

Airbnb goes back to basics with renewed focus on private room rentals

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Airbnb is going back to its roots, the company has announced, with a renewed focus on renting out single rooms to travellers concerned about cost-of-living increases. Labelled Airbnb Rooms, the short-term rental app will launch a range of features designed to encourage travellers to consider renting a single room in a house to save money and have new experiences on the move. Travellers will be able to search specifically for private rooms and see how much they would save over renting a whole flat or house, and a new set of filters lets them see only rooms with a private en suite bathroom. The company will also flag which private rooms do not have an internal or external lock, allowing guests to ensure that they have a minimum level of privacy before booking. “One of the things we know that’s on people’s mind is inflation and the possibility of a recession,” Nate Blecharczyk, the co-founder of the company, said. “And so money really matters. We think that Private Rooms is a very compelling value proposition and the time is right for this category to be rediscovered and relaunched.” The average price for an Airbnb room in the UK is £59 a night, Blecharczyk says, and globally, more than 80% of stays in private rooms were less than \$100 (£80) a night. “Airbnb has something for everyone: every price point, every location, every configuration,” he added. “Now you can toggle between searching for rooms of homes, you can see how it changes the value proposition dramatically. It’s very clear.” The change in focus marks a return to basics for the company, which started in 2007 when roommates Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia began renting out space on air mattresses in their San Francisco living room. Blecharczyk joined in 2008 as the one-room B&B became a full venture, offering to pair people who needed a hotel room with those who had a spare room and needed extra cash. By 2009, it had expanded from airbeds and shared spaces to full properties, which gradually came to dominate listings on the platform. Alongside the launch of private rooms, Airbnb is also releasing a set of features to address the viral criticism of the experience of checking out of a rental on the service. In late 2022, social media users shared experiences and jokes about being asked to perform increasingly ridiculous tasks by their hosts, from hoovering the carpets to walking the dog, as part of their checkout routine. While many of the jokes were fanciful, Chesky accepted the basis of the critiques in November, writing: “You shouldn’t have to do unreasonable checkout tasks, such as stripping the beds, doing the laundry, or vacuuming. “But we think it’s reasonable to turn off the lights, throw food in the trash, and lock the doors – just as you would when leaving your own home.” Now, Airbnb will be funnelling hosts’ requests through a more standard series of checkboxes, making it easy for them to request common checkout actions such as putting the bins outside or returning the keys, and discouraging them from adding on more esoteric requests. Those rules, a spokesperson said, would be “clearly displayed on the listing page before a guest books a listing. Guests are also reminded of the listing checkout instructions the day before departure, and listings with repeated low ratings from

unreasonable chores will be removed from Airbnb.” The shift back to promoting private rooms could also help Airbnb respond to criticism of its wider impact on cities and tourist areas around the world. As its whole-home rentals have grown, the company has found itself at the centre of rows over gentrification, over-tourism and housing scarcity, with residents of popular holiday destinations accusing landlords of taking homes off the rental market in order to profit from tourists instead. Unveiling plans to change the law on holiday rentals, requiring owners across England to get planning permission to change their homes into short-term lets, the housing secretary, Michael Gove, said: “I’m determined we ensure more people have access to homes at affordable prices and that we prioritise families desperate to rent or buy a home of their own close to where they work.” In a response to a Welsh government consultation last month, Airbnb cited research that suggested that tourists who used the site contributed £107m to the Welsh economy in 2019, the equivalent of 0.2% of Wales’s gross domestic product. The company supported plans for a registration scheme for short-stay landlords, arguing that the requirement would help solve “the lack of accurate data” on the effects of the platform within specific communities in Wales.