

THE PHOTO-DAY FIELD GUIDE

Vacation Rental Photography Prep Checklist



A room-by-room checklist for Airbnb, Vrbo, Booking.com and direct-booking properties.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE STANDARD

The property must be cleaned, staged and camera-ready before the photographer arrives.

Your photographer may remove a hot-tub cover or make a small practical adjustment. The appointment does not include cleaning, furniture moving, prop sourcing, bed making or room-by-room styling.

01 — BEFORE ARRIVAL

Make every room readable.

Removal has the highest return: clear visual noise, prove the advertised occupancy and show the amenities guests are choosing.

01 Whole property

- ☐ Deep-clean floors, glass, mirrors, appliances and visible surfaces.
- ☐ Hide cords, remotes, cleaning products, trash cans and owner supplies.
- ☐ Remove seasonal décor and personal photographs unless they are essential to the property story.
- ☐ Open blinds and curtains. Replace dead, flickering or visibly mismatched bulbs.
- ☐ Confirm that the furniture and dining setup support the stated guest capacity.

04 Kitchen + dining

- ☐ Clear counters to show usable workspace; keep only a deliberate coffee or tea setup.
- ☐ Remove refrigerator magnets, dish racks, soap bottles, towels and food packaging.
- ☐ Clean sinks, cooktops, appliance fronts and pendant fixtures.
- ☐ Set or clear the dining table—never leave it half-staged.
- ☐ Straighten chairs and prove that the advertised occupancy can dine together.

02 Bedrooms

- ☐ Make every bed with crisp, wrinkle-free linens.
- ☐ Use restrained pillows and one intentional throw; conceal under-bed clutter.
- ☐ Clear nightstands except for a lamp and one useful hospitality cue.
- ☐ Make bunks, trundles and sofa beds understandable without visual clutter.
- ☐ Hide laundry, luggage, toiletries, charging cords and owner items.

05 Living + work spaces

- ☐ Fluff cushions; remove excess throws and decorative pillows.
- ☐ Arrange seating toward the view, fireplace or conversation area.
- ☐ Clear screens, loose remotes, cables and game-controller clutter.
- ☐ If a workspace is advertised, show a comfortable chair, clear desk, task light and nearby outlet.
- ☐ Stage games, books or local guides as one organized amenity—not scattered decoration.

03 Bathrooms

- ☐ Clear counters and showers of personal products and cleaning tools.
- ☐ Close toilet lids; hide plungers, brushes and wastebaskets.
- ☐ Set matching towels consistently and place a clean bath mat.
- ☐ Polish mirrors, fixtures and shower glass; check every bulb.

06 Low-cost staging wins

- ☐ Matching neutral towels and cohesive textiles.
- ☐ A living plant or simple fresh branch.
- ☐ A tidy coffee setup with only the essentials.
- ☐ Outdoor cushions in good condition.
- ☐ One locally specific item: beach basket, trail guide or regional welcome detail.

02 — LIGHT WITH A REASON

Clarity first. Warmth second.

Natural light is the daytime foundation. Practical lights should support the experience—not introduce a different color in every corner.

01 Daytime lighting decision

Do not turn on every light by habit. Mixed daylight and household bulbs can create distracting color shifts.

- ☐ Open blinds and curtains; remove anything blocking the windows.
- ☐ If daylight is clean and sufficient, leave overhead fixtures off.
- ☐ Turn on selected lamps, pendants or under-cabinet lights only when they add useful atmosphere or illuminate a dark zone.
- ☐ Match visible bulbs for color and brightness before photo day.
- ☐ Tell the photographer about smart switches, dimmers and hidden exterior controls.

02 Exterior + arrival

- ☐ Move all vehicles, bins, hoses, toys, tools and maintenance equipment.
- ☐ Sweep walks and patios; remove leaves, spiderwebs and dead plants.
- ☐ Set outdoor furniture and cushions; clean the grill and dining surfaces.
- ☐ Make parking, entry and self-check-in areas easy to understand.
- ☐ Trim only what is needed to reveal paths, views and key exterior features.

03 Pool, hot tub + fire

- ☐ Water must be clean, clear and at the correct level.
- ☐ Remove covers, straighten loungers and set dry, coordinated towels.
- ☐ Confirm that lights, jets, heaters and fire features work safely.
- ☐ Decide who will light fire features and supervise them.
- ☐ The photographer may remove a hot-tub cover, but staging the amenity is the host's responsibility.

04 Live twilight

A live twilight is photographed during the real sunset transition. Weather, season, tree cover and sunset direction shape the result.

- ☐ Book twilight only when evening is part of the product: view, façade, pool, hot tub, fire pit, terrace or exterior lighting.
- ☐ Test interior lamps, sconces, path lights, string lights and pool lighting before sunset.
- ☐ Stage every visible indoor and outdoor area before the session begins.
- ☐ Remove cars and bins; turn on features at least 20 minutes before the target light.
- ☐ Expect a small hero set—usually one to three excellent images—not a full nighttime gallery.

PHOTO-READY BOUNDARY

Protect the light window.

Cleaning, bed making, prop sourcing, furniture moving and full-room styling should be complete before the appointment. If professional staging is needed, schedule it separately.

03 — BUILD THE BOOKING STORY

Create desire. Remove doubt.

Every image and video needs a job. Show the whole stay, lead with variety and adapt the media to the platform where guests will see it.

01 The first five

Avoid five similar angles. Airbnb uses these images as the cover presentation, and the first one appears in search.

- ☐ Hero: the strongest truthful reason to click.
- ☐ Gathering: how guests spend time together.
- ☐ Sleeping: the best bedroom or clearest capacity story.
- ☐ Differentiator: view, hot tub, pool, beach, game room or terrace.
- ☐ Practical anchor: kitchen, arrival or another essential space.

02 Recommended gallery size

These are Citadel communication guidelines—not platform minimums or booking guarantees.

- ☐ 25–35 finished images for a small, straightforward rental.
- ☐ 35–50 finished images for a larger, amenity-rich or multi-unit property.
- ☐ Show every guest-accessible room and every decision-driving amenity.
- ☐ Use honest wides for layout, mid-range views for scale and selective details to prove value.
- ☐ Do not pad the gallery with near-duplicates or use ultra-wide distortion to exaggerate size.

03 Video prep + placement

Airbnb home listings are currently photo-led. Plan video for the places travelers actually watch it.

- ☐ Horizontal master: direct-booking website, YouTube and Vrbo where video upload is available.
- ☐ Vertical edit: Instagram Reels, TikTok and YouTube Shorts.
- ☐ Property film: clarify arrival, flow, amenities and location with controlled, brand-safe visuals.
- ☐ UGC or creator content: show a lived experience, itinerary or human reaction for social proof.
- ☐ Give every video one audience, one platform and one trackable booking action.
- ☐ Disclose paid, free or discounted creator stays clearly in the video itself.

04 Final 15-minute walkthrough

- ☐ Beds crisp; towels consistent; toilet lids closed.
- ☐ Counters, floors, glass and appliance fronts spotless.
- ☐ Cords, remotes, bins, owner items and cleaning supplies hidden.
- ☐ Cars moved; patios swept; cushions set; water features ready.
- ☐ All relevant bulbs and exterior lights tested.
- ☐ Doors unlocked; smart-home controls and access instructions available.
- ☐ Shot priorities and any live-twilight plan confirmed with the photographer.

Ready for photo day?

Plan the story before the best light arrives.

[CITADELPHOTO.COM](https://citadelphoto.com)