

713 Nights in Airbnb Beds

713 NIGHTS IN AIRBNB BEDS:
TIPS, TRICKS, AND FUNNY
STORIES

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*This book is dedicated to the force that pushes
us to evolve every day.*

Introduction



I am Maria, and together with my daughter, we lived for 23 months in apartments rented on Airbnb. During this time, I learned to see the truth behind the shiny Airbnb photos, made all the mistakes you can make, and now I'm telling you so you can avoid them. This guide is for you to laugh when things don't go according to plan and to know how to make sure that the plan doesn't betray you first.

Our story began on February 24, 2022, in Kyiv, Ukraine, when dozens of ballistic missiles flew over our house and fighter jets were visible from the window. We fled to Europe in search of safety, hoping it would be a temporary solution for a few days or weeks. However, this journey turned into a desperate odyssey, my daughter and I became travel princesses with thousands of miles behind us. Tirelessly searching for not even a home, but at least a permanent place of residence, we were waiting for the opportunity to return to our native land.

First, let's get to know each other better, because we're going to talk about some pretty personal things

that strangers don't want to know. Since I was a little girl, I was always hungry for knowledge and bright adventures. Most children are like that, but in my case, the restless girl inside me hasn't gone anywhere; the desire to be at the center of adventures, to create them, is still here with me. And it is probably engraved in my heart forever. After high school, I entered the Faculty of Journalism, because being in the middle of events and broadcasting it to others is the fuel of my engine.

So, after getting my degree in journalism, I worked in various areas of media: as a correspondent for the news department, social life, a press secretary for a geodesy company, a lifestyle project manager for a publication, and a journalist for a charity organization that helped children from disadvantaged families. Then I fell in love. Everything happened very quickly, and within six months of our relationship, I was standing in Bali and, without hesitation, agreed to the world's most tender marriage proposal. And two months later, I started carrying my best creation under my heart - my daughter. And since then, I've been on maternity leave. When my daughter Solomiia was a little over a year old, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began. And so, on 24.02.2022, we left Kyiv with a half-empty suitcase, packed in 20 minutes, to visit relatives in western Ukraine, where it seemed

safer. There we spent the first two most terrifying weeks. The constant stress made it impossible to sleep, there was little food in the stores, and Solomiia was very irritable and sick, because small children can feel and take on their mother's condition. So I decided that we needed to go to Europe and be safe. This is how our journey of almost two years began.

During this period, I plunged headlong into the art of renting apartments through Airbnb, and this experience is so valuable that I can't help but share it. After all, I had never booked an apartment through Airbnb before, because it seemed risky. I traveled quite often, visiting over 25 countries. But it was always a booking through Booking or a package tour. And I sincerely regretted it, because renting a place to stay in an apartment is so convenient and profitable. The bonus is that you can feel like a real resident of the city, a friend who has come to visit. Interesting and new sensations. That's why I'm sure my knowledge will help save you a ton of nerve cells and a couple of hundred on your bill. So I created this guide to make booking an apartment through Airbnb easier. Interestingly, according to a study by Transparent (a specialized data analytics company), Airbnb publishes 89% of short-term rentals worldwide on its platform, so I took it as the basis for my research.

Carefully chosen accommodation is the key to a carefree trip. When everything is thought out to the smallest detail, you forget about the inconveniences and fully immerse yourself in your vacation and get a real reboot. At such moments, traveling becomes not just a vacation, but a profound life experience that opens up new horizons and contributes to your personal growth.

In my odyssey, I saw hundreds of tourists every day, insatiable explorers, and my desire was to make their travels better by teaching them how to choose vacation accommodation easily and successfully. So that later, inspired by the new energy of travel, they would return to their everyday lives and create miracles.

Therefore, keep your backpacks or suitcases ready, because after reading this, you will probably have a strong desire to go on a trip.

So, how do you avoid unpleasant surprises when renting a home through Airbnb? Remember: information is power. The more you know before you travel, the less likely you are to encounter unforeseen difficulties and the easier your trip will be. Next, I'll

share a step-by-step plan to help you turn every trip you take into a flawless adventure. So let's dive into the world of traveling together.



A roadmap of our longest journey. Two years, eight cities:

0. Kyiv, Ukraine — my first breath and my last page
1. Budapest, Hungary
2. Pula, Croatia
3. Krakow, Poland
4. Marbella, Spain
5. Istanbul, Turkey
6. Rijeka, Croatia
7. Vienna, Austria

EUROPE



1. LOCATION

It is the official policy of the Airbnb platform not to show you the exact address of the apartment until the final booking. This is to protect the privacy of the hosts and to avoid contact outside the platform. But for a traveler, this is not convenient at all. Why? Because, you see, an apartment in the historic center of Rome may have a completely different price if it turns out that a bar with tourists is loud all night under your windows and a biker club meets on the corner. You won't be able to tell from the beautiful photos and general phrases like "an apartment in a lively neighborhood with a real-life atmosphere." That is why the ability to find the exact location of an apartment before booking is an invaluable skill for those who value their comfort.

It's not a spy trick, it's just being careful. Here's how

you can do it, depending on whether you're booking on the desktop version of Airbnb or the mobile app. I do this step every time before booking and it always proves to be useful.

- **Using the desktop version** of Airbnb is very convenient because it has a street view from Google Maps integrated into it. You can literally walk down the street, see what establishments are located nearby, assess traffic, and the availability of bars, restaurants, and clubs. This is an invaluable feature if you want to understand the real environment of an apartment, not just its interior.
- **Airbnb mobile version:** a simple trick. If you are booking via phone, copy the name of the closest marker to your prospective apartment from the Airbnb map and paste it into Google Maps. By comparing them, you can find the address yourself. Zoom in on the map as much as possible, look at the neighboring buildings, establishments, and signs. Cafes, hotels, shops — all this will tell you exactly where your potential home for a few days is.

Noise has been one of the main reasons for guests' complaints on the Airbnb platform for several years in a row. More than 30% of negative reviews mention

noise, which is more than complaints about cleanliness or broken appliances. Insufficient sleep can ruin even the most perfect vacation. It's rarely written about in glossy travel magazines. Still, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), nighttime noise over 30 dB(A) significantly affects sleep quality, causing chronic fatigue, anxiety, and even increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

A tip from a travel cosmetic bag:

Speaking of sleep quality, I recommend using fabric blackout blinds for windows that are attached to double-sided adhesive tape when traveling. For some reason, I forget about this in most apartments. And if you have a sensitive sleep, it will be a lifesaver. Besides, it takes up little space in your suitcase.

The most annoying thing is that even in the upscale neighborhoods of London, Barcelona, Vienna, or Paris, the nightlife doesn't stop, which means that without checking the area, your quality vacation may be at risk.

When booking an apartment, people usually focus on price, area, rating, and beautiful photos. But even the

best apartment will lose its value if its location gives you sleepless nights. Therefore, the ability to find the address in advance is your personal travel insurance, which any insurance company does not sell.

STOP ONE.

Budapest, Hungary

We arrived in the evening, when the city seemed to be going on a date: the lights and lights were gradually turning on, and there was a slight smell of wine in the air. The long journey from Ukraine was behind us, marked by queues at the border, fear, and despair. "Everything is over," I thought. I wanted to cry from fatigue, but I held on, as I always did. Because I am a mom.

After walking a few blocks to the right of the parking lot, we saw the house where we had booked an apartment through Airbnb. In front of us stood an old house with small cracks in it, with a door drawn in marker, and a neon sign next to it - Bar open 24/7. Above this sign, I saw our balcony with a photo of where I was going to have a cup of coffee in the morning in a quiet, peaceful Europe. There was no

chance for the peaceful night I had dreamed of.

I kept repeating to myself: "The main thing is that we are safe." But it turned out that safety alone was not enough. When I went up to the apartment, I saw that the walls were thin and soundproof. It was clean and cozy inside: milky walls, a large bed that covered half the room, and a small table by the window. Solomiia sat on the bed and looked at the patterns behind the curtains.

"Is this our home now?" my daughter asked quietly.

"It is for a few days, and then there will be another one, and another one. But it's all temporary, until we can go home to daddy, to your room, and friends."

That night, I fell asleep in the morning, hugging and stroking my daughter, humming her favorite lullaby to drown out the sounds of the noisy party. Her soft snoring was my salvation in this madness of sounds.

The next day, I had to look for another place to stay, which meant I lost the money for canceling that reservation. We went to recover in the thermal baths of Budapest, walked along the Danube, and listened to the organ in an old church. It breathed some life back into me. And then we moved into a fantastic

apartment on the outskirts of Budapest, where at night you could only hear birds singing and your thoughts.

That's how we came up with the idea to add a mandatory average noise level rating for Airbnb apartment owners. This is how we learned that the most important thing about an Airbnb apartment is not only beauty and convenience, but also location. And that's how we gathered information for this guide from our own experience.

After this incident, I wrote a proposal to the Airbnb service department to add a mandatory indication of the average noise level in the apartment description. I am still waiting for a response. This could significantly improve the user experience by allowing them to more accurately assess their comfort level before booking. Providing this information would help travelers avoid unpleasant surprises and make their trip more comfortable and predictable when needed.





5 reasons to fall in love with Budapest

1. The Magic of the Danube. The river splits the city into Buda and Pest, and there's nothing like seeing the bridges glow in the evening light. To journey along the Danube is to experience Europe as it once was and as it still is.

2. Széchenyi thermal bath. More than 100 natural hot springs invite you to relax and experience an authentic Hungarian tradition.

3. Architectural Splendor. From Gothic and Baroque to Art Nouveau, every corner reveals a new masterpiece.

4. Ruin Bars. Atmospheric spots in abandoned buildings, filled with eclectic decor, live music, and the city's creative energy.

5. Buda Castle. Stroll the old streets, enjoy panoramic views, and explore the extensive museum collections.



2. AGENCY VS. PRIVATE ENTREPRENEUR

If you are undecided between two apartments, one owned by an agency and the other by a private entrepreneur with multiple apartments, opt for the private option. But trust my experience: private landlords are of a completely different quality. Why is this important?

- The human attitude. Private owners are people who rent one or more apartments personally. They are not hidden behind faceless CRM templates and cold answering machines. They often make more effort to make your stay comfortable because it is their reputation, their home, and their business.
- Live communication. I've been convinced dozens of times that communication with private landlords is much easier, faster, and more

efficient. You write - you get a response right away. You call - they are happy to help you. Sometimes, even with additional tips about the city or personal recommendations.

- Space for friendship. Thanks to my nomadic lifestyle, I have rented apartments from a dozen incredible people. We still keep in touch with some of them: we correspond and exchange news. This is a completely different level of interaction than a faceless "thank you for booking" from an agency.

I especially felt this difference in Poland. We rented apartments through agencies, not once or twice - seven times in total. And all these times the result was the same: disappointment. Terrible cleaning, an urgent need for cosmetic repairs, all for a maximum of 3 stars, even if the price hints at 4-5. The prices ranged from 70 to 200 euros per night, but never once did we feel that we got a quality product for the money. Agencies think on a large scale: the main thing is to fill the booking calendar, and quality is somewhere between the lines.

One of the first apartments we rented in Poland was the Bee Loft. We stayed there in March 2022 for 5 days, one of our first temporary apartments. Everything was fine inside, you could close your eyes

to something (dirty bathroom), but there was no access to wifi. The password on the welcome card was wrong, and no one answered my messages and calls because it was the weekend. It was very inconvenient because roaming internet is expensive and mostly slow. So it wasn't until Monday, when the "work week" started again, that we finally got access to fast internet.

STOP TWO.

Pula, Croatia

After our adventures in Budapest, I wanted the simple silence of nature. It was almost a vital necessity. Turn off the phone, forget about everything for at least an hour, and enjoy the moment. We didn't have a plan. Then I decided that we needed to go to the sea, especially since it took 5-6 hours to drive from Budapest to the Croatian coast. In seconds, the navigator plotted the route.

It was mid-March, a very low season, so there were plenty of free apartments at reasonable prices. Solomiia and I sat down to choose our new temporary home over lunch at a roadside cafe halfway to Croatia. After endless listings of "stylish apartments" with white walls and indifferent descriptions, I came across Claudia. Her ad was simple and clear, and the photo looked like a family album - a stone wall overgrown with ivy, blue wooden

shutters slightly askew, a wicker chair under an olive tree. Then I clicked "book" without hesitation.

When we arrived, Claudia was watering the flowers outside her house. She greeted us as if she had been waiting for us: no artificial smiles, no unnecessary questions.

"Hello, let's go, I'll show you where to park the car."

It was not a transaction. It was a meeting with a person who opened not only the doors of his house, but also a small part of his heart.

One of the first evenings, I was struggling with the dishwasher. After reading the instructions in three languages and pressing all the buttons, I gave up and texted Claudia. Five minutes later, she was standing next to me.

"It's not a technique, it's a test of patience," she said as she pressed two buttons. "They make things so complicated on purpose so that we can appreciate the simple."

I laughed with Claudia. And I realized that in any apartment rented through an agency, I would have been left alone with my dishwasher and my fatigue.

A few days later, Claudia brought us a box of Lego



Duplo figures, a little worn, with light scratches on the smooth plastic. She said: "These are the toys of my grandson, who was very fond of them when he was Solomiya's age. Now they are yours."

The next day, the daughter focused on building her own little world out of them - bright, juicy, sometimes completely crazy, but terribly her own. And then - crunch!" - one clumsy movement, and your construction goes to pieces.

"It doesn't matter, I'll do better," Solomiia laughs, already grabbing the first brick for the new tower. Lego Duplo bricks are the perfect rehearsal for adulthood. You build, enjoy it, and then accept destruction as part of the process - and start again. But in a different way. Since then, Solomiia and I have become Lego fans and started to build our own (already a bit too big) collection.

In Croatia, we changed a few more apartments and stayed there until the beginning of July, when the high season began and rental prices became too high for us.





5 reasons to fall in love with Pula

1. The Pula Arena. One of the largest and best-preserved Roman amphitheataters in the world. Concerts here under the stars bring history to life.

2. Pula's Beaches. Beaches in Pula are a slice of paradise, each with its charm.

3. Istrian Cuisine. Sampling dishes such as rich, earthy truffles, fresh briny seafood, and local wines was more than just eating; it was a culinary adventure.

4. Kayaking and Diving. Exploring hidden coves and diving into the underwater world

5. Kamenjak National Park. Stunning views, hundreds of islands, and thousand-year-old cliffs make this park a must-see.



3. REVIEWS

Yes, there are reviews on Airbnb, and you might wonder why we should stop at this point and pay extra attention to it.

First, reviews don't always tell the truth. Or rather, not the whole truth. Sometimes owners create a new ad after deleting the old one, which can result in some negative reviews. If it's an agency or an experienced landlord, they may run old apartments under a new ad, trying to destroy previous negative reviews. In this case, take the time to Google the name of the apartment or a snippet of the description, and check the results on Booking, Facebook, or local platforms. Often, real photos and impressions from other sites tell more than a polished Airbnb profile.

Secondly, accommodation without any reviews is roulette. I've rented both, and I've been euphoric

and "oh, not this one". And from my own experience, I can say that new owners try very hard. They want to get the first five stars because they realize that it is the reviews that will make or break their business. Often, these apartments look even better than you expect. But here you should carefully evaluate other details, such as photos, descriptions, and the owner's responses.

When reading reviews, pay attention to recurring themes. Look for patterns, not emotions. Not just one happy or angry review, but recurring themes. Is it written that "noise insulation is at zero" in three comments? Believe it. What if one person called the bed "very hard" and another "very soft"? It's a matter of taste, not fact. "Everything was great" is not a review. It's an emotion.

For example, "the towels smelled fresh, the owner left coffee, a chocolate bar, and there was good pressure in the shower" is what I call a reality index.

Everyone has different standards and expectations. People can overreact to small flaws or ignore big ones. Therefore, take everything you read with caution and try to form a balanced opinion as a

whole. Be sure to:

- Read reviews from recent and previous tenants to get a complete picture,
- Pay attention to real praise or complaints; don't dismiss individual negative reviews. Instead, focus on general patterns.

And most importantly, trust your feelings. If something doesn't feel right - even with perfect photos and five stars - it's best to look further. Don't forget that Airbnb is not a hotel where everything is standardized. It's like dating through apps: a photo, a profile, a few words, and a little magic (or disaster) because intuition in travel is no less important than anything else.

STOP THREE

Krakow, Poland.

Solomiia and I had just left Croatia, where in July housing prices soared beyond our means, and headed to Krakow. That was where my parents were supposed to come from Kyiv-we hadn't seen each other for four months, and this meeting was long-awaited. It was supposed to be a cozy family

vacation — some Polish buns, some parks, and lots of long-awaited hugs. I knew that the best thing for everyone was separate apartments. My parents prefer sleeping in silence, and Solomiia, with her own schedule, could wake up at three in the morning and demand to read "Pip and Posy," for example.

I took it upon myself to look for a place to live, as someone who has spent more time on Airbnb than some people do at work. First, I found an apartment for my parents. Then, during one of my evening scrolls, I came across an apartment that looked like a gift from fate: newly renovated, spacious bathroom, coffee machine, and a location two minutes from my parents. But there was one thing: this apartment didn't have any reviews. I had already had a super bad experience renting a new apartment without reviews, so I decided to take a chance this time. And here we are, on our way there, looking forward to comfort and hundreds of hours of warm conversations with our loved ones. I had a perfect picture in my head: walks together, outdoor dinners, Solomiia in pink sandals pulling her grandfather's hand to the park.

And everything would have come true — if not for... the smell. It met us first. Strong, tart, with the taste of old linoleum, wet towels, and something else — vague, not wanting to be remembered. I

involuntarily held my breath. It seems that no one has lived in this apartment for a long time, at least not those who know what a rag and soap are.

The kitchen resembled a prop from an anti-advertisement: crumbs on the table, cup marks, and greasy stains on the stove. In the bathroom, I mentally apologized to myself for trusting the attractive images. I dialed the number on the greeting card. An agency employee answered, polite but indifferent. "Everything has been cleaned up to our standards," he said, and there was neither doubt nor sympathy in his voice. It turned out that this was not a private landlord, but a company with a dozen similar apartments and a hundred identical answers.

Trying to find help from Airbnb's support team was like talking to a coffee vending machine: you press buttons, wait, and get something barely warm and not what you wanted. It was already late at night, one of those nights when fatigue covers your body, but your head stubbornly refuses to fall asleep. Solomiia and I sat silently among the suitcases, unnoticed, fighting the urge to shut up. As women, we were awake, and I was flipping through my phone looking for solutions, simultaneously writing to Airbnb in the chat window. The response was standard: "We will review your request within 48 hours." But we didn't have 48 hours. We had only one solution — to leave.

To sleep and leave.

In the morning, we met my parents. Their home was modest but clean, cozy, and smelled of coffee and cleanliness. As soon as Solomiia saw her grandmother, she came to life again: she hugged her like a life preserver after a storm. We decided to stay with them. It was cramped, but there was no dampness. Grandma had an extra bed in her room, and the kitchen had an inexhaustible supply of care and borscht.

I moved our belongings in one visit and have not seen the "ghost apartment" since. Except in the chat room, when I tried to leave a review and get a refund. But no one saw it—the apartment page was deleted. It disappeared as quickly as a bad purchase on sale. A few weeks later, I accidentally found the same ad on Airbnb: the same photos, the same interior, the same name, and, of course, no reviews. The apartment was reborn, like a fake profile on a dating site: everything is familiar, but something tells me it's better not to write first. Then it occurred to me to Google this apartment and voila - I immediately came across real photos taken by the tenants, which convey the real atmosphere of that apartment. After this incident, the rule of thumb is to Google all potential apartments.

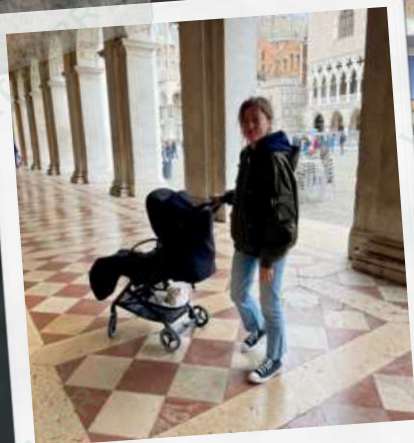
You could get angry. And I did. But as soon as we

were all together again—Solomiia, me, and my parents, whom we hadn't seen for four months—I thought, maybe this is how it was supposed to happen.

Maybe Krakow just reminded me that the most important thing is not the tiles in the bathroom or the coffee machine in the kitchen. It's the presence. My family is there for me. And the possibility of making mistakes, so that you know what you want to do next time.

This experience, although it cost me several ruined days and nights without sleep, was a helpful lesson. I also realized that sometimes accommodation without reviews is not just a risk. It's a mirror that shows how ready you are to get out of your comfort zone, unpack, and accept any experience, even if it has a lot of dust in it.





This is us



5 reasons to fall in love with Krakow

- 1. Beautiful market square.** The largest medieval square in Europe.
- 2. Historic Old Town.** Krakow's historic center was relatively unscathed by World War II because the Nazis planned to make it the seat of their puppet government after their "victory". In contrast to many other European cities, Krakow has preserved its centuries-old Gothic churches, Renaissance palaces, and Baroque townhouses.
- 3. Schindler's Factory Museum.** A moving journey through World War II history, where human stories take center stage.
- 4. Wawel Royal Castle.** Located above the Vistula River, it's filled with tales of kings, queens, and dragons.
- 5. The Leonardo da Vinci Masterpiece.** Visit the Czartoryski Museum to see "Lady with an Ermine," one of only a handful of Leonardo's paintings in the world.



4. ASK FOR A DISCOUNT

Let me start by saying that I wish you prosperity - sincere, inner, and financial. So that you can choose a vacation home not by price, but by the feeling that "this is where I will feel good." But life is different. And even if your wallet is still not bottomless, it doesn't mean you have to give up your sea view or morning coffee on the balcony among the flowers of Provence. The art of negotiation is not about being poor; it's about being flexible and respecting your budget. Sometimes a discount is a chance to go on a trip that seemed like a dream. That's how I got to Marbella for the first time.

How did I find out about it? It all started with a casual conversation outside our rented apartment in Warsaw. The landlord, a man in shorts with a soft smile, suddenly said words that radically changed my future travels: "By the way, next time, write to me

before booking. I'll make the price lower. Airbnb allows it."

It was like a window into a new reality. It turns out that many hosts are willing to give a special offer if you contact them directly. It is beneficial for them to fill the calendar, and for you to get the desired accommodation for less. Everyone wins.

Since then, I've learned to reduce the cost of accommodation by 10-60%, depending on the season, demand, and even... the mood of the host. The French Riviera, the coast of Spain, or Italy - places that seemed unattainable opened up to me thanks to a few lines of a polite email. This experience taught me two important things. The first is that you can always ask and nothing bad will happen; you will only be in the black. The second is that politeness and sincerity are very much in order in the world of rental housing.

A discount is not just about money. It's about trust between people, about micro-contact, in which the feeling of a cold platform disappears and something alive appears. Behind the screen is not a faceless manager, but a living person who wants their home to be filled with life, not empty. Many hosts are not companies, but people who rent out a second home, an inheritance, a guest house, or even a single room. And for them, it is extremely important not to lose

a month when no one has booked.

And now for the practical stuff:

- Find a few ads that you really like.
- Click "Contact the host."

Your goal is to show respect, warmth, and a genuine desire to reach an agreement. For example:

"Hello, Anna! Your apartment looks wonderful. I was especially fascinated by the balcony with its view—I imagined greeting the morning there with a cup of coffee. We are planning to come for four weeks, but our budget is limited to €1,000. Would you be able to offer a special price? We are very careful guests and would be happy to leave a glowing review after our stay. Thank you!"

Feel free to name your desired discount: 10-20% is already a standard, 30-50% is realistic, if you're traveling for 1-7 days, or the apartment is free for a long time. Write to 5-7 hosts at the same time. It's not rude, it's a strategy. The likelihood that one of them will say yes increases significantly. And don't take a rejection as something personal. It's a negotiation, not a declaration of love.

In Barcelona, I saved 340 euros per week just by posting a message. And in Vienna, received an extra night free of charge as a "bonus".

When and where does it work best?

- Low season or periods between bookings. If you see "holes" in the calendar, this is your chance.
- A few days before your trip. When the apartment is not yet booked, the host is more likely to agree to a discount.
- New ads. Often, new hosts are willing to give a good price to get the first reviews.

And finally, don't forget that in the world of travel, the main thing is not discounts, but the feeling of freedom. But if you can make your trip a little more affordable, why not? What started as a little life hack has become my tool of freedom. And I am happy to share it. Because in each of us there is a traveler who sometimes needs just a few words to open the door.

Examples of real messages that have worked for me:

Universal & Simple: "Hi! We really liked your apartment—the style, the light, the location. We are planning a trip for your dates, but have a slightly smaller budget. Would it be possible to offer a special rate for this period? I'd be very grateful for your reply."

For a more extended stay: "Hello! We are looking for an apartment for two to four weeks, and we really liked your space. Could you offer a discount for a longer stay? We are tidy guests and would be grateful for any opportunity to stay with you."

Suppose the apartment is new or without reviews:

"Good day! I see that your ad is new. We are currently looking for accommodation for these dates. If you are open to a first-time experience, we would be happy to stay with you. Perhaps you could offer a special price for your first guests?"

A bit of a personal touch: "Hello! I am planning a trip with my little daughter, and your apartment seemed very warm and cozy. If there's an opportunity to adjust the price for us a little, we would be extremely grateful. We are only considering options where we could truly relax."

STOP FOUR

Marbella, Spain.

When autumn finally put the sun to bed in Warsaw in early October, Solomiia and I decided it was time to leave. The city, where the rain seemed to be running a marathon and the sky was a solid gray canvas with no openings, could no longer be our refuge. We sought a place with not only artificial light but also a chance to shed not only our jackets but also the fatigue from our shoulders. Marbella came as a spontaneous idea - and quickly turned into one of the best decisions we made in 2022.

The idea of returning home still seemed dangerous, and there were blackouts and heat waves. And not only because of this, but also because we were not ready internally. We were looking for a new temporary "home," not just physically, but as a state of mind—a place where we could take root for at least a few months.

We already had acquaintances in Marbella, several families with children who had gone there in the spring. They told us about the city where it smells like jasmine in winter, where oranges ripen right on the streets, and where you can have breakfast barefoot on the terrace even in November. They said that this

place doesn't change you - it just gently reminds you of who you were before all this.

With a limited budget of a thousand euros a month, we were hoping for something modest. But the low season opened the doors wider than we expected: there was almost no demand, and the options were, on the contrary. In the evening, I came across Javier's ad: a spacious apartment with panoramic windows, a stylish kitchen, and a potted olive tree on the terrace. The price was almost €2,000 per month. In August, it might have been cheap, but now it felt unrealistic. And yet I wrote. I offered half the price. And although I was a little ashamed, I decided that it would not be worse than a 'no'. And not immediately, but in a few days, he agreed.

It was our small victory. And an example of why it's worth asking. Often, what seems unattainable is just waiting for your request.

It is helpful to know:

- Along the sea coast, the low tourist season is November-March. It is during this period that landlords are especially open to negotiations.
- Many apartments listed at the high season price can be rented cheaply if you offer a longer booking.

Marbella greeted us with sunshine that poured down every day, as if to apologize for the darkness of Warsaw. We spent our mornings on the beach with a thermos of tea and conversations that could finally flow calmly, without being rushed.

Solomiia built sand castles, collected shells, and leafed through books on her mother's lap. We walked through the streets of the old town, where laundry dried on balconies above streets with mosaic tiles like in movies. And for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel anxiety living in my body at the level of my breath.

It was a city where we could be just mother and daughter, without the burden of news, decisions, and constant readiness. A town where we found not only sunshine but also new strength - our batteries were finally recharged. In Marbella, you don't feel like a stranger or a tourist, because there are many Moroccans, Brits, and other European residents who come there for the winter.

We lived in Marbella not for one month, but for three. And every time we moved to a new apartment, I negotiated a discount again, and it worked every time. We lived in four different places: overlooking the sea, in a traditional Andalusian house, and a modern urbanization with a swimming pool. And each of them was unique and affordable. Traveling doesn't have to

be expensive to be happy. It's worth being flexible, attentive to seasonality, and open to communication, and even the most expensive cities can be hospitable.

It was not just November. It was our beginning again. December and January proved that the world still rests on good people and timely messages requesting a discount.







5 reasons to fall in love with Marbella

1. Old Town magic. The cobblestone streets, whitewashed walls, and flower-filled balconies of Marbella transport you to another era.

2. Wonderful climate. This region is rightly named the Costa del Sol (Coast of the Sun), featuring over 320 sunny days each year.

3. Natural landscapes. A perfect love story between turquoise waves and the Sierra Blanca mountains.

4. Orange Tree Square. The smell of citrus wafts through the air like a love letter from summer.

5. Golden beaches. Experience miles of soft sand where mornings seamlessly transform into lazy afternoons.



5. BEFORE & AFTER: APARTMENT SHOTS

"Trust is great. But proof is even better," something from a Ukrainian grandmother or an experienced traveler. Traveling teaches not only love of the world, but also attentiveness to the smallest details. So, how can you avoid unpleasant misunderstandings with the owner and save your money?

The moment you open a new door with a key and the smell of someone else's space fills your lungs for the first time, you feel a little excitement. You will live here for a week, maybe more. It's not just an apartment, it's a temporary home. You believe that everything will be fine. But sometimes this faith needs... a little proof.

Services like Airbnb, Booking, or Vrbo have given us the luxury of living among the locals, in real

apartments, with a kitchen, balcony, and a favorite coffee maker on the table. But behind this freedom is a thin line of responsibility: platforms are only intermediaries, and in the event of a dispute, it is you who will have to prove your case. In particular, when it comes to keeping your deposit or reimbursing unfairly charged fines.

That is, you may need to prove that you did not break a cup, scratch the floor, or leave a stain on the couch.

That's why photos of the apartment's condition - before and after you move in - are your simple but effective defense. Photos and videos are an argument that "speaks" for you when you have a different vision of the situation with the owner. And it is also a document that allows the platform or the police, as luck would have it, to make a decision in your favor in the event of a dispute. It's not paranoia, it's practice.

Even the friendliest hosts can have high expectations, or they may have complaints after you leave. This is especially true for apartments where a deposit is taken, or for homes with designer renovations, antiques, or delicate interior items.

This is a classic situation that happens everywhere:

in Madrid, Krakow, New York, Istanbul. And it's not necessarily related to fraud. Sometimes the owner really believes that the guest has damaged something, or just wants to cheat with existing minor defects. The only way to resolve the situation is with facts. And the first thing that should be in your "travel kit" is your phone camera.

What and when to take pictures?

Immediately after checking in:

- Take an overview video/photo of all the rooms - slowly and preferably with comments.
- Record the condition of the floor, walls, furniture, appliances, bathroom, and dishes.
- Be sure to pay attention to any existing damage, stains, or cracks.

The day before you leave:

- Repeat the video/photo, especially if something has changed.
- If something is broken, notify the owner in writing via the app with a description of the situation and a photo.

Keep photos of correspondence:

- Communicate exclusively through the platform.

This is your documentation.

- Confirm the agreements: for example, about the absence of additional payments, check-out time, and the state of things.

It seemed that photos were a small thing. 5 minutes of your time. But these 5 minutes can save you hundreds of euros, nerves, and leave you with pleasant memories instead of a bitter aftertaste. It's about respect for yourself, for your journey, for the work you've done to earn these days of rest.

At a time when reputation has become digital capital, both the guest and the owner have the same responsibility for honesty. So keep your boundaries with dignity and proof.



A tip from a travel cosmetic bag:

- *Photos before check-in and before check-out are not about distrust; they're about taking care of yourself*
- *Keep all messages*
- *Notify the owner of any minor incidents*
- *Do not hesitate to clarify all the conditions in advance*
- *Avoid making arrangements off the platform - this is a loss of your protection*



And most importantly, don't let fears ruin your trip. Mindfulness is not anxiety. It's self-love in action. May each of your temporary homes be safe and kind.

STOP FIVE.

Istanbul, Turkey.

After three sunny months in Marbella, breakfasts on the terrace, tons of olives, hiking in sandals in the middle of December, and an inner warmth that slowly replaced fatigue, Solomiia and I packed our bags again. This time we were going to Istanbul. It was a long journey—a day with transfers, dozens of children's (and adults') tantrums on airplanes, forgotten toys at the airport, and a million hopes for a new start. I knew why we were going. I had the opportunity to work temporarily on a cultural project — the idea of creating again in a city at the crossroads of the world seemed like something important, even symbolic.

Istanbul is a unique city. Torn into two parts by the Bosphorus Strait — between Asia and Europe, between history and chaos — it breathes simultaneously with all the centuries of its existence

every day. Here, even the air is full of contrasts — the smell of tea, freshly baked simitas, and the salty wind from the sea. It is full of energy, history, traffic, and the smell of roasted chestnuts. The city is huge — more than 15 million inhabitants, and there is also a whole army of tourists with suitcases on wheels that clatter along the stone pavement of Istiklal.

We arrived late. A tired city, exhausted us, and a taxi driver who drove like a 90s action hero. The owner kindly offered to meet us so we wouldn't get confused. He didn't say much. He asked for \$300 in cash as a deposit. He explained quickly and reluctantly, as if it were a ritual that everyone should already know. It sounded formal, and after the long journey, we didn't have the energy to argue. The apartment was modest and cozy, located not far from the Galata Tower. The windows overlooked a stony street where children played in the morning and waved to us from their balconies. It was loud, lively, but somehow kind. For those two months, we lived to the fullest: feeding the martins from the window, catching cats in the streets, hiding in baklava shops from the sun, and running away from the noise to the waterfront. I filmed Solomiia laughing, eating roasted chestnuts, and saying that her childhood smells like a warm fall here.

And, of course, on the day we left, the performance

began: "scratched floor", "unclean stove", "stains on the table". The owner refused to return the deposit. \$300 is a lot for one mom on the road with no destination. But even more is the feeling that you have been cheated. The photos of the apartment on the platform were artistic, but not informative. Our word is against the owner's. In response to the complaint, the platform politely wrote: "We are sorry. We sympathize. Please avoid transactions outside of our platform." The only option was to either call the police and possibly disrupt the planned flight to Warsaw or leave the money in the past and draw conclusions for the future. And that was the end of the story. Or it's beginning — as a lesson.

True travel safety is not only about booking with profit, but also about knowing how to protect yourself.

Istanbul is a city that can turn your head. But you need to have a base in it — knowledge, experience, and caution. Here, beauty is intertwined with chaos; here, they can pour a cup of spices into your tea without warning, so a traveler needs a steady hand and a clear head. Since then, our trip no longer seemed like an escape from reality or an attempt to forget. It became our new source. Solomiia and I learned to trust the darkness, but at the same time,

keep a flashlight in our pockets. Because I want to continue traveling the world with my daughter, without such traumatic situations.





5 reasons to fall in love with Istanbul

1. A city on two continents. You can drink coffee in Europe and have dinner in Asia all in a day. The Bosphorus isn't simply water — it separates worlds. Crossing it makes you feel like you have entered a different life.

2. Basilica Cistern. This fascinating underground palace of stone and water is a cistern in Istanbul. This is where the last scenes of *Inferno* were filmed. Standing next to Medusa makes you feel history is a breath away.

3. Traditional hammams. Embrace the steamy warmth of Turkey's oldest hammams, located in the marble city of Istanbul, where the moisture has collected for centuries.

4. The superdelicious food. From the



smell of grilled kebabs to street vendors selling simmering baklava and fresh out of the oven simit, every corner eggs you in. It really is an epic romance.

5. Like 20 cities in one. One moment you're in a Persian bazaar, and the next is a Parisian café, and then you stroll the streets of a forgotten Ottoman tale.



6. HOW TO CANCEL WITHOUT LOSING MONEY?

In a perfect world, all our travels would go smoothly. We'd arrive at a destination with a glow in our eyes, suitcase in hand, and the conviction that this piece of the world was waiting for us. But the reality is more dynamic. Plans change, children get sick, flights are canceled, borders close, and your heart tells you to stay home. And what do you do if your apartment is already booked and your money is already charged?

Airbnb offers hosts several cancellation policies to choose from: flexible, moderate, and strict. Most often, the flexible policy is used in ads, which allows you to get a refund for canceling even a few days before arrival. But canceling in less than 24 hours means losing the entire amount.

That's when my tried-and-true tactic comes in handy:

1. Check your property's cancellation policy. It is listed in the listing description.
2. If canceling now will result in a loss of money, don't cancel right away.
3. Instead, click "Change booking" and move the dates forward a few days (for example, instead of today, 3-5 days later).
4. Coordinate the change with the owner. Write a short, polite message: "Unfortunately, there has been a change of plans. Could you please confirm the change of dates so that I can cancel with a full refund? We will definitely stay with you next time".
5. Once confirmed, cancel the reservation. Airbnb usually refunds within 1-10 business days.

This method only works if the accommodation you have chosen has a flexible or moderate cancellation policy. That is, if you move the dates forward and then the cancellation period becomes safe again, you will avoid losses.

A tip from a travel cosmetic bag:

Save a message template for such situations in your phone notes. Remember the power of a polite tone - in a difficult situation, keep a cool head and write to the owner politely and calmly. This is often what

opens the door to a compromise. When will this method not work? If the host doesn't want to meet you halfway, reschedule the reservation.

Canceling is not always a defeat. Sometimes it's a chance to take a step back and return with new inspiration. Even changing plans is part of the great journey called life, and it's so good that we have ways to keep ourselves in balance, both in our hearts and in our wallets.

STOP SIX.

Rijeka, Croatia.

After a few months in Istanbul, Solomiia and I flew to Warsaw, where our car was parked, and decided to drive south to Croatia. It was a long way from the bustling streets of Istanbul, where the heat sticks to your skin, to September Croatia, where the light passes through the grape leaves like through the colored glass of an old cathedral. We wanted to find peace while most tourists had already returned to their offices. We wanted to feel where we were going next in every sense.

September in Istria is when the season is still breathing, but no longer pressing. The sea is warm, and the villages are quiet, like an inner voice that we occasionally hear in the din of everyday life. We stayed for one or two nights in different towns, tasting the local life: a little sea here, a little truffle there, and homemade wine with the aroma of the sweet sun.

But one morning, when we were supposed to leave the outskirts of Umag for Rijeka, the engine of our car suddenly said no. Without warning, without advice or diplomacy, it just refused to go. We stopped among the hills and olive groves, where the navigator gave up, and a coffee machine at a lonely gas station became an unexpected ally in this battle against the unpredictable.

Our next accommodation was 120 miles away. It was booked. And already paid for. But now it was out of reach. We had to look for something nearby. The platform warned us that if we canceled in less than 24 hours, we would not get a refund. The sound of a broken rubber band in my wallet flashed through my mind. But I know that when the exit through the door is blocked, you have to look for another way, and there is definitely one.

After reading the cancellation policy for about the sixth time, the thought occurred to me that it would

be great to have the gift of foresight and cancel my reservation at least yesterday. That way, I wouldn't have lost money for canceling.

"Again, I lack a time machine," I thought tensely. A minute later, I realized that I could not transfer myself to the past (which is unrealistic), but I could make a reservation for the future (which is quite realistic). I quickly started writing to the owner: honestly and simply. I explained the situation and offered to reschedule the reservation. And he agreed. After that, it was already possible to cancel with a full refund. A small victory. A big relief. Because the money we were supposed to spend the next night had already been spent on car repairs, and I didn't want this unfortunate accident to leave a bitter aftertaste on the trip.

This moment, between the breakdown and the correspondence, between nerves and decision, taught me that real travel is not just about geography. It's a skill in balancing trust and responsibility.

It's when you have a child in one hand and a world map in the other, and you're trying not to let yourself go with both.

We went further south, to our already familiar places — Pula and the surrounding area. And this adventure

was not a lost booking, but a newfound confidence.

Because every time life confronts you with the unexpected, you have a choice - to make it a disaster or a story worth telling.

After a month in Croatia, we were already thinking about returning home to Kyiv. My soul was drawn to my own and my people. But the news from home still frightened me: heavy shelling, problems with electricity again - we had electricity for 8-10 hours a day, sometimes less. So we decided to change the route again. Instead of going straight back to Kyiv, we turned sideways to Krakow — a city where we could still sleep peacefully and cook soup in silence. We stayed for the winter — not to escape, but to hope. And it seems that this pause gave us the strength and confidence to return home a little later, but with whole hearts.







5 reasons to fall in love with Rijeka

1. Beautiful viewpoints. From Trsat Fortress to hidden hills, Rijeka's views blend sea, city, and mountains into one perfect frame.

2. Romantic walk in Opatija.

Opatija's seaside path feels like walking through a poem, with each wave writing a new line.

3. The Rijeka Tunnel. Cool World War II tunnels hide under Rijeka's streets, holding the city's quiet, shadowed memories.

4. Early medieval, baroque, and neo-renaissance architecture. Rijeka's streets are a living timeline of stone walls, ornate facades, and graceful arches.

5. Krk Island. A bridge away, Krk offers fishing villages, turquoise water, and golden sunsets.



7. STAYING WITH A HOST

How to avoid spoiling your vacation with unrealistic expectations? Homesharing is a separate form of travel. It is not "saving money", not "temporary inconvenience", not "almost like a hotel, but without a reception". It's a choice of format that requires awareness of boundaries, flexibility, and respect for other people's space.

Just imagine: you rent a room in someone else's home. Yes, you are invited as a guest, but not as a tourist in a boutique hotel, but as a temporary roommate. And the most common mistake here is to expect the standards that are inherent in hotels or private apartments. Silence after 10 p.m.? Maybe. Access to the kitchen? Not always. Inviting friends? Often prohibited.

The biggest disappointments come not from conditions, but from unmet expectations.

All those stories of "the owner was strange," "I wasn't allowed to do laundry after 9 p.m.," "I felt unwelcome" are not always about bad hosts. More often than not, it's about the fact that you didn't find out in advance what kind of schedule this person has, whether they have children or pets at home, or whether they have noisy late-night dinners in the kitchen every Wednesday.

So, ask directly. Can you use the kitchen whenever it's convenient for you? Is there a "no noise" rule? Is it okay to check out a few hours late? Is a washing machine, shower, and workspace available?

And most importantly, do you feel comfortable with the rules that are announced? Another way is to tell the owner your needs before booking and ask if they can meet them. According to Airbnb's policy, the host has the right to set their own terms of behavior in the house. And the guest, accordingly, has the right to agree or choose another option. If you don't like someone's lifestyle, it's not a conflict; it's a decision-making moment.

Instead of building expectations, it's better to create a list of questions you'll always ask before booking. Avoiding disappointment is also part of being a good traveler.

What can you really get in a homestay?

Advantages:

- **Affordable.** The price of renting a room in a homeshare is often several times cheaper than a separate apartment or hotel. This allows you to travel more or increase your budget for entertainment rather than for a roof over your head.
- **Live communication.** The opportunity to get local advice, recommendations, and sometimes even dinner or help. A host can become a guide to the city as well as a guidebook.
- **Safety and support.** In many cases, this is a plus: you are not alone. If something happens, the host or other residents are nearby to help.
- **Cultural exchange.** This is a mini-immersion into another lifestyle, way of life, gastronomy, or even language. It is especially valuable for those who want to travel, not just as tourists.
- **Environmental friendliness.** Less use of resources for maintenance, cleaning, laundry, etc. Some hosts support the principle of "eco-tourism".

Disadvantages:

- **Lack of privacy.** You won't be able to fully relax or behave freely. You may not be able to go to the kitchen in your pajamas or listen to music in the bathroom.
- **Incompatibility with the host.** Even a polite host may be too talkative, too reserved, or have their own “strange” rules, such as about food, showers, and schedules.
- **Unpredictable everyday life.** Someone may turn on the TV at night, cook in the morning with all the smells, or not wash the dishes on time. Or simply have other ideas about “clean.”
- **Limitations in schedule and space.** You may not be able to come in late at night, leave things in the hallway, use the kitchen at a convenient time, etc.
- **Risk of disappointment.** Expectations of “home-like comfort” may not be realized. Many hosts do not consider you as a guest, but rather as a “temporary roommate.”

STOP SEVEN.

Vienna, Austria.

After driving a little over five hundred kilometers, we arrived in Vienna, a city that always seems a little theatrical, as if it knows it is being watched. Here, you can smell imperial grandeur, coffee, and chocolate in the air. The plan was simple: visit the Vienna Zoo, the oldest in the world, check out the Sisi Museum in Hofburg, eat Viennese schnitzel at a local cafe for lunch, walk the narrow streets of the first district, and be sure to listen to a street musician near St. Stephen's Cathedral.

And all this — not in hotel robes, but with a backpack and homemade sandwiches. Because Vienna is a city where prices can easily snatch all the gold coins from your pocket that seemed like a reserve for the future just yesterday. That's why we chose not to stay in a hotel, but to share an Airbnb accommodation with the owner. Our hosts were an elderly couple who lived in a spacious apartment near the center with high ceilings and windows that looked out into the autumn sky. Everything was modest, with a neatness that betrayed a generation that knew the value of time. They had their own rules: breakfast at eight sharp, silence after ten in the evening, and shoes to be left only on the mat by the door. At first, it seemed a little

uncomfortable, but on the first day we realized that these details were the respect for other people's space and the way to maintain harmony.

Solomiia, accustomed to a free schedule and flexibility, felt as if she were in an ancient musical clock: everything was indicated, everything was determined. But this also became part of the journey—not only between cities, but also between ideas about the world. We cooked breakfast together, stirred eggs while talking about everything, washed dishes, helped clean up a bit, and eventually even gave our hosts an impromptu dance concert to Ukrainian music.

Staying with hosts is not only a way to save money, but also an opportunity to immerse yourself in the daily life of the country. Here you will not see tourist clichés, but you will feel the rhythm of the city, learn to respect other people's habits, and, most importantly, learn to live in harmony with those around you. This requires opening your heart and mind, being realistic in your expectations, and being ready to compromise.

After these few days in Vienna, we headed to Krakow. The plan was simple: to stay for the winter, to wait out the cold in the city we know and love so well. At that time, Kyiv was experiencing problems with electricity

due to the constant shelling of the power grid — there was no electricity or heating for 14-16 hours a day, and we wanted to protect our child and ourselves from all this.



"To travel is to live."

Hans Christian Andersen



5 reasons to fall in love with Vienna

1. Imperial Vienna. The Hofburg isn't just a palace — it's a labyrinth of history. In its gilded halls and quiet rooms, you can step into the life of Empress Elisabeth, known as Sisi, whose beauty and restless spirit still haunt the city's memory.

2. Schönbrunn Palace and its endless gardens. The Habsburgs' summer home, with opulent rooms and gardens that seem to roll on forever.

3. Europe's oldest zoo. Since 1752, Tiergarten Schönbrunn has mixed imperial charm with exotic wildlife.

4. Coffeehouses. A velvety melange, the rustle of newspapers, a chandelier overhead — pure Viennese pause.

5. A city that sings. Mozart, Beethoven, Strauss — their music still drifts through Vienna. From grand opera houses to street musicians, Vienna's soundtrack is everywhere.



WHY DO WE TRAVEL?

For many millennia, people have traveled for a variety of reasons, including the search for new places to live and develop, trade, and cultural enrichment. These journeys contributed to the emergence of new peoples, who later created new societies and civilizations. The first travels of primitive man were very difficult and dangerous, as they had to confront not only natural dangers but also other species of animals. Nevertheless, humans proved to be extremely resilient and capable of adapting to different conditions. But from the very first steps, the fire of search lived in man himself — in his intuition that somewhere beyond the horizon, a new meaning awaited. First, it was the path to fire, then to trade, then to beauty.

And now, millennia later, when conditions have changed dramatically, we remain insatiable seekers

to find something new for ourselves and integrate it into our lives. I hope that this guide will help many people to travel more safely and comfortably, to organize their stay more easily, and to enjoy the adventure of traveling to the fullest.

Do not hesitate to inquire in detail when it comes to the terms and conditions of the rental. It may not be the most exciting part of vacation planning, but it's crucial for a hassle-free stay. And if you've ever canceled a reservation in the middle of the night because your child was sick, or moved to another city because of a noisy property, you know that sometimes "asking again" is the best investment in peace of mind.

Now that I'm back home after such a long forced journey, my world has expanded not only geographically. And it happened thanks to many things that I may write a separate book about. I realized that every trip is not just about the scenery and airfare. It's about a way to be yourself among other cultures, about the ability to adapt, about trusting in chance.

That's how my service **SpotScout.net** was born — to help others find their trip without unnecessary nerves and disappointments. I check each apartment, communicate with the owners, and filter out anything

that doesn't meet your real because I know what it's like to wake up in an apartment without curtains, when the child is still sleeping and the sun is already forcing open your eyes, or to find out about mold in the shower after you've paid.

How does the service work?

- You fill out a form on the website with all the details and wishes regarding the planned trip. You can add any request: whether you want a coffee machine, a bath or shower, whether blackout curtains are important, or the style of the interior. Anything that is important to you.
- I began my search. I contact the landlords, carefully check all the details in the apartment to make sure it is exactly what the client needs.
- You receive an email with links to 3-5 options for apartments that are perfect for your request, and make a reservation on your own. Write to the owner in advance to make a special offer to you as a client of our service.
- Pay for my services only if you are satisfied with the result.

This project is my answer to the question: how to make traveling a little better. I don't have the budget

for a perfect website yet, but I have heart and experience. And a very strong desire to help. When you're planning your next trip, keep in mind — it's not only about the destination, but also about creating space for your soul to grow.

With gratitude for every minute spent with this book.

