

How to AIRBNB YOUR HOME

Got space to spare? Consider listing your home for short-term home sharing – and turn your property into a passive income source, says **Deidre Donnelly**

“By renting out a portion of my house, I’ve not only met interesting people, I’ve also had the opportunity to earn an additional income while still being able to spend precious time with my two sons.” These are the words of Capetonian Michelle von Heynitz, an Airbnb hostess who won their ‘unique listing’ award in 2015.



WHAT IS HOUSE SWAPPING?

Also known as home exchanging (think “You stay in my house while I stay in yours”), this is an affordable alternative (in fact, it’s virtually free) that involves no monetary transaction. Home owners register on a website such as Homeforexchange.com, which has registered homes in most popular holiday destinations, and then begin a conversation with a homeowner whose house appeals, is willing to swap, and is available in the time you’d like to visit.

In over 190 countries across the world, homeowners advertise their homes to holidaymakers on the homestay website *TIME* magazine dubbed “the poster child of the sharing economy” as a way to make money.

And that’s how Airbnb started. During the global economic downturn of the late 2000s, founders Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia

and Nathan Blecharczyk struggled to afford their rent. Seeing a gap, they offered blow-up mattresses in their San Francisco flat to visitors needing accommodation during a conference.

Since 2008, people in 34 000 cities have followed suit, using home sharing to pay their bills, fund holidays, or offer financial support when starting a business.

How does it work?

Property owners become hosts by advertising their home, room or portion thereof on Airbnb for short-term stays. Guests browse listings and book via their computers or phones. There’s a double evaluation system: guests rate hosts, and hosts rate guests. Reputation counts.

Homestays offer travellers more of what

they want: unique experiences and affordable accommodation that allows them to feel what it’s like to live like a local.

“It’s such a simple yet powerful idea,” says Nicola D’Elia, Airbnb managing director for Africa and the Middle East. “Most hosts share their primary home to earn an extra income. It may not be a huge amount, but it’s that extra to help you pay

for your next holiday or make ends meet.”

The depreciating rand has boosted tourist interest in South Africa, so it's no surprise that since it launched here Airbnb has seen exponential growth. “We have about 20 000 listings across the country, and we're seeing almost a tripling of listings year on year,” Nicola says.

And you don't have to have a granny flat or some other separate living area attached to your home – you could rent out just a room or even a dorm-style set-up with several beds. Don't forget: you will have to pay tax on your rental income. Contact SARS to find out more.

Is it safe?

You may feel nervous about being hospitable to strangers. There's an element of risk, but Airbnb take security seriously: “We've had over 80 million guests globally. The majority of these have been safe, pleasant trips, which speaks to the over 40 safety tools we have in place, most of which kick in before the trip,” assures Nicola. These tools include:

➔ Verified IDs

Identification is verified via social media accounts, and email addresses and phone numbers are also checked. You can stipulate that guests' scanned hardcopy IDs are verified.



➔ **A global trust and safety team** works 24/7 across time zones.

➔ Ratings and profiles

You can check what other hosts have said about potential guests.

➔ **Messaging** Airbnb encourage you to use their safe messaging system to suss out guests.

➔ Upfront payment

Airbnb charges guests' credit cards at booking and holds this amount for 24 hours after check-in. You can also choose one of three cancellation policies and add a security deposit to your listing.

➔ Host guarantee

Airbnb offers a \$1-million host guarantee scheme, which acts as insurance. If a guest accidentally breaks something, claim with Airbnb.

6 TIPS TO GET YOUR HOME READY

1 Adopt the right mindset

Be honest about whether you have the time and energy to take on the extra responsibility. For instance, Chregan O'Flynn from AirManaged, a professional Airbnb hosting service in Cape Town, says one reason clients approach them to host on their behalf is the variable nature of check-ins: “Often, flights are delayed, so guests can arrive at midnight or later.”

But there are benefits to hosting, like meeting people from diverse cultures. Try to relax about what you have to offer and be open to the journey.

2 Consider legal and insurance issues

If you're a tenant, ask your landlord. Most sectional title units and body corporates don't allow it. If you're a homeowner, your home insurance plan may not cover short-term rentals. You'll also need public liability insurance.

3 Take good photos

Professional-looking photos increase your chances of getting bookings.

4 Cover the basics

See to essential details, like having extra sets of laundry and keys, WiFi or even DSTv.

5 Get your pricing right

Take a look at what other hosts in a similar category charge, or read the reports by data analytics company AirDNA (Airdna.co). Airbnb also offer a pricing tool, but what you charge is up to you.

6 Add special touches

In hotels, it's the chocolate on the pillow. In your home, it could be fresh fruit and flowers, vouchers, public-transport cards, an airport pick-up or bicycles and other sports equipment. Find more tips and info on Airbnb.com.

LONG-TERM RENTAL

Renting out a room in your home used to be common practice. If you'd like to do this, (check with your landlord if you're renting), advertise in your local newspaper, JunkMail or on Gumtree, but screen potential tenants thoroughly: ask for a copy of their ID, contact details for their next of kin and employer, and consider running a credit and criminal record check via a service such as Managed Integrity Evaluation (MIE.co.za). Don't publish your home address, and meet with the tenant in public first.

GOOD TO KNOW AirBnB isn't the only home-share game in town... You could also register with Homestay.com