

# Why Travelers Are Turning to Vacation Home Rentals for a Safe Getaway This Summer

From extended stays to new cleanliness guidelines, vacation home rentals are changing — but demand isn't slowing down.

BY ALISON FOX | JUNE 05, 2020

When Ryan Bodensteiner's spring trip was canceled due to COVID-19, he rebooked two new ones. But a couple of months later, he's down to one: a July trip to [Arizona](#) where he and his wife will enjoy the comforts of home — someone else's home.

Bodensteiner is part of a growing trend of travelers who are looking to home vacation rentals as a way to safely hit the road while maintaining a level of social distancing that isn't always possible in a larger hotel.

"We felt like [this] trip had more opportunity to socially distance if we needed to," the 34-year-old Kansas resident told *Travel + Leisure*, adding he liked the idea of being able to "cook meals at the house... being at a house with a pool and a fire pit... having those amenities, but doing it in a way we can be responsible and socially distance if we need to."

Hotels have borne a large share of the burden from COVID-19-related cancellations, but home rental companies like Airbnb and Vrbo are continuing to see bookings, driven by families desperate for a change of scenery after being stuck at home and groups looking to vacation together while remaining in a self-contained bubble.

“Essentially, the people who are in your quarantine crew now are in your quarantine crew as you go on your first trip,” Jeff Hurst, the president of Vrbo, said, adding, “this is a chance to get away to a place with a yard or... swimming pool.”

In fact, Labor Day bookings on sites like [Airbnb](#), [Booking.com](#), and [Vrbo](#) are comparable to what they were last year, Omer Rabin, managing director of the Americas at Guesty, a property management platform, told T+L.

## **Here's how vacation home rental trends are changing.**

### **The stays are getting longer.**

Extended stays are becoming increasingly more popular, said Sean Breuner, the CEO of short-term rental company AvantStay, as COVID-19 has made working from home both easier and oftentimes a necessity.

“Usually we average about three to four days per stay and now that has increased dramatically,” he said. “You might see four couples get together to work from home in Scottsdale for a month at a time... people looking for control versus going to a hotel.”

Generally, people are booking in two windows: they’re either looking to travel immediately or scoping out a trip for late summer, Hurst explained. In states like New York and California, which remain under significant restrictions, travelers tend to fit at the later end of that spectrum.

Alabama resident Lara Segrest fit into the former, booking a stay on [Hilton Head Island](#), in South Carolina, through Vrbo for her family, including three kids, about a week before she wanted to travel. Segrest, 44, was diagnosed with lymphoma in

2018 and is in the high-risk category for COVID-19. While she is looking forward to getting away, she didn't want to do it in a large building with lots of other people around.

"We just need to get everybody out of the house — even if it's just looking at four different walls, we have to get out," Segrest told T+L, but added: "I knew I wanted to do something not in a huge high rise."

## **A (Secluded) Home Away From Home Offers Unique Appeal**

Hotels across the country and throughout the world have implemented social distancing and cleaning procedures to reassure guests. Marriott International, for example, will utilize technology like electrostatic sprayers with hospital-grade disinfectant. Hyatt will train a "Hygiene Manager" to oversee disinfection protocols, and Hilton will employ a "CleanStay Room Seal" to show the room has not been touched since it was last cleaned.

Additionally, the Las Vegas Sands, Meliá Hotels International, and Accor hotels partnered with an inspection company that will review safety and hygiene protocols and certify them as safe.

But for some, it just doesn't outweigh the appeal of a home rental right now.

"I feel a ton more comfortable sitting at a house [rather] than being in a hotel where there's tons of people in and out of those rooms," said Ohio resident Brandon Gibson, 36, who booked an Airbnb in West Virginia to celebrate his brother's bachelor party with friends at the end of June. When Gibson booked the home in early March, he opted for a large — and isolated — home.

"It's only going to be us, so we're five miles from town on a mountain in a huge house," he added. "That went over a little bit better than everybody being crammed into a hotel or a resort."

## **Travelers are hitting the road.**

Segrest will be driving for her family vacation, a mode of (socially distanced) transportation that is seeing a rise in popularity.

“People are really embracing the road trip,” Hurst said. “We're seeing a lot fewer people book island trips and flights... people can still get away to the lakes, the river, the countryside, and have that bigger space.”

Similarly, Jon Staff, the CEO and founder of cabin and vacation home rental company Getaway, which offers tiny homes within driving distance of major cities, said the company saw a 400 percent jump in bookings from what they had projected around the time President Donald Trump banned travel from Europe.

Staff said Getaway is inherently built for social distancing: you let yourself into the cabin, you don't see a check-in desk, there is no restaurant. For now, the company is also limiting capacity to around 50 percent to ensure time can pass between guests leaving and staff entering.

“Folks are eager to get out of the house for obvious reasons, but I don't think any of us want to go to a pool party at a Vegas hotel right now,” Staff said. “Being able to take your own car matters.”

The occupancy rates at Sonder's properties, another vacation home rental company, have also risen, currently sitting at about 65 percent overall and even higher in some locations — San Diego, for example, has about 77 percent occupancy, according to the company. Now, Sonder is placing extras of commonly used items like batteries and toilet paper in the rentals so people don't necessarily need to leave, Julia Haywood, the company's senior vice president of the Americas, said.

“We've already been creating a business model that was effectively touchless, self-contained — you can do your laundry, you have a kitchen, and you don't need to

stay for just one or two nights, but you can stay for a while,” Haywood explained. “It is an opportunity that hotels and big chains are thinking, ‘We have to make this touchless, how do we do that?’ And we're already there doing that.”

## **Cleanliness matters more than ever.**

Home vacation rentals offer limited interaction with other human beings, but it doesn't mean they don't have to focus on cleaning protocols to assure potential guests. At [Airbnb](#), [hosts can get certified](#) by complying with a checklist of standards, and stays will be spaced out with 24 hours between reservations.

Travelers who [search for a home on Vrbo](#) will be able to see if disinfectant is being used to clean the home, if no-contact check-in is available, and if the home is unavailable for 24 hours between guests.

Breuner, of [AvantStay](#), said the company has gone a step further in bringing cleaning staff “in house.”

“Being able to control the in-house cleaning process... is the new normal,” Breuner said, adding: “Cleaning is No. 1 top of mind for all travelers... There's more concern about how professional a clean is today more than ever and making sure it's well documented. For the last two and a half months... that's something we've really doubled down on.”

