

Are online vacation rental services a good thing?

MANY CANADIANS are renting their homes to travellers via online vacation rental services such as Airbnb, HomeAway and VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owner). These services, say proponents, offer hosts a way to boost their income while giving travellers a comfortable and often less expensive alternative to hotels. Critics argue that these rentals have a negative effect on housing markets, the hotel industry and the peace and security of hosts' neighbours.

What do you think?

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC.

On the internet, search:

- Tenant turned Airbnb proprietor becomes landlord's nightmare.
- How Airbnb renters are helping Canadians pay off their mortgage in a grey-market area.
- Airbnb is a homeowners goldmine or a potential disaster.
- Airbnb ponders Quebec law; 'to be regulated is to be accepted'.



READER COMMENTS

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We've used VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owner), HomeAway and Airbnb for long-term rentals, and they've made it possible and affordable for us to pursue our travel dreams!

—Wendy Gervais

Airbnb rates vary from one day to the next; people sometimes get ripped off after making a reservation too quickly because they don't want to miss out. Meanwhile, hotel sites often have much better offers. Unfortunately I've been scammed more than once.

—Valérie Girardin

Airbnb, HomeAway and VRBO have totally revolutionized our travel! I have a very hard time now, going back to traditional hotels. Every experience is so unique.

—Merrilee Klassen

The immersion in local culture through grocery shopping, etc., makes for a true travel vs. tourism experience. I love being able to connect with the property owners for tips and suggestions on local sites and customs. I would have no issue with neighbours choosing to rent their properties via HomeAway or VRBO. In fact, I would welcome the opportunity to interact with travellers from around the world.

—Cindy Bartoli

We have used Home Exchange and VRBO for unique and inexpensive vacation alternatives. Now, in our small community, neighbours are interested in doing Airbnb. My main concerns with that are noise and parking. If those can be managed, I have no problem with it.

—Karen Dyck

It is particularly great for families, and we prefer the option of having much more room to spread out. Even if you want to go out for dinner every night, you have the convenience of breakfast, lunches, snacks and drinks at your fingertips.

—Maureen Harrison

YES FROM EXPERTS IN THE FIELD



Lisa Marion is co-founder of H&P Properties (HP-Properties.ca), a Toronto property management company specializing in Airbnb-style rentals.

WHEN VACATION RENTAL hosting is done properly, everyone benefits. Here are the reasons why.

Hosts earn income, which helps them pay their mortgage, rent or other bills or save for special things. Also, sharing their home with others lets them meet new people, share stories and make friends. I met my best friend through Airbnb. She was a guest of mine several years ago and kept coming back. Last year she moved here permanently, and I couldn't be happier.

Travellers using online short-term rental services get a great deal of value. Not only do they benefit from cheaper rates, but they get bigger, unique spaces with cooking and laundry facilities, plus the chance to meet locals, get advice about the city and explore parts of the city that other tourists don't get to see. Many travellers cite the convenience of staying close to family, friends, business or school.

Communities also benefit from short-term rentals. According to a recent global restaurant study by Airbnb, 42 per cent of the money spent by guests stays in the neighbourhood where they are renting. This is much-needed support for local businesses. When staying at a short-term rental, guests also tend to stay longer than they would at a hotel, and many of them indicate that if it weren't for these rentals they wouldn't have made the trip at all. Additionally, as new regulations for this industry are worked out, cities are poised to generate additional income via potential taxes or licensing fees.

Horror stories about online vacation rental services are often a case of an inexperienced, uneducated host making mistakes that the press then sensationalizes. Issues surrounding security and quality of life for neighbours are easily avoided with proper host etiquette, including having a clear set of expectations and basic house rules for your guests.

What you don't hear about are the millions of trips that go off without a hitch, leaving travellers, hosts and the community much better off. **C**

NO FROM EXPERTS IN THE FIELD



Linda Pinizzotto has been a professional realtor for more than 35 years and is the founder and CEO of the Condo Owners Association (coaontario.com).

THE EXPLOSION OF transient rentals, facilitated by companies such as Airbnb, is wreaking havoc in the condominium world. This trend is essentially turning residential condo buildings into hotels, forcing increased costs on unit owners and tampering with the spirit of community living.

Every condo corporation has governing documents, which include a variety of rules and regulations that residents and owners are required to follow. Many condo owners who host transient renters are not following the rules, and neither are their renters.

One rule frequently broken is when the renter arrives without proper identification. This disrupts the community atmosphere and puts residents at risk. Increased noise levels and the party/travel atmosphere disrupt long-term residents' expectation of quiet enjoyment of their homes. The increased traffic causes safety and security concerns, wear and tear on common elements and amenities, plus additional demands on the operating and reserve fund budgets of the condo corporation. The rise in water and electricity use; frequent maintenance and repairs on elevators, corridor walls and carpeting for damage caused by luggage; and added costs for cleaning and security force all owners to cough up additional monies through their maintenance fees.

Transient rentals also put condo buildings at risk for insurance claims from potential water and smoke damage, illegal occurrences and safety issues. This could result in lawsuits and claims concerning common areas of a building and could trigger higher insurance premiums for condo owners.

In some areas of Canada, including Toronto, there are housing shortages because vacation rentals are eating up housing inventory. The dream of affordable living for residents and owners who contribute year-round to our communities is taking a back seat to tourists seeking cheaper overnight stays or party-goers who want a weekend of fun. In their quest to make money as hotel operators, too many Airbnb-style hosts are destroying our residential communities. **C**

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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THREE WAYS TO VOTE

1. Online

At costcoconnection.ca, click "Informed Debate" in the contents column on the left.

2. Email

Send your feedback to debateCN@costco.com. Please include the title of the debate and the issue month.

3. Mobile

In our *Newsstand Edition* (available for iOS and Android), vote buttons appear on the Debate page (see page 7 for details).

Watch for results of the vote in the next issue.

MARCH/APRIL DEBATE RESULTS

Has office attire become too casual?

73% YES


27% NO

Percentage reflects votes received by March 10, 2017.

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