

FREE HOST GUIDE

Better listing photos

A practical guide to help guests notice, understand and trust your short-term rental before they book.

FOR HOSTS LISTING ON

Airbnb

Booking.com

Vrbo

First Look Photo

firstlook-photo.com

First Look Photo is an independent photography service and is not affiliated with, endorsed by or sponsored by Airbnb, Booking.com or Vrbo.

Read it with your listing open

About eight minutes. This isn't a photography course and you won't need a camera.

1 Open your listing on a phone

Not on a laptop. Most guests will meet your property on a small screen first.

2 Work through the two tools

The Cover Photo Test and the Gallery Audit are the parts to actually complete.

3 Sort what you find into three piles

By the end you'll know which problems cost nothing, which might be fixed without a new session, and which need a camera.

What photos can and cannot do

Better photos can make a listing clearer, more trustworthy and easier to choose.

They cannot guarantee bookings, ranking or revenue. Those depend on price, location, season, reviews, availability, demand and how the platforms behave.

SO THIS GUIDE PROMISES ONE THING

That by the end you'll know what to look at, what to change first, and what isn't worth changing at all.

Nothing here is a platform rule or an inside track. It's one host's judgment, applied to photographs.

Guests don't see your property first.

They see your photos.

Before a guest reads your amenities or checks your reviews, your photos have already made an argument. In a few seconds they decide whether to keep looking.

That decision isn't really about photography. It's about how quickly someone can understand what staying at your place would be like.

A good stay should not lose attention because the photos make it hard to understand.

THE IDEA BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Your property may be better than your listing shows. The goal isn't to make it look different, but to show its real value more clearly.

Not every photo has the same job

Each position in the gallery does something different for the guest.

1 Your cover photo

STOP THE SCROLL

Give a guest a reason to stop scrolling.

2 Your first five

BUILD INTEREST

Explain quickly why the property is worth considering.

3 The rest

REMOVE UNCERTAINTY

Answer the quiet questions. Is there space? Is it clean?

Look only at your first five. If two say the same thing, one hasn't earned its place.

TOOL 1

The Cover Photo Test

Your cover photo isn't the prettiest image you have. It's the one that earns the click.

Seven questions over the next two pages. Answer them about the photo you have now, not the one you meant to take.

THE MOST USEFUL HABIT IN THIS GUIDE

Don't judge your cover photo full screen. Judge it small. That's how most guests will actually see it for the first time.

✓ **Is it immediately clear what I'm showing?**

A guest should understand the space in about a second.

✓ **Does it show one of the best reasons to book?**

If your strongest feature is photo twelve, many guests never reach it.

✓ **Is there one clear place for the eye to go?**

A view, a bed, a table by the window. Not everything at once.

✓ **Does the light feel natural and inviting?**

Not brighter than reality. Just the property on a good day.

✓ **Is anything distracting in the frame?**

Cables, bins, clutter, a reflection of the camera in a window.

✓ **Does it hold up next to my competitors?**

There's a five-minute way to find out on the next page.

✓ **Does it still work small?**

Most guests meet your listing as a thumbnail, not a full-screen image.

READING YOUR ANSWERS

If you hesitated on more than two, your cover photo is probably the first thing worth changing.

BEFORE YOU CHANGE ANYTHING

The five-minute exercise

This is the fastest way to stop seeing your property as an owner and start seeing it as a product in a market.

1

Open Airbnb or Booking.com

2

Search your area with realistic dates

3

Find your own listing in the results

4

Don't open your listing

5

Compare your cover with the others

THEN ASK YOURSELF ONE QUESTION

Knowing nothing about these properties, which one would I click first?

A SECOND OPINION

Want another pair of eyes on it?

That exercise is uncomfortable on purpose. It's also easy to over-correct afterwards and change the wrong thing first.

Send me the listing and I'll look at your cover photo and tell you what I see. No cost, no obligation.

Start with a free photo review

firstlook-photo.com



Scan to send your listing

Not every problem costs the same to fix

You'll find things you want to change, and they won't all cost the same. Almost everything falls into one of three groups.

Decisions

Free. You can make them today.

Corrections

Often possible without going back.

Capture

Only a camera can fix these.

THE DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS

It comes down to one question: is the information already in the file?

The ones that cost nothing

These are choices, not corrections. Nobody needs to touch your files and nobody needs to visit the property.

- ✓ Which photo leads your listing
- ✓ The order of the first five images
- ✓ Removing photos that repeat something you've already shown
- ✓ Cleaning, tidying and setting a room with what you already own

Hosts often skip these because they feel too simple to matter. In practice they change more than most edits do, and they're free.

CATEGORY 1 · EXAMPLE



BEFORE



AFTER

Same room, same table, same crockery.
Someone set it before the photo was taken.
Nothing was added and nobody came back
with a camera.

Is your kitchen photo showing furniture, or showing a meal?

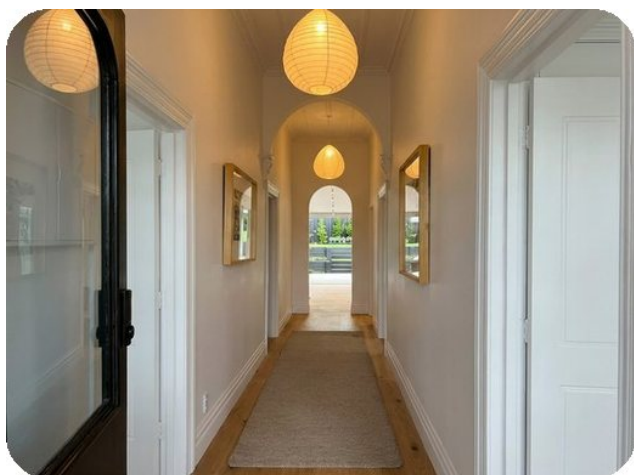
The ones that may not need a camera

These are problems in how the photo was processed, not in how it was taken. If the moment was captured properly, most of them can be corrected afterwards.

- ✓ Light and exposure
- ✓ Colour and white balance
- ✓ Leaning verticals and perspective
- ✓ Consistency across the whole gallery
- ✓ Small distractions
- ✓ Which image should lead, and in what order

This is where a remote upgrade can help.
There's a page on that further on.

CATEGORY 2 · EXAMPLE



BEFORE



AFTER

Same hallway, same hour, same furniture. Correcting the white balance lets the walls read as white and the floor as timber. Nothing was added or removed.

If the same room is a different colour in two photos, colour is doing something you didn't choose.

The ones only a camera can fix

Editing reveals what the camera recorded. It cannot record something that was never there.

- A room that was never photographed
- A photo that isn't sharp
- A camera position that hides how the space works
- An angle that cuts the room in half
- Resolution too low for the platforms
- An amenity or view you mention but never show

These aren't processing problems. No amount of editing produces information that wasn't captured.

Where editing stops



BEFORE



AFTER

Above, the sofa arm fills the foreground and the room has to be guessed at. Below, the same space read from a different position.

Why no edit produces that

An upgrade could have made the first photo brighter, straighter and cleaner.

It could not have moved the camera.

Where the photographer stands is decided once, in the moment the shutter opens. Everything the lens didn't see, the file doesn't contain: how the kitchen connects to the living area, the space to the right, the room behind.

No editing recovers it, because there's nothing to recover.

WHEN A SESSION EARNS ITS PLACE

Not because the photo is imperfect, but because the information is missing.

IF YOU'RE NOT SURE

Which of the three is yours?

Most hosts guess wrong in one direction or the other.

Some assume everything needs reshooting when the files are perfectly usable. Others assume editing can rescue a photo that was already lost when it was taken.

Send me the listing and I'll tell you which one you're actually dealing with.

Start with a free photo review

firstlook-photo.com

Improve the image. Don't invent the property.

Editing and AI-assisted tools speed up correction, and every image is reviewed by a person before it reaches you. They're a way of working faster. They aren't permission to change what the property is.

NEVER, ON ANY IMAGE

- Add or remove permanent features
- Make rooms look larger than they are
- Move walls, doors or windows
- Replace or invent a view
- Add amenities the property doesn't have
- Hide damage, wear or anything a guest would find on arrival
- Change the number or size of beds

Better presentation isn't false expectation. A photo that oversells today is a review problem in three weeks.

The Gallery Audit

Tick only what's honestly true today. The empty boxes are the useful part.

- ☐ The cover photo would stop me if it weren't mine
- ☐ The best reasons to book appear in the first five images
- ☐ Every important room and space is represented
- ☐ No two photos are doing the same job
- ☐ Light and colour look consistent across the gallery

TOOL 2 · CONTINUED

- ☐ Each room is easy to understand from a single image
- ☐ The amenities guests care about are actually visible
- ☐ The photos look realistic, not over-edited
- ☐ Small distractions have been cleared out of frame
- ☐ The sequence tells a clear story of the stay

YOUR SCORE

_____ / 10

It isn't a grade. It's a shortlist.

What your score points to

8–10

Your gallery is doing its job

Leave it alone. Revisit the cover photo seasonally, and again when the property itself changes.

5–7

May be fixable without a new session

Usually the order, the cover, the light or consistency. Start with the free decisions, then review what is still holding the gallery back.

0–4

The problem is likely in the capture

Editing can only reveal what was recorded. This is where new photos earn their place.

If your score is 0 to 7, send the listing before changing everything.

firstlook-photo.com

IF CORRECTIONS ARE WHAT YOU NEED

The Remote Listing Photo Upgrade

Sometimes your existing photos are good enough to improve. If the angles, resolution and information are already there, a remote upgrade may be enough to make the gallery clearer, brighter and more consistent.

This isn't virtual staging and it isn't about inventing the property. It's about improving the photo while keeping the stay honest. The goal is to make the gallery feel easier to understand, not to make the property look like something else.

- ✓ Up to 10 improved photos selected from your current listing gallery
- ✓ Light, colour, exposure, verticals and perspective
- ✓ Consistency across the whole set
- ✓ Which image should lead, and a recommended order
- ✓ A summary of exactly what was changed

Founding price: \$69

Usually \$99

This offer is available only after the free review confirms your current listing photos are suitable. Current pricing is confirmed on firstlook-photo.com.

When it works

- ✓ The room is visible and sharp
- ✓ The photo is dark but still has detail
- ✓ The colour feels wrong
- ✓ The gallery feels inconsistent

When it doesn't

- The room was never photographed
- The image is blurry
- The angle hides the space
- The resolution is too low

If your photos aren't suitable, I'll tell you.

Otherwise: send the listing link. I select and correct the candidates under manual review, and ask for higher-resolution files only if needed.

Send your listing first

You don't need to decide anything now. The review comes first, and it can end in three places.

1

Nothing

If your photos are already doing the job, I'll tell you and we're done.

2

A remote upgrade

If the files are good enough to improve, I'll tell you what I'd correct and what it would cost.

3

A new session

If the information isn't in the files, no edit will create it. Options and availability are confirmed after the review.

You do not need to know which one is right. That is what the review is for.

Start with a free photo review



Brian

I photograph short-term rentals, and I'm also a host. That's why this guide talks as much about sequence, expectations and guest trust as it does about light.

I also host my own short-term rental, so I know how much the first few photos, expectations and reviews matter from the other side of the platform. I look at listings from both sides: what a photograph does, and what a guest does with it.

Every listing gets looked at personally before I recommend the next step.

GET IN TOUCH

Talk to me

WEB

firstlook-photo.com

EMAIL

hello@firstlook-photo.com

WHATSAPP

Message me through the link on
firstlook-photo.com



Scan to send your listing
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DISCLAIMER

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