



AMAZON ALEXA IN VACATION RENTALS

Summary Guide: How to Fully Leverage Alexa in your VR

Abstract

A description of the various use cases by which Alexa can add value to vacation rental properties

v3.0

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Overview

In many ways we have entered the era of digital assistants. In 2016, only 7% of US households had a smart speaker with a voice assistant like Amazon's Alexa. Six million of them were shipped in 2016, 24M last year, and in 2018 over 56M will be shipped globally. It is an astonishing adoption rate. By 2020, 75% of US households will have one. This technology is beginning to be used everywhere - but it is particularly well suited to vacation rentals.

As a vacation rental owner or manager, you may have begun to explore the use of Amazon Alexa at your property. At Virtual Concierge Service, we've had many VR pros reach out and ask, "How can I leverage an Amazon Echo at my vacation rental?". This guide is intended to help with that, and provide actionable information that will help your business.

The guide provides an overview of various ways that Alexa can add value to your guest experience, as well as directly to you as the owner or manager. Some use cases also include

links to more detailed guides that include a description of the value proposition of the use case, exactly what you need in order to deliver that value, and setup instructions to implement it.

Use Cases

Fill Your Vacation Rental with Voice Controlled Music

Music is one of the core use cases for the Amazon Echo. After all, the device is called a Smart 'Speaker' for a reason. Chances are, your existing stereo setup may be dated. Today music is streamed digitally. Based on the availability of popular streaming services, our expectations are now that we can get basically any song in the world, and get it immediately. The Amazon Echo is a perfect way to deliver against this expectation.

Setting up an Echo for your guests to play music with at your vacation rental takes a little upfront planning. You will want to decide if you are willing to pay for a music service, or elect to go with a free one. There is a choice to make about which specific device to buy as well based upon cost and corresponding sound quality. How your Alexa account and your streaming music accounts are set up for your VR property is another consideration that has important nuances. Multi-room music is possible via grouping devices.

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa devices to provide music at your vacation rental, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#). It describes the use of Spotify Premium for leveraging a full-featured streaming music service, or Pandora's free version for a no-cost alternative. From a hardware standpoint, there is a discussion of various options within the Echo family, with the general recommendation of using an 2nd generation Echo vs other alternatives.

Provide an Interactive, Virtual Concierge for Your Guests

Vacation rental owners and managers have insight and knowledge to the local area that can make a big difference to the guest experience. This is nothing new - for years we have had a welcome binder with information for guests or even a tablet with local content. With Alexa, guests can get that same kind of personalized information delivered in a way that is like having a real concierge right at your vacation rental. Just speak a question, and get it answered. This natural interface offers the promise of replacing a welcome binder or tablet with a conversation. The [Virtual Concierge](#) is available at your VR via an Amazon Echo. It is also available to guests on their phone prior to their arrival.

By simply saying, “Alexa, use the concierge service”, guests will have immediate access to all the things you would like to make available to them. Your customized content is delivered in a conversational interface. You can extend a personal welcome to each group, and then share your ‘insider’ tips. That can include specifics on your VR property itself, as well as information about the local area - places to go, things to do and events to attend.

Defining your custom content is as easy as logging in to the [Virtual Concierge Management Portal](#), and simply adding items that you would like to share information about with your guests - what the item is, and what Alexa should say about it. No programming is necessary. The portal also enables you to manage multiple properties all within one account. You can also copy content from one VR property to another, and then modify it from there. To get started quickly, you can make use of the predefined template and modify to your liking.

Here are just a few of the kind of things you can provide your guests with the virtual concierge:

- A group orientation when guests arrive
- Check in & check out information
- How to connect to the internet
- Instructions for dealing with garbage & recycling
- How to use Alexa to contact the owner or manager
- Upcoming events, and other reasons to come back
- Fun group games available with Alexa
- Restaurant recommendations
- Insider tips on local attractions
- Local shopping opportunities
- Detailed information on things to do in the area

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to provide a virtual concierge at your vacation rental, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Remind Guests of Important Things to Do at Check-out

On the day of departure, your guests can get proactively reminded about important things to remember as they leave the property. With check-out reminders, the Virtual Concierge will send a notification to your Amazon Echo device(s) on the day of check-out. When a notification arrives, the device chimes and the light indicator pulses yellow. Guests can then say "Alexa, use the concierge service" to hear your custom departure instructions.

Get Notified When Guests Check-out, Plus Get Their Feedback

With the Virtual Concierge, your guests can check-out with their voice. When they do, you will receive an immediate notification, potentially allowing you to send the cleaning crew in early.

Further, you can also receive immediate feedback about your guest's stay. When guests say "We're checking out" they will be asked if they are willing to provide feedback on their stay via 3 quick questions. If they say yes, they will be asked:

1. How they rate their stay overall on a scale of 1 to 10
2. Areas they would recommend for future investment (you can customize these)
3. If they are interested in rebooking

If they elect to answer the questions, you will receive direct feedback that you can use toward continuous improvement and repeated bookings.

Supply Voice-Based Group Games for Guests to Have Fun Together

Helping your guests spend quality time together and building great memories is one of the most important things you can do to enhance their vacation experience. Games have always been a wonderful way to connect people, and make them laugh. Some of my best vacation memories are of playing games with family and friends.

You may already have some board games or card games at your VR. What are the top issues with them? I'd venture to guess that: 1) Pieces or cards get lost, making the game unusable, 2) Some games are complex and your guests need a Phd to figure them out (which can mean they rarely get played), or 3) You'd like to provide more games, but they are expensive and don't last.

Alexa provides a fantastic alternative - voice-based games with no pieces to lose that guests can learn quickly and have a blast playing together. Even better, most games on Alexa are completely free. Some games are voice-only, while others use [Echo Buttons](#) to help enable gameplay. This is still a relatively new space for games, so there are more all the time, and the game experiences just keep getting better.

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa devices to provide group games for guests to have fun together, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#). It includes recommendations for games that are available today that your guests will love.

Set Up New Ways to Communicate Between You and Your Guest

We all know how important it is to communicate with guests before and after their stay. Leading up to arrival the focus is on things like setting expectations, providing great info and learning a bit about your guests to enable that personal touch we all want to provide. After departure, good follow up can ensure guest satisfaction, continuous improvement and repeat bookings.

What about during a guest's stay? The Alexa platform provides an innovative way to further differentiate your guest experience with superior communication. Examples include:

- Providing a personal welcome which might include any last minute information that will be helpful to guests.
- Giving guests a way to contact you that is even easier than email, phone or text.
- Alerting guests of any important information mid-stay. Examples could include things like a weather warning, or notifying a group about landscape maintenance. Judgement is required so as not to overdo it, but if a guest's feeling about their stay would be improved by providing the information, it makes sense to give them a heads up.

The specific capability I'm speaking of is called Alexa Messaging. It can provide an innovative mechanism to communicate with guests, complementing existing channels.

As a host, you can send messages to guests using an Echo in your home or office. You can also message on the go with your phone using the Alexa app. The message is then delivered to all the Echo devices at your vacation rental. When guests have an incoming message from you, lights on all the Echos pulse yellow, and the devices momentarily chime. They can then listen to your message by saying, "Alexa, play message".

Your guests can contact you simply by saying, "Alexa, message the owner". They are then prompted for what the message should be. After speaking the message, they are asked if it is ready to send. Once confirmed, the message is instantly sent to Echos at your home or office as well as to your phone (via the Alexa app which will provide an immediate alert).

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa devices to enable messaging with guests, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Provide Your Guests a Fun New Way to Cook Together

Without a doubt, food is one of the central experiences of a vacation. As such, it also represents one of the biggest opportunities to spend time together. Extending this time beyond eating the food to preparing it provides a shared goal the group can work toward accomplishing together.

This naturally builds relationship. The ingredients are all here for making great memories on vacation together.

Alexa is quite helpful in the kitchen. For example, you can set multiple kitchen timers hands-free with their voice. Guests can also quickly find recipes that match their desired dish type, their available cooking time, and/or their preferred cooking method. If they need to make a quick trip to the store for ingredients, they can just ask Alexa to send the recipe to a phone.

A lot of questions come up in the kitchen, for both experienced cooks and young aspiring chefs. With many cooks in the kitchen, there will be many questions that come along! This is especially true in an unfamiliar kitchen like in a vacation rental property. Alexa can be a great help here. Guests will appreciate the ability to ask for the location of a common utensil or small appliance. They can ask for any measurement conversion they can think of. For example, "Alexa, how many pints are in a liter?"

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to add value in the kitchen of your vacation rental, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Provide Ambient Sleep Sounds to Help Guests Sleep Better

If you are like me, sometimes it is hard to get a good night's sleep when you are away from home. It becomes especially tough if there are distracting noises like traffic outside or maybe a snoring companion. Alexa provides an easy fix - [Sleep Sounds](#) lets you play ambient sounds to help your guests sleep peacefully or block out unwanted noise. With over 125 high quality sounds to choose from, guests will be able to sleep better, relax quickly, or get their baby to go to sleep faster!

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to help guests sleep better, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Assist Guests with Pairing Wine & Food, Grilling, or Making Cocktails

Nothing says vacation better than a relaxing afternoon cocktail, great grilled food and a perfect wine to go with it. These are probably things that your guests experience regularly at your vacation rental. Alexa can make that experience even better.

[Wine Finder](#) is available as your guest's very own personal sommelier. As they prepare for a shopping run, your guests may be wondering what type of wine to have to go with their dinner selection. They can simply say, "Alexa, ask wine finder what wine goes well with grilled chicken". Within seconds, a suggestion for the right wine is given. With more than 500 food pairings, Wine Finder is likely to find their ideal match.

Guests on grill duty can get tips on making food turn out great as well. For example, [Grilling Guide](#) can tell them what the safe internal temperature of chicken should be, or what a recommended sequence is for cooking it.

How about that cocktail? [The Bartender](#) is one of the best Alexa skills for learning cocktail recipes. Guests can ask about any cocktail they might want to try - a margarita, an old-fashioned, a mojito and many more. The Bartender will tell them the ingredients, amounts to use and detailed instructions for making the cocktail. They can also search cocktail recipes by a particular ingredient or spirit type. Or if they need inspiration, they can ask The Bartender to surprise them by suggesting a random drink recipe.

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to help with these common vacation activities, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Enable Smart Home Capabilities

Control Lighting & Temperature

The primary benefit of smart home systems in a vacation rental isn't equipping a guest with the ability to turn on the lights with their voice. That said, adding an Alexa does add incremental value to the smart home system. Alexa helps make smart home tech visible to guests. Tech investments that may have otherwise gone unnoticed are showcased with voice control. Adding a voice assistant device provides a futuristic sort of interaction model with smart home components.

It is also important to note that having a smart thermostat, outlets, door lock and lights isn't a smart home "system". It is a bunch of separate devices that don't work together and don't have any ability to be scheduled. It is important for a VR property to implement a system where all of the devices/components work together and know what each other is doing, and can be scheduled weeks or months ahead of time. You can find more information on an [integrated system here](#).

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to voice-enable smart home systems in vacation rentals, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Make the Entertainment System Trouble-free with Voice Commands

One of the things we have heard as a recurring theme from property managers is the time they spend on helping guests through frustrations with all the remote controls and required sequencing in order to use the entertainment system. Integration between Alexa and the [Logitech Harmony Hub](#) can make this process as simple as a guest saying, “Alexa, turn on the TV” or, “watch a movie”. Logitech has traditionally promoted the Harmony Hub as being able to be controlled by your smartphone. That is great for traditional household use when the app is linked to your equipment, but of course guests won’t have that same access. With voice however, all the magic is available to anyone in the VR.

The Details

For specific information on how to use Alexa to help make your entertainment system trouble-free, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Use Routines to Make Multiple Things Happen with a Single Voice Command

Alexa has a capability called ‘Routines’, which can allow your guests to complete multiple tasks with a single voice command. This is where the integration of Alexa together with smart home becomes really powerful. It will provide the kind of guest memories that can lead to delighted guests and word of mouth referrals.

A great example that you can set up is a ‘good night’ routine. If guests say the phrase, “Alexa, good night,” the virtual assistant will proceed to turn off all the lights, lock the doors, and shut off the downstairs heating system. You can also create another routine for guests to experience in the morning, where Alexa could start the coffee maker, turn on the lights, and read the day’s weather forecast for your area.

The Details

For more information on setting up and using Routines with Alexa, you can reference this [Detail Guide](#).

Get Value When Your Property is Vacant

Alexa Guard is available for the family of Echo devices at no cost. You can get alerts sent to your phone if Alexa detects the sound of smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, or glass breaking when your property is vacant. Guard also works with connected smart lights to make it look like someone's home, and integrates with security systems from Ring and ADT.

Conclusion

Alexa can add value in a number of ways and earn a place in your vacation rental property. Many of the capabilities described above will have a direct impact to your guest experience. Some also add value to you, the owner or property manager, such as reducing the customer support problems associated with complex entertainment systems, or making it easy to communicate with a group of guests. The pace of development for AI based platforms like Alexa is staggering, and new functionality is being added constantly. If you haven't yet taken the opportunity to leverage this value for your business, now may be a great time to consider it.



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