

# Just the Ten of Us

*Traveling with a slew of friends means that  
Italian seaside estate breaks down to a little over \$100 a night.  
But also that you might have to invite Jennifer.*

BY CLINT CARTER



**A** TOUR THROUGH INSTAGRAM suggests that more and more people are sipping white wine high above the Mediterranean in their oceanfront Corfu mansions—this is not because everyone has sold their start-up to Facebook. Thanks to sites like Airbnb and VRBO, villas that were once only the domain of 60-something sociology professors via the *New York Review of Books* classifieds section are now available to everyone. Why would you ever stay in a mediocre hotel when you could rent an entire riad in Tangier? You wouldn't. The only catch: You can't do it alone. And figuring out whom to invite, how many tomatoes to buy, and how to split the check can be enough to make everyone hermetically seal themselves in their respective oceanview rooms. Here, an array of grand villas, estates, and vacation compounds that—when divided up by an entourage—can cost less per person than room-service breakfast. Plus, how to make sure you're all speaking to one another when you get home.

## Massa Lubrense, Italy

*A one-hour-and-15-minute drive from Naples.*

**BEDROOMS:** 6; **SLEEPS:** 14

**PRICE PER HEAD:** On average, \$125 per night;

**TOTAL PRICE:** On average, \$1,755 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:**

Breakfast is served every morning at Villa Aretusa (plus daily housekeeping); there's a pool house with an outdoor shower and kitchenette for easy seaside lunch-making.

[luxuryretreats.com](http://luxuryretreats.com)



## The Advantages of the Friend Trip: Spectacular Houses Are Actually Affordable

### And so are private tours.

➤➤ “When you’re a large group, you can do a total buyout of a tour. It probably won’t cost you extra, but the experience is much better: The guide will be more willing to break from the script and focus on the things that your group is interested in. You should also reach out to the places you plan to visit—museums, theaters, vineyards. Even if they don’t typically run tours, they might make something work for you. I’ll get groups onto Scotland’s Old Course at St. Andrews—one of the oldest golf courses in the world—and score meet-and-greets with the casts of Broadway shows.” —*Joanna Stark, Seven Hills Global founder*

### And so is airfare.

➤➤ “Once you have more than nine people, no one should be booking through Orbitz. At that point, you can deal with a group agent who works on commission. That person wants to sell you more tickets, and I can get up to 8 percent off the going rate. With a group flight, you can change names on the reservation or arrange it so that one person flies back a couple days later. Say you have ten people flying to Paris and a few who are still on the fence: Just book 15 tickets, and if you don’t fill the spots before the utilization date, you can hand the unused tickets back.” —*Aaron Sanfield, easygroupairfare.com founder*

### Or you can charter a yacht.

➤➤ “My favorite boats are the ones where everybody has the same idea for the trip. They could all be couples who want to eat big dinners and drink red wine, or people who want to stay out late and party on the islands. Either group is fine, so long as everybody agrees generally on what the vibe is supposed to be.” —*Kevin McLean, Yacht Week skipper*

PHOTOGRAPHS: PREVIOUS SPREAD, COURTESY OF LUXURY RETREATS; ILLUSTRATION BY JASON LEE. THIS PAGE, COURTESY OF CASA SISAL (MÉRIDA); COURTESY OF AIRBNB (AMSTERDAM).



### Sac Chich, Mexico

A 35-minute drive from Mérida.

BEDROOMS: 2; SLEEPS: 6

PRICE PER HEAD: On average,

\$49 per night; TOTAL PRICE:

On average, \$296 per night

GROUP-FRIENDLINESS: There is a housekeeping staff who will clean daily and change the sheets every three days.

[vrbo.com](http://vrbo.com)

## Amsterdam, Netherlands

**BEDROOMS:** 4; **SLEEPS:** 8

**PRICE PER HEAD:** On average, \$48 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:** On average, \$384 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:** Centrally located near the Vondelpark, but in a quiet residential neighborhood; a fireplace and sofa in the kitchen-dining-room area means the designated cooks won't get lonely.

[airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)



# The Complicated Part of the Friend Trip: The Logistics Are Endless

## 1. To Airbnb? Or to VRBO?

*Weighing the big online listings players.*

### WHAT IT IS

#### AIRBNB

A San Francisco-based company that gives you access to everything from private villas to guest beds in a stranger's apartment, with over 2 million listings in 190 countries.

#### VRBO

An Austin listing agency that was founded in 1995, more than a decade before Airbnb, with 1 million listings in 190 countries. Owned by HomeAway.

### WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH

The hosts tend to be young and chill, the apartments slightly more modern and hip.

The crowd is generally older, a bit wealthier, and slower with technology.

### THE LISTINGS

The photos are often professionally shot, which leads to potential disappointment when you arrive to find that the well-lit living room was just the product of a camera trick.

It's the opposite of the Airbnb problem: Thanks to more amateur photography, the houses tend to be better than suggested by the photos.

## 2. Whom Do We Invite?

*Consider psychologist Michael Brein's three-point compatibility scale.*

➔➔ **Activity level.** If you plan to shun public transportation so that you can see a city by foot, then you want people who can keep up. ➔➔ **Diurnal-nocturnal disposition.** The person who considers dinner to be a pregame is going to have a very different experience from one who hopes to rest up and start the day early. ➔➔ **Time urgency.** If you hope to lock down two meals and three tours per day, you'll be frustrated by the person who won't commit to anything.

### Do We Have to Invite Jennifer? No.

➔➔ "For a couple of months, we were discreet in the planning so that Jennifer wouldn't find out about our ten-person trip to Prague. Then while a few of us were at brunch, it came up. Jennifer said she'd like to join us. So my boyfriend says: 'Crap! We already offered all the rooms to other people!' This was a lie." —Anonymous group-trip alum

### How Do We Avoid the Endless Email Threads?

**Doodle** will help. The free app allows you to blast out voting ballots, which your friends can reply to regardless of whether they have the app. Use it to decide which villa to rent, how much seed money to put into your group vodka budget, and when to schedule your departure flight. Because it syncs with your calendar, Doodle is particularly adept at working through scheduling dilemmas, too.



## Big Sur, California

*A two-hour-and-20 minute drive from Mineta San Jose International Airport.*

**BEDROOMS:** 3; **SLEEPS:** 6

**PRICE PER HEAD:** \$111 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:** \$667 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:** Designed by the architect behind Nepenthe restaurant, each bedroom has ocean views. The owner only rents this out for a month at a time, so make sure you really like each other.

[vrbo.com](http://vrbo.com)



## Búzios, Brazil

*A three-hour drive from Rio.*

**BEDROOMS:** 5; **SLEEPS:** 12

**PRICE PER HEAD:** On average, \$54 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:** On average, \$650 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:** Bella Villa Sul Mare has two swimming pools, so you and your friends won't feel like you're on top of one another.

[airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)



## Siracusa, Sicily

*A one-hour drive from the Catania airport.*

**BEDROOMS:** 12; **SLEEPS:** 24

**PRICE PER HEAD:** From \$64 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:** From \$1,524 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:**  
Cook service is included; big dinners can be held in the loggia facing the formal garden.  
[luxuryretreats.com](http://luxuryretreats.com)



## Tangier, Morocco

**BEDROOMS:** 6; **SLEEPS:** 12

**PRICE PER HEAD:** On average, \$46 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:** On average, \$554 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:**  
Located in the Marshan Quarter (the city's upscale residential neighborhood), just a ten-minute walk from the Kasbah and the Medina.  
[airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)

### 3. Who Gets the Master?

Room-picking tips you can learn watching *The Real Housewives*.

#### The organizer gets first dibs.

➔ “It’s only fair,” says Vulture’s TV recapper Brian Moylan. “If Kyle Richards organizes the trip, you can bet your ass she’s going to take the best room. Nobody’s going to fight her on that.”

#### It pays to be obsessive.

➔ “Ramona Singer is the queen at getting the room she wants. The minute she arrives at a new house, she’s like, ‘What room am I getting?’ She keeps bitching and complaining until the rest of the girls will give her anything to shut her up.”

#### It pays to have a roommate.

➔ “Another famous Ramona move: She’ll team up with her bestie, Sonja Morgan, and say, ‘Since Sonja and I are sharing, we deserve the best

room.’ Of course, Sonja doesn’t give a shit. She just rolls with it.”

#### It does not pay to show up late.

➔ “There’s usually one housewife who ends up arriving late because of scheduling conflicts. She’s definitely going to get screwed over.”

#### It’s possible to overthink the decision.

➔ “When the housewives visited Turks and Caicos, Sonja picked a room for her and Ramona to share. But Ramona wasn’t convinced it was the best, so she made a big production out of analyzing every room in the house. Nobody could settle in until she made up her mind, and in the end, it didn’t matter. ‘News flash,’ Carole Radziwill said. ‘All the rooms were exactly the same.’”

### 5. How Do 12 People Get Around?

Ruling out all the wrong vehicles.

#### Don’t Rent a Convertible

➔ “Our group of four people waged a battle at the car dealership to score a Mustang convertible. We figured it was the best possible way to cruise up the coast of California. But after an hour in the car, we were like, ‘What have we done?’ We were cramped together, and it was not only cold with the top down, but with the wind, it ended up being too loud to talk. Next time, we would go with a big-ass Suburban.” —*Danny Stern, donor-relations manager*

#### Don’t Rent a Van

➔ “During our ten-person trip to Tulum, Mexico, we thought about doing the van but realized that was a bad idea: It meant everybody would be stuck together the whole time. So we rented three cars. Some of us wanted to do yoga at the beach in

the morning, other people wanted to sleep late. Some people wanted to go kite-surfing, other people wanted to hang out at the bar. We’d always meet back up at some point, but being able to split up was key. That’s how we kept everybody happy.” —*Sophie-Claire Hoeller, travel writer-editor*

#### Don’t Rent an RV

➔ “I’ve been on four trips with friends. Three were terrific fun. But the RV trip through Iceland? That one was a disaster. There were six of us, stuck together in a small hotel room on wheels. We were forced to agree on every single restaurant and route and detour. There were people who were sick of looking at waterfalls, or they were too cold to do anything in nature. We were arguing over the itinerary so much that we ended up cutting the trip a day short.” —*Emily Chui, ad copywriter*

### 4. How Do We Foodshop for Ten?

A weeklong grocery list courtesy of traveling chef Ian T. Buchanan.

#### PRODUCE

(to last two days)  
Potatoes go with everything, so throw a five-pound bag into your cart. For aromatics, pick up two large onions and a head of garlic. Add four big heads of romaine, four cucumbers, and a pound of carrots (which you’ll shred) for appetizer salads. Then grab three

pounds of tomatoes (for sauces and omelets) and three pounds of whatever vegetables look the freshest.

#### MEAT AND FISH

(to last three days) Pick out some fresh fish for the first day, and 25 pounds of meat (chicken, beef, pork, sausage, and bacon) for the next few

meals. It sounds like a lot, but a lunch portion is four to five ounces, and dinner is six to eight.

#### DAIRY AND EGGS

(to last three days) Start with five-dozen eggs (two per person per day). Then grab milk (three gallons), butter (one pound), and assorted cheeses (three pounds).

### And Where Should We All Go Out to Dinner?

New York–chef recommendations. ➔ **Daniel Humm and Will Guidara**, *Eleven Madison Park*, the NoMad: **KRONENHALLE** Zürich, Switzerland “Every table is having fun, the noise level is just right, and between the food and the art (there are Chagalls, Mirós), there’s never a dull moment.” ➔ **Jody Williams**, *Buvette*, *Via Carota*: **TRATTORIA SOSTANZA** Florence, Italy “When I am in Florence with [my partner] Rita Sodi and her family, we can be 12-plus and we always eat here. It’s a classic trattoria, a table filled with friends and food to pass from one end to the other.” ➔ **Elise Kornack**, *Take Root*: **HARTWOOD** Tulum, Mexico “A necessity for a group is space for everyone to mingle. There’s tons of room at this outdoor spot to mill and move around with a cocktail.” —AS TOLD TO SIERRA TISHGART

### 6. What About ... Money?

Perhaps the most unpleasant issue of all.

#### WHEN IT COMES TO BIG EXPENSES

##### PAY PER ITEM

“When my friends and I were in Mexico, we all used this app called Splitwise. We’d go grocery shopping, and instead of splitting the bill right there at the supermarket, one person would pay for everything and enter it into the app. **At the end of the trip, Splitwise tallied everything up** and showed us who owed what to whom. It’s not like we had to do a lot of calculations or anything.” —*Sophie-Claire Hoeller*

##### PAY IN ADVANCE

“I’m planning a trip to Miami right now. I’m collecting \$500 from everybody, and I’ll use that to pay for the hotel, food, drinks—all of it. You just decide on a budget that everybody can afford. **pool the money together beforehand**, and plan your itinerary based on what you have to spend. If, by some miracle, we come in under budget, I’ll just divvy up the money and hand it back.” —*Tim Holley, product manager*

#### WHEN IT COMES TO DINNER

##### SPLIT THE CHECK

“I find it so annoying to divide up the bill each time. It saves you what—five or ten bucks? And it introduces all this awkwardness at the end of a nice dinner. There was no question that I was eating the most, so **I just picked up the gratuity**. We’d split the tab four ways, and I’d leave a tip for the whole check.” —*Danny Stern*

##### REALLY SPLIT THE CHECK

“I tend to eat and drink more than the people I’m traveling with, and they shouldn’t have to pay for me. But what are we going to do—itemize the bill after the meal? I’m big on asking for my own check. **You have to do it up front though**, when you’re ordering your drink. I don’t want to watch a perfectly good meal devolve into a math contest.” —*Dan Michel, fashion editor*

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF AIRBNB

## Palermo, Buenos Aires

**BEDROOMS:** 4; **SLEEPS:** 8

**PRICE PER HEAD:** On average,  
\$63 per night; **TOTAL PRICE:**  
On average, \$500 per night

**GROUP-FRIENDLINESS:** Each  
bedroom has its own private  
bathroom; the parrilla (an  
Argentine grill) means you can  
have carne asada dinners on the  
rooftop cupola-abutting terrace.

[airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)

