May 2024

Expectations vs. reality: Bridging the perception gap in property management

A deep dive into guest experience, privacy, and safety

Executive summary by Nils Mattisson, CEO and Co-Founder of Minut

The age-old mantra of 'the customer knows best' means it's easy to be guided by what we think they want, not what they're actually looking for.

It's the same story across every industry — rarely do short-term rental property managers pause for breath to ask clients what their real concerns are. That's despite the fact that understanding and meeting guests' actual expectations is the only way to win positive reviews and those all-important new and repeat bookings.

In this study of over **240 property managers** and over **530 guests**, we reveal vast rifts between what property managers think guests want, and what they really want.

From communication channels to guest's priorities, the sector is currently suffering from a series of misconceptions that need challenging.

Property managers will be surprised to learn more about the reasons behind why guests are choosing rental properties in the first place. According to our surveyed guests, **'more space' is the most common reason for choosing a rental,** with more than half of guests (**56%**) choosing this reason. However, property managers typically fail to acknowledge this, with just **4% of property managers thinking space plays a factor in a guest's decision-making process.**

Property managers were also **three times more likely than guests to think that affordability was a major deciding factor.** In an age in which 'bleisure' and 'workcations' are becoming the norm, strong and reliable internet connections are another important factor for guests. And while just **3% of property managers admit that their WiFi is "quite slow",** an alarming **60% of guests report having had to use their personal hotspot** on at least a few occasions during their stays at rentals.

While guests are usually respectful and recent technology is making it easier to monitor their behaviour in a privacy-safe way, our study also found that a shocking **1 in 4 property managers have had the police called to their rental properties** due to a noise complaint.

This shows that although we have come a long way as a sector, we're only now scratching the surface of what our guests genuinely want and need.

Short-term rentals are not like hotels and by making sure we're designing stays around guests' real priorities, we can be at the forefront of the tech-driven innovations that will continue to set new benchmarks for the wider hospitality sector.

What property managers think guests value and the reality

Guests ● PM's ●

Affordability
Authentic local experience
More space
Prefer longer stays
Privacy
Traveling with pets
Smart home features
Large groups
Unique properties

56%   **4%**

Guests value space far
more than PMs think

The success of your property depends on positive reviews and ensuring you meet your guests' expectations. When property managers have wildly different ideas about what guests want, it becomes a big problem.

Our research reveals that these gaps begin to appear well before the stay. These misconceptions could be damaging lead generation and conversion — wasting large chunks of marketing budgets in the process.

So, at the very earliest stage in the guest journey, where is the gap in perception the widest?

According to the guests we surveyed, **more space** is the most common reason for choosing a rental, with more than half of guests (**56%**) calling this out.

However, property managers typically fail to acknowledge this with only **4%** considering it as an important factor.

Takeaway: While OTAs have been using space as a selling point for a while, it seems that property managers often forget that this holds massive appeal for guests, especially families or corporate guests on extended stays. A whole property is far better than a hotel room if space is important to a guest, and short-term rentals are uniquely positioned to tap into this demand. They're also often cheaper per person than a hotel. Property managers should spotlight this in marketing materials by sharing photos, floorplans, and measurements in their listings to show guests just how much they'll be getting.

Are guests as price-sensitive as you think?

When it comes to affordability, it's easy to obsess over revenue management, dynamic pricing, and how the rates you're charging compare to similar properties nearby.

But what if we told you the average property manager is not on the same page as the typical guest and may be dwelling on rates a little too much?

Our research shows that affordability isn't as big a factor for guests as property managers think.

In fact, only **11%** of guests said this was a major consideration vs. **37%** of property managers. This may be because the public perception of short-term rentals has changed over the past few years, moving from an affordable alternative to hotels to a more upscale choice.

Property managers are **three times** more likely than guests to think affordability is a major factor.

37% of PMs
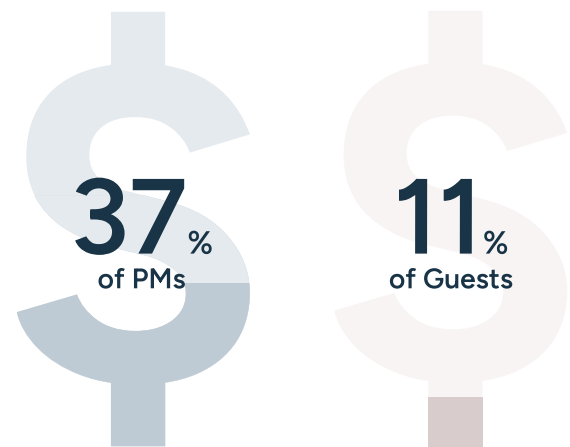
11% of Guests

While over a quarter (**26%**) of property managers cited privacy as a reason for choosing a rental, only **4%** of guests did.

However, an authentic local experience remains a significant factor for both property managers and guests. Around half (**46%**) of guests consider it important, and the same proportion of property managers (**54%**) believe it is why guests choose their rentals.

Takeaway: The key here is value for money, rather than price itself. Guests are willing to pay the same price or even more than they would for equivalent traditional lodging, but they expect more in return, with professional cleaning and more space being key. This means that property managers should also consider hotels as competitors, not just other short-term rental properties. Be as transparent as possible about pricing, and showcase what guests are getting for that price in your listings and any communications both before and after the booking.

The concept of privacy also highlighted a gulf between property managers and guests.

Takeaway: Although corporate entrants in the market, including aparthotels and serviced apartments, are growing in number, guests still see the original idea of 'alternative accommodation' as a positive factor. It also seems that property managers are doing a good job bringing this out in their marketing and communications with guests as a USP.

Getting to know each other: How guests and property managers vet each other before booking

How do property managers vet their guests

Reviewed their profile and reviews

Required they acknowledge a house rules check

Required a security deposit

Paid for third party screening services
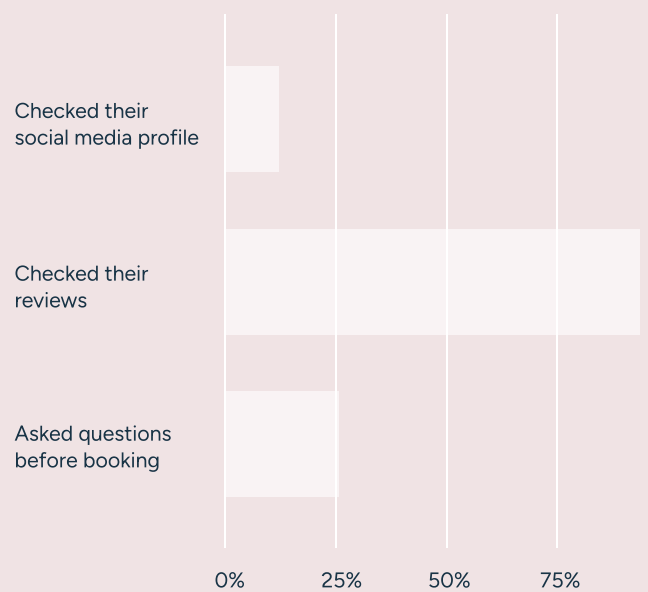
Checked their social media profile

Implemented restrictions, like age or type of group

0% 25% 50% 75%
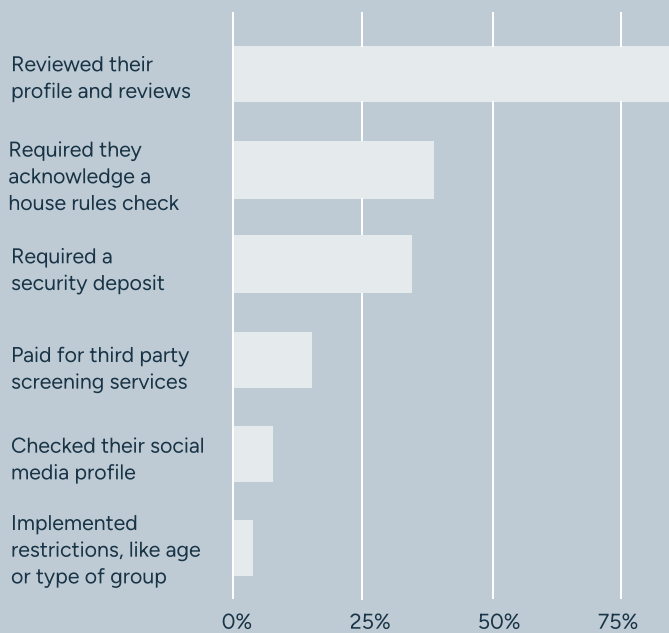
Have you ever carried out any of the following actions to vet your host?

Checked their social media profile

Checked their reviews

Asked questions before booking

0% 25% 50% 75%

Both property managers and guests understandably want to know who they are dealing with before booking. But how do they go about doing that?
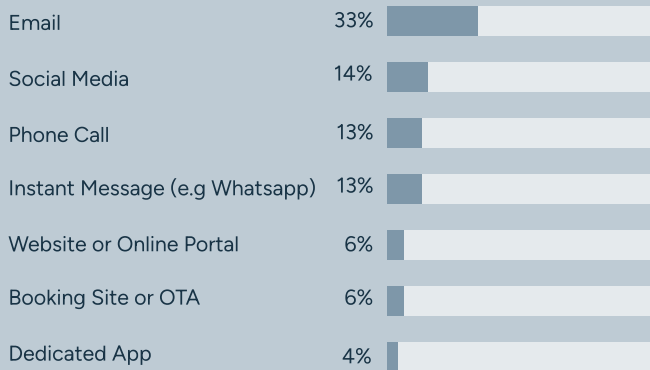
We know guests rely on reviews to learn about the property and its manager, with **75%** confirming they do so. But property managers are surprisingly proactive at checking out guests, too. In fact, **85%** of property managers said they'd check guests' profiles and reviews on the booking platform before a stay, with **16%** using third-party software to vet them and **8%** checking their social media profiles. Guests are just as likely to check out property managers' social media in return (**9%**).

To protect their properties, **39%** of property managers require guests to acknowledge house rules, and **35%** ask for a security deposit. However, this practice is decreasing as insurance policies and technology provide better protection than security deposits, which can deter bookings.

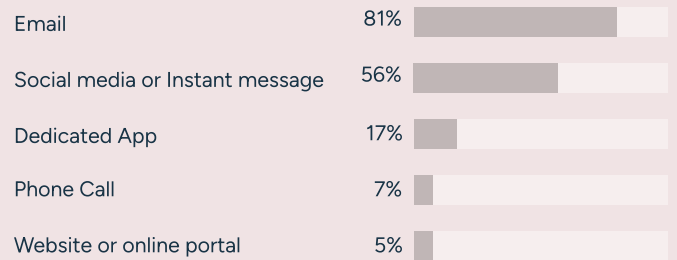**Takeaway:** For property managers, ensuring that guests leave a glowing review is essential to securing future bookings. If you have a direct booking website, look into importing your reviews from OTAs to make the most of all that amazing feedback.

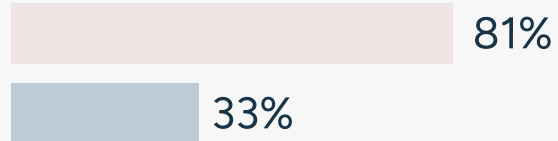# Communicating before the stay: Are property managers overcomplicating it?

How do you communicate with guests?

Email	33%	
Social Media	14%	
Phone Call	13%	
Instant Message (e.g Whatsapp)	13%	
Website or Online Portal	6%	
Booking Site or OTA	6%	
Dedicated App	4%	

How do you prefer the Airbnb host or holiday home owner to contact you before your stay?

Email	81%	
Social media or Instant message	56%	
Dedicated App	17%	
Phone Call	7%	
Website or online portal	5%	

PMs underestimate how much guests still like to receive pre-stay information via email

81%

33%

There is often lots of information to share before a stay: check-in time, entry codes, parking instructions, directions and let's not forget WiFi passwords!

However, how property managers communicate this information and how guests want to receive it doesn't always line up.

A third of property managers (**33%**) communicate rules and operational information before the stay via email. Unfortunately, this means most PMs aren't meeting guest expectations. That's because a huge **81%** of guests said that they still liked to receive this information by email, even in today's world of instant messaging via Whatsapp, Facebook and guest experience apps.

Only **6%** of hosts use a website or online portal, whereas **56%** of guests prefer these options for their convenience in avoiding multiple logins. Dedicated apps are unpopular with both hosts and guests.

Takeaway: While property managers recognize that dedicated apps are inconvenient for a single stay, there is no consensus on the best way to communicate with guests. Centralized guest messaging software simplified this process by keeping all communications in one place for property managers, while guests receive messages through their preferred channel.

Handling guest expectations around security & monitoring

43%
According to property managers, this is how many guests believe noise monitors record video or sound in rentals

92%
of guests understand that noise monitors don't record speech

96%
of guests know that noise monitors don't have cameras

Managing guest expectations starts long before the stay, and it can make all the difference. You wouldn't list the wrong number of bedrooms, or a pool when there isn't one, and it's the same for monitoring and safety devices like Minut. Being transparent from the get-go is key especially when guests aren't nearly as concerned about monitoring devices as property managers think.

Our survey revealed that the average property manager believes **43%** of guests think that noise monitors record video or sound in rentals. However, the vast majority of guests (**92%**) do actually understand that noise monitors don't record speech, with **96%** being aware they don't record video.

In fact, three-quarters (**73%**) of guests would be happy to stay in a holiday home with a noise monitor, with a further **95%** agreeing that noise monitors don't invade their privacy at all.

Takeaway: Neighborly property managers don't always have to be on the defensive when it comes to looking after their properties, guests and communities. Best practice means communicating clearly in listings and pre-stay communications about the technology that you use. However, many are pushing on an open door the vast majority of the time. Most guests already understand that these devices are there for their own safety and are privacy-safe. Monitoring tech is not only proven to deter noise, parties, and smoking in rentals, it also detects break-ins and fires. And don't forget it can even deter troublesome guests from booking in the first place.

Using tech to close the gaps between guests and property managers

Historically, the period during each stay was the biggest unknown for property managers. Once a guest checked in, if they didn't call, there was no way of knowing whether they were happy, whether they had any problems, or if any damage was caused, until after they left.

However, with today's technology, covering every tiny detail is easier than ever. In-stay monitoring devices integrate with your property management software (PMS), Airbnb and other listing sites, and even smart home appliances.

The increasing use of in-property tech mirrors the wider adoption of property management software tools. Our research showed that property managers have 3.2 property management tools on average, up from 2.3 last year. That's a **39%** increase in just one year, with all the onboarding, costs, and workflow changes that each new tech requires. One property manager surveyed

Larger property managers (100+ units) are using more tools on average, and that number is increasing faster than average, at 5.2 each, up from 3.1 last year a **68%** increase. Smaller property managers with fewer than 20 listings are only using 2 on average, up from 1.8 last year.

Takeaway: With so many tools on offer, consolidation is vital to help streamline the guest and property manager experience and ensure everything is working perfectly. With the addition of all these extra tools, property managers aim to make the guest experience even better, collect more data about what guests want, and reduce their team's manual workload, freeing them up to focus on the things that really matter. However, it's important to ensure these tools meet their intended purpose and do not create more work or distance between you and the guest.

Check-in and welcome: Guest expectations don't match what property managers are doing

Check-in is the property manager's chance to wow a guest, and that means a seamless check-in: no waiting around for the manager to let them in, a perfectly clean property, and personal touches that make them feel at home.

Property managers remain divided on whether an in-person check-in or keyless check-in is better. With guests ranging from business travelers who just need the key as quickly as possible, to families looking for a personal welcome to make them feel at home, it can be difficult to envision a one-size-fits-all solution. **Nearly 4 in 5 property managers (78%)** surveyed believe contactless or keyless entry is important to guests, however, **61%** of guests would happily stay in a vacation rental without keyless entry. Many don't even know how they're going to check in until they're arranging it.

Takeaway: Guests don't have particularly strong feelings about keyless entry, so it's really down to how you communicate around check-in. Let guests know what to expect from the beginning of the booking process, explaining the benefits of your check-in process and just make sure everything runs smoothly. The most important thing is to not keep them waiting so they can start enjoying their vacation immediately.

Once they do arrive, a welcome note may no longer be enough to make a lasting impression. While **51%** of hosts leave one, only **13%** of guests express interest in receiving one. With all the direct communication before

Welcome baskets and beyond: What can PM's do to improve guest experience?

Guests ● PM's ●

	Personalised welcome note	Food or drink	Recomendations /welcome guide	Pre-booked activities
Guests	13%	40%	19%	20%
PM's	51%	30%	13%	9%

a stay, a handwritten note might ironically feel impersonal, or even just old-fashioned and clunky to a guest who is used to having their property manager at their fingertips.
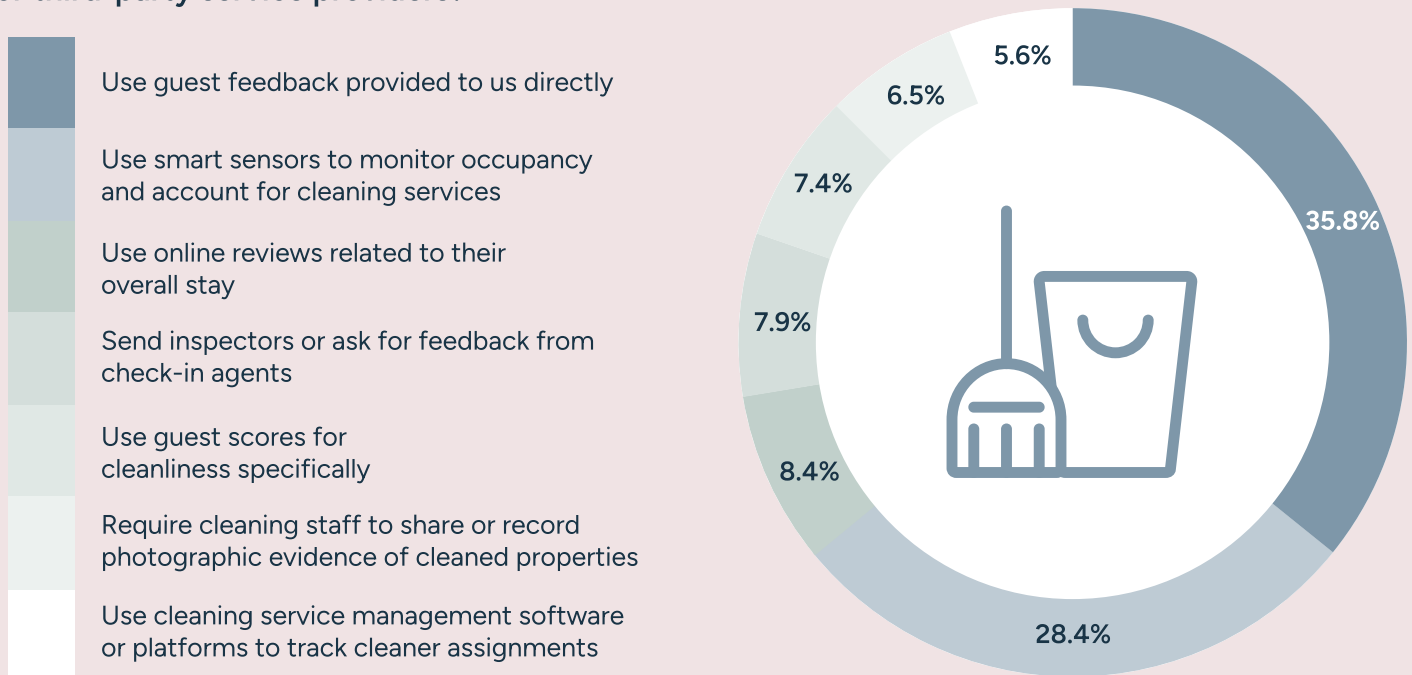
During the stay, **40%** of guests now expect to have a dedicated 24-hour phone line, and a further **28%** expect a mobile app with 24/7 messaging.

There are some opportunities for property managers to improve their welcome, however. Some **40%** of guests surveyed said they'd appreciate food or drink left for them, but only **30%** of property managers do this. Similarly, **20%** of guests would like their hosts to offer to pre-book activities based on their preferences, while just **9%** do this.

Takeaway: Property managers should focus on what guests really want from a short-term rental that authentic local experience. Bear this in mind and offer recommendations, local produce, and close attention to detail, as well as open channels for communication to make sure their stay is going well.

Keeping the peace: Good communication in harmony with non-intrusive monitoring

How do you monitor and insure the quality of cleaning services provided by your staff or third-party service providers?

- Use guest feedback provided to us directly
- Use smart sensors to monitor occupancy and account for cleaning services
- Use online reviews related to their overall stay
- Send inspectors or ask for feedback from check-in agents
- Use guest scores for cleanliness specifically
- Require cleaning staff to share or record photographic evidence of cleaned properties
- Use cleaning service management software or platforms to track cleaner assignments

5.6%
6.5%
7.4%
7.9%
8.4%
35.8%
28.4%

When cleaning's not up to scratch, guests are understandably not happy. But on vacation, being forced to report problems and coordinate cleaning services is stressful. How do property managers avoid these issues and keep guests happy?

Over a quarter (**28%**) of the property managers we surveyed use smart sensors to monitor occupancy and account for cleaning services. However, the majority still use guest feedback, reviews or cleaning staff reports to check the quality of their cleaning. Only **6%** use specific cleaning software.

To avoid complaints, **46%** of property managers use an operations tool to schedule regular maintenance checks and alerts for issues.

A quarter (**27%**) go further and use smart sensors or other Internet of Things (IoT) devices to monitor for leaks, electrical issues, and other problems with the home devices in their rentals. A fifth (**19%**) rely on guests to report issues using a mobile app.

Takeaway: Your guests are on vacation they're not there for the sole purpose of flagging problems with you. Make sure you have procedures and technology in place to spot and solve problems with as little guest disruption as possible. There are plenty of solutions out there now that can do this for you, giving you time to focus on improving the guest experience or growing your business not spot-checks and cleaning up!

Monitoring and privacy: avoiding parties and noise complaints
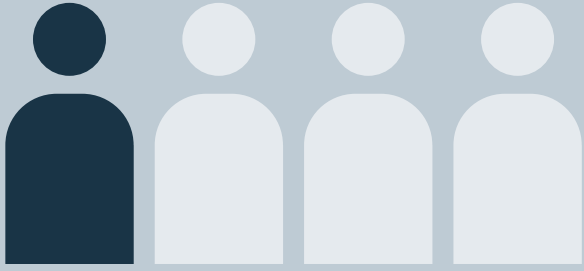
1 in 4
property managers has had the police called to their rental due to noise complaints

Parties are a big risk for property managers: **83%** of them believe that noise disturbances can damage neighbor and community relations, while it can also cause tensions with guests and damage to properties.

On average, property managers suspect parties take place in their rentals **43 nights a year**, while **43%** of property managers have received a noise complaint at their rentals.

The problem for property managers is that noise complaints can quickly get out of hand. In fact, **1 in 4** property managers has had the police called to one of their rentals due to noise complaints, and **1 in 10 guests** have had the police come to their rental for the same reason.

This is why noise monitors are so essential. If guests are making too much noise, the property manager will be alerted and can take action quickly — whether it's a simple message to the guests or a phone call.

Takeaways: Most guests are respectful of house rules, especially when they are communicated with properly. Remember, the majority of guests are happy to stay in a rental with a noise monitor because they have no intention of creating a noise issue in the first place!

"Can you hear me now?": How WiFi creates a disconnect between guests and property managers

3% of property managers admit their WiFi is' quite slow'

60% of guests report having to sometimes use a personal hotspot because of slow WiFi

With the advent of more flexible and remote work for many of us, good WiFi in vacation rentals is more important than ever.

However, there's a big difference between what guests and property managers think constitutes good WiFi.

When asked about the quality of the connection in their properties, **45%** of property managers think that the WiFi in their rentals is 'very good', **26%** said 'quite good', and **21%** said it's 'acceptable' only **3%** admit it's 'quite slow'.

This is vastly different from what guests said about the WiFi in the rentals they have stayed in. Faced with an unstable connection, **60%** of guests admit to sometimes using smartphones' hotspots. That includes **7%** who said that they always hotspot. For guests staying for longer or taking work calls from their rental, weak WiFi can be a dealbreaker.

Takeaway: Property managers should try to work for the day or take a call from their properties to test how good the working setup really is. Patchy WiFi connections and other small yet important niggles will be spotted instantly by a manager inspecting a property, but not necessarily by a cleaner during a short visit.

Safety in rentals: How do we ensure standards?

Germany	85%
Uk	62%
France	60%
Canada	57%
US	54%
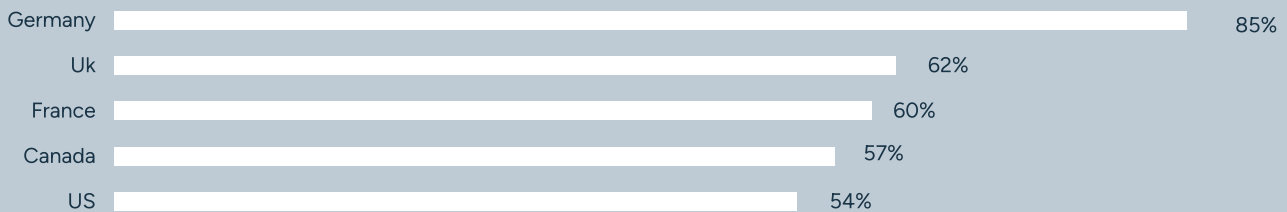
Understandably, guest expectations are high when it comes to health and safety, particularly as traditional lodgings, like hotels, are very tightly regulated. Property managers have a lot of work to do to live up to those expectations.

Our surveyed property managers said that they thought only **55%** of guests would expect there to be a carbon monoxide (CO) detector in their rental on average. In fact, **89%** of guests said that they would expect there to be a CO monitor in their rental. Of course, in some regions, this is a legal requirement, but not all.

Takeaway: A carbon monoxide alarm and fire precautions are an inexpensive way to ensure guest safety. Even if they aren't compulsory in your region, it's more than likely that your guests would want one. Guests come on vacation to relax, not worry about their safety and security, and seeing visible reminders that their property manager has a plan in place is both reassuring and gives an impression of greater professionalism.

Coming with these expectations from traditional lodging, **86% of guests said that they think there should be more stringent fire regulations for short-term rentals.**

However, only **58%** of property managers said that they believe regulations are essential to guaranteeing fire safety in rentals, while **27%** said that they are useful.

What about the regulations already in place? With an ever-changing regulatory landscape, **42%** of property managers are uncertain if they comply with existing fire safety regulations in their area. This percentage does not reflect a lack of concern but rather that the regulations are too complicated or difficult to understand.

Understanding of regulations varies widely depending on the country where property managers are based. In the UK, **38%** are uncertain about their compliance. In the US, this uncertainty is higher, with **46%** unsure. In Germany, **85%** are confident they comply, with only **15%** uncertain. Other countries might benefit from adopting Germany's clear regulatory approach.

Takeaway: Guests expect basic standards to be met to ensure their safety, and believe that local governments or authorities should oversee regulation. Our study shows that property managers do want to ensure guest safety, but need support in doing so. Associations and trade organizations can help with compliance where government guidance is unclear or lacking.

Come back soon! How do property managers ensure outstanding reviews after the guest leaves?

Even after guests have checked out, the gap in expectations remains.

For property managers, this is the golden opportunity to secure future bookings by obtaining great reviews to recommend their listings and encouraging repeat guests. But how they follow up after the stay to get those reviews is an area where property managers could be putting more resources.
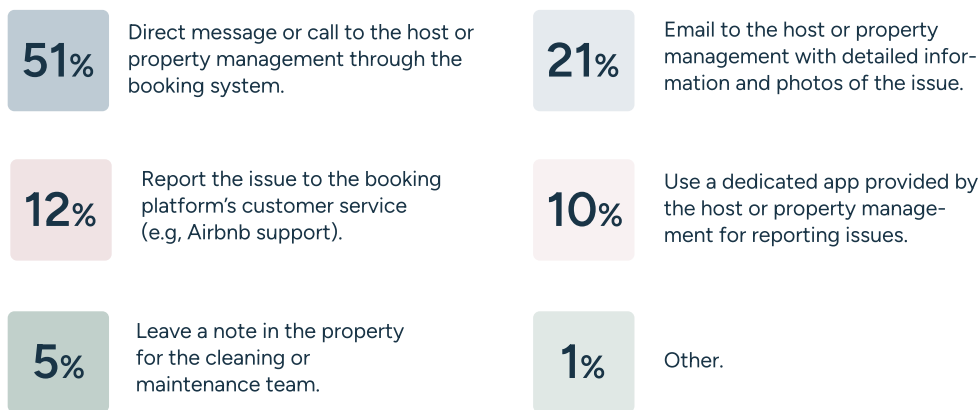
Most guests prefer a message or email, but when it comes to receiving a follow-up message, **53%** of guests expect it to be personalized. However, only **32%** of property managers follow up with a message that doesn't look automatically generated.

Takeaway: With the heavily-loaded tech stacks that most property managers have nowadays, it's easy to automate messages that appear personal. This can make a big difference to guests with minimal work for the property manager and, importantly, can lead to better reviews. New developments in AI make this even easier, so there really is no excuse to not add a little extra color and make guests happy!

Surprisingly, **5%** of property managers do absolutely nothing after the stay missing a huge opportunity to ensure a good review or repeat booking.

How to get good reviews: Cleaning and maintenance issues cause trouble for property managers

If the cleanliness of an 'Airbnb' or holiday home was not up to your standards, what would you do?

51% Direct message or call to the host or property management through the booking system.

21% Email to the host or property management with detailed information and photos of the issue.

12% Report the issue to the booking platform's customer service (e.g, Airbnb support).

10% Use a dedicated app provided by the host or property management for reporting issues.

5% Leave a note in the property for the cleaning or maintenance team.

1% Other.

Many guest complaints are due to dirty properties, but most guests would still prefer to solve this issue during the stay. This is a great opportunity for property managers to turn a problem into great service, but you need to catch the issue as quickly as possible through clear and open lines of communication.

If the cleaning wasn't up to standard, **44%** of guests would contact the property manager to request extra cleaning. However, just over **1 in 10 guests (12%)** would leave a negative review due to lack of cleanliness without contacting the property manager. This might be because it wasn't clear how they could reach them, or they don't feel like anything will be done. Property managers need to demonstrate that they are open to listening and helping.

Most guests (**51%**) would prefer to solve a maintenance issue by a direct message or call to the property manager. A further **21%** would email with more detail. Keeping communication channels open and clear is vital to understanding guest expectations and solving problems quickly.

Takeaway: It's true that some guests don't want to be bothered during their stay, but property managers need to find the sweet spot between leaving them alone and being overbearing. Being helpful and reachable in case of a problem is vital to getting a great review.

Creating loyalty and keeping our industry going with sustainable practices

Sustainability is becoming ever more mainstream, but very few property managers are advertising the good things they are doing. However, this can be a key way to win guests' favor and, of course, positive reviews. As in other areas, property managers underestimate guests' desire for sustainable choices.

Property managers believe that **46%** of guests on average would like to take the opportunity to offset their travel. However, **49%** of guests would offset their travel when they booked if it was free (in other words, included in the price), and another **26%** would do so for an added fee. This means that, in fact, **three-quarters of guests would like to offset their travel.**

Remember: If you do advertise your sustainability efforts, make sure to avoid greenwashing! Guests are quick to see through smoke and mirrors, and false claims about sustainability may backfire.

Takeaway: Despite what property managers think, guests are looking for ways to travel more sustainably. But, for the majority, it needs to be made easy for them and not affect the price!

Minut partners with EnviroRental to help property management companies become more sustainable. Find free resources at EnviroRental.earth.

Conclusions: How to bridge the expectations gap

From welcome notes that have become the bare minimum, to painfully-slow WiFi infuriating customers, property managers still have a lot to learn about guest expectations.

Our research has revealed how property managers sometimes aren't advertising their rentals' biggest selling points. We've also uncovered unnecessary caution when it comes to adopting technologies that make guests safer, as well as persistent false assumptions about what actually motivates a looker to turn into a booker.

Take, for example, our discovery that guests are no longer choosing rentals primarily for affordability, with only **11%** citing it as a factor. This frees property managers to focus on what makes this sector truly the most exciting part of the hospitality industry worldwide — ample space, authentic local experiences, and the unique characteristics that set it apart from traditional lodging.

If you take one thing away from this report, let it be that guests are willing to tell you what they want through their choices, reviews, and messages. By taking the time to really get to know your guests, and communicating clearly, you can close these gaps, educate guests on what to expect, and provide unforgettable experiences that bring in five-star reviews

Over 50,000 property managers trust Minut to help protect their properties.

Find out more about how Minut can help you better understand your guests with privacy-safe monitoring.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey completed in April 2024, with responses from 247 property managers and 536 guests.

The property manager group breaks down as follows: 56% from the United States, 23% from the United Kingdom, 8% France, 6% Germany, 6% Canada and the remaining from other countries.

Of the property managers surveyed, 29% have between 7 and 20 properties under management, and 28% have between 20 and 100. 18% had between 101 and 500, and 8% 500+.

Contributors

Mike Gluckman, Minut
Richard Coleman, Minut
Neil Millard, Abode Worldwide
Stewart Paterson, Abode Worldwide
Madeleine Parkin, Abode Worldwide
Marcus Ljungblad, Minut
Katrin Humal, Minut

MÎNUT

Minut is a single platform and device for noise and occupancy monitoring, AI-powered cigarette smoke detection, temperature, and humidity monitoring. Founded in 2014, its guest-friendly and community-first innovations are trusted by over 50,000 leading property managers around the world to make stays comfortable, safe, and secure. Minut empowers teams with the information they need to create and scale hospitality businesses that safeguard stays, evolve the guest experience, and help communities thrive. For more information visit www.minut.com