SHORT-TERM RENTAL STARTUP CHECKLIST

From idea to your first guest | A practical, printable checklist from Joan Friedenfels & Jean Adair

1. Decide if hosting is right for you

☐ Decide whether you have the time, interest, and temperament for hospitality.

☐ Plan who will manage guest communication, complaints, and emergencies.

☐ Consider alternatives if STR use no longer works: long-term rental, second home, or sale.

2. Research your market

☐ Identify why travelers visit the area (attractions, events, universities, hospitals, business).

☐ Compare similar Airbnb and Vrbo listings, amenities, rates, and calendars.

☐ Read 3- and 4-star reviews to identify gaps you can address.

3. Confirm local regulations

☐ Verify city/county zoning and short-term rental eligibility.

☐ Check licensing, permits, inspections, occupancy, parking, and safety rules.

☐ Review lodging taxes, HOA/condo restrictions, and permit renewal requirements.

4. Build a conservative budget

☐ Estimate average nightly rate and realistic occupied nights.

☐ Calculate operating costs: financing, taxes, insurance, utilities, cleaning, maintenance, fees, and software.

☐ Include reserves for unexpected repairs and replacement items.

5. Organize the business

☐ Discuss appropriate business structure and tax treatment with qualified professionals.

☐ Arrange permits, registrations, tax accounts, and an EIN if needed.

☐ Separate rental finances and set up bookkeeping and receipt storage.

6. Review insurance coverage

☐ Tell your insurance agent exactly how guests will use the property.

☐ Review liability, property damage, guest injuries, loss of income, and pet coverage.

☐ Confirm coverage for special amenities such as pools, hot tubs, and fire pits.

7. Prepare the property and safety basics

☐ Walk through as a first-time guest: parking, entry, lighting, outlets, luggage, and shower storage.

☐ Test smoke/CO detectors as appropriate; check extinguishers, locks, stairs, railings, and exits.

☐ Provide first-aid supplies and emergency contact information.

8. Furnish for durability and comfort

☐ Prioritize mattresses, pillows, linens, sturdy seating, lighting, and functional storage.

☐ Choose items that are easy to clean and hold up to frequent use.

☐ Avoid delicate furniture or anything needing complicated instructions.

9. Stock the kitchen

☐ Provide dishes, mugs, glasses, utensils, and cookware for maximum occupancy.

☐ Include practical basics such as coffee maker, toaster, knives, boards, and baking sheets.

☐ Choose durable, easy-to-clean appliances and supplies.

10. Choose the right amenities

☐ Identify amenities that matter to your likely guests and local market.

☐ Evaluate Wi-Fi, laundry, outdoor seating, games, workspace, child/pet needs, and other features.

☐ Budget for safety, cleaning, and maintenance of any special amenities.

11. Build cleaning and maintenance support

☐ Hire reliable cleaners and establish backup coverage.

☐ Document turnover, linens, restocking, inspection, damage, and lost-and-found procedures.

☐ Identify local contacts for urgent plumbing, HVAC, electrical, appliances, and lockouts.

12. Set up useful technology

☐ Configure entry locks and test guest access procedures.

☐ Set up guest messaging, cleaning coordination, and pricing tools as needed.

☐ Consider guidebooks and management software; check privacy/legal rules for monitoring tools.

13. Establish house rules

☐ Write clear rules for occupancy, visitors, parties, pets, smoking, and parking.

☐ Specify quiet hours, check-in/out, and any safety or septic limitations.

☐ Communicate important rules before guests book.

14. Plan pricing

☐ Research comparable listings, seasonal trends, holidays, and events.

☐ Consider minimum nights, advance booking patterns, cleaning costs, and platform fees.

☐ Revisit rates regularly, even when using dynamic pricing software.

15. Create an accurate listing

☐ Take high-quality photos and write a clear, inviting description.

☐ Describe beds, layout, amenities, parking, accessibility, and nearby attractions.

☐ Disclose meaningful limitations such as stairs, steep drives, noise, or weak cell service.

16. Prepare guest messages

☐ Draft booking confirmation and pre-arrival instructions.

☐ Draft check-in, first-night, checkout, and post-stay messages.

☐ Check that automated messages sound personal and tell guests how to get help.

17. Stay in the property yourself

☐ Cook, shower, sleep, make coffee, use Wi-Fi, and operate the TV as a guest would.

☐ Identify missing items, confusing instructions, or inconvenient room setups.

☐ Correct the problems you discover before your first booking.

18. Complete a final walk-through

☐ Test lights, faucets, hot water, toilets, locks, Wi-Fi, appliances, and TVs.

☐ Check safety devices, linens, kitchen supplies, outdoor spaces, and guest instructions.

☐ Arrive from outside after dark to test directions, address visibility, parking, and entry.

Final reminder: You do not have to get everything perfect on day one. Start with a safe, comfortable, well-prepared property and keep improving as you learn.

Notes / next actions:

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More guidance: Booked Solid: A Beginner's Guide to Short-Term Rental Success | BookedSolidGuide.com