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**2014**

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**[How To Use AirBNB - The first site you should visit after booking your flight](#)**



Getting a flight for a great price is just 50% of the amazing travel deal equation. You also need to land a great deal on a place to stay. Endlessly searching hotel websites won't help you.

They're all the same, and hotels are now very efficiently priced, thanks to the Internet, making good deals hard to find. So what can you do?

[AirBNB](#) is one of those rare sites that has truly changed the game. These game-changing sites are easy to spot, because the traditional industry, the hotel industry in this case, recognizes they are about to lose billions, and will do everything in their power to [try and stop them](#).

From what I've observed, 2014 seems to be the year that [AirBNB](#) has really started to gain traction in Canada. Even though it was launched in 2008, and has since raised \$450 million with a potential valuation of \$10 Billion, this year I've noticed it being mentioned a \*lot\* more than previous years in my Facebook groups across the country.

I'm not ready to call [AirBNB](#) 'mainstream' just yet. Your Mom has likely never used it. Your friend who travels a lot likely has. You may have heard of it but haven't tried it yet, or don't really know what it's about.

As for myself, the first time I used it was in Turkey in 2012. Since then I've used it in 3 other countries, with plans to use it again for an upcoming trip to Iceland. In this article I'll explain what I've learned from using [AirBNB](#) these past 2 years, offer some tips, and show you why it should probably be the first place you look for accommodations after booking a flight, no matter what kind of traveler you are.

### AirBNB, is that where you, like, pay to sleep on someone's couch?

I think perhaps the biggest hurdle to AirBNB going completely mainstream might be the perception that AirBNB is only for a certain type of traveler that just needs a place to crash for a while, kind of like couchsurfing.

[AirBNB](#) is more like the wild west of accommodations. You can find everything from an entire home or apartment, to cabins and yurts, to villas, and even the occasional cave, tree-house, or castle. The accommodations run the gamut from bare bones to ridiculously luxurious, and everything in between.



The accommodations can be owned by anyone, from someone who's just renting out a place for fun, or a couple looking for a way to help pay the mortgage, to people that have been renting out rooms as a real business for years (bed & breakfast owners for example) and just want to be listed on [AirBNB](#) because it's becoming a valuable place to be seen in the travel sector.

The great thing about the wild west of [AirBNB](#) is that the prices set by the owners can often be way out of line with their real market value, in your favor. In other words, you can find amazing deals on great places to stay where you're getting way more for your money than with the traditional hotel route. But, to correctly navigate this wild west you need to make sure you know how to use AirBNB effectively.

## How To Use AirBNB

### Step 1: Pick a location to search

This is pretty straightforward. Go to [www.airbnb.ca](http://www.airbnb.ca) and enter in the name of a city, town, or country.



Tip: You can also enter in the name of an entire continent (eg: 'Europe').

You can also try landmarks (eg: 'Eiffel Tower') but they don't seem to work on the front page search box, but do work in the search box on all other [AirBNB](#) pages.

Tip: If you don't have any specific dates in mind yet, you can just hit 'Search' without entering any dates to start browsing all AirBNB listings, regardless of availability. If you \*do\* enter in dates, it will only show you the listings that are actually available on your dates.

### Step 2: Entire Place, Private Room, or Shared Room ?



This might be the most critical decision you make when using [AirBNB](#). In my first AirBNB experience, I went with a private room in an apartment in Turkey. 'Private Room' means you have your own room to yourself, but the owner likely lives in the same dwelling where you are staying.

Living in the same place with the owner can be a great experience. You have someone who likely knows the city very well, with valuable local knowledge on the best things to do and the best restaurants to eat at (and the ones to avoid).

It can also be fun just to see how a real person lives in a different part of the world, and the place they are renting out has a good chance of being in a real neighborhood that gives you an authentic travel experience that a regular hotel stay never could.

All of this was true with my first [AirBNB](#) experience in Turkey. I was in a great neighborhood (Cihangir) in the trendy Beyoglu district of Istanbul. The owner was really nice, and had a cool cat. He gave great tips on restaurants and nightlife, and was extremely helpful and excited to share info about his city with me. But...

He also had a new girlfriend, who was spending the nights (and mornings) in the same apartment, and let's just say the walls are a little thin in Istanbul. The experience suddenly became a little more authentic than I had bargained for.

After that, I've always started my [AirBNB](#) research with 'Entire Place' selected first.



By selecting 'Entire Place' you are guaranteed that no matter what you are renting (house, apartment, etc) you will have the entire place to yourself. The only interaction you'll have with your host is likely just to get the key (at which point, you could still tap their knowledge of the area).

This isn't to say I would never 'Private Room' it again. In fact, I did, about a year later, on a trip to the Azores when I stayed at an [amazing, large house](#) with ocean views for something like \$40/night. The host was a kind woman who made delicious pastries for breakfast and everything worked out great.



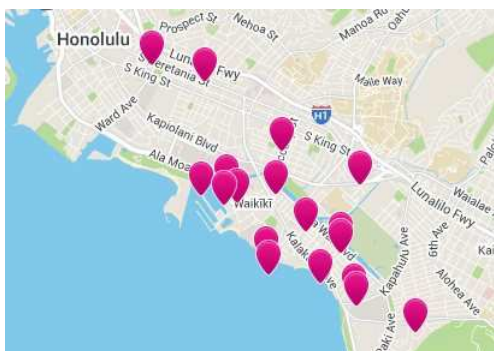
But the room type you might want to focus on could be dictated by what sort of traveler you are (a solo backpacker, a couple, a family or group) and what level of interaction you're looking for with the host.

Here's a chart for some guidance (but as is always the case with travel, one size does not fit all)

AirBNB Type	Pros	Cons	Probably best for...
Shared Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usually cheapest</li> <li>meeting new people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>greater chance of something not working out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the young backpacker crowd</li> </ul>
Private Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meet a local but with your own private space too</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>low chance of something not working out, but still a chance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>couples</li> <li>solo travelers who want their own space</li> </ul>
Entire Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>complete privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no interaction with the host</li> <li>usually costs the most</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>families, groups</li> <li>anyone who just wants complete privacy</li> </ul>

**Step 3: Narrow down your choices**

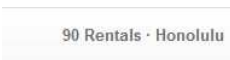
After setting my Room Type to 'Entire Place', the first thing I usually do is zoom in a bit on the map, into the area I'm really hoping to find a room (the listings will automatically update as you move the map).



Next, I set the price range. If you can't see the price range filter, click on 'More Filters'. I usually start by looking for something great in my area of choice for under \$100/night.



Now I look at the number of results...



If it's anything higher than say, 50 Rentals, I lower the price, to reduce the number of listings (why pay more if I can find something great for even less?). In this case, I'm showing 90 rentals, so let's lower it to under \$90/night and see what happens.

49 Rentals · Honolulu

Now I have 49 results, perfect! The other thing I could have done to get my results down to less than 50 is keep the price at \$100 or less, but click the 'More Filters' button to select some amenities (TV, Hot Tub, Kitchen, Pool, etc) or increase the number of bedrooms and washrooms. Let's see who will offer us the most for our dollar!

Tip: After clicking the 'More Filters' button, click the little arrows on the right to expand the number of amenity selection options.

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O'ahu
  Honolulu
  Waikiki

---

Wireless Internet
  TV
  Kitchen

---

Air Conditioning
  Family/Kid Friendly
  Internet

Breakfast
  Fire Extinguisher
  Pets Allowed

Buzzer/Wireless Intercom
  First Aid Kit
  Pool

Like I said earlier, [AirBNB](#) is the wild west of accommodations, with prices that are not always efficient, so it's amazing what you can sometimes get for the money!

Either way, the key is to get it down to a manageable number of listings. Anything under 50 listings is pretty good. I usually aim for around 30.

Tip: If you want to see what spending a little more will get you, you may want to try moving up the price bar in increments. For example, after checking out the \$100 and under listings, set the price filter to 'minimum \$100 - maximum \$125'. Otherwise, if you set it to \$125 and under, your results will include all the under \$100 listings that you've already seen.

**But I'm finding very few results, or none at all!**

If you're finding less than 10 listings in an area, it's probably time to sacrifice something. There are 3 ways you can sacrifice...

Price: You may want to consider going up in price by \$10-\$20 increments, until you find at least 10 listings.

Room Type: You may want to consider changing your room type from 'Entire Place' to 'Private Room'. Private Room listings generally cost less than Entire Places. There's also 'Shared Room', which is the cheapest, but personally, I'd probably sacrifice my price or location first.

Location: Click and drag around the map. Move the map to a location that's a little further away from your ideal spot. The results will automatically refresh, hopefully with more options.

I usually start by sacrificing on Price a bit. If there's still not any decent listings I drop my room type down to Private Room. And if there's \*still\* not many options (rare), I drag around the map a bit, to areas that surround my ideal location.

**Step 4: Look for listings with a decent number of reviews**

In the bottom right corner of each listing's picture, you will see the number of reviews that particular listing has ...



If you want to take a chance on a place with very few reviews, or none at all, go ahead (somebody has to!), but personally I like to see at least 10 reviews before I'll consider it a viable option.

To see the reviews, you need to actually click on the listing and view it. [AirBNB](#) does not seem to offer a way to filter or sort the listings by number of reviews (perhaps on purpose?).

As you scroll towards the bottom of the listing, you'll see the Overall Guest Satisfaction Rating...

---

**Overall Guest Satisfaction**
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**Accuracy**
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**Cleanliness**
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**Check In**
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

along with the individual reviews from each person that has stayed there...



I had a nice time in the condo. It is quiet and only a 5 minutes walk to the waikiki beach. bus stops are close to the condo. wifi is perfect.

Elisabeth

April 2014

You can learn quite a bit about a place by quickly scanning the reviews. If anything is specifically mentioned more than once, it might be an issue to consider. Keep an eye out for people mentioning cute pets, if you're allergic to cats or dogs.

Overall, I find the review scores given by guests on [AirBNB](#) are pretty generous. I usually hope to find a place with an Overall Guest Satisfaction Rating of 5 out of 5, which I don't think is unreasonable, just because the scores do tend to skew higher.

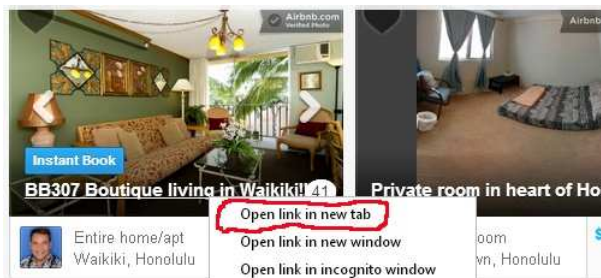
But a 4.5 out of 5 is fine too, as long as the place has a decent number of reviews (say, more than 15). I've never found it necessary to consider any place with less than a 4.5 rating.

If two places have the same rating, and I can't find any significant differences in amenities to help break the tie, I'll generally give the edge to the place with a higher number of reviews.

**Step 5: Narrow down your favorites**

You've searched, you've filtered, and have found some great looking listings with a decent number of reviews that look like they have real potential. It's time to start browsing the individual listings and narrow down your favorites!

I usually start by right-clicking on each listing that has a decent number of reviews, and open up each listing in their own browser tab. Then I just go back and forth between the browser tabs, eliminating the listings that don't make the cut for whatever reason.



The decision to keep or eliminate a listing is often based on a quick look at the pictures and scan of the review comments.

**Some things to watch for as you're browsing the listings...**

- You must have your specific dates entered to see the 'real' price, after any extra charges. Usually the only extra charge there might be is a cleaning fee. [AirBNB](#) factors in this cleaning fee (if applicable) into the 'Per Night' rate. \*But\* they do not factor in the AirBNB service fee into the 'Per Night' rate, which is a little annoying, but they do clearly display the amount of this fee.

- The map function gives you a pretty good idea of where the place is actually located, but not an exact address (for privacy reasons). As far as I know, the precise location is in the center of the 'general location' pink circle on the map...



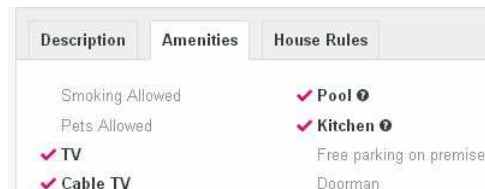
- Every AirBNB listing has a unique number code assigned to it, which never changes. You can see the number code for a listing in the address bar of your browser...



If you like to keep track of things in your own notes or spreadsheet, you can copy/paste or write down this unique number. If you ever want to find this listing again some day, you can Google 'airbnb 416853' (or whatever the number is) and quickly find the listing again.

Or you can just use the built in 'Save To Wishlist' function of AirBNB. I never really use it myself. I could swear AirBNB used to let you sort listings by 'Most Wished For', but I might have been dreaming that.

- If you've narrowed it down to your top few choices, and you're having trouble deciding between them, try comparing by clicking on the Amenities tab to help break the tie.



- You may also want to keep your eye on the cancellation policy of the listing. This can either be 'Flexible', 'Moderate', 'Strict', or 'Super Strict'. Note that the AirBNB service fee is always non-refundable no matter what policy it is.

City:	Honolulu
Neighborhood:	Makiki/Lower Punchbowl/Tantalus
Cancellation:	Moderate

- At any time, you can contact the host, and ask them any questions or address any concerns. It can also help give you a feel of whether it's the right place (and host) for you.

#### Step 6: Make your booking

Booking with [AirBNB](#) is a pretty painless experience. You will be asked for your credit card info, encouraged to send the host a short note to say hi and introduce yourself (not mandatory though), and that's about it.

You will then likely hear back from the host or owner in a timely fashion, usually with the specific address and directions, and any other info that you will require for your stay.

In their message they sometimes also include great recommendations of things to do and places to eat in the area. They're also usually happy to answer any additional questions you might have, and are generally nice, friendly people (especially if you've picked a place that was well reviewed!)

## How To Get A Free \$27 Credit On AirBNB

When you create your AirBNB account (free), make sure to go through someone's [AirBNB referral link](#), because you'll automatically receive \$27 in credit in your AirBNB account for doing so. If you go to AirBNB through any of the links in this blog post and create an account, you'll get the credit.

[AirBNB](#) also gives me a credit for referring you (and you can also earn credits by referring others once you have your account).

If you do not want either of us to receive any credits, you can just go to [www.AirBNB.ca](http://www.AirBNB.ca) directly, to create an account without going through someone's referral link (although I'm not sure why you wouldn't want \$27 in free credits!).

#### Is AirBNB \*always\* the best option for accommodations?

Certainly not always. Even though [AirBNB](#) has spread rapidly all over the world, it was founded in the U.S.A., and that's where the listings are still strongest.

In certain countries without much tourism, or in less densely populated areas, AirBNB may not have many listings. There are also times where the best available AirBNB option does not beat the best available accommodation from another source. But in my opinion it's always at least worth a look, if only because the slick website makes it so easy to do so.

I've used it on 4 of my last 6 trips, and other than in Turkey, the stays have all been a resounding success. I'll update this post later on, after trying it in Iceland.

If you have any questions about using [AirBNB](#), or have already tried it yourself and want to share your experience or tips, please comment below or [give me a shout](#).

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