

# Her first go at Airbnb, for a business trip: \$46 a night!

By Rachel Sloan  
Special to The Chronicle

**Editor's note:** Rachel Sloan operates Sloan Advisory Group, a financial firm on East Washington Street in Glens Falls. She has previously written several articles for *The Chronicle*, including about learning to ride a motorcycle and her subsequent cross-country trip.

I recently took a trip to Fairfield University in Connecticut for a four-day intensive review class to prepare for the Certified Financial Planner exam.

Typically, on my travels out of town I would stay in a hotel. But as I searched for a warm, homey, and is it possible to have good healthy food in the morning kind of hotel, nothing jumped out at me.

I know, I'm asking for a lot with the good healthy food and warmth, but I was going to be in a cold classroom from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for four days reviewing some hard-core financial data and information. I wanted something a little different and I wanted a little bit of home.

I had been hearing about Airbnb for a long time and now seemed like the time to finally check it out.

For those unfamiliar, Airbnb is a worldwide network on the Internet of regular people, called hosts, who have opened their homes to travelers, called guests.

Airbnb takes care of the infrastructure of the arrangement. In other words, they house all the listings, creating a marketplace of lodging alternatives, and they facilitate payment between the hosts and guests.

It was fascinating what I found.

On the website, I entered where I will be (Fairfield, Conn.) and how long I want to stay (four nights) and instantly I am presented a list of all that is available. And it was some range...from an entire house, to a bedroom, to a side of house, to a tree house, to a screened-in porch structure on a brook, and to a cottage on the beach.

The price range was amazing, too — from \$25 to \$350 per night.

For me, the hotel would have cost around \$500 for my four-night stay (yes, a modest hotel budget). I wanted to see if I could do better and more importantly, be in a personal setting, like I was at home.

I found a few places and set out to connect with the hosts, all via the Airbnb system. Before I could engage with the hosts, I had to sign up and set up my own profile and account.

Okay, so maybe you might be thinking how could you stay with people you don't know? And how could these hosts open their homes to people they don't know. I'll



**Rachel Sloan raves about her experience at a couple's condo in Fairfield, CT.**

come back to that in a moment.

## Airbnb checked her out

I was fascinated with what happened after I entered my information to set up my account and Airbnb set out to verify that I was really Rachel Sloan. The system started its automated confirmation process. They found me on Facebook and saw I had 300+ friends, they found my profile on Google, and they found my profile on LinkedIn.

They even sent a text to verify my cell number. Check, check, check and check. If I didn't have these social networks, they would have requested my drivers license as another form of validation. Now, I was verified and a registered guest ready to book a stay. This process was all completed in about five minutes. Technology is amazing.

I started to feel a bit of comfort knowing hosts had to go through this process as well. Each host/guest that has been verified has a green check next to their name, just like me.

Each listing that appeared from my search had pictures, a description of the space and amenities included. It sets the stage for what guests should expect.

It also lists the price and if there are any additional charges. Some hosts add a cleaning fee.

What drew me in next were the reviews that other guests had left. Most were very positive. They confirmed if the listing was just as described, if the host was lovely and inviting, and if it was clean. Some reviews included detail about restaurants and entertainment close by.

Some hosts even picked up their guests at the train station. Guests were from all over the world. This was amazing to me. Not sure what amazed me more — the

fact that Airbnb is a truly global platform connecting people from all corners of the world or that so many people were traveling to this part of Connecticut. Who knew?

## Her stay? 'Personal and homey'

I reached out to a number of hosts. Responses were within 30 minutes. Remember, most of the hosts are regular people living life just like us. In other words, everyone is busy. So when I received responses so quickly, I was pleasantly surprised.

I ended up staying with a young couple that had a spare bedroom in their recently purchased condo. It included a desk, shared bath, and they were okay that I made my own coffee in the morning and could use their fridge.

He is a radiologist at a local hospital. She moved to the U.S. three years ago from Germany to work as an au pair. They met during her first week in the states and got married last year. She is still working with kids to put herself through college to earn a marketing degree. I have to say, I was so impressed with my hosts, their work ethic, and how they were going about their lives.

Airbnb presented a way for them to earn extra money. My stay was downright personal and homey. I loved that I got to make lunch each morning and make my own coffee. And I loved coming "home" each evening to be greeted by Duncan, my hosts' happy and loving dog. My stay was \$46 a night.

Sometimes, when you open a door, another one opens, too. And while I was searching for places to stay for my trip, I started to wonder if local people here in Glens Falls had grabbed onto this concept of Airbnb.

I was completely blown away. Of course it is here and all around us. We live in such a warm and giving community and here is a way to open your home, meet some interesting people, and make a little extra side money.

This experience was another reminder that there are incredible people out there in this world. Stay open to new possibilities and experiences.

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P.O. Box 153, Glens Falls, NY 12801  
chronicle@loneoak.com  
518-792-1126

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