

'Rent a local friend': web idea eases travel blues

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Taking a vacation in an unfamiliar place? Forget the guide books and the maps, the ideal way to discover a city is with a friend who lives there -- even if you have to rent them.

That's the idea behind a burgeoning website created by a Brazilian, Alice Moura, who told AFP that its expansion to 15 major cities owed to pent-up demand for a one-on-one insider's tour.

"I thought mostly of backpackers. But many clients are elderly people who like personalized service. We also have families that don't like inflexible tours, and young people who want to know trendy places," she

said.

Her www.rentallocalfriend.com site started when she was living in London and a reader of her blog at the time asked her to play guide outside the usual [tourist](#) circuit.

Now, it covers cities including New York, New Delhi, Barcelona, Paris, Shanghai, Berlin and Buenos Aires.

Although relatively unknown compared to the big recommendation sites such as tripadvisor.com, Moura says her business has turned some client-guide "friends" into real friends after meeting up.

Those who do show visitors around can't expect much more than pocket money -- 80 euros a day in Milan, 77 dollars in Rio de Janeiro or 90 dollars in San Francisco, for instance -- "but it's more for the fun than the money," she said.

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