

Fresh outlook

Tired of staying in hotels? Rose Dykins lists 21 reasons to try an apartment instead

1 THERE IS ROOM TO SWING A CAT

Rather than just being somewhere to lay your head, serviced apartments give you the room to sleep, work, cook and relax – so no need to perch on the end of your hotel bed with a dinner tray.

2 THEY'RE GOOD VALUE

Serviced apartment prices are typically 20 per cent less than hotel rates of the same standard – their running costs are lower, as they don't need to operate a kitchen 24/7 to provide room service, or fund a team of cleaners to offer daily housekeeping.

3 YOU CAN COOK FOR YOURSELF

Sitting at a table for one, night after night, becomes a drag. And queuing for the expensive breakfast buffet seems silly when all you fancy is some peanut butter on toast. Being able to cook in your own kitchen is cost-effective, convenient and handy for keeping your calorie intake in check.

4 YOUR FAMILY CAN JOIN YOU

The extra space makes it easier and cheaper for you to have several loved ones join you. Simon Morrison, managing director of Select Apartments, says: "If you want your family to stay with you at the weekend, there's no extra charge, and most apartments have sofa beds, whereas a hotel wouldn't take kindly to you smuggling additional people in to your room."

5 WIFI IS FREE

Unlike many hotel brands, the vast majority of serviced apartment companies have offered free wifi from the start. *Business Traveller* was unable to find a provider that charged for it. ▶

Left: Staying Cool Birmingham

6 YOU CAN SKIP THE SMALL TALK

If you're not one for fawning treatment from hotel staff, or over-zealous housekeeping, apartments allow you to bypass the formalities. You often don't even have to talk to anyone – simply let yourself in and make yourself at home.

7 FACILITIES CAN RIVAL HOTELS

Gyms, pools, restaurants, bars, concierges – if any of these are an important part of your business travel routine, aparthotels and some serviced properties now offer many of these.

8 YOU CAN WASH YOUR CLOTHES

Having the option to do your own laundry – rather than paying for the privilege of having hotel staff do it for you – is cost-saving and convenient. At the very least, serviced apartments have communal laundry rooms, but many have washers and dryers in their kitchens.

9 THEY HAVE SPACE TO MEET

Time and money can be saved by hosting small meetings around the dining table of your flat. Alternatively, providers such as Marlin Apartments can book external meeting space for you, while some, such as Fraser Suites Edinburgh, have on-site boardrooms.

10 BOOKING IS EASY

The traditional system of booking an apartment – making an enquiry with a provider and waiting to hear back once they've checked availability – has largely changed. Many are now available on the likes of booking.com, and most providers offer online reservations for short stays. For longer periods, where enquiries are still necessary, the turnaround time

has improved. "We'll respond in one hour with a detailed proposal – web links, the rates, cancellation details and policies," Select Apartments' Morrison says. "Then the client sends us an email about which apartment they're interested in, and we'll book it."

11 NO MINIBAR TEMPTATION

Many serviced apartment properties offer bespoke hampers or shopping services, where you pre-select groceries that you actually need, rather than reaching impulsively for the US\$10 M&Ms when you get hungry.

12 YOU SAVE ON LONGER STAYS

Apartments are a good option for those working away from home on a long-term project – the general rule is that after seven nights, the nightly rate starts to fall (unlike hotel rates, which remain static). Joyce Cawthorpe, marketing and media manager for the Association of Serviced Apartment Providers (ASAP), says: "The VAT reduces to 4 per cent after 28 nights. And these days, instead of having to book an apartment for ten weeks solid, many providers allow companies to book from Monday to Friday for a ten-week block." ►



13 THEY'RE REGULATED

Tried Airbnb? Loved it? Great, but if you're on a company travel policy, you can't always ensure that its properties meet the necessary safety and quality requirements. Each ASAP member is assessed to ensure they meet the association's standards, so you won't arrive and find they're different from the website, or that they don't exist at all...

14 THEY'RE UNASSUMING FROM THE OUTSIDE

Serviced apartments tend to operate under the radar. Many are housed in converted buildings around the city, which can not only create that "live like a local" experience but can boost their security rating when you don't want to stay somewhere that screams "tourist".

15 THEY'RE NOT ALL BORING

Don't dismiss serviced apartments as boxy, bland spaces with cookie-cutter décor. Check out the luxury interiors of London's Cheval Three Quays, with its Thames views; the exposed 15th-century walls of Old Town Chambers in Edinburgh; the swinging Sixties vibe at Staying Cool at the Rotunda Birmingham; and the plush, masculine interiors with bright accents at Grosvenor House Apartments by Jumeirah Living – to name a few.

16 YOU CAN HAVE PEOPLE OVER

After a long day at a conference, joining colleagues on a bar crawl can be the last thing you want to do. Opting for an apartment means you have the space to invite people over for some actual downtime – sofa space, company, a couple of beers and a well-priced takeaway. Feeling antisocial? You can relax in your living room and watch TV.

From top: Capri by Fraser Frankfurt; Fraser Suites Geneva

**17 THEY'RE EVERYWHERE**

An additional 112,500 apartments are to be added in the UK by the end of 2018. And as the market is maturing, properties are opening up in new destinations, with brands making ambitious growth plans (see overleaf).

18 MANY REWARD LOYALTY

Being part of Accorhotels, Adagio Aparthotels' guests can collect Le Club points, while those who stay at Fraser Suites properties can take part in the Fraser World scheme. Apple Apartments' Apple 21 Club offers a 21 per cent discount on stays for its members.

19 THEY'RE WELL LOCATED

Struggling to find a hotel near a particular business park? See if there's a serviced apartment there instead. "A lot of our members started because certain companies had lots of travellers coming overseas and the nearest hotel was quite far away. Phoenix Apartments in Newbury, for example, was set up close to Vodafone," says ASAP's Cawthorpe. You'll also find them dotted around city centres, near stations and financial districts.

20 EVERYBODY NEEDS GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Opting for a serviced apartment means it's highly unlikely you'll be sharing a building with noisy families and large tour groups – during the week, the clientele will be like-minded business travellers with a need for peace and quiet.

21 THEY'RE MORE LIKE HOME

Staying in the four walls of a hotel room for an extended period can become a bit miserable. A home-from-home experience can give you a mental boost if you're spending a long time away. ▶



NEWS ROUND-UP

SACO opened its first aparthotel property last month, on Cannon Street in the City of London. The Cannon has 77 studios and one-bedroom apartments with smart TVs and contemporary furnishings. There's also an on-site gym, a communal lounge and an app that allows guests to check in and open their apartment's front door. SACO will unveil an aparthotel on Lemn Street in London's Aldgate at the end of this year, with two Edinburgh properties to follow next year. sacoapartments.com

BRIDGESTREET has launched its Mode Aparthotel brand, aimed at travellers who are "connected, creative and crave community". Each property will offer a 24-hour concierge and communal areas for socialising. The first Mode opened in February in Washington DC and has 46 apartments, a bar/restaurant and a rooftop lounge. The brand will make its European debut in Paris's 16th arrondissement this autumn, with 47 apartments, a lounge, a breakfast room and fitness centre. bridgestreet.com/mode

PREMIER APARTMENTS has rebranded as Premier Suites and Premier Suites Plus – the latter adds Nespresso machines, Elemis amenities and a concierge service. The 45-apartment Premier Suites Plus Glasgow opened in January, and the brand is set to open in 12 destinations – including Belgium and the Netherlands – over the next three years. premiersuites.eu

STAYCITY opened its second Birmingham property in the Jewellery Quarter in February. Staycity Aparthotels Newhall

From top: SACO the Cannon, London; Apple Apartments Limehouse, London; Old Town Chambers, Edinburgh

Square has 170 apartments and offers the brand's first ever dining offering – a lounge serving hot drinks, a continental breakfast and afternoon snacks. Staycity also added 125 new apartments to its property near Heathrow last month – bringing the total to 269 – and plans to treble its portfolio to 3,500 apartments by the end of next year in places such as Marseilles, Lyon and London's Covent Garden. staycity.com

APPLE APARTMENTS launched a new Liverpool property last month on Dale Street, with 35 studio apartments and a 24-hour reception. The brand also opened three new London properties last summer – Greenwich O2 (a ten-minute drive from the venue), Kensington Gardens (set along Kensington High Street) and Limehouse in the east. apple-apartments.com

THE ASCOTT LIMITED will complete a renovation of the 129-unit Citadines Barbican by the end of the summer. The company, which also operates Ascott the Residence, Somerset Serviced Residence and Quest

Apartment Hotels, plans to double its portfolio to 80,000 apartments by 2020, 10,000 of which will be in Europe. the-ascott.com

MARLIN APARTMENTS will open its first aparthotel on Westminster Bridge Road, ten minutes' walk from London Waterloo station, in 2017. The 236-unit property will be part of a mixed-use development with a restaurant, offices and shops. marlinapartments.com

SILVERDOOR has added 20,000 apartments to its global portfolio over the past two years, bringing the total to 120,000. New locations available to book with the agent range from Dover to Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. silverdoor.co.uk

GO NATIVE plans to double its total number of apartments to more than 3,000 by 2018, with new sites in London Stratford, Waterloo and Victoria in 2016, and London South Bank, Croydon, Manchester and Edinburgh in 2018. These will be followed by Glasgow, Birmingham, Newcastle and Reading. gonative.com

FRASERS HOSPITALITY plans to more than triple its global portfolio from 9,000 to 30,000 units by 2020. Last September, it launched its Capri aparthotel brand in Frankfurt's central business district, with a 24-hour fitness centre and an all-day restaurant. In January, it opened the five-star Fraser Suites Geneva, which offers a business centre, a gym and concierge services. frasershospitality.com

OAKWOOD WORLDWIDE will triple its number of properties this year, opening in locations such as Brisbane (this month). It will add another 28 properties in Asia over the next three to five years. oakwood.com

Below: Oakwood Leather Lane, London



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