

# BEDS ON A BUDGET



This cottage in Brixton available through AirBnB



As the rand continues to lose value against major international currencies, many South Africans are finding it hard to justify an expensive overseas trip. Fortunately, there are plenty of affordable options for those who want to have their holiday closer to home. **STORY BY EUGENE YIGA**

half a million visitors a month, and offers a guarantee that their price is the lowest available anywhere... and will refund you the difference if you find their accommodation on any other directory at a lower rate!

Another popular website is AccommoDirect.com. Its home page states that the service offers 20 000 listings in 2 000 locations with 10 000 reviews.

"After nine months in development, we launched the new AccommoDirect.com website and have seen approximately 20% growth each month since the launch" says creator Rupert Bryant.

Bryant, who co-founded internet service provider Web Africa, believes that this is a "fantastic segment in which to operate" as it not only allows him to ensure professional and consistent service to guests, but is also a perfect platform from which to offer more cost-effective, spacious, and unique accommodation options.

"AccommoDirect.com focuses on guest houses, self-catering units, holiday homes, and bed-and-breakfasts," he says. "It's a competitive but rapidly growing space, which is right up my alley."

## AUTHENTIC STAYS

One of the biggest providers in the budget accommodation field is Airbnb - a concept where travellers rent unique places to stay from local hosts who offer up space in their homes. From its 2008 beginning in San Francisco, it has now spread to over 35 000 cities in 192 countries around the world.

"South Africa is an incredibly beautiful and diverse country, with so much to offer visitors," says Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky. "We have a vibrant and welcoming community here, which we look forward to expanding so that even more visitors can benefit from the unique and local experiences our hosts provide."

But although Airbnb listings can be cheaper than a guesthouse or hotel, it's not just about saving a few bucks. According to Johannesburg architect Karl Hermanus, who signed up to Airbnb about a year ago at the suggestion of some friends, it's about travelling in a more authentic way.

## KARL'S STORY

"I love the diversity of the people," says Karl, who's hosted about two dozen guests in the last year. "Many of them become friends. In fact, I had a birthday party recently and many of the people who came were former guests."

All in all, it's been a great experience for Karl, who often includes his guests in his social activities and sometimes enjoys cooking for them too (when one of his guests broke a key in the bathroom door and was locked in for a few hours, Karl served him breakfast through the window).

"I like being a unique brand instead of pretending to be a hotel," he says. "And I like that I can travel the world without leaving my house!" Karl's ability to cater to individual needs has made him one of the top Airbnb hosts in South Africa.

## A STAY WITH ELSA

It's been the same with Elsa van der Watt. "Johannesburg is not exactly a holiday destination," she admits. "But my place is conveniently close to the airport, close to a highway intersection of all the major routes, and on the way to the Kruger Park"

As a self-employed stain glass artist, she found that retreating for long periods to avoid distractions and focus on her work was not good for her wellbeing. Fortunately, Airbnb is helping her live a more balanced life.

"After hearing about Airbnb a year ago, I took a chance and registered as a host, unsure if there would be any interest," she says. "But within a week I received my first bookings!"

At first, she felt a bit nervous about inviting strangers into the intimacy of her home. But when her first guests arrived, it was an absolute delight to meet them.

"I immediately found a connection with this warm-hearted couple and enjoyed every moment of their visit," she says. "This was the ice-breaker that I needed and every booking that followed became easier. One soon learns how to recognise guest needs and I've done a lot to improve my guest experience in the months that followed."

As someone who is selective with her requests, Elsa averages about three or four bookings a month. This suits her well because it gives her the time to pursue her other interests. But it also lets her meet fascinating people, from a popular rock star she didn't recognise at first to a generous guest who as a "thank you", gave her a free trip to one of the country's most luxurious game resorts.

"Airbnb has been an absolute blessing to me," she says. "Meeting lovely people from different countries, and sharing travelling experiences and insights of our own life-journeys, has enriched my life in many ways."

Most importantly, Elsa has come to realise that it's not just about the places you go. Instead, it's about the encounters and interactions with the people you meet. That's what creates lasting memories.

"Reflecting on some of my earlier travelling experiences where I stayed at youth hostels, motels in the USA, and the impersonal nature of hotel rooms, Airbnb offers a much richer and memorable experience," she says. "Indeed, Airbnb is not about accommodation. It's more about relationships."

So, if your interest is to have an enriching holiday that doesn't leave you broke, her suggestion is to go with Airbnb.

"If, like me, one's interest is to discover and learn more about the life and worldview of people of different cultures and backgrounds, there is no better way to gain insight than through this unique opportunity," she says. "Staying at someone's home, rather than a hotel room, one learns much more." ☺



Seen here and below: Rose Villa Boksburg.



## UP IN THE AIRBNB

There are more than 1.5 million homes available through Airbnb worldwide and more than 45 million people have travelled with the service globally. Some notable statistics reflecting Airbnb's growth in South Africa over the last 12 months include:

- South Africa is currently the largest market for Airbnb in Africa with 9,400 homes listed, an increase of 138%.
- South Africa is becoming an increasingly popular global destination, with the number of people staying in places booked through Airbnb in South Africa increasing by a staggering 257%.
- South Africans are embracing the service as well, with those using Airbnb to travel increasing by 163%.
- While most South Africans that have used Airbnb have travelled within the country, the most popular international destinations include the US, Italy, France and the UK.

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