

Bed and Breakfast Operator interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for a Bed and Breakfast Operator are usually conversations with an owner or property manager rather than a formal panel. They are testing whether you can run a property largely unsupervised, keep guests happy and keep the compliance side tidy, so expect practical questions about the daily routine and a good look at how you handle problems when you are the only person on site.

- **Process and routine:** How you sequence a day across checkouts, cleaning, breakfast, bookings and admin when you are often working alone.
- **Behavioural and guest service:** Past examples of handling complaints, difficult guests or reviews, usually probed with follow-up questions.
- **Scenario and judgement:** After-hours problems such as maintenance failures, late arrivals or overbooking, to see how you think under pressure.
- **Technical and compliance:** Food safety, allergen handling, cleaning standards, registration and insurance obligations.
- **Commercial:** Pricing, channel mix, marketing and how you fill quiet periods, since occupancy is the whole business.
- **Self-management and boundaries:** How you protect your own time and health when the property is also your home, given the long hours involved.

Most processes start with a phone or video conversation of about twenty to thirty minutes covering your background and availability. Shortlisted candidates are then invited to the property for an on-site interview, which often includes a walkthrough of the guest rooms, kitchen and common areas while the owner asks practical questions. For live-in or manager roles you may be asked to complete a short practical task, such as preparing a breakfast service plan or talking through a mock booking enquiry. Reference checks with a previous property owner or manager are standard, and questions about police checks, working rights and any food safety certification usually come up at the end.

1. Walk us through how you handle a booking from the first enquiry through to checkout.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job and shows whether you actually understand the sequence of a small property, not just the guest-facing parts.

How to structure your answer

Use a chronological walk-through: enquiry and response, confirmation and payment, pre-arrival contact, check-in, the stay itself, and checkout with follow-up. Flag where you reconcile the calendar and where you record the payment, because those are the steps owners worry about.

Example answer

"An enquiry usually comes through Booking.com, Airbnb or a direct email. I answer within a few hours, confirm availability against the calendar before I quote anything, and give the guest the arrival window and parking details up front. If it is a direct booking I take a deposit through Xero and send a confirmation with the cancellation terms. The day before arrival I send a short message with directions and ask about dietary requirements and arrival time, which cuts down on late-night waiting. On arrival I show guests their room, the breakfast times and the wifi, and take the balance if it has not already been paid. Each morning I reconcile the channels so a new booking on one site does not clash with another. At checkout I ask how the stay was, note anything that needs fixing, and follow up

with a thank you message and a review request.”

2. Tell me about a time you turned around a guest complaint that could have ended in a bad review.

Why they ask

Reviews drive bookings for small properties, so owners want evidence you fix problems rather than defend yourself.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, describe exactly what you did and said, give the outcome in terms of the guest and the review, then add what you changed in the property afterwards.

Example answer

“A couple arrived on a hot afternoon to find the air conditioner in their room was not working properly. They were already frustrated from a long drive. I apologised, moved them to the larger front room which was cooler, and offered to take breakfast to their room the next morning. I called a technician that evening and had the unit serviced the following day, and I checked in with them at breakfast rather than waiting for them to raise it again. They stayed three nights, extended by one, and left a review that mentioned how quickly the problem was handled. After that I added an air conditioner check to the room turnaround list at the start of every hot week.”

3. It is 9pm, the property is full, and a guest tells you the hot water has stopped. What do you do?

Why they ask

You will be on your own at night, and this tests whether you can look after guests and solve a practical problem without panicking or over-promising.

How to structure your answer

Work through it in order of priority: guest comfort first, then immediate mitigation, then the fix, then what you tell the guest and what you record. Be honest about when you would call a tradesperson and when you would wait until morning.

Example answer

“First I would confirm which rooms are affected and check the fuse box and the hot water system myself, because it is sometimes a reset or a tripped switch. If it is not something I can fix, I would tell the affected guests straight away rather than let them discover it in the shower, offer them the use of a bathroom in another part of the house, and leave a note with the kettle and a sincere apology. I would call my after-hours plumber or electrician if the property has one on retainer, and if they cannot come until morning I would tell guests honestly what to expect and offer a reduction on that night. I would log the fault with time and details so it can be raised with the tradesperson and claimed if it is a warranty issue, and I would follow up personally at breakfast.”

4. How do you manage food safety and hygiene in a kitchen that doubles as your own home?

Why they ask

Small properties serve food from domestic-style kitchens, and inspectors and insurers care about separation, records and allergens.

How to structure your answer

Answer in layers: the physical setup and separation, the daily routines, the records you keep, and your own training. Name the standards and certificate you work to, since this is a technical question.

Example answer

“I keep the guest kitchen and my own food preparation separate, with dedicated chopping boards, a separate fridge shelf for guest items and clearly labelled containers for anything that is not for guests.”

Temperatures of the fridge and the cooked food are checked and written down daily, and I keep a cleaning schedule that covers surfaces, dishcloths and the bins. Every guest booking asks about allergies, and those details go on a board in the kitchen on the morning they are staying so nothing gets missed. I hold a Food Safety Supervisor certificate and I keep a current record of it with the council food business registration. My supplier invoices and temperature logs are kept for the required period because inspectors ask for them and insurers may too."

5. Suppose your bookings go quiet through the shoulder season. How would you fill those nights?

Why they ask

Occupancy is the business. This question separates operators who wait for the phone to ring from those who go out and generate demand.

How to structure your answer

Give a short assessment of why the quiet period happens, then a set of specific actions across channels, pricing, partnerships and repeat guests, and finish with how you would measure whether it worked.

Example answer

"I would start by looking at the last two shoulder seasons in my occupancy spreadsheet to see which nights and which channels went quiet. Then I would work on four fronts. On the channels I would review the minimum-stay rules and adjust midweek rates rather than blanket-discounting, and make sure the listings show the things that sell in cooler months, like heating, a fire and a cooked breakfast. I would approach local tour operators, the visitor information centre and nearby wineries or walking groups about packages, because a two-night midweek deal with an activity converts better than a cheap room. I would email past guests directly with a returning-guest offer, since that costs nothing and they already trust the property. I would track enquiries and bookings per channel through the season so I know what actually worked and can repeat it next year."

6. This job blurs work and home, and the days are long. How would you keep that sustainable?

Why they ask

Owners know burnout is the main reason small properties go downhill, and they want to hear a realistic plan rather than a promise to work every hour.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a self-management question: acknowledge the reality, describe the boundaries and systems you would put in place, and give one example of how you have kept a routine going in a previous role.

Example answer

"I would treat it as a roster rather than a lifestyle. Breakfast, room turnaround and check-in windows get fixed times, and everything outside those windows is my own, with the phone on for genuine emergencies only. I would set quiet hours for guest enquiries in the house information pack so guests know what to expect and do not feel ignored. I batch admin, invoicing and marketing into set blocks rather than letting them leak through the evening. I would also make sure someone else can cover a day, whether that is a local cleaner, a relief manager or a neighbouring operator, because being the only person who can run the property is how you end up never taking a break. In my last property I kept one day a week free of guest arrivals, and the standard of the rooms and the reviews did not drop."