

The 14 Best Vacation Rental Sites for Travelers in 2021

(Courtesy of <https://www.smartertravel.com/>)

Hoping to rent a house or apartment on vacation? You've got plenty of options—maybe too many. Travelers looking for the best vacation rental sites have to weed through big online travel agencies, small specialty sites, and everything in between. The process can be overwhelming.

Many people aren't aware that most of the best vacation rental websites are owned by a handful of large companies—so you could find yourself wasting time searching the same inventory on multiple sites.

To help you sift through the options, I tested more than a dozen top vacation rental sites to figure out which ones offer the best combination of plentiful inventory, useful filters, informative listings, and fair prices, without too many hidden fees. I discovered that there's no single best vacation home rental site, but that each one has pros and cons to suit different types of travelers.

For example, some of the top vacation rental websites are better if you're open to both hotels and rentals, while others are more specialized to suit those who already know they want a vacation home, rental apartment, or private room in someone else's space. Some vacation rental sites make it easier than others to browse properties on a map or to contact the owner of a property to ask questions before your stay.

The following are the best vacation rental sites found by Smarter Travel testing. Scroll down for more in-depth analysis of each (to also see the 'Smarter Travel' website [click here](#))

- [Airbnb](#)
- [Booking.com](#)
- [Expedia](#)
- [HometoGo](#)
- [Hotels.com](#)
- [Tripadvisor](#)
- [Tripping](#)
- [Vrbo](#)
- [Plum Guide](#)
- [Sonder](#)
- [TurnKey](#)
- [Marriott Homes & Villas](#)
- [Agoda](#)
- [Getaway](#)

Airbnb

The name of this site is almost synonymous with short-term rentals these days, and its reputation as one of the best vacation rental sites is well deserved: [Airbnb](#) offers abundant listings in most popular travel destinations, and its site is cleanly designed and easy to use. There's a prominent map of properties on the main listing page, so you can quickly browse by location—or you can turn off the map feature if you don't find it useful. The main listings page offers useful information right off the bat, including the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, traveler rating, price (both per night and for your total stay), guest capacity, key amenities, and type of accommodation—such as “entire apartment” or “private room in house.” You can also scroll through a listing's photos right on the initial results page.

Once you click into a given listing, there's more than enough information to help you decide whether to book, including house rules, bed configurations, cancellation policies, amenities, reviews from past guests, and a full price breakdown (which typically includes things like a cleaning fee and Airbnb's own service fee). You can also contact the property's host through the platform if you have questions before you book.

Best feature: The site makes it easier to sort through hundreds of properties by identifying Superhosts (“experienced, highly rated hosts who are committed to providing great stays for guests”) and Airbnb Plus listings (“a selection of places to stay verified for quality and design”). Because standards can vary so widely from one vacation rental to another, choosing properties with one or both of these designations can help travelers feel more confident in their selection.

Booking.com

[Booking.com](#) lists just about every type of accommodation imaginable, from hotels and B&Bs to vacation rentals and apartments. This is a perk for travelers open to a variety of lodging options, while those who know they want a vacation rental will have to take the extra step of filtering out extraneous search results. (That's easily done via a “Entire Homes and Apartments” button at the top of the results page or searching by property type.)

Property listings offer plenty of information, including amenities, guest reviews, house rules, and an option to contact the host through the site. The site clearly labels whether your booking is nonrefundable, or you can cancel without penalty up to a certain date. (In some cases, you'll pay less if you're willing to make a nonrefundable booking.)

Keep an eye out for extra fees, which can be significant depending on the property. For example, one property's listed price was a seemingly affordable \$689 for seven nights in the Outer Banks—but when I clicked “book,” the site added a 12.75 percent tax, \$63.11 tourism fee, \$105 resort fee, \$130 cleaning fee, and \$260 property service charge, taking my total charges to \$1,406—more than double the original quoted price. However, none of these were Booking.com's own fees; unlike Airbnb, [Booking.com](#) does not charge guests a service fee.

One annoyance: The site sometimes clutters up the search results page with sold-out properties, complete with a little “You missed it!” message. These are probably meant to spark a sense of booking urgency, but many travelers will find it irritating to see options that aren't actually available.

Best feature: The sheer breadth of offerings on [Booking.com](#) means you're almost guaranteed to find something suitable, even if it doesn't end up being a vacation rental.

Expedia

Like [Booking.com](#), Expedia offers a variety of accommodation types, but it has a dedicated [vacation rental search page](#) so you can skip the filtering step. The site offers a good selection of results, though for certain searches I got some listings that really didn't seem like vacation rentals (TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Outer Banks Motel).

Expedia isn't the best vacation rental site if you prefer to use the map view to browse; although a map is available, it doesn't have the site's filter options, so you'll have to set your preferences on the main listing page first and then toggle over to the map.

Once you click into a listing, you'll find photos, amenities, policies, reviews, and a list of nearby attractions. However, there does not appear to be a way to contact the owner of a given property. The total price is not visible until you click "reserve," at which point you'll see an additional amount listed vaguely as "taxes and fees," with no detailed breakdown. On many properties, the site notes that you can save 10 percent if you log in as an Expedia member.

Best feature: The site has useful filters such as "Business friendly," to help you find properties with Wi-Fi and breakfast, and "Family friendly," for listings that have "in-room conveniences and activities for the kids."

HometoGo

The prime advantage of [HometoGo](#) is that it's a meta-search site, which means that you can search many of the best vacation rental sites (including most of the others on this list) with one click. Persistent pop-ups and offers to sign you in with Google or Facebook are annoying, but once you've cleared them away you can view tons of properties, visible in a clean listing format or on a map. Each listing features photos you can scroll through as well as user rating, type of lodging, and where you can book the property (such as [Airbnb](#), [Hotels.com](#), or [Vrbo](#)).

One handy feature: You can toggle the price filter to show you either the nightly rate or the total cost of your stay, and then adjust your price range accordingly. Other filters include accommodation types (including an "instant booking" option), location, user rating, and amenities.

In most cases, when you click on "view deal," you'll be taken to the site where the property was originally listed. However, there are occasional properties where you will go to a HometoGo listing page and fill out a booking request that will then be fulfilled through one of the site's partners.

I occasionally found that when I clicked over to a deal (particularly on Airbnb), I was not taken directly to the property I was interested in but rather to a list of other rentals in my destination. Unfortunately, travelers will be familiar with this from other meta-search sites; sometimes a given deal simply isn't available anymore. I also sometimes discovered that the price on HometoGo didn't match what was advertised on the original listing site.

Best feature: Despite the occasional pricing glitches, this site is the closest thing the vacation rental industry has to a one-stop shop, as it lists inventory from hundreds of other short-term rental websites.

Hotels.com

Like [Booking.com](#), [Hotels.com](#) lists a wide array of accommodation options, so travelers who know they want a vacation rental have to use the “Accommodation Type” filter on the search results page to weed out hotels, hostels, and other options. I appreciated the honesty of the note at the top of the page: “How much we get paid influences your sort order.” That said, you can sort your results by star rating, distance from a given landmark, guest rating, and price, and refine the list with a variety of other filters.

There is a map view available, though I didn’t find it very useful; it shows properties that *don’t* meet your criteria by default, and by the time you screen those out, you’re often left with just a few options (even if the site is showing hundreds of listings on the main results page).

The list view of results is better, displaying both the nightly rate and the total price for your stay, as well as guest rating and location information. You do need to weed through occasional “fully booked!” listings, and [Hotels.com](#) doesn’t offer the ability to scroll through a property’s photos right from the results page the way many other vacation rental sites do.

Once you click into an individual listing, you can see amenities, policies, photos, guest reviews, and a list of attractions within walking distance. One drawback: There’s no way to contact the owner or property manager directly. While there is a phone number given for “more info” about the listing, this does not put you in contact with the owner but rather takes you to a general [Hotels.com](#) corporate phone number. Taxes and fees aren’t visible until you click the “Let’s book” button, and there’s no detailed breakdown of where your money is going.

Best feature: Many vacation rental bookings are eligible for [Hotels.com Rewards](#), so you can count your stay toward a future free night at either a hotel or a rental.

Tripadvisor

Although it’s best known for hotel reviews, [Tripadvisor](#) also provides vacation rentals thanks to its acquisitions of [FlipKey](#) and [HolidayLettings](#). (The sites share inventory, so searching Tripadvisor will turn up properties from the other two sites.) There are plenty of listings, which you can filter by price, number of bedrooms/bathrooms, distance from a landmark, and many other factors. The site also lets you change the order of your results based on nine different criteria, including online booking, traveler rating, and number of bedrooms.

The site has a mix of properties, some of which can be paid for online and others that require direct arrangements with the owner. (The former is generally preferable, as paying with a credit card is the safest way to go—and you’ll be backed by Tripadvisor’s [Payment Protection guarantee](#).)

I found that photo quality could vary widely from one listing to another on Tripadvisor, whereas some other vacation rental sites have more consistently glossy images. Otherwise, Tripadvisor’s listings are generally informative, with traveler reviews, house rules, and an owner profile. Prices and fees are

spelled out in detail. However, cancellation policies are not as clearly stated on this site as on some others. There is an option to send a message to the owner through the site.

Best feature: The price on the listing results page is the final price you'll pay, including taxes and fees—rather than the base rate, which is what most vacation rental sites list. Tripadvisor also lists both the nightly rate and the total cost.

Tripping

Acquired by HometoGo in 2019, [Tripping](#) is another meta-search site for vacation rentals that turns up listings from hundreds of different sites, including many on this list. When I searched HometoGo and Tripping side by side, I found a lot of overlapping properties, but the results did not appear to be completely identical. (A Rome search turned up 8,800+ properties on HometoGo vs. more than 14,000 properties on Tripping, for example.) So even though the two sites are owned by the same company and offer virtually identical layouts and filters, it may be worth your time to check both.

Tripping offers a prominent map view alongside the listings on its main results page. Like HometoGo, Tripping shows hotels and hostels in addition to apartments, homes, and other types of properties, so you can use the “Accommodation types” filter to trim your results. You can toggle between “per night” and “per stay” options for pricing, specify a minimum number of bedrooms, and filter for amenities such as internet, air-conditioning, and washer. And you can scroll through listing photos right from the results page.

Clicking on “view deal” takes you to an external site for information and booking. As with HometoGo, there were occasional snafus in this process; prices didn't match, properties weren't available, or (in one case) I got a dead-end error page. But in most cases the listings were as advertised.

Best feature: Both Tripping and HometoGo have a new “flexible dates” feature that lets you search a given length of stay (such as a week or a long weekend) over a selected time period (such as October through December) to see when the best deals are available.

Vrbo

Acquired by Expedia Group in 2015 and then [merged with its sister site HomeAway](#) in 2019, [Vrbo](#) (originally called VRBO, which stands for “vacation rentals by owner”) offers the strongest features of both sites. You can browse by property type, from condos to cabins, through their catalogue of over 2 million vacation rentals. If you have an idea of the type of trip you'd like to take but aren't attached to a destination, you can check out their curated lists of properties by vacation type and nearby activities. The search results are displayed alongside a convenient interactive map to show how far your rental is from your target destination. While this is a great visual, if you move the map even slightly the site will recalibrate your search to show you new properties, which can be a bit of a nuisance.

The search results display the top amenities at a glance for each property along with both the nightly price and total price of the stay for the selected dates. Click into a result to see an in-depth and easily navigable description of policies and amenities, along with star ratings and traveler reviews.

Best feature: Vrbo highlights Premier Partners that offer great guest service.

Plum Guide

Aimed at taking the hit-or-miss guesswork out of vacation home rentals, [Plum Guide](#) has dedicated itself to what it refers to as “the science behind the perfect stay.” This site is extremely selective in its properties, with only 3 percent of homes at any given destination passing its 150 criteria Plum Test conducted by their seasoned Home Critics.

With a real person team of Plum Experts available seven days a week to assist with any questions and an easy to navigate, highly visual website, the Plum Guide’s people-centric approach to booking will make your vacation rental experience easy and pleasant.

Best Feature: [Plum Guide’s](#) best feature by far is their selective criteria. You can be sure you’re getting what you see online. While this can be a blessing if you want the peace of mind that comes with knowing your accommodation has been given a professional seal of approval, it may restrict your options if your travel dates don’t allow for flexibility.

Sonder

Focused on eliminating unnecessary steps in the rental process, [Sonder](#) is a streamlined way to book your next vacation rental. Guests can check in, make requests, and ask for recommendations all through their phones. The site’s layout is remarkably easy to navigate, with clearly marked amenities for each property and information on parking, accessibility, and house rules readily available.

Beyond its booking process, Sonder places an emphasis on social responsibility. This past year, they partnered with [Off-Their-Plate](#), an organization working with chefs and restaurants to get meals to frontline healthcare workers, to donate a minimum of 1,000 meals. Travelers can book with code SonderOTP for a \$50 credit toward their stay and to donate 5 additional meals.

Best Feature: Sonder offers a [flexible cancellation policy](#) on their site and app. Select “Flex Rate” when booking for the option to cancel your stay up to three days before check-in for a full refund.

TurnKey

As a five time winner of the Gold Magellan Award, [TurnKey](#) is no stranger to the world of vacation rentals. Browse the site by popular destinations or scroll through their convenient listing of properties

by state. You can centralize your stay through their Guest Portal, which guests can access while booking and during their stay.

Properties are protected by digital locks, with each customer receiving a custom key code at the time of booking, eliminating the need for tedious key exchanges, and reducing in-person contact.

If you do find yourself needing some one-on-one assistance, TurnKey offers 24/7 live guest support. Each rental features complimentary wi-fi and fully equipped kitchens, making these properties a great option for families or travelers who plan to save a little money on eating out. While accommodations are currently limited to the United States, their wide variety of options ensures you'll find something to meet your needs.

Best Feature: With [TurnKey](#), you always deal with a local TurnKey team rather than individual homeowners, guaranteeing a more consistent quality of service across stays.

Marriott Homes & Villas

If you want the quality assurance of a big hotel brand without the big hotel feel, then [Marriott Homes & Villas](#) may be the right site for you. All accommodations come with 24/7 guest support, kitchen essentials, in-unit washer, bathroom amenities such as shampoo and soap, wi-fi, linens and towels, and a television.

The site has the same easy user interface you expect from Marriott. The search function allows you to filter by destination, with travel dates being optional criteria to narrow the search. This is great for those early in their trip planning process or travelers who like to let deals dictate their itinerary. No destination in mind? You can click the "near me" option to see what weekend getaways are available right down the road. Properties on this site typically have upward of 30 photos in their galleries so you'll be able to see exactly what you're booking.

Best Feature: [Marriott Homes & Villas](#) ties into the larger Marriott Bonvoy rewards program. You can earn points when you book or redeem existing points on a vacation rental. Just check the box beneath the search bar to use your Bonvoy Points and start booking.

Agoda

[Agoda](#) allows you to book both hotels and vacation rentals through its online services. With over 2 million hotels and rentals available, at first glance booking through Agoda can seem overwhelming (my cursory search for an August week in Kuala Lumpur returned just shy of 3,700 results).

Luckily, Agoda allows you to refine its catalogue with highly specific search criteria. Travelers can filter by the typical destination, trip dates, and number of guests, but they can further narrow their search through options such as

- Trip budget
- Number of stars

- Payment options
- Guest rating (overall and by category)
- Specific amenities
- Property type
- Proximity to local attractions
- Association with popular hotel brands
- Beach access.

This is great for whittling down your options as well as sparking some inspiration for how to fill your days at your destination.

Best Feature: [Agoda](#) will match any competing online price for their properties and refund the difference. Once you know where you want to stay, do your comparison research to make sure you're getting the best deal.

Getaway

If a break from your hectic day-to-day is calling your name, there's no better option than [Getaway](#). Getaway makes it their mission to give people the "time, space, and permission to be off." Their fourteen Outpost locations—focused along the East Coast with a few options along the Gulf of Mexico and two on the West Coast—are made up of minimalist cabins that range from about 140 to 200 square feet and can accommodate two to four guests. The mini-kitchens at these properties provide only the bare necessities, but you can supplement your supply by opting for a \$30 Sustenance Box, which includes some nonperishable meal and snack options. Other camping essentials, such as [insect wipes](#) and [log bundles](#), are also available for purchase.

Each cabin has a firepit, grill grate, and picnic table. The neighbors are close enough to be seen but far enough away that everyone has their own outdoor space to enjoy. Check in starts at 3 pm with a personalized entry code sent to your phone, so it's possible you may not see another soul your entire trip. The trade-off for some time in the great outdoors is that cell phone service may be spotty or unavailable. However, there is a landline for emergencies and to contact the Getaway team. There's also no Wi-Fi (and "never will be" according to their FAQ) so make sure to download those Spotify playlists pre-trip.

Best Feature: If you're looking for the feeling of an off-the-grid escape but aren't truly ready to pitch a tent in the middle of the wilderness, this is the right rental experience for you.