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TRAVEL TALK - VACATION RENTALS and VRBO

By Chase Binder

Bud and I have been renting vacation homes and villas here in the US, throughout the Caribbean and even across Europe for well over twenty years. We began using VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owner, vrbo.com) back in the mid-1990's when the internet was a fledgling mechanism for getting information from afar. Pictures were grainy, contracts were transmitted by fax (wow—great new technology!) and payments were sent via wire or cashier's check. Risky? No question!

But in all these years and all these bookings, we never got burned. Oh sure, some were more spectacular than others, but we never had a major disappointment. Nowadays, with the proliferation of websites and online booking platforms, there's much more opportunity to be disappointed—or even scammed.

How do you make sure you'll be happy?First of all, begin by defining your expectations and needs. Is your dream a campy, right-onthe-sand cottage? Or would you rather have a private pool surrounded by lush landscaping-no sand involved? Are you expecting lots of company, or will this be a quiet retreat to reconnect and restore? Will you want HD TV and high-speed connectivity, or would you prefer an old-fashioned book? Do you insist on comfortable recliners and pillow-top king beds, or are you OK with a rickety double bed as long as it's right on the beach?

All of these questions have huge implications for the success of your vacation—and the longer the vacation, the more important each question becomes. You can deal with a less-than-ideal kitchen for a week or two—but for two or three months? Your crankiness quotient could reach the boiling point.

Here is where due diligence comes in—and it's on you. Scrutinize the pictures and compare the descriptions. Does it say king bed, but the photo is clearly a



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queen, or perhaps there is no photo at all of the master bedroom (danger!)? If you're expecting company and need a dining table for 8 or 10, look at the photos and count the chairs. And what about living room and pool area seating? Will everyone be comfortable watching the rented movie and are there enough poolside loungers? If it says cable access and high speed Wi-Fi, how big is the TV, where is it located and what company is the service provider? How big is the kitchen? If it's dog-friendly, is there a fence? These

the complaint—or ask a follow-up question. I have never been sorry about taking the time to do this!

rate—often the low season, like Florida in August or Sorrento, Italy in January. This gets you clicking on the property, and then when you enter your travel dates, you find the price doubles, triples or more. This is annoying, but pretty transparent. Not so transparent are taxes, utility usage (electricity, heat, etc.) fees for cleaning, damage deposits, pet fees and so on. Some will be refundable, some won't, an important detail. Before you commit, do the math! A property that might seem not so much of a stretch at the "listed" price of \$9-12,000 for the whole winter could top out at \$12,000-15,000 or even more.

But suppose you do due diligence and book a place, only to find you have been scammed? Sadly, this can happen. If you book through the Homeaway.com family of booking platforms (homeaway.com, vrbo. com and vacationrentals.com in the USA and several others in foreign countries, totally 1.2 million properties in 190 countries), you have a level of protection for your deposit, your whole booking fee (if you have been scammed) and more. Read the fine print. Airbnb.com approaches safety and security a bit differently, putting more responsibility in the hands of the participants, presumably with more transparency.

But...as we found out last year, when our beloved dog-friendly winter rental of 3 years was put up for sale, there is another option—be it a little old-fashioned. We worked with a real estate broker (an actual person!) specializing in winter rentals in Cape Coral, Florida, and found a place for this year that met our needs and was within our budget. This was after weeks of combing through online listings that were ballooning in price and becoming increasingly slippery in terms of availability. Somewhat unexpectedly, the broker served us well this year. For next year, we'll be doing Florida still differently...but that's a topic for another column!

KEENE NATIVE O'CONNELL NEW BOW HIGH PRINCIPAL



Starting on July 1 Bow High School will have Brian O'Connell as its new principal. O'Connell will succeed Dr. John House-Myers the current principal.

Coming from Timberlane Regional High School, O'Connell served as assistant principal at a school with twice the student population as Bow High School. O'Connell focuses on a "studentcentric" model to work on the need for students to prepare for their education after high school.



For information on the location of over 50 medicine drop boxes in New Hampshire or how to participate with dozens of other law enforcement agencies in the National Drug Takeback day on April 29, go to www.nh.gov/medsafety.

are all comfort and usability questions, and *must* be answered before I book any vacation rental. If pictures and descriptions don't answer these questions, email/ text the owner for more pictures and info. Most booking websites have reviews for each property. These are a goldmine of information—but understand that complainers tend to be noisier than people who were really happy. Don't be afraid to go the extra mile and email the reviewer directly. Dig a little deeper into

Perhaps the biggest part of your due diligence responsibility is looking at the money. Websites normally list properties at the lowest possible

(Leppard cont. from p. 4)

Ben King: Does it amaze you that the songs that you put out 30 years ago that people were all excited about then can still generate such an enthusiastic audience response all over today?

Collen: I am, but just going back when we recorded them that producer said, "Look we have to make these songs so that you can hear them forty- fifty years from now and they still have the same effect. We have to put so much energy, effort and work into them that they sustain the years. That was something that he really drilled into us. Ben King: Right, now I don't know quite how to ask this question, but is it still exciting for you to play songs like "Photograph," "Rock of Ages," "Pour some Sugar On Me", songs that you must have played literally

hundreds of thousands of times by now. Is it still exciting for you to play those tunes in front of a live audience that comes to your shows eager to hear them?

Collen: So, let me ask you this, if you were a 60 year old man or 59 year old man and you were able to run around like a 25 year old and had women screaming and taking their underwear off and throwing it at you, a whole range of kids 5 year olds 75 year olds singing the words to a song that you had written, how would you feel?

Ben King: Ecstatic, I think.

Collen: There you go. You just said the magic word. That's how I feel every single night we play those songs. If we played them like we rehearsed them in--you do it at sound check or you're doing a line check on a TV show. It is like watching like paint dry or having your teeth

pulled, but the minute you put an audience in that light even if it's one person that reacts to that it's a state of ecstasy, I mean it really is. I think that the fact that we're still doing it this far into our career and this far into our lives you know like I said I'm 60 at the end of this year.

Ben King: Oh, really?

Collen: Yeah I don't feel it-I feel physically better than I did at 25 and musically I can sing better and play better so everything is great so the fact that we still have that reaction when we play these songs to an audience is just mind-blowing.

Ben King: Def Leppard has had a lot of challenges over the years dating back to what happened to Rick and then what happened to Vivian and then certainly the untimely passing of Steve. You guys have just soldiered on and there really hasn't been a lull in the career. What do you attribute Def Leppard's extraordinarily longevity to?

Collen: That's easy. One thing our upbringing. We were all raised by very working class parents in England and they had all experienced the absolute horrors of World War II like my mom, Joe's mom/dad, the air raid shells in the backyard. Houses were getting blown up in the night. People were blowing up England. Our parents had value systems they instilled in us. It's very working class integrity and just strength and resolve that you see less and less the further you move away from something horrific like a World War.

Ben King: Thank you very much. Collen: Absolute pleasure.

