



Short-Term Rental Taxation Part 2

Course #33702B

Taxes

2 Credit Hours

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SHORT-TERM RENTAL TAXATION PART 2

This course explains how to properly classify and deduct rental property expenses. It distinguishes between current expenses, repairs, betterments, and improvements, and provides guidance on how depreciation applies to long-term assets. The course equips property owners with the knowledge to accurately track and report expenses for tax purposes.

LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS AND OBJECTIVES

As a result of studying each assignment, you should be able to meet the objectives listed below each individual assignment.

SUBJECTS

Operating Expenses
Repairs
Deducting Long-Term Assets

Study the course materials

Complete the review questions at the end of each chapter

Answer the exam questions 1 to 10

Objectives:

- To recognize what expenses qualify as current
- To identify differences between repairs, betterments, and improvements
- To recognize how depreciation is handled

NOTICE

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EXAM OUTLINE

- **TEST FORMAT:** The final exam for this course consists of 10 multiple-choice questions and is based specifically on the information covered in the course materials.
- **ACCESS FINAL EXAM:** Log in to your account and click Take Exam. A copy of the final exam is provided at the end of these course materials for your convenience, however you must submit your answers online to receive credit for the course.
- **LICENSE RENEWAL INFORMATION:** This course qualifies for **2 CPE hours**.
- **PROCESSING:** You will receive the score for your final exam immediately after it is submitted. A score of 70% or better is required to pass.
- **CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION:** Will be available in your account to view online or print. If you do not pass an exam, it can be retaken free of charge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Operating Expenses	1
What Are Operating Expenses?	1
Direct Expenses Deductible in Full	2
Operating Expenses That Must Be Allocated	10
Chapter 2: Repairs	16
Repairs vs. Improvements	16
Deducting Repairs for Short-Term Room Rentals	17
Three Safe Harbors	18
Repair vs. Improvement: Analysis Under the Regulations	23
How to Deduct Repairs and Maintenance	25
When Guests Pay for Repairs	25
Properly Documenting Repairs	26
Chapter 3: Deducting Long-Term Assets	27
Depreciating Property Used in Your Rental Activity	27
How to Depreciate Real Property	28
Personal Property	35
Test Your Knowledge	46
Solutions and Suggested Responses	49
Glossary	52
Index	54
Final Exam Copy	55

CHAPTER 1: OPERATING EXPENSES

This chapter is about the day-to-day operating expenses you incur for your short-term rental activity. All these expenses are currently deductible in the year they're incurred (except for start-up expenses). Some are deductible in full; others must be allocated according to how much and how long you rent your property.

WHAT ARE OPERATING EXPENSES?

You may start to deduct your operating expenses the moment your short-term rental activity begins—this ordinarily happens when you list your property for short-term rental. Expenses you incur before you offer your property for rent are not operating expenses but might be deductible as start-up expenses (see “Start-Up Expenses,” below). Many different types of operating expenses exist—so many that they can’t all be individually listed in the tax law. The basic rule is that you can deduct in a single year any expense that is:

- Ordinary and necessary
- Current
- Directly related to your rental activity, and
- Reasonable in amount. (I.R.C. § 162.)

An expense is ordinary and necessary if it is common, helpful, and appropriate for your activity. It doesn’t have to be indispensable—it only has to help your rental activity in some way, even a minor way. A one-time expenditure can be ordinary and necessary. Generally, the IRS won’t second guess your claim that an expense is ordinary and necessary unless the item or service clearly has no legitimate business purpose. You will not be allowed to deduct off-the-wall or clearly ridiculous expenses.

An expense is current if it is for an item that will benefit your rental activity for less than one year. These expenses are the costs of keeping your rental venture going on a day-to-day basis, including money you spend on items or services that get used up, wear out, or become obsolete in less than one year. A good example of a current expense is the cost of utilities like electricity, gas, and water you provide your short-term guests. Anything you purchase that will benefit your rental activity for more than one year isn’t a current expense—for example, purchasing a new refrigerator for your vacation home. You can usually deduct the cost of personal property like a refrigerator in a single year using bonus depreciation or the *de minimis* safe harbor (see Chapter 3).

An expenditure must be directly related to your rental activity to be deductible as an operating expense. So, you can’t deduct personal expenses. If you buy something for both personal and rental use, you can deduct only the business portion of the expense. You must figure out how much of the time you use the item for rental purposes and how much for personal purposes. You then allocate the total cost between the two purposes and deduct only the rental portion of the cost. These allocation rules are particularly important for part-time rentals and are discussed in detail in Course 33703B.

Finally, unreasonable expenses aren't deductible. As a rule of thumb, an expense is reasonable unless more economical and practical ways are available to achieve the same result. If the IRS finds that your deductions are unreasonably large, it will disallow them or at least disallow the portion it finds unreasonable. Certain areas are hot buttons for the IRS—especially travel and meal expenses. The IRS won't allow any lavish expenses here, and you will have to follow strict rules requiring you to fully document these deductions.

DIRECT EXPENSES DEDUCTIBLE IN FULL

Any operating expense you incur solely for your short-term rental activity is deductible in full. These are expenses you incur only because you're renting your property short term; otherwise, you wouldn't have them, including all the following types of expenses.

Rental Platform Fees and Commissions

The fees charged by short-term rental platforms, such as Airbnb, VRBO, or FlipKey, are all fully deductible operating expenses. These fees can be substantial, so this deduction can be valuable. For example, Airbnb charges a "host service fee" equal to 3% of the cost of each reservation (but some hosts pay more), while VRBO charges \$699 for an annual subscription. These rental platforms also typically charge "service fees" to guests—for example, Airbnb charges guests a 13%–20% service fee. Obviously, hosts can't deduct guest fees because they don't pay them. Guests might be able to deduct such fees if their travel is for business.

Local and State Licenses and Fees

Many local (and some state) governments require short-term hosts to pay for business licenses and special registration fees. For example, San Francisco requires short-term hosts to pay a \$250 registration fee every two years. These fees are fully deductible operating expenses.

Advertising and Marketing Expenses

Expenses you incur to advertise and market your short-term rental are fully deductible. For example, if you hire a professional photographer to take pictures of your property for your online rental listing, the cost is fully deductible. If you create your own website to market your short-term rental, the cost is also deductible. Ongoing website hosting, maintenance, and updating costs are currently deductible operating expenses. Money you spend to get people to view your website, such as SEO (search engine optimization) campaigns, is also currently deductible. However, the cost of initially developing your website might constitute a capital expense, not a currently deductible business operating expense. If so, the cost might have to be deducted over three years. Any other advertising you do is also deductible.

Car and Local Transportation Expenses

Local travel is travel by car or other means within the area of your tax home—the entire city or general area where you live. If the home you rent out short term is also the main home where you live, this deduction might be quite limited. You might have more deductions if you have a second home you rent out, but even here, restrictions are in place.

Driving Must Be for Rental Activity

You may deduct local travel only if it's for your short-term rental activity. For example, you can deduct the cost of driving to the airport to pick up or drop off your short-term guests. You can also deduct driving to meet with repair people, attorneys, accountants, property managers, and other people who help in your short-term rental activity.

What about travel to and from your short-term rental property? If this property is also your main home (that is, the place where you live), you'll likely have no deductions for this unless you have an office outside your home you use to manage your rental activity (which is rare for short-term rental hosts). In this event, you could deduct travel between your outside office and your main home for rental purposes.

You'll likely qualify for more deductible local travel expenses if you rent out a property other than your main home, such as a vacation home. Travel from your main home to your vacation home (or other property away from your own home) can be deductible if done for rental purposes—for example, to do cleanup, maintenance, repairs, guest check-in, hauling supplies, or other rental-related tasks. However, this is true only if you have an office in your main home that qualifies as the principal place of business for your rental activity (see "Home Office Deduction," below). Otherwise, such trips are nondeductible personal commuting, even if there is a rental purpose for the trip. Moreover, you may not currently deduct driving expenses incurred while making improvements to your home or another property you use in your short-term rental activity. Instead, the cost of such driving must be added to the basis (cost) of the improvement and depreciated over several years (see Chapter 2).

How to Deduct Car Expenses

If you have tax-deductible driving expenses, you can deduct them by using the standard mileage rate or the actual expense method. With the standard mileage rate, you deduct a specified number of cents for every business mile you drive. The IRS sets the standard mileage rate each year. For 2024, the rate was 67¢ per mile. (For 2025, the rate is increased to 70¢ per mile). To figure out your deduction, simply multiply your rental miles by the applicable standard mileage rate. You can find the current standard mileage rate on the IRS website. Alternatively, instead of using the standard mileage rate, you can deduct the actual cost of using your car for your rental activity. This requires more record keeping, but it can result in a larger deduction. If you use this method, you must keep careful track of all the costs you incur for your car during the year, including:

- Gas and oil
- Repairs and maintenance
- Depreciation of your original vehicle and improvements
- License and registration fees
- Parking fees for rental-related trips, and
- Insurance and auto club dues.

You may deduct parking fees and tolls with either method.