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Kemah vacation rental checklist

Galveston County, Texas | Rules checked November 8, 2026

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Kemah requires a yearly short-term rental permit, $450 (as low as $300 with a sound monitoring system), and the city inspects each rental to set its maximum occupancy and parking. Stays owe 6% state plus 7% city hotel tax, which owners file quarterly themselves.

> Late hotel tax returns owe a 5% penalty.

Licensing steps

STATE OF TEXAS

- [ ] **Know who pays the hotel tax**
  Airbnb collects and pays the 6% state hotel tax on its bookings. If guests pay you directly or through a site that doesn't collect, register with the Comptroller and file the state tax yourself.
  Texas hotel occupancy tax: https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/hotel/
- [ ] **Register for local hotel tax**
  Your city (and in some places your county) charges its own hotel tax, filed with that city or county, not the state. Airbnb pays it only in the places on its list; everywhere else you register and file it yourself, even for Airbnb bookings.
- [ ] **Check your city's rules**
  Many Texas cities require a short-term rental permit or registration, and some require an inspection, a local contact, or posted rules. Outside city limits there's usually no permit, but deed restrictions and HOA rules often limit rentals. Pick your area for the local rules.

GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS

- [ ] **Then pick your city**
  Texas counties can't zone, so rental permits and the local hotel tax are set by each city. Pick your city, or the unincorporated page if you're outside city limits.
- [ ] **Expect a business personal property account**
  Since May 2024 the Galveston County Appraisal District treats short-term rentals as businesses and values their furnishings and fixtures for property tax. If you disagree with the value, protest by the deadline on your notice.

CITY OF KEMAH, TEXAS

- [ ] **Apply for the permit**
  Email the completed short-term rental application to the city and pay $450. If you have an approved sound monitoring system (such as Minut or NoiseAware), send proof for a credit of up to $150. Applications for the next year open November 1.
  Kemah short-term rentals: https://kemahtx.gov/386/Short-Term-Rentals-Owner
- [ ] **Pass the city inspection**
  The city inspects within 30 days to set your maximum occupancy and on-site parking and check basic health and safety. If anything fails, the Building Official sends a written list to fix.
- [ ] **Hotel taxes on each stay**
  Stays of 29 nights or less owe the 6% state hotel tax, which Airbnb collects on its bookings. If guests pay you directly, file it with the Texas Comptroller. Kemah's 7% hotel tax isn't collected by Airbnb. File a quarterly return with the city (due April 30, July 31, October 31, and January 31), even at $0, and pay by check or card.

Fees

$450 a year, or $300 with a sound monitor

Annual STR permit	**$450**
Sound monitoring credit	**Up to $150 off**

Who to contact

Kemah City Hall: 281-334-1611

Official sources

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts: Hotel Occupancy Tax FAQs: Airbnb. https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/hotel/airbnb-faq.php

Airbnb: Occupancy tax collection and remittance by Airbnb in Texas. https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/2331

Texas Legislature: County zoning authority (Local Government Code ch. 231). https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.231.htm

Community Impact: As short-term rentals bloom, Galveston County, Bay Area cities scramble to regulate them (August 1, 2024). https://communityimpact.com/houston/pearland-friendswood/real-estate/2024/08/01/as-short-term-rentals-bloom-galveston-county-bay-area-cities-scramble-to-

City of Kemah: Short Term Rental Owner. https://kemahtx.gov/386/Short-Term-Rentals-Owner