



REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2017

# Creative Hosts on Airbnb

Toronto



## Introduction

Creatives — people who work in visual arts, performing arts, photography, music, film, fashion, or entertainment — have always been an important part of Airbnb's DNA, and a big part of what makes Airbnb special. Airbnb's co-founders themselves are creatives, fellow graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design. While struggling to fund their fledgling company, co-founders Brian and Joe put their design backgrounds to use with an inventive marketing campaign in 2008, selling limited edition election-themed cereal boxes — ObamaO's and Cap'n McCain's. The proceeds of the cereal sales kept the company afloat.

We hope that Airbnb can be the “cereal boxes” for other creatives — allowing them to fund their art, personal projects, creative businesses, and livelihoods. Home sharing through Airbnb is an attractive proposition for creatives: the Airbnb host community over-indexes on creatives, from photographers and comedians to musicians and fashion designers to film directors and actors. The creative community, across many creative sectors, are often early adopters of Airbnb. We love that Airbnb can provide artists with a flexible way to support their craft and contribute to their communities.

The story of creative hosts is repeated across artistic hubs throughout the world — in Berlin, Florence, Los Angeles, New York, Paris, London, Tokyo, and beyond. In this report, we showcase the creatives in our host community of Toronto.

## Creative hosts on Airbnb

Toronto is undoubtedly one of the hubs of Canada's creative sector. According to the City of Toronto, one out of every four jobs in Canada's performing arts industries and one out of every three jobs in Canada's design industry are based in Toronto.<sup>1</sup>

As early adopters of Airbnb, creatives in Toronto helped to establish the sharing economy culture, and continue to be disproportionately represented in the Airbnb host community. In 2011, when Airbnb was still new and fledgling, creative hosts made up 20 per cent of the host population.<sup>2</sup> Creatives have been effectively managing multiple gigs, flexible jobs, self-employment, and alternative income options for ages<sup>3</sup> — and home sharing is a natural complement.

Today, creative hosts represent 14 per cent of the host community, compared to 3.4 per cent of the Toronto labour force that is employed in the community and entertainment sector.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed August 24, 2017 at <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-41204.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> 20% of the host population in Toronto was employed in art and creative industries, film, visual arts, entertainment, photography, music, or fashion.

<sup>3</sup> Accessed August 24, 2017 at <http://ccarts.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/StatusoftheArtistReport1126101-Copy.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed August 24, 2017 at <https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/City%20Planning/SIPA/Files/pdf/T/TES%202016%20Bulletin%20AO%20revised%20final%205.pdf>.

The majority of creative hosts in Toronto are women: 58 per cent female; 42 per cent male. All ages are represented in the Toronto creative host community, with 14 per cent of hosts under 30, 64 per cent of hosts between 30 and 50, and 22 per cent over 50.

### **Why creatives choose home sharing on Airbnb**

Home sharing can be a good fit with creatives' lifestyles, where creative work is often project-based, and the time between projects and contracts can be financially uncertain. Given that uncertainty, it's not surprising that 42 per cent of creative hosts in Toronto juggle multiple jobs or roles, oftentimes lower-income jobs. Home sharing through Airbnb can be a way for creatives to generate or supplement income when they need to. The income earned from Airbnb can be an important lifeline for creatives, smoothing out earnings during lulls, supplementing wages, and providing a financial boost that helps creatives pursue work and stay in their communities. The majority of creative hosts on Airbnb, 58 per cent, depend on Airbnb income as supplemental income to help make ends meet. Approximately seven per cent depend on home sharing as their primary income, helping to pursue their passions and build their profiles in this unpredictable and challenging sector.

Along with financial uncertainty, project-based creative work can also require travel — movies are filmed on location; photographers do destination shoots; artists travel to exhibitions; actors, costume, set and lighting designers work in summer theatre (Stratford, Shaw, etc.) around the province — meaning that creatives are sometimes away from home for long periods of time. Among creative hosts who share their home while away, travelling for work is the most commonly reported reason for home sharing. By comparison, among non-creative hosts who share their home while away, the most commonly reported reason for home sharing is travelling for vacation. Of creative hosts who share their primary home while away, 27 per cent<sup>5</sup> report sharing their home while travelling for work, often hosting medium- and long-term stays.<sup>6</sup> 18 per cent of trips hosted by creative hosts are for extended stays of more than seven nights.

Home sharing through Airbnb is a flexible tool for creatives in Toronto to generate income when they need it, accommodate an irregular work schedule, financially optimize extended business travel, and invest time in hosting when they can.

### **The importance of supporting creative communities**

A strong creative community makes places more attractive for both residents and visitors. The Toronto Arts Council found that residents of the city view the arts as a way to help improve the quality of life in the city as well as “highlight the city’s cultural diversity”.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, they found that “96% of Torontonians see at least one benefit of the arts to the city.” Building vibrant communities that support quality of life is critical to attracting a workforce and allowing areas to

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining 73% of hosts share their homes while away for reasons other than business travel, including staying elsewhere with friends and family in the city (27%), travelling for vacation (23%), other reasons (14%), or a combination of these reasons (9%).

<sup>6</sup> 21% of host respondents share their primary home as an entire home listing while staying elsewhere on the same property. These respondents were excluded from the analysis, given that they are not away from home.

<sup>7</sup> Accessed August 24, 2017 at <http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/TAC/media/tac/Impact/2016-TAC-TAF-State-of-the-Arts-Presentation-pptx.pdf>.

grow and prosper. In this way, supporting a creative community contributes to a strong community.

Alongside cultural diversity and community development, a strong artistic community can contribute to tourism. Toronto is home to world-class symphony orchestras, ballet companies, theatre troupes, comedy clubs, and art galleries; and also emerging artists, small venues, fledgling musical groups, and small-scale fashion production. The presence of these institutions is a major draw for cultural tourists. 67 per cent of Airbnb guests report that they attended cultural events and cultural attractions when they visited Toronto, apportioning 26 per cent of their travel budgets towards cultural activities and entertainment.

Airbnb recently announced a complement to home sharing in Experiences. Experiences are another way creatives can share their craft and contribute to tourism: 29 per cent of Experiences in Toronto are creative experiences in the arts, entertainment, fashion, or music, one of two of the largest categories of Experiences, the other being food and drink. We look forward to the way Airbnb Experiences can enhance travel for guests to Toronto and benefit creative Experience hosts alongside home sharing.

We believe that creative Airbnb hosts, and creatives in Toronto generally, make important contributions in their communities, helping to make the neighbourhoods of Toronto great places to live *and* visit.

## Meet our creative hosts in Toronto

### Ruth, Photographer

Airbnb has been a lifeline for Ruth as she has navigated a series of big life changes over the past three years. As the longtime caregiver to her aging mother, Ruth faced a significant challenge when her husband passed away. While she had a lifelong love of photography and developed a nascent business, she needed additional income to pursue her creative passion and continue caring for her mother at home.

Home sharing provided an opportunity to check both of those boxes, while also giving Ruth the opportunity to meet new people and develop long-term friendships. “Airbnb has really helped



me,” she says. “I haven’t been able to get out and see the world much - this brings the world to me, right in my own home.”

Ruth’s photography business Widow’s Endorphins has been growing year over year and allows her to share her love of photographing flowers with an ever-growing customer-base.

More than that, because she does much of her work from

home, her Airbnb guests can share in her projects. “Home sharing lets me pursue my love of photography and has helped me continue to grow the business,” she says. “It adds even more to the experience when my guests see how a photograph of a flower becomes a notecard, or draped kimono. An image on a notecard of the butterfly we saw in High Park, or the rose we planted on the balcony, or the cake and flowers from the birthday party. Great memories created together!”

While Ruth’s mother passed away just a few months ago, she is thankful for the people she has met through the platform, “My life is so much richer with all of these people in it.”



## Kathleen, Arts Teacher, Therapeutic Clown and Artist

Kathleen spent 15 years working in theatre and television, until one day, she saw an ad that captured her attention. “Sick Kids Hospital was looking for a therapeutic clown,” she says, “and I thought what a great opportunity it was to put my creative skills to work to help others.”

Today, Kathleen continues her work as a therapeutic clown artist in healthcare companioning residents living with dementia in long-term care. She is also an arts teacher and facilitator at the Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy, an arts-based learning centre for people living with memory loss.



She says that it is the one-on-one nature of her work that makes it truly meaningful. And she brings that experience of building one-on-one relationships to the guests she hosts in her spare room on Airbnb. “Hosting is a very relational exercise,” says Kathleen. “I have to be sensitive to the needs of my guests.”

Airbnb helps support Kathleen given the contractual nature of her healthcare work. It’s able to give her the flexibility she needs to bring in additional income when she needs it, but also allows her to use her space for creative work when she needs it. “Airbnb is the perfect way to fill in the gaps that I experience as an artist,” she says.

## Anet, Digital Artist

As a freelance digital artist, designer and photographer, Anet is always looking forward, trying to make sure her next job is lined up. Her career has allowed her to meet people across many fields, from automotives and travel to cyber-security and gaming. She has seen a similar pattern in her adventures as a host on Airbnb.

Anet's journey into home sharing started in 2016 at a host information session. Shortly thereafter she started to welcome people to her home and hasn't looked back. Airbnb has boosted her ability to freelance, and has even helped her get new work. It has also given her the ability to travel for work and leisure.



She loves welcoming guests to her home and has enjoyed the wide variety of people she's met from retired couples to business travellers and international tourists on vacation.

Anet sees a lot of integration between her digital work and her hosting on Airbnb. "I believe in a lifestyle which balances both online and offline life," she says. "Home sharing gives me the ability to achieve this balance while supporting my career."

## Peter, Mixed Media Artist

As a successful Multidisciplinary Artist & Designer, Peter has showcased his work in multiple galleries and has done commissioned installation art projects in several condo buildings in Toronto. He also has been featured on Getty Images, Toronto Star and Creative Mornings, yet he still can't help but get excited when guests mention that they booked his Airbnb listing because they love the look and feel of the house, and how they are drawn to his displayed artwork.

Peter has wanted to pursue art since he was young, but it's really in the last five years that he has been able to put more of his time into it. And his recent decision to join Airbnb has been further helping him achieve that goal.

The purchase of a townhome with his partner has allowed Peter to share their two additional bedrooms when they aren't being used by visiting friends. He loves welcoming guests into his home and creating new friendships and connections. Peter says his rooms have been regularly booked since joining Airbnb.



“The extra income helps cover the high cost of living in the city,” he says. “And anything extra? That goes to my art supplies!”



## Indrit, Actor, Theatre Producer

Indrit's Airbnb journey started through a love of travel. "When I'm travelling, I like being able to ask people about their life and perspective there. It's sort of a two-way system." Today, he is an active host on the platform and he also helps his parents manage their listing.



As a Toronto-based actor and theatre producer, Indrit appreciates the flexibility that Airbnb has given him to pursue his chosen career. "I travel a lot for my work and being able to share my home helps cover costs," he says. "My friends and family help support my guests if I'm away - it's really become a community effort."

If there is one lesson he has learned in his career as an artist, it is that the key ingredient when just starting out is time. But finding the time to properly invest in your work is difficult to do when there are bills to pay. "Dealing with bookings, hosting, these are all things that allow the freedom for you to focus on your art, as opposed to, say, working as a barista with an 8-hour shift," he says.

## Alex Garant, Visual Artist

Alex has had a lifelong passion for creating art. After suffering from a heart attack at the age of 30, her worldview was forever changed and she decided to fully commit to her artistic career.



After living in Toronto for 10 years, Alex decided it was time to own a house. When that dream finally became a reality she chose home sharing as a way to help pay the bills. She shares the space in her basement and says the flexibility of Airbnb allows her to still be able to welcome friends and family into her home.

Alex's journey in the world of painting has brought her to galleries all over Canada and the U.S., as well as Australia and Portugal. She has won multiple awards and been featured in several magazines, however she says it's her home in Toronto that grounds her.

Alex's experiences on Airbnb have solidified her belief that the sharing economy brings people together and allows them to help one another. More than that though, it has allowed her to personally flourish in her personal life as well as her career. "Airbnb made it easier for me to own a house, do art and be a host," she says, "it doesn't get much better than that."