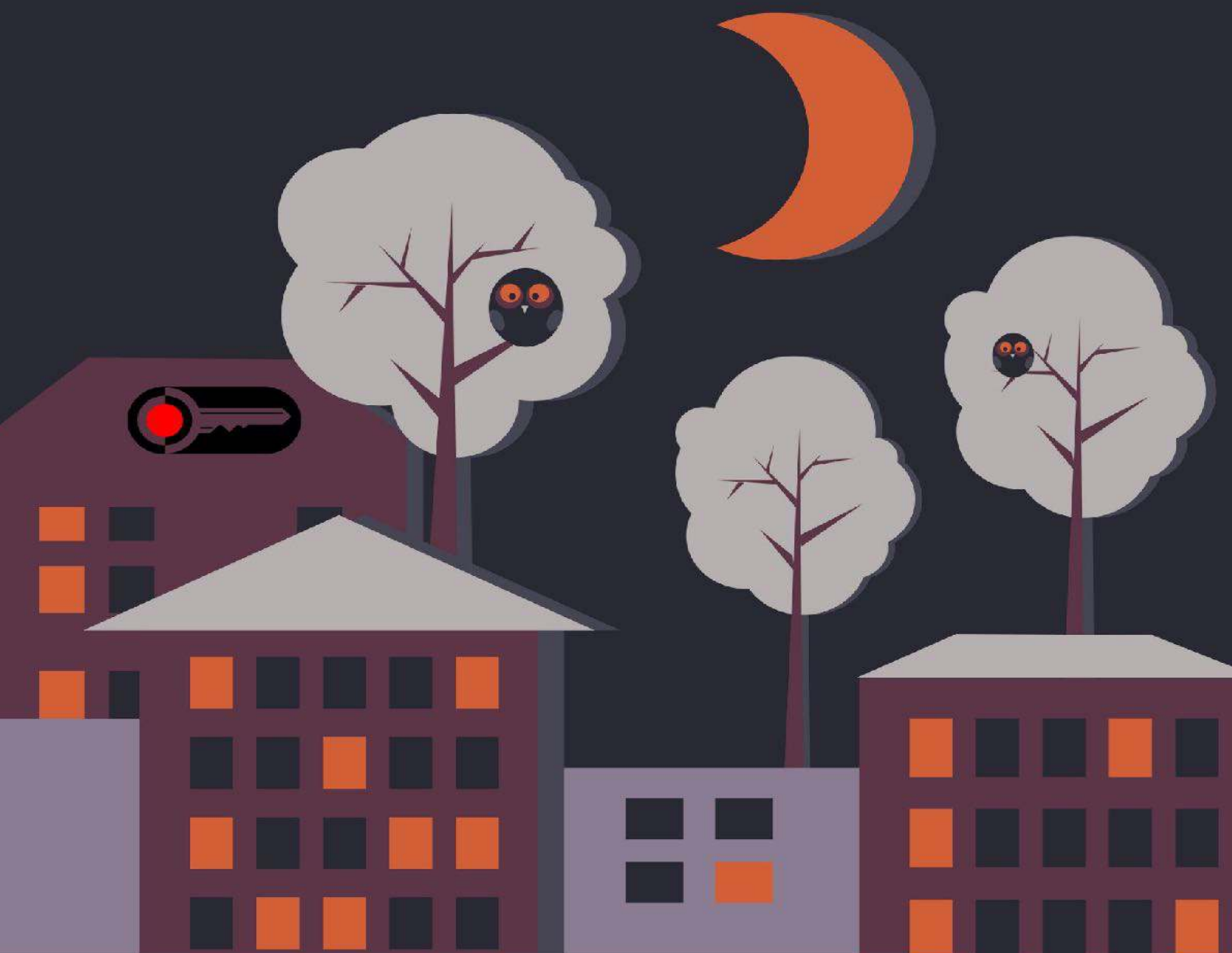


GUEST EXPERIENCE SPECIALIST

7 HOSTING MISTAKES

YOU'RE MAKING RIGHT NOW

(AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM)



TRACEY NORTHCOTT



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Introduction

This guide is 100% practical. It gives you an easy-to-use overview of what it takes to run a great hosting business.

I can't teach you everything in a short guide like this, but I've focused on what really matters. If you follow this guide you'll get good results - fast.

For each of the seven mistakes I've explained why it's important, what happens when you get it wrong, and what happens when you get it right. I've also given you real-world examples and tips, based on my many years of experience, hosting thousands of guests in my own business in Tokyo. Plus I have helped hosting clients all over the world create profitable, sustainable and abundant businesses.

Wherever you are in the world, whatever STR platform you use or where you are in your hosting journey, I can help you too.

For more information see www.tracey-northcott.com

Tracey Northcott





Mistake #1 You don't know who your ideal guest is

The most successful hosts spend a lot of their time and energy thinking about their ideal guest. You should too. It's well-worth the effort.

Think about the people you'd feel comfortable dealing with. Think about who would suit your space. Many struggling hosts think they just need any guest with a pulse and healthy bank balance! But nothing could be further from the truth.

If you try to please everyone you'll end up pleasing no-one.

Create an "avatar" of your [ideal guest](#). This checklist will help you get started:

1. What's their biggest frustration when travelling?
2. What's their pet hate?
3. What personality do they have? For example, are they quiet or lively? Confident or nervous?
4. Are they an experienced traveller? Is this their first trip to your city/area?
5. Why are they travelling? A family holiday? A business trip? A honeymoon?
6. What's their demographic and psychographic? Age? Occupation? Hobbies and interests?

As a host, you need to understand not only your own hosting style but also the style of guests you're most comfortable with.

Let's say you're a complete "neat freak" and you've filled your house with subtle artistic touches and interior design elements. Your ideal guest is an older couple who'll appreciate the finer things you've curated.





Let's say you're a relaxed, artistic type and you love each thing in your environment to have a story or an eclectic edge. Your ideal guest is a bohemian traveler who'll add to your stories by leaving you some doodles in your guest book.

Let's say you love to travel with your small children and you understand the needs of families and you've a relaxed and fully-equipped family home with no sharp edges.

Or that you are living in a same-sex partnership and are wanting to provide a safe place for other non-binary guests.

If you dislike other people's children - that is totally fine. Your ideal guest doesn't have kids.

There are as many different types of guests as there are subway stations in Tokyo. You need to identify who you feel you can best serve with your experience and style of hospitality.

Why does it matter?

Your guests define your hosting business almost as much as you do. Having a vividly clear image of your ideal guest is often the "difference that makes the difference". It's one of the key points that sets a "superhost" apart from someone who's struggling just to get by.

Get it wrong and...

If you don't put a little time and effort into choosing your ideal guest then you'll be sabotaging your own business. You could be getting most things right but because of this one, vital point you're not doing as well as you could be, or as well as you should be doing.

But get it right and...

Your success will flow naturally and consistently from knowing who your ideal guest is. Decisions will be quick and straightforward. You can simply ask yourself "What would my ideal guest want?"





Mistake #2 You haven't created a space that meets the needs of your ideal guest

The more you love your space, the more your guests will love it. Right? Uummm. Not quite. You are setting this up for your ideal guest and this may or may not be YOU.

But you can let your talents run loose when you look through the eyes of your ideal guest and make it exceptional for their needs.

Your rental property is a perfect opportunity for you to express yourself with exceptional hospitality. You can create something really special. Something you can be truly proud of.

Think about your own travel experiences. What makes a great hotel room? What makes a rental house or apartment feel like a real home? What were the small touches that changed a past holiday from an OK experience to an extraordinary one. You will be surprised that it really is the little thoughtful touches that tip the scale towards the extraordinary. If you're stuck for ideas you'll find travel magazines and interior design magazines have some great examples.

What about the practical side? Start by making a list of all the things you wish you'd brought with you on your last few trips.

What equipment and facilities would your ideal guest need? What little extras would they want? And what can you include that will make them say "Wow!"?

Remember, beds and furniture get a lot of use so they should get a lot of your attention.

Another, often overlooked point: How much luggage are your guests likely to have? For example, a family with a baby and a couple of toddlers certainly aren't going to be travelling light. Have you provided enough storage space? And is it clearly labeled? "Clever" storage can be completely invisible until someone points it out to you!





Let's say you feel your best fit for hosting would be guests who have children. But your house has steep stairs. Here you would be best to also offer a guard to block off the stairs or a way to allow a child to be in a room safely. Or if you feel you'd like to host quiet, older couples (grey nomads) from overseas but you do not have chairs or a Western-style bed. You need to be aware that older folk from non-asian countries are used to Western-style beds and chairs.

You need to walk through your space as if you were wearing the skin of your ideal guest and see things through their eyes to really get an objective overview of your listing.

Why does it matter?

Creating a [perfect space](#) to meet the needs, and desires, of your ideal guest is a major step towards hosting mastery. It can make the difference between an average guest experience and an outstanding one.

Get it wrong and...

Guests will leave feeling underwhelmed or disappointed. Your space will be like the other hundred of other generic listings. You may even get bad reviews and very few repeat bookings.

But get it right and...

Guests will be impressed by how thoughtful you've been. They'll appreciate the extra care and attention you've put into the selection of furniture and equipment. They'll be eager to tell others about it, and they're likely to write about it online too.

Top Tip: I write about this extensively on my free blog. If you want to dig into this some more I have a whole section devoted to your IGA - [Ideal Guest Avatar](#).





Mistake #3 You haven't prepared your space for guests of different cultures and languages

If you are serving tourists or non-local folks visiting your area you need to pay attention to the demographics. For example in my city of Tokyo over 45 million tourists came in 2019. 2020 is a different story but the tourists will be back in 2021. Some have a good level of English. But many others speak English as their 2nd or 3rd language. Have you tackled this potential problem yet? Maybe you're often having to explain things again, and sort out misunderstandings.

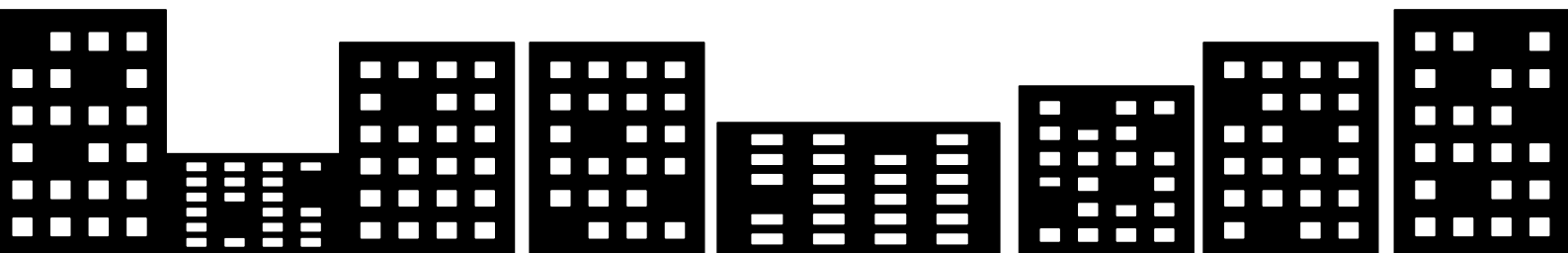
And occasionally, do you find there's a total mismatch between your guests' expectations and what you told them you'd be providing? This mismatch may be nothing directly to do with your property and the guest experience you strive to create. It could be a cultural issue, not a language issue.

Here's a common example, one that may have even happened to you:

A family from the US picks up their rental car when they arrive in Japan. They drive to their rental property in central Tokyo. You can probably see where this is going, can't you? You're not allowed to park on the road in Tokyo. And few houses or apartments have private parking because only about 30% of families have cars. So what happens? The guests leave a negative review online, and certainly don't plan on rebooking in the future. Substitute Tokyo for NYC, London, Paris or Beijing.

It's a simple example but it's the sort of thing that often happens. If you don't explicitly say there's no parking you can't assume guests will work it out, even if you give loads of helpful details about the local public transport.

Another, perhaps surprisingly common cultural misunderstanding relates to using the toilet. After a lovely group of guests leave, you clean the bathroom but notice a lingering foul smell. When you go to empty the trash can you find the cause... in much of southern Europe, Asia, Africa and large parts of Russia it's common to put used toilet paper in the trash can. Flushing it would block the narrow pipes those places use for their sewerage system.





If you've travelled globally, you'll know household plumbing is different in different countries. In some countries, the toilets can't handle any paper material and so hoses are provided for washing and a large trash bin is beside the toilet for paper. If your country can handle flushing of toilet paper you need to say this. But to avoid embarrassment, a multilingual sign or better yet an illustration on how to use the toilet will set your guests up for success.

The above examples are just a couple of the many things you need to consider.

Global peace comes through global understanding. We are more alike than we are different however our experiences are different. People who travel want to learn how to live peacefully in another place so be kind and help them understand your experiences too.

Let's look forward to 2021 when we are all traveling again and get prepared. We've been cooped up for so long, travel is going to be back with a huge demand

Why does it matter?

Travelers often arrive tired and stressed so providing timely, multilingual and/or easy to understand graphical information to successfully navigate in their new environment will ensure they are instantly comfortable and relaxed. Guests are often shy about approaching you with embarrassing questions especially if your native languages are different.

Get it wrong and...

Guests with all the best intentions may "improvise" when clear instructions are not available leading to possible damage or the need for some awkward conversations after check out. Or it could end up costing you time and money with damages to your property.

But get it right and...

Your guests will be blown away by your thoughtful considerations for their personal needs and they will be proud of themselves for managing to live like a local in a foreign country.





Mistake #4 You have many high-tech gizmos without a crystal-clear explanation of how to use them

Providing well-chosen gadgets and equipment can be an easy way to make your property extra-special. But they're pointless if your guests can't get them to work. Or worse still, if your guests don't even notice them.

This sort of thing often comes up in reviews:

"The Internet didn't work..."

[Well, it's worked for all my other guests]

"There was no mobile wifi..."

[So you didn't notice the device marked 'portable hotspot'...]"

I couldn't get the damn cartridge into the coffee maker!"

[Maybe removing the wrapper would have helped?]

So [label everything](#), and provide clear, simple instructions. You can also include the original manuals. If the only manual you have is in a different language from your target guest, you can often find a PDF of the other language versions online. Just print out the key pages and include it in an attractive binder.

Washing machines are pretty common in vacation rentals but their use is very different in different countries. The buttons need to be explained. Take a photo and do a translation in English and/or the most common language used by your guests, for example Thai, Mandarin, Cantonese Spanish or Korean.





You don't want people blithely pressing buttons and breaking things or having a bad experience and leaving you a bad review. Lets say your hot water needs to be turned on 30 minutes before the guest can shower. Leave detailed and polite instructions to set your guest up for success. Show guests you care about them enjoying the house features and functions you've prepared for them.

Be informative but also be personable. Your guests are people who are trusting you with their care but don't want to feel like they are living in a rigid boarding school full of strict rules and regulations.

Why does it matter?

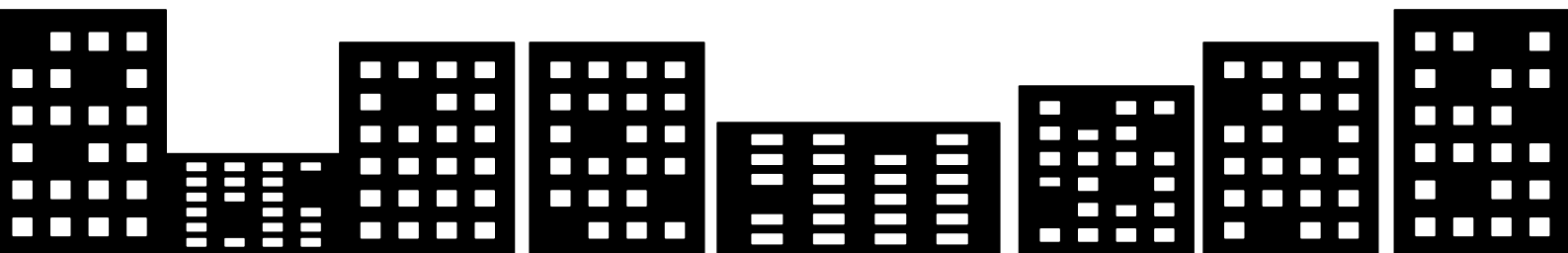
What's obvious to you may be utterly baffling to your guests. Your guests will feel frustrated and disappointed because things didn't work in the way they expected them to. You need to ensure that all the assets in your listing description are working for the guests as advertised as some guests may have specifically booked your place to take advantage of your inclusions.

Get it wrong and...

It's not the end of the world if your guests can't connect to the wifi. Or get the dishwasher to work. Or use your high-end coffee maker. But your guests won't enjoy their trip as much as they otherwise would have. Which is a shame. And your guests are almost certain to mention it in a review, even if the rest of the review is very positive.

But get it right and...

Your guests will be able to make full use of the facilities you have carefully curated for your space. And they're less likely to damage anything if they know how to use it. So providing clear instructions is good for you and good for your guests.





Mistake #5 You haven't compiled a standard list of replies to common questions

This can be a huge time-saver. And it can also prevent a ton of problems.

You shouldn't be spending your precious time answering the same questions again and again. Your hosting business should work for you, not the other way round.

Start by keeping a note of everything you're asked. Use your notes to [create a detailed FAQ](#). But also be pre-emptive. Think about what your guests need to know to make the most of your property. But don't just limit yourself to questions about the property itself. What can you tell your guests to help them make the most of their trip? For example, is there a hidden gem within walking distance, with a serene and tranquil garden that only the locals know about? Where's the best place for sushi? Where're the closest dry cleaners? How about contact numbers for the embassies, just in case someone loses their passport?

Even if your guests use only a small fraction of the information you provide, they'll be very glad it's there.

Walk a mile in the shoes of your guest.

What information would you need to have a comfortable stay? What questions would you likely ask? What services are you willing and able to provide. Prepare these in advance and include clear answers in your welcome information. Many people are nervous about travel and they want to come prepared so treat them kindly with lots of useful information and they'll be grateful and think of your preparations as a desire to see them as people and not just as an extra income.





Why does it matter?

You know your neighbourhood, your property and your belongings better than anybody else. However, assuming that everybody else has this inside knowledge is just not feasible especially if most of your guests are international travelers.. Having pre-written answers allows you to have the language and messaging that is consistent with your brand and the ensure you are providing the highest level of courtesy and hospitality in your communication.

Get it wrong and...

You will have to spend lots of time writing the same replies out again and again which leads to frustration for you. You may end up sounding short or resentful or at the very least, not your best self - especially if you are busy. If your policies of what you will and will not provide are not clearly spelled out in advance, guests may be disappointed if they were hoping for something that is not available.

But get it right and...

Guests are looking to you to answer their questions and concerns and providing answers to questions they may not have thought of yet, will ensure guests know you have their interests in mind and elevate your professionalism in their eyes. They will appreciate your consideration and also allow them to understand your boundaries in advance.

Top Tip: Try our [Swipe Files](#). These are done-for-you templates to cover the entire communication workflow of a busy STR host.





Mistake #6 You haven't written your listing to find your ideal guest

Getting your listing just right changes everything.

If you've identified your ideal target guest, write a listing profile that clearly showcases who you are and who will love your space and why. You need to be clear about what you will and will not provide in terms of service and most of all be honest about the quality, age and functionality of your furniture and interior.

You really need to paint a picture for your guests about what their experience will be if they choose to book your property. Use phrases that take the reader into your property on the average day and highlight how they will interact with the rooms and the spaces. Use descriptive language with adjectives like "cozy", "tranquil", "urban", "scenic", "rustic", "designer" that will appeal to your ideal guests.

Guests need to know in advance if they are going to be comfortable in your home before they choose to book. Authenticity and honesty will go further than slick sales talk in order to attract the right guests that will suit your standards of hospitality.

Use a copywriter if you are not comfortable with your writing and grammar and a human translator if you want to include your listing profile in languages other than your native one. Don't skimp here as professional translation is not expensive but it will ensure your overall image is professional.

Ensure your photography is done by a professional interior photographer and using a wide angle lens. A good photographer has seen all sorts of different properties and will also assist you in staging the photographs to highlight the best features of your property to match your overall brand. Again, this is not a huge expense and will ensure your guests will see you as a professional host.

Ask a trusted friend or a person who is just like your ideal to look at your listing with fresh eyes and ask them to give you their unbiased feedback.





Why does it matter?

Once a guest has checked into your place, there is no hiding what it is like to be in your space. If you have written your listing accurately, then the guest has chosen you as much as you have chosen them ensuring you are a good match.

Get it wrong and...

Dealing with guests with expectations that are different from reality will be frustrating and time-consuming on all sides. You'll have lots of small misunderstandings and perhaps bad reviews and poor repeat business.

But get it right and...

Things will probably go smoothly right from the beginning of each relationship. You'll be attracting guests who are ideally suited to the space you've created. They'll know what to expect and will be receptive and cooperative.

Top Tip: Book in a [Branding Audit](#) to help you get to the top of your game in the STR Industry!





Mistake #7 You have accepted guests who are not your ideal guest

I've saved the worst mistake until last! You know you shouldn't take guests who may cause you stress, guests who may even end up costing you money.

We're not just talking about trouble-makers or scammers. Thankfully those kinds of guests are actually quite rare. We're mainly talking about guests who may not be a good fit for you. Guests who aren't going to be helping you towards running an enjoyable, sustainable and profitable hosting business.

But it's tough, right? If you're anything like me, you don't want to be judgey, you want to be inclusive, and you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Or you are worried that your income will suffer if you don't accept every booking that presents itself.

On the other hand, there are certain guests who simply aren't suitable for you and your rental property. I'll show you the kindest, fastest way to filter out "bad" guests. (ok, of course we both know they're not really "bad", they're just not a good fit for you)

Get to know your guest before you accept the booking. If you get a bad vibe, you can easily suggest to guests your property may not be a good fit for them. Let's say you have a premium property with designer furniture and artwork. You do not have to accept a group of rowdy students who are looking for cheap digs. This group will not be comfortable and your hosting will not give you any joy.

What about the concern of "lost" income if you turn away guests and potential revenue? This does take some discipline especially when you are new to hosting and you are relying on the income but accepting an unsuitable guest can often cost you more in bad reviews and also blocks out your calendar so you don't have availability for your ideal type of guest. Please trust me on this.

But stay open to the goodness in people. You'll meet some very interesting people you wouldn't have met otherwise.





If you've found the right guest and they have found the right host in you, there's magic in the transaction that goes far beyond finances. You've become a part of people's travel stories they'll keep in their memories forever. And they can bring as much joy to you by their happiness that you've created for them. You can share your love of your local area with people who appreciate what you have to offer. Guests that will come again and again and think of you as friends.

Why does it matter?

When you accept a less-than-ideal guest or group you set yourself up for trouble. The chances are something is going to go wrong. Maybe something small, like a simple misunderstanding that you can quickly clear up. But it could be something far more serious. Something that ends up costing you a great deal of time, money and attention to sort out, assuming there's actually something you can do to fix the problem.

Get it wrong and...

The trouble caused by "bad" guests can be anything from a negative review or formal complaint to an online rumour campaign about you and your property. Or the disgruntled guest could even take legal action against you, potentially putting you out of business if you don't have the time and money to fight the case, no matter how right you are and how wrong the guest is. Whatever happens your going to be wasting energy on something pointless, something that could have (and should have!) been avoided in the first place.

But get it right and...

By only accepting ideal guests you're setting yourself up for success. You'll be able to relax, knowing that you've stacked the odds in your favour. You won't be lying awake at night, stressing about what your guests may be doing to your property. Instead, you'll be confident you're going to a good review, maybe a couple of referrals and possibly a repeat booking. These three things ensure you'll have a steady stream of guests for as long as you like.





Conclusion

So now you've seen the 7 big mistakes. Here they are again:

Mistake #1 You don't know who your ideal guest is.

Mistake #2 You haven't created a space that meets the needs of your ideal guest.

Mistake #3 You haven't prepared your space for guests of different cultures and languages.

Mistake #4 You have many high tech gizmos without any explanation of how to use them.

Mistake #5 You haven't compiled a standard list of replies to common questions.

Mistake #6 You haven't written your listing to find your ideal guest.

Mistake #7 You have accepted guests who are not your ideal guest.

You've seen the damage making these mistakes can do. But you've also seen how getting things right gives you a successful, enjoyable and lucrative business. A business you'll feel really proud of. So what do you think? If you'd like my help, just email me. Tell me how things are now, and where you want to be in the near future. The chances are, I'll be able to help get you there. Don't put it off, do it now while it's fresh in your mind. You'll be glad you did.

Want more guidance? Get in touch! consulting@tracey-northcott.com

Check out my blog where I did into many of these subjects in more depth.

<https://tracey-northcott.com/blog>

Plus check me out on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).





Meet The Author



Tracey Northcott helps entrepreneurs world-wide get more from their rental properties. She can help you build a profile of your ideal guest. She'll help you create a dream-come-true experience for your ideal guest. And she'll help you write a "winning listing" for your property. No matter if you are on [Airbnb](#), [VRBO](#), [booking.com](#) or your own [private booking platform](#), she can help you demystify the tech and create a winning listing. A listing that reliably and regularly delivers you the best possible guests - while filtering out the bad ones.

Send her a message to find out how she can help you:

consulting@tracey-northcott.com

Tracey started in hosting, in 2011 in Tokyo with a single small 1 bedroom apartment. In under 3 years she became a "super host", operating 23 properties all over Tokyo: Shibuya, Shinjuku, Meguro, Taito, Suginami, Nakano, Chiyoda, Minato and Setagaya. Recently Tracey has been spending more time on her other businesses, including consulting. But she still runs 10 properties in 5 wards of Tokyo.





What others say about Tracey

"Tracey is always the first person I go to for advice about our vacation rental. She was especially helpful with offering her thoughts about the pricing of our unit in Tokyo. With her diverse range of rentals here, she has a unique depth of experience, and as a result really knows the vacation rental market in Japan extremely well."

- Colleen S.

"Words can't express how much of a help Tracey has been to our family. First she convinced us to offer our home for short term rental way back in the early days when only a few people were hosting. I had a mountain of worries, but everything Tracey said turned out to be 100% accurate. At first I tried doing it all myself (as I was initially worried about even making enough to pay the mortgage), but after a few months of comparing my reviews (and price points) to hers, I came begging for help. She jumped in and completely turned our place around! It went from a crash pad to a family apartment that attracted professionals. Exactly the kind of guests I want. Not only was I able to make more profit, but by attracting the right kind of guests, I now have peace of mind. And that has made all the difference!"

- Tia Ward

"Tracey's enthusiasm and expert knowledge was invaluable to us when we were considering starting our Airbnb. She was always available to help with any questions we had as well as adding a lot of great advice that we hadn't even considered. I highly recommend Tracey if you are looking for someone to help guide you through the Airbnb process."

- Ushka Wakelin

Want to chat? Get in touch!

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