



# airbnb Anyone?

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Travelers who are new to Airbnb may assume that they will be renting a room in someone’s home and will be given breakfast. Actually, today’s Airbnb has evolved beyond the traditional bed and breakfast idea, but in the beginning, offerings generally *were* for a room in someone’s house or apartment.

Airbnb originated in 2007 with two San Franciscans, Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia, renting space in their apartment to three people for short stays. Within a few months, these two took on a partner, Nate Blecharczyk, and formed Airbed & Breakfast, an online service that allowed people to find, book, and pay for accommodations.

By spring of 2009, the company changed its name to Airbnb and branched out into whole apartments, homes, and vacation rentals. Over the next decade, Airbnb added an app, an instant booking feature, international sites, and official access to accommodations at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Airbnb has continued to expand locations, and has added programs such as alternative housing for people dislocated by disaster and for frontline workers.

The pandemic beginning early in 2020 posed additional challenges. The company responded by establishing extensive cleaning protocols so that renters could feel confident Airbnb sites were safe places to visit.

The company has grown from its original two hosts to four million as of September 2020. Offerings are wildly varied.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE HEDDERICK FAMILY

**Jacob’s Cottage (top and middle) is furnished with family heirloom furniture and decorated with Angela’s art. The cottage is owned by the Hedderick family (bottom): Angela, Katy, Alex and Dan.**

In addition to rooms, apartments, and homes, listings include 90,000 cabins, 40,000 farms, 24,000 tiny homes, 5,600 boats, 3,500 castles, 2,800 yurts, 2,600 treehouses, 1,600 private islands, 300 lighthouses, and 140 igloos.

Two local families, the Heddericks and the Maiers, who decided to become Airbnb hosts, have been pleasantly

surprised by how well it has worked for them.

About five years ago, Dan and Angela Hedderick's neighbors put their house on the market, and the Heddericks saw an opportunity. They purchased the home, named it Jacob's Cottage for Angela's father, furnished it with family heirloom furniture, decorated it with Angela's art, and began offering it as a guest location for family and friends and the occasional vacationer looking for a quiet place to stay. After a year or so of this casual approach, at the suggestion of a relative, the Heddericks decided to try joining Airbnb as hosts. They were delighted with the steady stream of short-term rentals that resulted.

Jacob's Cottage is booked about 3/4 of the time, never for longer than a week, and the rental income finances family hobbies such as daughter Katy's horseback riding and son Alex's downhill mountain bike racing. All four members of the family have important roles in keeping the cottage running. The Heddericks have become "superhosts," a designation that Airbnb gives to hosts who establish a consistent record of excellent reviews over time.

Dan says it is impossible to name one main reason that people choose to stay at Jacob's Cottage. Some travelers break their road trips by staying at the cottage, which is easily accessible from I-68 and Route 220 near Cumberland. Some come to be near skiing at Wisp Ski Resort or at Seven Springs Ski Resort, both within an hour's drive. One regular visitor is a doctor who lives in another city, but works a few days a week at a Cumberland hospital. Some want to be near local festivals and other events. Some people book it as a quiet getaway from hectic lives. Though most guests are Americans, people from all over the world have chosen Jacob's Cottage.

The Hedderick family thought that the pandemic would put a serious dent in their rentals; however, they found that even after suspending operations for several months, bookings for later in the year made up for the losses. They surmise that people were more eager than ever for a change of scenery, and visitors were reassured by the cleaning protocols required by Airbnb.



**Tara's Cottage, a three-bedroom house with modern décor, is owned by Henry and Nancy Maier (left). It is located on a 100 acre farm/ranch with plenty of mountain views and abundant wildlife.**

The Heddericks' experience led directly to another recently inaugurated Cumberland area Airbnb location.

Twenty years ago, Henry and Nancy Maier sold their HVAC business in Silver Spring, Maryland, and retired early. They moved to a hundred acre property where Henry's mother lived at the top of Warrior Mountain near Cumberland, where they got to know Dan Hedderick through his forestry work. Initially, the Maiers built a modern three-bedroom house that they called the Red Barn for their family's use.

When Henry's mother went to a retirement community, they moved her home to another part of the property and built "Nancy's Dream House" on the site at the top of the ridge. They took on long-term renters for the Red Barn. The last of these was their son, who rented for six years. When he moved off the farm in 2019, Henry and Nancy thought about Dan's success with renting through Airbnb and decided to try this route themselves.

They added a large, furnished screened porch; painted; installed new carpet, furniture, bedding, and art; and renamed the building Tara's Cottage in honor of Henry's mother, a serious fan of *Gone with the Wind*. Just as everything was ready and the paperwork was filled out, the pandemic closed down non-essential travel, so the project waited. When travel restrictions were eased in mid-2020, Henry and Nancy put the intensive Airbnb-directed cleaning protocols in place and took a leap of faith into Airbnb land. They, too, were delighted with the results. Tara's Cottage garnered immediate interest, and bookings have continued steadily. Henry and Nancy, as experienced businesspeople familiar with burdensome paperwork, are especially pleased that reservations and payments are handled so efficiently by Airbnb.

Unlike Jacob's Cottage, Tara's Cottage is available for stays of more than a few days. Several people have used it for a month or more while waiting for house construction or home buying to be completed. However, Tara's Cottage also attracts many short stay visitors because of its location. It has ample parking and a quiet rural setting close to major highways such as Route 220, Route 51, and I-68. WiFi is available, as it is at Jacob's Cottage,



**Top to bottom: Tara's Cottage is in a quiet rural setting with many amenities including a firepit, furnished screened porch, modern kitchen, dining area and bedrooms.**

which makes it possible for renters to communicate or work online while enjoying the bucolic beauty of the farm.

Visitors can relax in the comfortable interior of Tara's Cottage or take advantage of several outside spaces such as a recently-added fire pit. They can watch the draft horses and longhorn cattle that Henry and Nancy raise, and gaze at the mountain vistas available in every direction. Remarkably, it is possible to see Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia from the cottage. One peaceful spot inside, where a love seat faces a large window, has been dubbed the "best seat in the house."

Both the Heddericks and the Maiers keep guest books in their cottages and love to read the comments that visitors leave. Some Jacob's Cottage visitors have been interested enough in the artwork on the walls that they have purchased Angela's paintings. Guests who were there to attend a quilt show informed Dan and Angela that a family quilt they had displayed in Jacob's Cottage was unusual and valuable.

Henry and Nancy are always willing to talk with visitors to Tara's Cottage about the animals on their farm or the windmills (which they sell and install as part of a renewable

energy business they own) that provide some of their power. With reviews that are positive about both the place and the hosts, the Maiers anticipate soon becoming super-hosts themselves.

The families are happy to meet and interact with renters, but it's also possible for visitors to come and go without seeing their hosts. Booking and payment are handled online with Airbnb, and arrangements can be made for visitors to let themselves into the cottages. This makes the process of renting easy for hosts and for guests. Another convenience is that the cottages are well-equipped with linens, kitchenware, condiments, and other essentials.

If you're interested in browsing for places to stay in the mountains, you might want to see what's available on Airbnb. You can narrow the search to your preferred area, number of guests, type of accommodation, and cost range. Just visit <https://www.airbnb.com/>. On the other end, you will find friendly hosts, like Dan and Angela and Henry and Nancy, in beautiful and varied locations, eager to provide a positive experience for visitors.



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