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Hilton Head Island vacation rental checklist

Beaufort County, South Carolina | Rules checked November 6, 2026

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Every short-term rental (under 30 days) on Hilton Head Island needs a yearly town permit at $150 per bedroom, on top of a town business license. Owners must respond to complaints within an hour, list the permit number in every ad, and meet fire-safety rules. Tax is 10%.

> The town's requirements page also says owners renting on their own, or with a manager that isn't licensed, collect and submit the 3% town tax themselves.

> Violations can bring citations, fines, a magistrate court summons, and suspension of the permit or business license for repeat problems.

Licensing steps

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

- [ ] **Get a retail license for direct bookings**
  If you take bookings yourself, you need a SCDOR retail license for each rental property and must file and pay electronically through MyDORWAY. If you rent only through a property manager or an online travel company that takes the payment, they remit the state tax and you don't need a license. Rent no more than one week a quarter and you can file once a year instead.
  MyDORWAY: https://mydorway.dor.sc.gov/

- [ ] **Know what the platform collects**
  Airbnb collects the 5% sales tax, 2% accommodations tax, and the local sales taxes the state collects, on its bookings. It also collects some county and city accommodations taxes, but only in the places it lists. Everything else is yours to file.

- [ ] **Register for local taxes**
  Many counties and cities charge their own accommodations tax (up to 3%), a hospitality tax, or a beach preservation fee. They collect these directly, so you register with the county or city even if a platform pays your state tax.

- [ ] **Check your property tax rate**
  A home that is your legal residence keeps the 4% assessment ratio only if it is rented out 72 days or less a year. Rent it more and it is taxed as a 6% rental property. Ask your county assessor.

- [ ] **Then your county and city**
  Business licenses, rental permits, and zoning are where South Carolina towns differ most. Pick your area.

BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

- [ ] **Find out who governs your address**
  A Hilton Head, Bluffton, Beaufort, or Port Royal address may be outside town limits. If it is, the county's permit, business license, and 3% accommodations tax apply instead. Check your parcel before you apply.

- [ ] **Then your town or area**
  Permits, caps, and fees differ in every town. Pick your area.

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

- [ ] **Get a business license**
  Every property rental in town needs an annual Town of Hilton Head Island business license (May 1 to April 30), taxed on gross revenue. Renew by April 30.

- [ ] **Request a permit account**
  Ask Town short-term rental staff (843-341-4740, STRPlan@hiltonheadislandsc.gov) for an account number, then apply in the GovOS permit portal. The permit must be in a person's name, not an LLC. Allow up to 30 days for approval.
  Hilton Head STR permits:
  https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/business/short_term_rentals/short_term_rental_permits/index.php
- [ ] **Gather the application documents**
  A site plan for single-family homes showing the trash location and the 9 x 18 ft parking spaces (six at most), a copy of an ad showing your permit number, an HOA approval letter if you have an HOA, and a current business license. The home needs a Certificate of Occupancy.
- [ ] **Meet the fire-safety rules**
  A 2-A:10-B:C extinguisher on every level (and one for an attached garage), interconnected smoke alarms in and outside every bedroom and on every level, carbon monoxide alarms where there are fuel-burning appliances or an attached garage, a propane alarm if gas is used inside, and a 60-minute shut-off timer on outdoor gas grills. Homes of 3,600 square feet or more need sprinklers or a monitored fire alarm system.
- [ ] **Register for state and local taxes**
  The state-collected tax on stays here is 7% (state sales and accommodations tax plus local sales taxes). Airbnb collects it on its bookings; for direct bookings, get a SCDOR retail license and file through MyDORWAY. The town's 3% (1% accommodations tax plus 2% beach preservation fee) is filed quarterly with Town Revenue Services by April 20, July 20, October 20, and January 20. Airbnb's tax article lists it as collected by Airbnb; file it yourself for direct bookings and other platforms.

Fees

$150 per bedroom a year, plus the business license tax

Short-term rental permit	**$150 per bedroom, yearly**
Late renewal After May 15, 2026; after April 30 in later years.	**$250**

Inspection checklist

- [ ] **Fire extinguisher on every level.** Rated 2-A:10-B:C or higher, inspected yearly by a licensed vendor.
- [ ] **Interconnected smoke alarms.** Inside and outside every bedroom and on every level; not over 10 years old.
- [ ] **Carbon monoxide and propane alarms.** CO alarm near sleeping areas with fuel-burning appliances or an attached garage; propane alarm mounted low if gas is used inside.
- [ ] **Monitored fire alarm for 3,600+ sq ft.** Unless the home has sprinklers. Existing permit holders have until May 1, 2027.
- [ ] **Grill timer and clear exits.** Gas grills shut off within 60 minutes; two ways out of every room; 4-inch address numbers visible from the street.

House rules for guests

Quiet hours: 10:01 p.m. to 6:59 a.m.
The town's noise notice must be posted inside.

Posted for guests: Contact, trash, pool and parking rules
Guests may not park on grass or pine straw.

Who to contact

Short-term rental staff: 843-341-4740
STR Rapid Response Hotline: 843-341-6864
Town Hall: 843-341-4600

Hilton Head Island asks for drawings with your application.
Make the site sketch, floor plans, and evacuation maps to scale from your measurements at FireEscapePlan.com.

Official sources

South Carolina Department of Revenue: Accommodations tax. https://dor.sc.gov/tax/accommodations

Airbnb: Collection and remittance by Airbnb in South Carolina. https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/2328

South Carolina Department of Revenue: Revenue Ruling #15-4: vacation rentals of a residence-
. https://dor.sc.gov/resources-site/lawandpolicy/Advisory%20Opinions/RR15-4.pdf

Town of Hilton Head Island: Short-Term Rental Permit Requirements-
. https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/business/short_term_rentals/requirements.php

Town of Hilton Head Island: Short-Term Rental Permits-
. https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/business/short_term_rentals/short_term_rental_permits/index.php

Town of Hilton Head Island: Short-Term Rental Fire Safety. https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/business/short_term_rentals/fire_safety.php

Town of Hilton Head Island: Accommodations Tax & Beach Preservation Fees-
. https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/government/finance/taxes/accommodations_tax_beach_preservation_fees.php

Town of Hilton Head Island: Short-Term Rental Program at a glance-
. https://hiltonheadislandsc.gov/business/short_term_rentals/program/index.php

Town of Hilton Head Island (Municode): Code section-
. https://library.municode.com/sc/hilton_head_island/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT10BUPRLIFRRE_CH2SHRMRE