Why Stars Are Renting Out Their Homes for Dirt Cheap

Martha Stewart's 150-plus-acre property in Bedford, N.Y., includes a farm with horse stables and a chicken coop, a fruit orchard, a peacock pen and seven stately houses.

One of the abodes opened for a night's stay this month.

The domestic goddess is among the A-listers, including Gwyneth Paltrow and Mariah Carey, putting their estates or penthouses up for short-term stays on rental sites such as Airbnb and Booking.com for nominal fees or no cost at all.

"It is a very pleasant weekend in the country," Stewart said in an interview. Why would a celebrity invite strangers to traipse through their home? Rental companies can use the attention to reach new audiences and distract from public criticism over hassles such as rising fees. Luminaries can promote their own brands, and guests get to briefly live like a star, in a highly orchestrated way.

Stewart said she had never used Booking.com or Airbnb for her own travel and was intrigued by what the experience would be like as the homeowner. She recently announced that one of her farmhouse residence, her "tenant house" in Bedford, would be bookable for two guests for one night starting Nov. 18. The Thanksgiving themed overnight (Thanksgiving is among her favorite holidays) included a guided tour of the farm, a wreath-making class, and a brunch with Stewart herself.

In keeping with the holiday vibe, the getaway was priced at $11.23, as in Nov. 23, this year’s Thanksgiving date.

The two-bedroom cottage where her guests stayed is always prepared for visitors, she said. (Of course, it is.) That meant she didn’t have to worry about removing personal items, and she was unfazed about opening her home to people she didn’t know.

But don’t expect to post all over Facebook about your stay at Martha’s. Booking.com said celebrities can ask their guests to sign nondisclosure agreements, something Stweart required for hers. What exactly it is like to spend a night in any of these BIP homes will likely remain rarefied knowledge.

Celebrities are compensated for the home stays; Leslie Cafferty, Booking.com’s chief communications officer, declined to say how much.

People have long had a voyeuristic fascination with the lifestyles of the rich and famous. In Los Angeles, companies compete to offer celebrity-home tours, where passengers crane to see mansions behind gates and humongous hedges while sitting in faraway buses. Dwellings with even a patina of historic relevance draw fans. “George Washington slept here!” says a title for a Virginia farmhouse on Airbnb. (Wrote one reviewer: “This is a beautiful old home with wonderfully scenic views. There are horses, donkeys, and the oddest assortment of charismatic dogs.”)

Some can even be enthralled to sleep in a dorm room if it once housed American royalty-turned U.S. president. At Harvard University, guests including actor Alec Baldwin have stayed overnight at John F. Kenney’s senior year dorm suite, though it hasn’t been available for personal use for several years.

Companies such as Airbnb have faced scrutiny over soaring cleaning fees and host demands. In September, New York City began cracking down on short-term rentals by requiring hots to register with the city and meet multiple requirements. During a recent travel-industry event, Airbnb’s CEO Brian Chesky acknowledged seeing thousands of complaints on social media about rising rental costs. The publicity-drawing celebrity home stays are one of the ways short-term rental companies are marketing to new hosts and guests.

Earlier this year, Paltrow invited guests to spend the night at her Montecito, Calif., home free of charge through Airbnb. The sunny, white-marbled rental featured a bathroom filled with products from Goop, Paltrow’s lifestyle company, and activities such as transcendental meditation, beach house.

Those who walk through the doors of aa celebrity-anointed home might wonder: Should they expect to see family photos, or Paltrow’s personal trinkets hanging on the walls? And do they really get the run of the whole house?

“This is up to the stars, Cafferty said. The entirety of Stewart’s guesthouse is available for the duration of the guests’ stay.

Carey, the queen of Christmas, opened both her New York penthouse and her rental home in early Hills, Calif., to fans via Booking.com yet Carey’s penthouse was available for aa cocktail hour; her guests stayed overnight at The Plaza Hotel.

Producer DJ Khaled opened only one room of his Miami house for Airbnb his sneaker closet doesn’t look like your sneaker closet. To be fair, his sneaker closet doesn’t look like your sneaker closet. His is the size of a small dorm room, large enough for a bed for two, a shoeshine station and floor-to-ceiling sneakers (which guests weren’t allowed to touch). This was bookable last year for $11.

One of the guests who spent the night with DJ Khled’s shoes wrote that the stay came with a free sneaker shopping trip and chauffeurs, deeming it “an experience from start to finish.” No word on how the sneaker closet smelled, though the reviewer called it “immaculate.”

Sarah Jessica Parker invited two guests to her Hamptons home via Booking.com. It came with access to a crystal blue private beach, a free pair of heels from Parker’s shoe line and reservations at some of her favorite local restaurants (though no appearance from Parker herself).

He rental went up for $19.98 priced for the year “Sex and the City” premiered.