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## The Price Of Privacy Is On The Rise. Can We Afford It?

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Consumer Tech

Booking data across the hotel sector shows an exodus from dense cities and an increased demand for seclusion. Get ready for sticker shock.



Richstone Properties' Villa Charlotte, a new private rental property on the island of Mauritius.

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Exclusive. Elite. Reserved. These status symbols of the hotel industry had almost lost all meaning in the prior decade of democratized travel. Then the coronavirus came and changed their connotations. Now, exclusive means remote. And private (supposedly) means safe. Here's who is leading the trend:

## A-List Accommodations

On the high end of resorts and private vacation rentals, Aman, Belmond, safari outfitter Roar Africa, and London's Richstone Properties — which can each welcome guests via private aircraft — are among the boldfaced names attracting the world's wealthiest clientele despite Covid. They were all outperforming before the onset of the virus, and now they're the first to reopen, reporting an "uptick in demand" for their most secluded retreats.

Don't expect a discount. [Demand is rising](#) for remote properties promising safety within socially distant venues, equipped with consistent coronavirus testing for staff and strict new hygiene standards. Aman, which sells remote suites in Utah for nearly \$7,000 per night, has rolled out vigorous [new cleaning standards](#) across its ultra-luxe properties. In South Africa, [Roar Africa](#) is selling eight day safaris for \$60,000 per person, distance guaranteed.

In Europe, it's markets like the Swiss Alps, the Baltic coast, and the Spanish and Greek islands that are seeing a recovery first, according to STR, an aggregator of hotel and tourism data. In the Alps, hotel occupancy rates have already spiked between 60-70% during the last two weekends in May, [STR data shows](#). Comparatively, in gateway cities such as Paris, London, and Amsterdam, room cancellations still outweigh new bookings.

Now that travel is unrestricted within France, Richstone Properties' private villa in Provence called [La Bergerie](#) is already fully booked for July and August. "We have had no cancellations due to the pandemic. In fact, we have had bookings because of Covid. [For example], a Monaco family stayed at La Bergerie for six weeks in self isolation in April and May," reports Genevieve Lawrie, Richstone's director of sales and operations.

Richstone's business is driven by full property buyouts, sourced by a private network of about 50 travel agents operating from the UK, Europe, the Middle East, and Russia. "We haven't lowered our prices because of Covid," adds Lawrie, who books guests for the

jaw-dropping rate of 62,500 Euro per week at La Bergerie, and 25,000 GBP per night at [Templeton House](#), Winston Churchill's former mansion in southwest London.



The Templeton House, Winston Churchill's former mansion in southwest London COURTESY RICHSTONE PROPERTIES

For the world's wealthiest travelers, privacy and security is everything — and technology helps provide it, before anyone even arrives on property. “I know all my agents personally, because it can be quite a strange world out there and you have to have trust. Many of them won't even look at email. We send signed contracts through WhatsApp, because of encryption. It's a question of protecting our brand.”

End-to-end encryption is considered the gold standard in secure data, which is now more critical than ever to a travel industry trying to woo price-insensitive customers who value their privacy so highly they'll spend fortunes trying to guarantee it.

On the flip side, the big box, open-to-the-public chain hotels that can't offer seclusion are feeling the pain of pandemic. Now, they're scrambling to fill the void left by canceled conferences and the sudden cessation of corporate with deep discounts and “3rd night free” offers. But this void can't be filled by the wealthy few.

“Corporate, group business travel sets the base in our hotels in many cases. That will not recover anytime soon, until a vaccine, or when states start to really open up. I know I speak for all my fellow hoteliers when I say we’re all going down a similar path. Whether it’s a Marriott, Hilton, or Hyatt, we want you to feel safe,” said Gus Vonderheide, Vice President of Global Sales Americas, Hyatt Hotels & Resorts during a Business Travel News webinar last month.

## **Selling Survival**

Aviation is experiencing a similar go-private phenomenon. First class travelers who once flew commercial find themselves more willing than ever to pay [private jet premiums](#) for safer skies.

Sentient Jet, which is part of the multi-billion dollar OneSky private aviation portfolio, caters to 6,000 high-net-worth customers. “I have seen a surge in demand since the month of March. The request volume is at an all time high,” Andrew Collins, CEO of Sentient Jet [told Forbes](#).

At the same time, commercial air travel might never return to pre-Covid levels. “There will be more supply than demand in the air travel space, and there will be less flights,” said Hank Benedetti, Managing Director for American Airlines in May.

“Internationally, at the low point in April, we only had three long haul flights a day, out of our entire global network. We’re slowly reinstating all of that.”

In a post-Covid world, many far-flung adventures—once attainable with an EasyJet ticket and rumpiled JanSport backpack—may become the purview of the rich. Though luxury travel has always been a playground for the affluent, the price of isolation will demarcate the haves versus the have-nots more starkly than ever before.

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