

## DIY Photography Tips for Vacation Rental to Compete with Hotels

Vacation rentals make up a \$13 billion US market and is expected to [grow](#) around eight percent annually through 2022. Meanwhile the global [hotel](#) market generates around a half trillion dollars annually.

The newest entrant to this market is accommodation-sharing sites like AirBnB and VRBO. These new services peg average homeowners against big-money operators. So, how can an average home owner attempt to compete? With photography.

Hotel operators understand how important a quality photograph is to the marketing of their properties. It's no secret they have an impact on how rental sales will go.

For example, according to [TripAdvisor](#), travelers are 150 percent more engaged on listings with 20 or more photos than listings with only a few photos. Furthermore, [92 percent](#) of travelers are more likely to book accommodations for hotels that post detailed descriptions with photos.

The quality of a photo is also without dispute in the impact it has on marketing properties. [Research from Redfin](#) found that homes for sale advertised using DSLR photos versus point-and-shoot photos sell for around \$3,000 to \$11,000 more. According to a [Wall Street Journal article](#), homes with high-quality photos receive a 47 percent higher asking price per square foot.

Photography is arguably one of the best methods for homeowners of accommodation-sharing properties to compete with big-budget hotels. But, what do property owners need to do to ensure their photography can compete?

### The Challenges Behind Getting the Lighting Right

Many real estate photographers employ HDR (High Dynamic Range) photography techniques when photographing properties. A homeowner with a DSLR or mirrorless camera can also do this on their own.

HDR photography may sound complex, but it's just about making a scene appear how the human eye would see it. The technique is very useful for interior shots and marketing of properties, and this has to do with the limitations of cameras.

The human eye can adapt in an instant to scenes that have very bright and very dark areas. As an example, if you're in your home with the lights off looking out the window on a sunny day, your eyes can see the interior walls and outside scene just fine. But, a camera cannot.

If you point the camera to expose for what's inside the room, the view outside the window will be totally blown out - an overexposed white mess. And, if you point the camera to expose the outside, then the interior will become very dark.

A camera sensor's ability to expose the brightest brights alongside the darkest darks has come a long way but, still has a long way to go. Simply put, cameras are not as capable as the human eye at exposing a scene. So, how do real estate photographers make up for a camera's inability to properly expose interiors scenes?



*The camera didn't cope well with the high contrast. The room is too dark while the view outside the window is washed out.*

### **How Pros Photograph Interiors**

HDR photography sounds as if it should be left to professionals. However, amateur photographers use it quite often for landscape scenes, especially when they have a lot of contrast. It just requires a DSLR or mirrorless camera setup that lets you snap bracketed exposures, which most cameras do nowadays.

In quick summary, bracketed shots are a series of photographs taken with different exposures. One photo exposes for the window, so you can see what's outside. Another photo exposes for the room, so you can see the inside. Then one or more photos expose for lighting variations in between. You then merge the photos to an image where both the room and the exterior are perfectly exposed.



*The image merged in HDR software optimally balances bright and dark areas*

## How to Merge Photos for Proper Exposure

There are a few options for merging bracketed photos. There are software suites that require monthly subscriptions and are usually comprehensive all-purpose photo editors. In addition to the monthly fee, they often also have a bigger learning curve since they attempt to provide extensive feature sets. In some cases, the learning is too steep to consider.

You can also opt for HDR-specific software, particularly if you know this is the primary editing you're wanting to do. If you're only going to do occasional real estate or landscape photos here and there, it can minimize processing time.

These software suites usually have a one-time low cost to acquire rather than a subscription model. Furthermore, because HDR software is purpose-built to work with bracketed photos, learning curves are reduced.

The automation includes aligning the photos and merging them. This is the part when the software takes the properly exposed elements from each photo and combines them into one new image, an HDR image. In the end, you get an accurately exposed photo for the inside and outside of a real estate interior, like how your eyes see it in real life.

Done properly, HDR real estate photos provide accommodation-sharing homeowners a way to compete against big-chain hotels. HDR photography is used by professionals because it conveys quality and attention to detail. This can significantly increase perceptions about a property, whether a professional photographer was hired to do it or whether a homeowner

pulled a DIY. And, most important, research has proven this level of photography has a direct impact on sales generated from rentals.

*Author Bio:*

*Ron Pepper has been using HDR techniques in his photography business for more than a dozen years. Since 2008, he also has been working closely with HDRsoft, the maker of [Photomatix](#), a software solution for HDR photography.*