

## Opinions

# Is co-living the wave of the future?

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Millennials and other younger generations are living with like-minded people in locations around the globe, which could influence hotel experiences, and the age of people making decisions, down the line.



By Becca Chester

Rick, a 34-year-old entrepreneur, enjoys co-living as it has helped him “try new places and experiences while having some of the comforts of home.” He adds that, although he would like to have his own space, he finds the appeals of co-living are “meeting others and saving money.”

Pamela, age 40, says she “likes meeting new people, the sound of life around and sharing,” and co-lives “for the experience—the more the merrier.” She further says that co-living allows for fluidity and, as a traveler, she looks for “flexible packages—a couple weeks or months.”

### What exactly is co-living?

A variety of venues are self-branded as co-living. Some of these establishments evolved specifically from co-working spaces (e.g. the very popular WeWork now has WeLive locations). A few others identifying as co-living are, in fact, large houses leased by one owner with subtenants, and are loosely modeled on the hacker house Mark Zuckerberg rented in 2004. Many are specifically developed as a unique hybrid of hostel, dormitory, summer camp and commune, either in an existing structure or newly built. All venues have basic standards of cooperation and rules for sharing food, cooking, living and working together, which are agreed upon by tenants. Many also offer shared activities and events. In a sense, they all seem to be a variant of an extended family unit or small community, available either on a nightly, monthly or mobile membership basis.

### Why is co-living a popular and growing concept?

“Millennials are connected but not tethered,” a [2014 Forbes article](#) stated.

There’s a large number of Gen Xers and millennials actively pursuing a globally-nomadic lifestyle. The “have-Wi-Fi-will-travel” mantra has empowered them and allowed for new possibilities, which have led to new ventures. They don’t want to wait for retirement to see the world. They can work and travel, while temporarily sharing space with like-minded people. A commitment to one home, one city, one country is no longer valued or needed. They are not ready to settle down and are, in fact, migratory in nature. A transient lifestyle has its drawbacks—relocation to a new city can lead to an overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation. The comradery of co-living spaces helps to counteract these feelings.

Migration to cities has for the first time in many years surpassed moves to suburbia. A lively, metropolitan environment is more appealing than a rural or suburban one for this generation. They seem keen to seek higher-paying jobs and experiences within cities, where traditional rentals are high priced and do not fit within their cost of living allowance. The shared real estate of co-living makes city living more affordable.

Characterized as connecting through their mobile phones, tablets or laptops, via Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter, this generation is perhaps too cynically caricatured as device-focused, with faces glued to mobile screens, or hopelessly narcissistic, taking innumerable selfies and posting on their favorite social media platforms.

Could it be that they actually enjoy real face-to-face interaction? There seems to be a value on the simple, friendly company of other people.

In the clamor to develop lifestyle and boutique hotels, was the desire for community a characteristic of this market overlooked by many of the more conventional hospitality developers?

Some hotel brands certainly have strived to create a sense of community within their lobbies and bar areas, particularly with the making lobbies the “great room.” And boutique hotels had it right about this group craving unique experiences, but they set the bar very high, spending lots of dollars making those experiences “bespoke” and “crafted.” Do these come off as contrived, too high-brow and lacking authenticity? In addition, the majority of the millennial generation cannot yet afford to stay at them. As Rick put it, a boutique hotel is “appealing, but always feels pricey and pretentious.”

Maybe one of the reasons why many co-living developers are better attuned to their target market is that many of them are their market—not an older

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generation of developers trying to predict or envision what they think millennials desire. The developers of co-living know what they want and have aspired to design appealing concepts and spaces for their generation.

Elvina Beck, founder and CEO of PodShare, has successfully developed five co-living spaces in the Los Angeles area and enjoys a continuous 94% occupancy. She's in her early 30s. She has plans for more in the pipeline, with additional locations in LA, San Diego, San Luis Obispo and San Francisco. When asked about the future of co-living, she notes, "trends are ... defined as behaviors that peak in a market then plateau or plummet into obscurity ... co-living—is not a trend—as long as it is affordable. Affordable housing is always sought after ... 35% of millennials live with their parents, and I doubt that is because they want quality time with their family."

An online survey site, [OneSharedHouse2030.com](http://OneSharedHouse2030.com) helps define what type of Co-Living would suit one's specific needs and personality, based on answers given. In its introduction, it paints a picture of our planet Earth in the year 2030: "There are expected to be 1.2 billion more people on the planet; 70% of us are living in cities now. In order to house 1.2 billion more people, all of us are sharing more household goods and services. We refer to this sharing as co-living. And many more of us are living this way now."

Co-Living may be for the millennial generation now, but for many more of us, it could be our future.

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