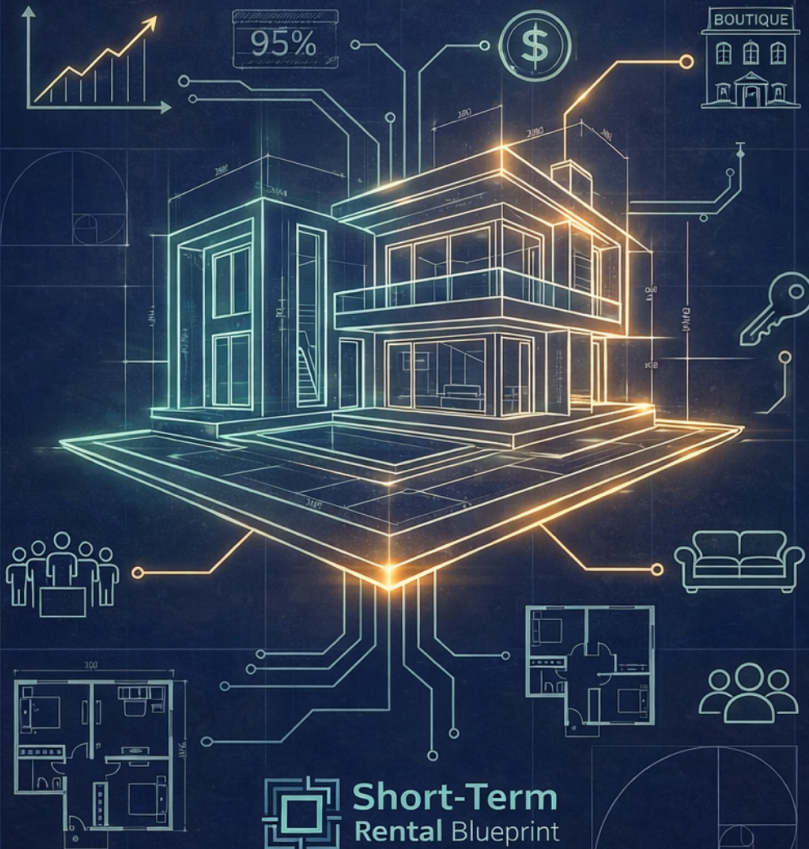


THE STR BLUEPRINT

THE FUNDAMENTALS THAT TOOK ME TO
28 UNITS AND **\$3M+** IN STR EARNINGS



 **Short-Term**
Rental Blueprint

KEITH HAZLE

The STR Blueprint

The Fundamentals That Took Me to 28 Units and
\$3M+ in STR Earnings

Keith Hazle

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Intro

Congratulations on taking your first step into the world of short-term rentals (STRs). This book is your blueprint to the fundamentals you'll need to secure your first (or next) unit via rental arbitrage and start scaling the right way. What you learn will help you build a strong foundation that you can grow from—whether you want one unit bringing in extra income or you decide to expand into multiple properties.

I wrote this blueprint to eliminate confusion and provide you with only what you need to get started: clear steps, real-life examples, and practical strategies that work. No fluff. Just the basics you need to go from idea to action. By the time you finish, you'll know exactly how to identify profitable properties, secure your first (or next) unit, set them up correctly, and start generating real income.

This book is your starting line. What you do with it will decide how far you go but everything you need to take that first leap is right here in your hands.

I know we all learn differently, so you can also get access to bonus videos inside my STR Fam community — real walkthroughs where I break down exactly how I've made this work over the last five years. [Join STR Fam](#)

Another reason I wrote this book is because I know the struggle it was for me learning all of this piece by piece to build my business. I didn't come from money and I

didn't have a hospitality background. My first unit was a bad deal in a rough area with basic furniture, and I ran out of money setting it up.

Before Airbnb, I was on the edge of giving up on entrepreneurship altogether. I had bounced between outside sales jobs because I wanted the freedom of being outside an office, but I had just taken a traditional inside 9-5 sales job — my first real "office" gig. Two months in, COVID hit, and I got laid off shortly after. That's when I promised myself I'd figure this out so no job would ever hold that much power over my future again. Initially, my wife and I put it all on the line, taking any deals offered to us because we didn't know any better. However, each opportunity contributed to the success we have now. Fast forward: we now manage 28 units and are projected to generate over \$2 million in revenue this year. My wife left her job five years ago, and I never went back to the 9-5. I have the freedom to build this business from anywhere in the world. In 2024, we spent over two months in Jamaica across four trips.

I believe STR hosts have a responsibility to raise the bar. Too many hosts are doing this business the wrong way, leading to too many guests having bad experiences that turn them off from ever booking an STR again. When we do this business the right way, everybody wins — guests, hosts, and the entire industry.

This book is for anyone who wants to step into STRs the right way. It's not a get-rich-quick scheme. You're not going to read this, do nothing, and wake up rich. If you treat this like a hobby, you'll get hobby results. However, if you put in the work and apply the principles outlined in these pages, you can significantly reduce the pain and avoid many of the mistakes I made, ultimately reaching your STR financial goals faster.

If you're ready to get started, build something real, and treat this like the business it is, then you're in the right place. Everything you need to take your first (or next) step starts right here.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to meet you wherever you are. If you're new to the topic, I recommend reading it straight through to establish a solid foundation. However, you can treat it like a playbook and jump straight to the section you need most. Whatever you decide, the most important thing, and my biggest request, is that you put into practice what you learn. Implementing what you learn from this book is the only way to get results.



6 Myths Holding Most People Back

I would like to address some common myths that can hinder your success in this industry. If any of these reasons have been holding you back from starting the process of getting your first or next property, I want you to commit to no longer letting them stop you. Here are 6 of the top myths (in no particular order).

Myth #1: It's illegal to do

This myth is a prime example of how the media passes incomplete information that can stifle growth. The truth is, it's illegal to do in SOME markets. However, short-term rental businesses are legal in more markets than they are not. There are certain cities where it may be banned, but the overall business model remains legal. It's very similar to the hotel business (they may be the reason for some of the bans, but that's another topic).

S O L U T I O N

Research the areas you want to launch in. Call their building department. Rely only on official government websites or the town's building department staff. If the

regulations are too strict for you to profit or if STRs are banned, you can always find another location that is not.

Myth #2: It's too late

Do you think that within the next 30 days, somewhere in the world, someone will travel or a new hotel will open up? I'm pretty sure your answer to both is yes. In 2023, Hilton alone opened 395 hotels, averaging more than one new hotel per day. If new hotels are continuously opening, that means there must be demand. You don't just open a hotel and hope it gets booked. Unfortunately, in the STR industry, only rookie hosts launch STRs and hope they get booked, and it breaks my heart to see them so excited to get started and fail due to poor planning. According to Grand View Research, the global short-term vacation rental market size was valued at USD 134.51 billion in 2024 and is projected to double to USD 256.31 billion by 2030. The industry is indeed changing, but it remains a growing one.

PRO TIP

It's not saturated. The only thing that is saturated in the short-term rental industry is average.

There is an abundance of average listings with average amenities, average customer service, and average expectations, resulting in average experiences for guests. Is the Ritz-Carlton competing with Howard Johnson or Quality Inn for business? Absolutely not! They are attracting clients looking for an enhanced experience. If you commit to improving your customer experience in all areas, you will always be able to get market share, no matter which city you're in. On the other hand, you can cater to more budget-conscious guests who desire more affordable accommodations while still generating a profit. No matter what type of guest you serve, become one of the top hosts serving that type of guest.

Myth #3: You need to own the property (My favorite)

Believing I needed to own the property before getting started stopped me from entering the industry for years! Here's the reality... You DO NOT need to own the property to have a short-term rental business. All you need is PERMISSION from the owner. Now, some cities do have ordinances that require you to be the owner to operate legally. However, many cities do not require you to be the owner.

What does this mean for you? It means that, in fact, you can rent any type of livable residential unit from an owner, furnish it, get it professionally photographed (trust me, do not skip this step), and list it with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Airbnb, Vrbo, and Booking.com, and rent it out legally as an STR. This one truth almost levels the playing field for anyone who wants to get involved in this industry. Instead of having to go out and buy a home (or even pricier, having to buy a hotel) and pay a sizeable down payment and closing costs, you can simply go through the process of a regular renter.

As long as you obtain permission from the owner, you can operate a legitimate business that can be highly profitable in a short period. It's called rental arbitrage. Rental arbitrage is simply the renting of an apartment from a landlord who gives you their approval to rent it out as a short-term rental. Cohosting is another way to get into the STR game without owning property. Cohosting is managing the short-term rental operations for a property owner.

These are two of the most affordable options for getting started in the real estate industry that I have seen. They're also a great stepping stone to help you go from

renting/managing properties to owning them if you invest your profits wisely. There are several cities where, with proper research, you can identify areas that offer the potential to earn hundreds to thousands of dollars per month in profit without ever owning the property. We'll cover how you can find profitable properties yourself in the market research section.

P R O T I P

My goal is to consistently profit at least \$2,000 per location. When I first started, I aimed for at least \$1,000 per deal.

Myth #4: Owners don't want to rent to STR hosts

The truth is, some just won't allow it. It's business - some people want your service or product, and some don't. On the other hand, there are tons of landlords who will rent to STR hosts. Here are several pros for landlords to rent to STR hosts:

- Property is regularly professionally cleaned to remain guest-ready
- Some hosts handle basic maintenance and repairs
- Most hosts will take better care of the apartments
- If all goes well, why would the host want to stop renting?
- Hosts can become tenants for multiple locations
- Hosts sometimes cover minor improvements

Myth #5: Short-term rental income is Passive Income

One of the biggest myths that gets sold online is that short-term rentals are a passive income stream. The truth? It's anything but passive in the beginning.

Sure, the *income* can feel passive when bookings are rolling in while you sleep. But what most people don't tell

you is how much work goes into getting to that point. If you're running your business yourself, it's hands-on. Between guest communication, cleanings, maintenance, pricing, staging, and handling issues, there's always something to manage. You *can* absolutely build systems and hire a team to reduce your day-to-day involvement, but that takes time, effort, and leadership.

The only way this becomes truly passive is by bringing in a co-host or a property management company to handle everything for you.

Until then, you're the CEO — and that means staying involved enough to protect the guest experience, monitor performance, and keep the business running profitably.

You can earn money in your sleep — but not without putting in work while you're awake.

Myth #6: You need a substantial upfront investment

You don't need to drop the kind of investment you would on a home purchase, but yes, you do need to invest something. Just to be clear, when I say "huge investment," I'm talking \$40,000 and up. While some people have launched a short-term rental with even less, the average startup capital for a small studio or one-bedroom unit using the **rental arbitrage model** is typically between **\$10,000 and \$15,000**. I personally recommend budgeting **\$15,000-\$20,000** to give yourself flexibility and breathing room.

If you do not have that, it's time to get resourceful. Many people allow funding to stop them from starting businesses in every industry. Do not be that person. One of the first problems many entrepreneurs have to learn to solve is making it work with limited capital. Look at it as a problem to solve, not a barrier to entry. If you are

determined enough, you'll figure it out. In the funding section, we'll cover more on what you can do to fund deals.

P R O T I P

Finding hosts exiting the business is a way to get furniture for unbelievably low prices.

Now that we've cleared the noise, let's get into what this business actually is and why it works.



C H A P T E R O N E

How STRs Earn 3x More Than Traditional Rentals

A short-term rental is any apartment, home, or space rented out for less than 30 days. If someone can sleep there overnight and access a full bathroom, it qualifies. Yes, that includes properties like boats, tents, and even treehouses.

Types of Short-Term Rental Properties



Hotels have been doing short-term rentals for decades. But in 2007, Airbnb changed the game. They made it popular for everyday people to turn their extra room into cash in exchange for an overnight stay. Why have short-term rentals exploded in popularity? Low startup costs and high earning potential, even for hosts with zero experience.

F U N F A C T

The oldest hotel in the world is the Nishiyama Onsen Keiunkan in Japan, founded in 705 A.D., and was run by the same family for 52 generations until recently.

What is considered short-term?

Understanding Rental Duration Types



1-30 days

Short-Term Rental —
Less than 30 days

Guests, tourists & travelers



31 days – 11 months

Mid-Term Rental —
31 days – 11 months

Relocations, work assignments
& insurance stays

12+ months

Long-Term Rental —
12+ months

Traditional tenants &
lease agreements

Why Short-Term Rentals

Now, if you're considering STR's, you may be wondering why I would choose this over long-term tenants, and why a guest would choose to book with me over a household hotel brand?

Why Guests Choose STRs Over Hotels

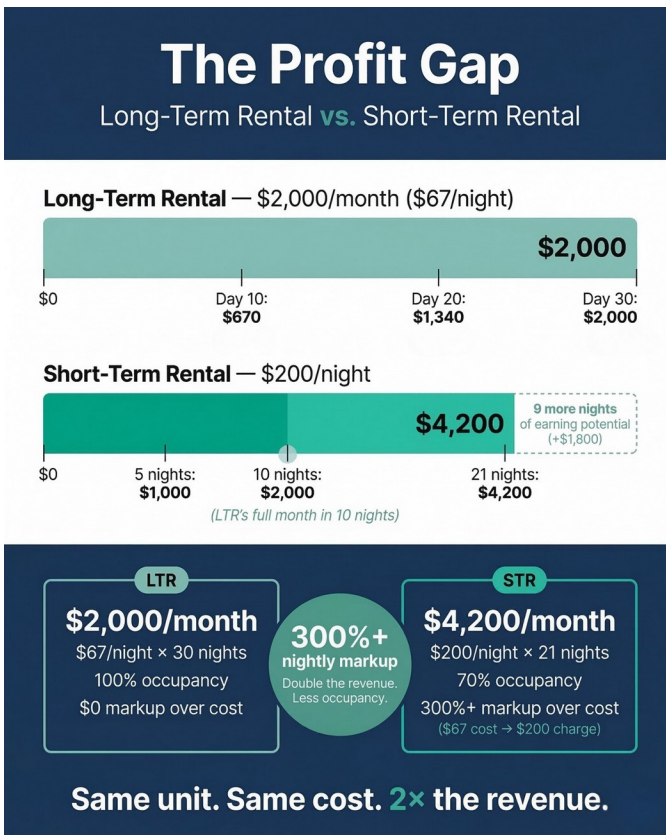
The truth is, short-term rentals often deliver far more than a standard hotel room. Guests aren't just booking a bed; they're stepping into spaces with full kitchens, real living rooms, and that authentic home-away-from-home local living experience they crave. Additionally, larger groups can save on the average per-person cost and stay together in a single accommodation, rather than in separate rooms, which is the norm in most hotels. (I'm aware that some hotels offer multiple bedrooms, but this is not typical.) At the end of the day, some people will always prefer STRs, and some will prefer hotels. That's cool. We can't host everyone anyway.

Why STRs are more profitable than LTRs

Unlike traditional home rentals, where you get paid once a month, short-term rentals let you charge by the night, and thanks to hotels, people are already used to paying premium nightly rates.

Running a short-term rental is like **buying at wholesale and selling at retail**. You lease a place for a long term (wholesale price) and rent it out for a short term (retail price).

Let's take a look at the graphic below and compare the profit gap between long term rentals and short term rentals.



In this scenario, we compare renting an apartment to a long term tenant at \$2,000 a month to renting an

apartment for **\$2,000/month** to operate as an STR. That's about **\$67/night**. If you charge **\$200/night** and get booked **21 nights (70% average occupancy)**, you're bringing in **\$4,200**.

That's \$2,200 more than you pay monthly, and you still have 9–10 nights left that month to earn more potentially. This is the power of STRs: buy low, sell high — and as you become a better host and business person, you'll learn how to get closer to **100% occupancy**, boost your nightly rate, and maximize your profit.

TRANSPARENCY NOTE

Your unit's design, marketing, reviews, market seasonality, and demand versus supply all play a significant role in determining what you can charge. Also, 100% occupancy is not typical.

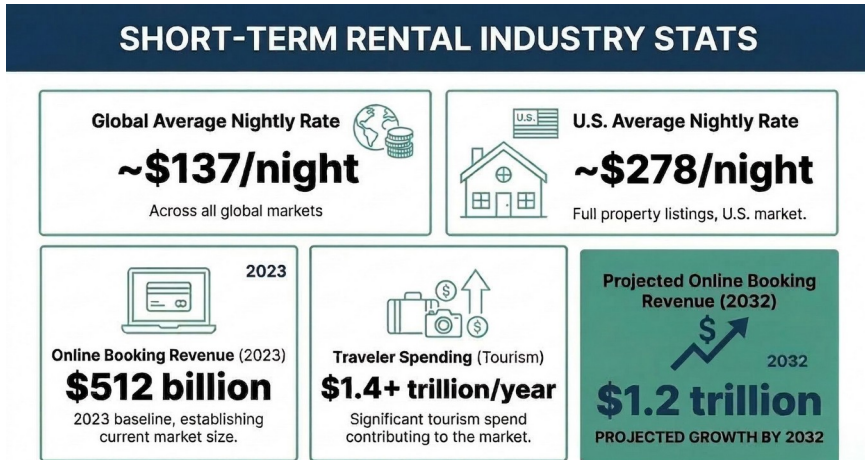
Evolution of Short-Term Rentals

When Airbnb launched in 2007, it revolutionized the travel industry. What started as an unusual idea — renting out air mattresses in a spare room — has evolved into a global movement that has generated over **\$150 billion** for hosts. And here's the thing: Airbnb is just **one** platform.

Today, there's a whole ecosystem fueling the STR industry. Platforms like **Vrbo** and **Booking.com** are also attracting millions of guests. And that doesn't even touch the growing world of **direct bookings** — where hosts build their own websites and brands to cut out platform fees entirely.

What does that mean for you? It means opportunity. Massive opportunity. STR isn't just a "trend." It's an entire segment of the travel industry, and it continues to evolve. Airbnb might have sparked the fire, but the short-

term rental space has exploded into something much bigger. Check out these stats.



Source: Skift, Grand View Research

Bottom line? There's more than enough money flowing through STRs for you to get your piece. Average hosts make average money — but if you treat this like a business, you can break out of "average" and build serious income.

So how do you get started? Let's talk about your options.



CHAPTER TWO

Choosing Your Path Into STRs

There are multiple ways to get into STRs. You can run your own place, manage for others, or invest and let someone else do the managing. Here's a quick breakdown of each hosting path to help you decide how you want to play the game.



Now that you know the different types of hosts, it's time to decide how you want to acquire your units. You can start by **co-hosting**, with your strategy focused solely on acquiring clients and managing their properties. Many hosts begin by managing their own portfolio and then add co-hosting services, which allows them to scale faster without having to fund every deal themselves.

If you decide to acquire your own units, you can do so through **buying** or through **rental arbitrage**. We'll

briefly cover buying and co-hosting, and then we'll get to the primary focus of this book: rental arbitrage.

Buy

This book is not about buying properties, so we'll keep it brief. If you want to purchase properties specifically for STRs, here are the main takeaways I have for you.

- Ensure it's profitable for STR (use the profit calculator)
- Have a mid to long-term stay profitability strategy in case STR laws change
- Know the market regulations
- Ensure all expenses are accounted for (use Profit Calculator)
- Aim for a minimum 20% cash-on-cash return (30%+ is my target)

NOTE

We'll cover more on regulations and the profit calculator in the Market Research section.

Cash-on-cash return is the percentage of annual cash flow earned compared to your total investment. For example, a \$100K investment generating \$20,000 in annual cash flow gives you a 20% cash-on-cash return.

Cohosting

Co-hosting is when you manage another person's short-term rental operations for a percentage of revenue, typically 15% to 25%. It can be either a property that they own or lease. Typically, you'd manage all STR operations, but some agreements cover only specific areas of the business. That's where your co-hosting agreement comes in. It should clearly outline what you are and aren't responsible for.

This is the lowest-risk way to get into the STR business. You're not putting up a security deposit or furnishing a unit. Your investment is your time, your ability to deliver results, and your software costs to run the business operations.

PRO TIP

You could find the deal for them. They fund it, and you manage it.

Rental Arbitrage

Rental arbitrage is a strategy where you **rent a property long-term**, such as an apartment, house, or condo, with the intention of **listing it as a short-term rental**. You don't own the property, but with the owner's permission, you control how it's used during the lease.

What makes this model so powerful is the **low barrier to entry**. Instead of paying a down payment, closing costs, or dealing with the complexities of owning property, you can start with **as little as a refundable security deposit** to gain control of an income-producing asset.

That level of leverage is unheard of in most industries. It's one of the primary reasons rental arbitrage has revolutionized the short-term rental space, enabling everyday people to enter the market, scale quickly, and earn high incomes without owning a single property.

Compared to buying a home or opening a hotel, arbitrage is simpler, faster, and dramatically more affordable. You avoid mortgages, high closing fees, and long wait times. You sign a lease, furnish the unit, and start hosting.

Based on my experience, **single-family and multi-family homes** offer the best returns. We'll discuss **how to find and acquire your first (or next) arbitrage**

unit in the next section. From sourcing deals to negotiating with landlords and getting approval, I'll walk you through what works for me.

You don't need to stick to just one model. To achieve diversity, I've built my portfolio through rental arbitrage, co-hosting, and ownership. If you're new, I recommend starting with arbitrage. It's low risk, easy to exit, and a great way to learn the business.

Now let's get into the how.

CHAPTER THREE

Getting Your First (Or Next) Unit No Ownership Required

Local Laws and Regulations

Before running numbers or analyzing listings, take the time to **understand the local laws and regulations that govern them**. Every city has its own rules. Some have no restrictions, others have light regulations, and then there are cities with near-ban-level restrictions that make hosting almost impossible.

The only way to know the rules for sure? **Check directly with the city or town's building department**. You can contact them by phone or search online for their information. If you check online, ensure you obtain your information from an official government website. Try searching "[Your City] short-term rental ordinance" and look for .gov or .org domains.

Avoid relying on random blogs or social media posts for information. Those can be outdated or completely wrong. The city is the only reliable source for what's legal and what's not.

Whether you're calling or researching online, make sure you get clear answers to these key questions:

- Are STRs allowed in this city or zone?
- What are the specific regulations? (if any)
- Are there permits or licenses required?
- Do you have any taxes or fees to pay?
- Are any new regulations in the pipeline?

Check if laws are hyper-local. Rules might only apply to specific neighborhoods or zones within the city. What's banned downtown may be allowed just a few blocks over.

Don't Overlook Local Taxes. Some taxes can be as high as 10%–15% of your gross revenue and must be paid monthly or quarterly. Ensure you understand the full tax picture and account for it in your expenses when analyzing any deal.

I learned this the hard way. My first out-of-state deal was in San Antonio. I factored in the permit but completely missed the 11.5% monthly gross-revenue local tax. It significantly impacted my margins and was a key reason I didn't renew the lease. Had I known up front, I would've negotiated better terms with my landlord or walked away.

And let's clear this up — **regulations don't automatically make a market bad.** In fact, a regulated market can sometimes be more predictable. You know precisely what you're signing up for.

On the flip side, **markets with zero regulations aren't automatically "better."** No rules today doesn't mean no rules forever. Cities constantly change their

stance. Sometimes they take years to enforce new laws, sometimes they never follow through.

What I avoid are markets that cap hosting at absurd numbers, such as 60 days a year. That's not a "restriction." That's basically a ban. What are you supposed to do the other 10 months? A 300-day limit is less harsh, but you're still losing 2 months of revenue. Depending on the seasonality, a 300-day limit market could be worth it.

PRO TIP

Even if there are no current STR regulations in a market, call the city and ask if anything is "in the pipeline." Sometimes cities spend years drafting ordinances that never pass. Sometimes they're just months away from passing. Either way, it's better to have a heads up.

Here's the bottom line:

- Know the rules before you jump in.
- Don't assume "no regulations" means "no risk."
- Don't assume "regulations" mean "don't invest."

Market Research

After five years of building a portfolio that's generated multiple seven figures, with properties hitting \$20,000+ monthly revenue, I've learned one truth: **Market research isn't optional. It's the foundation of every profitable deal.**

Many hosts fail because they chase high-revenue or popular markets instead of focusing on high-profit opportunities. Popularity or high revenue does not equate to high profitability. This guide gives you the exact process I use to identify profitable markets.

Start with the Data Tools

I start with STR data companies. Platforms like **AirDNA (rentalizer tool)**, **BNBCalc**, and **Rabbu** can display a property's average daily rates (ADR), occupancy, revenue potential, and comparable listings. Use multiple tools and compare their data, but remember that nothing is as valuable as your own research. These companies aren't hosts; they're data aggregators. I've seen them underestimate markets by 20-30%, and I'm sure some markets are more underestimated. **Cross-reference everything**. If most of them report similar numbers, I believe it more, but my favorite way to confirm profitability is to check the platforms directly.

Do your own Homework on Airbnb

Here's where you separate yourself from average hosts. Go directly to **Airbnb** and study the listings in the market. Look for real performance to compare to the data tools' projections.

Here's what to analyze:

Monthly Reviews: 3-5+ new reviews a month = solid booking activity.

The number of reviews gives me an idea of how frequently the listing has been booked in the past. I also read them to know what *guests* are loving or complaining about. This helps me know what *and what not to do*, and *I get to see the top reasons guests* travel to the area.

Future Bookings: Future blocked dates on their calendar. This is what I want to see:

- 50%+ blocked next 30 days
- 25-30%+ blocked 31-60 days out
- 10-20%+ blocked 61-90 days out

If I see multiple listings hitting the above targets, it tells me there is interest in the market and good booking demand. These are also the listings I study.

NOTE

Blocked dates on a calendar usually indicate that it's booked; however, it could also mean that it's simply blocked. This is why you confirm this with multiple listings and not just one.

Weekday & Weekend Pricing: Spot rate patterns, compare with data and comps

Photos: Study photos to find out the following:

- What design styles are working in the area?
- What type of properties are doing the best?
- What are hosts offering guests?
- What's the overall market standard?
- What are the top performers highlighting in their photos?

Amenities: What's consistent across top listings? What's missing?

Identify Gaps in the Market

By comparing multiple listings, I start to see patterns and gaps. A gap is an opportunity to stand out by providing something that your market is missing or where demand exceeds supply. A gap can be specific amenities, design, or even something simple, such as having more beds and accommodating more guests than other units with the same bedroom count, which can help you earn more.

Confirm The Profitability

It's not enough to see revenue potential. You need to run the numbers

I look at:

- ADR (average daily rate) for weekdays vs. weekends.
- Average monthly revenue
- Average monthly occupancy
- Operating Expenses

Once I know the projections for the average nightly rate, average occupancy, and operating expenses, I enter these numbers into my [Profit Calculator](#) to confirm if I'll meet my profit target of \$2,000/month. Remember, revenue doesn't mean profit. Don't let revenue impress you without knowing the operating expenses that come with it.

PRO TIP

Don't forget to calculate the taxes you need to pay. Some markets require you to report income and pay taxes monthly or quarterly.

The Bottom Line

Market research isn't about chasing the "hottest" market. It's about making **data-driven decisions**, validating demand and profitability, and spotting opportunities others miss. The hosts who win in the long term are those who know how to read the numbers, analyze the competition, and position themselves as the obvious choice for guests.

Acquisition

Now that you know how to identify profitable listings, it's time to find your own. Acquiring a unit via rental arbitrage is often the biggest hurdle for new hosts. You'll need to sift through listings, reach out to landlords, and deal with rejection. That's part of the process. But with strategy and repetition, you'll sharpen your skills, build confidence, and the right deals will start coming to you. You will suck at it in the beginning. I promise that if you push through and do the necessary work, you can build a profitable portfolio that meets your financial goals.

Let me walk you through my approach, including how I find deals, what I look for, how I pitch, and how I negotiate favorable terms to ensure strong profitability.

Profit Target & Break-Even Strategy

First, decide what your financial goals are. This will determine the type of deal you need to pursue. Again, I don't just grab any deal. When I first started, I accepted deals that profited at least **\$1,000/month**. My profit target per unit is now \$2,000/month. This is what I expect for my 1-2 br units. For 3-bedroom or larger units, I am looking to earn at least \$3,000 per month. The larger the property, the more capital I must invest, so I won't take it unless the increased investment comes with increased profit.

My goal is also to **break even within 6-12 months**, with **9 months being my sweet spot**. That means I aim for **100%+ cash-on-cash return in Year 1**, so I can see profit in the first year. If you're less experienced, you may break even in 12-18 months; however, anything past that I would not entertain for arbitrage. Remember: the sooner you break even, the sooner you're truly profitable.

Where to Look for Units

Now that your profit goal is clear, it's time to **find profitable properties that align with your targets**. Here's where I start my search:

Network

I highly recommend starting with those you know first. Ask your family, friends, or peers if they or anyone they know owns any properties in your target market. My network is actually how I got my very first unit (It was a terrible deal because I didn't know any of what I'm teaching you now.) The point still stands: your network can bring you opportunities.

Online Platforms

Zillow: My go-to platform. Use the filters to narrow your search to just the type of property you're looking for

(e.g., number of bedrooms, bathrooms, amenities, price range)

I prefer to speak to the decision makers first, so I start my searches by applying keyword filters like:

- Listed by owner
- Property owner
- No broker fee

These filters can help you quickly find properties listed by owners. The no broker fee filter can help you find owners or agents who don't charge broker fees. These no-broker-fee Realtors are my next favorite people to connect with. Once I have gone through the listings under these filters, I remove the keywords, then sift and sort through the remaining options.

Craigslist is another website you can use. Just watch out for the scammers.

Apartments.com, **Rent.com**, and **Trulia** typically have a lot of the same inventory as Zillow, but are also additional sites you can search.

Facebook Marketplace: I found a no-broker-fee agent on Facebook Marketplace, which led to closing a deal in a building where I now have four units.

Facebook Groups: There are several STR host groups you can join. Some groups cater to hosts in all areas, while others are specifically designed for hosts in particular areas. If you are active in these groups, you will eventually see someone post opportunities. I acquired my first out-of-state deal this way.

PRO TIP

Check listings for building photos, such as exterior or common areas. Upload those photos to Google Lens and let it find the location for you. If unsuccessful, browse through apartment websites in the area to match the photos yourself. This is the easiest way I know to reverse-engineer

and find buildings where units are already being used as STRs. Remember: just because someone is doing it in that building, it doesn't mean it's approved.

Real Estate Agents

Of course, you can also work with real estate agents. Many realtors charge broker fees that you must pay (some deals are worth it), but sometimes the landlord pays the realtors, so you don't have to pay that fee. I will analyze any deal that comes my way, regardless of whether it involves a broker fee. Two of my biggest deals required me to pay broker fees:

Deal #1: Paid \$6,800 broker fee - Property generated over \$200k in first year revenue

Deal #2: Paid \$4,500 broker fee - property did over \$100k in revenue in year 1

In both deals, I've had months where I have profited more than the broker fee I paid in 1 month. Not a bad deal, is it?

Canvassing: An old-school method that still works. I don't suggest going out of your way for this, but if you're already in the area, keep an eye out. Some landlords still advertise with "For Rent by Owner" signs instead of relying solely on online listings, and new construction sites can be a great way to learn about opportunities before they officially hit the market.

How to Identify Winning Properties

My goal when searching for potential units is to reverse-engineer the success of the profitable comps from my market research. I look for similar or better properties in the area. Once I find potential units, I take the address and run it through AirDNA, Rabbu, and BnB Calc to determine the performance projections. You do not need to use all of them, but I like seeing what they all predict.

Next, I compare that data with my manual Airbnb research to confirm how the market is performing. Lastly, I plug in all of my findings into my profit calculator, and if the projected profits meet or exceed my **\$2,000/month goal**, I add that property to my shortlist.

NOTE

Understanding this without seeing the profit calculator used live may be difficult. For that reason, I created a video walkthrough.

Profit calculator link: [Profit Calculator](#) (*How to video is located in the STR Fam community*)

Now, before we get to the next step: reaching out to book calls or tours, let's talk about the importance of relationships.

Relationship Over Scripts

What to say to a landlord is important. However, if your best friend were a property manager at a building that allowed short-term rentals, would you have a hard time getting a unit there? Probably not. Why? Not because you have a catchy script, but because you have a relationship with the property manager.

That's why I recommend focusing on building strong relationships with property managers, real estate agents, leasing officers, and developers. Yes, building genuine relationships takes more effort. But here's the truth: one solid relationship can unlock an endless number of deals. I've seen it firsthand.

After leasing just three units from one contact, I was offered a fourth without even asking. Two years later, that same person offered me units in a brand-new building. I brought in a partner, and we ended up splitting 15 leases in that building. That's one connection that led to over six figures in monthly revenue.

Every time I tour a unit — whether in person or virtually — my goal isn't just to evaluate the property or give a pitch. My main goal is to build a connection. Because at the end of the day, relationships open more doors than any script ever will.

Now, I do not mean you can just say anything now. However, it's essential to maintain the proper perspective about what is most important. Let's now move on to the reach-outs.

Reaching Out: Start Vague, Get Specific

Once I have my list, my next step is to reach out to book tours. My preference is to discuss the business as I am getting the tour, so I can make it more conversational, so my message is short and to the point:

On rental sites:

"Hi, my name is Keith. I represent XYZ Housing, a corporate housing company in **[City]**. Your property fits our portfolio's aesthetic. Do you accept corporate leases? We'd love to schedule a visit if you do."

Over the phone:

"Hi, is **[property address]** still available to rent? Great, we love the property. It fits our portfolio's aesthetic and would be a great fit for our business - I run a corporate housing company in the area. When can I see it **[in person/over a video call]**?"

Things to keep in mind:

- Address them by name if you know it
- Avoid sounding robotic - be human
- The goal: Get the tour with them, having an idea of what you do (clarify on tour)

- There are landlords you do not need to convince about this. Law of averages will work in your favor. Contact enough people, and you'll find them.
- On the tour, ensure they understand how you will use the property (as an STR)

Local Tours:

If the property is local, I **always prefer to visit it in person.**

Being physically present allows me to gain a better perspective on what the property, neighborhood, and immediate neighbors are like. Being on-site will enable me to catch the details — such as uneven floors, cheap finishes, sloppy paint jobs, or other information that doesn't show up well on video. This gives me the full scope of the deal. Also, during the tour, I'm building rapport and educating the owner/property manager on how my business operates.

After the tour, even if I am ready to submit an offer, I'll say:

“Thanks so much for the tour. I'm going to take this back to my team — we review opportunities like this daily and select the ones that align best with our goals. This is definitely *one of my faves.*”

This conveys professionalism, avoids a sense of neediness, and reinforces that I'm selective — not desperate.

P R O T I P

It's more about the confidence you have instead of what you say.

Out-of-State Tours:

When the property isn't local, I follow a similar process — just virtually:

- Schedule a FaceTime or video call walk-through.

- Still use the tour to build rapport and elaborate on my business model.
- Ask probing questions about the property's condition, maintenance, and neighbors.

If I am moving forward with the lease, to mitigate risk, I would first schedule an in-person walkthrough, conducted either by me or by hiring a local person. If I have limited time to decide, to hold the property, I'll do one of the following:

- Submit a letter of intent (LOI) outlining the details of the agreement

Or... (and only if needed)

- Negotiate a partial deposit and add a clause to the addendum that makes the lease official contingent upon an in-person walkthrough. This way, if I or whoever I hire shows up and the unit is not as represented, I can legally back out.

I would not move forward with a deal out of state without a thorough walkthrough. I prefer to do it myself, unless I have someone in the market I can trust to do a thorough inspection.

PRO TIP

If you can pay the deposit with a credit card, you have better protection in case you're dealing with any shady people.

Explaining the Business Model, Additional Permissions, and Addressing Their Concerns

In addition to building rapport and seeing the property, I use the tour to proactively address common concerns—such as security, guest quality, and property care—so objections are resolved before they even come up. I request permission to install smart locks and a front-door camera and ask about important details such as

emergency contacts, paint color codes, and trash procedures.

Another thing I'll do is explain how my team manages regular cleanings and inspections to ensure the property is consistently maintained. I also emphasize our strict guest screening process—we don't accept just anyone, and we turn away bookings that don't meet our standards.

Landlords may hesitate because of Airbnb's stigma. Media headlines have done a great job of painting it as a platform full of wild parties, constant damage, and chaos. The truth is, most guests are not looking to throw a party, but you have to be in the industry to understand.

If the landlord asks, "Are you going to put this place on Airbnb?", here's exactly how I respond to clear up concerns and set the tone for a professional partnership:

- I never deny using Airbnb.
- I downplay it: "Airbnb is just one of many platforms we use to fill vacancies. We also work with relocation agencies, insurance housing providers, corporate teams, and medical professionals, etc."

The key here is not to deny using Airbnb, so they understand that some of your guests will be from Airbnb, and to clear up the stigma that Airbnb is only for party guests.

By the end of the tour, my goal is for the owner to feel confident that their property is in good hands with a reliable, long-term tenant who not only pays rent on time but also takes great care of it.

Negotiating Like a Pro

Even if it feels uncomfortable, ask for concessions. Everything you negotiate is money saved, and those

savings directly reduce the time it takes to profit. Here are the **common concessions** I negotiate:

- One month free rent (First, last, or pro-rated across the lease)
- Reduced security deposit
- Waived parking or amenities
- Apartment access before lease start date (helps reduce holding costs)

N O T E

The goal is to ask and see what they'll agree to. Whether it's one, some, or all, it's a win in my book.

Legal Protection

Many landlords use their own generic leases, while some may ask you to provide one. Either way, every lease should include or be paired with an addendum that states:

- You have explicit approval to operate as a short-term rental from the landlord
- Protects you with a 30-day or 60-day cancellation clause if STR laws change
- Clearly outline the responsibilities of both the landlord and tenant

N O T E

An addendum is a written document that modifies or adds specific terms to your lease agreement, and once signed, it overrides the lease on those specific points.

You've got the fundamentals of regulations, market research, and acquisitions. Next up: Setting up your business structure and proper budgeting.



CHAPTER FOUR

Business Structure & Budgeting: 7+ Hidden Costs to Avoid

Before we get into this topic, let me be clear: **I'm not a funding expert.** My lane is short-term rentals, not teaching how to maximize credit approvals. What I will do is show you how I structured my business for funding, what steps worked for me, and the expenses—both expected and unexpected—you should plan for.

NOTE

To maximize funding, I recommend working with someone who specializes in this space.

How I Structured My Business (Applies to US companies)

Here's the order I followed when setting up my company:

1. Pick a business name.

- Check your business name's availability through your **state website** or **LegalZoom**.

To avoid being flagged as high risk, choose a business name that ends with something more generic, like *Consulting*, *Management*, or *Holdings*. Names with *Properties* or *Real Estate* often get categorized as high risk and can hurt your chances of securing funding.

- Confirm the website domain is available
- 2. Secure your digital presence.
 - Buy the website domain. (I prefer **Namecheap** over GoDaddy. It's cheaper and includes free privacy.)
 - Claim social handles (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, YouTube, etc.).
- 3. Set up a business email.
 - I recommend **Google Workspace** for a professional email tied to your domain.

Using an email like **@yourcompany.com** looks more professional and credible than Gmail or Yahoo.

- 4. Get a business address.
 - Regus or Alliance Offices are two good options.
 - No PO Boxes, Post Office, or Staples locations.

Do this first so that when you apply for your EIN and LLC, you can use your business address on the applications. This helps you avoid paying to change it later, which costs money and doesn't always update right away.

- 5. Set up a business phone number.
 - I use Quo (Formerly Openphone). I love it because I can add multiple numbers, and my team can log in and answer calls or send messages to guests.
- 6. Apply for an EIN and LLC.

- File for the EIN first. An EIN is like the social for your business. You can apply for it on the IRS website for FREE. [Apply for EIN Here](#)

- Apply for LLC: Apply directly through your state's website. If you prefer extra guidance, services like LegalZoom can handle the filing for you for an additional cost.

NOTE

This part can feel confusing. If you're not 100% sure you're filling things out correctly, let a platform like LegalZoom handle it for you. It's worth the investment to get it done right the first time.

LegalZoom: [Set up LLC with LegalZoom](#)

7. Open a business bank account.

- You will need your EIN and articles of organization to open an account. Some banks also ask for an operating agreement. I suggest having at least one bank account with Zelle, so you can use it when you need to make quick vendor payments (I use Chase)

- Online banks like **BlueVine** and **Lili** are also solid. BlueVine may even extend a line of credit based on usage. (Neither of these offers Zelle.)

8. Apply for business credit.

Once your business is set up, you can apply for business credit cards. This is one of the smartest moves you can make early on because you'll need capital to furnish your unit, and business credit cards give you access to it without dipping into your personal funds.

Here's how I approach it:

- Apply with the banks I have a relationship with first. Many business credit cards only need your EIN, LLC, and personal credit score to get approved.
- Look for cards with a 0% introductory APR period.

- Keep your business and personal expenses separate. Use your business credit cards strictly for business purchases. This makes tax time easier and protects your personal credit.

P R O T I P

Some rent portals accept credit card payments, which allows you (if you have enough business credit) to fund possibly the entire deal with OPM (other people's money)

Be Aware of Hidden Costs

When setting up a unit, especially if it's your first time, the things that usually push you over budget aren't the big purchases you planned for, but the hidden or unexpected costs you didn't see coming. Here's a list of expenses you may incur:

Business Structure Costs

- Domain registration (Namecheap)
- LLC filing fees
- Business address (virtual office)
- Business phone number
- Business bank account fees
- Website

Leasing costs:

- Application fees
- broker fee/finder fees
- Security deposit
- First month's rent
- Amenity fees
- Renter's insurance
- Parking
- Pet fees (if you plan to allow pets)

Setup costs:

- Furniture costs

- Supplies costs
- Utilities costs
- Labor cost (furniture assembly, locksmith, painting, etc.)
- Operational costs (PMS, camera, noise monitor)
- Local permits and licenses (if any)
- Storage unit rental (if needed for early deliveries)
- Property-specific needs (lockboxes, storage cabinets, outside trash bins)
- Deep cleaning before the first guest
- Professional photography

N O T E

A PMS (Property Management System) is the software you use to manage your listings, bookings, and communication across platforms.

Unexpected or "hidden costs"

- Delivery issues: Delays, damaged items, or reschedules
- Storage unit rental: Temporary for deliveries; sometimes first month free
- Vendor delays: Handyman/Cleaner no-shows, reschedules or taking too long
- Appliances not provided by landlord: Refrigerator, washer, dryer, microwave, etc. If you don't see it in the unit, make sure to ask if the landlord is providing it.
- Utility setup deposits: Depending on your credit, electric or Wi-Fi providers may require upfront deposits (I paid a \$250 deposit for Wi-Fi before)

The most significant expense that hosts often overlook is their holding costs. Holding costs are the daily expenses you incur for a unit, whether you're hosting a guest or not. If the unit isn't booked because you're waiting on furniture, photos, contractors, or simply waiting for reservations, your rent, utilities, and other

fixed expenses still have to be paid. For example, if your rent is \$3,000 a month, that's \$100 per day. If it takes you 15 days to set up your unit and another 5 days to get your first guest checking in, that 20-day period costs \$2,000 in holding costs. (*See graphic*)



PRO TIP

1. Purchase your smart lock ahead of time so you can install it the moment you get access and avoid any delays with key exchanges.
2. Renting a storage unit and shipping items there before your lease begins can significantly cut down your holding costs.

Giving You an Idea of What to Budget

To help you plan better, here's a quick guide to what I typically spend on some core furniture items when building a unit. I avoid cheap quality, and I don't buy expensive ones either. These ranges are what I've found to be a balance between quality, appeal, and profitability.

- Bed Frames (Queen/King): \$125-\$350
- Mattresses (Queen/King): \$200 - \$350
- Sofas: \$600 - \$800
- Accent Chairs: \$100 - \$200 each
- Dining Table: \$250 - \$450
- Dining Chairs: \$50 - \$75 each
- Coffee Table: \$100 - \$175
- Nightstands: \$80 - \$150 each
- TV: \$150 - \$250
- Bar Stools: \$60 - \$100 each
- Desk: \$60 - \$150
- Desk Chair: \$75 - \$125

These numbers aren't fixed. You may find quality items for less, or you might spend more, depending on your design style and the size of the furniture required. Based on my experience, these ranges are suitable for most apartments and homes. Study the top-performing listings comps in your area to identify what works, and then adjust your budget as necessary to stay competitive.

BUDGET TIP

Essentials First

I prioritize purchasing essential items first to manage my budget effectively. Acquiring these necessities later can lead to overspending on non-essential items, potentially forcing you to exceed your budget to complete the project.

Essential items include beds, bed frames, sofas, dining sets, coffee tables, etc. Non-essential items are anything not crucial for a guest's comfortable stay (table decor, board games, plants, art). While you will eventually

purchase non-essential items, it's wiser to compromise on less critical items, such as table decor and mats, if budget adjustments are needed, rather than sacrificing the quality of a bed frame. A broken table decoration is minor, but a broken bed frame requires immediate attention.

P R O T I P

The bulky items usually take the longest to deliver, so ordering them first also helps ensure they arrive on time.

Now that you know how to set up your business properly and what to budget for, let's talk about budget planning and making every dollar count when furnishing your unit.



CHAPTER FIVE

The 5 Pillars for STR Furnishing

Furnishing your apartment is an opportunity to differentiate yourself from other short-term rental operators in your market. While finding a seasoned professional designer can pay off in the long run, I choose to stay heavily involved in the interior design of my units.

I'm not a pro designer, but I've learned what works through guest feedback, YouTube University, Instagram, Pinterest, and comparing unit performance. I've studied the basics of interior design to enhance my "designer eye" - this approach may not be right for you, but it works for me.

Pillar 1: Budget Planning

Budgeting correctly for your unit is crucial, especially when you're just starting. If you spend too much money,

it will eat into your profits and take longer to break even. While some hosts claim they can furnish an apartment for \$2,500 or less, I've seen a significant difference in profitability between units where I invested more in design versus those where I spent less. It still has to be strategic design. Cost alone is not an indicator of good design.

My goal is always to find equilibrium - making a place look expensive while not breaking the bank. I recommend budgeting **\$1,500 to \$2,000 per room** or **\$9-12 per square foot** for the average STR.

For example, \$6,000 can be a decent budget for a small one-bedroom, and you can increase it by \$1,000-\$1,500 for every bedroom you add. Square footage will impact this budget, as larger apartments require more furnishings.

Pillar 2: Avatar Identification

Your avatar is the guest you're looking to attract, and understanding them is essential before making any design decisions. Once you know who you're targeting, you can think about what they want to see in your space.

To gain insights into your avatar:

- Read reviews on listings similar to yours
 - Look for reviews from guests who match your target profile
 - Take notes on what they appreciated or wished for
- I personally target families with kids because they typically fall into manageable categories:
9. Families traveling to sightsee (minimal time in the unit)
 10. Families visiting nearby relatives (also minimal unit time)

11. Families looking to relax together (more time in the unit)

These groups typically don't cause issues and have predictable needs, making them ideal guests for my properties.

Pillar 3: Theme Development

Once you've identified your avatar, pick a theme that will attract them while filling gaps in your market. This is where you create your unique value proposition.

Think about what's missing from other listings in your area that your guests would appreciate. If you can find something your avatar desires that no one else offers, you have a powerful opportunity to differentiate.

A theme can be as simple as a specific **color palette** carried throughout the space, or it can include distinctive design elements that stand out. You can approach design in two ways. If you'd rather not handle it yourself, you can hire a designer, which usually runs between **\$1,000-\$2,000 depending on the size of the unit**. If you prefer to design it yourself, you can draw inspiration from top-performing competitor listings or use websites like **Pinterest** to gather ideas and create mood boards.

Whatever you choose, your theme should be **cohesive** throughout the space, while incorporating unique touches that make guests remember and choose your property over others. Accent walls are a cost-effective way to elevate your design, especially in focal areas that will be featured heavily in photos. Painting and wallpaper both work—paint is typically more affordable and faster to apply, while wallpaper adds more visual interest. When painting, always choose higher-quality paint; it lasts longer and is easier to maintain.

Pillar 4: Layout Assessment & Measurements

When visiting a potential unit, I thoroughly survey the property before making any purchase. This systematic approach ensures you order the right items and maximize your space.

What to measure and assess:

- Room dimensions and square footage (determines bed sizes and if multiple beds fit)
- Ceiling height (needed for curtain measurements)
- Number and location of closets (ideally one for a lockable cleaning closet, preferably not in a bedroom)
- Bar stool areas or islands (measure for appropriate stool heights)
- Living room dimensions (for couch and rug sizing)
- Dining area space
- Any other areas requiring specific furniture sizes

PRO TIP

Measure for bulky items first since they typically have longer delivery times. I often order these before getting keys (only after the lease is signed and deal secured).

Important warning: If it's a new construction property, never order furniture until the property has received its Certificate of Occupancy (CO). I once purchased \$6,000 worth of furniture that sat in storage for almost a year because the property was waiting for city approvals. I ended up no longer wanting the unit and sold the furniture to someone else.

Pillar 5: Strategic Shopping

I shop in a specific order—starting with the most affordable places first—while choosing different stores for different items. Some furnishings are worth spending more on because they shape the entire vibe of the listing

and can directly influence guest appeal. Others, especially items that aren't heavily used or visible, can be sourced more affordably without sacrificing quality or comfort.

Here's my go-to shopping hierarchy (from most to least affordable):

In-Store Options:

- Ross (not available in all areas)
- Burlington
- TJ Maxx
- Marshalls
- HomeSense
- HomeGoods

Online Options:

- Amazon - My Amazon shopping list: Amazon List
- Wayfair
- Walmart

Second-Hand Options:

Don't overlook thrift stores and resale platforms. It's a great way to save money.

- Facebook Marketplace
- Facebook groups
- Other Hosts
- OfferUp
- Goodwill: excellent for books at \$1-2 each.

P R O T I P

Choose books that match your unit's color palette to make your design more cohesive.

- Local thrift stores

By following these five pillars—Budget Planning, Avatar Identification, Theme Development & Differentiation, Layout Assessment, and Strategic Shopping—you'll create a furnished STR that stands out in your market

while maintaining profitability. Remember, the goal isn't just to provide a space; it's to create an experience that your *ideal guest* will love and remember.

Here's proof that great design increases profitability. These are three units in the same market with similar guest capacity but very different levels of design investment.

Basic Design

Photo: [Redacted] | [Share](#) | [Save](#)

6 guests · 2 bedrooms · 4 beds · 1 bath
 • 4.86 · [29 reviews](#)

Add dates for prices

| CHECK-IN | CHECKOUT |
|----------|----------|
| Add date | Add date |

[Show all photos](#)

Past guest

[Redacted Name]



Nov 25 – 29, 2025 (4 nights)
 4 guests · \$813.73

Elevated Design

THE STR BLUEPRINT - 107 reviews

Share Saved



THE STR BLUEPRINT - 107 reviews

4.82 · 107 reviews

Add dates for prices

CHECK-IN
Add date

CHECKOUT
Add date

Past guest

[Redacted Name]



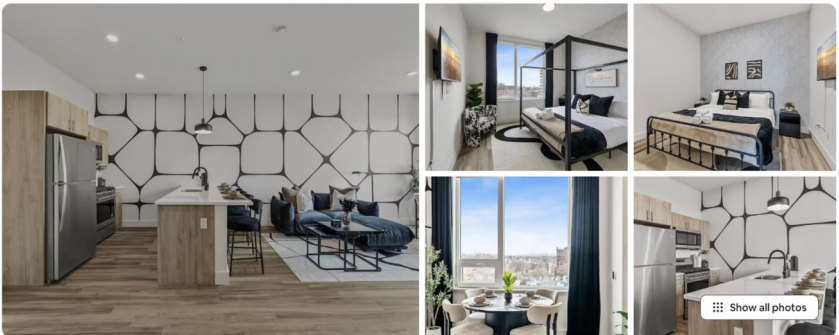
Nov 26 – 29, 2025 (3 nights)

4 guests · \$688.67

Premium Design

THE STR BLUEPRINT - 49 reviews

Share Save



THE STR BLUEPRINT - 49 reviews

4.82 · 49 reviews

Add dates for prices

CHECK-IN
Add date

CHECKOUT
Add date

Past guest

[Redacted Name]

[Redacted Address]

Nov 25 – 27, 2025 (2 nights)

4 guests · \$915.68



These are three units I designed at three different stages in my journey. On the left, you'll see the design of each unit, and on the right, you'll see their payouts within the same timeframe. The premium design earned the most money in the fewest nights. That's the power of strategic design. When your space looks and feels premium, guests pay premium rates, and you make more profit.

Once your unit is designed and guest-ready, the next step is to get it listed and get it booked.



CHAPTER SIX

Turn Your Unit Into A “Must-Book” Listing

Different Platforms (OTAs)

While Airbnb and other OTAs might bring in most of your bookings at first, think of them as training wheels. They help you start, but your long-term goal is to ride on your own, securing direct bookings through your own marketing and website first, and then having OTAs help you book the rest. As long as you depend entirely on OTAs, you're subject to their rules, changes, and limitations.

NOTE

I'm not saying ditch OTAs altogether. Just don't depend on them alone.

Here's my take on the most common platforms based on personal experience:

Airbnb

- Most popular OTA for short-term rentals.
- User-friendly for both guests and hosts.
- Largest market share in most locations
- Offers AirCover for guest and host support.

Cons: Extremely pro-guest. Policies often favor guests, and undertrained reps may make unfair rulings—though with persistence, you can usually get the correct resolution. Still, I'm grateful for Airbnb. It helped me scale to 28+ units. Would I ever leave? Probably not. What's the saying, "can't live with them, can't live without them?"

Set up an account using this link: [Set Up Airbnb Account](#)

Vrbo

- Best for whole-home and larger properties.
- Attracts higher-paying, longer-stay guests.
- Allows hosts to control split payment options
- Best chargeback protection (applies only when they handle the payment processing)

Cons: No same-day bookings; depending on your PMS, you must handle payment processing.

N O T E

Don't forget to turn on insurance coverage for claims so guests are required to add it to their stay.

Set up an account using this link: [Set Up Vrbo Account](#)

Booking.com (BDC)

- Guest quality has improved
- Now has more STR market share than Vrbo
- High booking volume, especially from international travelers
- Hosts can experience more BDC bookings than Airbnb in some markets

Cons: Worst cancellation policies, poor calendar syncing (prone to double bookings depending on PMS), no support for guests or hosts beyond the booking process, and most difficult platform to navigate. BDC recently launched host property insurance starting Oct. 13, 2025. I will not speak on it here because it is fairly new and I don't have experience filing a claim (yet). You can find out more here: [BDC New Host Property Insurance](#)*

Set up an account using this link: [Set Up BDC Account](#)

Furnished Finder

- Great for mid-term stays (weeks to months)
- Great to use during the booker's market (slow season)
- Used by travel nurses, corporate execs, and other professionals
- \$179/year per listing.

P R O T I P

Use long-stay discounts on Airbnb, Vrbo, or Booking.com to attract mid-term guests during the slow season.

Google

- Guests can find you via a Google search and be directed to your booking page.
- Currently offering no-fee hosting
- You must be using a PMS to get on their platform

Direct Booking Website

- Your own website for guests to book directly - no middleman, no commission cuts.
- You control everything: the design, the policies, the payments, and the guest experience.
- Every major hotel has one—you should too.

When you visit The Marriott, St. Regis, or The W Hotel, that's their direct booking platform. And even though

they have their own websites, you'll still find many hotels listed on Airbnb, Expedia, Booking.com, and Priceline. Why? Because it fills nights they wouldn't otherwise fill. You pay a fee, but that's better than no revenue at all.

Additional platforms

HomeToGo: Like Kayak but for vacation rentals

TravelStaytion: Luxury listings

Glamping Hub: For outdoor stays like tents and treehouses

Whimstay: Fills last-minute availability

Blueground: Mid/long-term stays

Smiling House: Luxury villas and estates

Savvy: vacation home rentals

Rentalz: Focus on regional bookings

Travia: Targets group bookings (sports/events)

Misterb&b: LGBTQ+ travelers

Hipcamp: Outdoor-focused rentals

Ecobnb: For eco-friendly stays

Hostelworld: Budget/hostel stays

Anyplace: Mid-term and digital nomad travel

Zillow: Can be used for mid-term rentals

Bonus Places to list

While your primary focus might be short-term overnight stays, there are other ways to make money with your unit. You can rent your space during the day for photoshoots, podcasts, filming, business meetings, or small events. Platforms like **Peerspace** and **Giggster** make it easy to connect with that type of audience.

Set Up Peerspace Account: [Set Up Peerspace Account](#)

Set Up Giggster Account: [Set Up Giggster Account](#)

Another solid income stream is building relationships with **insurance agencies** that place families in temporary housing. This usually happens when someone is displaced due to events such as renovations, relocations, or property damage.

We've discussed several OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) you can list your units on to attract guests. I don't recommend spreading yourself too thin by listing everywhere right away. Start with **Airbnb, Vrbo, and Booking.com**, but put a hyper-focus on the one that brings you the most bookings.

In most markets, that's Airbnb. Once you know which platform performs best for you, **master that one first**, then gradually expand to the others.

When I started in 2021, I was only on Airbnb. Once I got comfortable, I added Vrbo, and it wasn't until 2023 that I brought on Booking.com. At that time, growing step by step made sense. However, in 2025, the landscape has shifted—competition is higher, and guest behavior is more spread out across platforms. That means you may need to start from the beginning on all three, while still identifying and doubling down on the one that generates the most revenue.

Setting Up Your Listing

Now you've got your lease signed, the property designed, and you're getting it guest-ready. The next step is where it all comes together—listing your property on OTAs so you can officially open for business. But remember that simply being on a platform isn't enough. **The way you optimize your listing is a huge factor in your ability**

to maximize your profits. A big part of optimization starts with your title, description, amenities, and photos.

Title and Description

Your **title** is one of the first things guests see when scrolling through listings on Airbnb, and you only get **50 characters** to grab their attention. Think of it like *clickbait* — your goal is to make them stop scrolling.

Focus on what makes your listing stand out to *your ideal guest*, not what you personally like. Highlight **attractions**, **amenities**, or even **promotions** that appeal to your target audience.

Examples:

- Huge 2BR-8min to AT&T Stadium-15mins to Airport
- Stylish Loft w/ Free Parking + Walk to Downtown

In your Airbnb **description**, you have 500 characters to expand on what your title started. Use this space to clearly outline what guests will get and why it's the perfect place for them.

Include:

- Bedroom and bed count (2BR w/ 1 King and 2 Queen beds - Sleeps 6)
- Top amenities (pool, gym, free parking, backyard, coffee/tea station)
- Nearby attractions or transport (5 mins to airport, 10 mins to xyz stadium)
- Any standout features that make your space memorable

The goal is to use your full character limit and paint a quick, vivid picture that helps guests imagine themselves staying there.

NOTE

Vrbo allows you to use more characters. Make full use of it.

Amenities

Your amenities should align with your guest avatar. Essentials such as **Wi-Fi, air conditioning, self-check-in, heating, hot water, body wash, towels, toilet paper, kitchen basics, and a TV** are non-negotiable for top-performing properties. Without them, it's harder to compete, and some OTAs will highlight the gaps in your listing, which hurts your visibility and revenue.

Beyond the basics, add amenities that elevate the experience for your ideal guest. If families are among your avatars, I recommend including amenities for the kids as well. For example:

- Books (for kids and adults)
- Games
- Children's dinnerware
- High chair
- Pack'n Play
- Crib
- Outlet covers
- Corner guards

You also want to ensure guest safety by including basics like a first-aid kit, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers. Landlords are typically required to provide the alarms and extinguishers.

Ultimately, the more boxes you can check on your amenities list, the higher your listing ranks, and the more appealing it looks to potential guests.

Photo Order & Strategy:

Photos are the first thing a guest will notice. You want to be strategic about the photos you take and the order you place them in on your listing. Potential guests should feel like you're giving them a tour of your place:

- The first five photos are your strongest selling points (unique design, standout amenities, most attractive spaces).
- Add 2-3 photos of each room.
- Include exterior shots and nearby attractions.
- Use captions for every photo—tell a story and highlight amenities (e.g., "All bathrooms stocked with body wash, shampoo, conditioner, and fresh towels").

The absolute most important thing about your photos is to ensure they are professional photos. iPhone photos may be used as a placeholder. However, professional photos are a must to maximize revenue potential.

PRO TIP

Not all photographers are professional REAL ESTATE photographers. Ensure you are using someone who is skilled in real estate photography with a portfolio to prove it.

House Rules

Clear house rules protect your property, your neighbors, and your profits. Anything you want to enforce—especially if it involves a fine—must be written into your rules, or the platform may not back you up.

Essential rules to include:

- Smoking policy - Set fines high (I charge up to \$1,000) since smoking impacts future guests.
- Unauthorized guests/pets - Spell out consequences clearly.
- Quiet hours - Keeps neighbors happy and avoids complaints.
- Parties/events - Be explicit about what's not allowed.

I've learned that high fines can discourage rule-breaking, even if they are not consistently enforced to the full amount. For example, I list a \$150 fine for lost key cards, but usually charge \$75. The higher amount

motivates guests to take the rules seriously. High penalties aren't about nickel-and-diming—they make guests pay attention.

Another approach some hosts take is to keep rules simple and just ask guests to treat the property as their own. Personally, as someone who operates in city markets where guests often travel for concerts, birthdays, or other events, I've dealt with numerous claims. Because of that, I include specific language in my listings to deter party guests before they ever book.

Browse competitor listings to see how others phrase their rules and what fines they use. Test different approaches and refine your rules until you find the balance that works best for your property and market.

Other Key Settings to Optimize:

These are additional settings you'll need to configure when setting up your listing. Each one matters, so don't skip them.

- **Accessibility features:** Most hosts skip this entirely. Adding it helps your listing stand out and reach more guests.
- **Minimum night stay:** I recommend one night Sunday through Thursday, two nights Friday and Saturday, and lower to fill gaps.
- **Booking window:** How far in advance your calendar is open for bookings.
- **Advance notice:** How much lead time you need before a guest's check-in.
- **Cleaning fees:** Stay competitive in your market, but try to at least cover your actual cleaning cost.
- **Cancellation policy:** Pick one that protects your business while keeping you competitive. On Airbnb, I use Firm.
- **Nightly rate:** Set realistic, data-driven pricing

- Weekend rate: Higher rates than weekdays
- Check-in instructions: Make them clear and easy to follow
- Clearly state what is shared vs. private (e.g., in-building washer/dryer, lounges, rooftop, gym access)
- Host Profile:
- Complete every section (bio, company info, photo).
- Platforms reward fuller profiles with higher visibility and more trust from guests.

There's a lot to cover when setting up a listing properly, so I've included a **free Airbnb Listing Setup Checklist** to make sure you don't miss anything. It will guide you through the exact process my team follows to set up an Airbnb listing.

Checklist link: [STR Fam: Airbnb New Listing Checklist 2025](#)

How to use this checklist: [Watch Video](#)

What About Vrbo & Booking.com?

- The setup process is similar to Airbnb. The core of what we discussed still applies. It's just a different platform to navigate through, and you may see more or fewer sections to fill in.

Now that you have optimized your listing, you'll want to ensure you have a team to assist you in the operations of your property. Without a team, you'll have to do it all yourself. I've been here before, and I know first hand doing it all yourself leads to burnout. I do not recommend this approach at all, especially if you're in it to build time freedom.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Who You Need On Your Team (And Where To Find Them)

You can't scale this business alone. At some point, you're going to need people you can count on. You don't need to hire a full team on day one, but you do need to start building your network of reliable contractors and professionals early. Here's who you need and why.

Independent Contractors

Cleaners: Cleaners are the **backbone** of your business. You can have perfect pricing, the best photos, and a great location — but if your cleaning is off, you'll get guest complaints and bad reviews, which translate into fewer bookings and less revenue. Avoid cleaners without STR experience when possible. There is a big difference between residential cleaning and cleaning an STR. Have clear expectations. Communicate clearly and require photos of their work before and after.

Handyman: Think minor repairs (some can handle major repairs too), furniture assembly, touch-ups. You want someone who can also be available for urgent last-minute calls.

Runner: Someone who can drop off supplies, swap linens, or run last-minute errands when needed. They can be a lifesaver if something like the wifi needs troubleshooting and guests need assistance. (Your cleaner may be a good fit.

HVAC Tech: For heating and cooling emergencies — you don't want to scramble to find one if the AC breaks in July. A handyman can sometimes handle some minor HVAC issues. However, you still want a professional for when it's something more serious.

Appliance Repair: Dishwashers, washers, dryers — they break. Have a pro you can call if the fridge suddenly stops cooling.

Plumber: More serious plumbing issues. Or you may end up being the person in a basement, with an eel, unclogging the pipes filled with human waste. I've had to do this more times than I'd like to admit.

Carpenter: For bigger structural issues that are worth fixing on furniture.

Pest Control: You can tackle this task on your own using store-bought sprays for the most common pests. Some properties may require more frequent and powerful solutions.

Virtual Assistant

You **don't need a VA for your first or even second unit.** At that stage, handling certain areas of the business yourself is crucial to learning how the business operates.

Around your **third unit**, consider bringing in a VA to help with:

- Guest communication
- Scheduling cleanings & maintenance
- Tracking reviews or refunds
- Admin tasks

How to find them

I recommend starting with your network to see if you can get any referrals first. If unsuccessful, you can rely on the following platforms to find reliable help. Ensure you check reviews and vet the candidates. It's beneficial to hire multiple people during the unit setup stage, allowing you to assess their skill level and communication skills. Contractors usually have a bad reputation for being unprofessional, showing up late or not at all, and for sloppy work. During the setup, if you have multiple people working, you get to see for yourself who you can trust and who's reliable.

PRO TIP

Negotiate rates when you can. Online rates are usually inflated.

Platforms for building your team:

Thumbtack: For pros. Mainly companies

TaskRabbit: For handymen, runners, and small tasks. You can find Pros here as well, but typically it's more individuals rather than companies like Thumbtack.

Turno: Cleaning-specific platform. You can not only find cleaners here but also manage your cleaning schedule. I personally just use it to find cleaners. Their Super Cleaner badge means nothing to me.

Fiverr: For VAs, graphic help, or odd jobs.

Online Jobs PH: My go-to for Virtual staff in the Philippines.

Handy: Quick bookings for cleaners or handymen.

Indeed: For more formal, long-term hires.

Networking/Facebook Groups: Some of the best team members come from personal referrals.

What if you need to save money?

If you're on a tight budget, you can absolutely clean, fix, and manage things yourself for a while. **I did the same.**

But here's the truth:

- It may feel like you're saving money, but the time you're losing will slow you down from growing.
- Every hour you spend scrubbing toilets is an hour you're not finding your next property or improving your systems.

Be selective — do the jobs you can, but don't get trapped in the "I'll do it all forever" mindset.

You may not need all of these connections on day one. However, it is better to build these connections before you need them.



STR Mistakes You Can't Afford to Make

Starting an STR is exciting, but if you're not careful, you'll step into traps that will cost you money, time, and credibility. Here are the big ones to watch out for:

- **Skipping Due Diligence** - Don't take any unit just because it's "STR approved." Decide on your service level, know your numbers, and be prepared to walk away from deals that don't align with your goals. Acting out of scarcity will lead to unprofitable units.
- **Rushing Decisions** - Move with urgency, but don't let FOMO push you into the wrong deal. Otherwise, you risk ending up like the hosts selling off furniture from failed units—they rushed or didn't run the numbers at all.
- **Overspending** - Set a clear budget and stick to it. If you go over, make sure it's only on essentials that directly improve the guest experience and your profit. Don't waste money on things guests won't notice. And remember—the more you spend upfront, the longer it takes to break even.

- Not Negotiating Lease Terms - Always ask. Whether it's free rent, rent reductions, free parking, or upgrades—let the landlord say no, not you.
- Overpricing or Underpricing - Weekday and weekend demand differ. Most hosts overestimate what they can charge during the week and underestimate what they can charge on weekends. Study your market and set dynamic pricing parameters to maximize your profit based on demand.
- Cheap or Hard-to-Maintain Furniture - Skip wood bed frames, skinny-leg sofas, and glass tables. They break easily or make cleaning harder.
- Bad Photography - Professional photos aren't optional if you want to maximize bookings and revenue. Phone pictures might get you some early bookings, but they won't maximize revenue. Guests shop with their eyes—the listing with the best photos almost always wins.
- Thoughtless Design - Mismatched furniture from your cousin might save money upfront, but it can hurt bookings. Have a plan, study design basics, or hire a (virtual) designer. If you must start like this, plan to invest profits to improve the property.
- Set-It-and-Forget-It Pricing - The market shifts daily. Review and adjust to maintain occupancy and revenue.
- Not Screening Guests - Vet guests to avoid damages, rule-breaking, and problem stays.
- Ignoring Guest Feedback - Guest feedback, whether in text or reviews, often contains clues to fixes that can boost ratings and revenue.
- Skipping Local Regulations - Not knowing permit requirements or zoning laws can shut you down before you even start.
- No Backups for Key Roles - If your cleaner cancels on check-in day and you have no backup, you're in

trouble. The same applies to handymen and maintenance assistance.

- **Doing Everything Yourself Too Long** - You might save money in the short term, but you'll burn out and slow your growth.
- **Not Tracking Numbers** - If you're not monitoring expenses, revenue, and profit, you're running blind.
- **Poor or No House Rules** - If it's not written in your listing, you'll struggle to get Airbnb or Vrbo to back you in disputes.
- **Burnout** - No boundaries, no systems, no help = no longevity. Protect your time and energy.

Avoid these, and you're already ahead of most hosts. Now let's make sure you have the right tools in your corner.



Tools, Links, and Next Steps

Tech Stack/Platforms to Run & Grow Your STR Business

Over the years, I've tested dozens of tools—some designed specifically for short-term rentals and others built for general business management. I prefer a **blended tech stack** because both types have their own limitations.

I use a mix of industry tools for core STR operations (such as property management) and general business tools for everything else (such as project management and finance). This combination has provided me with the best balance of cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and long-term growth.

That said, this is **my opinion and what works for my business**. Your situation may be different. The tools you choose should be based on **your goals, team setup, and comfort level with technology**. There are plenty of options out there, and the "perfect" stack is the one that best supports how you run your business.

Here are my go-to tools:

Property Management & Guest Communication

- Hospitable - Automates guest messaging, syncs calendars, manages multiple OTAs, and helps streamline day-to-day operations.
- Pulse App (Booking.com) - Mobile app to accept bookings and message guests directly (a good backup to your PMS).
- OpenPhone - Cloud-based phone system that allows your entire team to text and answer guest calls from one shared number.
- WhatsApp - Ideal for group chats with cleaners, handymen, vendors, and international guests/vendors.
- Igloohome - Alternative to Encode locks; offers smart locks with unique PIN codes for each guest.

Team Communication & Operations

- Slack - Keeps team communication organized with channels, file sharing, and light project management.
- Google Workspace - Paid business suite with email, file storage, and unlimited-length video call recordings.
- Loom - Record training videos and walkthroughs; also generates AI transcripts for SOPs and guides.
- ClickUp - Project management tools to track tasks, automations, and workflows.
- Zapier - Connects and automates workflows between apps and tools.
- Timeroo - Scheduling tool to manage time-sensitive tasks, shifts, or rotations.

Smart Devices & Security

- Schlage Encode Smart Locks - My preferred smart lock: reliable, secure, and easy for guests to use.
- Minut - Noise monitoring device to prevent parties.
- Ecobee or Nest - Smart thermostats (I prefer Ecobee).

- Eero - Wi-Fi extenders to ensure strong coverage throughout your property.
- Blink or Ring Cameras - Exterior monitoring for security and guest safety. (Ring preferred due to sharing capabilities)

Maintenance & Errands

- TaskRabbit - Hire local help for small tasks, such as furniture assembly or quick repairs.
- Thumbtack - Find vetted professionals for maintenance, repairs, or installations.
- Uber - Useful to move guests in emergencies or transport staff without cars.

Purchasing & Inventory

- Amazon - Quick delivery for nearly everything you need.
- Walmart+ - Low-cost essentials, with Walmart+ offering free delivery.
- Sam's Club - Best prices overall; free 2-day shipping.
- Costco - Known for its excellent towels and washcloths (making the membership worthwhile for linens alone).
- Home Depot - Offers reasonable pricing on supplies and products, including those beyond tools.
- Instacart - Fast delivery when you need something last-minute (slightly higher markups).

Creative & Marketing

- Canva (Pro) - Create listing graphics, social media posts, guest guides, and internal infographics.
- Fiverr - Hire freelancers for design, writing, or specialized projects.
- ChatGPT - Rewrites house rules, optimizes listings, drafts SOPs, policies, captions, and almost any task.
- Wix - Easy-to-use website builder.

- Boostly - Marketing and direct booking website solutions specifically for STR hosts.

Finance & Admin

- QuickBooks - Accounting software for bookkeeping, income tracking, and tax prep.
- Bill.com - ACH payments for vendors (only \$0.49 per transaction).
- Gusto - Payroll platform for staff and contractors, with tax filing if needed.
- LastPass - Securely stores and shares passwords with your team via folders.
- Wise - Low-fee international payments (great for paying VAs).
- PayPal Working Capital - Business funding based on your PayPal sales history.
- NordVPN - Allows staff to access websites that block out-of-country users.

Data, Analytics & Optimization

- AirDNA - Market data to analyze revenue potential in specific areas.
- Rabbu - STR portfolio management and deal analysis platform.
- BnbCalc - Simple calculator to forecast STR deal profitability.
- RankBreeze - Helps improve Airbnb SEO and track ranking performance.
- IntelliHost - Analytics platform for pricing, occupancy, and performance optimization.

Hiring & Talent

- OnlineJobs.ph - Best platform for finding skilled virtual assistants in the Philippines.
- Upwork - Marketplace for freelancers in every niche, from design to data analysis.

NOTE

Don't feel like you need all of these from day one. Start with the essentials.

Insurance

While OTAs provide some level of host protection, it's essential to understand their limits and make sure you supplement with your own coverage:

- Airbnb provides AirCover for Hosts, which includes up to \$3 million in damage protection and \$1 million in liability insurance—but it has exclusions and isn't a replacement for traditional insurance.
- Vrbo offers \$1 million in liability coverage but does not provide damage protection by default (guests must purchase a damage waiver or leave a deposit).
- Booking.com has recently launched host property protection, offering \$1 million in primary insurance coverage for all stays booked through their platform – at no extra cost.

To further protect your business, consider third-party short-term rental insurance providers. These are designed explicitly for STR operations and cover both property damage and liability:

- Proper Insurance – One of the most trusted providers in the STR space; replaces homeowners or landlord policies and includes business liability coverage.
- Safely – Bundles insurance with guest screening and offers up to \$1 million in coverage.
- Truvi (Formerly Superhog) – Provides guest screening and damage protection (can be layered on top of Airbnb or used for direct bookings).
- **InsuraGuest** – Integrates with platforms and PMS systems. Automatically protects guests (who pay a nightly fee). Covers accidental property damage, theft, and liability.

There are others; you can do your own due diligence and pick the one that works best for you.

PRO TIP

If you're engaging in rental arbitrage, ensure your policy covers third-party property, not just owned homes. Always disclose your use of the property as a short-term rental when applying for coverage to avoid claim denials.

This is not a recommendation of which ones I believe are the best. Please do your own research.

What's Next

You've got the fundamentals. Now it's about implementation and scale. I created STR Master Keys and STR Fam specifically for that reason.

STR Master Keys Book

This blueprint shows you how to get started. STR Master Keys is what you use when you're ready to scale.

Inside, I break down the eight skills I used to grow my portfolio to 28+ units and \$2M+ in revenue, including:

- Keeping a steady pipeline of good deals coming in
- Designing and pricing so you can charge more and stay booked
- Shifting from "doing everything" to actually running a real business

If you want to grow a portfolio on purpose instead of guessing, this is your next play.

[Get STR Master Keys](#)

STR Fam (Free Community)

If you don't want to do this alone, start here.

Inside the free **STR Fam** community, you'll get:

- One monthly live Q&A call to help you start the right way
- Bonus videos walking through key parts of this book
- Real deal breakdowns from my 28+ unit portfolio
- A place to ask questions and see how other hosts are applying this
- Basic AI tools access

If you're serious enough to finish this book, you belong in that room.

[Join STR Fam Free](#)

STR Fam Pro (Paid Community)

As you add units, the problems change: team, systems, and growth decisions.

STR Fam Pro is for hosts who want deeper support and more access. Inside, you'll get:

- Live weekly Q&A calls where we go beyond the basics
- Advanced trainings, tools, and systems I currently use
- A tighter circle of operators focused on scaling
- Advanced AI tools access

Use the free community to get moving. When you're ready for sharper strategy and closer support, step into STR Fam Pro.

[Join STR Fam Pro](#)



Summary of Key Points

- **Mindset:** This isn't passive income. Treat it like a real business from day one
- **Market Research:** Use data tools (AirDNA, BNBCalc, Rabbu) and study listings on Airbnb
- **Regulations:** Call the building department. Check for permits, taxes, and anything in the pipeline
- **Profit Target:** \$2,000/month minimum per 1-2 BR unit. Break even within 6-12 months
- **Acquisition:** Build relationships first, scripts second. Negotiate concessions
- **Legal:** Get an addendum with explicit STR approval and a cancellation clause
- **Business Setup:** EIN, LLC, business bank account, business phone and email
- **Budgeting:** \$1,500-\$2,000 per room or \$9-12 per square foot. Account for holding and hidden costs
- **Furnishing:** Follow the 5 Pillars: Budget, Avatar, Theme, Layout, Strategic Shopping
- **Listing:** Optimize title, description, amenities, and photos. Professional photography is non-negotiable
- **Platforms:** Start with Airbnb, Vrbo, and Booking.com. Master one before spreading thin

- Team: Don't do it all yourself. Cleaners, handyman, and a VA (by unit 3) are essential



Conclusion

At the beginning of this book, I told you I'd give you clear steps, real-life examples, and practical strategies that work. No fluff. This is my blueprint. I hope you believe I delivered on that promise.

You now know more about this business than I did when I signed my first lease. A bad deal, in a rough area, with basic furniture, and I ran out of money setting it up. I'm telling you that because I want you to understand something: you don't need to be perfect to start. You just need to start.

But you also need to be smart about it. That's what this book was built to help you do. Use it like the blueprint it is.

Here's the truth: most people who read a book like this won't do anything with it. They'll feel motivated for a day or two, then go back to scrolling. Don't be that person.

Don't wait until everything is perfect. It won't be. Pick a market, do the research, and make the call. I started with a bad deal, and it still changed my life. Imagine

what happens when you start with the knowledge you have now.

Treat this like the business it is. Put in the work. Do it the right way. The income, the freedom, the life you want on the other side of this. It's real, but only if you take action.

I'm rooting for you. Now go build your STR business.

— Keith

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