

An \$18,000 Airbnb Weekend Stay

By Dr. Rosanna Garcia

I just booked through Airbnb a stay at a lovely home in Leuven, Belgium, for the end of May. The simplicity and quaintness of the room reminds me of Van Gogh's Bedroom in Arles. Besides its charm, I chose this room because previous guests had described their stay as 'amazing', 'magnificent', and 'excellent'. The last Airbnb guest wrote that it was a 'pleasure to sit down and get to know [the hosts] a bit better over some wine and snacks.' It's the locals you meet through home sharing that adds to the foreign travel experience. For me as a single woman traveling for business, it's also nice to know I'm in the safety of a home where I'm genuinely welcome. No eating alone in sterile hotel dining halls for me.

But Airbnb doesn't just offer rooms in a local's home. You can rent a romantic houseboat on the Seine overlooking the Eiffel Tower or an Italian villa surrounded by Tuscan oak woods, olive orchards and vineyards, making it your own for the vacation stay. Airbnb reportedly has 1,000,000 listings in 33,000 cities in more than 190 countries. If you dream of it, you will likely find it on Airbnb including windmills, renovated airplanes and treehouses. I've rented homes with my family in tow in the Provence area of France, on the Big Island of Hawaii, and on a Greek Island. In Provence, the house even came with a BMW that I was too afraid to drive because of the narrow, windy roads where the French drivers had no problem whipping around blind corners while I timidly advanced – and thereby only increasing the chances of a collision!



A question one has to ask, is 'who would give their luxury home and their car to someone they have never met?'

I am one of those people. I belong to a number of home sharing sites including HomeAway, HomeLink, US Servas and I have my luxury home in Monterey, CA posted on Airbnb. It's a three bedroom, four bath home perched on a ridge with windows around the entire house overlooking the pastoral community of Watsonville in one direction and the Monterey Bay in the other. When you wake up, it seems as if you are floating in a cloud as the morning fog embraces the house cutting off the rest of the world. The afternoon sun burns off the fog leaving a majestic view of the red-barked manzanita bushes and the wizened oak trees that create a wide carpet down the valley to the beach. The sign on the door as you enter the house says "Bievenidos, mi casa es su casa," and I do mean that. Well, I mean that for most people.

I'm an early adopter of the 'collaborative consumption' economy, which Time magazine identified in 2011 as one of the "10 Ideas That Will Change the World."

Collaborative consumption, also known as the sharing economy, is defined as a shift in consumer values from private ownership where the person with the most toys wins to one of shared assets where experiences matter more than property accumulation. It was natural for me to list my home on Airbnb when it started.

All way going well until last July when I unknowingly rented by home to a 19 year-old boy who threw his 19th birthday party at my house when under his care, the house sustained \$18,000 in damage. One of the first questions I get asked is, 'what did Airbnb do?' Through their insurance, they paid the \$18,000 to have the repairs made. So how does someone do \$18,000 of damage in a

weekend? Picture 19 year-olds punching holes in the wall, urinating in the mattresses, smoking paraphernalia and you get an idea. The next question I get asked is 'why did you rent your home to a 19 year-old?' Well, that was my mistake. Because of my positive past home sharing experiences, I let my guard down.

So why do I still use Airbnb? I'm obviously a fan of Airbnb and continue to list my house on their network. Those of us who participate in the sharing economy believe in a world where people are inherently good and use collaborative consumption as a way of making travel more accessible to everyone. I would rather rent my vacation home than have it used only a few times a year by me. It's bad for the house and bad for my pocketbook. Yes, there is an economic incentive for me and I don't deny this is an important part of the decision for many in the sharing economy. I earn money on the assets I don't use daily and others

get to save from borrowing my assets. However, now I am much more vigilant about who I rent my house to. I'm a university professor whose research is in predictive analytics so after the \$18,000 Airbnb stay, I started a company, Vijilent. We use social media to analyze an individual's online reputation to provide a trust score, which can be delivered to anyone through a mobile app. Now I'm more comfortable renting my house out and staying in someone else's house as I know a bit more about them through their Vijilent score. I encourage you to go, explore the world, share experiences but be informed of who you are sharing your life with. I can't wait to meet my Leuven hosts.

Dr. Rosanna Garcia is the Chancellor's Faculty of Excellence in Innovation + Design at North Carolina State University. After an Airbnb guest caused \$18,000 in damage to her home, Rosanna started Vijilent to turn her expertise in human behavior and modeling to making the burgeoning sharing economy safer.

