



Pay Less Rent ... Or Even None at All!

THESE SAVVY WOMEN ARE PAYING THEIR LANDLORDS FAR LESS RENT THAN YOU ARE. SEE HOW THEY DO IT (AND STEAL THEIR IDEAS!), FROM PAYING 20% LESS TO PAYING NO RENT AT ALL. READ ON, AND TAKE NOTES

BY SARAH BROWNING-DE VILLIERS

I learnt there were two people who were happy to rent a bay each

PAYING 20% LESS RENT

Name **Lesley Marchant, 24**
Occupation **Writer and journalist**
Lives in **A one-bed flat in Cape Town's Claremont**
Monthly rent **R6 500**
What she's actually paying **R5 300**

'I moved out of my parents' house when I started working two years ago. After spending my varsity years commuting for at least two hours every day, I refused to do the same for my job – my poor clutch-leg just couldn't handle it any more. I got incredibly lucky when a colleague's boyfriend moved from Cape Town to Jo'burg, and his one-bedroom flat was perfect for me.

'The catch? At R6 500/month, it was about R1 500 out of my price range. The high rent was because the flat used to be a two-bedroom, but a previous owner had removed one of the second bedroom's walls to make the living area bigger. It also happened to come with two parking areas – one a bay inside the gate, and the other an automated garage outside the block.

'This was frustrating because the flat is so close to my office that

I don't actually need a car – I can walk or Uber if necessary. My boyfriend also lives right up the road in case I need transport. I'd essentially be paying more than I could afford for amenities I didn't need – not exactly ideal. 'That's when my dad had a brainwave: why not rent out the parking to other tenants in the block? It made total sense and, after asking around, I learnt there were two people who were happy to rent a bay each. Both people were one half of a couple, and they'd been parking on the street for months while their partners used the bay inside the gate. 'I could charge a cool R600 from each of them per month to add to my rent – and the extra R300 over my R5 000 budget was a small price to pay for the flat of my dreams.'

PAYING ZERO RENT

Name **Sarah Kerr, 32**
Occupation **Marketing manager**
Lives in **A two-bed flat in Cape Town's Gardens**
Monthly rent **R12 000**
What she's actually paying **R0 in summer; R2 000 in winter**

'I've been renting out a room in my apartment for two years via Airbnb. I rent the smaller of my two bedrooms, mostly to international tourists, while I stay in the bigger bedroom.

'I first discovered Airbnb while I was travelling in Hong Kong. Staying at an Airbnb listing worked so well I thought I'd try it for myself when my housemate moved out.

'Guests are able to use my WiFi and have access to the shared bathroom and kitchen – though I find most tourists opt to eat out 90% of the time, so it isn't too inconvenient for me. I also include fresh orange juice, tea, coffee and condiments in the package. The lady who cleans for me once a week assists with guests' laundry, if they need it. I don't have a TV but this has never put guests off booking.

'My room is rented out 90% of the time in summer

and 70% of the time in winter, so the rental income I get is pretty stable. I've come to rely on it: in summer, it can pay my entire rental bill of R12 000/month; in low season this drops a little, so I end up paying in about R2 000 per month in the colder months.

'I've never had an issue with bad guests or feeling unsafe using Airbnb. The platform is great for screening guests and ensuring that things like payment are secure. I'm careful about the kind of guests I accept – they have to supply their driver's licence or passport to verify their identity. I also tend to choose guests who have positive reviews from other hosts on Airbnb, which is a trustworthy way of screening people.

'I earn far more renting my spare room to tourists than I would with a long-term housemate – and if I don't like a guest, at least they aren't staying for long!

'I'd definitely recommend this strategy to other women, particularly through Airbnb. It can help to pay off debt or save some cash if you're thinking of starting your own business, going on holiday or treating yourself to things you can't usually afford. Meeting other people who don't live in Cape Town also makes me appreciate how lucky I am to live in such an incredible city.'

Kerr offers a service to help you set up as an Airbnb host. Visit Consultbnb.com for more.

I earn far more renting my spare room to tourists than I would with a housemate

I've been working at home for just over two years, and I claim back about 30% of my rent at the end of each tax year as a work expense

PAYING 30% LESS RENT

Name Leigh Carew, 28
Occupation Graphic designer
Lives in A two-bed flat in Jo'burg's Bryanston
Monthly rent R15 000
What she's actually paying R11 000

'When my roommate moved out of our two-bed, I had a choice: downsize to a one-bed that I could afford by myself or get creative about supplementing my income. Our flat was beautiful and central, and I didn't want to move.

'I'm a graphic designer and, around the same time, I'd been toying with the idea of going freelance. Working for myself now made sense: I had a free room to turn into office space at home, and I'd save on petrol by not having to travel to work and back every day.

'I spoke to a professional tax accountant about my options – mostly because I didn't know how my tax deductions would work when I wasn't getting a pay slip every month with PAYE coming off automatically. He also explained the tax I could claim back if I created a home office.

'I've been working at home for just over two years, and I claim back about 30% of my rent at the end of each tax year as a work expense. This is because my second bedroom is used solely as an office space, so I can claim back this room's square-metre area against my overall flat size and monthly rent. It adds up to a monthly saving of just over R4 000.

'There are other savings: I can claim back for my phone and Internet line (which I use for work), my utility bill, my equipment (like my laptop and software), stationery and client-entertainment costs. I keep a logbook of mileage on the occasions I have to drive for work, and claim back for this as well.

'I wouldn't want to do my own tax return – I'd hate to get it wrong. An accountant can help you make the right claims for working from home – it's definitely worth it. I spend about R1 300 a year on my accountant, and he saves me a small fortune! He sends me a simple Excel spreadsheet so I can track my work expenses each month, and I submit this to him with my petrol logbook when tax-return time hits.

'Even better: my small business is growing, I can dictate my own hours and I haven't had to sit in peak-hour traffic for two years!'



INSPIRED? TIPS TO DO IT YOURSELF

IF YOU'RE RENTING OUT A ROOM

Stay safe
 'If you're going to rent out a room, use a regulated platform such as Airbnb or CouchSurfing to ensure your safety,' says Amanda Hamilton-Attwell, the business and entrepreneur consultant behind *Businessdna.co.za*. 'They ensure payments are secure and guests are screened, and provide a portal for any complaints and concerns.'

Up-sell your services

Another way to supplement your income? 'Add the service of being a local host to your visitors on Airbnb,' says Hamilton-Attwell. 'Offer to take guests on activities such as wine tours, which allows you to charge extra. You can offer other options – like cooking dinner for guests – to increase what you charge.'

Don't Photoshop!

'If you're planning to rent out a space, ensure the images you use and the info in the listing are honest,' says Hamilton-Attwell. 'Guests expect to get what they've been promised, and a bad review after a visit could kill your popularity.' Also, add as much helpful info to your listing as possible. How close are you to public transport, great nearby sights and amenities? These are things that will attract people to your listing.

IF YOU'RE RENTING OUT A PARKING BAY OR GARAGE

Get permission
 'Check your body corporate's rules and perhaps let them know the vehicle registration number of whoever will be parking in the bay that's allocated to your property,' says Hamilton-Attwell. 'It helps with security, and ensures you aren't breaking any rules.'

Draw up a contract

If you're renting out a bay or garage long-term, draw up a formal contract so you're on the same page as your lessee. In the contract, add any complex rules the owner of the vehicle would need to abide by: not having oil leaking from their car, for example, and ensuring the vehicle is legal and roadworthy.

IF YOU'RE WORKING FROM HOME

Get a professional accountant
 'A professional will know exactly what you can claim for, and what records you should be keeping to ensure you do so legally,' says Hamilton-Attwell. 'The money you invest in a qualified accountant will be much less than what they'll help you save on tax.'

Track everything

Hang on to receipts, keep a small notebook in your car to note down trips made for work (including dates and reasons for trips) – basically, keep anything and everything that will create a paper trail to validate a claim. Not only will this help when it comes to tax-return time (there's no way you'll remember every little expense without these records), but if SARS ever requests proof of your claim, you'll have it on hand. File and archive everything by year, and keep for a few years just in case.

Plan ahead

Between tax returns, you won't be receiving refunds from SARS – but you'll still need to make monthly payments, like rent. Ensure you have enough money saved, or income coming in, to make full payments in the periods between tax returns. And when you do get your money back from SARS, stash it to help with the coming year's monthly payments. ■