

Not Your Typical Hotel Room

Written by Connie Valimont
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Memorial Day signaled the beginning of summer – break out the white shoes and, if you haven't already done so, get cracking on those vacation plans. Sometimes one of the most difficult decisions in planning is agreeing on what type of accommodation suits everyone in the travel party. Sometimes budgets may dictate that you look at other options - which may surprise you by being both affordable and memorable. Here are a few “tapas-type” alternatives to let you think outside the standard hotel room:

CASTLES – Staying in castles means you'll experience a unique character, fine architecture, interesting history and beautiful gardens all complementing your vacation. You can *sleep happily everafter*

the world over in France, Scotland, Poland, Canada, England, Negril (Jamaica), Tuscany, Latvia and more. From a listing of a castle called Camelot in Tintagel (the Diamond Jewel of Cornwall) – you can rent “rooms with a priceless view overlooking the Cornish coastline.” Another boasts “an economical way to spend a luxury holiday in an historical castle in the Loire Valley for 2 to 30 people.” Castles allow you to enjoy the splendor of the past with the comforts of today. And most, due to their location, also give you the quiet and beauty of the surrounding countryside.

CONVENTS - Many convents throughout Italy depend on modest lodging operations as a major source of income. The benefit for you is good location and rates that are a fraction of what nearby hotels are charging. One example, near St. Peter's Basilica, offers single rooms starting at €43-€48/night (\$63-\$70 USD). Remember that none of these operations is large, and their beds will fill quickly not only in peak season, but often in the quiet times as well. Such rooms are available not only in Rome but a number of other major Italian cities. Convent rooms often are spacious enough to accommodate a small to moderately sized family in one room. In some cases, the room actually could be a suite with a separate sitting room. In most cases, it will be spotlessly clean and spacious. No one will ask if you are Roman Catholic, and you are not required to participate in any religious services. But please note that the convent option is not for everyone. At many locations, the nuns speak no English and accept only cash payments. There is a curfew each night, and most beds are only large enough for one person.

LIGHTHOUSES - Ever thought about staying in a lighthouse? I quickly counted about 15 listed in the New England area; another 15 out West; about 8 in the Mid-Atlantic; 12 on the Great Lakes; and there's even one in Iowa that boasts a “breathtaking view from this landlocked

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lighthouse of 3 states: Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois.” Overseas lighthouse accommodations include Jamaica, Mexico, the Bahamas, Argentina, Australia, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, South Africa and more! Don’t forget our neighbor to the North, Canada, as well. Some of the rooms are former keeper’s houses; some are cottages on the property; some are replicas of the original lighthouse; and most have a history or may house a small museum to make the stay more memorable.

FARM – Farm stays are limited in their practicality. If you're touring attractions in a major city or have to report to a business meeting, a farm stay probably isn't the best choice. But if your itinerary includes only big cities, you're missing out on the flavor of the nation in which you are visiting. New York is not a microcosm of the United States; the same is true of London or Munich or other metropolitan areas. Farm stays are more available than you might think. For example, one website includes a page linking travelers with farmers in southern Germany and Austria. Some will let you camp on their properties at greater savings. Most offer a bed and facilities at very reasonable prices. Farm stays are generally cheaper than the German bed and breakfasts, but perhaps a bit more expensive than hostels.

New Zealand is a country where farm stays have become quite popular. The GlenMac Farmstay, for example, allows visitors to experience a merino sheep and beef cattle farm in the picturesque Waitaki Valley from \$25 per person for either their backpacker hostel or campervan park. It lists itself as a “typical High Country New Zealand Farm” and has many activities such as horseback riding, rural walking, fishing for trout and stunning scenery, history and architecture in the area around the farm.

BOATS- Some of our best vacations have been aboard chartered yachts in the Caribbean, in the Pacific Northwest and in southern California, to name a few spots. You have several choices here: if you’re an experienced boater, you can bareboat (which means you chart the course and are responsible for all navigation of the vessel as well as provisioning it with food & linens & other staples); or, if you don’t have a boating resume, you can hire a captain (and crew) and, while you plan the course, they are responsible for getting you from point A to point B and may assist in provisioning, cooking & other daily duties. Your other choice is type of vessel: either motor or sail vessel. We found a 40- to 45-foot sailboat to be comfortable for 2 couples, although our requirement was that it had 2 heads (that’s bathrooms for you landlubbers) and 2 separate sleeping areas.

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Did you know that you need virtually no experience to charter a houseboat? Every houseboating lake in North America is unique, and every houseboat rental a little different. You can cruise gentle waters surrounded by trees or dramatic desert bluffs; cruise on a compact houseboat great for families and fishing trips; or on a luxury houseboat perfect for retreats. You can even rent a personal watercraft or two, motorboats or water skis to add a touch of sport to your houseboat vacation. Lake Powell (one of our favorites) or some of the lakes in Tennessee/Kentucky or nearby Lake Lanier in GA allow the freedom of exploration, a multitude of water activities, and just plain rest and relaxation at the end of the day tucked into a secluded cove.