

Open your own bed and breakfast!

FabJob Guide to

# Become a Bed & Breakfast Owner



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## Introduction

According to industry sources, bed and breakfast inns are the fastest growing segment of the lodging business. There are an estimated 200,000 in the United States alone. Is there room for more? Absolutely. In a fast-track, 24/7, high-speed world, both vacationers and business travelers alike are growing in their appreciation of the home-away-from-home comfort of a bed and breakfast over a more impersonal chain hotel.

To open your own inn, all you need is to find your niche and do the work. On the other hand, you should have no difficulty buying an established inn if you prefer. Many (but not all) inn keepers tend to get into the business in mid-life. It seems almost as though we humans

have an innate urge to escape the rat race when we hit a certain age and fulfill our fantasy of owning a little piece of heaven.

Then there are those who have retired from their jobs but are still vital and creative and want a second career. Because these people get into inn keeping later in life, they tend not to stay in it for decades. Once you start checking the “inns for sale” resources you’ll find in this guide, you are likely to discover that nine times out of ten the reason for selling is retirement. Consequently there is always a pool of good inns on the market waiting to fulfill your dream.

Since you have an interest in becoming a bed and breakfast inn keeper, there is a good chance that sometime recently you have stayed in a bed and breakfast. Perhaps you spent a romantic weekend in an enchanting “painted lady” Victorian house at the sea shore. Maybe on a business trip to a distant city you opted for the oasis of calm provided by a bed and breakfast over a noisy, crowded hotel.

At sometime during your stay – while being served a delicious home-cooked breakfast in a dining room with a view, or sharing a glass of wine on the veranda at sunset – you thought to yourself, “This is a great lifestyle; I could handle this.” It is; and you could. Many people with no prior experience in the hospitality business have made successes of being inn keepers.

As the owner of a bed and breakfast, you get to live year round in the lovely home that as a guest you can only enjoy for a few days at a time. Letting out rooms can enable you to have the house of your dreams that you may not otherwise be able to afford. Not only do you work out of your home, you are also your own boss. Many of the expenses of running your home will be tax deductible.

You get to host a constant stream of interesting visitors from all parts of the world, show off your cooking and decorating skills, and make money doing it. Your bed and breakfast can bring tremendous enjoyment to many travelers and a great deal of satisfaction to you.

Depending on the size of inn you opt for, you could run it alone if you are the independent type. Or the bed and breakfast can be a family affair, with everyone – even the kids – contributing to the running of the business. This is a career that is truly open to everyone.

How much money are you likely to make? That depends. Conventional wisdom is that an inn with less than five guest rooms is a part-time business for a couple. This means that perhaps one of you could maintain his or her day job while the other runs the inn. Inns over five rooms can provide a fulltime income, but also likely will require that you hire staff to help with the work.

Location is a significant factor, too. Some inns are seasonal, catering to the ski crowd or summer vacationers (enabling you to close down and travel during the off season, if you want). Others are open year round. This will also dictate whether your inn provides a part-time or full-time income. Remember, though, you have bought a property and very probably will be acquiring equity in it, so your inn is also a good investment.

Speaking of location, there are opportunities available all over the country. A browse through one of the inns-for-sale websites will yield listings from Maine to California. And while at one time bed and breakfasts were generally thought of as rural establishments, one of the biggest growing sectors of the industry is city inns catering to both tourists and business people.

No particular education is compulsory for becoming an inn keeper, although there are some very good seminars available if you choose to take them, and that course of action is recommended by most experienced inn keepers. You can also get hands-on experience of the business by becoming an “inn sitter” before you take the plunge with your own bed and breakfast. You do need to have some business savvy: you’ll require rudimentary bookkeeping skills. Marketing know-how is also very important and there are many resources available to you for acquiring that knowledge. It doesn’t hurt to be handy around the house, either, so you can make minor repairs to maintain your home in perfect condition.

Perhaps the most important thing is to really love company and to be excited about the prospect of having people – make that strangers – in your home. The ambience that you create for your guests will make a world of difference both in your own enjoyment of the job, and in whether or not they have a great stay that will prompt good word-of-mouth and repeat business. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

A couple of years ago, a friend and I took a vacation in New England, staying in bed and breakfasts all the way. The first one we stayed at on Cape Cod was a beautifully restored building furnished with antiques and high end reproduction furniture including four-poster beds. The location was also impressive, just a block from the beach.

But the couple who ran the place seemed almost shy. They talked in monosyllables and volunteered no information other than the basics of where our room was and what time they served breakfast. In fact, my friend and I were there two days before we stumbled across a sitting room open to guests! During breakfast, guests sat at separate small tables, and talked in hushed tones, almost as though they were afraid of disturbing the peace. Then immediately after breakfast, the dining room was locked.

The next inn we stayed at on the North coast of Massachusetts couldn't have been more different. The delightful owners and their two friendly dogs met us at the door. They gave us the grand tour of the inn, and provided us with maps and information about the area. They explained that the kitchen was always open and we were free to use the refrigerator and microwave if we wanted to fix dinner. In the evening they lit a fire and put out munchies and a bottle of wine for guests. Breakfast was served at a big round table and guests chatted and exchanged stories about day trips and sight-seeing in the area.

Although the inn itself was not quite as grand as the previous one, it has stayed in our minds as the "best time" of our vacation. By the time we left, we felt as though the inn keepers were friends, and we have exchanged Christmas cards ever since. I can't even remember the names of the first inn keepers. Does it matter? Well, I have recommended the second inn to several friends visiting that area.

My impression was that the Cape Cod inn keepers were in the business because they wanted to restore the lovely old building and letting out rooms was a way of financing that endeavor. And that's a worthy undertaking. But the second couple gave the feeling that they loved having people stay and really enjoyed being hosts. These inn keepers struck exactly the right note by being personable and available but not obtrusive.

“We think the most important part of the experience of the bed and breakfast guest is their perception of the inn keeper,” confirms John Casey, who with his wife Linda Fay runs O’Casey’s Bed & Breakfast in San Antonio, Texas ([www.ocaseybnb.com](http://www.ocaseybnb.com)). “So it’s really important for that person to be relaxed, open, and comfortable about the accommodations he or she is offering.”

Apart from being a “people person,” another important factor to consider about being an inn keeper is that it puts you in the service industry. Guests will be paying you considerable amounts of their hard-earned money to spend special occasions such as honeymoons or vacations at your inn. They will expect, and deserve, to be treated well. Some may have special needs or requirements, whims even.

Finally, inn keeping is a quite an exacting job. It takes a fair amount of energy and physical ability. During your busy season you might be working long hours seven days a week. Housework, gardening, hauling supplies, cooking and tending the needs of others can be tiring. Still, not only do young, energetic people get into inn keeping, but many people in mid-life and beyond – even retirees – make a go of it and love every minute of it.

## **Do You Have What It Takes?**

Do you have what it takes to be an inn keeper? See how you do with these questions. There are no right or wrong answers, but your responses will give you a clue as to how well suited you are to being an inn keeper.

By no means are these questions designed to deter you from your dream. They only point out that being an inn keeper is more than having a lovely home and baking muffins. As an inn keeper, you’ll do best if you have that magic combination of warmth, tolerance, professionalism, and above all, a sense of humor!

- How do you feel about getting up at the crack of dawn every day to prepare breakfast, even after a late night or when you don’t feel well?

- Are you up for cleaning bathrooms, unclogging drains, vacuuming the stairs, or shoveling snow if the help doesn't show up one day?
- Do you realize you likely will be doing laundry and making beds almost every day?
- Not everyone is pleasant: Some guests may complain, be rude, and even steal from you. Could you grin and bear it?
- Can you keep your cool if guests say they will be there at 5:00 p.m. but don't show up until 10:00 p.m., and then claim they don't like their room?
- How will you deal with a rowdy couple who keeps the other guests awake at night?
- What will you do when you've put out cereal and your special home-made coffeecake for breakfast, and a guest tells you he's on a low-carb diet so can he have eggs?
- Will you comply when valuable repeat business guests say they'd love to come at Christmastime but you were planning to close and spend the holidays with family?
- How will you handle the situation when a guest breaks a valuable item in your home?
- What would you do if you smelled marijuana smoke drifting from under a guest's door?

The bottom line is that you need to find out if you have what it takes and, more importantly, if you will enjoy what it takes, before you invest in an inn of your own. The most obvious way to do that is to thoroughly learn what the business requires of you on a day-to-day basis. There are a number of ways in which to do that.

## About This Guide

There is, though, more to achieving success as a bed and breakfast inn keeper than being congenial and a good breakfast cook. That's where this guide comes in. It will help you decide on what type of inn you are going to open. Will a country or a city place best suit your style? Do you

want an old charmer with lots of ambience, or one with modern facilities like hot tubs? Would you like to take over a thriving concern, or buy a suitable home for converting into an inn and start from scratch? Will you cater primarily to vacationers or to business travelers? Will you offer additional meals such as afternoon tea or dinner? Will you cater only to adults, or also accept children? What about pets (yours and theirs)?

Being a bed and breakfast inn keeper is an exciting and lucrative profession and lifestyle all in one. "I cannot think of any other 'job' (and this isn't really a job) that has all the benefits that inn keeping does," says Peggy Egan, who with her husband Brett runs The Red Brick Inn in Panguitch, Utah ([www.redbrickinnutah.com](http://www.redbrickinnutah.com)). "Yes, it's a lot of work but you get to have a house full of happy people on vacation from all over the world, many of whom become friends that you stay in touch with. If you ever need to renew your faith in mankind, run a B & B."

All you need to get started on this marvelous career is right here: resources, case studies and tips from those who have already made a success of it. There is information on finding a great location, getting start-up financing, and finding the right employees. When you're ready to start taking guests, you'll find help on marketing and running your inn. So read on, hang out the "vacancies" shingle, and open the door to a fabulous new existence.

**NOTE:** Before you do, just a note about terminology. There is no industry standard about what to call these establishments. You will see them spelled out bed and breakfast; bed & breakfast; B and B; B&B; sometimes with inn attached, sometimes not. All of these variations should be tried if you are doing any kind of web search for further information. For the sake of consistency, I have stuck to using the term bed and breakfast inn, unless a specific inn or association uses a different form in its name. Whatever, they all mean "welcome!"