

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Airbnb blends personalized service, home-sharing in Luxe offerings

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An Airbnb Luxe in Te Wanaka, New Zealand. Image credit: Airbnb

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Home-sharing platform Airbnb is continuing its pursuit of affluent clientele with the launch of Airbnb Luxe, amid increased competition in the temporary rental arena.

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Demand for intimate and unique accommodations continues to grow among wealthy travelers, driving the popularity of Airbnb and similar services. Through Airbnb Luxe, the platform is making available high-end homes as well as trip designers who can arrange bespoke experiences.

Luxe rentals

Airbnb Luxe is a result of the brand's 2017 acquisition of Luxury Retreats ([see story](#)).

While Luxury Retreats continues to operate independently, more than 2,000 homes are available to book through Airbnb Luxe. These luxury home stays are currently in limited markets, including Tuscany, Costa Rica and Los Angeles, with plans to expand to 12 more cities this year, including Milan, Paris and Austin, TX.

Each Airbnb Luxe rental needs to pass an inspection that includes more than 300 design and function standards, including number of bedrooms and corresponding bathrooms, chef-grade kitchen appliances and premium materials.



A kitchen at an Airbnb Luxe penthouse in London. Image credit: Airbnb

Although nightly rates at Luxe properties vary, Airbnb reports that bookings for listings worth at least \$1,000 per night increased more than 60 percent in 2018.

"Today's luxury traveler is craving more than just high-end accommodations; they seek transformation and experiences that leave them feeling more connected to each other and to their destination," said Brian Chesky, cofounder/CEO of Airbnb, in a statement. "With Airbnb Luxe we are applying the same approach we've used since we launched Airbnb more than 11 years ago creating local, authentic and magical travel moments now in amazing places to stay to reimagine the way people think and experience luxury travel."

Airbnb Luxe is also differentiating itself by assigning guests "trip designers" who are available 24/7. The designers are responsible for coordinating check-ins, local experiences and arranging other services such as childcare or spa treatments.

These offerings are an updated take on what was originally introduced as "Beyond by Airbnb" in 2018.

At a tier below Luxe is Airbnb Plus, a selection of homes verified for quality and design across 300 markets ([see story](#)). However, Plus accommodations do not feature the privacy and personalized service that will be part of the Luxe experience.

[Airbnb Chateau d'Estoublon, Provence, France](#)



An Airbnb Luxe in the French countryside. Image credit: Airbnb

One luxury predecessor to Airbnb Luxe is from hospitality group Four Seasons, which has been renting homes and villas for 20 years and recently rebranded this service as Four Seasons Private Retreats.

Four Seasons Private Retreats' footprint currently includes 750 properties, selected from the brand's existing resorts and residences, across 21 destinations, including Japan, Thailand and Costa Rica. Additionally, Four Seasons manages its private rentals without third-party assistance while offering full access to on-site services and amenities ([see story](#)).

Hotel group Marriott International is also embracing the sharing economy with a new rental division poised to compete with hospitality disruptors including Airbnb.

Dubbed Homes & Villas by Marriott International, the platform will enable consumers to rent properties from third-party companies through the world's largest hotel group. Rather than allowing property owners to rent directly, Marriott is working with third parties including TurnKey Vacation Rentals and LaCure, who vet homes and take care

of the services, such as replacing linens ([see story](#)).

Home-sharing strength

International tourism growth, rising hotel prices and experiential travel trends are factors that are contributing to the growth of Airbnb and other home-sharing services.

According to the Hotel Price Index from Hotels.com, a 3 percent increase in costs for overnight accommodations in 2018 is the latest indicator that the global travel industry remains healthy. Canada, Ireland and Japan saw increased interest from American travelers as well.

Globally, a 3 percent jump in hotel prices has pushed rates to the highest point since 2004. Average accommodation rates rose in 33 of the top 50 international travel destinations ([see story](#)).

Another report from Hotels.com, the "2018 Chinese International Travel Monitor," showed that more Chinese travelers are also traveling independently, with 65 percent of travelers preferring that travel style instead of participating in group tours.

This trend is also fueling demand for more intimate, boutique-style accommodations. More than half of Chinese tourists, 55 percent, stayed at independent hotels while 49 percent booked at international chains and 33 percent stayed at boutique hotels ([see story](#)).

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