

Flexi-term letting could be the answer

Winter in Cape Town often results in a drop in visitors looking for short-term accommodation, while much of Joburg and its surrounds become reminiscent of a ghost town over summer months when residents seek December refuge closer to the beach.



Image: www.freedigitalphotos.net

Guest houses and B&Bs have traditionally offered short-term accommodation with higher rates in exchange for a warmth and hospitality not generally seen in large hotels and which is non-existent in self-catering units. However, these higher fees, while both expected and warranted, exclude a longer, medium-term market that needs accommodation at reduced rates.

The conundrum: higher rates with lower occupancy versus lower rates with a higher occupancy.

Lorna Vermeulen, former owner of a successful guest house in Clydesdale, Pretoria, said she had several medium-term guests who turned into a win-win scenario for both her bottom line and the guests themselves. "Over the years of running our guest house we had a few longer term guests, but quite by accident. They generally stayed from Monday to Friday, but the rooms would be completely vacated over the weekends so they could be rented out at our normal short-term rate during that time. These longer guests did not expect the same services, so decreasing the rate to retain these guests made a lot of financial sense."

Vermeulen cites factors such as having a consistent income, the safety of having an additional person on the premises, and increased occupancy as a few reasons why her business benefited.

The fact is that it is unusual to find an establishment that is fully booked throughout the year - and this is even more apparent during quiet seasons. Vermeulen suggests that the owners of these establishments set aside a room or two for more flexible lengths of stay.

Flexi-time accommodation

Liezl Hesketh is the founder of [TheRoomLink.co.za](https://www.theroomlink.co.za), a South African rental site dedicated to offering flexi-time accommodation. The site lists rooms available by the day, week, month or longer - and even caters for commuters who are looking for weekday-specific housing.

Hesketh says she has seen a surge of renters looking for more flexible options for their stay. These guests include commuters looking for a 'Monday to Friday' rate, mature students, and even interns from other countries.

"We are getting more and more requests from online users who are looking for greater flexibility," said Hesketh, whose client base consists primarily of students, young professionals, city-to-city commuters, and interns from abroad. "We have seen a gap in the short-term accommodation market, where rooms are not always filled, but which could be if the owners and agents targeted an additional group of potential visitors."

Hesketh believes the lack of flexible term accommodation in this market will increase once owners realise the potential of having a consistently long-term income and the win-win scenario for both renters and owners.

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