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9flats.com is a new website that handles private listings from hosts all across Europe – from houseboats and upmarket lofts to treehouses and shared apartments. In short, properties for every taste and budget. Why not become a 9flats host too, and turn your flat into a money earner? Find out more on 9flats.com



-  Travel expert Christine
-  Art gallery in Berlin
-  Actor's home in Rome

# Finding a home away from home

Christine Neder, author of *90 Beds, 90 Days*, explores the hottest new trend in travel: renting a flat from a local.

From dog sharing to car sharing to desk sharing – sharing is officially in. Some things that would be impossible to achieve on your own can suddenly become a reality with the help of others, whether it's finding a home for old clothes at a swap market, arranging a meal using an internet meet-up group, or planting a garden in the countryside with like-minded people. Sharing is ecological, practical and fun; plus it's a new social trend which has evolved from our increasingly fast-paced yet flexible lifestyle.

9flats is revolutionising the 'sharing' market with an innovative idea. It's bringing together people all over the world who want to rent out their apartment (or sofa, boat or caravan) with travellers who want to feel more at home while they're away. What all sharing concepts have in common is a sense of community (after all, sharing is only possible with other people), and 9flats is no different. In a short time, it has grown into a large, buzzing community. Through my bookings on 9flats I've already met so many different people, and found them to be a very wide-ranging group, each with their own, personal reasons for using 9flats.

Elisabeta (38), a mother from Rome, says the practical side is most important to her. "When you've three kids ranging from three to 12 years, eating out while on holiday can be far from relaxing," she says. She's found that cottages with a kitchen

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are the perfect solution: "Everything I need is already there, the children can spread out and play and there's no next-door neighbour to complain when things get a bit noisy."

As a publisher, Philip (28) travels a lot. He has just become self-employed and is finding that book fairs pose a big problem when it comes to accommodation. He needs somewhere to stay, but often the hotels in the area will either be booked out or too expensive. "9flats has been a godsend," he says. "It's the ideal way for me to find an affordable, available room. And in a relaxed environment too."

Last week I was on the road again, and this time I stayed with Hanna (25) in Paris. She excitedly told me about her first trip using 9flats: "I was with my girlfriends for a weekend in London. On a girls' trip, you can shop for hours and are free to chat in peace about everything under the sun. It was wonderful because we could all stay in the same apartment. When you divide the cost of the apartment by four

people, it becomes a real bargain. I wanted to help other people get to know Paris as cheaply and conveniently as I did London, and that's why I now also offer my apartment on 9flats.com."

With 9flats, you not only get the best holiday accommodation, but also new contacts throughout the world. Next weekend I'll be renting an apartment in London from Amy, who I already got to know a little from her profile on 9flats. We'll be meeting in her apartment first so she can give me the keys, and she has promised to reveal a few insider tips before I set out to explore the city.

As well as being fun, I've found 9flats to be a refreshingly inexpensive and safe way to travel. All I can say is, if you want to get to know a city and have an unforgettable travel experience, book your accommodation with 9flats. There's no better way to live like a local, wherever you are in the world.

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