

BusinessWeek

Business Week:

Home Sweet European Rental

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Europe

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Live like a local by renting an apartment in one of Europe's capitals. Book during September or October for cooler weather—and prices



Summer is half over, but it's not too late to plan a European vacation. Or, perhaps you'd like to miss the heat, crowds, and high airfares by booking a September or October sojourn. Whatever you choose, one of the best ways to get really familiar with a European city is to live like a local in a short-term rental apartment. More and more travelers today are saying no to the pricey luxuries of hotels in favor

of a place that feels a little bit more like home. In addition to often being cheaper, renting an apartment also offers a number of practical advantages. With a kitchen instead of a minibar, you can have a midnight snack without worrying about breaking the bank. A washer/dryer means you don't have to let the stains from spilled European cuisine settle into your clothes before your return home. And, most of all, you feel less like a tourist and more like you're actually part of the city that you're visiting.

Most major European cities are chock full of apartment rental agencies—and some of them have excellent Web sites that let you thoroughly view properties and book online. Options range from economy studios to sprawling luxury pads with panoramic city views.

CITY OF RENTALS. Paris is particularly outfitted with short-term rentals. Now that the Orangerie has reopened after a six year-long renovation, it's the perfect time to come to Paris for a café au lait and a long look at Monet's water lilies. Berlin is also begging for a visit: With the World Cup over, the city has gone back to business as usual and it's safe for non-soccer fans again. It's always a good time to visit Amsterdam, whose concentric rings of canals make finding waterfront property a cinch. And Barcelona and Rome now offer a growing number of short-term rentals as well.

Despite their often luxurious accommodations and decor, short-term apartments often work out to be cheaper on a weekly basis than hotel rooms. Larger apartments can often sleep five people or more, so groups traveling together can get more for their money in an apartment than they would by renting several hotel rooms. Alternatively, some agencies, such as Holland's Loving Amsterdam, offer large groups the additional option of renting several smaller apartments in the same building at a special group rate.

More often than not, though, people who choose to rent apartments place a higher premium on comfort than price. For instance, families with children often prefer apartments because it's easier to keep an eye on the kids and to maintain familiar daily routines. People with dietary restrictions like being able to stock the kitchen with foods they can eat. And businesspeople on extended trips find apartments less impersonal than hotel rooms.

OLD WORLD CHARM. The only major downside of renting an apartment is that it generally won't offer hotel-type amenities, such as daily maid service, a fully equipped health club, or a 24-hour concierge. Yet some prefer such austerity because it forces them to get out into the city and taste the native lifestyle. One eye-opening trip to a nearby shop can more than compensate for having to make your own bed.

No matter what your tastes, the European short-term apartment-rental industry is expanding to serve them. Although hotels don't seem to be going anywhere for the

time being, more and more visitors to Europe are choosing to stay in a place that mixes Old World flavor with a bit of home.

Check out the properties and Web sites highlighted here for suggestions on where to start.

Paris Perfect

If you want a beautiful apartment with a view of the Eiffel Tower, Paris Perfect (www.parisperfect.com) is the agency for you. Prices range from \$1,330 to \$9,030 per week (although it's possible to rent per night) during the high season, but you get what you pay for: elegant, well-equipped, and centrally located apartments. This particular unit, the Bergerac, has three bedrooms (sleeping up to seven), 2 1/2 bathrooms, three balconies, wireless Internet, cable TV, a full kitchen, and, of course, a view of the Eiffel Tower. During the high season (summer and Christmastime) its rental price is \$6,480 per week, but it falls to \$4,446 off-season.