

Vacation Rentals on Denman FAQ

Summer is coming, and with it, visitors. Friends, family, home-and-garden-tour-goers, Baroque music listeners, literature lovers, soccer players, people seeking natural beauty and peace. And probably a few wedding parties.

They need to stay somewhere. This brings up the topic of vacation rental regulations on Denman: what's legal, what isn't, and what is appropriate and sustainable for our community. It's a topic much on my mind. As a trustee, I hear a lot of questions and concerns about vacation rentals—pro, con, and everything in between.

Here's an overview of the Denman situation:

What's legal?

- Renting a room or rooms that are part of or attached to your home
- You need to be living in the home
- Maximum of three bedrooms with up to two beds in each
- There can be kitchen facilities in the visitor area
- Owners are allowed, but not required, to serve meals

What isn't legal?

- Renting a full house or cabin/cottage
- Renting part of a secondary cabin or outbuilding
- Renting a room or rooms in a home that is not being lived in
- Inns, hotels, resorts, and private campgrounds

Is Air BnB legal?

Air BnB is not regulated by the Islands Trust because it is not a land use. It is simply a marketing tool. It can be used to market both legal and illegal uses. If you search 'Denman Island' on Air BnB right now, you'll likely find both types of offerings.

Why do these regulations exist?

These regulations are intended to reflect the wishes and values of the community, as expressed in our vision document, known as the Denman Island Official Community Plan (OCP). Several years of widespread and spirited community discussion went into creating the OCP.

Our Community Plan says that visitor accommodation should

- Provide for a range of economic activities that respect the natural environment and the character of the human community (p 17)
- Be provided primarily in home-based guest accommodation (p 58)
- Be managed in a way that respects our community's main function as a home for its residents (p 15)

- Not threaten the privacy, peace and quiet beauty that island living permits (p 15)
- Be small-scale and avoid negative impacts of traffic, noise, and artificial light (p 57)

Visitor accommodation regulations differ from island to island and are not, as some people believe, imposed by a centralized Islands Trust headquarters.

What makes vacation rental regulation so contentious?

Over the last ten years or so, vacation rental issues have become increasingly complicated for communities all over the world, thanks to the proliferation of on-line booking sites which make renting so much easier. The challenges are not so much with in-home operations, such as what's described above, but more with rental of whole homes.

On the one hand, allowing vacation rentals brings benefits:

- landowners receive income
- local businesses and cultural organizations gain income and exposure: visitors shop, eat out, hire services, buy from local farms and artisans, and attend events
- locals can host large gatherings on the island

And they have downsides:

- Potential rental housing is diverted to the vacation rental market, making housing shortages worse
- Neighbourhoods lose their character and cohesion
- There are problems with parking, noise, garbage, pets, and other nuisances
- In rural areas, the aquifer can suffer if the commercial use involves more people than would otherwise live in the space

Cities and communities all around the world are grappling with how to find the balance in all this, and how to enforce regulations in an ever-changing on-line world. I wrote about how the Denman Local Trust Committee is approaching vacation rental enforcement last June. You can read about it at <http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/islands/local-trust-areas/denman/local-trustee-corner/> (scroll down to June 2018).

Have a nice summer!