



*Taken from HomeAway's email marketing campaign*

Your final guests are packing up and the cash from your last few bookings is about to hit your bank account. It's the end of vacation rental busy season.

In the calm after the storm, it's tempting to take a deep breath and relax.

**Although summer is the busy season for the majority of vacation rentals, there's still plenty to do in the downtime that follows.**

We asked industry experts, including some of 's successful owners, to share the tips they use to wrap up one busy season and prepare for the next. Here are their top recommendations that you can use as summer winds down and you start thinking about how to prepare for your next big booking window.

## 1. BLOCK OFF A WEEKEND FOR YOURSELF

Julie Merritt, a successful homeowner in Provincetown, Massachusetts, likes to reserve a weekend in the fall when she and her wife can stay in the property. That's when they do a thorough inventory check and perform any necessary maintenance to restore the house to their high standards.

**“At the end of the summer it's good to plan a weekend to stay in the unit to replace and refresh everything for the fall rentals.** After hosting the volume of people in our unit over the summer, it's important to make sure the unit doesn't look like a rundown rental property,” Julie explained.

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Trista Custer, a highly successful owner with three vacation rentals in Arizona, echoes this recommendation: “Spend a night in your home to really take in the guest experience and uncover any items needing attention. Also, ask the housekeeping company to conduct a standard clean prior to your stay so you can see what the full guest experience is like.”

Staying in your vacation rental and seeing it through the eyes of a guest is a great way to spot problems that may have gone unnoticed otherwise. Small issues such as worn towels or loose drawer pulls are the types of things you may not notice during a quick sweep of the house, but that guests will recognize right away.

## 2. RESTOCK BACK-UP SUPPLIES

The post-busy-season lull is the ideal time to restock your vacation rental with all the basics that guests need to have a pleasant stay, according to Alanna Shroeder, the owner of The Distinguished Guest.

“First, be sure to stock all the five back-up items I recommend is three sets of backup linens, extra towels, backup small appliances, cleaning supplies, dishes and glassware). It will make your life so much easier to have these things on hand when it gets busy again,” said Alanna.

You go through a lot of supplies during the busy season. Even the most responsible guests can leave you with a broken glass and a stain or two throughout the year. Accidents happen – there’s no avoiding that – but you can minimize the hassles they cause by replacing damaged items and purchasing backup items before your next rush.

## 3. SWITCH OUT SEASONAL BEDDING

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Swapping out light summer blankets for heavier quilts and comforters might not be on the top of your to-do list in August, but perhaps it should be.

“Switch over your breezy summer linens to your cozy fall ones,” advised Alanna Schroeder. “Add an extra blanket and a few more throw pillows. Pull out the down comforter.”

You’ll need heavier bedding for shoulder season bookings that stretch into the fall and winter when temperatures drop. **It’s a good idea to keep additional sets of linens and blankets on hand rather than a single set that you expect to work for all seasons and temperatures.** Guests will really appreciate the homey touch and the option to get cozy on cool nights.

## 4. READ AND RESPOND TO YOUR REVIEWS

Two owners in South Lake Tahoe said they spend their down time addressing as many of their past guests’ critiques and suggestions as possible.

**“One way to utilize the slow time after a busy season is to look back at all the reviews you’ve received and identify a list of critiques or suggestions from guests.** Go back through these and respond to relevant reviews with an update of what you have addressed! This way those guests (and others reading through past reviews) know that you’ve done your best to address the feedback!” said owners Morgan and Travis Fields.

**Reviews are critical to your vacation rental business.** To make your business stronger, it’s a great idea to use the break at the end of busy season to comb through them and make meaningful changes.

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## 5. REVISE YOUR WELCOME BOOK

A Welcome Book is a living, breathing guide to your vacation rental. Restaurants go out of business, road construction changes driving routes, and favorite shops relocate. That's why

Trista Custer suggests giving this valuable document a facelift every year when busy season comes to a close.

**“Check your guest book and other forms of guest communication to make sure everything is correct and up to date.** See if there is anything you should add based on guest feedback,” said Trista.

Unless you update your welcome book, guests will be none the wiser. And when they go to visit your recommended ice cream parlour and find it's been replaced with an insurance office, they will be left with a bad taste in their mouths.

If you need a new Welcome Book for your vacation rental. It's the perfect solution for an up-to-date guest book because you can go back, edit, and reprint if any of the information has changed.

## 6. CONDUCT A COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

“Take the time to educate yourself on the direct competition in your area. This allows you to stay competitive with your pricing, with the amenities you provide, and gives you an idea of how you can set yourself above the rest of the vacation rentals in your area,” added Trista.

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Survey the vacation rental marketplace by using the top listing sites in your area. This type of research will give you a solid understanding of where you fit into the market and will provide you with a good idea about where you're ahead of the curve and where you can improve.

Make adjustments based on what you discover to keep your vacation rental among the top choices in the area.

## 7. REPLACE ANY ITEMS WITH SIGNIFICANT WEAR AND TEAR

If you get a chance to spend some time in your property, take note of any items that are no longer in peak condition and replace them. If you can't do it yourself, ask your cleaning company or guest contact to do a spot check for you.

**"Look out for towels, linens, and other amenities that are no longer fresh and clean,"** said Trista.

Dingy towels and threadbare linens **do not** give guests the right impression about your vacation rental. They suggest that the house is in a state of disrepair. Switch out any items that are past their prime with fresh replacements to ensure guests feel like they're staying in a safe and comfortable accommodation.

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## 8. TACKLE A BI-ANNUAL DEEP CLEANING

Spring cleaning doesn't have to take place during March or April. In fact, many successful owners keep their vacation homes in pristine condition by doing a twice-yearly deep clean.

"Begin a semi-annual cleaning checklist! We are completing different sections of the checklist during gaps between bookings to make sure everything gets done," said Trista. "Meet with your cleaner/service providers and discuss a plan to complete all of the tasks on this list."

## 9. LOOK FOR MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WITH MARKETING

**"Is your marketing up to date? Make sure your property looks as good online as it does in person,"** added Kendra Williams, an owner in Tucson, Arizona.

"For us, working with the team is critical because their success is based on our success, so they are ready to help," she said.

If you're managing your vacation rental on your own, think about switching up the listing sites you use to advertise your property. It might be the ticket to reaching new audiences. You can also try investing in a new set of professional photos to make your home stand out when travelers are browsing through pages of properties in your area.

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Outside of photos, look for opportunities to revise the descriptions in your listing to make them more attention grabbing.

If you're tired of keeping up with listing sites, or you work with a property manager that doesn't do a great job with your marketing, you might want to revisit your management strategy entirely.

## 10. REEVALUATE YOUR RATES

Last, but not least, look at your pricing structure to make sure you're not leaving any bookings or rental income on the table. Also reevaluate your minimum nightly requirements as well as your seasonal rates structure.

Evaluate your rates to determine if you could get more bookings if you lowered your per-night price or if you are losing money because you're not charging enough. It's a delicate balance that requires an expert eye.

Kendra says she gets an analysis from the host websites at the close of her busy season to double check that their rates are competitive. If you don't have a partner to help you with vacation rental management services like pricing, you can check out how your competition is pricing by doing research on the listing sites.

When doing this type of competitive analysis, you'll specifically want to look for whether nearby properties with the same amenities are charging more or less than you. **If they're charging more for specific nights, that's a good sign that you should raise your rates.** If they're charging less than you, you might want to consider dropping your prices to see if you can secure more bookings at a lower per-night cost.

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## DON'T OVERLOOK SHOULDER SEASON BOOKINGS

All of these experts have one big thing in common: they know that the work of **managing a vacation rental doesn't come to a stop when busy season ends.**

In fact, much of the behind-the-scenes work doesn't start until after guests check out. These owners use the break in bookings to rebound and get their properties back up to peak condition for future guests.

Put their suggestions into practice if you want to keep your vacation home guest ready year round.

You won't have to worry about falling behind on any aspect of your business, from guest reviews and nightly rates, to keeping the property spotless and well-stocked. And thanks to your work now, you'll be in even better shape for the following busy season.

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