

CRIME 10/11/2017 01:18 pm ET

Couple Uncovers Hidden Cameras In Nightmare Airbnb Stay: Police

Security experts weigh in on how to detect cameras and why they're becoming more common.

By Nina Golgowski



It was an Airbnb nightmare for a couple vacationing in Florida after they say they found their rental unit rigged with hidden cameras — something experts tell HuffPost is happening more often, but there are ways to detect.

Derek Starnes said he and his wife had already spent a full night at the Longboat Key home listed by Wayne Natt last month when he noticed a small hole on the side of the bedroom's smoke detector, he [told Tampa-based station WFTS](#).

Being employed in the tech industry, Starnes took the device down and inspected it, only to find a camera inside. Reviews of an SD memory card taken from the device, as well as a second in the living room, revealed footage of them, as well as other suspected victims, according to police.

"My wife and I are distressed by this situation. I hope more victims will come forward," Starnes said.



LONGBOAT KEY POLICE
This image was reportedly taken of the couple inside the Airbnb home by the hidden camera. The couple said they never gave their Airbnb host permission to film them.

Natt, 56, was arrested and charged with one count of video voyeurism, which is a third-degree felony. [A since-deleted Airbnb page](#) appearing to belong to him, and confirmed by Starnes to WFTS, shows 42 reviews by guests since 2015, earning him a stellar five-star rating.

Police said Natt has denied wrongdoing, claiming that the camera was there for consenting sex parties — something local authorities aren't quite buying.

"If everyone had knowledge, then why hidden cameras?" Lt. Bob Bourque [asked Fox 13 News](#). "His answer to that was, a better angle of video, which we don't necessarily believe."

For the record, the Starnes deny they gave any consent to be filmed. Airbnb, in a statement to HuffPost, said [hosts are required to disclose whether there are security cameras](#) or other surveillance equipment at or around the listing. They must also get consent where those devices are required.



WFTS
The couple said they were never informed that they'd be filmed inside of the rental, pictured among these townhouses.

Airbnb spokesman Benjamin Breit said the company is "outraged" over the allegations and that Natt has been permanently banned from using their services in the future.

A Google search for similar hidden camera cases in the news suggests this Longboat Key case is just a drop in the bucket, which security experts affirmed to HuffPost.

In Thomas Martin's line of work, handling hidden camera cases is "as common as picking up your pen and writing," he told HuffPost. Martin is a former supervisory federal agent and current president of [Martin Investigative Services](#) in Newport Beach, California.



LOREVISION VIA GETTY IMAGES
Hiding a camera in a smoke detector may be one of the easiest places, according to one security expert.

Martin's work often protects and serves corporations, banks, attorneys, and high-profile individuals, including celebrities. His company also [recently investigated a case of a camera found](#) in a corporate office's restroom.

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Over the last decade, there has been a rise in the number of secret surveillance bugs found during sweeps, he said, with his company finding them in 16 percent of their hunts. That's up from four to six percent between 1988 and 2005.

"There's a variety of sick crazy reasons," he said. Ultimately, he says it's because the technology has improved and people "are becoming more aware of it."

Ari Morse with investigative services company [Locaters International Inc.](#), in Daytona Beach, Florida, agrees.

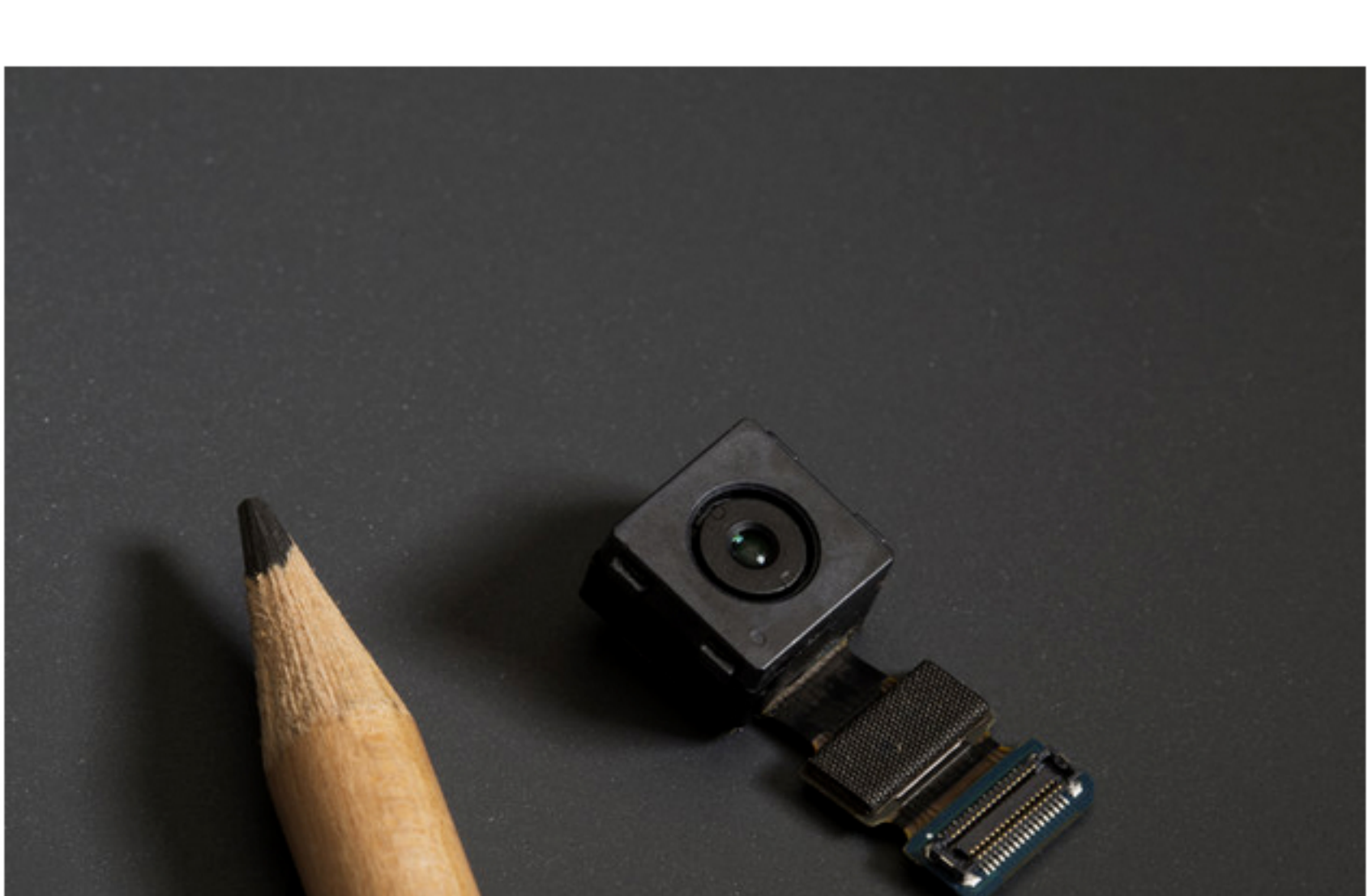
“It is more common because the cameras are so affordable nowadays.”

"It is more common because the cameras are so affordable nowadays," he told HuffPost.

An Amazon search lists a number of hidden cameras that are disguised as alarm clocks, USB chargers, smoke detectors, lamps, light bulbs and pens, to name a few.

"I'm not saying it to scare anybody but there are cameras that come in all shapes and sizes nowadays," Morse said.

People suspicious of being watched are advised to look around for anything out of the ordinary, including items showing signs of tampering.



ROY VIA GETTY IMAGES
Experts recommend examining surrounding items for possible cameras or signs of tampering. Often these cameras are placed over the bed or in front of the bed.

"I would make sure that the outlets look normal, that the smoke detectors are not necessarily near another one," Morse said. "If you're staying in a lower end hotel and there's a fancy piece of china there, [ask yourself] 'well does that fit?' If you're staying in a fancy hotel and you see a broken piece of plastic or a book that looks out of place, 'does it look right?'"

Martin also suggested inspecting the ceiling fan, lamp and dresser drawers. "Usually it's a small device that's easily detectable by us but not by the naked eye and it's put over the bed or in front of the bed," he said.

"The smoke detector would probably be one of the easiest," Morse said, reasoning that its power source can be concealed. "You can run the power through the ceiling, though sometimes they are battery powered."

Battery-powered cameras can only operate for a finite amount of time, making them less desirable. There are ways to attach and hide battery packs, though that requires more time and expertise, which most creeps lack, he said.

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Both Martin and Morse acknowledged that there are a number of devices for sale that are marketed as able to detect hidden cameras, but they're not as reliable as one would hope. A glance of such [products' reviews on Amazon](#) appear to confirm that assessment.

For those who have serious concerns about being secretly monitored, both men advise calling in the professional, since they are equipped with sophisticated technology and expertise to sniff out such bugs.

"Most of the time, for people to do it the right way, it's sometimes cost prohibitive because it takes a team of people," Morse said.

Martin also warned that not all debuggers are experts like they claim.

"The vast majority don't have the skill, knowledge, and more importantly, they don't have the equipment," he said, while describing that pricey equipment as including room X-rays and scanners that detect electronic signals.







"A lot of guys just have a magic wand, wave it around," he said of the electronic devices you can buy online. "We bring the real deal."

"I know that it probably sounds very scary," Morse said of all of the information and security measures out there. "We've seen it a lot because that's just what we do."

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