

A photograph of a vacation rental property, a wooden cabin on a dock over water. A man is jumping from the dock into the water. Two women are sitting on the dock in the background. The scene is surrounded by lush green trees and foliage.

Built to Stay Report

The keys to winning traveler
trust in vacation rentals

What's inside:

This report moves past general travel trends to focus exclusively on the vacation rental space. Dive in to learn what matters most in today's market, including:

- **The definition of quality:** Why travelers prioritize reliable basics and consistent service over luxurious extras
- **The trust equation:** How verified reviews and accurate photos act as the primary currency for conversion
- **Friction-free booking:** Identifying the specific nonnegotiables that cause travelers to walk away at the finish line
- **The promotion payoff:** How to use strategic offers to attract guests and win the tiebreaker against similar listings

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Quality:



The new standard for success

Vacation rentals are now a mainstream travel choice giving travelers access to the locations they want and the space, privacy, and home amenities that make trips convenient. For many travelers, that combination is exactly what sets vacation rentals apart when comparing lodging options.

But as the vacation rental market matured, it experienced growing pains fueled partly by the pandemic's impact on supply growth. With more supply on the market, differentiation is more important than ever. Travelers have more options, more ways to compare them, and less tolerance for friction. They still come to vacation rentals for what makes them different, but they increasingly expect a quality experience that is consistent every time they book.

Because of this, trust has become the new currency. Travelers are looking for proof that a property will deliver what it promises — key trust signals like accurate listing content, clearer pricing, strong reviews, and reliable support before and during the stay, for example.

This research was designed to reveal what travelers see as the quality standard for vacation rentals, how they judge whether a property feels trustworthy, and what ultimately makes them decide to book. In other words, it accurately illustrates exactly where the vacation rental category stands today in terms of traveler expectations.



Tim Rosolio, Vice President of Vacation Rental Partnerships at Expedia Group



Methodology

We surveyed 1,758 travelers across seven global markets to decode the specific signals they use to judge your property, your management, and your value.¹

1,758

respondent survey
powered by The Harris Poll

All respondents had stayed
in a vacation rental in the past
12 months

Fielded from April 22-24, 2026

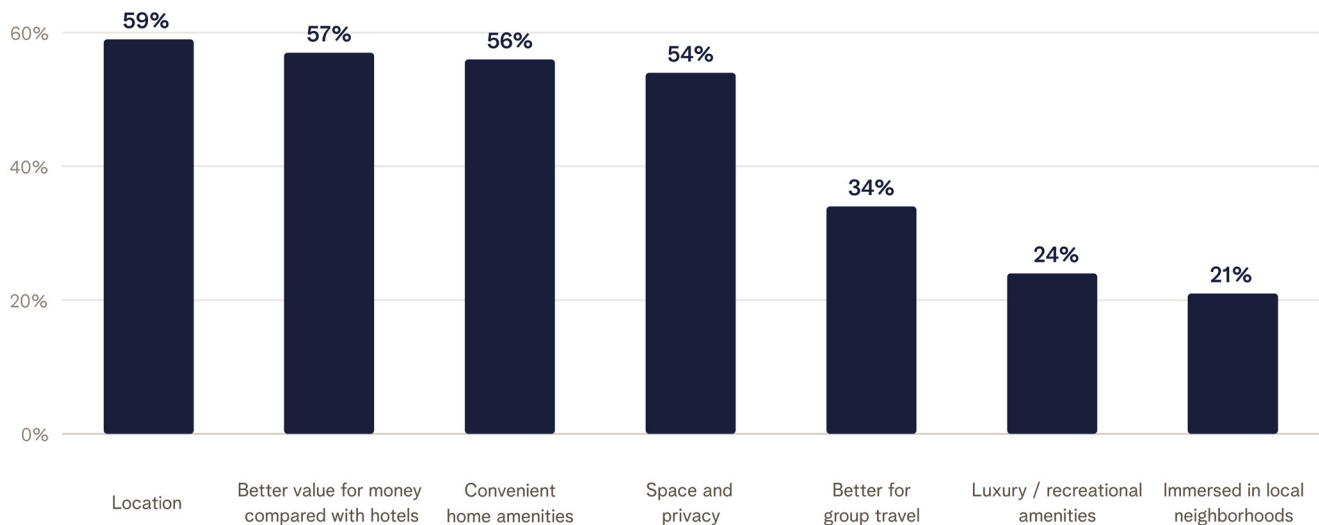
7 markets

United States
Canada
Mexico
United Kingdom
France
Germany
Australia

Why travelers choose vacation rentals — and why they hesitate

Vacation rentals continue to win on the things that have always made the category compelling: location, value, convenient home amenities, flexible space, and privacy.

Top reasons for choosing vacation rentals



Question 10: When you think about why you choose vacation rentals for travel, which of the following are your top reasons?

Those strengths remain powerful because they meet real trip needs, especially for longer stays, family travel, and group trips. The appeal is practical, not aspirational. Travelers are looking for a stay that works for the way they travel, not just the idea of living like a local.

But these benefits come with anxieties and a sense of uncertainty for many travelers. Before the stay even begins, travelers worry about hidden or extra fees that change the value equation at the last minute, host cancellations, and slow or missing communication when they need reassurance the most. Those concerns can make the path to booking feel less straightforward and make travelers question the vacation rental travel experience altogether.



Pre-stay anxieties

42%

Hidden or extra fees

36%

Host cancelling last minute

33%

Non-responsive host after booking is made



On-property anxieties

41%

Broken or unreliable amenities

41%

Cleanliness issues

39%

Property not matching the photos/descriptions

Question 11. When booking a vacation rental, what are your biggest anxieties before your stay occurs?

Question 12. Upon arrival at your vacation rental and during your stay, what are your biggest anxieties?

That anxiety doesn't disappear once the trip begins. Upon arrival, travelers worry about broken amenities, cleanliness issues, and properties that don't match the listing. In practical terms, that can mean arriving excited to cook and finding dirty kitchen utensils, discovering the hot tub they were counting on is out of order, or realizing the bunk beds their kids were looking forward to sleeping in have been replaced by a single twin.

Travelers are drawn to vacation rentals because of what they make possible, but they also see more room for things to go wrong. That push and pull is central to the category. The result is a higher bar for confidence.



It isn't enough for a property to look appealing. Travelers need to believe the experience will be dependable from booking through checkout.

Partner takeaway

Remove the biggest sources of doubt from the equation.



Show all fees upfront and don't tack on surprise charges after booking, e.g., fees for amenity usage.



Avoid cancellations whenever possible — they break trust and can lead to penalties on Vrbo.



If communication is a weak spot, put stronger systems in place so guests get timely updates and answers.



Provide the consistent level of cleanliness travelers expect every time. "Clean enough" is no longer enough.



Defining quality when travelers expect more

As the vacation rental industry increasingly focuses on quality over quantity of properties, it's critical to understand how quality is perceived by travelers. **Research shows that the power is in the practical, not necessarily the luxury.** A property that gets it right excels on what travelers consider as nonnegotiables: cleanliness, reliability, safety, responsiveness, and transparency.

The baseline for confidence

These nonnegotiables point to a clear theme: Travelers are focused on the fundamentals that make a stay feel safe, clean, reliable, and easy to trust before they book. These are no longer nice-to-haves or differentiators for a small subset of travelers. They are simply essential.

The top nonnegotiables when booking a vacation rental



Safe and secure property



High rating and positive reviews for cleanliness



Fast and reliable Wi-Fi



Host who is responsive



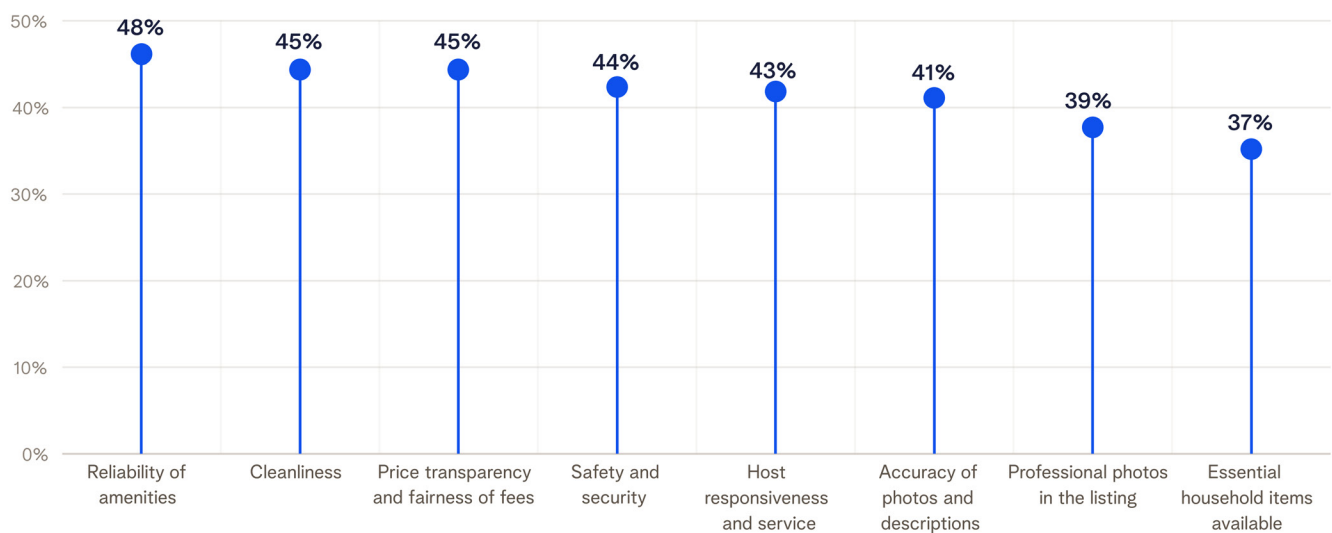
Accurate listing photos

The top nonnegotiables travelers have when booking a vacation rental are safety and cleanliness. Other nonnegotiables that rose to the top include fast and reliable Wi-Fi, responsive hosts, and accurate listing photos.

And travelers aren't just holding properties to that baseline — they are raising it.



Where expectations have increased over the past 2-3 years



Question 13. Compared with 2-3 years ago, how have your expectations for vacation rentals changed in each of the following areas?
Note: Results are net of “somewhat higher” and “much higher.”

With the vacation rental category entering a more mature phase, traveler expectations have risen most in the areas that matter most to a smooth stay: reliable amenities, cleanliness, fair and transparent pricing, host responsiveness and service, and accurate, professional listing photos.

Partner takeaway

Make the basics operational, not optional. Make security visible with features like smart locks that generate a new code for every booking. Deliver hotel-like cleanliness every stay, make sure Wi-Fi is fast and reliable, respond quickly before and during the stay, and keep photos updated, high-quality and accurate so guests know exactly what to expect.

How guests judge quality

Quality matters because it affects both perception and performance. Most travelers say they would pay more for a higher-quality vacation rental, showing that quality isn't just an experience issue. It's a commercial one as well.

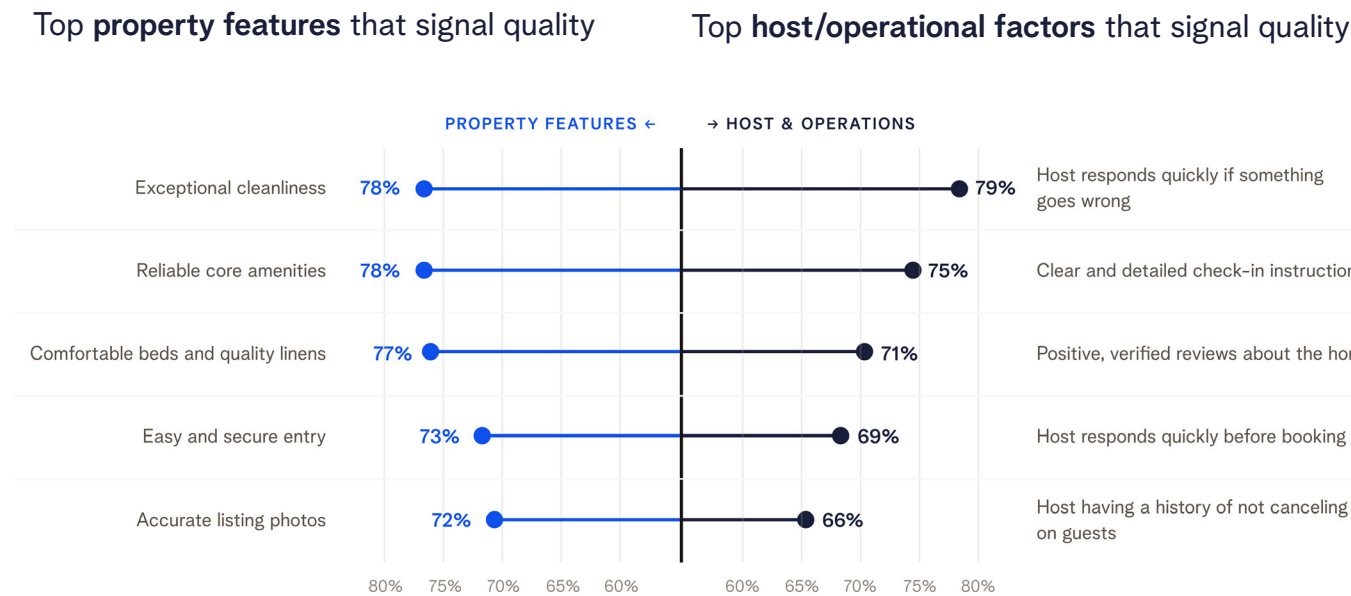


86% would pay more for a vacation rental with a higher-quality listing.

And that number rises to 91% among Gen Z.

That willingness to pay is even stronger among Vrbo travelers: 26% say they would pay 11% or more for a higher-quality property, compared with 17% on average.

But how exactly are travelers judging and defining quality? What specifically signals quality in the property itself and in the host experience? We asked. And the answer is clear: Quality isn't just about beautiful design or premium amenities. It is about reducing doubt and increasing trust.



Question 16. How important are each of the following property features in signaling that a vacation rental is high quality?
Question 17. How important are each of the following host and operational factors to you in signaling that a vacation rental is high quality?
Note: Results are net of "very important" and "extremely important."

Travelers define quality through a mix of signals tied to the property itself and to how the stay is managed overall. The strongest signals of property quality are exceptional cleanliness and reliable amenities, followed by comfortable beds and quality linens, easy and secure entry, and accurate listing photos.

Because cleanliness is such a foundational part of the vacation rental experience, we wanted to understand what “clean” actually means to travelers. Their answers point to a set of specific, visible signals of care.

Seventy-four percent cite fresh, clean sheets and towels; 67% no unpleasant odors or smells; and 66% both spotless bathroom surfaces and trash removed, with bins clean and empty on arrival.

Travelers are judging not only the property itself but also how confidently the stay appears to be managed. Quality hosts are responsive, offer detailed check-in instructions, and have positive reviews. Speed matters here. More than half of travelers expect a response within an hour or less if something goes wrong, and many expect help even faster.

Partner takeaway

Turn quality into a repeatable part of your operation. A strong cleaner is one of the most important parts of the guest experience, because consistent, high-quality cleaning is one of the clearest signals of quality travelers notice. And when something goes wrong, hosts need reliable systems in place so guests can get help quickly. For practical steps on building a stronger operation, start with [How to List Your Property on Vrbo](#).

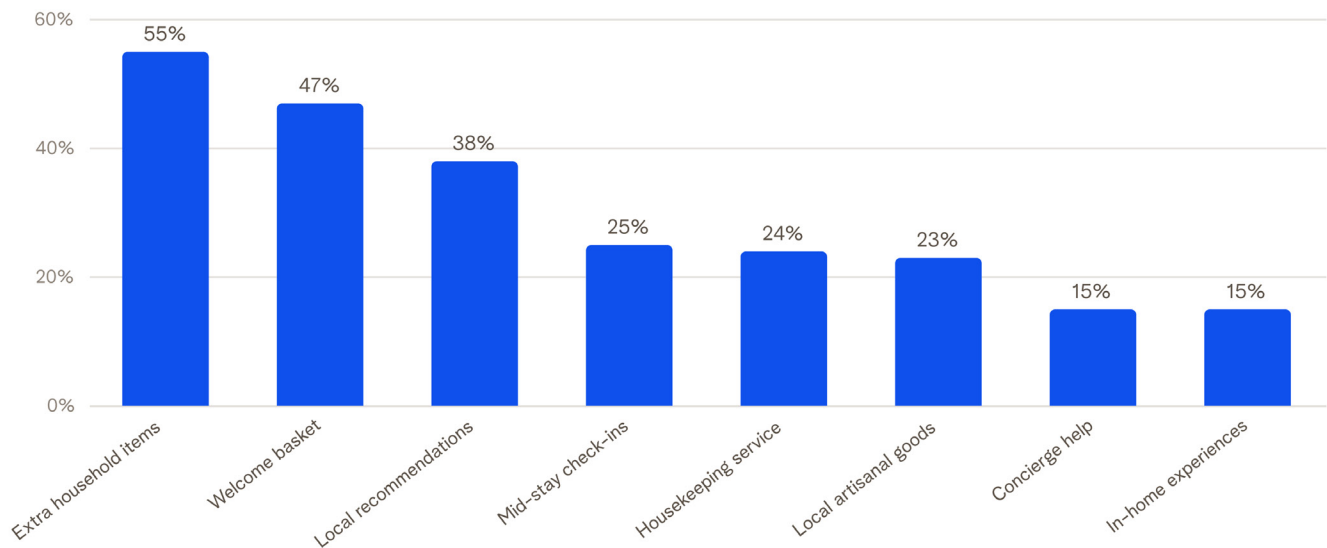


56% of travelers expect hosts to respond in an hour or less if something goes wrong.

Bringing quality to the next level

Once the fundamentals are in place, travelers value extras that make the stay easier, smoother, or more comfortable. The most appreciated touches are often practical: extra household essentials or thoughtful local recommendations.

The most appreciated thoughtful extras



Question 19: Which of the following thoughtful extras or added services would you appreciate most from a vacation rental?
(Select up to 3)

Ultimately, travelers want the household basics that make a stay feel easy from the moment they arrive. They don't want to run to the store for more toilet paper, paper towels, or dishwasher pods. Simple touches like welcome snacks or a small basket of essentials can help guests settle in right away — especially after a long travel day.

In most cases, travelers aren't looking for luxury add-ons like in-home experiences or concierge-style services. They're looking for the practical comforts that make the stay feel easy, well-run, and stress-free.

Partner takeaway

Prioritize the extras travelers value most: household essentials (paper towels, toilet paper, etc.) and thoughtful local recommendations. Highlight these touches in your property listing so guests can see the extra attention and care before they book. These practical details do more to reduce stress and improve the stay than more elaborate add-ons.



Trust is the new currency

Quality attracts travelers, but proof is what converts them. Trust signals make travelers more likely to book — and more willing to pay more once they believe the property will deliver.

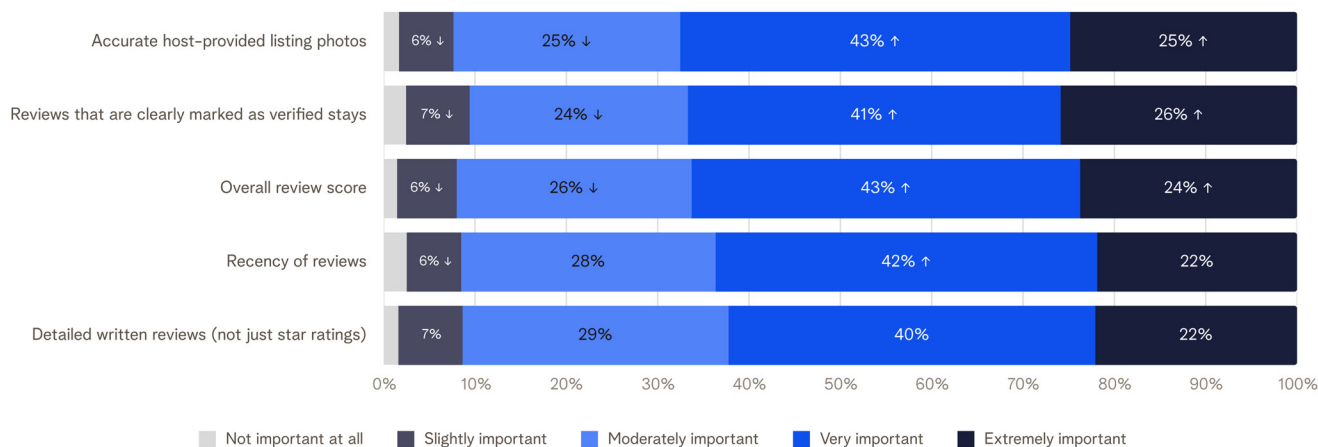
81% would pay more for a vacation rental with stronger trust signals.

And that number rises to **88% among Gen Z.**

On Vrbo, trust signals are peppered throughout the search experience from Premier Host and Loved by Guest badges to ratings on cleanliness, acceptance rate, and communication. But one signal sits at the center of the traveler's trust equation: reviews.



The most important trust signals when choosing a vacation rental



Question 22: When choosing a vacation rental, how important are each of the following trust signals?

Travelers place high importance on strong review scores and reviews that are verified, recent, and detailed. Vrbo travelers are especially attuned to these signals.

Looking specifically at the data for Vrbo travelers, 73% say recency of reviews is a very or extremely

important trust signal compared with 64% on average, and 54% of Vrbo travelers say the same of property badges versus 46% on average.

Travelers don't just want proof that a property was good once. They want evidence that it is delivering a reliable experience now.

54% say real traveler photos from people who have stayed at the property are important trust signals.

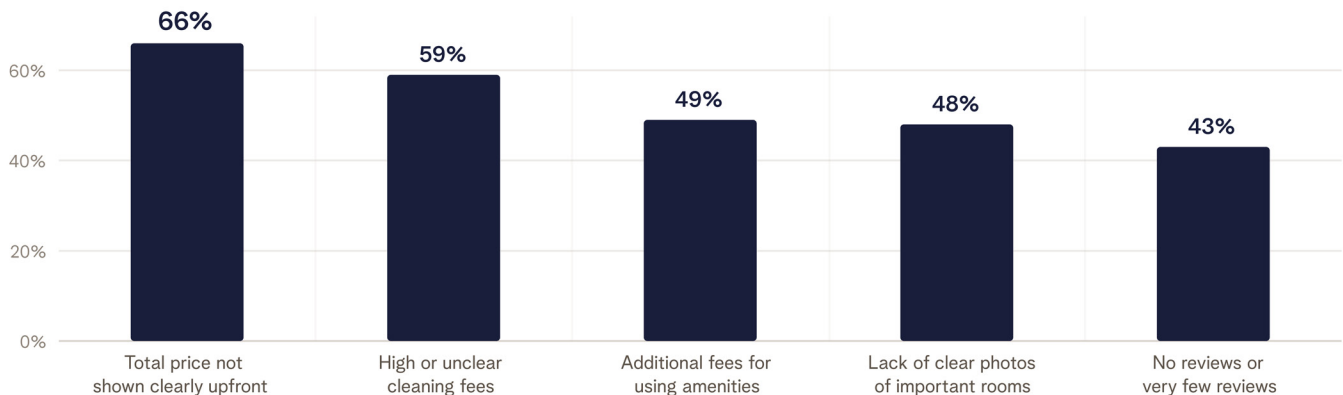
Partner takeaway

Make detailed reviews a habit, not a nice-to-have. Vrbo will automatically ask guests to leave a review after their stay, but a personal message from you a few days after checkout can go a long way in prompting action. Encourage guests to leave recent, specific feedback about cleanliness, amenities, and the overall experience — and to share real photos — so future travelers have the proof they are looking for. See [how to drive positive Vrbo guest reviews](#) for practical tips.

What makes or breaks a booking

Once travelers narrow their options, the decision becomes less emotional and more practical. At that point, properties win or lose based on whether they remove friction and make the choice feel straightforward. The findings provide a clear lesson on what not to do as a host.

The biggest deal breakers when booking a vacation rental



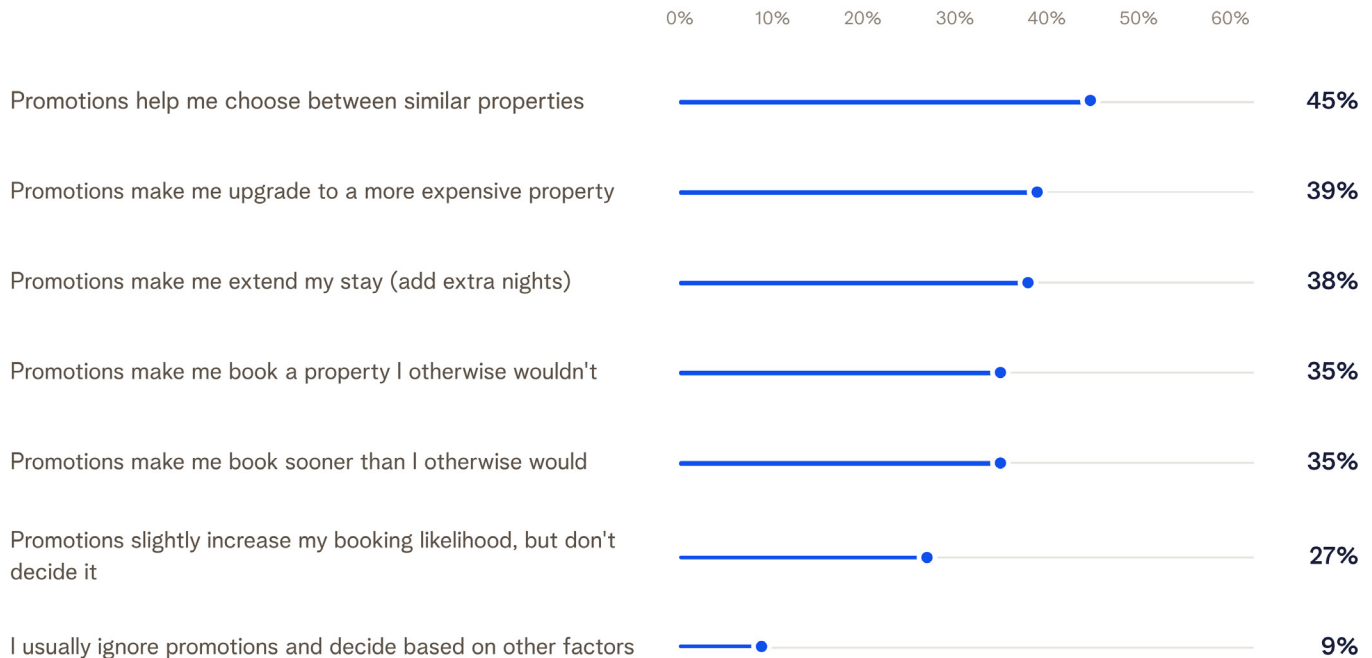
Question 25: For each of the following, please indicate whether it would be a deal breaker, something that would make you shop around more, or not a big issue when booking a vacation rental?

The biggest deal breakers center on price clarity. Travelers are likely to walk away when the total price isn't shown clearly upfront, when cleaning fees feel high or unclear, or when extra fees appear for using amenities. A lack of clear photos of key rooms and few or no reviews can also create enough doubt to stop a booking.

What helps tip the decision in the other direction? Promotions.

91% of travelers are influenced by promotions when booking a vacation rental.

How promotions affect travelers looking to book



Question 27: Thinking about booking a vacation rental property, how do promotions or discounts on that specific property typically affect your booking decision?

Travelers say promotions can help them choose between similar properties, trade up to a more expensive option, or extend their stay. In competitive sets where several listings already meet the basics, promotions can provide the final push — especially when they are paired with clear value and low friction.

That dynamic is even more pronounced among Vrbo travelers. **Fifty-four percent say promotions help them choose between similar properties, versus 45% of travelers on average. Nearly half say promotions can lead them to upgrade to a more expensive property (49% vs. 39%), extend their stay (45% vs. 38%), or even book a property they otherwise wouldn't have considered (45% vs. 35%).** In other words, promotions don't just drive cheaper bookings — they can unlock more valuable ones.

Partner takeaway

Remove the friction points that stop bookings. Show the total price upfront, keep cleaning and amenity fees simple, make sure key rooms are clearly photographed, and continually build fresh reviews that reassure guests. Then use promotions strategically to help your property stand out once the basics are in place — learn how to [master Vrbo promotion strategies](#).



The City Traveler

- Looking to be immersed in local neighborhoods
- Anxious about check-in instructions
- Expects quick response times if issues arise



The Beach Traveler

- Looking for great locations and luxury/recreational amenities
- Higher expectations around accuracy of listings
- More influenced by promotions

How guest expectations vary by destination



The Lake Traveler

- Anxious about cancellations and overwhelming house rules
- Looking for well-equipped kitchens and ample recreational amenities
- More likely to say lack of badging is a deal breaker



The Mountain/Ski Traveler

- Looking for well-equipped kitchens
- Appreciates local, personalized recommendations
- Will pay more for properties with stronger trust signals



The Countryside Traveler

- Looking for strong value and thoughtful extras
- More likely to say trash removal is a key sign of cleanliness
- Sees high or unclear cleaning fees as a deal breaker



Translating insights into success on Vrbo

These findings point to a clear opportunity for Vrbo partners. Travelers have become more specific about what they want, what they trust, and what they won't tolerate. The next step is to turn those expectations into actions that improve performance on Vrbo: stronger listings, better-maintained amenities, clearer trust signals, and more strategic promotions.

1

Build a stronger listing to reduce traveler anxieties

A stronger listing reduces uncertainty before a guest even books. Make sure the listing clearly communicates bed setup, bathrooms, amenities, entry details, parking, and outdoor spaces so travelers can quickly tell whether the property works for their trip. Keep photos and listing information tightly aligned to the real experience. Accurate listings aren't just good practice; they directly support trust.

Vrbo data shows that photos matter to travelers as well. We see that net-new properties with **25+ photos convert 7-9% higher** than those with fewer photos.²

Offering flexibility can also help reduce hesitation. Travelers who are already worried about uncertainty are more likely to move forward when cancellation terms feel clear and manageable. Want more guidance on flexible cancellation policies? [Check out our blog.](#)

Deliver the core amenities travelers count on

Unique amenities are a major reason travelers choose vacation rentals, but they are also one of the things guests worry most about being broken or unavailable. Regularly check and maintain the amenities guests depend on most, especially Wi-Fi, heating and air conditioning, kitchen appliances, hot water, and entry systems. These aren't minor operational details. They play a major role in whether a stay feels dependable.

When travelers are searching for vacation rental properties across Vrbo, Expedia, and our

B2B network, **the most-used amenity filters are pools, hot tubs, parking, air conditioning, and free Wi-Fi.**³

However, looking at the filters driving the highest conversion rates points to a slightly different set of priorities: **Kitchen, pet-friendly, and washer/dryer filters are especially strong conversion signals**, suggesting that the amenities most likely to drive booking are the ones that help travelers picture an easier, more functional stay.⁴

2

3.

Build trust before guests arrive

Trust is built through the basics: strong reviews, responsiveness, clear policies and check-in information, accurate photos, and a track record of following through. Use Vrbo tools — including the Vrbo Owner app, guest messaging, and email templates — to answer questions quickly and proactively send guests the details they need before they have to ask.

Top-performing hosts already do this well. **Eighty-seven percent of Vrbo's Top 1% of hosts initiate communication before a booked guest even asks a question, whether by providing check-in information, local tips, or trip logistics.**⁵

It also helps to protect the booking itself. Taking steps to maintain a strong [honored booking rate](#) can increase guest confidence and make travelers feel safer committing to the stay.

An achievement you can earn through building that trust is Premier Host status. That recognition goes a long way in signaling to travelers that you consistently deliver quality. Premier Host listings see an average of 2x more page views than non-Premier Host listings, and **Premier Host listings convert page views to bookings at a 76% higher rate than similar non-Premier Host listings.**⁶

Use promotions strategically to tip the booking decision

Promotions can do more than lower the price. They can help travelers choose between similar properties, trade up to a more expensive stay, extend their trip, or consider a property they otherwise might not have booked. The opportunity isn't just to offer the same stay for less but to use promotions to unlock better outcomes once the fundamentals are already in place.

Hosts see an average uplift of 15% in incremental net booking value (NBV) across promotion types.⁷

Think about promotions as a way to stand out in a competitive set, not as a race to the bottom. For ideas on how to do that well, [read our blog post](#) on how to master Vrbo promotion strategies.

4.



See how the research plays out in real life

Karl Tretter's hosting style is a strong example of how to put these learnings into practice. Read how he expanded from one property to 14 by making quality a priority from the start.

[Read the blog](#)



¹Unless otherwise noted, data in report is from Expedia Group, Built to Stay Report: The Keys to Winning Traveler Trust in Vacation Rentals, 2026

²Vrbo internal data, 2025-Q1 2026, across 1- to 4-bedroom homes

³Expedia Group internal data, June 2025-June 2026

⁴Ibid.

⁵Vrbo internal data, 2025

⁶Vrbo internal data, Jan 28-Mar 31, 2026

⁷Expedia Group internal data, 2025