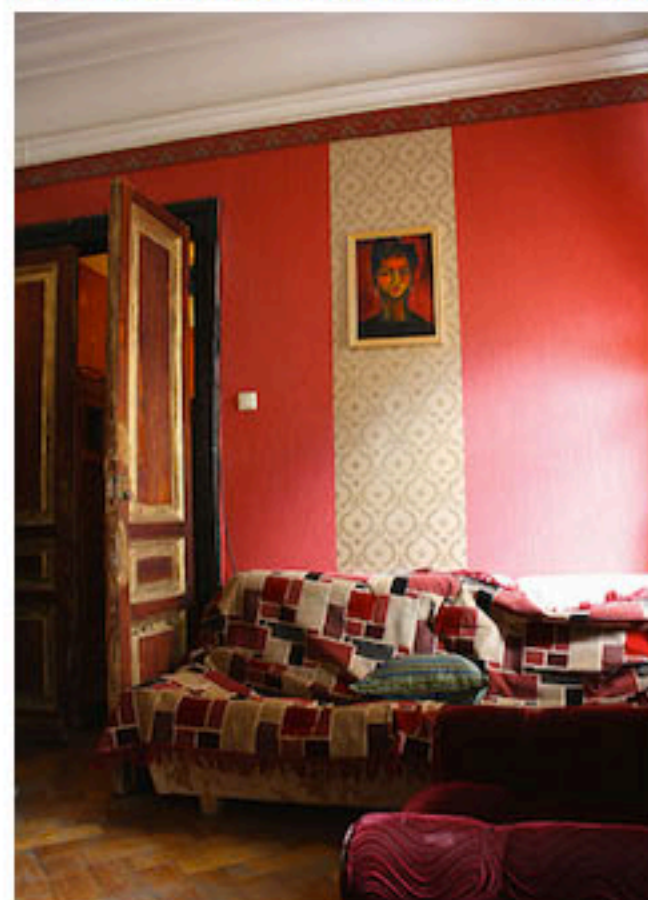


HOSTELING FOR BABY BOOMERS

By [NOMADICMATT](#) | Published: OCTOBER 7, 2010



This is a guest post by Barbara Wiebel, from [Hole in the Donut Cultural Travel](#).

When I explain to people that I usually stay in hostels during my travels around the world, the initial reaction from most baby boomers is astonishment verging on horror.

"Aren't they filthy?"

"Don't you have to put up with a bunch of drunken twenty-somethings who party all night long?"

"Are they really safe?"

Due to the number of budget hotels and motels available in the U.S. and the lack of a backpacker culture here, hostels never really

caught on like they did in other countries; only about 100 of the 31,752 hostels listed in the Hostels.com are located in the U.S.

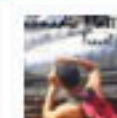
My preference for hostels began out of necessity; as a corporate dropout determined to recreate herself into an independent travel writer and photographer, I had to watch every penny. I set out on my first round-the-world journey in early 2007. Arriving in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with a reservation at a cheap hotel for

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the first two nights, but it didn't take me long to find the backpacker district and switch to the cheaper digs. Although I worried about unclean conditions, bugs, and being kept awake by boisterous hostel mates, my accommodations were always clean, bug-free, and fairly quiet.

During this first trip, I opted for private rooms with bathrooms rather than dorms with shared baths and showers. That they even have private facilities is one of the best-kept secrets about hostels. Most people I tell are shocked.



It's now four years later and I've become so enamored with hostels that I rarely stay anywhere else. This year, for the first time, I decided to stay in dormitories rather than private rooms. At first, I was worried that I wouldn't be accepted. I envisioned a bunch of twenty and thirty-year olds thinking, "What's this old broad doing in our dorm room." I soon discovered that this mindset was only in my mind. I've developed wonderful friendships with people of all ages from staying the dorms.

Every hostel offers different sleeping arrangements. Some have dorms with up to 16 bunk beds, although eight and four bed configurations are much more common. Guests can often choose between same-sex dorms or mixed dorms. I have slept in both and never felt the least bit uncomfortable. Many hostels are even

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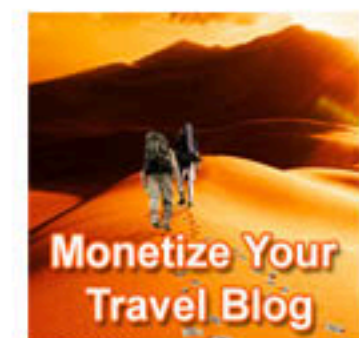
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offering family rooms for up to four people. One of the biggest hostel secrets I've discovered is that you can book a two-bed dorm room and unless it is a holiday or other high-traffic time, you will almost always have the room to yourself. For some reason, hostels hesitate to book a second person into a two-bed room if they have alternate beds available.

Hostels are safe, well-staffed, usually well-located, and generally offer a free breakfast. Most offer metal lockers to secure your possessions while you are away for the day, but be sure to bring along your own padlock. While more and more are providing bath towels, many still charge extra or don't have towels available so it is a good idea to carry a camp towel with you. Most hostels offer common rooms for relaxing and socializing with other travelers as well as fully equipped kitchens where you can refrigerate groceries and prepare your own meals. Some have laundry facilities and travel libraries, where travelers can swap a completed book for one not yet read. A few I have stayed in even had hot tubs, barbecues, and beaches at their front doors.



Despite the persistent stereotype, I have never been kept up by drunken partygoers. For the most part my dorm-mates have been delightful and considerate. As for creepy crawlies, I have never even seen a bedbug. Hostels in general are clean, although some more than others. To ensure the cleanliness of the facility, be

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sure to read customer reviews before booking. What we think about hostels come from antiquated notions of what hostels looked like back in the 60s and what we see on T.V. or in movies.

Used by solo travelers, married couples, and friends traveling together who range in age from late teens up to 70-somethings, hostels offer a marvelous, eclectic experience, but the biggest benefit for me is that I can stay on the road longer. These days, I measure the cost of everything against the price of a bed in a hostel dorm. Their cheap prices let me stay out on the road longer.

After years of working at jobs that paid the bills but brought no joy, baby boomer Barbara Weibel walked away from corporate life in 2007 to pursue the only things she'd ever wanted to do: writing, photography, and travel. These days she discovers the world, one culture at a time, for nine to ten months each year. Follow her journey at [Hole In The Donut Cultural Travel](#).

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Deano says:

[October 7, 2010 at 12:13 pm](#)



I don't tend to stay in dorms that much at the moment as I am based in SE Asia and rooms are pretty cheap anyway. That said I have stayed in some nice ones on Europe, Oz and NZ. The best one was a place in Vienna, 4 bed dorm, en-suite bathroom. Stayed at some really bad ones too.

With regards to prices, I find that booking a single/double room in a guest house is often much cheaper and nicer than the equivalent room in an hostel.

The other plus side of hostels is that they are a great place to meet people, and are therefore great for single travellers. That said it is nice to escape from the crowd sometimes 😊

[Reply](#)

Marcia says:

[October 7, 2010 at 12:19 pm](#)



Thank You so much for this posting! This is exactly the sort of info I am looking for and dreaming about! Very timely!

[Reply](#)

Gray says:

[October 7, 2010 at 1:31 pm](#)



The one time I looked at private rooms in hostels, I found the prices were equivalent to rooms in budget hotels, so not much of a savings there, but I suppose it depends on the country you're looking at. GREAT to know about the 2-bed dorm rooms. Did not know that, and that certainly would make a difference in price.

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Lis says:

[October 20, 2010 at 6:41 pm](#)



I've found the same thing in Europe – been researching a trip and basically I can get a double room in a discounted Ibis or similar – with a private bath compared to a private room in a hostel. However you are unlikely to get a kitchen and free films if that's important to you

Reply

Jenny says:

[October 7, 2010 at 1:32 pm](#)



When I was in Colombia there was a 70-year old man staying in our dorm room. Very cool to see him out there! He had a great story to tell, moreso than many 20-somethings.

Reply

txdakini says:

[October 7, 2010 at 2:10 pm](#)



THANK YOU!! I love your blog, but boomer info is perfect for me.

Also, Deano: how do you find guest houses? Do you wait until you are on location or book ahead?

Reply

Deano says:


[October 8, 2010 at 9:29 am](#)



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I tend to just turn up and walk around until I find a place that I like.

This works fine most of the time, but probably not the best approach in high season; especially in Europe. I also try not to arrive at a place when it is dark if I can help it; sometimes you have no choice, so I may book ahead in those circumstances.

Reply

Travel with Kids says:

[October 7, 2010 at 6:51 pm](#)

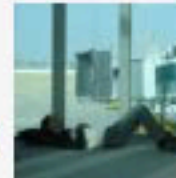


Good overview Barbara. I stayed in the Tokyo youth hostel with my 2 kids and it was great. Backpackers and 20-somethings have so much energy and interact so easily with other people that the kids love the vibe found at youth hostels. Family rooms are usually pretty roomy and good value. And I agree, the drunken partygoers are a bit like Elvis sightings — you hear stories about them but never witness them yourself.

Reply

The World of DeeJ says:

[October 7, 2010 at 10:16 pm](#)



My only experience with a hostel was in Amsterdam, where a buddy and I shared a private room. It was about the same price as a budget hotel, but we preferred the vibe of the hostel better. If my wife and I ever return to Amsterdam, its likely we'll return to this hostel. Great experience, and after reading this post, I may have to consider them more in the future...

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NomadicMatt says:

[October 8, 2010 at 6:17 pm](#)



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What was the name of the hostel?

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Stuttgartgirl says:

[October 8, 2010 at 5:17 am](#)

I haven't stayed in a hostel in years, always thought they were for early 20- somethings, but may have to reconsider. I can see that it would be a good way to meet interesting people, although I'll have to sleep on it some more.



Reply

Sofia says:

[October 8, 2010 at 5:23 am](#)

I am often impressed by the high quality many hostels offer. Often the private rooms are not much different from a basic hotel room!



Reply

Chris (Amateur Traveler) says:

[October 8, 2010 at 5:39 pm](#)

Hostels not for kids? then you have not stayed at the hostel in Grindalwald, Switzerland which is very family friendly



Reply

NomadicMatt says:

[October 8, 2010 at 6:04 am](#)



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[October 8, 2010 at 6:44 pm](#)

I think she meant hostels aren't just for young people 😊



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Kelly says:

[October 8, 2010 at 5:52 pm](#)

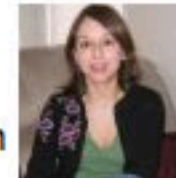


Great post! I think it's lovely that you feel so passionate about staying in hostels. They have really impacted my travels as well! I sort of hate the idea of paying money for a place to sleep.. esp when you're only there maybe 7-10 hours! Also I'm really happy to see that you haven't met drunken rowdy hostelers yet, but they are out there! Thanks again– I love this! Just goes to show there is no 'one' type of traveler, or hostel-goer!

Reply

Anis Salvesen says:

[October 8, 2010 at 6:33 pm](#)



Barbara always writes such great blog posts! Hostels can indeed be quite nice. Fort Mason International Hostel in San Francisco, for example, is a great place to stay. They have a lounge with wi-fi and tons of comfy seating, and the front desk staff is just amazing. The view as you step out the front door is just gorgeous, and the guests who stay there are everything from the young "typical" backpacking crowd to foreign professionals extending their stay for a couple of weeks after attending a conference or after working out of their company headquarters for a short period down in Silicon Valley.

<http://www.sftravel.com/hotels/hostels/fortmasonhostel.html>

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Benjamin Spall says:

[October 8, 2010 at 7:37 pm](#)



Really enjoyable post Barbara. I was talking to an old friend about hostels only yesterday. Everybody I have asked (including him) echoed everything you said re: the clean, safe and social nature of hostels. I haven't stayed in once since school, but I'll be sure to make it them my accommodation of choice in the future!

[Reply](#)

jessiev says:

[October 8, 2010 at 11:46 pm](#)

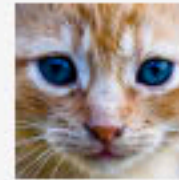


i've never stayed at a hostel, since when i traveled before having a kid, they were too far for me to get to with my disabilities. now, i am not sure that families with younger kids would be welcome. what do you think?

[Reply](#)

Mark Tisdale says:

[October 9, 2010 at 6:04 am](#)



My first experience with hostels was New Years in Edinburgh several years ago and I've rarely done hotels abroad since. I've encountered a wide range of ages and more than a few families staying at various hostels along the way. A friend recommended the first one to me, but since then I've tended to read the reviews on hostel booking sites and you can get a pretty good idea of what to expect and whether what someone else saw as a shortcoming is an issue for you. Reports of grotty showers and baths are the main thing that will send me back to the list! There's a limit to being cheap sometime! LOL

Seriously, though, in my eyes the hostel serves one main purpose, a place to put my head at night. People spend out the nose for nice hotel rooms and then spend their days seeing the city. Seriously don't understand it! I do like the common areas, though, as a solo traveler, nice way to meet other

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travelers and exchange notes on where you've been and where you're going.

That said, I have never been so happy as I was arriving in Edinburgh after a rumble tumble week of hostels in the highlands and having a nice hotel room that I'd gotten super cheap (middle of January!). I had a yucky cold coming on and there was nothing so pampering as a huge soft bed and a bath all to myself! I guess it is nice to treat oneself every so often. 😊

Will have to try the two bed dorm trick the next time I see one. I've been alone in a dorm before – mid-week in a four person in London. Was quite odd having all that space!

Reply

Sharon M says:

[October 9, 2010 at 7:47 am](#)



There are many hostels available that welcome children, but you need to do your research beforehand. Sometimes they're listed as "family rooms" or something along those lines. It's more expensive than staying in the dorm rooms, but usually much cheaper than a hotel! My kids love traveling and meeting new people, so staying in a hostel is always a fun experience for them. And if you expose them early and teach them the "rules of the road," others will be very impressed with your child's good behavior 😊

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