From: Kathrin Huber
To: CD STRComment
Subject: Letter regarding short term rental
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To whom it may concern

I am a Leavenworth local since + 2o years. I come straight from the heart of the Alps (bear in mind that English is my second language please) and some of Leavenworth's, tourism related growing pains, seem all to familiar.

The fact, that Mayrhofen in Tyrol (my hometown), focused on quantity versus quality, was good for the economy, however not good for many other things. Therefore, I set out to find a new home, which happened to be 5000 miles away. When I first set foot into Leavenworth, I thought: "This is like home, only without the crowds." Well, it was only a matter of time, before everyone else discovered the beauty of this area and wanted to spend time here. I can't blame them. However, there is a fine line between keeping it pleasant to live in and the economy thriving.

Even in my hometown they now realized that there needs to be a different approach and the latest trend is "gentle tourism". Meaning, back to the roots. However, it is not easy to back paddle once the word is out. They do their best, but sure wish they'd have looked at other towns, for leading examples. There weren't any though, since it all started growing at the same time. Now, Leavenworth, does have an opportunity to learn from the trials and tribulations of a place, that they are actually trying to mimic – Austria/Bavaria and I hope to be able to bring some of this insight from overseas.

As far as the short term rental situation goes… I'm absolutely against badly managed, nuisance causing Airbnb's, but think prohibiting all short term rentals won't be the answer nor fair. Finding a middle ground, could still keep everyone happy. The town, the neighbors, the guests and the renters (which, especially in times like these) rely on that income, to pay mortgage and taxes. I have a 5 year degree in tourism and marketing and have been in the industry my whole life. My family owns a Hotel in Austria, which I managed for many years and I managed hotels in Leavenworth, before I became an Airbnb Superhost. With experience on both sides, I actually have to say that sometimes Airbnb, can be managed much better than a Hotel, due to the reviews, between the hotel owner and guests. As a host, once gets a very good feel, for who and how these guests are and by looking at previous reviews, it allows one to choose the right cliental. In a Hotel, you never know and people often don't "behave" as well, because a Hotel takes anyone's reservation, without previous screening. At Airbnb, one actually gets black

listed and can't use the account any further, if they screwed up. That said, I am always surprised, as to how many complaints there are about Airbnb's. It's clearly the management or lack thereof.

I think it is important that we make a difference in judgement, of each individual short term rental. I've heard horror stories of non-stop partying at Airbnbs, in the midst of a quaint little housing community. That is disrespectful and an absolute no go.

First rule of prevention of that. Occupancy/group size. I know that more money is to be made with groups, but the quality is priority, therefore I only allow a maximum of 2 guests, with very little exceptions.

Anyone who'd like to book my Airbnb, needs to agree to the house rules, which state that there will be fines, if the guests are disturbing the neighbors in any way. Partying is an absolute no go at my rental and I make sure the guests know that. If disrespected, they get fined, kicked out and reported to Airbnb.

That said, I had a company manage my Airbnb for a short amount of time and it didn't take me very long to find out, that they collect an arm and a leg, however were not doing what, one would think, their main focus should be. Proper management! Granted, sometimes that's not even possible, when they have many units and they are busy with correspondence, marketing, cleanings, etc. That's why I am really on the fence about Airbnb management companies. If someone wants to make money off of rentals, I think they should put in the work as well. But that's just my personal opinion.

Maybe it has improved, since I had my experience, but from the complaints I hear by locals, it hasn't and I wonder who runs these rentals, that get the most complaints? I'd say one factor of permitting a short term rental, could be that it is "manageable". Meaning, someone on site or very near by, who's main focus is making sure that only the amount of booked guests check in and they respect the house rules. In Austria we say: "When the cat is out of the house, the mice dance." Meaning, if guests know, no one is around, they are much more likely to behave in ways, that they wouldn't if they knew the owner is right around the corner and got an eye on them.

I believe doing it right, is not as easy as just renting out a room or your home and collect a bunch of money. It actually takes a lot of money to set it up right, know-how, experience, supervision, dedication and effort, as well as constant availability, for guests and neighbors to be gotten ahold of. That might already make someone think twice about turning their spare room or home into an Airbnb/Vrbo. To buy a second home here and just turn it into an Airbnb is a bit problematic, I believe. That's when it is literally "out of control' and therefore making a bad name for all Airbnbs.

For me, it is essential to be able to be a host for part of the year, because the cost of living here, let alone mortgage and taxes on a house that was once invested in, in 2004, is close to unaffordable, these days. Unless one scored a well paying job. Which brings me to my empathy, for young people, who didn't get a foot in the door, back then when it was affordable, nor have great income. For this town to run well, we need everyone to be able to exist here. That's why I am all for providing affordable housing, but think it'd be better to build that and hold off on more Hotels and houses to be added, for now. In Austria, for instance, it is not allowed for someone from Germany (2 hrs drive away from my town), to buy a place, that he does not intend on living in.

Furthermore, the tourist board, also realized, that making friends with the enemy (short term private rentals) is better than trying to beat them. That's why they work in conjunction with them. Offer them help setting it up properly and do it right. Maybe some sort of short course needs to be made, for people who want to step into the rental business.

I also think it'd only be fair and might naturally keep it all at bay, for Airbnb as well as Hotel owners, to be taxed the same, much like in my hometown. This money can go towards, for instance, infrastructure or things like xc trails (which are all free of charge, as a service to the guest).

Airbnb makes contracts with individual towns. Airbnb collects, actually quite a lot of money from the guest on top of what the host charges. This money goes towards taxes, so I think (if that is not already in place), then there needs to be an agreement, that they pay a certain amount towards the city of Leavenworth.

In my opinion and from what I have experienced, there needs to be money set aside and large focus on infrastructure of a town, before we pack it full of people. Much like Airbnb's need to be set up correctly, before filled with guests. For the town, that means enough parking, public toilets, proper garbage management, etc. before more growth is allowed. New additions, may it be Airbnb, Hotels or anything else, needs to be carefully reviewed and well thought out, before permitted. They built a large underground parking lot in my hometown, when they decided to turned the town center into a pedestrian zone, for instance. Which is expensive, I get it, but money can be allocated from everyone that's visiting and staying here, through this tourist tax, collected from Airbnb.

Anyways, as you can see, I could keep on writing forever. To sum it all up, for now: Growth is inevitable, but can be steered in the right direction. I am not against tourism, but there is a right and a wrong way to do it and if there is anything I can do to not have the same exact thing happen here, as in my hometown Mayrhofen, I'm more than happy to dedicated my time to it. So please let me know if there is any way I can help or if you'd like to sit down and brainstorm.

Thanks for your time. Kat