



LOCAL SEO GUIDE:

**HOW TO POSITION YOUR
VACATION RENTAL WEBSITE**

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INTRODUCTION

Local SEO is the name given to a very powerful form of local online marketing.

Local SEO refers to the optimization of a site or pages on your site in order to show up for organic queries in search engines, where the intentions of the searcher is to find *local* information.

Not only does local SEO take into account search engines like Google and Yahoo, but it also trails through business directories like Yelp or Qype to provide searchers with results.

To put it simply, vacation rental owners need local SEO in order to show up within the first few search results for their area. What's more, local SEO is particularly valuable for VR owners in niche locations. That's because you can use your niche to your advantage and attract guests to your home because of the specific place or surrounding area.

This guide aims to teach you the basics of optimizing your vacation rental website for local search. We'll cover everything from choosing a domain name to on-page SEO tricks, content creation and link building, all you need to do is put the wheels in motion afterwards.

Glossary

If you're new to online marketing for your vacation rental, this glossary should help you to understand some of the specialized vocabulary out there:

Backlink

An incoming hyperlink from one web page to another website.

Citation

Mention of your business name and address on other webpages.

Keywords

Words or phrases describing your product or service that you choose to help determine when and where your ad can appear.

Link building

The process of exchanging links with other websites to increase your own site's backlinks and quality backlinks.

Local SEO

The optimization of a site or pages on your site in order to show up for organic local queries in search engines like Google.

Long-tail keywords

Long-tail keywords are used to target niche demographics rather than mass audiences. They're more specific and often less competitive than generic keyword terms.

Meta description

A 160-character snippet, a tag in HTML, that summarizes a page's content in search engine results pages.

NAP

Name, address and phone number.

PMD

A partial match domain (PMD) is a domain name that contains one or few



keywords related to targeted search queries.

SEO

Search engine optimization is a methodology of strategies, techniques and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the search results page of a search engine like Google.

SERP

A search engine results page (SERP) is the page displayed by a search engine in response to a query by a searcher.

Title tags

The title tag is an HTML element of a web page that describes the content of the page.

USP

The unique selling proposition (USP) is what sets your products and/or services apart from your competitors'.

1. DECIDE YOUR DOMAIN NAME



Having a good brand is hugely important for the success of your vacation rental, so when your domain name is the starting point for building your online brand, how can you make the right choice?

Many vacation rental owners make the mistake of choosing very literal domain names that are too keyword-heavy, without understanding that keyword-rich domains don't have the power they once had.

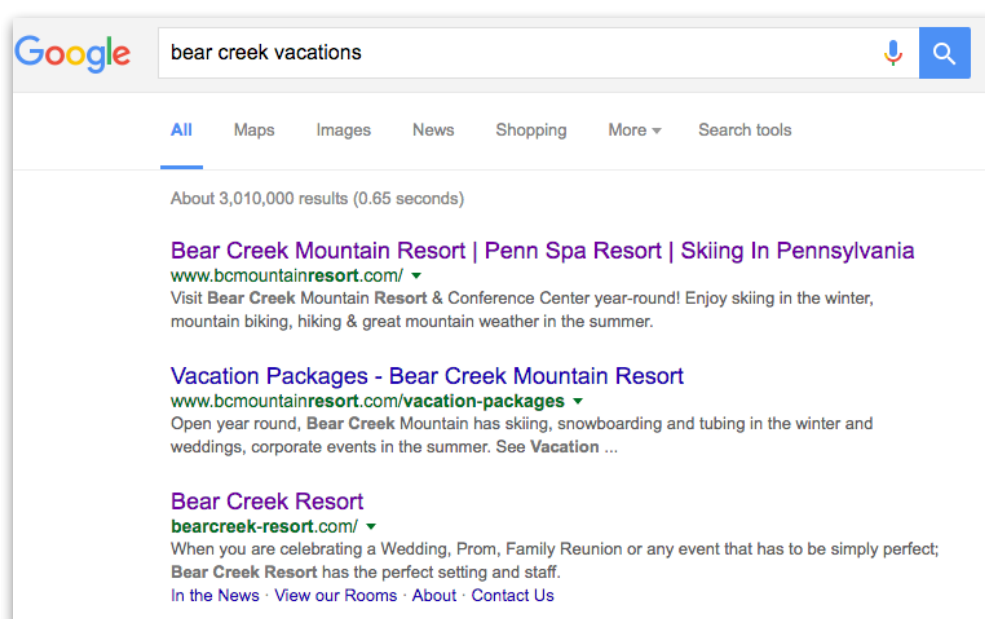
Nowadays, it's far less likely for small, local businesses to rank solely because of keywords in their domain. Instead, it's much more effective for SEO purposes to ensure that your vacation rental website has a memorable, unique and most importantly, branded domain.

Domain structure

So, what constitutes the “perfect” domain name?

Many experts recommend owners to use a partial match domain (PMD) for their vacation rental website, especially since Google crushed the ranking of many exact match domain websites in an update a while back.

Partial match domains contain at least one keyword that is a match for what is searched for. So if a user searches for “bear creek vacations” in Google, the result “bear creek resort” is a partial match domain, and the third search result!



There's still a tendency for partial match domains to rank higher than websites that don't use keywords. That said, nowadays, a multinational technology brand ("Apple") ranks first place when searching for the fruit used to make juice, cider and pies.

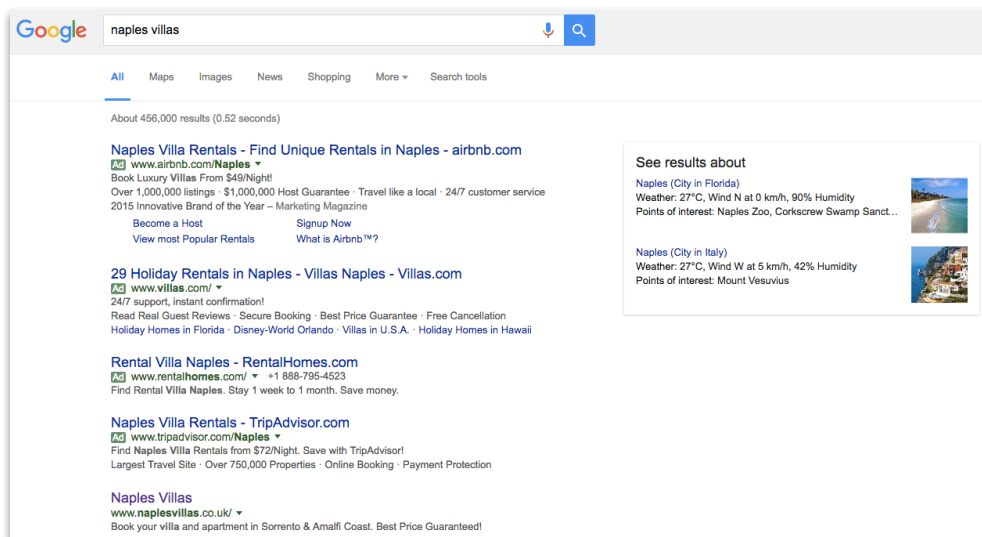
Building a household name brand like Apple, however, takes a lot of time, work and above all, money. Building your vacation rental brand, on the other hand, needn't.

A PMD can help you out from the offset because it means you'll already be on your way to showing up in search results.

Conrad O'Connell, online marketing and SEO for vacation rentals expert says:

"Instead of just creating a long keyword-stuffed domain that no one will remember, brand your vacation rental website with a memorable brand. For example, partially matching your branding + destination can work well."

Take a look at this as an example:



By having the domain for their vacation rental website as naplesvillas.co.uk, the owner has managed to achieve appearing first (after paid search results) on Google's search engine results page (SERP).

Even when searching “Naples villa rentals”, Naples Villas still shows up in sixth place. Not bad considering it’s a partial match. In fact, it’s an even better result when you consider that all the websites listed before it are all listing sites or OTAs.

So if you’re starting out and struggling to come up with your vacation rental domain name, think about how you can combine the city or town your vacation rental is located in with your brand. But if it’s a toss up between fitting the destination in or sticking to your brand, you should try and put your brand first.

By simply having a branded vacation rental business name, you’ll be off on the right foot. It’ll mean that any brand queries or brand mentions across the internet will be exclusive to you, unable to be mistaken for another VR company. And best of all, no matter who the competition, you’ll always show up in the SERP for your business name.

Conrad adds:

“I do think it’s okay to try to find domains with your destination name in them, but favor your brand over just adding the name of the destination to the domain name.

It may be worth purchasing a domain if there is one you really want (the .com version), but it is rare I’d spend over \$100 for the domain.”

2. ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

According to a study by [Moz](#), on-page factors now account for more than 20% of the different elements that help a website rank in terms of local SEO.

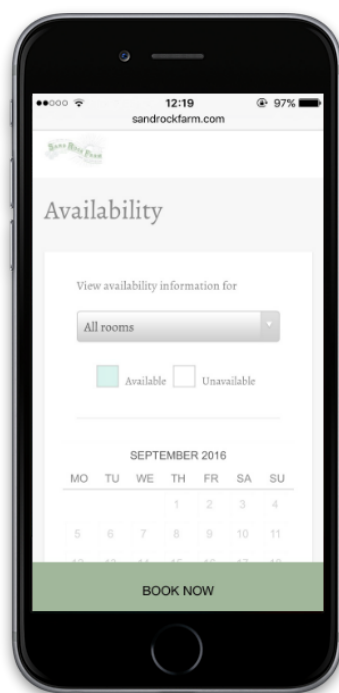
On-page optimization refers to all the SEO-relevant stuff you do on your website. And guess what? It's hugely important for local SEO results.

So what exactly can you do to make sure your site shows up in local search results?

Have an optimized website design

First things first, you're not going to get anywhere on Google unless your vacation rental website is mobile-friendly.

Since 2015, it's been pretty much critical for business owners to have mobile responsive sites, as Google announced that it was modifying its mobile search algorithm to only display listings that could easily be viewed on mobile devices.



But compliance is not just about tweaking your layout or fonts.

Google's mobile web standards now disqualify sites with slow load times, incorrect formatting, blocked Javascript and CSS files, and outdated Flash animations. Any of these issues could sabotage your vacation rental from

showing up in Google's mobile local search results, and cause you to miss out on a potential booking.

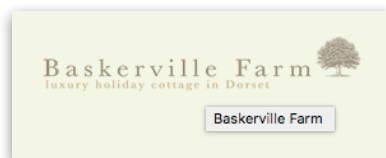
The bottom line?

Being mobile-friendly is no longer a choice for vacation rental owners. The statistics have spoken and, like it or not, it's an absolute must. Unless you want to risk your vacation rental site being buried at the bottom of Google's mobile search results, you need to make sure your site's template is mobile ready.

Include alt tags on images

In order to fully optimize images or other media for local SEO, it's vital to accurately describe what is presented in the image. It's best if you can include the chosen keywords and your location in the file names.

Hover over an image online and you'll see it's alt tag. For example, the alt tag included for this logo is the name of the vacation rental business, Baskerville Farm.

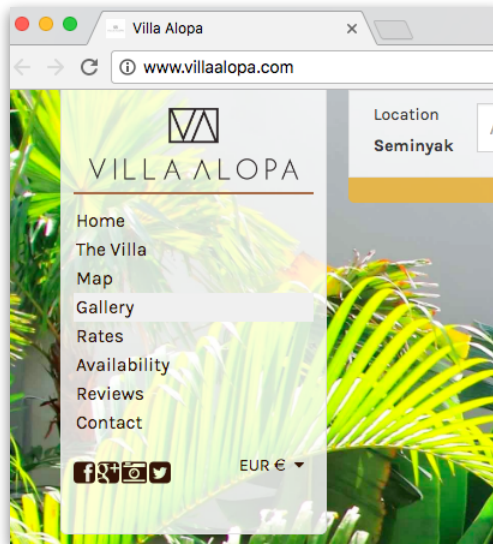


Google will recognize these keywords and as a result, your images show up in the SERPs. Given that 60% of consumers are more likely to consider or even contact a business when images show up in local search results, it's a wise move to spend time adding these tags vacation rental site.

Titles, headers and metas

Titles

Title tags tell your visitor what each page on your site is about in a clear and concise manner. More than anywhere else, you should make sure you have title tags on your homepage.



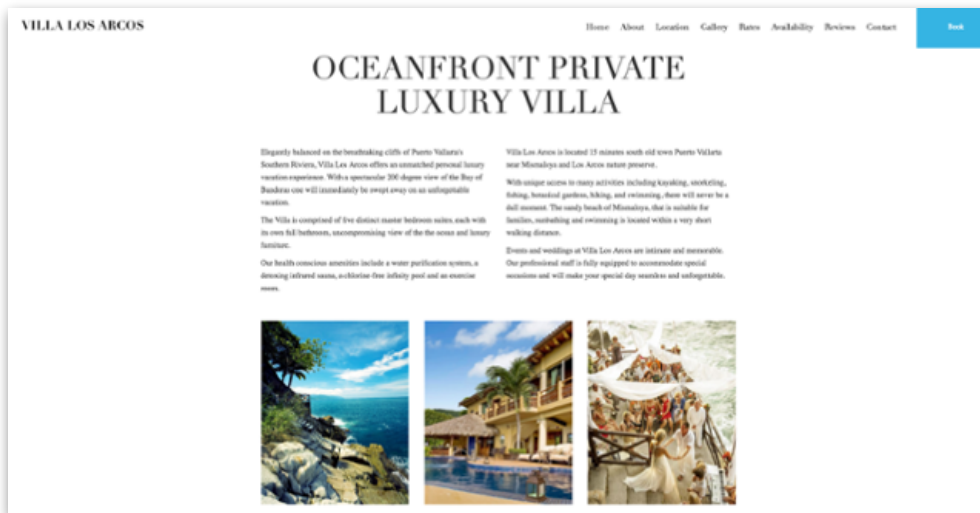
There are a number of ways you can optimize title tags for your vacation rental website. These are our best practice tips:

- Use keywords towards the beginning of the title. MOZ have done a lot of testing on this topic, and found that the closer a keyword is to the start of the title, the more successful it is in ranking highly.
- Optimal title tag length is between 50-60 characters, or 512 pixels wide. Any longer than this, and Google will truncate the title in search results.
- Title should include the keyword and city where possible.

Headings

Heading (or 'H') tags are also a valuable element to optimize from a local SEO perspective as they define the structure of your content, for both your audience and search engines alike.

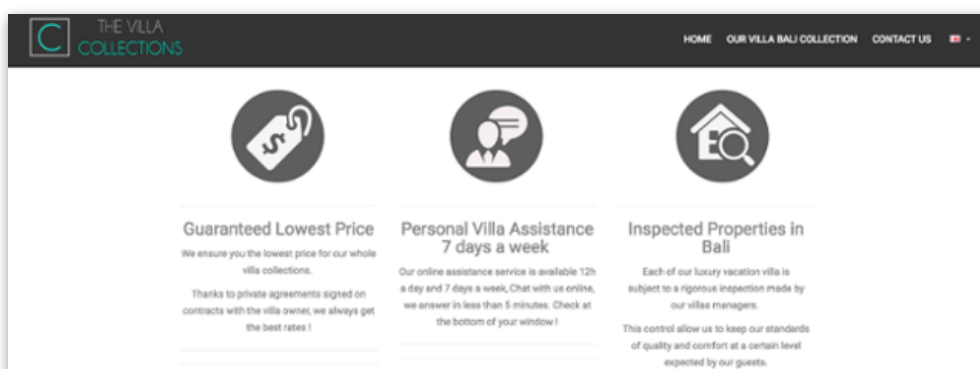
Headings are defined using H1 to H6 tags, with H1 being used for the most important heading on the page. It's necessary to remember that each page of your vacation rental website should have only one H1 tag. In the example below, the H1 tag is "Oceanfront Private Luxury Villa".



Why is the H1 tag so important?

Because it sends necessary signals to search engines as to what a page of content is about. Having “Home” as H1 on your vacation rental website says nothing about the page, that’s why it is also recommended to use a targeted keyword (one you want to rank for) and your location in the first few words of the headline for your page.

H2 tags are more about dividing the content up into readable chunks, think of them as subheadings. The main role of H2 tags is to reflect or summarize the paragraph they are assigned to. In the example below, “Guaranteed Lowest Price”, “Personal Villa Assistance 7 days a week” and “Inspected Properties in Bali” are all H2s.



If keywords fit into your H2s, great! But if they don’t, it’s not a big deal. Rather than optimizing by force, which will make your copy look unnatural, you should always be prioritizing your readers first, before thinking about search engines.

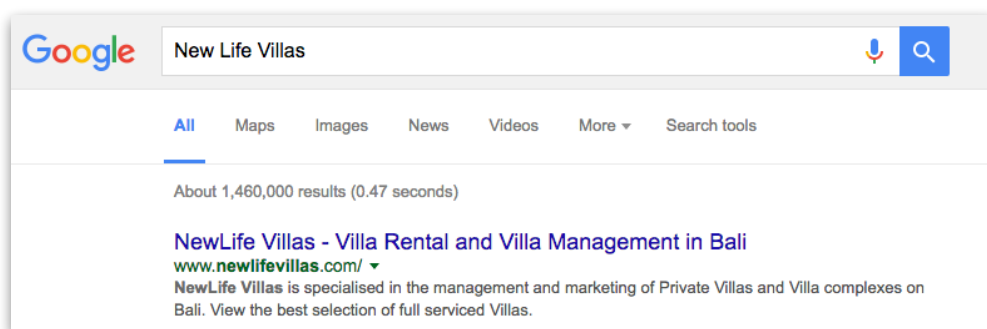
That said, keywords included within any H1 or H2 tags (along with title tags, meta descriptions and URLs) will send strong defining and relevancy signals of what a page is about to search engines like Google, which in turn help improve your rankings.

Meta descriptions

A meta description is a snippet of content around 160 characters long which outlines what the page is about.

Even though recent studies have shown that meta descriptions don't directly impact your website's rankings in local search results, it's always a good idea to include them on your website pages, simply for the fact of convincing users to click through.

Meta descriptions should be concise and engaging – the aim of this small chunk of text is to attract potential customers to your vacation rental site. So always try and include your keyword and city in your meta descriptions.



In this example, "NewLife Villas" has been used as the meta keyword (shown in bold), and the meta description succinctly describes what the site is about and names the location, Bali. The description doesn't truncate as it has abided by the character count (157ch).

Remember to NAP (name, address, phone number)

Another great way to boost your local SEO ranking is by including your vacation rental business name, address and phone number on your website's footer.



This way, all of your basic contact details will appear on every page of your vacation rental website, sending signals to Google which will help it understand that you are a local business.

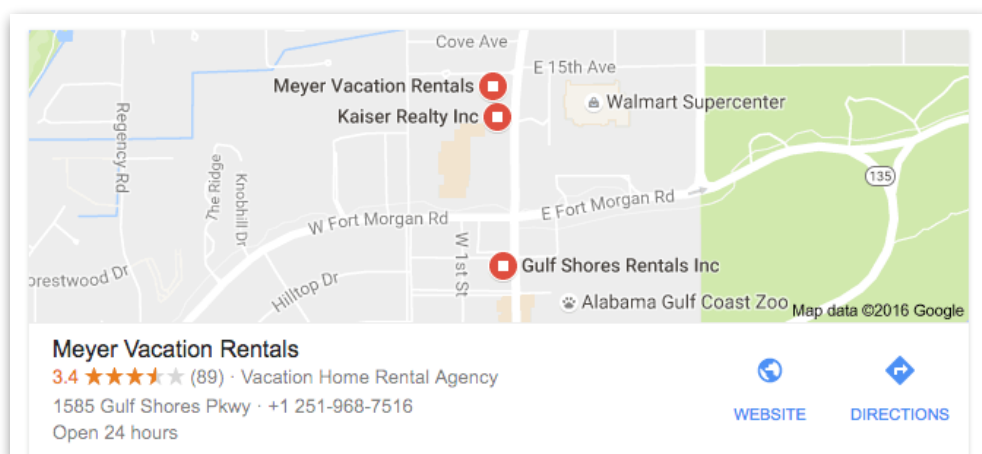
If your goal is to rank for the nearest big city, you can also include it in parentheses. For example:

Carrer de la Mercè, 47
08911 Badalona (20 minutes to Barcelona)

List your customer reviews

Nowadays, reviews are an absolute essential for any kind of service, especially local businesses, even if what they're selling isn't necessarily online (like a vacation rental).

Take a look at what happens when you perform a simple Google search for beach condos in Gulf Shores:

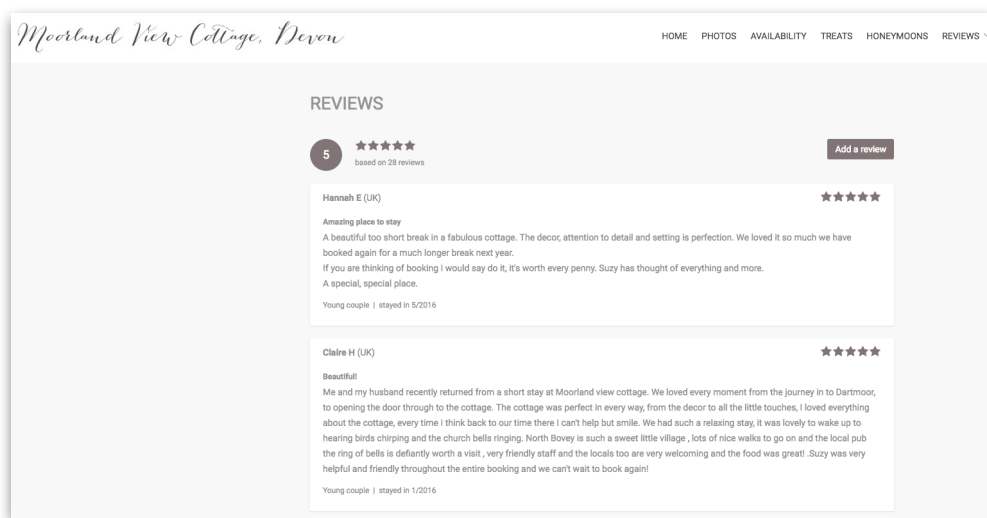


After the paid ads, the first result to show has 89 reviews. For mobile search in particular, organic listings are taken by businesses with the best reviews. From there on, the next organic listings usually come from review sites like TripAdvisor

or Yelp, or vacation rental listing sites like VRBO. Only a couple of actual vacation rental websites making it onto the first SERP.

So it's pretty clear, to have a prominent position in local SERPs, you need user reviews.

But in order to encourage these viewers to click through to your site, let alone book your property, you need *sparkling* vacation rental reviews.



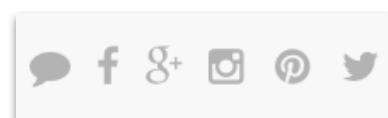
By including your customer reviews or testimonials and adding links to websites listing these reviews, your site will send strong signals to Google about your business credibility and you'll have more of a chance of standing out in local search results.

Connect to your social media sites

Using social media can be a very lucrative way to raise awareness for your brand and website.

For local SEO boosting, simply add the buttons on your vacation rental website which link to your social media sites. For small, local businesses like vacation rentals, these are the best social networks to use:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn



- Google+
- Pinterest

It's really important you add consistent information across all your social channels (like your business NAP, customer service hours etc.), not just for your brand's credibility, but also for local SEO purposes.

3. CREATE SEO-FRIENDLY CONTENT

Good content is a must for any vacation rental website – not just in order to secure bookings, but also to boost local SEO. Creative content that is relevant, insightful and unique can make the world of difference for your vacation rental site's local ranking.

Do your homework: keywords

After you've defined your niche markets and who your audiences are, but *before* you start creating any content, you're going to need to research and decide what your main keywords are.

Keywords can be a very competitive business when it comes to vacation rentals, especially if you're in a very touristic or well-known holiday destination where there is no shortage of hospitality businesses. For local SEO, it is very hard to rank on queries like:

Vacation rentals + city

Holiday rentals + city

Rent house + city

That said, it *is* sometimes possible to rank for “vacation rental”, depending on the size of your city or town. Test it for yourself with Google (e.g. vacation rental Orlando) to see what competition there is. If the first results returned are listing sites such as Airbnb, HomeAway etc. then you'll need to think about long-tail keywords (don't worry, we'll cover that subject next!).

In short, keywords are the queries written by users who are looking for some information about the location, or who are actively searching for a place to rent. To find the right keywords, you have to put yourself in the targeted guest's shoes – then you can almost guess the queries that they will key into Google.

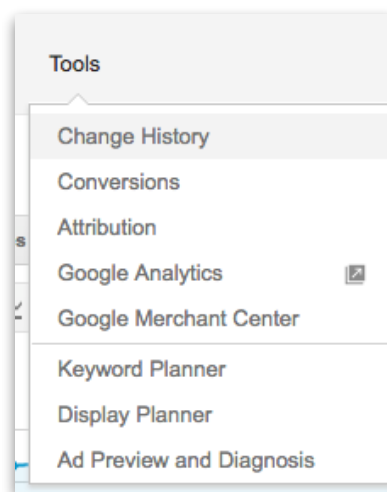
There are also lots of tools that can help you to choose your keywords, one of these is the Google Adwords Keyword Planner.

Bonus tip: Keyword Planner tutorial

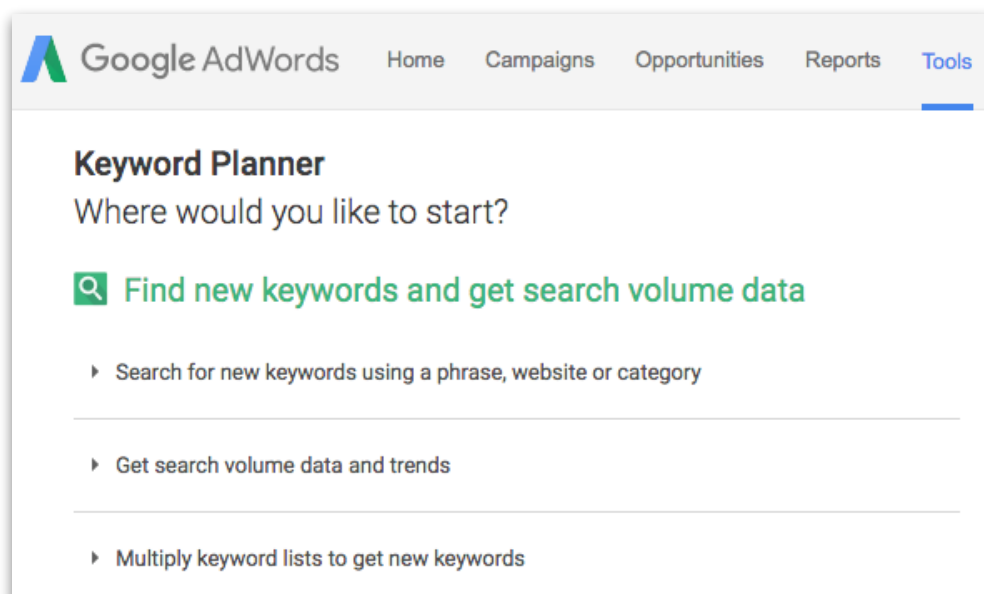
1. To begin using the Keyword Planner, you'll need to have a Google Adwords account. If you don't already have one, get one [here](#).

Simply enter some basic information about yourself and your vacation rental business, and you'll be good to go.

2. Login to your Google Adwords account, then click on "Tools". Choose "Keyword Planner" from the drop-down list.



3. You'll be presented with a list of different tools within Keyword Planner. We're just going to focus on new keywords, so select "Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category".



4. Type a relevant search term into the box and press “Get Ideas”.

Google AdWords Home Campaigns Opportunities Reports Tools

Keyword Planner

Where would you like to start?

Find new keywords and get search volume data

▼ Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category

Enter one or more of the following:

Your product or service
vacation rental Orlando

Your landing page
www.example.com/page

Your product category
Enter or select a product category

Targeting ?

- All locations
- All languages
- Google
- Negative keywords

Date range ?

Show avg. monthly searches for: last 12 months

Customize your search ?

Keyword filters

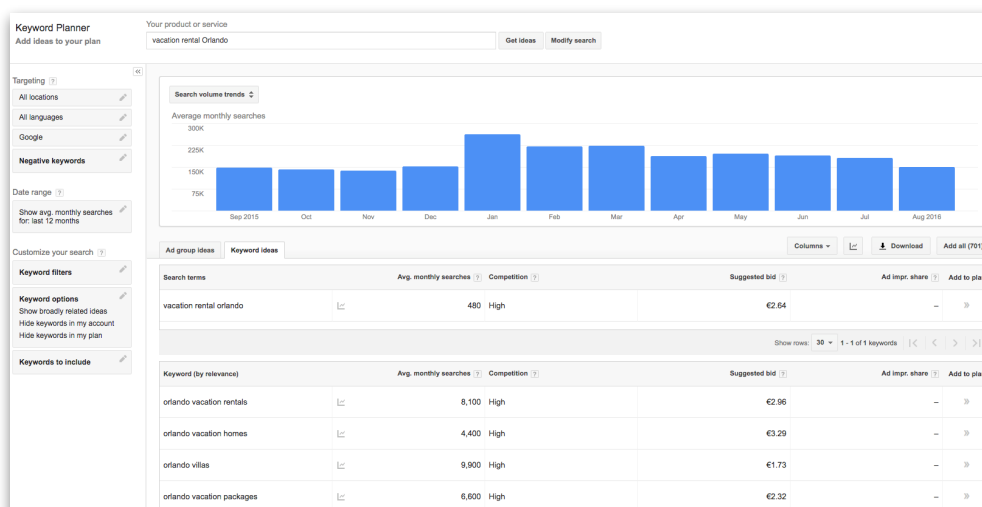
Keyword options

- Show broadly related ideas
- Hide keywords in my account
- Hide keywords in my plan

Keywords to include

Get Ideas

5. Check the results and search volume.



6. From this, you'll have a better idea of which keywords you should choose.



Long-tail keywords

If, like for “Vacation rental Orlando”, it’s going to be pretty difficult to rank for those terms, the next best thing you can do is aim to rank for long-tail keywords.

Creating pages that use long-tail keywords which target activities, questions or local events researched by the user can help your Google rank in the long term. What’s more, it will be super easy to write local content as it’s probably what you as the owner know most about. You’re an expert in this region! Don’t be afraid to share your local secrets – it’ll be really beneficial in the long run.

Have a think about what attracts guests to your area: is it the food, the amazing beaches, the summer sports events or winter Christmas markets? Whatever your area’s USP, use this to your advantage and create simple pages of resources with helpful information, like event prices, how to get to the best beaches, where to park in the city center, etc.

The same applies for services that may be useful for any guest at your vacation rental. Are they going to want to rent a car? A boat? Skis or snowboard gear? Go back to the keyword planner and decide which exact phrases you’ll include in the most important places on your pages.

Bonus tip: use the site [Answerthepublic.com](https://www.answerthepublic.com) to generate your long-tail keyword ideas. Check out this example for the search ‘Lake Nipissing’ – a region in Canada:



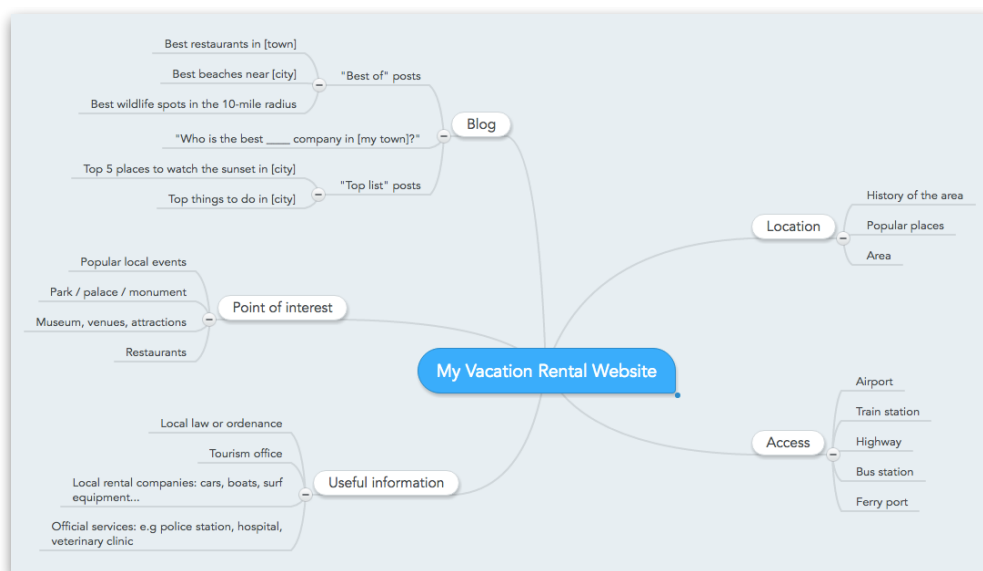
Results are ordered into ‘how’, ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ sections, so straight off the mark you have some ideas to base your pages on.

The questions in the results above are very simple (“how far is Lake Nipissing from Toronto”; “when does Lake Nipissing freeze”), but imagine you’re the only vacation rental owner out there providing clear, well-written answers to these frequently asked questions? That’s going to send you up the search engine rankings, and you might even convert some of your site visitors into bookings.

Organizing your content

As well as making it much easier to navigate around the different pages of your website, organizing your content logically and methodically is also essential for a good user experience.

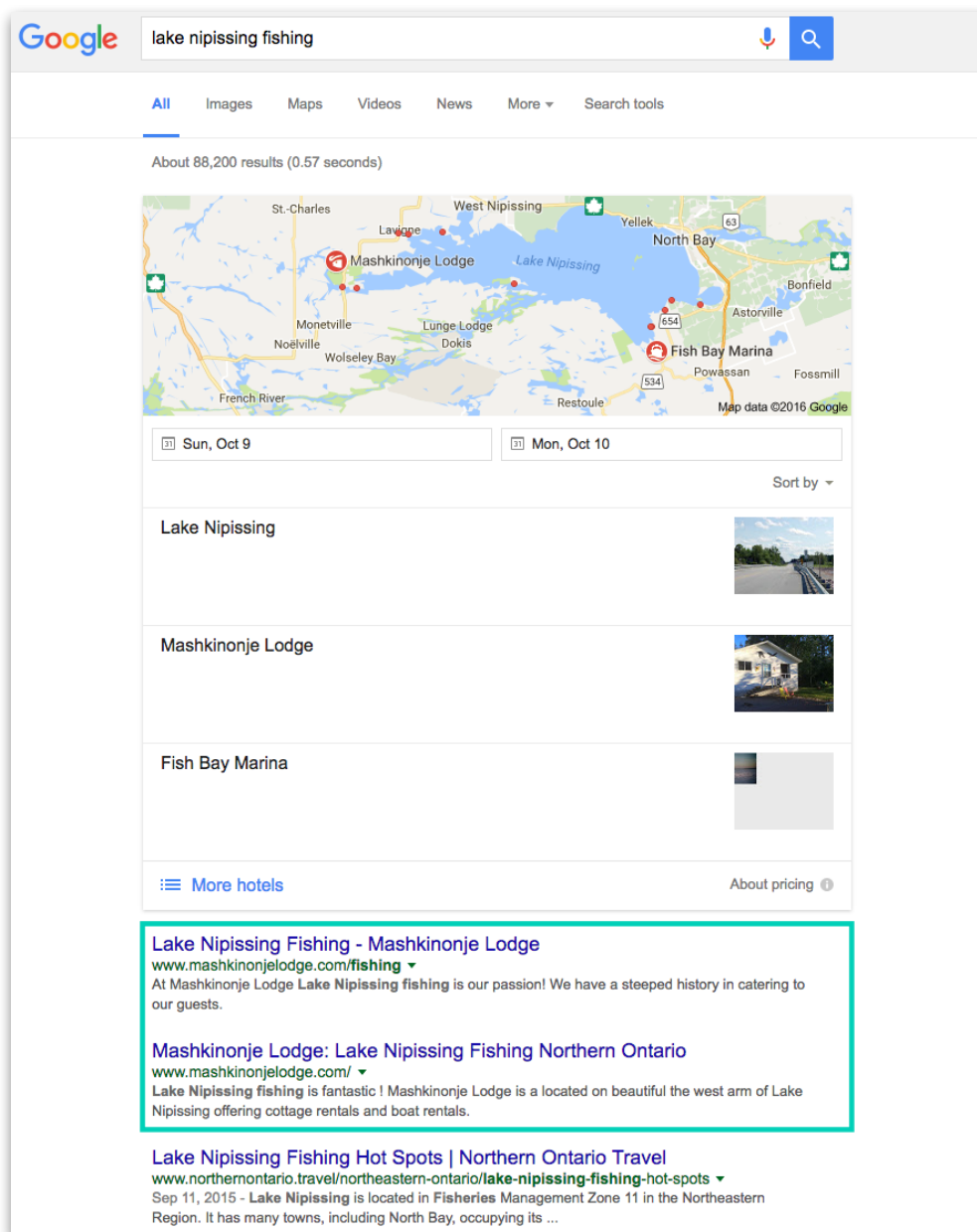
An easy way to decide how to organize the content on your vacation rental website is by using a tool like [MindMeister](#). By creating a mindmap you’ll be forced into thinking logically about your content’s presentation. Take a look at this example for inspiration:



Though very basic, these sections cover the essentials that your guests might be looking for. Will they be bringing pets? Make sure you write a directory entry with local veterinary services information. Is your vacation rental on an island you can only access by local ferry? Be sure to list the ferry operating hours, as well as note any holiday closures.

It is completely possible to rank for these types of queries, because more often than not, the information will not only just be relevant to guests looking to book accommodation in your area, but to anyone else who is passing through and wants to know about local events or how to get there. It could even be a great resource for locals living nearby!

Let's think back to the Lake Nipissing example:



What surprises you about these top results?

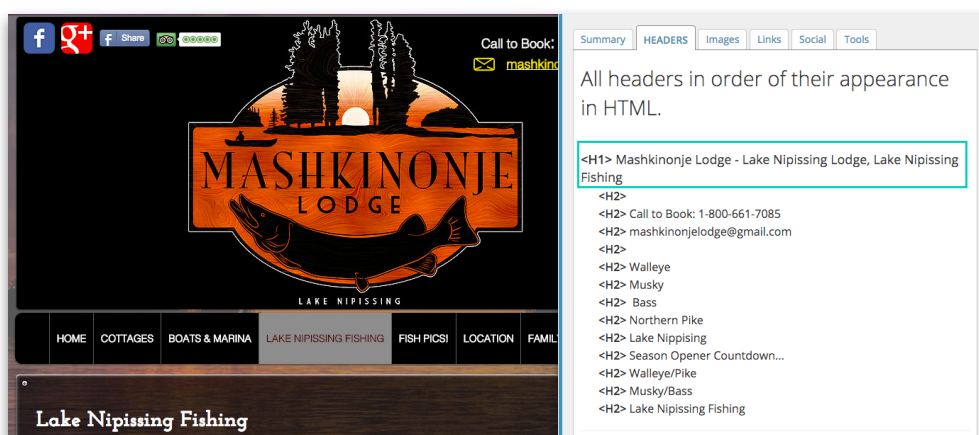
The first two organic results for "Lake Nipissing Fishing" aren't from the local tourism office. Instead, they're from [Mashkinonje Lodge](#) – a *vacation rental website*!



Not only has this hospitality business managed to rank first in Google, but it also takes the second-place spot with its specific pages dedicated to fishing.

Knowing that fishing is a hugely popular activity in the region, Mashkinonje Lodge have taken advantage in their local SEO efforts, reaping the benefits of ranking first place as a result. As long as there is an activity or attraction of some sort that brings guests to the area, this can be a really easy and effective technique to help you rank for local SEO.

By no means do you have to be an expert or even provide this activity for guests at your rental, you can always just write about it and its popularity in the area in order to rank well. Just remember to include the keyword you want to rank for, plus the location, in your page's title. Your page's H1 should also include the keyword.

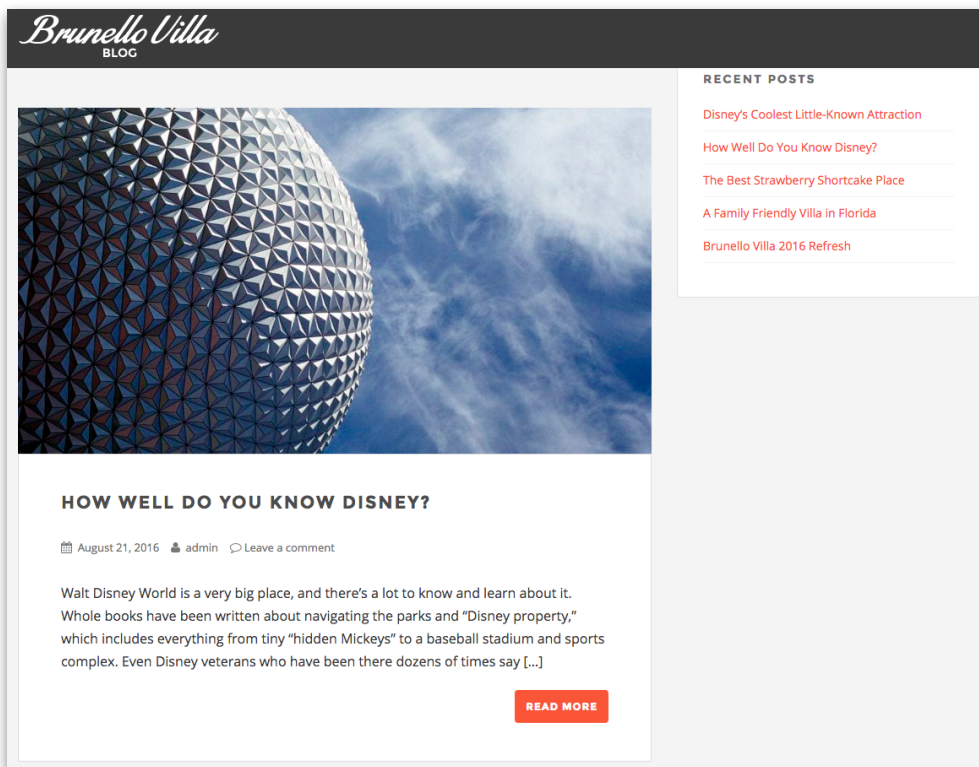


Bonus tip: start a blog

We know that a blog isn't the first thing on a vacation rental owner's radar. Starting a simple blog, however, can have a significant effect on your local SEO rankings.

It doesn't have to be overly complicated and you don't even need to be a professional writer, just start off by writing a few things of interest in your area. For example, some "best of" or "top 10" lists for restaurants, bars, theme parks, lakes, nature hotspots, etc. in your area. These work really well, are easy to produce and can give you more visibility on the search associated with your location. You can also share these posts on social media, or even email them to your previous, current and future guests!





If you include any original images in your post, make sure you add an alt tag that states the photograph's location as this will also help you rank in local SEO image search. E.g. Disney-Florida-Epcot.

Or, if you include any images of your vacation rental in your blog posts, be sure to do the same but include the business type in the alt tag. E.g. Bedroom-Brunello-Villa-Florida.

4. BUILD QUALITY BACKLINKS

What is link building?

Local SEO link building is like the gym of the marketing world – it can take a long time to see a difference, but when you finally start noticing results, they make it more than worth it.

Link building can be tedious, and as a result, it requires a *lot* of patience. Though for vacation rental businesses that depend on search visibility to gain traffic to their websites, it's a must.

And links *are* achievable!

Link building just takes time, perseverance and a touch of hard work.

Backlinks are extremely important for vacation rental websites because when search engines calculate the relevance of a site to a keyword, they also judge the number of quality inbound links to that site. For Google, high quality links are still one of the top ranking factors.

Picture it like this: one link from a respected website to your page equals one trust vote for your site in Google's eyes.

That's why the more relevant and worthwhile citations (with links) you have from other websites, the better your own vacation rental website will rank.

How to gain backlinks for your vacation rental website

There are lots of things you can do to start building the number of quality backlinks that lead to your website and boost your local SEO.

In order to gain backlinks for local SEO purposes, you're going to need to live, breathe and think locally.

We're talking:

Get listed in local directories with a link. We do advise you to be very careful with some OTAs and listing sites like HomeAway, because a recent article



revealed that HomeAway had sent an email to its users stating: “we will deactivate listings that contain messaging indicating that travelers are encouraged to pay outside of our reservation system.” – ouch!

Build partnerships with businesses that are local to your VR. These could be anything from day spas to mechanics, local tourism offices to bike rental shops/ Simply get in touch with any local services or places that could be of interest to your guests, and ask for a link – you’ll be pleasantly surprised how many say yes!

Leave reviews or testimonials. Some businesses are fussier than others, and it may take a while to receive your link. A great alternative to local partnerships is to leave testimonials for local businesses you regularly interact with. Not only will this strengthen your relationship with them, but it will also help give your link request the edge. After all, who would ever refuse a glowing testimonial of their service?

Make backlinking easy for your connections. Why not generate a HTML snippet that you can send to local businesses. That way, they’ll easily be able to copy and paste your link into their site without any problems.

Create your own local area directory. One of the easiest ways to gain backlinks and boost your local SEO is by taking the initiative and linking to businesses first! So make a list of all the activities, restaurants, tourist information centers, vehicle or equipment hire companies, laundromats (or any other businesses that are local to your VR), and add a page to your website as a ‘near my home’ directory.

Not only will your guests love the effort you’ve gone to in providing so much local information, but it will also sow the seeds for your relationships with the businesses nearby, and they’re bound to want to return the favor.

5. OBTAIN AUTHORITY CITATIONS

What are citations?

Any mentions of your vacation rental business name and address on any other website (but which don't necessarily link to your website) is called a citation.

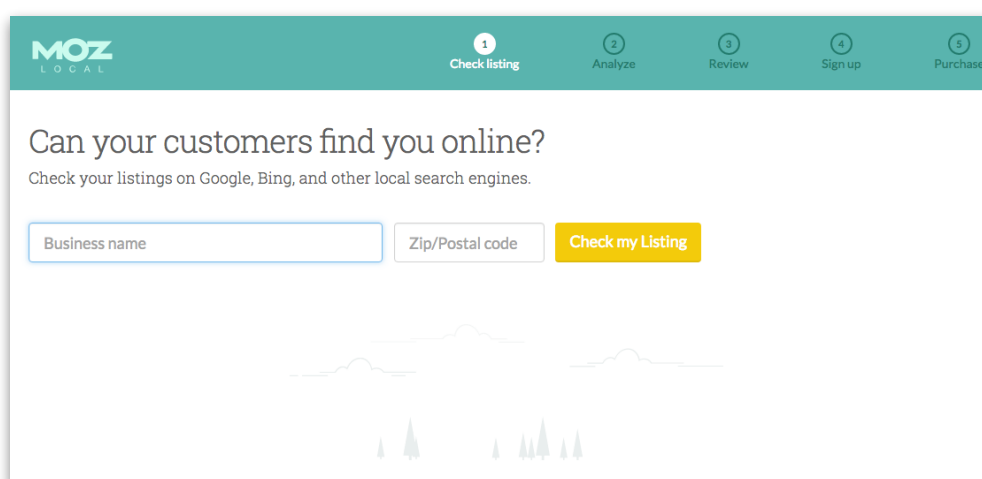
Citations exist in the form of Yellow Pages or Yell-type business directories whereby an entry exists with your business name and contact details but there's no link to your site. They can also be found on local chamber of commerce pages or any other local business association pages that includes your VR business information in its directory.

Citations make up a key part of the algorithms which Google and Bing use to determine your website's ranking. Good quality, well-established and well-indexed citations on directories can really boost your local SEO by helping search engines confirm that yours is a valid business.

In fact, according to Whitespark citation audit service, the consistency of structured citations is the fourth most important local ranking factor!

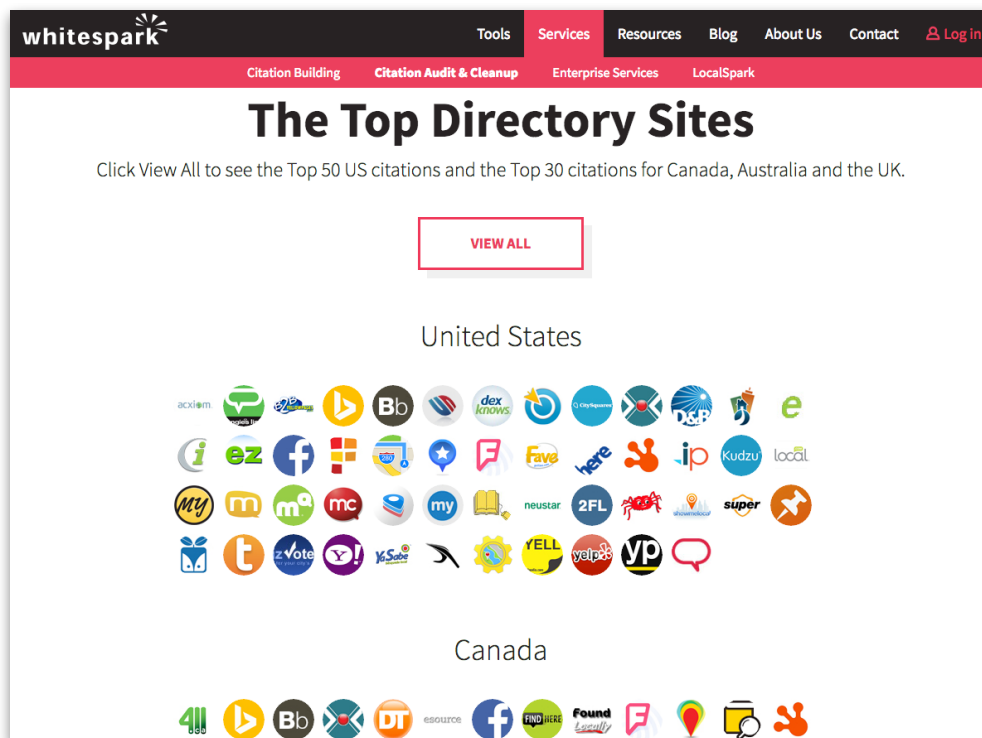
How to get citations for your vacation rental website

Start off by performing a citation audit to see if you have any existing mentions online. You can do this by using a tool like [Moz Local](#).

The image shows the Moz Local website interface. At the top, there is a teal header with the Moz Local logo on the left and a navigation bar with five steps: 1. Check listing, 2. Analyze, 3. Review, 4. Sign up, and 5. Purchase. Below the header, the main content area has the heading "Can your customers find you online?" followed by the subtext "Check your listings on Google, Bing, and other local search engines." There are two input fields: "Business name" and "Zip/Postal code". To the right of these fields is a yellow button labeled "Check my Listing". At the bottom of the form area, there is a faint illustration of a mountain range with evergreen trees in the foreground.

Then, you can use a site such as [Whitespark](#) to find out which are the best directories for listing your vacation rental business, depending on where you're located.





After, simply add your property to as many directories as you like. Here are a few examples of where you could list your vacation rental business:

Booking sites

[Adventurepads](#)
[Airbnb](#)
[FHBO](#)
[HomeAway](#)
[PetVR](#)
[RentalSpot](#)
[TripAdvisor](#)

Generic directories

[Angie's List](#)
[BBB](#)
[Foursquare](#)
[Hotfrog](#)
[Manta](#)
[MapQuest](#)
[Merchant Circle](#)
[Yell](#)
[Yelp](#)
[YP \(Yellow Pages\)](#)

Create your entries on these directories to begin seeing an improvement in your local Google rankings!

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Local SEO doesn't have to give vacation rental owners a headache. There are so many easy and actionable steps you can take to improve your rankings in local search results.

Whether that's registering the right domain for your vacation rental business or optimizing every headline of every page on your website. If it's generating content that will draw in tons of interested parties or building networks of affiliated local businesses and directories. Using all of these techniques together will lead you along the right path to a good local SEO ranking.

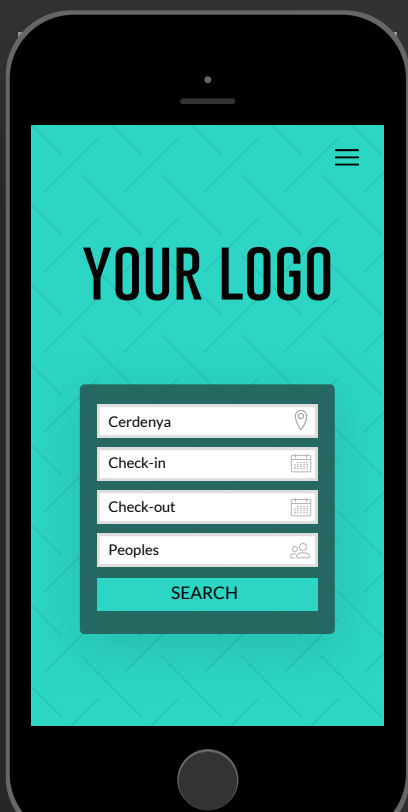
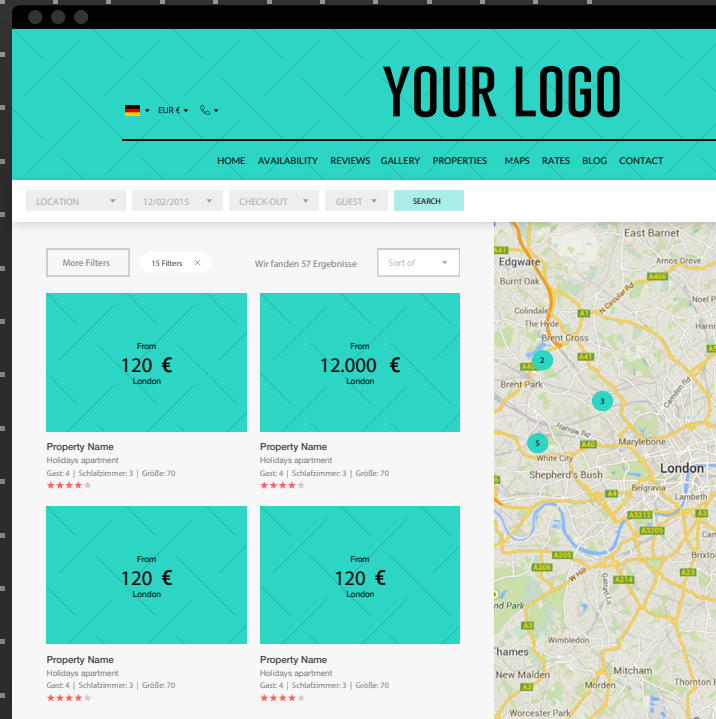
The more users that find your vacation rental website on local search results, the more potential guests you can try to convert.

Let's face it: even if guests only find your website because of your useful local content, there's still a chance they'll take a look around the rest of your site, fall in love with your vacation rental and make a booking... well, why wouldn't they? There really is nothing to lose!



CREATE YOUR OWN VACATION RENTAL WEBSITE

Wow your visitors with stunning web design. All our website templates are optimized for SEO, customizable, mobile-friendly, and ready-to-use. No coding or design skills required.



Improve your website ranking



Synchronize availability calendars with your booking channels



Manage all reservations from one place



Accept credit card payments online

BUILD YOUR WEBSITE NOW

