

What's All the Fuss About Airbnb?



The two-bedroom Seashell House "Casa Caracol" is in Isla Mujeres, Mexico

It's the "greatest phenomenon happening in travel today." It's part of the sharing economy. It's an adventure. It's just for twenty-somethings. It's exotic. It's confusing. It's scary.

To some extent, each of these statements is true — and not true. Some *Ranch & Coast* readers told me they've already stayed at an Airbnb property — others asked for more information.

- Airbnb is a "global community marketplace" that connects travelers with unique places to stay. Hosts offer lodging and guests book their dates online or via a mobile phone, this might be in an apartment for a night, a castle for a week (yes, they offer 4,000 castles), or a villa for a month.

What makes it a great phenomenon? Airbnb was founded in 2008 by three Millennials who couldn't make the rent on their San Francisco

apartment. Today the company is valued at \$10 billion.

- 20 million guests have stayed on Airbnb — over 7 million of them just this past summer.
- 800,000 Airbnb properties can be rented in thousands of cities in over 190 countries — including Mozambique, Fiji, Madagascar, Azerbaijan, and Nepal.

- In one week alone guests left reviews for hosts in 42 different languages.

It's part of the "sharing economy."

- This is definitely true. In fact, Airbnb is the poster child for the sharing economy. The ride sharing service Uber is another good example. These businesses reflect the fact that today's world is hyper-connected, making it possible to network with "strangers" to rent lodging, drive, or be driven.

It's an adventure.

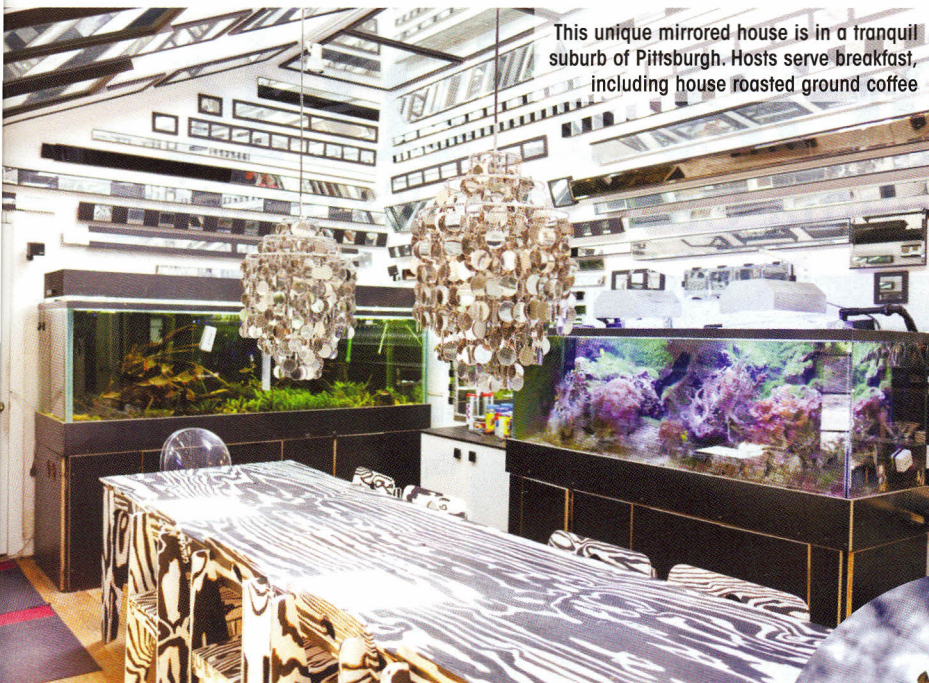
- True — and would you want a travel experience that wasn't an adventure? The difference between staying in a cookie-cutter hotel and staying at an Airbnb? Authenticity and sense of community. When my friend Brian learned that a guest renting his Chicago apartment was going to propose during the stay, he thoughtfully left a bottle of Champagne in the fridge. I know of another case in Denmark, where the host took guests to a pharmacy to replace lost prescription meds. Hospitality is definitely at the core of Airbnb.

It's just for twenty-somethings.

- Age doesn't determine who looks for lodging on Airbnb. It's much more about being adventurous and wanting an authentic experience. This is true for both guests and hosts. I know one host who goes on vacation when guests are staying in his apartment — and tries to match his expenditure with the income he's receiving.

It's exotic.

- In addition to 4,000 castles, guests can book lodging in 2,800 treehouses, 1,000 islands, and 9,000 boats. On a recent night, over 100 people were staying in yurts.
- However, the vast majority of listings on the site are for more conventional places to stay — such as the several thousand apartments, cottages, and luxury homes within the *Ranch & Coast* circulation area. (Just for fun, search for rentals in your neighborhood. I think you'll be surprised.)



This unique mirrored house is in a tranquil suburb of Pittsburgh. Hosts serve breakfast, including house roasted ground coffee

It's confusing.

• Here's how it works: Someone has extra space they aren't using. It might be a spare bedroom in their New York apartment or it might be an entire six-bedroom luxury home on the beach in Maui. Airbnb makes it possible for owners to monetize the space by renting it to you. In the case of the spare room in New York, you might have coffee with your hosts in the morning before they dash off to work, but in other instances, you might collect the key

from a third party or a dropbox and never see the host.

• It's important to read the description of the property carefully, so you know what to expect. One friend who recently stayed in Airbnb properties during an Italy vacation was (wisely) focused on A/C, Wi-Fi, and location when she did her research — but forgot to inquire about stairs. Another friend was



Feeling royal? You might find this British castle to your liking

It's scary.

• Airbnb created a "trust platform" to manage the relationship between hosts and guests. Everyone has a profile and hosts and guests rate each other, so everyone has a visible reputation. Airbnb monitors for "fraud and safety" and blocks anyone whose behavior is questionable from using the site. (www.airbnb.com)

ELIZABETH HANSEN



This treehouse near the Kilauea Volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii comes with stained glass windows



The landmark 1934 hacienda is located in the Old Movie Colony of Palm Springs