



# Building a Guest Experience That Earns 5-Star Reviews

In the short-term rental business, your review score is your reputation — and your reputation is your revenue. Hosts who consistently deliver exceptional guest experiences don't just get better reviews; they get more bookings, higher rates, and long-term business sustainability.

## 01 — Why Reviews Are Everything

On platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo, your review score is your most valuable business asset. It determines your search ranking, your booking rate, and whether guests choose you over a competitor with a similar listing. A 4.7 rating looks close to a 5.0 — but the difference in bookings is significant.

- Listings with 4.9–5.0 ratings consistently outrank lower-rated competitors
- Guests filter by rating — many won't even view listings below 4.5
- A single bad review can take months of good reviews to offset
- Superhost status (Airbnb) requires a 4.8+ rating and unlocks significant visibility benefits
- Reviews also build trust with guests who are unfamiliar with your property

**Mentor Tip:** Think of every guest interaction as a review in progress. The experience starts the moment they book — not when they check in.

## 02 — Pre-Arrival: Set the Tone Before They Arrive

The guest experience begins with your first message. Fast, friendly, and informative communication before arrival sets expectations and builds confidence. Guests who feel informed and welcomed before they arrive are far more likely to leave positive reviews.

- Confirm the booking with a warm, personalized message within a few hours
- Send check-in instructions 24–48 hours before arrival (not too early, not too late)
- Include everything they need: door codes, parking, Wi-Fi, house rules
- Anticipate common questions and answer them proactively
- Recommend local restaurants, attractions, and tips — guests love local knowledge

**Mentor Tip:** Create a pre-arrival message template, but personalize it for each guest. Mention their name and the purpose of their trip if they shared it.

## 03 — The Property: Comfort, Cleanliness, and Consistency

No amount of great communication can overcome a dirty or uncomfortable property. Cleanliness is the single most-cited factor in negative STR reviews. Consistency matters just as much — guests should get the same experience every time.

- Professional cleaning between every stay — no exceptions
- Comfortable, quality mattresses and bedding
- Fully stocked kitchen with the basics guests expect
- Reliable, fast Wi-Fi — test it regularly
- Working HVAC, appliances, and lighting
- Thoughtful extras: coffee, toiletries, local snacks, a welcome note

**Mentor Tip:** Do a 'guest walkthrough' of your property periodically — enter through the front door and experience it the way a guest would.

## 04 — During the Stay: Be Available Without Being Intrusive

Guests want to know you're available if something goes wrong — but they don't want to feel monitored or bothered. The right balance is responsive availability with a light touch.

- Send a brief mid-stay check-in message (day 2 for longer stays)
- Respond to any issues within 1–2 hours during reasonable hours
- Have a backup plan for common issues
- Don't show up unannounced — always give notice and get consent
- Address complaints immediately and with empathy, not defensiveness

**Mentor Tip:** If a guest reports a problem, your response speed and attitude matter as much as the fix.

## 05 — Checkout and the Review Ask

The checkout experience is your last impression — and your best opportunity to prompt a review. Make checkout easy, express genuine appreciation, and ask for feedback in a way that feels natural, not transactional.

- Send clear checkout instructions the evening before departure
- Keep checkout tasks minimal — guests resent excessive chore lists
- Send a thank-you message after checkout
- Ask for a review naturally
- Leave a review for the guest promptly
- Use any feedback to improve before the next guest arrives

**Mentor Tip:** On Airbnb, reviews are released simultaneously after both parties review or after 14 days.

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## The Bottom Line

Five-star reviews aren't luck — they're the result of intentional systems. Build your guest experience around communication, cleanliness, and comfort, and the reviews will follow. Start with the basics, refine as you go, and treat every guest as an opportunity to build your reputation.