



SPECIAL STAYS

PREMIUM COASTAL PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

HOST LEARNING SERIES

Five-Star Cleaning Systems

What cleaners wish every host knew — the systems that separate a consistent five-star property from one that swings between five stars and three.

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About this guide

This is not a guide on how to clean. It is a guide on the **systems** that protect a five-star cleanliness rating across every turnover, every cleaner, and every season.

Some properties earn five stars every single time. Others — beautiful, expensive properties — consistently sit at three. The difference almost never comes down to the property itself. It comes down to the clean, and more precisely, to the system behind the clean. Cleanliness is one of the most visible factors in how guests choose, review and rebook a property — usually the first thing they judge when deciding whether a stay feels professionally managed.

Everything here is drawn from professional short-term rental cleaners, host communities, and recent industry observations, and is organised so you can act on it. It comes together as one method — **The Five-Star Cleaning System™** — built from five stages, each with a printable checklist you are welcome to laminate, share with your cleaner, and use on every turnover.

1 The data behind cleanliness	Why it matters to your bottom line
2 What makes guests say “wow”	First impressions & the details
3 What one missed hair costs	Why this is revenue protection
4 Managing turnover cleans	Expectations, checklists, timing
5 Deep cleans	The preventive maintenance you can't skip
6 Products & protecting finishes	What to use, what to avoid
7 Ask the cleaner	Straight answers to common questions
8 The Five-Star Cleaning System	The method, and the five checklists

1 The data behind cleanliness

Cleanliness is one of the most visible drivers of reviews, rebookings and complaints — usually the first thing a guest judges. The figures below mix Airbnb’s own published thresholds with widely reported industry observations; treat the latter as directional rather than precise.

The number	What it tells you
4.8+	Airbnb (official): the Superhost program requires a 4.8 or higher <i>overall</i> rating. Cleanliness is one review category that feeds that overall score, not a separate Superhost threshold.
4.9+	Airbnb (official): the newer Guest Favorite label requires roughly 4.9+, and now carries significant weight in search visibility.
First	Cleanliness is consistently among the first things guests react to on arrival — smell, the first surfaces they see, and the bed.
Most	Industry-reported: cleanliness is the most-commented theme in guest reviews, and a frequent driver of both five-star praise and one-star complaints.
\$\$\$	Operator experience: a cleaning complaint typically costs a host in partial refunds plus the harder, longer cost of a dented rating and lost search visibility.

Airbnb program thresholds change — verify current criteria directly with Airbnb. Industry-reported and operator figures reflect common patterns, not laboratory measurements.

THE HEADLINE

Cleanliness is one of the clearest signals a guest uses to decide whether a stay feels professionally managed. A consistently clean property protects your rating, your search visibility, and your returns.

2 What makes guests say “wow”

Guests form their cleanliness impression fast, on arrival — and that first impression shapes the whole review.

The first impression

A strong first impression buys goodwill that carries through the rest of the stay; a poor one does the reverse, sending the guest to look for faults. This is the primacy effect — first impressions tend to be remembered more strongly than what follows. In practice, the early minutes after a guest walks in do a lot of the work in setting their cleanliness rating.

On arrival, guests process five things almost simultaneously:

- **Smell** — hits first, before any visual assessment
- **Cleanliness of the entry zone**
- **Temperature** — too warm or too cold reads as discomfort
- **Lighting** — dim or flickering bulbs communicate neglect
- **Whether the listing matches the photos**

What guests smell first

Smell is the very first sensory trigger. A neutral, fresh scent communicates care. Musty air, cooking odours, or — just as damaging — an overpowering air freshener all trigger concern. The professional approach is to air the property out, run an air purifier during turnover, and use diluted, plant-based cleaners so the space never smells like it has “just been bleached.” Some research suggests up to around a third of people report sensitivity to fragranced products, so neutral always beats heavily scented.

The three zones guests audit immediately

Professional cleaners identify three areas guests check within minutes — and they judge the entire property by what they find:

- **The bathroom they will use first.** Water spots on mirrors, hair in the drain, or soap scum trigger immediate disgust. Every other room is judged against this one.
- **The kitchen counter and sink.** Even guests who never cook scan this. Sticky counters, crumbs in corners, or a dirty sink signal the whole clean was rushed.
- **The bed and bedding.** Guests inspect linen closely. Wrinkled sheets, a visible stain, or a single hair on a pillow undermines confidence in everything else.

The small details that win reviews

- A fresh, neutral-smelling entry
- Toilet paper folded to a point, hotel-style — proof a human took care
- Towels folded neatly and uniformly positioned
- Remote controls aligned; no clutter on surfaces
- No fingerprints on glass doors, mirrors or stainless steel
- Ceiling fans dusted — guests look up when they enter a room
- Bins lined and clean; nothing of the previous guest left behind

“The difference between a 4.2 and a 4.8 cleanliness rating is not cleaning harder — it is eliminating the specific oversights that guests notice most.”

Why consistency beats perfection

This is the single most important mindset shift. One cleaner scrubs the grout; the next skips it. One restocks everything; the next forgets the coffee pods. The result is mixed reviews — five stars one week, three the next — which drags down your average and your search visibility. It is the **repeatable standard**, not the occasional exceptional clean, that builds and protects a five-star rating. A checklist is what makes the tenth turnover of the month identical to the first, even when a substitute cleaner is working.

3 What one missed hair actually costs

This is not really about cleaning. It is about revenue protection. A single small miss can set off a chain that quietly costs a property thousands over a year.

It is tempting to think of a missed hair or a smudged mirror as a small thing. On its own, it is. The problem is what it sets in motion. One visible miss makes a guest doubt the whole property; that doubt becomes a lower cleanliness score; a lower score pulls the overall rating down; a lower rating costs search visibility; less visibility means fewer bookings. None of the individual steps feels dramatic. The cumulative effect, over twelve months, is not small.



A two-to-five-minute task — checking the pillow for hair — sits at the top of that chain. That is the entire argument for a system. You are not paying for a more thorough clean; you are removing the small, repeated misses that trigger the cascade. Seen this way, the cleaning fee is not a cost to minimise. It is the cheapest revenue insurance a property has.

REFRAME

Every checklist in this guide exists to break that chain at step one. The cost of running the system is tiny next to the cost of one bad quarter of search visibility.

4 Managing turnover cleans

The most common reason standards slip — even with a good cleaner — is unclear expectations, not poor effort. The cleaner is rarely the problem; the missing system is.

Setting clear expectations

Set expectations in writing, before the first clean, and be specific to the point of feeling excessive. Not “make the bed” but “replace the fitted sheet with a fresh one, tuck the corners firmly, place pillows centrally with cases facing the same direction.” Give your cleaner:

- A property-specific written checklist — not a generic one
- Reference photos of how each room should look when complete (bed presentation, towel fold, toilet-paper fold)
- Supply storage locations, restocking levels, and which linen set belongs to which bed
- The exact checkout and check-in window times
- A single agreed communication channel (most hosts use WhatsApp)
- Clear instructions on what photos to send, to whom, and by when

“The checklist is our contract. Each and every time. If you check this off and understand what I’m expecting on that line item, then you and I are on the same page.”

Why checklists create consistency

Cleaning without a checklist is the mistake that enables every other mistake, because it relies on memory — and memory skips tasks under time pressure. A laminated, property-specific checklist used every time achieves three things: a consistent standard even with a substitute cleaner, a genuine quality-audit tool for the host, and real accountability for the cleaner. Apps such as Turno, Properly and StayChk let you send digital checklists, track completion by room, and receive timestamped photos as proof.

Turnover timing: build in enough time

Tight windows create more negative reviews than any individual cleaning fault. These are realistic single-cleaner estimates — two cleaners roughly halves them. Always add a 30-minute buffer before check-in for the final walkthrough.

Property size	Standard turnover	Deep clean	Suggested window
Studio / 1 bed	60–90 min	2–2.5 hrs	11am out / 3pm in
2 bedrooms	90–120 min	2.5–3 hrs	10am out / 4pm in
3+ bedrooms	2–3 hrs	4+ hrs	10am out / 4pm in
Larger homes	4–6 hrs	More	Consider next-day check-in

Same-day turnovers: parallel processing

A same-day flip (11am checkout, 3pm check-in) is the most time-pressured task in short-term rental operations. The professional method is to **start the machines first**: the moment you walk in, strip the beds and start the washer, then load and start the dishwasher. Laundry (45–60 min) and the dishwasher (90 min) run while the visible cleaning happens, buying nearly two hours of parallel time. Keeping **three sets of linen per bed** means you are never waiting on a dryer — the gold standard for high-occupancy properties.

Communicating after every clean

The best host-cleaner relationships involve a short report after every single guest stay. It protects both parties and catches problems before a guest does. The report should cover:

- Timestamped photos of each room (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, entry)
- Any damage, breakage, or items left behind by the guest
- Restocking needs (soap, toilet paper, coffee pods, etc.)
- Any maintenance issues — a dripping tap, a faulty appliance, mould spotted
- A general sense of how the guests left the property

Preventing negative reviews

The triggers for bad cleanliness reviews are rarely catastrophic — they are small, visible misses that make a guest doubt the whole turnover:

- A single hair in the bathroom or on a pillow
- Smudges on the front-door glass
- Pink mildew in a shower corner (builds within days)
- Coffee residue in the kettle or machine
- Hair behind the toilet base
- Sticky light switches or cupboard handles

The fix for nearly all of these is **checklist depth, not more time**.

5 Deep cleans

A deep clean is not a luxury — it is insurance. Every property accumulates buildup that turnover cleans can't reach. Schedule it, or eventually guests will notice what has been avoided.

Regular turnover cleans, however thorough, cannot catch everything. Grime, dust and wear accumulate in places that are simply too time-consuming to address between guests. Deep cleaning is preventive maintenance that protects the guest, the property, and your rating.

How often

Occupancy level	Recommended deep-clean frequency
High (15+ bookings / month)	Every 4–6 weeks
Moderate (6–10 bookings / month)	Every 8–12 weeks (quarterly)
Low / long-stay listings	Every 3–4 months

Smart hosts schedule deep cleans into low-occupancy periods and block the calendar to prevent bookings. That turns deep cleaning into a predictable operating cost rather than a surprise expense.

What a deep clean covers

KITCHEN

- Inside and behind the oven and fridge
- Rangehood / exhaust filters (grease accumulates invisibly)
- Dishwasher drain and filter; cleaning cycle
- Vinegar descale through the coffee maker; descale kettle
- Cupboard interiors and drawer fronts
- Grout on splashback and floors

BATHROOMS

- Grout lines in the shower / bath surround
- Showerhead descaling
- Behind and underneath the toilet base
- Exhaust fan vents (dust collects heavily)
- Silicone seals — mould hides here
- Wash shower curtain with vinegar

BEDROOMS

- Under and behind all furniture
- Mattress vacuuming and spot-treatment
- Decorative pillows and throws laundered
- Headboard, bedside tables, lamp bases
- Window tracks and individual blind slats
- Wipe walls for marks and scuffs

LIVING AREAS

- Ceiling fans — blades and motor housing
- All window and sliding-door tracks
- Blinds wiped individually
- Couch cushions vacuumed; undersides cleaned
- Artwork frames, shelving and lampshades dusted
- Spot-clean walls and corners

OUTDOOR AREAS

- BBQ cleaned inside and out (a notorious complaint in WA properties)
- Outdoor furniture wiped — surfaces, legs, undersides

- Cobwebs cleared from eaves and corners
- Paths and mats swept and hosed

DO IT DURING THE DEEP CLEAN

Use the deep clean to run a maintenance check: replace HVAC filters, test smoke and CO detectors and replace batteries, inspect for leaks or water damage, test all appliances, and review towels and linen — retire anything worn, frayed or stained.

6 Products & protecting finishes

The right products protect both the guest experience and the property's finishes — the wrong ones quietly cause damage that becomes a future cost.

What to keep on hand

- **Multi-surface disinfectant**, plant-based where possible — gentler on surfaces and guest-safe
- **Glass cleaner** — nothing ruins a first impression like streaky mirrors and shower screens
- **Microfiber cloths** — streak-free, no shedding; better than paper towel for most surfaces
- **HEPA-filter vacuum** with attachments for carpets, upholstery and door tracks
- **Non-scratch sponges** — never standard scouring pads on stainless steel
- **Grout brush** for shower corners and tile lines
- **Lint roller** for bedding, sofas and fabric furniture
- **Degreaser** for the rangehood and kitchen
- **Air purifier** run 2–3 hours during turnover — neutralises odour without masking it

Protecting furniture and finishes

- **Avoid ammonia-based cleaners** on wooden furniture — they damage the finish
- **Avoid high-alcohol polishes** — they dry out and crack wood
- **Never let water stand** on wood — always dry after cleaning
- Use **non-scratch sponges** on stainless; regular pads leave micro-scratches that trap grime
- Use a **glass scraper**, not abrasive pads, on glass cooktops and shower doors
- Be mindful of **sunlight** — it fades and cracks finishes, a real issue in WA summer properties

7 Ask the cleaner

Straight answers to the questions hosts ask most.

How do I find a good cleaner?

The highest-quality channel is **host referrals** — a cleaner already doing short-term turnovers understands checkout windows, linen rotation and restocking without training from scratch. Local host Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and short-term-rental-specific marketplaces like Turno, are next best. Generic platforms find names, not vetted turnover cleaners. Always run a trial clean and inspect the result in person, with reference photos prepared so the standard is clear.

The five traits that matter most:

- ❶ **Reliability** — shows up on time, every time. More valuable than perfection.
- ❷ **Attention to detail** — the finishes matter as much as the basics.
- ❸ **Trustworthiness** — access to your property is a significant trust.
- ❹ **Trainability** — willing to learn your specific standards and checklist.
- ❺ **Proactive communication** — flags issues, doesn't go silent after a clean.

What should I ask before hiring?

- Do you have short-term rental turnover experience, not just domestic cleaning?
- Can you handle same-day flips between an 11am checkout and 3pm check-in?
- Do you have backup cover if you're sick or double-booked?
- Do you walk through and photograph before leaving?
- Will you report maintenance issues, damage, or missing items?

What's the biggest mistake hosts make?

Not using a checklist and relying on memory. That one gap enables every other mistake. After that: skipping high-touch surfaces (remotes, switches, handles — under three minutes to clean and among the dirtiest things in the property), rushing same-day turnovers, not scheduling deep cleans, keeping no photo record, and having no backup cleaner.

What do guests complain about most?

Verified across host communities, cleaning-company data and industry studies, in rough order:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Hair — consistently the fastest way to lose a five-star cleanliness review | • Dusty ceiling fans |
| • Smell — musty, stale, or chemical | • Used-looking, wrinkled bedding |
| • Smudged or filmy bathroom | • Dirty BBQ |
| • Sticky surfaces — rangehood, cupboards | • Unclean kettle, microwave or coffee maker |

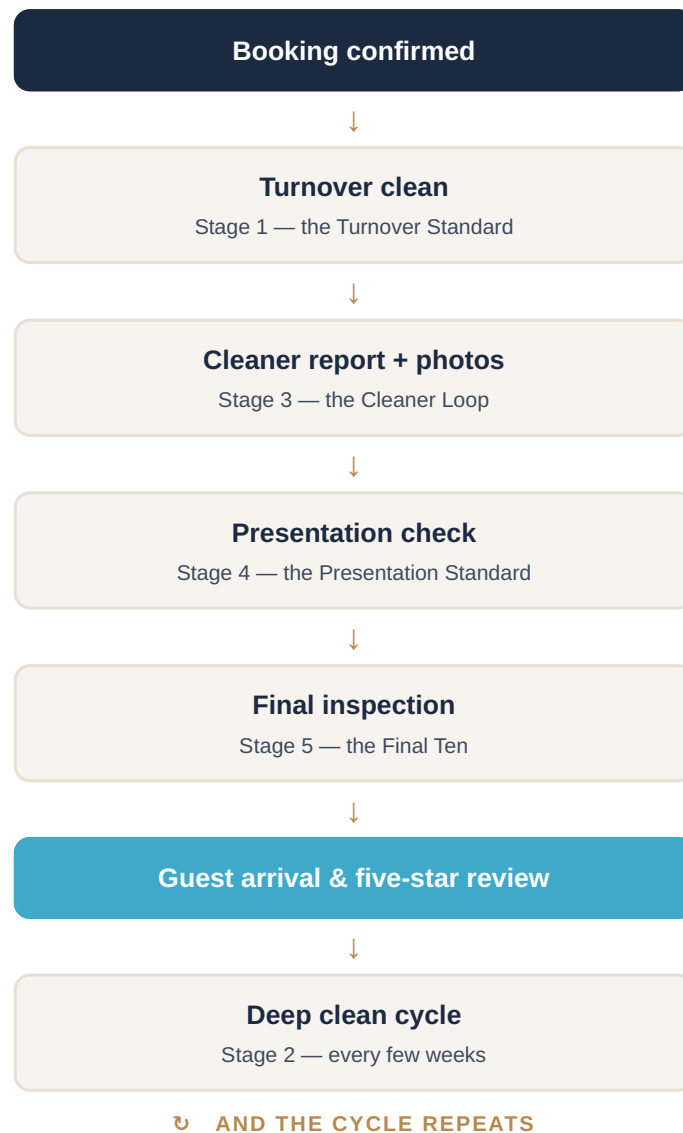
THE SURPRISE

The most complained-about issues are almost never the slow jobs. Removing hair, wiping the mirror, degreasing the rangehood — these are two-to-five-minute tasks that get missed under time pressure without a checklist. The difference isn't the cleaner. It's the system.

8 The Five-Star Cleaning System

Everything in this guide comes together as one repeatable method. Five stages, five checklists, one cycle that runs on every booking — so a five-star result never depends on which cleaner is working that day.

This is the loop that turns over on every reservation. It is deliberately circular: the deep-clean cycle feeds back into the standard, and the standard protects the rating that drives the next booking.



The five stages

1 The Turnover Standard

The repeatable clean between every guest. Checklist 1.

2 The Deep Clean Cycle

Scheduled preventive cleaning that reaches what a turnover cannot. Checklist 2.

3 The Cleaner Loop

Clear expectations, and a timestamped photo report after every clean. Checklist 3.

4 The Presentation Standard

How the property should look and feel in the final minutes before arrival. Checklist 4.

5 The Final Ten

A ten-point, host-led audit before every guest arrives. Checklist 5.

The five checklists that follow are each stage in practice. Print them, laminate them, and use them every time.

STAGE 1 · CHECKLIST 1

The Turnover Standard

The standard clean between every guest. Start the machines first.

START — TASK STACKING

- ☐ Strip all beds — start laundry immediately
- ☐ Load and start the dishwasher
- ☐ Open windows for ventilation
- ☐ Walk through; photograph any damage, items left behind, or maintenance issues

KITCHEN

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Wipe all countertops and splashback | ☐ Wipe cabinet fronts and handles |
| ☐ Clean stovetop including burner grates | ☐ Check inside fridge — remove any food left behind |
| ☐ Clean rangehood filter (exterior and accessible interior) | ☐ Empty bin and replace liner |
| ☐ Clean microwave inside and out | ☐ Restock dish soap, sponge, coffee, hand soap |
| ☐ Wipe exterior of fridge, toaster, kettle | ☐ Sweep and mop the floor |

BATHROOM(S)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Clean mirror streak-free | ☐ Scrub toilet inside, outside, base and behind |
| ☐ Clean sink and tap handles | ☐ Scrub shower / bath, screen and taps |

- ☐ Check drain for hair — remove it
- ☐ Check grout corners for pink mildew — scrub
- ☐ Mop floor including corners

BEDROOMS

- ☐ Replace all bedding; check mattress for stains before remaking
- ☐ Dust nightstands, lamps, headboard
- ☐ Wipe light switches and doorknobs
- ☐ Check inside wardrobe and drawers

LIVING AREAS & HIGH-TOUCH SURFACES

- ☐ Dust all surfaces, shelves and decor
- ☐ Wipe remotes, switches, all door handles
- ☐ Fluff cushions; fold throws

FINAL WALKTHROUGH

- ☐ Stand in each doorway — see it as the guest will
- ☐ Smell check in every room
- ☐ Check every light bulb

- ☐ Replace towels — fresh, folded set
- ☐ Restock toilet paper, soap, shampoo / conditioner / body wash
- ☐ Empty bin and replace liner

- ☐ Check under the bed
- ☐ Vacuum floor including under the bed
- ☐ Lint-roll any upholstered surfaces
- ☐ Empty bin and replace liner

- ☐ Vacuum sofa and chairs, including under cushions
- ☐ Vacuum / mop floors
- ☐ Wipe thermostat / AC controls and cabinet handles

- ☐ Confirm Wi-Fi password is visible
- ☐ Confirm all supplies stocked
- ☐ Timestamped photos of every room and the entry

STAGE 2 · CHECKLIST 2

The Deep Clean Cycle

Everything in the turnover clean, plus these scheduled extras.

KITCHEN

- ☐ Clean inside oven — racks, door glass, roof
- ☐ Pull fridge out; clean behind and underneath
- ☐ Soak rangehood filter in degreaser
- ☐ Run dishwasher cleaning cycle
- ☐ Descale kettle; vinegar cycle through coffee maker
- ☐ Clean all drawer and cupboard interiors
- ☐ Clean behind / under stovetop if removable
- ☐ Clean grout on splashback tiles

BATHROOM

- ☐ Descale showerhead
- ☐ Deep-scrub all grout with a grout brush
- ☐ Clean silicone seals for mould
- ☐ Remove and wash exhaust fan grille
- ☐ Machine-wash shower curtain with vinegar
- ☐ Wipe all tile and painted wall surfaces
- ☐ Descale toilet tank interior
- ☐ Polish fixtures to remove water spots

BEDROOMS

- ☐ Flip, vacuum and spot-clean mattress
- ☐ Wash or replace mattress protectors
- ☐ Launder decorative pillows and throws
- ☐ Wipe headboard; clean behind it
- ☐ Move furniture; vacuum / mop underneath
- ☐ Clean window tracks and individual blind slats

LIVING & OUTDOOR

- ☐ Clean ceiling fans — blades, housing, above blades
- ☐ Vacuum and steam-clean upholstery
- ☐ Clean window tracks, frames and lampshades
- ☐ Wash curtains; wipe blinds; spot-clean walls
- ☐ BBQ — full internal clean, grates soaked, grease trap emptied

- ☐ Wash outdoor furniture; clear cobwebs; hose paths

MAINTENANCE CHECK (DO DURING THE DEEP CLEAN)

- ☐ Replace HVAC filters
- ☐ Test smoke / CO detectors; replace batteries
- ☐ Inspect for leaks or water damage
- ☐ Test all appliances
- ☐ Review and retire worn towels, linen, kitchen tools

STAGE 3 · CHECKLIST 3

The Cleaner Loop

The routine that keeps host and cleaner on the same page.

BEFORE THE FIRST CLEAN — SET UP FOR SUCCESS

- ☐ Provide a written, property-specific checklist (laminated)
- ☐ Walk through the property together on the first clean
- ☐ Share reference photos of how each room should look
- ☐ Provide a restocking list with product names and storage locations
- ☐ Confirm the checkout / check-in window
- ☐ Agree a communication method and photo-delivery routine

BEFORE EACH CLEAN

- ☐ Confirm the day before (especially same-day flips)
- ☐ Confirm access method (smart-lock code, key location)
- ☐ Note anything flagged from the previous guest
- ☐ Confirm restocking supplies are available

AFTER EVERY CLEAN — CLEANER REPORTS

- ☐ Timestamped photos of each room and the entry
- ☐ Any damage or breakage found
- ☐ Any maintenance issues noticed
- ☐ Supplies running low (specify items)
- ☐ Anything unusual — leftover items, mould, leaks

HOST RESPONDS & QUARTERLY CHECK-IN

- ☐ Acknowledge clean complete; confirm photos received
- ☐ Note anything needing follow-up; confirm next clean
- ☐ Quarterly: review the checklist together and walk through
- ☐ Update any property quirks (new appliances, layout changes)
- ☐ Confirm backup cleaner contact is saved

STAGE 4 · CHECKLIST 4

The Presentation Standard

How the property should look and feel before every guest.

SCENT & AIR

- ☐ Windows opened during the clean; property aired out
- ☐ Air purifier run for 2+ hours if available
- ☐ No artificial air-freshener sprays — neutral is the goal
- ☐ No chemical, food or musty smell

LINEN & BEDROOM

- ☐ Bedding freshly laundered and fully dry
- ☐ Bed made hotel-style; sheets tight, creases minimised
- ☐ Pillows plump, centred and squared
- ☐ Throws folded uniformly
- ☐ Bedside lamps working; charger cables tidy
- ☐ No towels with fraying or staining in rotation

BATHROOM

- ☐ Toilet paper folded to a point
- ☐ Towels folded uniformly and aligned
- ☐ Toiletries refilled or replaced; fresh soap
- ☐ All surfaces streak-free, mirror especially
- ☐ No personal items or cleaning products visible

KITCHEN & LIVING

- ☐ Dish rack empty and dry; sink clean and dry
- ☐ Benches clear except intended items
- ☐ Coffee station neatly arranged and stocked
- ☐ Remotes aligned; cushions plumped; throws draped
- ☐ No guest items, packaging or magazines left behind
- ☐ Welcome / guest information in its place

ENTRY & OVERALL

- ☐ Front-door handle and glass clean, no fingerprints
- ☐ Entry mat clean and straight
- ☐ Door unlocks smoothly; access confirmed
- ☐ Lights and temperature set as instructed

STAGE 5 · CHECKLIST 5

The Final Ten

The host's own 10-point audit — not the cleaner's. Takes 5–10 minutes, done before every arrival.

- ☐ **Smell** — stand at the front door and breathe in. Neutral and fresh? No chemical overhang?
- ☐ **Bathroom hair** — shower drain, floor corners, sink, behind the toilet
- ☐ **Linen** — pull back the duvet, check the fitted sheet for stains, sniff pillowcases
- ☐ **Lock** — enter the guest's access code from outside and confirm it works
- ☐ **Lights** — flip every switch in every room; replace any dead bulbs
- ☐ **Wi-Fi** — connect with the guest password and confirm it works
- ☐ **Supplies** — toilet paper (4 rolls per bathroom), soap, shampoo, coffee, bin bags
- ☐ **Previous-guest items** — under the bed, in drawers, closet shelves, behind the bathroom door
- ☐ **Kitchen** — fridge empty and clean, microwave clean, coffee station stocked
- ☐ **Photos** — timestamped photo of each room, stored as arrival evidence

REMEMBER

The checklist is the standard — not the cleaner's memory. Consistency beats perfection, every property accumulates buildup a turnover can't reach, and guests don't inspect — they feel. Give them the right cues, every single time.

“Five-star properties are rarely created by exceptional cleaners. They are created by exceptional systems that ordinary cleaners can follow consistently.”

THE FIVE-STAR CLEANING SYSTEM · SPECIAL STAYS