

# Communications



# Communications

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# Private Messaging on Airbnb

Airbnb have created a dedicated private messaging platform on their site for hosts and guests. All communications prior to bookings need to take place via the platform.

Only registered Airbnb users can use the platform. Becoming a registered user requires providing Airbnb with a valid credit card and uploading a profile photo (as the absolute minimum) for signing up.

Through the platform, all communications can be referenced and followed up. Airbnb also proactively monitor the platform in an attempt to identify fraudulent, malicious or suspicious activity.

Hosts can take comfort in knowing that all communications on the system are safe, secure and taking place on a closed and monitored platform.

In addition to Airbnb's communication platform, you'll also receive email notifications from Airbnb too.

#### LIMITATIONS ON THE INFORMATION YOU'RE ABLE TO SHARE

Airbnb's messaging platform will attempt to identify and censor certain types of information that hosts and guests try to share prior to a confirmed reservation.



Hi there.

I wanted to know if your place was available to book 1st – 7th March? You can call me on (Phone number hidden by Airbnb).

Thanks, Michael.

1 Feb 2018

# Private Messaging on Airbnb

Airbnb do this principally to prevent lost revenue due to bookings that hosts and guests try to arrange outside of the Airbnb platform. Censored communications include things like personal contact information.

Nonetheless, hosts still want to feel comfortable with prospective guests before accepting a reservation request. One downside of this limitation is the difficulty in acquiring supplementary information when undertaking 'due diligence' on inquiring guests.

#### COMMUNICATION TACTICS FOR 'FILLING IN THE BLANKS'

Despite this limitation, there are still ways to learn about your guests on the platform prior to accepting reservation requests.

If you are uncertain about the trustworthiness of a prospective guest, politely message them to understand more about...



You'll end up with specific information that will provide the comfort you're looking for, or give you a gut feeling that something doesn't quite add up.

Be courteous in your requests for information, and explain that you simply like to understand who you're opening up your home to. Also emphasize your desire to better understand your guests so that you're able to provide the best possible hosting experience for them.

Remember to remain compliant with Airbnb's Non-Discrimination Policy when asking any personal or probing questions.

#### PROVIDING INFO BEFORE AND AFTER CONFIRMED BOOKINGS



#### Providing information before a confirmed booking

Do not share personal information prior to having accepted a booking. If a guest wishes to see your place prior to booking, contact Airbnb – they're able to assist you in organizing a viewing. It's also a fairly uncommon request and entirely reasonable to decline if this is something you do not wish to do.

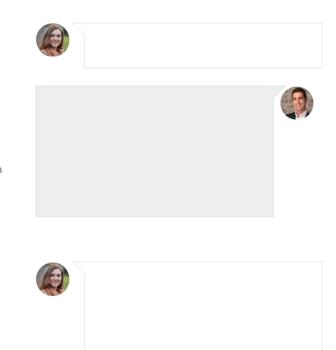


#### Providing information after a confirmed booking

Once the booking is confirmed, you will be able to communicate with your guest via telephone or personal email channels. Despite this, try keep as much of your communications as is practical on the Airbnb platform for ongoing safety, referencing and protections.

# About this guest Marie Smith 2 verifications Wellington, New Zealand Email marie-abcdefghij1klm2@guest.airbnb.com

+64 12 345 6789



Many hosts will have enabled Instant Book. For these hosts, the need to respond to reservation requests will not be necessary since guests will be able to book these places provided they meet Instant Book requirements.

However, for hosts that have not enabled Instant Book, prospective guests are still required to send a reservation request (even if they would have satisfied the Instant Book requirements). Guests that do not meet the Instant Book requirements are also required to send a reservation request if they wish to book.

It is important to therefore understand the difference between a **booking inquiry** and a **reservation request**. They are similar, yet different in a few crucial ways:



#### **Booking Inquiries**

A non-committal message from a guest to a host to inquire about booking specific dates



#### Reservation Requests

A committed request to stay at a place from a guest to a host for specific dates

In response, the host can send a message, pre-approve, send a Special Offer, or decline the dates of the inquiry

In response, the host needs to either accept or decline the request within 24 hours before it expires

Regardless of whether the guest sends a booking inquiry or reservation request, hosts will receive an email notification advising when either of these are received.

You can compare what each of these email notifications looks like below...



#### Respond to Michelle's enquiry



Michelle Canada On Airbnb since 2016

Hi Thomas,

My name is Michelle. I'm coming to NYC on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> Feb – Mon 20<sup>th</sup> Feb with my family for a mini getaway. I was wondering if you would give us the pleasure of using your apartment throughout our trip – it looks like a lovely place!

Kind Regards, Michelle

#### Pre-approve / Decline



Family-friendly Dream NYC Apartment Entire home/apt

Friday, Monday, February 17, 2017 February 20, 2017

Guests 5

#### 

#### **Respond to Simon's Request**



Simon Australia On Airbnb since 2017

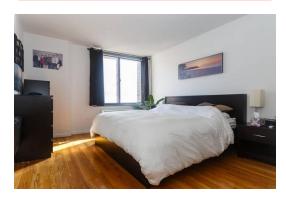
#### Hello Thomas,

I would like to come stay at your apartment. I am travelling with my wife around the US and would love to spend a weekend in New York.

Your place looks great and is close by to one of our good friends

I look forward to hearing back from you.

#### Accept/Decline



Family-friendly Dream NYC Apartment Entire home/apt

Friday, Monday, February 17, 2017 February 20, 2017

Guests 5

A key distinction between a reservation request and a booking inquiry is the effect each have on your calendar.

If the reservation request is approved, Airbnb will continue to block out the dates as a confirmed trip. Other prospective guests will be unable to submit additional reservation requests for overlapping dates until you have approved or declined the initial request. If the request is declined, Airbnb will free up those dates to again enable you to receive new reservation requests from other prospective guests.

On the other hand, a booking inquiry will not block the desired dates on your calendar, and will allow you to accept other reservation requests that come through after the booking inquiry has been received.



If you receive a reservation request, do not allow it to expire as a means of declining it. Respond to all reservation requests within 24 hours, irrespective of whether you choose to accept or decline it. Failure to do so will impact your response rate, which will also negatively affect your placement in future search results.

Since the dates included on a pending reservation request will be automatically blocked on your calendar, other potential guests won't be able to request them – another reason you'll want to respond ASAP.

If you receive a booking inquiry, you may want to create a sense of urgency that prompts the prospective guest to act sooner rather than later in converting the booking inquiry into a confirmed reservation. This can be done by suggesting the prospective guest to book, in light of peak season demand or other inquiries received for the same dates.

Remember that it is always up to you whether or not to accept a reservation request. Bear in mind that declining a high number of reservation requests will adversely impact your placement in search results.

When you receive a booking inquiry or reservation request, you will be notified through all of the following channels:



<sup>\*</sup> Phone notifications will only occur if you've downloaded the Airbnb app and/or setup push notifications

When it comes to responding to reservation requests, your options are:



Accepting the reservation for the requested dates



**Learning more** about the potential guest by sending them a private message



Declining the reservation with the option of providing an explanation to the guest



Sending the guest a Special Offer

COMMUNICATIONS

# Sending Guests a Special Offer

A **Special Offer** allows you to set a custom price for a guest who sends you a booking inquiry or reservation request.

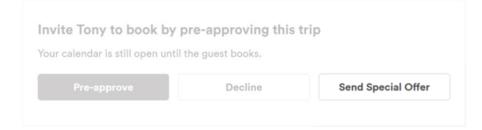
Only send a Special Offer if you are ready to confirm a reservation for the inquiring guest.

You can offer multiple guests the same Special Offer for the same (or overlapping) dates. A Special Offer doesn't block dates on your calendar until it is accepted by the guest. Airbnb recommend being open and transparent with your potential guests by letting them know that other guests may be interested in (and potentially book) the same dates too.

If you don't see the option to send a Special Offer, check that the dates on your calendar aren't blocked or that you don't have any pending reservation requests for the same dates. If you do have a pending request from another guest, you'll need to decline it (should you wish) before you can send the Special Offer for any overlapping dates.

If a guest has already submitted a reservation request or has confirmed a reservation, you won't have the option to send a Special Offer for overlapping dates. You can nonetheless change the details of an existing reservation by altering the reservation if you wish to.

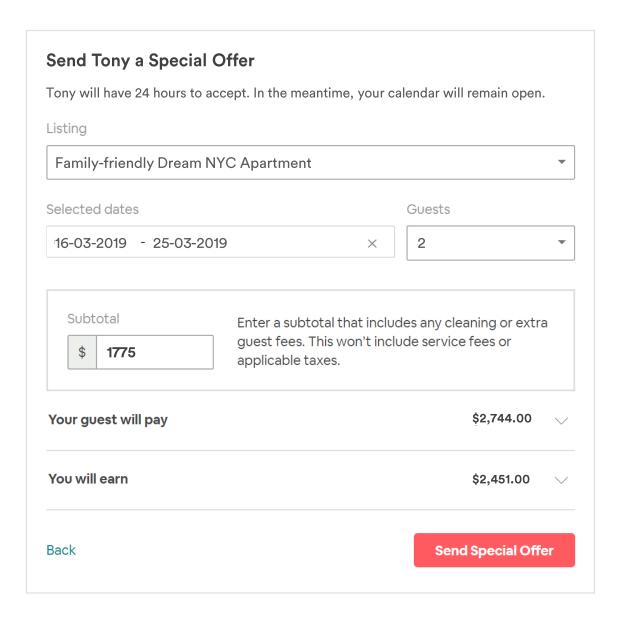
To send a guest a Special Offer: Login to Airbnb > In Hosting mode, select Inbox from the top menu > Open the message thread from the guest you want to send the Special Offer to by clicking on the message thread preview text > Click the Send Special Offer button



COMMUNICATIONS

# Sending Guests a Special Offer

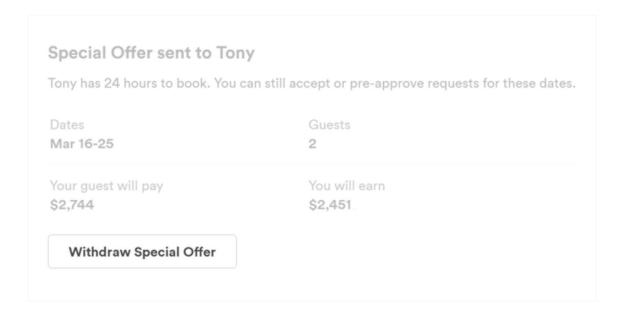
In the **Subtotal** field, enter the price you'd like to offer your guest for their stay. Be sure to include the cleaning fee and/or your additional guest fee in this subtotal. If you already add a security deposit on your listing, you don't need to add it to your Special Offer Subtotal – it will be included automatically.



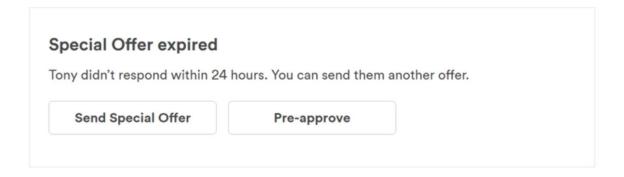
# Sending Guests a Special Offer

Once you've sent the guest a Special Offer, Airbnb will notify them. If the guest accepts the offer, the booking will be automatically confirmed.

You have the option of withdrawing the Special Offer at any time prior to the guest accepting it:



The guest has 24 hours to respond before the Special Offer expires:



# Importance of Remaining Responsive

Airbnb encourage guests to contact multiple hosts. You are likely not the only host being contacted about a potential guest's booking. Being the first to respond will give you a definitive head-start on winning the booking with all other things being equal.

Your listing's ranking is also affected by your responsiveness to reservation requests. Your listing will state your average response time - aim for within an hour:

#### Hosted by Thomas

New York, New York, United States · Joined in April 2013



Languages: English

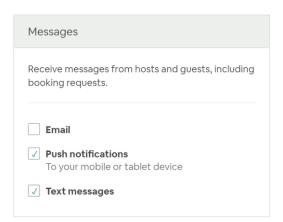
Response time: within an hour

Response rate: 100%

The notified easiest you're of reservation way to ensure requests immediately as they come though is to download the Airbnb app for your phone from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

You can also enable push notifications via SMS to your phone. You'll receive an SMS alert every time a new booking request is received for your place.

To enable push notifications and text messages: Login to Airbnb > Click on your account profile photo in the top right corner > Click Account Settings > Select Notifications > Tick notifications and Text messages in the Messages box



# Handling Requests for Discounts

Some guests will message you prior to placing a reservation request and ask for a **discount**. From their perspective, they have little to lose in asking.

These requests can be frustrating to you as a host however. They inevitably require a lot of back-and-forwards communications which take up your time and inevitably raise the administrative overheads in managing your listing.

Furthermore, they occasionally indicate a red flag for potentially problematic guests. Whilst by no means always representing a troublesome guest, these individuals tend to be the type of guests that occasionally require a more 'hands-on' management style throughout their stay, and will be more likely to cause any number of additional problems that cost you time and money.

Your best strategy is to begin by reflecting on what you stand to gain in offering a discount. Some questions to reflect upon include:



How blocked out is your calendar currently?



How many days is the reservation request for?



What day(s) of the week is the reservation request for?



What impact would accepting this reservation request have on being able to accept other reservation requests?



What vibe are you getting from the prospective guest in terms of potential concerns throughout the stay?

## Handling Requests for Discounts

Once you've determined the desirability of accepting the particular booking to you, consider the availability of alternative booking options for the guest requesting the discount.

If you live in a big city with lots of Airbnb listings, chances are that if you say no, the prospective guest can comfortably accept this fact, and move on with their search to find an alternative listing of comparable price, quality and amenities.

If however, the current competition is low, or your place represents something that makes it unique amongst a scarcity of comparable listings, then you are in a much stronger bargaining position to deny the request or offer only a minimal discount.

#### **SMART NEGOTIATING TACTICS**



"Call their bluff" by suggesting the likelihood that your place will be booked by other full-paying guests. Here's an example response:

"Thank you for your enquiry. We receive a lot of booking requests over summer, so we're unfortunately unable to accommodate requests for discounts throughout these months."



Offer a separate low-cost benefit as an alternative to receiving a discount. Most people simply want to feel like they've walked away a winner, and providing a 'token' benefit transforms the negotiation from a zero-sum game of winner/loser into a scenario with a win-win outcome for both you and the guest. You may wish to offer the prospective guest something like a complementary welcome gift upon arrival or free tickets to a local tourist attraction.



Similarly, provide a discount for future reservations. Guests will infrequently take you up on this, but still enables you to make them feel like they've walked away a winner despite having no consequence to your current profitability. And in the event that they do take you up on the offer, it will assist your future occupancy rates with an additional booking too.



Communicate additional value that guests will gain by choosing your place over alternatives. Thinas unique amenities or higherquality features encourage prospective guests to see charge full the as an investment in a superior experience rather than an unnecessary expense. Here's an example response:

"Thank you for your enquiry.
Unfortunately our costs cover the additional amenities and high-end finishes that separate our place from similar places in the area.
We've already discounted our prices despite these value-adds and factored them into our lower prices. We are regrettably unable to provide these superior amenities at rates lower than what we currently charge."



After a reservation is confirmed, both parties are given each other's full name and phone number.

You will receive a reservation confirmation email to let you know about the upcoming reservation, which will include a link to view the full itinerary on Airbnb:



# New booking confirmed! Dennis arrives Jul 31.

Send a message to confirm check-in details or welcome Dennis.



# Dennis Paris, France On Airbnb since 2015

Hi there,

Your place looks great. I am coming for a business trip and would love to stay at your place. I have been using Airbnb as both a host and guest for a few years now.

Please let me know if you need any other info from me.

Thanks, Dennis

#### Send Dennis a message



Family-friendly Dream NYC Apartment Entire home/apt

Tuesday, Jul 31, 2019 Check-in After 3PM

Friday, August 03, 2019 Checkout 11AM

#### Guests

2

Guests will now let you know if they're bringing children and infants. Let them know upfront if your listing is suitable for children by updating your House Rules.

Confirmation code

View itinerary

#### Payment

ABCDEFGHIJ1

\$150.00 x 3 Nights \$450.00

Cleaning Fees \$100.00

Airbnb Fees -\$16.50

You earn

\$533.50

On the day after your guest checks in, the payment method you supplied will be credited. For details, see your transaction history.

#### Cancellations

Your cancellation policy for guests is Strict (grace period).

The penalties for cancelling this reservation include not being a Superhost for a year, getting a public review that shows you cancelled, paying a cancellation fee, and having the cancelled nights blocked on your calendar.

Read cancellation penalties

Get ready for Dennis's arrival

#### **Provide directions**

Check that your guest knows how to get to your place.

Send Message

You can also get this information by logging into Airbnb and going to Reservations. Should you wish, you're able to continue messaging your guest through the Airbnb messaging platform. Your guest will also receive their itinerary containing useful information about the reservation, such as...















Check-in Checkout times times

Your

Your

Their address contact info receipt house rules

Your house Your manual



#### Your reservation is confirmed

You're going to San Francisco!



Cozy SF Loft in Heart of City Entire home/apt by Michelle



Friday, June 14, 2019 Check-in time is 4PM - 9PM

Saturday, June 15, 2019 Check out 11AM

View full itinerary

#### Address

123 Main Street, San Francisco, CA 94105, United States

Get directions

#### Guests

**Invite Guests** 

#### Amount

\$250.00

View receipt

#### Reservation code

ABCDEFGHIJ1

Change reservation

#### Leanne is your host

Contact Leanne to coordinate arrival time and key exchange.

Message Host +1 (123) 456-7890

#### Know what to expect

Make sure to review the house rules and amenities.

View House Rules

#### Customer support

Contact our support team 24/7 from anywhere in the world.

Visit Help Centre Contact Airbnb

Whilst non-obligatory, you should also send a welcome message. This will typically include confirmation of the trip details, information on how the guest is able to get to your home from common arrival points (e.g. airports, train stations, etc.), and questions that clarify check-in details (e.g. arrival time, need for spare beds, parking arrangements, etc.).

Creating a high-quality template message will enable you to re-use it for each reservation you receive. The purpose of this message is twofold:



It demonstrates that you're a friendly, communicative and contactable host

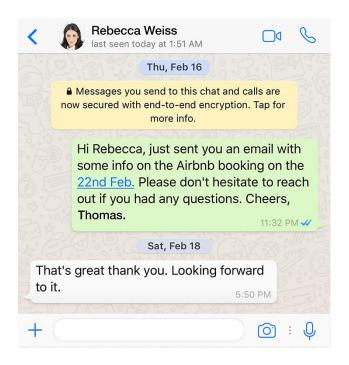


It helps you understand where your guests are arriving from and at what time. You can then use this information to provide useful information on getting to your place to ensure a seamless check-in (which you'll be rated on shortly)

These days, many guests use the text messaging app Whatsapp. Upon confirmation of a reservation, you will receive your guest's phone number.

Using Whatsapp is especially useful for communicating with international guests who aren't on your local country's telecommunication network. Alternatively, standard SMS or Apple's *iMessage* works just as effectively for local guests from your country or non-Whatsapp users too.

Once you've downloaded the app to your phone and added your guest's name and phone number to your contacts, you'll be able to see if they too have the app, and if they do, you can send them a text message.



Even if you send your guests an introductory message, it's still a good idea to also send them this brief text message too. You may wish to introduce yourself or let them know that they're able to contact you on that number if they have any questions. You can also let them know that you've just sent them an message with some information and/or questions too.



Despite the usefulness of alternative communication options like text messaging, calling and private email channels; try default to communicating via Airbnb's private messaging system on the Airbnb platform after having established these other communication channels. Doing so will streamline messages into a single repository both you and your guest are able to reference again in the future, and provide a heightened level of safety and accountability.

You also have an opportunity to develop a House Manual which explains features of your listing (such as how to gain access to your home). Guests will have access to your house manual once they've confirmed a booking. To avoid repeating yourself in any introductory messages and your house manual, simply reference the existence of your house manual in any introductory message.

However, make sure that critical information like how to get to your place is specifically included in introductory messages.

# Communications During a Guest's Stay

Throughout your guest's stay, ensure that you remain both **proactively** and **reactively** communicative.



#### **Proactive Communication**

There's no easier way of winning brownie points with guests than proactively checking in with them to ensure that everything is going well.

In almost all instances, everything will be fine, and they'll appreciate you taking the time to have checked. Occasionally, there'll be a small question at the back of their mind – where do you keep the extra towels? How do you work the television? Where's the closest train station?

In both scenarios, taking the time to have checked in on them will not only pre-empt or resolve any issues, but will likely pay its dividends in positive reviews too.



#### Reactive Communication

Guests may occasionally get in touch to raise an issue or ask you a question. Sometimes these will be fair and understandable. Other times they may be petty, silly or obvious.

Regardless of your thoughts on the matter, do everything within your power to answer their question, remedy their issue or fulfil their request. Your default position should be a willingness to accommodate the wishes of your guests wherever reasonably practical.

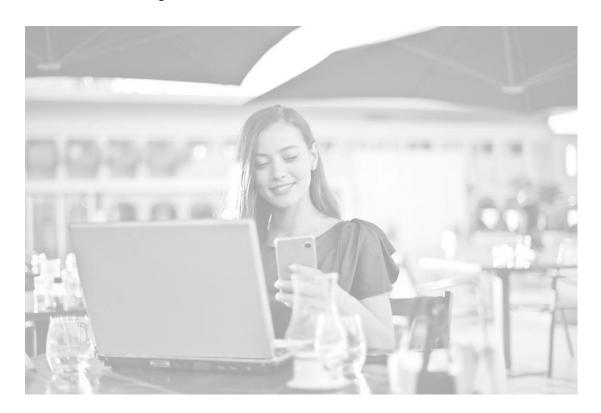
In the eyes of your guest, you are in the hospitality business. And within reason, the principle that the customer is always right still remains.

# Communications During a Guest's Stay

Most guests are considerate and reasonable and will not require a disproportionate investment of your time to ensure you are left with a glowing review.

Over-investing in the occasional 'bad egg' is a small price to pay to guarantee that your good reviews are maintained.

Take a big picture perspective, and see these 'over-investments' as being diluted amongst the vast majority of other trips you host that do not require such hands-on, time-intensive management.



In most instances, guests take issue not with the particular problem they may be having, but rather the lack of its acknowledgement or efforts to have it fixed. Simply acknowledging the guest's issue and demonstrating a desire to get it resolved is normally more than enough to placate an otherwise problematic guest.

# Communications During a Guest's Stay

Many issues or problems that a guest will raise with you are also likely to be issues or problems that will resurface for future guests too. It is therefore in your interest to fix these for the guest that brings them to your attention with the view that this will benefit future guests and avoid foreseeable problems for you in the future too.



These 'annoying guests' will also provide an insight into the type of things that may be specifically important to your target guests, but have flown 'under the radar' up until then. They therefore represent big opportunities for continually improving your hospitality standards on Airbnb.

You may on occasion be requested or choose to issue a guest with a partial refund in lieu of an issue that a guest brings to your attention.

Use your discretion, but again, if the request is not unreasonable and the amount not too substantial, then consider paying it to make the problem disappear. Regardless of whether you're technically obligated, this may represent a small price to pay to avoid a bad review and ensure your long-term Airbnb success.

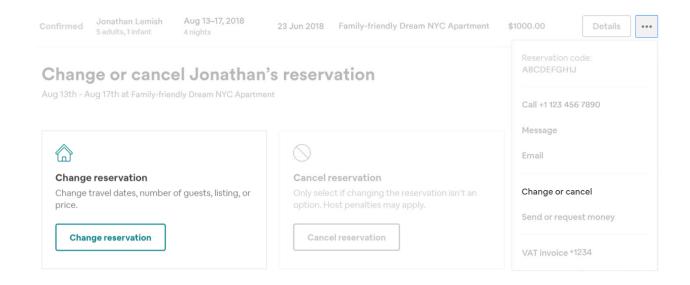
# Altering an Existing Reservation

There may be occasions where you wish to make alterations to a future or current confirmed reservation.

Maybe your guests wish to extend their stay by a day or two. Maybe your guests wish to invite a few more people to join them in your space? Or maybe you need to update your prices to reflect changes to these or other circumstances?

Whatever the reason – Airbnb provide the ability to make changes to a confirmed reservation by submitting a reservation alteration request to your guest.

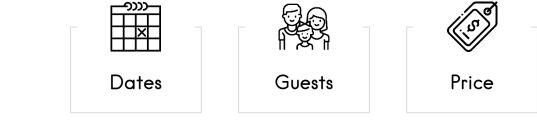
To alter a reservation: Login to Airbnb > In Hosting mode, select Reservations from the top menu > Select All > Find the reservation you wish to alter and click on ••• > Select Change or cancel > Click on the Change reservation button



# Altering an Existing Reservation

Make the relevant changes to the reservation on the screen that pops up.

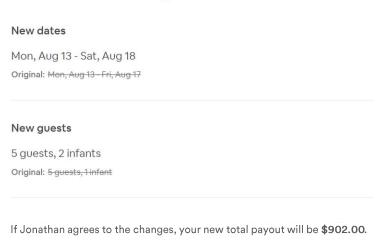
You have the option of changing...

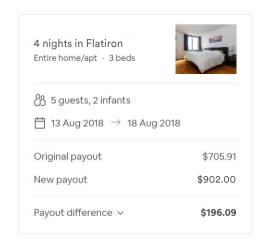




You will then be presented with a summary of the reservation alteration. It will display the original reservation details as well as the proposed altered reservation details:

# Does this look right?





Back Send request

# Altering an Existing Reservation

Your guest will be sent details about your request to alter the reservation, which they are then be able to accept or decline.

If the guest accepts your reservation alteration, the reservation details will be updated automatically within Airbnb. If the guest declines your alteration, the reservation details will not change.

Either way, you will be informed about their response via email:



# Jonathan agreed to change their reservation



Jonathan
Flatiron
Family-friendly Dream NYC Apartment

We've already updated your reservation. If you have questions, send Jonathan a message.

## View updated itinerary

Message guest

# Communicating After the Stay

There is no requirement to follow-up with your guests after their stay is complete. Nonetheless, it is exactly for this reason that sending a brief thank you message will stand out and be appreciated.



#### Say "Thank You"

Thank your guest for staying at your place, and let them know it was a pleasure hosting them. Post-trip thank you notes provide friendly closure on the guest's travel experience. As a non-obligatory gesture, doing so should validate their great stay or smooth out any unpleasantness that took place throughout the booking.

In both scenarios, the guest is more likely to look back favorably on their stay, or be more inclined to overlook anything that was less than favorable. All of this adds up to a higher likelihood of receiving a better guest review.



## Request a Review

Guests are also encouraged, but not obliged, to review their hosts upon the completion of their stay. Airbnb will send them a notification reminding them and encouraging them to do so – but the guest is still able to ignore these requests should they so choose.

Writing a personal note at the completion of the stay – especially one that kindly requests the completion of the review process and emphasizing the criticality of reviews as being the lifeblood of hosting on Airbnb – will provide an additional and personalized impetus for the guest to do so.

You're also able to let the guest know that you'll be positively reviewing them, which should hopefully result in a reciprocal positive review from them to you too.

# Communicating After the Stay



#### Provide Future Discounts

Many hosts offer small discounts (typically 5–10%) for return stays. You're also able to offer your guest a discount that they're able to pass on to friends and family as well.

If they or their friends and family take you up on the offer, you've gained the benefit of having secured an additional reservation and future revenue. If they don't, you've still provided added value and something that can only increase the likelihood of receiving positive reviews after having left a good taste in their mouth.

Below is an example message you may wish to adapt for sending to a guest following the immediate conclusion of their trip:

Hi,

I just wanted to say thank you for choosing to stay at my place. It was a pleasure hosting you, and you are welcome back anytime in the future! I'll be sure to be writing a positive review saying as much.

If you too had a good trip, could I please ask that you complete the review process and share any thoughts on your experience. It only takes a couple of minutes, and reviews truly are the lifeblood of hosting on Airbnb. I'd be super appreciative!

As a small token of appreciation, I offer a 5% discount on any future stays for previous guests that I have enjoyed hosting. If you ever return and need somewhere to stay, please send me a message and I'll get back to you with a Special Offer.

Thank you once again.



Your one-stop-shop for getting found more often, selling your space and making more money on Airbnb

#### Other Airbnb Cheat Sheets in this series:

- Deciding to List your Place on Airbnb
- Safety, Security & Protecting Your Property
- Listing Your Place on Airbnb
- Pricing
- Booking Settings
- Getting Found

- The Check-In Process
- Providing a Phenomenal Guest Experience
- Check-Out, Cleaning & Turnover
- Payment & Taxes
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