

RESIDENTIAL REINVENTION

As people shun short city breaks in favour of longer periods of time away with loved ones in rural and coastal locations, home rental platforms are expanding, innovating and creating tempting curated collections

BY MARISA CANNON



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The virus has upended our travel habits, with the “work from anywhere” revolution creating more flexibility than ever – and with that, a desire to travel and stay away longer. According to Airbnb’s 2021 *Report on Travel Living*, 10,000 survey respondents across five countries said that, after taking more trips, increased flexibility would spur them to travel for longer periods, with 42% of consumers saying they plan to undertake more longer-stay travel after the pandemic.

The data supports this, with Airbnb’s platform showing the percentage of long-term stays of at least 28 nights on Airbnb doubling from 14% of in 2019 to 24% in Q1 2021. Airbnb CEO and co-founder Brian Chesky says: “People can travel anytime, they are travelling to more places and they are staying longer. The lines between travel, living and working are blurring; we are upgrading our service to make it easier for people to integrate travel into their lives.”

This shift towards extended stays has prompted a new wave of curated villa collections and luxury home rental platforms for travellers in search of splendour and seclusion. Airbnb Luxe is one such service, providing access to “designed homes with high-end amenities, services and dedicated trip designers”, while new entrant Domus Stay connects elite travellers with London’s most upmarket houses, plus a five-star concierge service.

Launched this spring, Domus Stay plans to grow its property portfolio to European hotspots by the end of 2021. Chief operating officer Rachel Angell says: “[Our team’s] bespoke management of the property, adding all the homely touches and customisation, is to a level not seen in short-term rentals before.”

Another new contender is Smarter, a pending B Corporation that positions itself as the

“first sustainable short-stay platform”, offering access to the world’s best homes while monitoring emissions from guest flights and stays. It funds carbon offset projects from a percentage of booking proceeds.

Meanwhile, Plum Guide offers a similar curation of lavish holiday homes, with the promise to present only the top 3% of homes available in each price bracket. The company’s website reads: “Restaurants have the Michelin star. Books

have *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. Vacation homes have the Plum Award”. True to its tagline, each home is vetted using 150 criteria, from shower pressure to design credentials.

In June, Google launched a combined hotel and vacation rental search product, revealing that searches for “beach rentals” and “staycations” had grown by more than 100% globally over the last 12 months. The filter now lists hotels and vacation rentals together

in one comprehensive search result on Google’s Travel platform, giving greater exposure to longer-term rentals. A Google spokesperson said: “We’ve seen growing and sustained interest in vacation rentals since the start of the pandemic and have evolved our product accordingly to meet those user preferences. This launch is the first time that we are showing results that combine both hotels and vacation rentals when a user is looking for a place to stay.”

