

San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a short-term rental company such as Airbnb if you are travelling to another country or city?

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

gentrification	eviction	sentiment	unaffordable	flyer
unscrupulous	slander	eradication	sanguine	dingy

- _____ is the process by which an area of a city where poor people live becomes an area where middle-class people live, as they buy the houses and repair them.
- _____ is the process of getting rid of something completely.
- A _____ is an announcement or advertisement that is printed on a sheet of paper and given to people or posted on walls.
- _____ is the process of forcing someone to leave the house they are living in, usually because they have not paid their rent.
- A _____ is a belief or attitude towards something.
- An _____ person is willing to do things that are unfair, dishonest or illegal.
- If something is described as _____, it is too expensive for ordinary people to pay for it.
- If a place is described as _____, it is unpleasantly dark and dirty.
- _____ is the crime of saying something about someone that is not true and is likely to damage their reputation.
- A _____ person is confident and hopeful about what might happen, especially in a difficult situation.

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

- What does *SRO* stand for?
- What was the average rent for an *SRO* room in Chinatown in 2015?
- Which four adjectives does Airbnb use to describe Chinatown?
- How many blocks make up San Francisco's Chinatown?
- How many people feature on the "wanted" flyers posted around Chinatown?
- What is the average rent in San Francisco?

San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Level 3 • Advanced

Most Wanted: San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Posters in the city's Chinatown claim Airbnb landlords are 'destroying affordable housing for immigrant, minority and low-income families'

Julia Carrie Wong in San Francisco

22 July, 2016

- 1 San Francisco's gentrification wars have often featured people willing to make the debate over affordable housing extremely personal. During the first dot-com boom, members of the "Mission Yuppie Eradication Project" posted flyers encouraging residents of the once working-class Latino neighbourhood to "vandalize yuppie cars". During the current tech boom, as evictions soared, activists began painting the pavements in front of certain buildings with an image of a suitcase and a message: "Tenants here forced out."
- 2 But throughout all the turmoil, San Francisco's Chinatown – 24 crowded blocks that have been a point of entry for generations of low-income Chinese immigrants – has remained largely insulated from the arguments. Until now.
- 3 In recent weeks, "wanted" flyers have been posted around the neighbourhood featuring the names and photographs of 12 individuals. The crime in question? "Airbnb'ing our community" and "destroying affordable housing for immigrant, minority and low-income families."
- 4 Unlike a flyer posted recently in the Mission District that featured the heads of various tech CEOs, including Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky, impaled on spikes, the Chinatown flyer names and shames individual Airbnb hosts. "It expresses a growing sentiment and a reality that the community is being exploited by speculators and unscrupulous players in the housing market," said city supervisor Aaron Peskin, who represents the district that includes Chinatown.
- 5 "There's no question that there are an increasing number of illegal short-term rentals throughout the city and in Chinatown." Indeed, Peskin said that, just recently, he observed three French people leaving a Chinatown apartment building with their suitcases at 10am. The fact that a group of tourists staying in a residential building in the city that is home to Airbnb seemed remarkable shows how insulated Chinatown has been from the market forces affecting the rest of the city. "Chinatown has generally been preserved and defended against gentrification," said Joyce Lam of the Chinese Progressive Association.
- 6 Strict zoning laws enacted during the 1980s have protected the stock of single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, which serve as low-cost housing for newly arrived immigrants, as well as many elderly Chinese Americans. With their shared kitchens and bathrooms, Lam said the SROs can feel "like a village" to the multi-generation families crowded into single rooms.
- 7 But units that once changed hands solely through word of mouth or Chinese-language flyers posted on the street are now popping up on craigslist, Airbnb and other short-term rental sites, as landlords have realized that they can earn more money renting to college graduates, single adults and white people, Lam said. "It's changed the fabric of the SROs," she said, especially since the new residents often cannot communicate with Cantonese-speaking tenants. "It's a different kind of feeling."
- 8 The average rent of SRO rooms has increased as well, from \$610 in 2013 to \$970 in 2015, according to a survey conducted by the Chinatown Community Development Center. Those figures are remarkably low in a city where the average rent was \$3,907 as of June 2016 but increasingly unaffordable for many low-income immigrant families.
- 9 "Contrary to the message in the posters, we don't see the problem as caused by individual players," Lam said, adding that her organization supports citywide reform legislation aimed at strengthening short-term rental regulation. "We are more interested in having a meaningful discussion about San Francisco's longstanding housing issues than responding to anonymous attacks on individual San Franciscans," a spokesperson for Airbnb said in a statement.
- 10 The appeal of Chinatown to non-traditional residents is described on Airbnb's website, where a number of Chinatown listings feature photographs of the neighbourhood's famous Dragon Gate and paper lanterns. "Cramped. Crowded. Dingy. Delightful," reads the caption on Airbnb's neighbourhood description of Chinatown.
- 11 One Airbnb host who lists four rentals in Chinatown defended his preference for tourists over tenants. "We would rather leave rooms and

San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Level 3 • Advanced

apartments empty than rent them out because of rent control," he said. "Once tenants move in, they own the property ... they have more rights than property owners." That host was not featured on the "wanted" poster. None of the people on the "wanted" poster who currently have Chinatown units listed on Airbnb responded to queries.

- 12 Justin Hobbs, who is on the poster, said: "I've seen this flyer and have reported it to AirBnB and will be filing a police report. If I'm able to find the creator of the flyer, there will also be a lawsuit filed for slander as this is completely untrue." Hobbs said that he lives in Nob Hill, not Chinatown, and he does not rent out his apartment, which is his only residence.
- 13 Another one of the people on the poster, who asked not to be identified, was also frustrated by it. The individual said that he no longer lives in San Francisco but had used Airbnb once, several years ago, and has long since deactivated his
- account. "I don't see that what I did was criminal," he said. "The reason why I left San Francisco is because it was way over-gentrified and it was impossible to live as an artist, and now to get blamed as a gentrifier is just funny."
- 14 Jeff Chen, who was also featured on the poster, was more sanguine about being singled out. Chen, who moved to a different part of the city in May 2016, said that he rented out his apartment a few times on Airbnb in summer 2015, when he was travelling for work. "I don't really feel good about the poster but I can see why members of the community are concerned about the housing situation," he said. "I see stories about people who do Airbnb as a business and I can see how that would drive up housing costs ... I actually do identify with those concerns."

© Guardian News and Media 2016

First published in *The Guardian*, 22/07/16

4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- Why have activists posted "wanted" flyers around Chinatown?
 - because they are protesting against high rents in the city
 - because they believe low-income families are being forced out by landlords renting out properties through companies like Airbnb
 - because they are angry about Airbnb's description of Chinatown as cramped, crowded, dingy and delightful
- What does Airbnb want?
 - to stop anonymous attacks on individual San Franciscans
 - to have a meaningful discussion about the city's housing issues
 - to prevent other companies from renting out rooms in Chinatown
- What have SRO hotels in Chinatown traditionally provided?
 - low-cost accommodation for newly arrived immigrants and elderly Chinese Americans
 - low-cost rental accommodation for tourists visiting the city
 - affordable housing for people who made money during the first dot.com boom
- Why do some landlords prefer to leave rooms and apartments empty?
 - because they want to contribute to the gentrification of Chinatown
 - because they want to drive up rents by creating a housing shortage
 - because they believe that tenants have more rights than property owners

San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Level 3 • Advanced

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a noun meaning *someone who is young, earns a lot of money and lives in a city in a style that is too expensive for most people* (para 1)
2. a verb meaning *deliberately damage or destroy* (para 1)
3. a noun meaning *a state of uncontrolled activity* (para 2)
4. a verb meaning *push a pointed object through someone or something* (para 4)
5. a three-word verb phrase meaning *publish embarrassing facts about a person, especially in order to persuade them to change their behaviour or policies* (para 4)
6. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *appear very quickly or suddenly* (para 7)
7. an adjective meaning *small and crowded* (para 10)
8. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *choose one person from a group for special attention* (para 14)

6 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. enact | a. a lawsuit |
| 2. change | b. a survey |
| 3. conduct | c. a law |
| 4. drive up | d. a discussion |
| 5. file | e. hands |
| 6. have | f. costs |

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. Housing in San Francisco is becoming increasingly _____ for low-income immigrant families. [AFFORD]
2. Many people feel the area is being exploited by unscrupulous _____. [SPECULATE]
3. The Chinese Progressive Association wants a _____ discussion about housing issues. [MEAN]
4. Chinatown is described as dingy and _____. [DELIGHT]
5. One of the people named on the flyer _____ his Airbnb account a long time ago and no longer has it. [ACTIVATE]
6. A lot of people are opposed to the _____ of working-class areas of the city. [GENTRY]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- Governments should impose limits on how much rent can be charged by landlords.
- Gentrification is a good thing because it improves the condition of the buildings in a particular area.
- Companies like Airbnb should be banned from renting out rooms in working-class areas.

San Francisco flyers name and shame Airbnb hosts

Level 3 • Advanced

KEY

2 Key words

1. gentrification
2. eradication
3. flyer
4. eviction
5. sentiment
6. unscrupulous
7. unaffordable
8. dingy
9. slander
10. sanguine

3 Find the information

1. single-room occupancy
2. \$970
3. cramped, crowded, dingy, delightful
4. 24
5. 12
6. \$3,907

4 Comprehension check

1. b
2. b
3. a
4. c

5 Find the word

1. yuppie
2. vandalize
3. turmoil
4. impale
5. name and shame
6. pop up
7. cramped
8. single out

6 Verb + noun collocations

1. c
2. e
3. b
4. f
5. a
6. d

7 Word-building

1. unaffordable
2. speculators / speculation
3. meaningful
4. delightful
5. deactivated
6. gentrification