

Why Airbnb Cleaning Fees Cost So Much Now

The charge, which travelers don't often see when first searching for short-term rentals, is frustrating guests and hosts alike

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As the cost of a vacation climbs, some travelers are paying closer attention to a messy line item: cleaning fees at short-term rentals that can add hundreds of dollars to a trip.

The pandemic has put a renewed focus on sanitation, but some short-term-rental guests resent the cleaning fee, a flat-rate charge set by the host that varies widely based on the property and location. Some guests say they feel duped when they see an attractive nightly rate, then encounter hundreds of dollars in added fees before checkout.

Traditional hotels can have added charges, such as resort fees, but don't typically itemize housekeeping bills. This is why industry analysts say short-term rental cleaning fees can spark a strong reaction in guests, especially when they also receive cleaning instructions before departure.

"Once you go to finally click through and pay, if you throw on the Airbnb fees and taxes and that cleaning fee, all of a sudden it's not even close to what you thought the per-night rate was," says Ashley Teague, a lawyer based in San Diego.

Even some hosts oppose cleaning fees.

Lynda Cull and her husband run two Airbnbs in Plumas County, Calif. She believes cleaning is part of the host's cost of doing business and shouldn't be broken out as a separate charge. She looked for Airbnbs in the Mammoth Lakes, Calif., area for a one-night stay last fall and saw rates of \$80 a night, with \$120 cleaning fees. "There's no way it costs \$120 to clean a bedroom after we've only been there for one night," she says.

Offseason stays at her properties start at about \$125 a night for an apartment attached to her house and about \$180 a night for a two-bedroom cabin down the road. Neither has a cleaning fee. The Culls clean themselves, but ask guests to wash dishes, consolidate trash and strip bed linens.

In the U.S., about 85% of short-term rental listings have a cleaning fee, according to data from analytics company AirDNA, which includes listings on Airbnb and Vrbo. Cleaning fees increased an average of 9.8% from the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021, and an additional 6.6% by the first quarter of 2022, AirDNA says.

The fees range broadly based on location and size of the property, says Jamie Lane, AirDNA's vice president of research. Average cleaning fees for one-bedroom properties went from \$59 in 2020 to \$73 in 2022, while the average cleaning fee for a property with at least five bedrooms in a coastal destination is \$410.

"We've gone from \$112 in 2019 to \$137 now in 2022," Mr. Lane says of the average fee increase over time, noting that he thinks the increase is reasonable given pandemic protocols and increased labor costs.

Airbnb has said the cleaning fee on average is less than 10% of the total reservation cost. Airbnb advises hosts to consider minimal—or no—cleaning fees if they ask guests to do certain tasks, and cautions hosts with high cleaning fees that guests might expect to walk out as they would at a hotel.

Vrbo says it advises hosts to set minimal fees. Vrbo says more guests are paying attention to cleanliness as a result of Covid-19, so hosts might have started charging more because they are enhancing their own cleaning protocols.

Guests say part of their frustration stems from how cleaning fees are displayed while searching for a short-term rental. In the U.S., Airbnb's price-filtering feature sorts properties by the nightly rate rather than total cost. Customers can find the total cost, excluding taxes, in small print in the platform's list view, but it isn't displayed on the map view.

On Vrbo, guests can filter results by the nightly rate or total cost with fees. When guests search with dates, both prices are shown on the map feature, though taxes are excluded.

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Do cleaning fees affect your decisions around using short-term rentals? Why or why not? Join the conversation below.

After social-media backlash to fees last year, [Airbnb](#) announced [a review of fees](#). Airbnb also tested pricing displays last fall where users saw new explanations and, in some cases, banners denoting the total cost without taxes. In May, the company said it would make recommendations for making pricing more transparent and easier for hosts and guests to navigate “where appropriate,” and aimed to have the review and recommendations in place by Dec. 15. Nearly four months later, Airbnb says that it has no news to announce, but will continue to provide updates on its efforts.

Some hosts say they could get priced out of the market if they eliminated the cleaning fee and raised their nightly rate, as people would be deterred by nightly rates that exceed nearby rentals.

The cleaning fees can help hosts encourage longer stays, says Tarik Dogru, an assistant professor at Florida State University who has studied short-term rental fees. The flat-rate cleaning fee might exceed or come close to the nightly rate for a one-night stay, but can seem more reasonable for those booking a longer stay, he says.

Many hosts say inflation has hit them, too. Some hire a professional cleaning service and pass off the cost to guests, who feel the increased cost of cleaning.

Cleaning services say costs have increased in many markets, from the supplies to their cleaners’ wages and cost of gas from driving to properties. Cleaners also say the work that goes into cleaning a short-term rental, often with multiple bedrooms, bathrooms and a full kitchen, far exceeds the effort needed to clean a hotel room.

Cassie Murray cleans short-term rentals in the Raleigh, N.C., area. For small properties, she charges \$150 per cleaning session for a minimum of three hours of work. She says 20% of that pay goes to taxes, at least \$10 covers her cleaning supplies and \$10 covers gas. “Thirty-three dollars an hour sounds great, but we don’t get employer-sponsored health coverage,” she says.

Other hosts clean themselves, but use the cleaning fee to cover their time, and some hosts incorporate the cost of supplies.

“We need to be able to increase the cleaning fee just a little bit in order to make sure to restock those things without pulling out of our own profits,” says Kyle Stanley, a short-term-rental host and hospitality manager based in Fresno, Calif. If a cleaning crew charges him \$150, he says, he will charge the guest about \$175.

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