

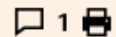
Travel

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City dwellers seek rural retreats to sit out the crisis

Some holiday home companies are seeing a surge in demand

Tom Robbins 2 HOURS AGO



While much of the global travel industry shuts down, one niche has seen a flurry of booking activity this week: rental properties to which people can retreat and self-isolate in style. “No one wants to be in London,” says Bella Seel, founder of private travel company ALS Sun. “They are looking for a safe haven where they are happy to be in lockdown for a long time.”

Seel reports a rush of inquiries and bookings, particularly following Boris Johnson’s speech on Monday advising greater social distancing measures. Her clients have been prepared to double their usual holiday budgets; one booking was for a nine-bedroom home in the Home Counties, which the client took for three months at £50,000 per week.

Specialist self-catering companies have noticed a similar trend. Classic Cottages, which rents 1,100 properties across southern and western England, saw a doubling in web traffic on Monday from people looking for bookings in the next fortnight. Its occupancy for Easter is up 25 per cent on last year, although some guests are also postponing trips.

The Landmark Trust, a charity which offers holidays in historic buildings, also reports strong short-notice demand. Following Johnson's speech on Monday it took bookings for the Martello tower, a defensive fort in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, whose walls are more than two metres thick, and the China Tower, a castellated octagonal tower surrounded by forest in Devon. The charity says it has enhanced cleaning at its properties, including the use of virucidal disinfectants.

In the US, New York-based luxury rental company StayMarquis says it is seeing an "unprecedented influx" of what it calls "Doomsday bookings". It offers more than 600 homes in the Hamptons, Hudson Valley and Berkshires, and says bookings increased tenfold in the past week, driven by families cancelling trips overseas and wanting to escape the city. Its more expensive properties have been most in demand and renters have been requesting a "right of first refusal", giving them the chance to extend their stay if someone else tries to book it for the subsequent period.



A house in the Hamptons let by StayMarquis" © Laura Berhman

Link to coverage: <https://on.ft.com/3a2mYiU>