

# **5-STAR HOSTING MADE SIMPLE**



Your Step-by-Step Guide to  
Running a Successful  
Short-Term Rental Business  
(Airbnb & Beyond)

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# Welcome

Hello, I'm Suzy. I wish you a warm welcome, and thank you for choosing this book.

***5-Star Hosting Made Simple*** is a step-by-step roadmap to help you master the essentials of running your short-term rental business efficiently, profitably, and with heart. It blends together strategy, actionable guidance, and the art of great hospitality.

The idea for this book came from the many commonly-asked questions during my seven years as a host:

“How do you do what you do?”

“How can I achieve the same success?”

“Where do I even start?”

The truth is, there isn't one single answer. Hosting takes time, passion, attention to detail, and above all, a genuine love of people. Some of these skills can be learned, others come naturally. But, with the right guidance and systems in place, I'm confident you'll be able to create and achieve a 5-star guest experience—one that is unforgettable!

This book is written for independent hosts; people managing one or two properties, and for anyone passionate about creating beautiful spaces and exceptional hospitality. Along the way, you'll find smart strategies, creative ideas, and time-saving AI tools to make your hosting life easier.

Welcome

Undoubtedly, it's the book I wish I had when I first began my hosting journey!

## **A Little About Me**

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Before I became a host in 2016, my world revolved around marketing and advertising. I spent a decade managing major brands at several London ad. agencies before branching out as an entrepreneur and launching my own ventures. When digital marketing began reshaping the industry, it became my goal to build my skills, so I went on to earn both a bachelor's and master's degree from the UK's Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing. I've also qualified as a Level 1 AI Marketer, specializing in the practical and strategic use of generative AI tools to help small business owners work smarter.

My husband and I are originally from England, but we've spent more than 30 years living abroad, in Germany, the United States, Brazil, Panama, and now Portugal. We have two children living and working in the UK.

Each move taught us adaptability, cultural curiosity, and most importantly, a deep appreciation for what makes a place feel like home. Those lessons became the foundation of how I approach hospitality today.

Our journey into hosting began in Panama, where we transformed our weekend villa in Buenaventura (a luxury golf and beach resort) into a vacation rental. Drawing on my marketing background and my countless experiences as a guest, we focused on creating a space that combined comfort, thoughtful presentation, and genuine hospitality. Post pandemic, we went full-time with the business; elevated our offering, expanded

our amenities, and created an atmosphere of heartfelt hospitality that kept our guests returning again and again. We quickly earned Superhost (Airbnb) and Premier Host (Vrbo) status. By our final year in the business, before we made our big move to Portugal, 82% of our bookings were direct, which were backed up by glowing 5-star reviews on Google.

Through that experience, I've gained immense insight into the fact that success in short-term rentals comes from genuine hospitality, which involves caring about people, providing a beautiful space, and paying attention to the details.

## What You'll Find in This Book

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Each chapter blends professional know-how, from seven years of hands-on property management, with many years of guest experiences in every type of accommodation around the world. I've brought this knowledge and insight together so you can build a business you're proud of. A business that is sustainable, successful, and delivers joy to the guests.

Throughout the chapters, you'll see special icons to guide you:

1. ☆ **5-Stars:** Key factors that influence guest reviews on platforms like Airbnb, Vrbo, and Booking.com.
2. ♀ **Pro Tips:** Practical ideas and shortcuts to help you improve and stand out.
3. ✂ **Action Summaries:** End-of-chapter checklists to keep you focused on what matters most.

## PART 1:

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# The 5-Star Experience: Reaching for the Stars

Every successful hosting journey begins with a solid foundation of understanding what guests truly value and how your hosting style will meet those expectations.

This part of the book uncovers the foundations of building trust and reputation. We'll dig deep into learning more about guest reviews, the personal qualities that define great hosts, and the mindset that transforms your property into a thriving, professional business.

Whether you're just starting out or refining your setup, these first chapters will enable you to see your rental through your guests' eyes and set the tone for long-term success.

# Guest Reviews and Why They Matter

Like it or not, guest reviews can make or break a short-term rental business. That's why it's essential to understand how these reviews work, what guests are really judging, and how your future bookings and visibility depend on them.

In today's digital world, writing reviews has become second nature. Whether it's reviewing a restaurant, a short-term rental stay, or even a pair of socks from an online store, we're all active participants in the review economy.

Be honest, when was the last time someone asked you to review something in a physical shop? You probably can't remember, but those online reviews? They matter. A lot. Think of them as ***trust signals***—social proof that tells future guests whether they can count on you to deliver what you promise.

Online travel agency (OTA) platforms like Airbnb, Booking.com, and Vrbo have their own review systems. Where

guests rate you across several categories like cleanliness, communication, and accuracy. For direct bookings, Google Reviews is the go-to for reviews, which are highly visible, simple, and just as influential.

## **Why Guest Reviews Are So Important**

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It's no secret that guest reviews keep most hosts feeling nervous or on edge. Achieving 5-star status takes effort, consistency, and serious attention to detail. Losing that rating, even from only one or two negative reviews, can seriously affect your business, your reputation, and your visibility on online travel agency (OTA) platforms. And it can take a long time to recover.

To underscore how much guest reviews matter, consider this from **Expedia's** Traveler Value Index (2025) <sup>2</sup>:

***75% of travelers*** would pay more for a vacation rental with ***better customer reviews***.

***85% of travelers*** are more likely to book a property that ***consistently delivers great guest experiences***.

***Among travelers under 40, reviews matter more than price.***

That's the power of reviews: they don't just reflect your performance, they directly influence booking decisions, pricing power, and your long-term success as a host. To protect your ratings (and grow them), it's important to know exactly what guests are judging you on.

## Know Exactly What You're Being Judged On

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When a guest leaves a review, they're not just sharing an opinion, they're scoring you against specific criteria that directly impact your ratings, search ranking, and future bookings. While each platform has its own nuances, the core categories remain fairly consistent. Here's what guests are asked to evaluate:

1. **Overall Experience:** How was the stay as a whole?
2. **Cleanliness:** Was the space spotless and well-maintained?
3. **Accuracy:** Did the property match the description and photos?
4. **Check-In:** Was the process easy and clearly explained?
5. **Communication:** Did the host respond quickly, and were they helpful?
6. **Location:** Was it as expected, safe, and was information well communicated?
7. **Value:** Did the price match the quality and experience?
8. **Amenities:** Was everything promised available and working?



While Airbnb, Vrbo, and Booking.com all focus on these areas, each platform measures and presents them differently, as shown in the table below.

| <i>PLATFORM</i>                 | <i>RATING SCALE</i> | <i>KEY CATEGORIES</i>                                                                         | <i>HOST REVIEW</i>  | <i>REVIEW SYSTEM</i>                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>AIRBNB</i> <sup>3</sup>      | 1-5 stars           | Overall, Cleanliness, Accuracy, Check-in, Communication, Location, Value, Amenities           | Yes (mutual review) | Blind (reviews published simultaneously) |
| <i>VRBO</i> <sup>4</sup>        | 1-10 scale          | Overall, Cleanliness, Accuracy, Check-in, Communication, Location, Value, Recommendation      | Yes (mutual review) | Open (reviews visible to both parties)   |
| <i>BOOKING.COM</i> <sup>5</sup> | 1-10 scale          | Overall, Staff, Facilities, Cleanliness, Comfort, Value, Location, Free Wi-Fi (if applicable) | No                  | Guest-only (reviews published directly)  |

Guest reviews aren't just a reflection of how well you can host; they are the currency of your business. They shape guest trust, platform visibility, and ultimately, your profitability.

The good news is that reviews are within your control when you understand what matters most and consistently deliver on those expectations.

Focus on the basics, refine the details, and every stay becomes an opportunity to earn the 5-star trust signals that fuel long-term success.

Keep an eye out for the ☆☆☆☆☆ graphic throughout the book. The five stars indicate the criteria that guests will rate when leaving their review.

## **Action Summary:** **Building a 5-Star Review Foundation**

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1. **Know the Criteria:** Learn what each platform measures (cleanliness, accuracy, communication, etc.) and build your systems around them.
2. **Prioritize Consistency:** Deliver the same high standards for every guest, every time.
3. **Manage Expectations:** Ensure your photos, descriptions, and communications match reality.
4. **Encourage Feedback:** Proactively remind guests to leave a review and respond graciously to all reviews received.
5. **Learn and Adapt:** Treat every review as insight. Double down on what works, and address the areas that don't.

## Notes

<sup>2</sup> Expedia Group, “2025 Traveler Value Index (2025),” *Expedia*, 2025

<sup>3</sup> Airbnb, “Ratings for Homes,” Airbnb Help Center, 2025

<sup>4</sup> Vrbo, “How Do I Submit a Review About My Travellers?” Vrbo Help Centre, 2025,

<sup>5</sup> Booking.com, “Everything You Need to Know About Guest Review Scores,” Booking.com Partner Help, 2025

## The Essential Qualities for 5-Star Hosting Success

Before you jump in and open your doors to strangers, take an honest look at yourself—your personality, skill set, and mindset. Ask yourself: ***Am I cut out for this job?***

The lure of extra income in exchange for what might seem like minimal work is enticing. The OTAs make hosting look effortless; snap a few photos, write a description, and voilà. You're a host.

Slow down. Successful hosting is far more than fluffing up cushions or running a vacuum cleaner around the sitting room floor. If you want this to be a real business and not just a side hustle, then you must know the truth. The truth is, it's hard work. But rest assured, I will share the key strategies that will help you thrive.

Hosting takes time, dedication, and much more effort than most people expect. Yes, technology makes things easier, but the competition keeps growing, regulations are tightening, the

OTAs are constantly updating their rulebooks, and guest expectations are rising every year.

You'll need to comply with local laws, prepare your property to align with professional standards, and juggle multiple roles. Hosting means being a jack of all trades **and** a master of all of them. Often at odd hours, sometimes under pressure, and occasionally with guests who test your patience. We'll explore the full scope of hosting in the next chapter.

But here's the reward: hearing guests rave about their stay, reading glowing reviews, and knowing you've helped create a space for people to treasure lasting memories. Oh, and let's not forget the bonus of meeting new friends along the way.

So, before you take the plunge, pause and consider ... ***do you have what it takes?***

There are 8 key qualities of a 5-Star Host. Some come naturally, like a genuine love of hospitality and an instinct for making people feel welcome. Others are skills that can be learned and developed over time, such as organization, communication, and business planning.

The following are the 8 key qualities to 5-star hosting success:

1. ***Love of People and Hospitality:*** Do you have a genuine love of people and a generous spirit? Hospitality is about connecting with people, understanding their needs, and going the extra mile to make their stay the best. Not every guest will be easy, and things don't always go as planned. But good hosts stay calm, flexible, and maintain a solution-focused approach.
2. ***A Good Communicator:*** To be successful at hosting, you need excellent communication skills. Be the first to

reach out by welcoming the guest(s) into your property. Then carve out time to build a relationship by engaging in direct communication to find out their needs and wants. This is an ideal opportunity to build trust.

3. ***The Devil is in the Details:*** This is one of my mantras that you will see throughout the book. Guests notice the little things, and those details can make all the difference, whether it's cleanliness, comfort, amenities, or communications.
4. ***Exceptional Organization Skills:*** This job is a balancing act. Picture yourself juggling many balls all at once; you must not drop any of them. This is like keeping on top of every aspect of hosting. You'll need exceptional organization skills and efficient use of technology to keep everything running smoothly.
5. ***Problem-Solving Skills:*** Sometimes unexpected problems arise, such as a broken hot water boiler or an air conditioner that is dripping water. Being able to address and find solutions to problems quickly and efficiently is crucial for guest satisfaction.
6. ***Local Knowledge:*** Usually, guests are booking your property as a vacation getaway so that they can explore your local area. Part of hospitality is being able to provide your guests with insider tips on what to do and where to go for fun, including local attractions and entertainment, mouth-watering cuisine at reputable restaurants, shopping, and other activities. Ensure that you are knowledgeable about your area and establish a good relationship with other businesses in your community.

7. ***Flexible and Understanding:*** Things happen at the last minute, and it's common for guests to change their plans. They may arrive late, ask for an early check-in or late check-out, add an extra guest, or decide to bring their pet. Being flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and guests' needs helps create a more enjoyable experience, and it may be a critical factor to ensure you get a 5-star review.
8. ***Professionalism:*** You need to establish a relationship that is professional, polite, friendly, and helpful from the very first interaction. Your priority is to earn their trust by demonstrating that you are knowledgeable, reliable, and committed to their experience. Some guests may eventually become your friends.

Being a 5-star host isn't about perfection, it's about mindset, attitude, and a genuine love of hospitality. If you can combine your people skills with professionalism, organization, and resilience, you'll be well on your way on the road to success. You can improve, practice, and refine the rest of the 8 qualities as you go.

 **Action Summary:**  
**Do You Have What It Takes to  
Be a 5-Star Host?**

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1. **Take Stock:** Be honest about your mindset, skills, and resilience.
2. **Know Your Strengths:** Identify which 5-star qualities you already have.
3. **Spot Gaps:** Note areas for improvement.
4. **Get Feedback:** Ask someone to be honest with you. Do they think you'd make a great host?
5. **Commitment:** If you're ready to grow and deliver great stays, you're halfway there.