

Airbnb growth comes with growing safety concerns

The year 2007 was only the start for roommates Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky when they could not afford their San Francisco rent. Then, the idea of putting an air mattress on their floor for extra cash led them to start “Air Bed and Breakfast,” now known as “Airbnb.”

Airbnb, the popular house rental program has grown to an estimated net worth of \$38 billion, according to multiple sources, including Forbes and other sources close to the company in March 2019. Now, travelers have the ability to rent full houses with amenities you would not have elsewhere. Paula Hancock, Champaign resident who rents her home out on Airbnb has recently updated her home, which visitors appreciate. “I have a full kitchen and a coffee maker, espresso machine. People just want to come and have a really good time,” Hancock said.

More recently, in 2016, Airbnb added “experiences” to their website, a feature that allows people to book activities led by locals. You do not need to stay in an Airbnb property to participate, and the tour guide does not need to have a property listed to rent. The [website](#) explains that these activities “go beyond typical tours or classes by immersing guests in a host’s unique world.” For example, you can attend a homemade pasta class in Italy, or take surfing classes in Malibu. There are over one thousand cities offering unique experiences.

All of this growth comes with growing safety concerns as well. This past October, Airbnb made headlines with a [nationwide scam](#), first uncovered on Chicago’s North Side by Allie Conti of Vice Magazine. After her host canceled on their party last minute, she was sent to another property, which did not even exist, until finding a rundown guest house in an alley. Then, she discovered more people were having similar problems, and she began to “accidentally uncover a nationwide scam.”

Because of unfortunate events such as these, some people avoid Airbnbs and stay in hotels because of the added security provided. Caitlin Aylmer, the main desk attendant at the Illini Union Hotel, finds pros and cons between Airbnb properties and hotel rooms. “If you are going to a city where you’re not as familiar with, you might not know the neighborhood that your Airbnb is in. I like knowing that I have the security of a hotel,” she said.

Margie Fazio, who has global travel experience, agrees. “We haven’t considered Airbnbs only because we sometimes have heard there have been issues and we didn’t want to be stuck somewhere without a hotel room,” Fazio said.

However, Ella Schindler, recent U of I grad, has stayed in five Airbnbs and has always felt safe. “They’ve all been really great. I was so surprised by the amount of hospitality I was given. They had coffee available, they were there for any questions, they were available to talk to you,” Schindler said.

Airbnb’s community standards strive to uphold the safety and security of hosts and guests. Their [website](#) lays out five central pillars: safety, security, fairness, authenticity, and reliability, which “helps ensure safety and foster belonging.” It is also suggested to use their secure payment platform and communicate with hosts with the secure messaging system on the website, so everything can be monitored with their “multi-layer defense strategy.”

Source List

Interviewees:

- Paula Hancock, paula@mckinley-foundation.org, 217-344-0297 ext. 103
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- Margie Fazio, margiefazio@hotmail.com, 630-908-0445
- Ella Schindler, elizabethschindler22@gmail.com, 224-425-9485

Data Source:

Forbes Estimates

- <https://www.businessinsider.com/brian-chesky-airbnb-life-career-net-worth-relationship-philanthropy#airbnb-is-estimated-to-be-worth-about-38-billion-according-to-what-a-source-close-to-the-company-told-vox-in-march-2019-and-what-forbes-estimated-in-march-2018-2>
- <http://dashboards.trefis.com/no-login-required/qC4zolzn?fromforbesandarticle=as-a-rare-profitable-unicorn-airbnb-looks-to-be-worth-at-least-38-billion>