

For beach reservations, you have a friend

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Team Best of ... doesn't want to be alarmist about this, but the summer of 2008 is getting away from you.

Yes, we know you're still basking in the mid-holiday glow. But already, some of Oregon's best beach rental houses are completely booked for the month of July.

Team Best of ... has learned this through sad experience. Thus, our reminder to those among you who like a little sand in your shorts come summertime.

In order to help you nail down the appropriate vacation rental, whether you're a party of two or 20, we recommend Ocean Odyssey at www.ocean-odyssey.com. The Yachats-based outfit manages houses from the Sea Lion Caves north to Seal Rock. The 68 properties listed run the gamut, from rustic to luxurious.

Sure, there are more comprehensive Web sites out there (Vacation Rentals By Owner at www.vrbo.com, comes to mind). But Team Best of ... has spent hours browsing for rentals from Astoria to Brookings, not to mention from Government Camp to Sunriver, and we keep coming back to Ocean Odyssey. Its straightforward home page points us easily toward the information we most want: location, availability, size and layout of the house.

Anyone who has the task of organizing a rental for a family reunion knows how challenging this can be. Family gatherings often include dogs, children, teenagers, high-maintenance in-laws and aging parents. Ocean Odyssey's Web site allows us to quickly screen for properties that will meet our needs.

Since most people want a view, Ocean Odyssey put a button on the home page that jumps to thumbnail photos and quick descriptions of all their oceanfront units.

Besides key details such as size, price and location, the thumbnails include small icons that indicate whether the house is pet friendly, and if it has a hot tub, a fireplace or an Internet connection.

A "search vacation rentals" button allows us to browse homes in a specific location or price range, or those with particular amenities.

Once we find a house that we like, clicking on the photo brings up a page where the most prominent button is "online booking." Clicking on that takes us to a calendar showing which days the house is available.

Veteran Web searchers for the perfect rental will recognize these as common features on many Web sites. But Ocean Odyssey goes one step further and includes a floor plan with the house description.

While seeing photos of individual rooms is helpful, we have found it makes a big difference knowing where the rooms are in relationship to each other. It lets us settle room assignments before we arrive with the assurance that we won't have to put the rambunctious teens anywhere near the insomniac in-laws.

The floor plan also has steered us away from houses where the fold-out sofa bed is next to the high-traffic kitchen area.

So check out Ocean Odyssey. But don't wait too long to do it.

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