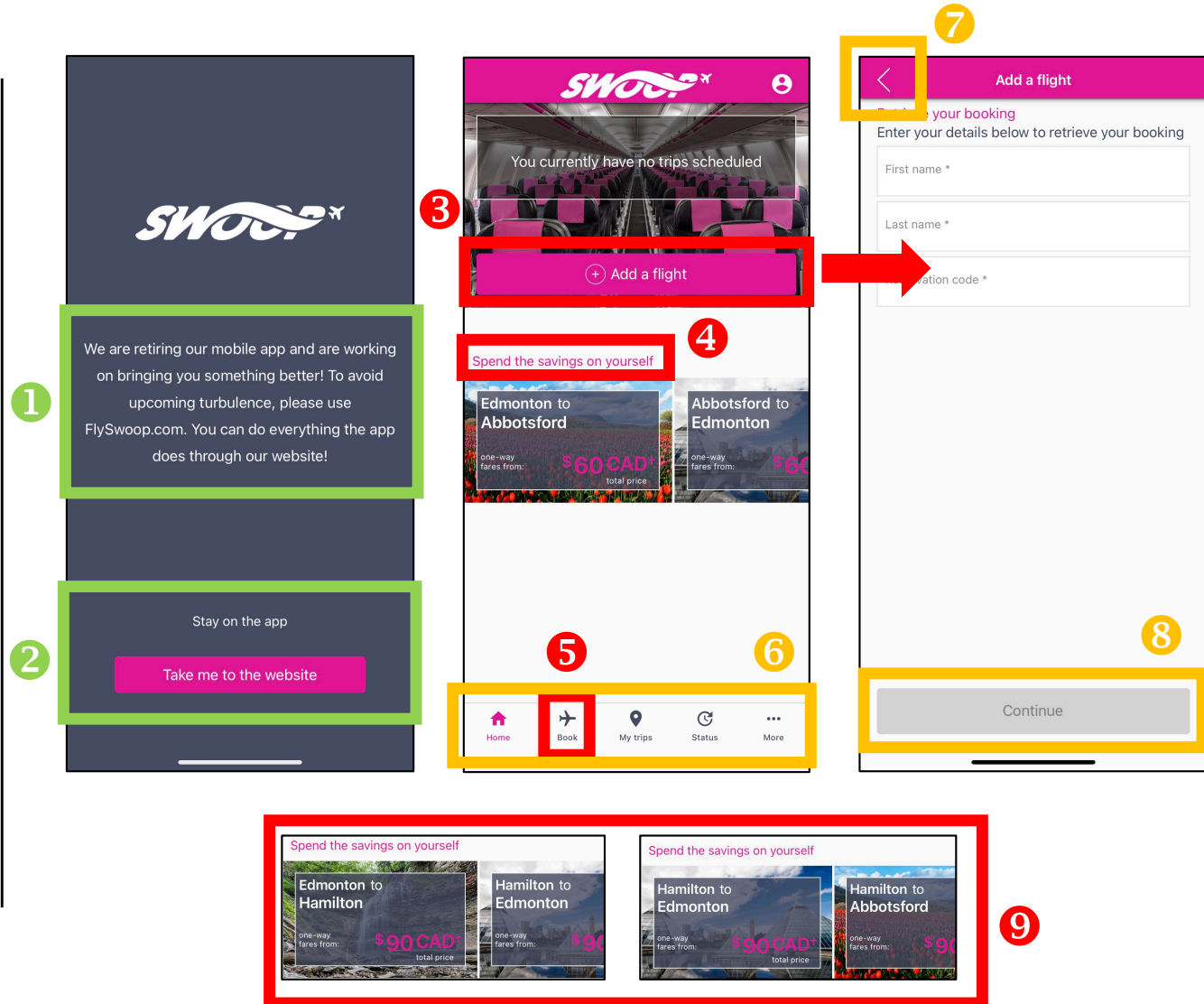**Upgrade to Econo for $31.50**

per-person

OR

Continue With Basic

Trips   Book   Inflight   Profile   Help

WESTJET ✈25

HOMEPAGE

1 Important announcement presented prior to home screen for best visibility

2 Encouraged next step is highlighted through use of a bold obvious button

3 Prominently displayed 'Add a flight' button implies this is where flights are booked when it actually leads to a screen for retrieving bookings

4 'Spend the savings on yourself' does not immediately imply these are sale flights or promotions

5 Only means to access the flight search screen for bookings is the icon in the menu at the bottom of the screen – not obvious

6 Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

7 Standard use of back arrow

8 Standard use of grey and halftone text to indicate button is not yet active/available

9 Image behind text is distracting and make it hard to see details of the promotions

Screen 1

We are retiring our mobile app and are working on bringing you something better! To avoid upcoming turbulence, please use FlySwoop.com. You can do everything the app does through our website!

1

Stay on the app

Take me to the website

2

Screen 2

SWOOP

You currently have no trips scheduled

3

(+) Add a flight

Spend the savings on yourself **4**

Edmonton to Abbotsford
one-way fares from: $60 CAD total price

Abbotsford to Edmonton
one-way fares from: $60

Home | Book | My trips | Status | More

5 **6**

Screen 3

7

< Add a flight

Retrieve your booking
Enter your details below to retrieve your booking

First name *

Last name *

Reservation code *

Continue

8

Bottom promotions

Spend the savings on yourself

Edmonton to Hamilton
one-way fares from: $90 CAD total price

Hamilton to Edmonton
one-way fares from: $90

Spend the savings on yourself

Hamilton to Edmonton
one-way fares from: $90 CAD total price

Hamilton to Abbotsford
one-way fares from: $90

9

SWOOP

FLIGHT SEARCH

❶ Does not autofill with current location

❷ Standard use of color to indicate button can be selected

❸ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❹ Since this is an airline with limited destinations the choice to include images and a dropdown menu is a good choice – allows users to be familiar with the cities they fly to as well as avoid entering cities that the airline does not service

❺ The negative sign (-) beside Adults implies that the form will allow 0 passengers or 0 Adults (children/infants flying alone?) which doesn't make sense

❻ Standard use of greyed out and halftone text to indicate dates with no flights available

❼ Does not show both departure and return dates on the same calendar – only shows the date selected and then a second calendar screen is presented
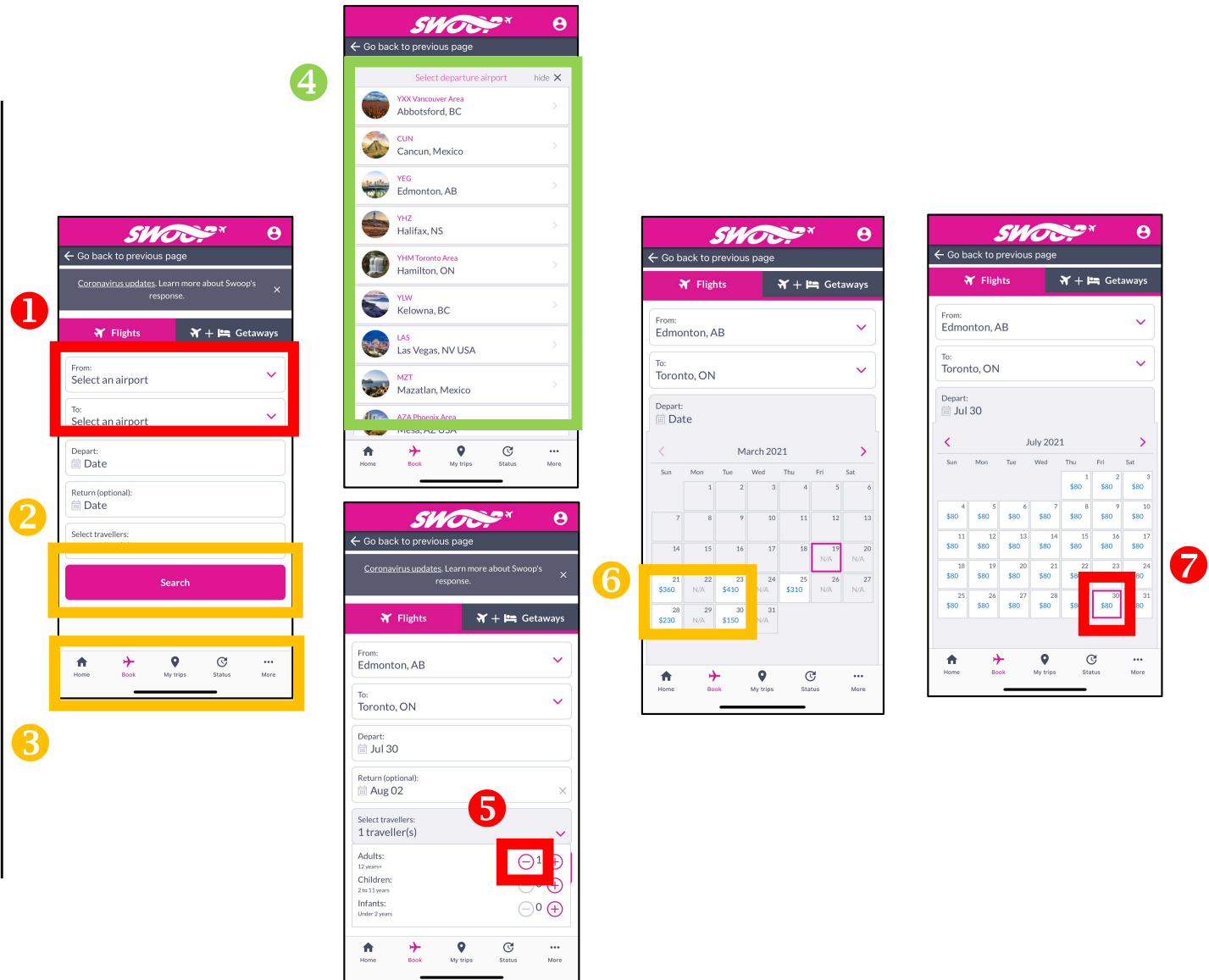
SEARCH RESULTS

❶ Overly wordy 'Back' button

❷ Progress bar with iconography is clearly visible and easy to understand

❸ Most visible part of search results screen shows no flights

❹ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❺ Title at top of screen clearly indicates which flights are being displayed – one screen per stage in journey

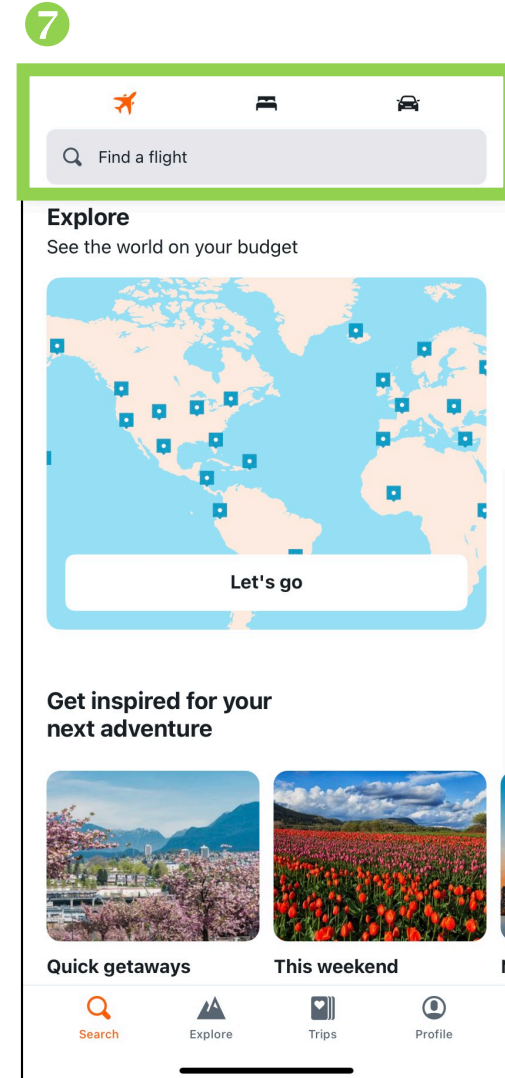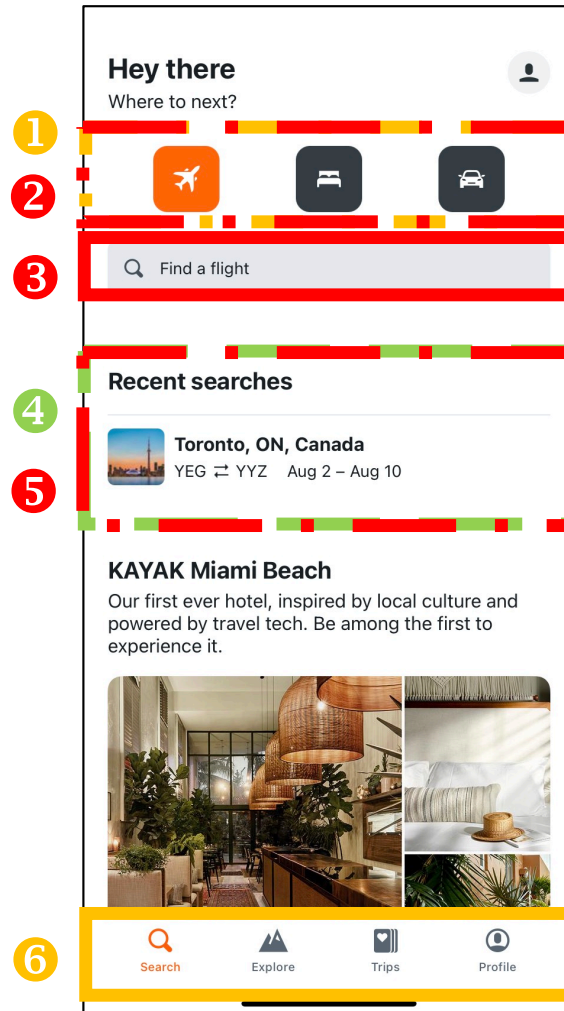❻ Ability to see prices for flights a day before and after – formatted in a way similar to what users are used to seeing on airline websites

❼ Flight information is very clearly displayed with plenty of white space around text to make it easier to read

❽ Flight prices are bolded but not Total price (as if not more important); also, 'Details' button requires more information about what kind of details it is providing

Screen 1 (left):
❶ ← Go back to previous page
Select
❷ (progress bar icons)
❸ Select your flights
You searched for
Edmonton, AB (YEG) to Toronto, ON (YYZ)
Friday Jul 30   Monday Aug 2   1
Modify
Have a promo code?
[   ]   Apply
To use FlySwoop.com, you agree to the website terms of use, the privacy policy, and the use of cookies.   Accept
❹ Home   Book   My trips   Status   More

Screen 2 (middle):
❺ ← Go back to previous page
Departing Flight
Edmonton, AB (YEG) to Toronto, ON (YYZ)
Due to information caching intervals, actual price may vary. Please query flight directly for actual fares available at time of query.
❻ Thursday Jul 29 $87.48 | Friday Jul 30 $87.48 | Saturday Jul 31 $87.48
1:00 AM 6:36 AM
Nonstop 3h 36m
WO421 737-800 $87.48
11:30 AM 5:09 PM
Nonstop 3h 39m
WO271 737-800 $97.47
3 seats left at
Returning Flight
Toronto, ON (YYZ) to Edmonton, AB (YEG)
Due to information caching intervals, actual price may vary. Please query flight directly for actual fares available at time of query.
Home   Book   My trips   Status   More

Screen 3 (right):
← Go back to previous page
Returning Flight
Toronto, ON (YYZ) to Edmonton, AB (YEG)
Due to information caching intervals, actual price may vary. Please query flight directly for actual fares available at time of query.
Sunday Aug 1 6 seats left at $69.24 | Monday Aug 2 $69.24 | Tuesday Aug 3 $69.24
❼ 7:40 AM 9:50 AM
Nonstop 4h 10m
WO412 737-800 $69.24
9:45 PM 11:54 PM
Nonstop 4h 9m
WO420 737-800 $69.24
❽ Total
$156.72 CAD   Details
Including taxes and fees
Home   Book   My trips   Status   More

HOMEPAGE

❶ Use of highlighted iconography to indicate selected option and common icons for flights, hotel and car rental are used

❷ Should also include text to confirm proper interpretation of icons

❸ 'Find a flight' button looks like a search field and does not align with standard mental model of what a button looks like

❹ App saves recent searches which is convenient

❺ No option to 'Clear' saved options – if options no longer relevant, it unnecessarily takes up prime real estate on the home screen

❻ Standard menu with icons along bottom of screen

❼ While scrolling down, 'Find a flight' button remains available and same icons used as initial screen – allows selection of options without scrolling back up

Hey there
Where to next?

❶
❷
❸ 🔍 Find a flight

❹ **Recent searches**

❺ **Toronto, ON, Canada**
YEG ⇄ YYZ   Aug 2 – Aug 10

KAYAK Miami Beach
Our first ever hotel, inspired by local culture and powered by travel tech. Be among the first to experience it.

❻ Search   Explore   Trips   Profile

❼ 🔍 Find a flight

Explore
See the world on your budget

Let's go

Get inspired for your next adventure

Quick getaways   This weekend

Search   Explore   Trips   Profile

FLIGHT SEARCH

❶ Automatically fills in with last search details

❷ Standard use of bold color to highlight button

❸ Not inherently clear what 'Add nearby airports' slider does – does it allow you to save the closest airport? Show airports within a certain distance?

❹ Keyboard automatically available to prompt typing in departure city

❺ Although 'Tip' and 'Sign in' button are helpful, the fact that it persists on subsequent screens is distracting

**❻** Shows recent locations – helpful function especially for frequent travelers

KAYAK
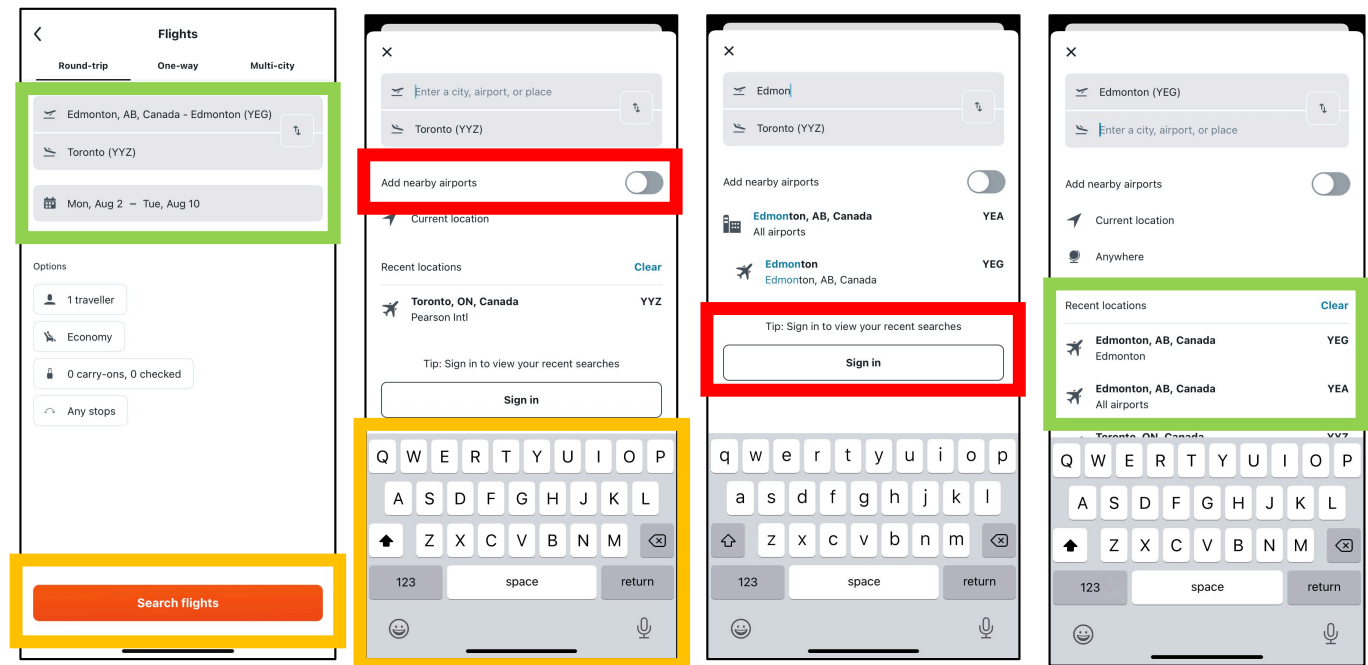
FLIGHT SEARCH

❶ Unclear what low/med/high color-coding means – at first glance, green and yellow could be interpreted as available flights / no available flights

❷ Dates selected are highlighted boldly and clearly visible

❸ Not immediately clear the meaning of 'Exact day' – drop down provides options to include days on either side of chosen days; could be better executed

❹ Minimalist aesthetic with additional options clearly visible

❺ Option screens all follow similar format providing easy navigation complete with clearly visible 'Cancel' and 'Apply' button

❻ Standard use of + and – icons to increase or decrease passenger numbers

❼ Option to select 'direct only' flights is a helpful function that is not common to other flight booking apps
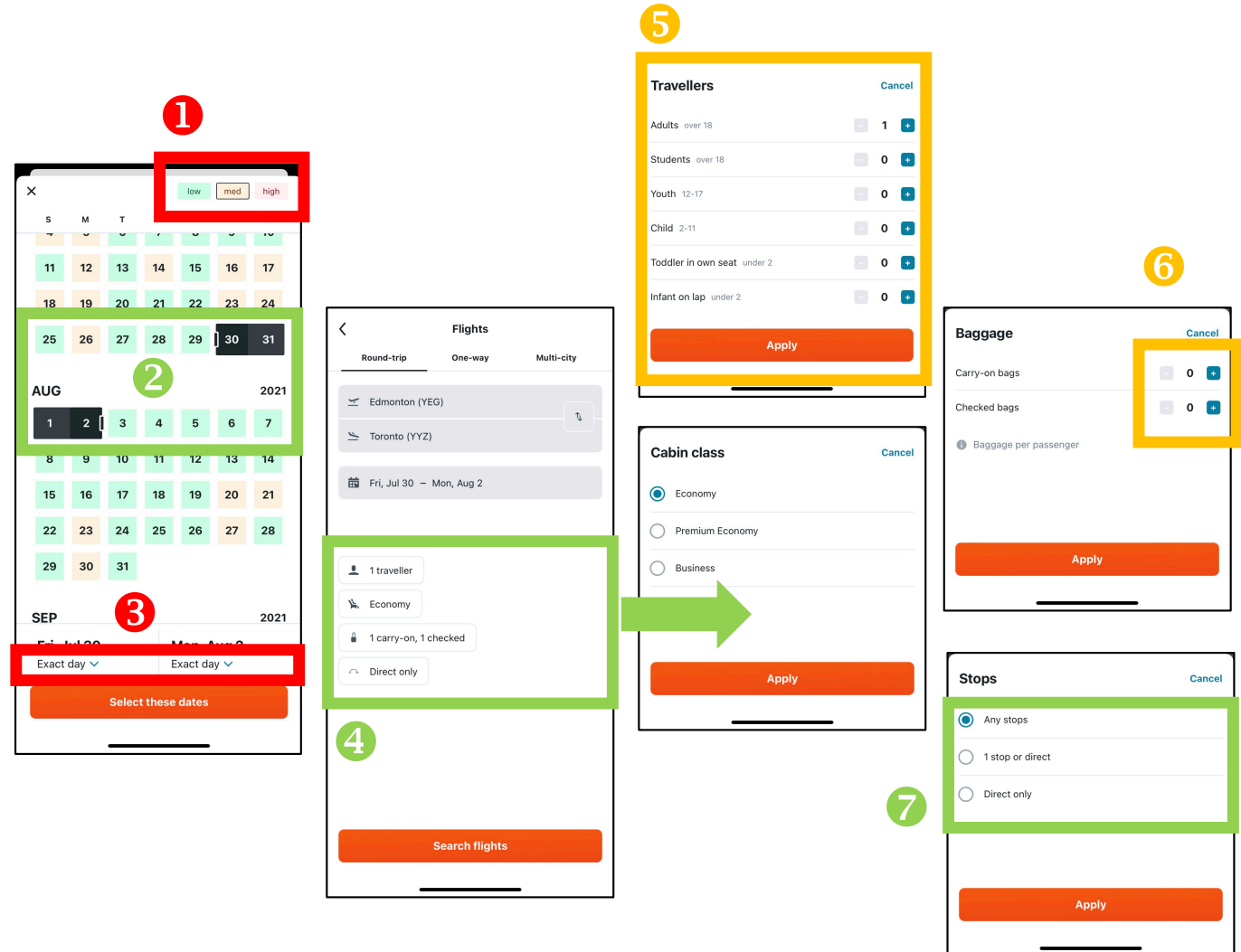
SEARCH RESULTS

❶ Flight result screen looks cluttered overall with price being given priority through the largest font

❷ Ability to sort by criteria such as stops and time is a useful function and located in an easy to find spot on the screen

❸ Unclear what a 'Sponsored' flight means; also, why is there not ability to save sponsored flights?

❹ Airline logos are small and hard to differentiate plus the airline name is also listed below (redundant)

❺ 'Tip' is only visible once the user scrolls down to view more results – it does not show on the initial screen

❻ Standard use of arrow to indicate 'Back'

❼ Swoop logo shown at top of screen but Flair flight below – confusing

❽ Unclear if "View deal" selects flight – turns out it takes you to 3rd party window (eDreams); a note indicating that user is leaving Kayak for another site would be helpful
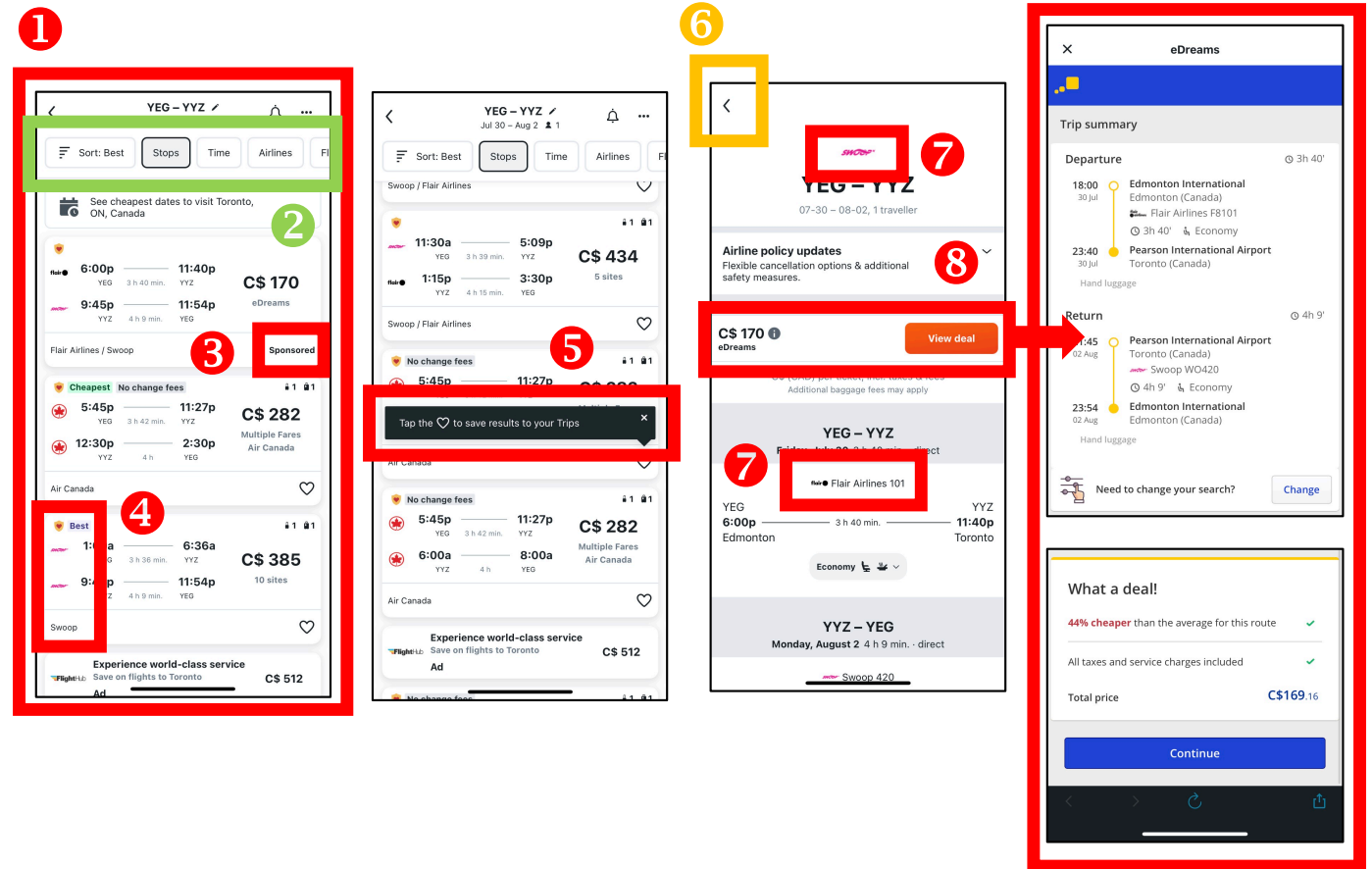
CONCLUSIONS

Industry Standard

- All apps included a menu at the bottom of the home screen featuring 4 icons representing common tasks. Often this menu would be 'pinned' to the bottom of the screen and remain fixed while the user was scrolling right/left or up/down.

- All apps provided a calendar in which to select departure and return dates – none of them provided an option to type in dates.

- Visual iconography and standards common to all 4 apps included:

    - < or "Back" in the top left corner to indicate where to click to go back to the previous screen

    - 'X' or 'Close' in the top right corner to indicate where to click to close the current window

    - Using ✔ and ✘ to indicate when options are included or not included

    - Using + and – icons to increase or decrease number of passengers

    - Where information was to be typed in, a keyboard automatically appears

    - Greying out or showing text halftone to include that something was not available or not ready to be selected

    - Having a something show bolded, highlighted or with solid infill to indicate that it is a button that can be clicked

Good Practice

- Industry standards alone do not make an app easy to navigate. They need to be employed consistently.

- When important messages needed to be conveyed to all users, a screen dedicated to the message which appears before the home screen was very effective.

- Screens at each step of the process should be labelled clearly with what information is being requested or provided (i.e. Departure City, Select Return Flight etc.)

- Since an app is designed to be used on a much smaller screen that a website, effective use of white space goes a long way towards a user understanding the information presented and having a positive wayfinding experience. This is especially critical on the search results screen.

Areas of Improvement

- It is annoying when essential information is not readily visible on the main screen without the need to scroll down or swipe left. For example, when arriving at the search results screen, there should be at least one flight visible – often there is other information above the flight results forcing the user to scroll down before seeing the critical information.

- On a website, 3+ fare options can be presented together on a single screen. This is not the case with an app. All the cases reviewed that have more than 3 fare options did not present them in a fashion that it was easy to understand or access.

- Because space is limited on an app, when white space is used ineffectively, and options are too close together (i.e., flights) it is often difficult to differentiate what information belongs together.

- Images behind text is makes the text hard to read, this should be avoided.