

MoneySavingTips



Home from home... this apartment is in New York's up-and-coming Morningside Heights

Seeking solace amid the financial gloom? If you're looking to save money on holiday, you could find the global economic crisis working in your favour

It's a great time to...

1 Book an apartment

You might have to make your own bed, but at least you can lie in as long as you like. Increasingly, savvy travellers looking to offset the falling value of sterling are increasingly considering a holiday apartment rather than a hotel.

The economic slowdown has also seen a torrent of properties originally bought as investments or second homes flood on to the holiday lettings market. And many of the established websites specialising in holiday apartments have upgraded their offerings in recent months, presenting potential renters with the range of accommodation and level of functionality they've come to expect when searching for hotels. In short, there's never been a better time to rent a holiday apartment.

Kate Stinchcombe of holidaylettings.co.uk says it has witnessed almost 50% growth in the amount of properties listed on its website in the past year,

with the UK in particular seeing an astonishing 73% increase, resulting in a classic buyer's market.

"Many are finding that they need to lower their prices to attract potential renters," adds Carol Mendelsohn, editor of slowtrav.com, which advocates living like a local on holiday. Finding a suitable apartment is easy, she says, as several websites are searchable by region and price and, increasingly, the big sites contain reviews written by recent visitors.

Marie and Jamie Dean from Hackney in east London rented an apartment during a trip to Tokyo over Christmas. Through the Japan Stay Club (japanstayclub.com) they found a third-storey apartment in a residential block in Ebisu for £600pw (including a "hidden" cleaning service charge), a quiet neighbourhood just two subway stops away from glamorous Shibuya Crossing. Staying in an apartment saved them money not only on accommodation, but also on overall living costs.

"We ate out quite a lot," says Marie, "but enjoyed being able to cook our own meals, too, making the most of trips to local markets and food halls." Staying in an apartment also allowed their trip to alternate between "one day exploring and the next day chilling", a godsend after a 14-hour flight, and gave them more space to relax and get a feel for neighbourhood.

They say you do have to think carefully about the area you choose - hotels tend to be near transport connections, nightlife etc, though not all flats will be - but they would definitely do it again.

Another tip worth bearing in mind is to use a site with a rental guarantee that will reimburse you should anything go wrong with the booking.

The downside of renting an apartment, particularly for those looking for city breaks, is that some owners still insist on a minimum of one-week rentals. But, just as hotels are prepared to haggle (see right), apartment owners are increasingly willing to negotiate.

And here's our pick of the best

New York from £67pn (sleeps two)
This brownstone studio apartment in up-and-coming Morningside Heights is a snip. With a sofa-bed in the living room, technically it could sleep four.
holiday-rentals.co.uk/p210889.

Paris from £553pw (sleeps four)
Recently refurbished apartment in fashionable Le Marais, it features attractive wooden furniture and an interior showing a clear affection for 60s modernism. The Place des Vosges is practically on your doorstep and the Picasso Museum a short saunter away.
ownersdirect.co.uk/france/FR4045.htm.

London £133pn (sleeps three)
You don't get many apartments in the City of London. Even fewer that you can rent for a city break. This smart Bishopsgate bolthole comes with a credit crunch price reduction.
holiday-velvet.com/london/london_apartments/details/central-executive+s/id/8373.

Rome £624pw (sleeps two)
A bright, handsomely furnished one-bedroom close to the Vatican. Features newly refurbished wooden floors and a terrace.
friendlyrentals.com/en/apartments/rome/apartment-2610-220.htm.

Miami £559pw (sleeps two)
Here's a little bargain: located in the funky neighbourhood of Lincoln Road it comes with its own parking space and a late checkout of 6pm.
holidaylettings.co.uk/rentals/miami-beach/35879.

Venice £122pn (sleeps three)
An art-lover's crash pad: this large studio near the Peggy Guggenheim Museum combines exposed rafters with a Mondrian-inspired colour scheme.
holiday-velvet.com/venice/apartments/details/guggenheim/id/164.

Ibiza £893pn (sleeps six)
A superbly arranged, newly built, three-bedroom apartment overlooking the white sands of Playa d'en Bossa. Comes with its own rooftop pool. Near both Ibiza Town and the legendary nightclub Space.
holidaylettings.co.uk/rentals/ibiza-town/56422.

Stockholm £63pn (sleeps two)
The Swedish krona is one of the few currencies to have fared as badly as the pound, making Sweden, of all places, an increasingly affordable European destination. Save more of your money by staying in this quaint little 16th-century flat in heart of Gamla Stan, the old town.
travel-library.com/apartments/europe/sweden/stockholm/old_town_gamia_star_stockholm_lh.html.

Rio from £79pn (sleeps four)
Splendid views of the mountains overlooking Ipanema beach make this loft apartment a fabulous place to bask in the best of Rio. Minimalist interior and English-speaking owners.
travel-library.com/apartments/south_america/brazil/rio_de_janeiro/ipanema_loft.html.

Budapest from £297pw (sleeps four)
This impressive art nouveau suite (pictured below) is situated in the city's most salubrious quarter, close to the opera house and the famous music academy. Rooms at the Corinthia Grand Hotel Royal, directly opposite, average £400pn.
holidaylettings.co.uk/rentals/budapest/67673.



2 Ask for a no-frills alternative

Tour operators are taking a leaf out of the supermarkets' book by introducing value-brand holidays. Adventure operator Explore (0844 499 0901, explore.co.uk), for example, has launched 13 Back to Basics trips, where "luxuries" have been stripped back to make the holidays more affordable. Its Spirit of the Incas tour for £1,595pp follows almost exactly the same itinerary (Cusco, Lake Titicaca and a train ride to Machu Picchu) as its existing Sacred Land of the Incas tour, which starts from £2,195pp. The £600 difference is due to more basic accommodation, use of local transport and because meals and some excursions are not included. In a similar move, Tribes (01728 685 971, tribes.co.uk) is launching a range of value holidays called Down to Earth (down-to-earth-holidays.com, will go live on 16 Feb), such as a week's Golden Triangle tour in India for £580pp (exc flights), using homestays instead of hotels.

3 Haggle for a hotel

Hotel rates are notoriously blurry. The rack rate quoted on a website is not necessarily the lowest rate available, so it is always worth contacting a hotel directly to ask what their best price is, and then asking whether that really is their best offer. In other words, you should haggle. We contacted several hotels in New York and each was prepared to offer deals that were significantly lower than the listed internet price. The W Hotel chain was prepared to shave 25% off one price - £360 down to £270 for two nights - citing a special offer that wasn't listed on the net. Even better, the Dylan Hotel (dylanhotel.com) in midtown Manhattan, offered us two nights for £245, when the listed price was £467. We found it helps if you are flexible with dates or have the nerve to book the hotel close to your departure.

4 Take a package

Only lazy, unadventurous types who can't be fuffed to make their own holidays go for packages, right? Wrong. Conventional wisdom used to dictate that DIY holidays always came in cheaper, but with operators desperate to get bums on seats, there are some startlingly cheap package deals out there - especially if you're looking to book last-minute. The mercurial "I'll go anywhere" function on Lastminute.com's holidays section is currently churning out some crackers; when we looked, there were seven days' B&B in Gambia from £399pp (departing 20 Feb), five-star all-inclusive Nile tours in Egypt from £529pp (23 Feb), and half-board Goa beach breaks (6 March) from £409pp, all including flights. On expedia.co.uk (0871 226 0808), deals include seven nights' B&B in Cape Town for £625pp at the four-star St George's Hotel, including Qatar Airways flights with from Heathrow via Doha, departing 23 Feb.



Unlimited horizons... (clockwise from below) all-inclusive in Halkidiki; cut-price Las Vegas; glamping in Goa

Quarzazate in Morocco (€28pp pn half board), pavilion tents with en-suite bathrooms and four-poster beds by the beach in Goa (€252 per tent per week, sleeps up to 6), and eco tents in the Australian outback (from A\$87/£41 pp pn).

8 Go all-inclusive

It's 11am, it must be water polo... Believe it or not, it is possible to stay in an all-inclusive that doesn't involve being frog-marched to the pool for fun games, all-you-can-eat buffets and the feeling that you're actually imprisoned on holiday. Upmarket operator Carrier (0161-491 7650, carrier.co.uk) has seven nights at the Sani Beach Club in Halkidiki, for £875pp including all meals at any of the Sani Resort's restaurants, unlimited premium-brand drinks, British Airways flights from Gatwick and transfers. Captivating Cuba (08444 129917, captivatingcuba.com) is offering seven nights at the five-star adult-only Hotel Melia Las Americas in Varadero for £875pp (saving £175pp) with Virgin flights from Gatwick, transfers and Visa (valid for departures 3 May-28 June).

9 Live it up in Vegas

There aren't many things falling as fast as sterling, but according to hotels.com, accommodation prices in Sin City has dropped by 20% in a year as Americans tighten their belts. The three-star Stratosphere Tower on The Strip has dropped to an average of £30 a night (hotels.com), Virgin (virginholidays.co.uk) has four nights inc flights for £515pp at the 3.5 star Excalibur Hotel and Casino before 28 Feb (online only), while Best at Las Vegas (bestatlasvegas.holidays.co.uk) has five nights for the price of four until autumn. Three-star Circus Circus is currently £425 inc flights before 31 March, so you will arrive with a healthy wallet, even if you don't leave with one.

10 Become a courier

Courier flights - where you get a reduced price ticket in return for assisting in the delivery of a package to a destination - are not as common as they once were, but nor have they disappeared altogether. British Airways currently offers courier tickets on flights to Tokyo and Bangkok (the latter is only available until this spring). Travel writer Gemma Exley has booked a trip to Japan for April - peak season - for £320, when the normal online fare for the same flight was £910. "As there's only one courier flight to each destination per day (only Tues to Sun for Bangkok), my friend is flying out on another ticket 24 hours later," she says. "But since no responsibilities are required on the return leg, we can travel back together." As for those responsibilities, you don't come into contact with the package, but on arrival, you are required to collect a loading note which you must then hand to customs officials. Availability was plentiful at the time of writing - even for flights this month.

For more information call British Airways World Cargo on 0870 320 0301.



5 Join the club

A number of websites collate the cream of the crop, and then fix deals with the hotels to ensure the best prices. I-escape.com, for example, is a collection of guest houses and boutique hotels around the world with honest reviews that lay out pros and cons. It's worth keeping an eye on its special-offer section. At the moment the Hotel Salvia in Soller, Mallorca, is on sale for €125 per night, a 50% reduction (valid 1 March - 15 May). designhotels.com has 176 properties on its books and promises to match the price of a hotel if you find it cheaper elsewhere within 24 hours. You don't have to join, but membership is free and entitles you to discounts. The hotels on mrandmrs.smith.com tend to be pricey, but basic membership, at £15 a year, means you

hear about timely offers. Currently it has a two-nights' B&B-for-the-price-of-one offer at Seaham Hall, County Durham, for £360pp. Travel Offers (travel-offers.co.uk) charges £44.95 to sign up, but members pay only for dinner and breakfast (ie the room is thrown in free) at more than 350 good UK hotels. Other sites worth bookmarking are: travelfriendsllc.com, a site founded by travel writers, among them AA Gill, and the American-based tablethotels.com.


6 Swap your home

Since the economy started to pinch, home-exchange sites have been doing a roaring trade. This is where holidaymakers swap homes (and often cars, sometimes even friends) with people in their destination-of-choice

for a fixed period. Obviously, this saves heaps on accommodation. For example, if you live in Liverpool and want to go to New York for a week in April, you look for New Yorkers who want to visit Liverpool around that time, and get chatting. With the recent new in membership, there are lots of new locations popping up day by day. homelink.org.uk.

7 Camp in the sun

Camping is a great budget option as long as the sun shines. For guaranteed dry weather, you have to go further afield. A new website, goglamming.net, is a great place to start. It features luxury sites cherry-picked from across the globe, including a desert campsite run by a nomadic family near



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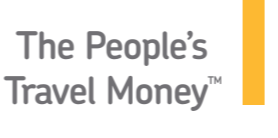
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