

# Home, suite home

Co-living/co-working hostelries provide a new option for globetrotters seeking transience over a long-term lease

JUDITH RITTER

Six months ago, Ester Morales sold all her belongings and gave up her California condo. “All I want is to be free,” says the solutions architect, who originally hails from Barcelona.

Free she is, except for some obligatory meetings at her company’s headquarters in Texas. Morales, whose skill set is in high demand, can work from anywhere. She admits that, at first, she had qualms about cutting loose. But “once I did it,” she says, “magic happened.”

What Morales “did” exactly was take up residence in one of the many co-living/co-working space hostelries that are sprouting up across the globe. Some of these latter-day boarding houses are like boutique hotels, some like high-end hostels. But all are designed to shelter and entertain the growing demographic of the gainfully employed and uprooted by choice.

Just back from Outside, a co-work/co-live space in Costa Rica, she’s now in Miami at one of Roam’s four international “homes.” Roam is a one-year-old growing network of homes on three continents that caters to location-independent workers.

To one degree or another, each of these spaces offer a comfy bedroom, a state-of-the-art communal kitchen and stylish communal workspace with lightning-speed Internet. Some have maid service, others swimming pools and a few have small, hip eateries on site. Some of these projects have multiple locations, and each has a wide range of stay and lease options.

All cater to the growing army of mostly young, nomadic, tech-savvy globetrotters, whose talent and temperament allow them to choose transience over a long-term lease or mortgage. On a whim, these digital drifters pack up their Macs and roam from location to location – London or Thailand or Tokyo. These digerati simply move in, plug in, get to work and play in their new digs with their new friends.

Another wandering cohort, Liza Hall, sitting at the same outdoor communal table as Morales, surrounded by bougainvillea, chirping birds and gentle Florida spring breezes, nods her head at the word “magic.” Hall is the marketing manager for a company in Minnesota. Asked where she lives, she laughs and says, “Wherever.”

But does “wherever” provide real community? Absolutely, says Vancouver native Alana Banks who, for almost a year with partner Laura McIlvain and a couple of suitcases, has been bouncing around Roam’s locations in Miami, Bali and Tokyo, to Sun and Co.’s seaside co-live/co-work space in Spain.

“The community we help to build and all of the friends we have made is more than I could have imagined,” Banks says.

And it’s not just any community, she says. Banks has her own bookkeeping business, and says that being an entrepreneur can



Roam’s Miami location is one of four ‘homes’ set up on three continents by the co-living and co-working network. TOM BENDER

## IF YOU GO

From Melbourne to Montenegro, and Thailand to Tenerife, there are co-living/co-working spaces for the location independent, otherwise known as digital nomads. Here are a few:

### OUTSITE

**San Diego, Venice Beach, Lake Tahoe, Sonoma, Santa Cruz, Peurto Rico, Costa Rica**

Outsite boasts lots of outdoor activities and the company’s locations have a team-building retreat feel about them. The California focus means lots of Silicon Valley types there for “Work-ation” as they call it.

Price: From \$1,500 (U.S.) a month for a private room.

outsite.co

### STARTUP BASECAMP

**San Francisco, Montreal; coming soon: Shanghai, Barcelona, Paris**

Although there are several locations, Startup Basecamp’s centre of gravity is in San Francisco, where it promises to immerse you in “the Silicon Valley startup ecosystem.”

While other co-living spaces have pool parties at night, Startup Basecamp offers

“pitch nights with VC/Angel investors.”

Price, San Francisco: Starting at \$69 a night for shared room and \$99 a night for private room;

Price, Montreal: \$35 (Canadian) a night shared or private.

startupbasecamp.org

### NOMAD HOUSE

Nomad House hosts co-working trips to a variety of destinations and provides co-living accommodation in those locations.

Prices: Vary depending on length of stay, destination and room quality. Fifteen-day trips from \$1,000 (U.S.) to 30-day trips from \$2,000.

nomadhouse.io

### COMMON

**New York, San Francisco, Washington**

Common offers co-living/co-working spaces in three cool U.S. cities’ coolest neighbourhoods (Okay, Washington’s cool quotient dropped like a stone in January), with flexible leases that allow you to switch locations on a whim.

Price: Bedrooms begin at \$1,340 (U.S.) a month based on a 12-month lease.

common.com

### REMOTE YEAR

Remote Year is a kind of gap year for grownups. A year-long tour takes professionals who can work remotely to a dozen different co-live spaces in 12 different cities on four continents.

Price: \$5,000 (U.S.) down and \$2,000 a month get you the package, including travel from destination to destination.

remoteyear.com

### ROAM

**Miami, Bali, Tokyo, London**

Probably the most attractive of all the co-living spaces with its stunningly designed locations. A single lease lets you stay in any one of its four high-end global digs.

Price: Starts at \$1,800 (U.S.) a month to \$3,200 for premier locations.

roam.co

### WELIVE

This WeWork spinoff has two

locations: Washington and New York. WeLive seems to offer a little more privacy with its range of furnished accommodation, from studios to three-bedroom apartments, including private kitchen facilities, with communal options.

Price: Varies. New York starts at \$3,000 (U.S.) for studio to \$10,000 for a four-bedroom apartment. Washington checks in at \$1,640 for a studio to \$1,200 a person in a four-bedroom.

welive.com

### SUN AND CO.

**Javea, Spain**

This sun-and-sea hideaway offers a dreamy Mediterranean holiday in a historic 19th-century home with 21st-century high-speed Internet connection so you can work 24/7 (except when you use the kayak or surfboard included with your stay).

Price: Depends on room occupancy and length of stay. For example, a private room is from \$50 (U.S.) a day for a seven-day stay to \$36 a day for a 30-day visit.

sun-and-co.com

Judith Ritter

get a bit lonely. Spaces such as Roam’s are the antidote. “Living in a community of entrepreneurs and like-minded people wanting more than the traditional lifestyle of settling down in one place has been amazing,” she says.

Projects such as Roam, which merge co-living and co-working with reasonably priced opportunities to see the world, are not a hard sell to a demographic already used to car-sharing and bumping around the world in other people’s homes.

Chip Conley, Airbnb’s strategic adviser for hospitality and leadership, says the concept of combining housing, work and travel is more than a trend, but rather a sustainable long-term shift. Conley says the confluence of a few factors conspire to make this a durable change in the way people travel. The first is a changing work landscape.

“Evolving technologies for mobile devices and wireless mean there will be more digital nomads,” he says. Secondly, he says that this younger cohort,

made skittish by a U.S. housing crash, is less interested in owning a home. “They think real estate is not safe, and they don’t want to be weighed down with purchases like homes or cars for that matter.”

Those labour and real estate trends, plus millennials’ and Generation Z’s obsession with social hubs, comfort with sharing space and desire to meet like-minded people, has not gone unnoticed, magazine editor Jeff Weinstein says. “Hotels are dabbling with more communal concepts, and you will be seeing that concept at various levels like luxury, high-end and budget.”

Weinstein points to harbinger French brand AccorHotels’ new JO&JOE, a blend of hostel and hotel for millennials. Not surprisingly, Marriott, often the leader of the pack when it comes to institutionalizing under-the-radar trends, is piloting a communal living option at its Element brand, which seizes on the work/pleasure hybrid. Each space has four private bedrooms built around a communal kitchen and workspace.

“Next-generation consumers want more than just a place to put their heads down,” says Toni Stoeckl, Marriott’s global brand leader, lifestyle brands at Marriott International. “They want a sense of community.”

Along with the space, of course, Element guests will have the amenity options of the largest hotel brand in the world.

The idea of community is also central to Roam’s founder, Bruno Haid. There are other co-living/co-working projects such as Nomad House, Remote Year, Outside and WeLive (a WeWork spinoff), but if the digital nomad movement in high-end hostelry has a guru-in-chief, it’s Austrian-born Haid, who is based out of Britain.

“Show up and find community anywhere,” is a Roam motto. Haid, who is not a hotelier but a graphic designer, says he got the idea from seeing people like himself in Bali, working out of coffee shops and living in bed-and-breakfasts or Airbnbs. Betting on a generation already more trans-

ient, global-thinking and communal, he thought, “Why not bring it all together: accommodation, travel, work with the like-minded in international locations?”

His idea, though thoroughly entrepreneurial and commercial (he has a substantial infusion of venture capital), has elements of a social experiment. “Roam homes provide a stage for expression of cultural values aligned with community,” says Haid, pointing to the way the physical space is laid out in each venue to “engineer guests’ encounters with one another.”

Each guest has an attractive private bedroom with en suite bath, but cooking, dining and working is a communal affair. Long tables are natural gathering places, as is a state-of-the-art kitchen. Staff mingle with guests and do their own work from the same communal “office” space, all the while subtly encouraging group activities such as weekly dinners and on-site yoga classes.

Roam guest Steven Azoulay, a Montrealer who is chief executive of Findor – a company that organizes travel packages for sports and entertainment events – is simply not comfortable at hotels. “I just don’t feel at home,” he says. Here at Roam, he says, everyone is working and has a shared understanding about that. “It is very motivating. We work where we sleep.”

While the whiff of freedom is alluring and the idea of potlatching all one’s belongings has merit, the set-up is not for everybody. It would be hard to imagine juggling diaper bags or managing toddlers or sulky teens in spaces such as these, where meals are ad hoc, nine-to-five doesn’t exist and work plays a central role.

But for those untethered by work or family, roaming is perfect, Banks says.

“This lifestyle is not unrooted if you think about it. Rather, it is putting down roots wherever we go, making more friends and building connections around the world.”

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