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## How a Weekend of Luxury Travel Saved Me as a Mother

A writer reconciles her life as a travel snob and new mom.



by ALYSSA SHELASKY 🕒 MAR 29, 2016

I'm a tough broad. I can write a book proposal, bake a pie, paint a wall, slay a first date, and Citibike home on the Brooklyn Bridge, all before midnight.

Which is why I was sort of made to be a single mom—a longer story for another time. But suffice it to say that there's very little I can't handle. My first six months with my wonderful daughter Hazel has been mostly pleasure, little pain. Except for one major upset—travel.

It took a long, hard trip to the fantastically luxurious—but also overwhelming—[Faena](#) in Miami to realize that I cannot survive traveling alone with child. (Well, *I can*, but barely.) Just flying there required (almost) more fortitude than I am physically or emotionally capable of.

It's great to know your boundaries, but this one is a real problem, considering a good chunk of my work comes from travel writing. And a massive chunk of my personal happiness has always come from escaping New York. And not just any escape. I'm accustomed to the finest hotels in the world: [Claridge's](#) in London, [Villa Orsula](#) in Dubrovnik, [The Dylan](#) in Amsterdam, etc.

What was I going to do? Now more than ever, I needed stellar vacations; I live in Dumbo, which is the coolest, but also noisiest, part of Brooklyn. I craved silence. And my daughter... she must see the universe! I had to find another way to get my travel on, a way to take off with family or friends, without forcing everyone to buy hotel rooms that met my outrageous standards.

So when I heard about [3rd Home](#)—a house-swap service for fussy, spoiled travel snobs like me, where people exchanged their second or third homes, a.k.a. beach properties and ski chalets—I thought, Oh God Yes.

I liked 3rd Home's strict commitment to pristine properties. (Sure, I'm a single mother who shops at sample sales and rides the subway—but I still want Frette to sleep on, Caudalie to wash in, and All-Clad to cook with.) This left no chance of dodgy lodgings like those I've been stuck with via Airbnb.

Since it's a members-only club, I pulled some travel-writer strings to surf the 3rd Home properties and book the right place. I considered beautiful, rustic estates in Vermont and charming waterfront havens in Nantucket, but ultimately chose The Ham House, a dramatic 1850 Italianate mansion in upstate New York. Fathom called it one of the [most romantic destinations](#) in the country. (It is [available](#) to non-3rd Home members as well.)



Obviously, I wasn't looking for romance-romance, but with a palace like this, I could haul my parents, my sister, her husband, and their one-year old; it meant my daughter would have plenty of people to play with her, while I—hopefully—could close my burning eyes for a second. And as a new mom, there's nothing more romantic than that.

So on a crisp winter day, we pulled into the regal Ham House, overlooking the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. My jaw dropped. This was not your average vacation rental. It was right out of the movie: *My Big, Waspy, Rich Wedding*; or where Claire Underwood would reside if she left the White House and moved to, um, Tivoli, New York.

We were casually greeted by Mr. Ham House, whose real name is Michiel van Dijk. He's a Dutch antiques dealer, real estate investor, and—added bonus—male model, with a taste level so exceptional, Diane Von Furstenberg could cry her eyes out.



Michiel guided us around the woozy dream of fireplaces, enormous European bedrooms and a sublime chef's kitchen, and then he left graciously, without lingering (unwelcome lingering being a major fear I had about staying in someone's home). Everything was immaculate.

As my family spread out into their various nooks and corners—my nephew with his toys in the living room, my mother in the kitchen at the Viking, my father in the library, my sister in the bathtub (one of many) and me, with my daughter, gazing at the gardens, swimming pool, and tennis court—I couldn't help but twirl her gleefully.

I had pulled it off. A luxurious, stress-free vacation with my family. We had space and privacy to get messy and silly and weepy and whimsy, the autonomy to be a family, in all our quirks and

quips; where the only noises at night were the hush of the weeping willow trees and songs of the moon—and, maybe, someone sneaking down the handsome stairwell for a snack.