

How to Hire a Vacation Rental Property Management Company

Written by The Evolve Team August 17, 2017



Are you thinking about hiring a property management company to help with your vacation rental?

While there are lots of owners who handle management themselves, it's time consuming to promote your rental, field traveler inquiries, answer questions about your property, vet potential guests, and juggle on-the-ground services like cleaning and maintenance.

If you don't have the time or energy to manage your vacation rental yourself, you'll want to find a qualified property manager to ensure your investment and your guests are in good hands.

Before you hire a property manager, ask these 7 questions to be sure you're getting everything you need.

1. WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT VACATION RENTAL PERFORMANCE IN THE AREA?

You're looking for a manager who has a good feel for the local market. Don't limit yourself to years in the business, either – there are quite a few longtime property managers out there who haven't kept abreast of changes in the industry and don't perform well as a result.

Instead, ask specifically about what they feel high and low seasons are, what types of property they've found are most popular in the area, and how local regulations have affected vacation rental lately. If they have ready and reasonable answers to those questions, you've probably found a solid manager who spends a good amount of time thinking about how to help their clients succeed.

If they seem uncertain or their answers seem off base, you may want to keep looking. Be particularly wary if you know about regulations in the area that they're unaware of – every manager should be fully aware of the status of local short-term rental regulations.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR FEES AND CONTRACT TERMS?

Vacation rental property management fees typically range from 25-50% of your rental income. Before hiring a property manager, you'll want to determine whether you can afford to pay that high of a fee and still meet your rental income goals.

Contracts are the biggest sticking point for owners who have wound up with a poor property manager. If you figure out in the first two months that the property manager isn't doing their job well, but you're locked in for a year-long contract, you're going to be very unhappy for the remaining 10 months of that year.

If a management company requires a contract, ask whether there are any out clauses based on performance or poor service. For example, if the management company fails to clean the property three times in one year, or only gets you 2 bookings in 6 months, you should be able to leave their service.

3. WHAT SERVICES ARE INCLUDED IN YOUR MANAGEMENT FEES?

You should also inquire about any services that aren't included in their fee – for example, some property management companies will charge an additional fee if one of their employees has to visit the property outside of business hours to address a problem the guest is having.

Specifically ask whether the fee covers: marketing, cleaning, maintenance, pre-stay walkthroughs, in-person visits for any issue that arises during a guest's stay.

Once you know what services the fee does and does not cover, ask yourself if you're getting enough bang for your buck. If your management company covers everything from marketing to maintenance, the fee may be worthwhile. If it only covers cleaning and all other services are an add-on, you should probably keep shopping for a better fit.

4. HOW DO YOU MARKET MY PROPERTY?

This is an important one! Many vacation rental management companies prefer to market their clients' properties only on their own website. That can be a problem because an individual manager's website, no matter how popular, is never going to get the same amount of traffic as major listing sites like VRBO or Airbnb – which means you're missing out on a lot of potential guests.

A vacation rental manager's 25-50% ought to cover the cost of marketing your property on at least one major listing site in addition to any marketing efforts they make to raise the profile of their own site. Listen for words like "appear high in the search results" or "search engine marketing" – these are good indicators your manager has put effort into raising and maintaining their website's profile online.

Your manager should also actively solicit reviews from happy guests and follow up with guests who have already stayed at the property to see if they want to re-book next year. Ask your vacation rental manager what they do to ensure repeat business and 5-star reviews to entice new guests to come and stay at your property.

5. WHEN AND HOW ARE GUESTS ABLE TO BOOK MY PROPERTY?

Vacation rental managers aren't awake around the clock (which is just fine, because most guests aren't either!) but they should be available when people are likely to be making their travel plans: before work, after work, and on weekends.

If your manager is only available to make bookings from 9-5 on weekdays, odds are very good you'll be missing out on bookings from people who work standard office jobs at those hours.

You should also ask if guests are able to book online and use a credit card. The vast majority of guests prefer to book online, and very few are willing to send a paper check in the mail. If your potential manager doesn't offer any way for those guests to book online, you won't get the number of bookings you're looking for.

6. HOW OFTEN CAN WE EXPECT UPDATES ON OUR PROPERTY'S CONDITION?

After every stay, you'll want to know that your guests left the property in good condition, and that any accidental damage was documented and addressed. Be sure to ask your potential vacation rental manager how they handle issues like broken dishes or missing items after a guest's stay.

You're looking for a manager who performs a post-stay walkthrough after every guest leaves, takes photos of any damages for your records, and takes steps to bring the property back up to good condition for the next guests.

Your property manager isn't expected to pay for damages out of pocket – that cost will come from the guest's deposit or a damage protection program like [Property Protection Plus by Evolve](#). However, your manager should notice the damage, report it, and speak to the guest about retaining their deposit to cover the damage if necessary.

7. CAN I SPEAK TO SOME OF YOUR CURRENT CLIENTS?

Always ask to speak with a few existing clients prior to signing a contract. Previous owners won't necessarily know about changes to the operation that you won't like, but current owners can tell you exactly what to expect.

If a manager is reluctant to give you references or isn't on good enough terms with their current clients to ask them for the favor of speaking to their experience, that's a sign this manager isn't going to be a good fit for you.

On the other hand, if their current clients rave about this vacation rental manager and give you lots of insider tips they've learned since working with them on navigating the local market, full speed ahead! This manager may well be just the partner in business you're looking for.

AND NOW, A QUESTION FOR YOU

One last question: Have you evaluated the credentials of your prospective vacation rental manager. I use an entirely new approach to providing all the services you need in a manager – along with some extras! – for significantly less than most vacation rental managers that aren't nationally certified.

If top-of-the-line marketing, a team fielding your inquiries 7 days a week, amazing customer service, no term contracts, and far more flexibility in how you handle on-the-ground services sounds like it might be a better fit for your needs, we suggest you me for a verbal conversation and to establish.

You may find that your perfect vacation rental manager is just a phone call away. Call me today!