

Wealthy Britons are letting out their homes to holidaymakers – but you won't find them on Airbnb

As travellers turn back to trusted brands, meet the 'Sawdays set' – well-to-do owner-occupiers renting their homes on upscale sites



Pearl's Place, a seven-bedroom Georgian house in Somerset, is available through Unique Homestays

Interior designer and former pop star Pearl Lowe rents her Somerset mansion to holidaymakers to cover the “extortionate” energy bills that come with owning a sprawling historic home. For Wiltshire-based therapist Juno Shears, the income from staycationers occupying her five-bedroom former hunting lodge will, she hopes, offset the costs of a family holiday in the Azores; whereas architect Adam Richards’ “sci-fi and Roman-inspired” own-build on the South Downs has, quite simply, “to pay its own rather large mortgage”.

Middle-class Britons have always worked their bricks-and-mortar assets to enhance their lifestyles: think of Edwardian landladies letting their attics to respectable lodgers; or early retirees, stretching their holiday spending power by home-swapping with their overseas counterparts through house exchange companies such as 1961-launched HomeLink.

What's new is that very well-heeled Britons are getting in the action too: letting out their principal dwellings via vetted villa and holiday brands such as [Sawday's](#); luxury cottage stable [Unique Homestays](#); and quirky bolthole specialist [Coolstays](#). Partly, posh folks' new readiness to open up their homes to paying guests is down to the soaring cost of living, with larger piles (with five bedrooms or more) having seen their annual energy bills rise in excess of £3,000 a year since 2020, and mortgages by tens of thousands of pounds.



Pearl Lowe's property features quirky objects and maximalist chandeliers

It was the cost of living – and a sense of rattling about in a large house now two of her four children have flown the nest – that led Pearl Lowe (a former Britpop wild child, who was a vocalist with indie bands Powder and Lodger in the 1990s), to holiday let her seven-bedroom mansion in Frome, Somerset. “I feel quite guilty we're in this big, draughty house that we're not really using,” she explains.

Lowe rents [Pearl's Place](#), her primary residence in Frome – where she lives with her husband, the Supergrass drummer Danny Goffey, and their two youngest children, Frankie and Betty – as well as a holiday home at the coast in Winchelsea, with [Unique Homestays](#). The Somerset property, which sleeps up to 14 adults and four children, dates from the early 1800s and has an interior kitted out with quirky objets d'art, canopied beds and maximalist twinkling chandeliers, as well as a gypsy caravan and wood-fired hot tub on its grounds. It's yours for the week for £10,595.

“A photographer once referred to my style as ‘rock ‘n’ roll romantic,’” says Pearl, whose oldest daughter is the model Daisy Lowe, 35. “I think that's about right: guests definitely have plenty of fun objects to chat about!”



The master bedroom's en-suite bathroom is indicative of the property's unconventional design

Architect [Adam Richards](#), 56, describes [Cadence](#) – his four-bed modernist family home in Petworth on the Sussex Downs, listed with Unique Homestays from £5,250 per week – as “a labour of love”. Having designed hundreds of homes for others, he explains this house was his pièce de résistance: “something for us as a family to enjoy”. Richards lives at the property with wife Jessica and his three children. The family moved into the house in 2019 following a two-year build. Set against a wooded copse, Cadence has a large central kitchen, secret staircases and a designated kids' living area, and is a short stroll from Petworth House. Its style, says Richards, references classical Georgian and Roman architecture but is also modern, with nods to the sharp-edged futurism of sci-fi films. Richards' chief reason in letting his family home to holidaymakers is to cover the cost of his “eye-watering” mortgage and the day-to-day costs of family life.



Cadence's design may be modern, but its setting in the Sussex Downs is gloriously traditional

That said, Richards also likes the fact that paying guests get to enjoy his design. “In designing the house I really thought about the way it interacts with the landscape and changing light levels during the day,” he says. “It's nice when guests appreciate that.”

The new Sawday's Set is tapping a mood amongst consumers for authentic and ethical stays. The trend is a repudiation of the generic holiday cottages of the 2010s, with their white walls, paucity of decoration and kitchens featuring two spoons and a colander (a look that's been dubbed the “Airbnb aesthetic”). It's also about an impetus to spend holiday funds ethically, in a way that doesn't exacerbate rural or coastal housing shortages and that's better for the environment. On these fronts, what beats making the most of another family's glamorous home as your summer bolthole?



Cadence, designed by Adam Richards, offers a more contemporary place to stay

That is, if you plan to be well-behaved. All three families lock their possessions away in lofts or out-of-bounds kids' rooms when the holidaymakers descend, although there's always going to be an element of trust in letting strangers sleep in your bed. [Studies of Italian home swappers](#), for example, have found that people willing to open their homes to strangers score more highly on the psychological traits of openness and adventurousness.

The key benefit of vetted villa brands, although they take a higher cut of bookers' fees (typically 14 to 20 per cent plus annual listings fees of around £300, compared to Airbnb's average three per cent), is the prospect of avoiding the party brigade.

Pearl Lowe tells me she was recently contacted by a group looking for a celebratory stay for a 21-year-old's birthday. “I tend to be queasy about having stag and hen dos or 21st birthdays here,” she explains. She was surprised, however, to discover that the group of young women enquiring were booking a tame all-woman yoga retreat. “For a 21st birthday!” Lowe hoots. “I think we need to teach these kids a thing or two!”