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Senior Traveler: Apartment instead of hotel

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For The Inquirer

If you want to visit Paris, London, Rome, or other travel spots without the expense of a hotel and restaurants, do what a lot of seniors do and rent an apartment or condo for a week.

Going it alone - making your own itinerary and choosing your own accommodations and neighborhoods - can save money and offer deeper immersion in a destination than will overnight jaunts from one hotel to another.



The Rental in Rome Web site shows apartments available in the city as alternatives to hotels.

These days, finding decent apartments at a vacation spot is relatively easy. Avoiding surprises, such as finding out too late that your reserved space competes with a rock band's rehearsal hall, is paramount.

The Internet provides the most complete and fastest source of information. A recent search on www.limaparis.com netted 132 apartments and condos, which can be narrowed down by neighborhood, size of the unit, desired dates, and rent. There are color photos of the interiors.

A search for a two-room apartment near the Arc de Triomphe and Champs-Élysées turned up five choices for 800 to 1,500 euros a week (about \$1,172 to \$2,207) for one to three weeks. Other choices of four or more weeks would cost about \$762 to \$1,414 a week.

The Web site also tells you whether there are vacancies at specific times. If you do not have Internet access, write to LimaParis.com, 39 Avenue des Ternes, 75017, Paris, France.

On the London Choice Web site (www.londonchoice.com/home.asp), a search for a two-room apartment for four people in the Hyde Park neighborhood found 14 choices, starting at about \$156 a night. The site also has color photos and lists amenities, such as Internet connection, oven, microwave, dishwasher, washer, satellite/cable TV, safe, foldaway bed, iron, elevator, maid and room service, porter, and airport transfers. You can call London Choice at 1-866-402-1904.

On the Rental in Rome Web site (www.rentalinrome.com), 28 apartments were listed in the Trevi Fountain area. Categorized as "low cost" (less than \$145 a day), "high quality" (\$145 to \$290) and "luxury" (more than \$290), the locations and amenities are shown with photos and maps. You can also call the company's New York City office at 212-889-0313.

Then there are places you find through a prior visit.

Walking the beach on Grand Cayman Island not long ago, my wife and I came upon a coifed lawn and swimming pool, tall palms, a children's playground, and thatched cabanas. The beauty of it stood out from the string of beachfront hotels and other condos. By nosing around, we learned that many guests of the **Aqua Bay Club** (www.aquabayclub.com) reserve space for a later trip simply by dropping in.

The name may sound as though it's a resort, but it is merely a three-story building of 21 mammoth apartments, 19 of which are rentals. The one we eventually stayed in cost \$377 a night; its two large bedrooms and two full baths made it perfect for traveling with grandchildren.

Just up the beach is the 23-acre **Cayman Turtle Farm and Marine Adventure Park** (www.boatswainsbeach.ky), which has lagoons for snorkeling. It also is a kind of refuge for 11,000 green sea turtles, ranging from 6 ounces to 600 pounds each, plus loggerhead, hawksbill and endangered Kemp's ridley turtles. The turtle farm says it has 47 of the world's estimated 1,200 Kemp's ridleys.

Grand Cayman Island is most famous for Stingray City, where you snorkel with inquisitive - and hungry - stingrays in relative safety. An easier place to experience these frolicking sea animals is the nearby Stingray Sand Bar, which is only waist deep and easier for smaller children to handle.

When we were in Ireland, we stumbled on the **Ballyvara House** (www.ballyvarahouse.ie) in Doolin, County Clare, en route to the Cliffs of Moher. The hotel is a beautiful place to stay, with exquisite views of the sea and shore. And it offers so much more: the nearby cliffs; the Burren, a wild and unforgettably rocky place; inns with Irish music; and a ferry to the Aran Islands.

The Ballyvara House also is ideal for grandchildren, with its children's outdoor activity center - a multipurpose, synthetic-turf court lined for soccer, basketball and tennis. There also are donkeys and ponies roaming the grounds.

You can call the Ballyvara House at 011-353-65-707-4467. It is closed for the winter, but its sister property, **Tír gan Éan House Hotel** (www.tirganean.ie) is open.