 From a cave in Spain to a London water tower, these are the world's strangest vacation rentals: [tandl.me/strgrntl](http://tandl.me/strgrntl).

**Lothariuslaan  
Residence,  
Amsterdam**

**KID & COE**  
3 bed • 1 bath

**\$339** a night  
[kidandcoe.com](http://kidandcoe.com)



## THE MICRO HOTELIERS

A new breed of vacation-rental owners is taking a page from hotels and bringing more polish and professionalism to the industry.

By Grant Martin

Two years ago, when Jeremy Braud started renting out his shotgun house in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans to Super Bowl fans, the property was simple and spartan. Braud used his own sheets; he stocked the bathroom with big bottles of shampoo and conditioner. But now that vacation rentals have become more popular and competitive through online-booking sites, Braud has refined his approach. He now offers small, single-use shampoo bottles and high-thread-count Egyptian-cotton sheets. On the living room table, there's a fan of tourism brochures and a free bottle of wine for his guests. Braud's house is no longer just a home. Nor is it a short-term rental in the old-fashioned sense. It's now a competitor to the B&B down the street.

Braud is on the leading edge of vacation-rental entrepreneurs who are starting to adopt the manners and methods of the hotel industry, blurring →

## Trip Doctor

the line between traditional hotelier and anonymous property owner. It's a strategy aimed at expanding their potential client base beyond the budget traveler and into a much broader, and more lucrative, market—one that even includes people on the road for business.

Online rental agencies have started to adapt their tactics, too. Airbnb brought in hotelier Chip Conley, founder of the Joie de Vivre group of hotels, to head up global hospitality and strategy. Conley's goal is to help rental owners deliver some of the consistency of a hotel by standardizing things like communication, cleanliness guidelines, and amenities. (Airbnb's instant-booking feature is especially hotel-like.) HomeAway, meanwhile, is offering a batch of new tools to create a more seamless experience, including integrating its app with Uber and the grocery-delivery service Instacart, and populating it with information about the property a guest has rented and its surrounding area (sort of like a hotel-room directory).

A slew of third-party tools have emerged to address the rise of peer-to-peer rentals. Sites like Huitly, Guesty, and Rentingyourplace help hosts with the process of researching and managing vacation properties so that they can charge the right price and align their services with nearby hotels. It's even possible for renters to compare Airbnb properties with hotel rooms when planning a trip, thanks to the online travel agent Hipmunk.

### Atelier Villa, Barbados

HOMEAWAY

4 bed • 3 bath

\$2,000 a night  
homeaway.com



New companies and services are also helping to emulate the hotel experience for renters. BeMate, a rental-listing site from the Spanish hospitality group Room Mate, combines the amenities of a hotel (concierge, luggage storage) with the uniqueness of a vacation rental (see page 56 for more). Ancillary apps like Gymsurfing and Spinlister help travelers bypass hotel and resort fitness centers, while others provide everything from valet to spa services (see below).

All of this has put the hotel establishment on notice. So far, the response from individual brands is anecdotal (Marriott CEO Arne M.

Sorenson reportedly talks about the rental industry all the time). But in cities like New York and San Francisco, the hotel lobby has supported regulators in some bitter public battles with rental companies over issues like taxes and zoning laws.

While global regulation of the vacation-rental business is unlikely, location-specific legislation will continue to roll out over the next several years. But even if tomorrow's host has to follow a stricter set of rules, it's clear that vacation rentals have been fundamentally transformed. Hosts like Jeremy Braud will continue to compete with hotels—and the costs for consumers will continue to fall.

### Apps and sites that turn a rental into a hotel

#### Luxe

Need a parking spot? Luxe sends a valet to park your car for up to \$15 a day. Available in San Francisco and Los Angeles; other cities soon. *Free; Android, iOS.*

#### Caviar

If you're craving room service, use this app to order meals from top restaurants that don't normally provide delivery. *Free; iOS.*

#### Zeel

Choose from a network of certified massage therapists—some employed by luxury hotels—and turn your living room into a spa. *Free; Android, iOS.*

#### Viator

You don't need a concierge to book food crawls, cultural guides, and walking tours. Viator offers thousands of excursions around the world. *Free; Android, iOS.*

## SPECIAL HANDLING

Niche rental companies are cropping up to address travelers' hyper-specific needs, whether that means a house with a high chair or a condo with a concierge. Here, four we love.



A three-floor penthouse in Madrid.



A four-story town house in New York's West Village.



### FOR THE FIRST-TIME RENTER

**BeMate**

If you can't give up daily housekeeping and a concierge, consider Room Mate Hotels' new peer-to-peer site, which lists rentals in 150 cities so far. Each shares resources with one of the company's hotels or partners. [bemate.com](http://bemate.com).



### FOR THE STYLISH URBANITE

**Onefinestay**

This brand lists chic properties in London, Paris, New York, and L.A. (Four more cities are in the works.) Stark white linens and an iPhone loaded with tips deliver a luxury-hotel feel. [onefinestay.com](http://onefinestay.com).



### FOR THE FAMILY

**Kid & Coe**

Here's proof that "kid-proof" doesn't have to mean blah—even in places like South Africa and Kerala, India. Listings include details like whether or not there are baby monitors and the distance to the nearest park. [kidandcoe.com](http://kidandcoe.com).



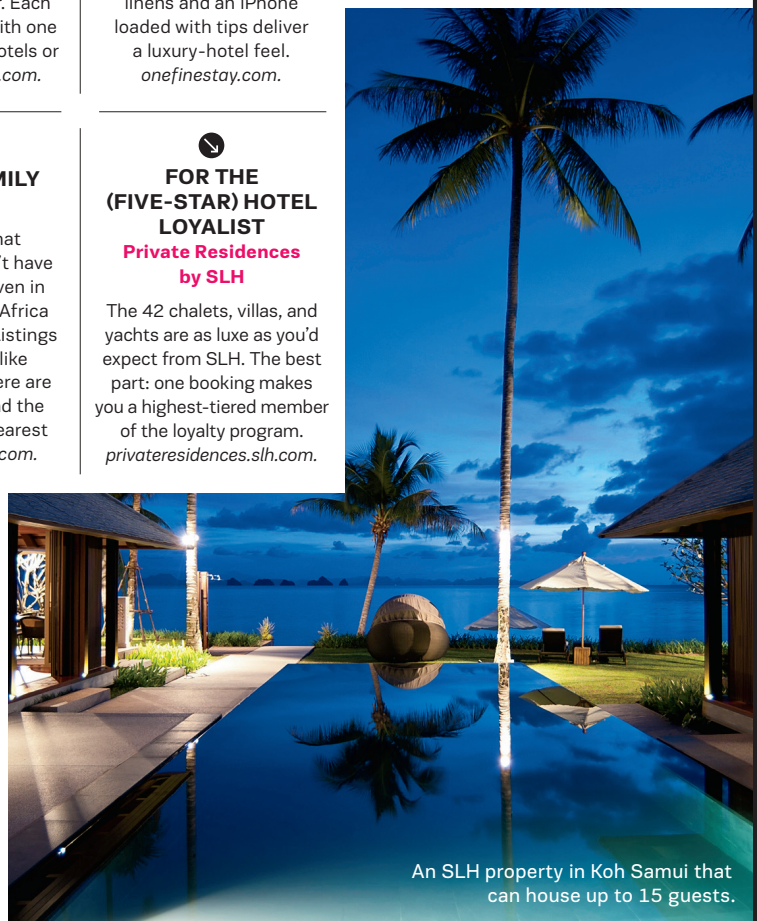
### FOR THE (FIVE-STAR) HOTEL LOYALIST

**Private Residences by SLH**

The 42 chalets, villas, and yachts are as luxe as you'd expect from SLH. The best part: one booking makes you a highest-tiered member of the loyalty program. [privateresidences.slh.com](http://privateresidences.slh.com).



A three-level rental in Amsterdam with a playroom and a backyard.



An SLH property in Koh Samui that can house up to 15 guests.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF BEMATE; COURTESY OF ONEFINESTAY; COURTESY OF PRIVATE RESIDENCES BY SLH; COURTESY OF KID & COE

📺 *Don't miss the Vacation Rentals Twitter chat on Tuesday, March 3, at 2 p.m. EST. Follow @travandleisure and #TL\_Chat.*



**The Adobe Creative Suite, Los Angeles**  
**AIRBNB**  
 2 bed • 1 bath  
 \$195 a night  
 airbnb.com

## HOW TO FIND YOUR DREAM RENTAL

Most of the large booking sites don't vet all their inventory, so it's up to you to approach each listing with a critical eye. Below, T+L's tips for searching intelligently. By Brooke Porter Katz

### CAST A WIDE NET

Start with an aggregator like Tripping.com, which searches more than 2 million listings on partner sites that include FlipKey, HomeAway, and 9Flats. Once you find a rental, see if it's run by an owner or a management company. The latter can usually respond more quickly and reliably than an owner, who may not have a handyman on call. Note that some properties appear on multiple sites—and rates can vary greatly between them. For example, we found listings for the same house in Palm Springs, California, that ranged from \$2,088 (VRBO) to \$3,470 (Airbnb) for a week in June.

### KNOW HOW LISTINGS ARE ORGANIZED

It's important to understand how sites display search results. FlipKey, for example, rewards hosts for good behavior (fast response rates, new photos, up-to-date calendars) by giving them greater visibility. HomeAway offers tiered membership: the more an owner pays, the higher his listing ranks. (Not always a bad thing: paying more could be a sign of a pro.) Cut through the fat by using the HomeAway Sort, which prioritizes a combination of membership tier and host behavior. On Airbnb, look for listings

with a "verified photos" caption (which means the site photographed the property) or a Superhost badge, achieved after hitting various milestones like completing at least 10 stays and receiving 80 percent five-star reviews.

### READ REVIEWS

Seeing what past guests have to say can provide invaluable insight into what you are (and are not) getting. When possible, book on sites that authenticate reviews—allowing only people who have actually stayed at the property to write in. Both Airbnb and HomeAway do this. And know the signs of fraud:

if there is an unrealistic number of overly gushing reviews, beware.

### BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT

When using Airbnb and other rent-by-owner sites, it helps to share a little about yourself (where you're from, what type of traveler you are) on your profile or in the request to book. Remember: hosts are appraising you as much as you are them. (On Airbnb, instant booking is available only to renters with robust profiles and solid reviews from hosts.) If you have lingering questions for the owner or manager, don't be afraid to pick up the phone.

### What to look for in a listing

#### Photos

Quantity and quality matter—the more professional-looking the pictures, the more serious the host.

#### Reviews

The best ones reconfirm details and amenities you've read about in the listing.

#### Updated calendars

To avoid inquiring about a property that's not actually available, always look to see when the host has last refreshed the calendar.

#### Response time

Hosts typically have 24 hours to respond to a booking request. (Factor this into your planning timeline.) Many sites actually display each host's average response time—so you can get a sense of when (or if) to expect an answer.

## WHAT YOU GET IN...

There's a wide world of properties out there and nearly as many agencies with exclusive access to them. Here's what's on the market in four locations—and their cost per night.

### CARIBBEAN



**Villa Sahara, Anguilla \$3,500**  
5 bed • 5½ bath • [carpediemtravel.co.uk](http://carpediemtravel.co.uk)



**Dream Villa, Dominican Republic \$3,750**  
8 bed • 8 bath • [spaces42.com](http://spaces42.com)



**VI Friendship Villa, St. John \$2,429**  
6 bed • 7 bath • [beautiful-places.com](http://beautiful-places.com)

### TUSCANY



**Bucine Granaio \$252**  
1 bed • 1 bath • [italyperfect.com](http://italyperfect.com)



**Villa Chigi \$6,223**  
10 bed • 10 bath  
[uniquepropertiesandevents.com](http://uniquepropertiesandevents.com)



**Villa Fiorentina \$5,100**  
6 bed • 5½ bath • [homebaseabroad.com](http://homebaseabroad.com)

### PARIS



**Pasteur Designer Apartment \$300**  
1 bed • 1 bath • [haveninparis.com](http://haveninparis.com)



**Louvre Mansion \$1,868**  
4 bed • 4 bath • [luxuryretreats.com](http://luxuryretreats.com)



**Saint Louis Island Luxe \$904**  
2 bed • 1 bath • [timeandplace.com](http://timeandplace.com)

### COLORADO ROCKIES



**Hood Park Chalet, Telluride \$2,450**  
6 bed • 6 bath • [vaanyc.com](http://vaanyc.com)



**Exclusive's Residence at the Arrabelle, Vail \$1,995**  
4 bed • 5 bath • [exclusiveresorts.com](http://exclusiveresorts.com)



**Olympic Bowl Villa, Aspen \$1,896**  
4 bed • 4 bath • [homeaway.com](http://homeaway.com)

TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: THIERRY DEHOVE/COURTESY OF CARPE DIEM LUXURY TRAVEL; COURTESY OF SPACES42; DON HERBERT PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY OF BEAUTIFUL PLACES. SECOND ROW, COURTESY OF ITALY PERFECT; MANUEL ZUBLENA; COURTESY OF HOMEBASE ABROAD. THIRD ROW: JULIEN HAUSER/COURTESY OF HAVEN IN PARIS; COURTESY OF LUXURY RETREATS; COURTESY OF TIME & PLACE. FOURTH ROW: COURTESY OF VILLAS & APARTMENTS ABROAD; COURTESY OF EXCLUSIVE RESORTS; COURTESY OF HOMEAWAY