

To B&B or not...To B&B

By Marsha Larsen

B&B is not a drink, and it's not a polite description of what the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders have to offer. Rather, it's a new way for Americans with less and less discretionary income to travel, have their bed and eats with it, too.

Bed-and-breakfast accommodations are springing up all over the country. Even in Manhattan.

My husband and I decided to try it. We wanted to go to New York, but hotels there had become too expensive. How to combine these two realities became an exercise in creative problem-solving. Could we stay with friends? (Out of the question. We have no friends in New York.) Camp in Central Park? (Probably illegal.) Ride the subway all night? (Were we kidding?) At last we discovered the B&B alternative in New York magazine.

The bed-and-breakfast referral service, The B&B Group, we found in the magazine acted as our broker. Like a stockbroker, these services consider the amount tourists want to spend and help them get the most from their investment. They do this with a brochure listing all their client homes. The listings

give a little information about the hosts, the accommodations themselves, and the cost.

For example: "Pediatrics nurse & computer sales husband, both ski & white water enthusiasts, offer double bedrm. w/pri. bath in downstairs of their duplex apt. (a converted loft). Apt. has Jacuzzi & upper bedrm., reached via captain's ladder as well as conventional stairs. Located in City Hall area (old New York). . . 10 min. walk to SOHO & Greenwich Village. \$30/Single \$45/Double."

Or, for a splurge: "Extraordinary, posh, self-contained 2-1/2 rm. suite (kitchen & private bath), Middle Eastern decor in 3 story brownstone offered by couple in interior decorating field, who run their own catering service as well. \$75/night (W. 40's off Fifth Ave.). They'll fix a candlelight dinner for two or a larger cocktail party at an extra fee."

We chose a "duplex converted loft which doubles as studio and living quarters of costume designer and film wardrobe artist. . . . Walk to Greenwich Village, SOHO." The reservation was handled entirely through The B&B Group by telephone. We mailed them our deposit, then they gave us the details — name, address, and telephone number of our host.

We arrived by train (another "deal"—buy one full-price Amtrak ticket, and the spouse goes half-price) and called our host, Ken, from Penn Central Station. He was expecting us and had arranged to be home early from work that Thursday to greet us.

We pulled up in a cab before an old soot-stained mercantile building, and I began to have second thoughts. We entered the building and caught the rickety elevator. At the entrance to the apartment on the dingy fourth floor, I was ready to turn and go find an outrageously expensive hotel room. At least it would be decent.

My husband, ever the optimist, insisted we see the place, so we followed the instruction taped to the metal double doors to "KNOCK LOUDLY." The sound of our arrival clanged throughout the area, mixing in with the hot salsa music and chatter of Puerto Rican workers in the Lucky Toy Co. down the hall.



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Water trickled from a leaking pipe behind us.

When I stepped inside, I felt like Dorothy Gale felt in the Wizard of Oz when she opened the door of her house blown from black-and-white Kansas to the technicolor world of the Munchkins. It was a tastefully decorated, colorful artist's loft, and the host was young and attractive. The place was funky, granted, but that only added to its charm. The furnishings were an eclectic mix, all circa 1947. The walls displayed interesting soft-sculpture art painted in vivid colors.

B&B in this instance meant "Bed-and-Budweiser." Ken invited us to share anything in the fridge. We saw beer inside plus two cans of cat food, a jug of cold water, and a one-lb. can of Cuban coffee. Just as well. We are not breakfast eaters but love a cold brew after a hectic day of New York sightseeing.

We found this sort of flexibility to be one of the major attractions of B&B-ing in New York. Don't eat breakfast? Have a beer instead. Your train doesn't leave until 5:00? Okay, stay here those additional three hours after checkout.

Of course, there's meeting nice people, too. Ken was an attentive, but not intrusive, host. He provided us with a city guidebook and good advice about transportation, budget shopping, and inexpensive restaurants. And with his pre-planned weekend activities, he gave us a lot of time to share the spacious loft.

B&B lodgings are a bargain. B&B's have been a familiar part of travel for generations of visitors to Europe. But, only in the last seven or eight years has this idea been practiced in the United States.

A recent article by Gloria Levitas in *The New York Times* attributed the mushrooming B&B trend to several factors: the state of the economy, the sterility (and expense) of

motels and hotels, and Americans' desire for more human contact in our increasingly technological, alienated culture.

If you like absolutely private lodgings, B&B's will not suit you. But if you like to travel, must travel on a tight budget, enjoy meeting interesting people in their own homes, and don't mind "winging it," then consider this sleep-cheap alternative.

When you make your reservation, tell the agency as much as possible about yourself. For instance, do you smoke? Do you have special dietary needs, or require facilities for the handicapped? Any children or pets in your party? The agencies generally approach these problems with a sense of challenge. They want your business, and they and their hosts can be flexible in ways hotels and motel chains can't.

Nothing broadens like travel, nor flattens the pocketbook so quickly. B&B's can help.

Contact:
The B&B Group
(New Yorkers at Home), Inc.
301 East 60th Street
New York, N. Y. 10022
212/838-7015

House Guests, Cape Cod
85 Hokum Rock Road
Dennis, Mass. 02638
(House Guests can also put you in touch with referral agencies that service other parts of the U. S. — the West, Southwest, Deep South, New England.)

Send for:
"Bed and Breakfast Services—United States"
\$1 and self-addressed stamped envelope to:
Sweet Dreams & Toast, Inc.
P. O. Box 4835-0035
Washington, D. C. 20038

"The Bed and Breakfast Directory"
\$3.50 (covers cost & mailing) to:
Posey Publications
P. O. Box 2512
Fairfield, Calif. 94533



Photography by Joseph Hart