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TRAVEL

Giving Airbnb a Run for Its Money

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By Stephanie Rosenbloom

When travelers think about vacation rentals, they almost always think of Airbnb. The easy-to-use site, founded in 2008 and now with more than a million listings worldwide, is the first stop for many tourists — which means properties are snapped up fast, especially during major events such as concerts, games and conferences. Yet a handful of new contenders is striving to disrupt the vacation rental market by targeting specific kinds of travelers, be it families with children or jet-setters seeking luxury villas and airport transfers by helicopter. Below, a guide to some of the upstarts and, at the end of this column, a reminder of some veteran sites that all too often end up in the shadow of Airbnb.

[KidandCoe.com](#). As any family with children knows, staying in a hotel room can be costly and crowded. This glossy site, which was introduced in 2013, offers kid-friendly rentals with children's rooms and amenities. For instance, a listing for a three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bathroom apartment in the SoPi (South Pigalle) area of Paris for 320 euros (about \$355 at \$1.11 to the euro) a night (plus the site's booking fee, which is 3 to 15 percent depending on the type of property and the cost of the reservation as well as a cleaning fee) says it sleeps up to four adults, a child and a baby. The listings are geared to parents with details such as "one large kid's bedroom with single bed, crib and toys and books" and "plenty for kids including a Maclaren stroller, highchair, toys and kids' DVDs." There are few properties in each city, however: A search for a Miami rental in March, for instance, turned up just three results, including one where the price was upon request and another on Hibiscus Island — with a "leafy courtyard filled with tropical flowers, ideal for a game of hide-and-peek" — that was \$3,700 a night (it has four bedrooms and bathrooms, a dock and heated pool with views of the ocean). Don't have children but want to stay anyway? The site is designed for families with children, but it's ultimately up to the property owner to decide.

Pros: Elegant and spacious kid-friendly properties. Cons: Limited inventory; few reviews from guests, which makes it difficult to gauge how likely you are to be satisfied with a particular residence.

[PreferredResidences.com](#). This month Preferred Hotel Group, which represents 650 properties around the world, introduced this site for those seeking luxury bungalow, villa and condominium rentals (some with private pools and free car services) at upscale hotels and resorts, without paying for membership in a vacation club. On the site you'll find a smattering of rentals in places that include Ireland, Italy, Spain, Tanzania, Switzerland and Hawaii as well as lists of amenities such as fitness facilities or handicap-accessible rooms. You can also filter for categories such as "style" (including "hip," "romantic," "stately," "eco-friendly," "tranquil") and "interest" (including "food and wine," "pet-friendly," "honeymoon," "L.G.B.T.-welcome"). A recent search pulled up a three-bedroom villa with a balcony overlooking a golf course at the Kildare Hotel Spa & Country Club in Dublin for 1,500 euros a night (for four nights in March), including Wi-Fi and breakfast. Guests can also make last-minute spa appointments and schedule airport transfers by helicopter, depending on the location.

Pros: You're dealing with an established hospitality brand rather than individual homeowners who may forget to, say, turn on the hot water or leave the keys; guest-reviews through TripAdvisor. Cons: Limited inventory at the moment.

[VacationsbyTzell.com](#). Tzell Travel Group recently announced a vacation site that includes a section devoted to luxury villa rentals. You can search by destination, specials and themes (sports, events, lifestyles, including multigenerational or kid-friendly travel.) A tab under “themes” labeled “unique” allows users to search for properties that are just that, including historic estates, private islands and celebrity hot spots. In Positano on the Amalfi Coast, for instance, a four-bedroom, four-bathroom villa with views of the sea can be had from 402 euros a night.

Pros: Easy-to-browse site; detailed information; nice range of prices. Cons: There are tabs for guest reviews, but most of the listings I checked out did not have any yet.

[Villas.com](#). You’ll find more than villas on this nascent offshoot of the lodging site [Booking.com](#). There are chalets, cottages, apartments and condos, too. Introduced in May, Villas.com has more than 240,000 vacation rentals worldwide. A recent search found a two-bedroom apartment in a building with a 24-hour front desk in the Kensington neighborhood of London starting at \$5,713 for a week in March. Users can filter their searches for extras including pet-friendliness, free bicycles, barbecues, pools and nearby golf courses. Searches can also be narrowed by categories, including a property’s review score (from no rating to “pleasant” to “good” to “very good” to “wonderful”), price, number of bedrooms and parking. Unlike many rental sites, users of Villas.com are not charged a booking fee and they can see which dates the properties are available, eliminating the need to email the owner about scheduling.

Pros: Some guest reviews; no booking fees; detailed listings. Cons: The site can feel cluttered.

[WorldEscape.com](#). This site was reinvented last year when more cities were added, including Barcelona and Munich. Another recent addition: 24-hour customer service. You can filter search results by price, property type, number of bathrooms and neighborhood, among other categories. There are also filters for supplies like coffee, movies and books, and services such as tours and housekeeping. The site, which includes apartments, villas, timeshares, cottages and houseboats, may not have as many properties as others, but what distinguishes it is that the properties are visited by a WorldEscape staffer. A recent search found a three-bedroom loft in the SoHo neighborhood of Manhattan for \$445 a night in March.

Pros: Some affordable rentals; no booking fees. Cons: No guest reviews.

The Veterans, The following sites either predate Airbnb or were founded around the same time. While some are not as handsomely designed, they are certainly worth browsing, especially if Airbnb lets you down. **[VRBO](#)** (Vacation Rentals by Owner) was founded in 1995, making it one of the online rental pioneers. The site, which has thousands of listings, is part of **[HomeAway](#)**, which was founded in 2005 and also owns **[VacationRentals.com](#)** and a luxury rental site, **[Luxury.homeaway.com](#)**. **[FlipKey](#)**, which has guest reviews and property owners who are verified by the FlipKey staff, is now owned by TripAdvisor (which offers rentals on its own site); it was founded in 2007. Right after Airbnb entered the scene, more sites began popping up. In 2009 and 2010 came **[OneFineStay](#)**, **[WelcomeBeyond](#)** and **[HouseTrip](#)**. Short on time? You can search Airbnb, Flipkey, Homeaway and VRBO at the same time (along with hotel rooms) on the aggregate site, **[AlltheRooms.com](#)**.

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