The Blueprint For How to Start an Airbnb

A Step-by-Step Path to Your First Booking

Distilled from Rob Abasolo's 3-hour Airbnb masterclass, built from 9+ years running short-term rentals himself.

Your math on Airbnb usually works. What stops people is never starting. This blueprint pulls the steps that matter out of a 3-hour course, the ones that take you from thinking about it to your first guest checking in.

5 Ways to Get In

- **House hacking:** Rent out rooms, a bonus space, or an ADU in a home you already live in.
- **Rental arbitrage:** Lease a property, then sublease it on Airbnb.
- **Buy and hold:** Purchase a second property built to cash flow as a full-time short-term rental.
- **Glamping or a duplex:** Lower buy-in models for people without a big down payment.
- **Medium-term rental:** 30-day-plus stays, which also works as a backup plan in markets that restrict short-term rentals.

The 10 Steps

1. Set your goal first.

Wanting to quit your job and wanting a low-key vacation home you break even on require 2 completely different strategies. Know which one you're building before you buy anything.

2. Get pre-approved before you fall in love with a property.

Lenders typically want your debt-to-income ratio under 40-45%. This number decides your market before you ever pick one.

3. Pick your market based on your budget, not your bucket list.

Four types worth looking at: National parks, state parks, eclectic small cities near a bigger draw, and vacation destinations. Run a price audit on Redfin or Zillow for what your pre-approval buys there, and check whether short-term rentals are legal in that city before you go further.

4. Find a realtor who already understands short-term rentals.

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5. Run the numbers before you run to the closing table.

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6. Keep renovations light.

Paint, flooring, a shower curtain over a dated tub. Save the full remodel for a deal with real value-add upside, not your first property.

7. Invest in real photos.

Twilight and golden hour shots outperform daytime ones every time. Never go live with cell phone photos. It may be tempting, but we believe that it is absolutely imperative to launch with your best foot forward.

8. Automate your guest messages.

Four messages minimum: Welcome, check-in, checkout, and a review request 2 days after checkout.

9. Build your team before you need it.

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Six roles make up the bulk of the work in self-managing a short-term rental:

- **Cleaner:** Priority one. Pay them well, they're at your property more than you are, and they're your early warning system for anything broken.

- **Handyman:** Keep 2 to 3 on rotation since the reliable ones are always busy. Jobs under roughly $1,000 stay with a handyman; bigger jobs need a contractor.

- **Pest control:** $50 to $80 a month, usually includes emergency visits. One bug sighting can trigger a refund demand, so this is prevention, not overkill.

- **Landscaper:** An overgrown yard kills the first impression before a guest opens the door.

- **Pool or hot tub person:** Hot tubs break down constantly and guests notice fast. Budget for a dedicated person, not a DIY fix.

- **Contractor:** Someone you hopefully rarely call, but need on standby for anything past a handyman's scope, roof leaks, structural issues, major systems.

Find all 6 through referrals, from your realtor or a host community like **Host Camp, but never cold.**

10. Have a regulation backup plan.

If a market bans or restricts short-term stays, converting to a 30-day minimum medium-term rental keeps the property earning, typically 30-50% less than short-term rates, but still ahead of a standard long-term lease.short-term rentals are legal in that city before you go further.

No Money Down? Here's How to Fund Your First Deal Anyway

You don't need six figures sitting in a bank account to buy your first short-term rental. Two structures worth knowing:

- **The bankroll-and-brains split**. A partner brings the capital and qualifies for the loan. You find the property, run the deal, and manage the business. Structure it so you don't take a paycheck until your partner is paid back in full; that alignment is what gets partners to work with you again.

- **HELOC arbitrage.** Someone with unused equity in their home lends it to you through a home equity line of credit at their rate, say 5%, and you pay them a higher rate, say 10%. They earn money on equity that was sitting idle. You get funding without going through a bank's underwriting process.

- **Both come down to the same principle:** These deals tend to start the same way; someone already knew the person was serious about real estate, before any pitch happened. Put yourself out there before you need the money, not after.

Run Your Own Numbers

	Example	Your numbers
	$285,000	
Est. gross annual revenue	$106,000	
Target cash-on-cash return	20–50%+	
Renovation/setup budget	Cosmetic only	

The Host Camp take

Airbnb isn't hard, but it's hard work. People who succeed here aren't smarter or better funded. They ran the numbers on a real property instead of watching more videos about it.

Disclaimer: This guide reflects one investor's approach to short-term rentals. Results vary by market, financing, and execution. Partnership and private lending structures involve real legal and tax complexity. Talk to a licensed real estate professional and a real estate attorney, and run your own numbers before buying.

What to Do Next

You've now got the blueprint Rob spent 9+ years building, buying properties, testing strategies, and teaching hosts how to do the same. The people who read guides like this and still don't buy anything in the next 12 months usually stall on the same thing: Nobody in their corner while they run their first deal.

Rob Abasolo and Kai Andrew built Host Camp into the world’s biggest resource for short-term rentals. Visit our website for blogs, newsletters, tools, and personally mentored coaches, all built to help hosts go from managing 1 property to managing a real portfolio. We want to get first-time hosts from thinking about it to closing on their first property.

We'll run your numbers with you and tell you straight whether your first deal makes sense.

Book your complimentary strategy call here →