

Start & Run a Bed & Breakfast

Monica Taylor and Richard Taylor

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Bernhardt's Victorian Rarebit

½ lb. grated Cheddar cheese

½ teaspoon dry mustard

1 tablespoon butter

½ cup beer (room temperature)

1 egg

Dash of salt

Combine cheese, butter, salt, and mustard in the top of a double boiler. Heat over hot water until cheese melts. Stir in beer gradually. When mixture is fully combined, stir briskly until smooth.

Beat the egg in a separate bowl, then add to cheese mixture. Stirring constantly, cook until thick as heavy cream. Pour over hot toast.

Serves 4.

I

THE BUSINESS OF BED AND BREAKFAST

1. What Is Bed and Breakfast?

Bed and breakfast (B&B) has its roots in ancient times. In parts of the countryside where public inns were not always available, weary travelers would be accommodated by a local family who would provide food and lodging for a fee.

B&Bs have been popular in Britain and Europe for many years, but only recently have they gained wide acceptance in North America as a legitimate and popular type of accommodation.

The modern B&B provides the same type of environment as its ancient counterpart. The emphasis is on hospitality in a family setting. The visitor is greeted by the host and is given overnight accommodation in one of the spare bedrooms. In the morning, the visitor usually joins the host family for a leisurely breakfast and social conversation. The breakfast menu varies from house to house, but guests are offered selection and quality. The cost is usually less than comparable accommodation in a hotel or motel, especially when the price of the breakfast is included.

Because of the increased popularity of B&Bs, a range of services are now offered in the name of bed and breakfast. Most of them are legitimate, but some vary greatly

from the original concept of this special type of accommodation.

The following are brief descriptions of different establishments that may call themselves B&Bs.

1.1 Private homes

The true B&B falls into this category, and it usually consists of a home situated in a residential area with one or two family members running the business. Spare bedrooms are set aside for guests and breakfast is served by the hosts.

From the guest's point of view, the emphasis is on visiting a local family, enjoying their companionship, and sharing their home. Meals other than breakfast may or may not be available.

1.2 Family-run operations

Family-run establishments consist of small lodges or inns that are owned and operated by a host family. The hosts live on site and might join the guests for breakfast. Although these establishments are operated on a larger scale, they can provide an alternative to a private home, but guests should not expect the same level of interaction with the host family. Additional meals may or may not be served.

1.3 Commercial operations

Larger commercial establishments consist of blocks of apartment suites, cabins, motels, or hotels. The owners usually don't live on site, and there is no interaction with a host family. All these operations have some form of lobby or front desk, where the visitor checks in and out. Breakfast can vary from coffee and muffins available in the lobby to a prepared breakfast in a coffee shop.

These establishments actively advertise themselves as B&Bs in order to attract that part of the marketplace, and although they do, technically, provide a bed and a breakfast, they do not offer the friendly family environment that gives a true B&B its unique appeal.

1.4 Other variations

There are a number of other variations of B&B that don't seem to fall into any particular category. They offer a variety of unusual sleeping accommodations followed by a fairly standard breakfast. Houseboats, camping trailers, recreational vehicles, and tents have all been offered as B&Bs.

2. Take a Look at Your Competitors

If you are thinking about opening your own B&B, you have probably stayed at a few establishments and have your own ideas of what you would like to do to make yours unique. It's a good idea to explore other B&Bs to share ideas with other hosts or just to see how others have set up shop.

If you want to find out more about other B&Bs, the following references will be helpful. You will also want to consider having your

own B&B listed or advertised in one or more of these publications.

2.1 Free publications

Free pamphlets listing B&Bs or reservation services are available from most government tourist offices. A list of tourist offices along with the titles of their B&B brochures is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 Bed-and-breakfast guide books

There are numerous guide books that provide detailed descriptions and sometimes pictures of B&Bs. Specific features of each home are pointed out, and a coding system tells you what services are available and what restrictions may apply (e.g., no smoking or no children younger than 12).

Book stores and libraries generally carry a large selection of bed-and-breakfast guide books, which are regularly updated and revised.

2.3 Reservation services

Reservation services act on behalf of groups of B&B hosts and match a customer's requirements to one of the homes registered with the service. Each B&B pays an annual membership fee to be listed with the reservation service, which will actively seek customers for their members by advertising in government brochures, travel publications, newspapers, etc. Most reservation services will inspect each B&B to ensure a certain standard is maintained.

There are two general types of reservation services available: booking agencies and B&B associations.

A booking agency does all the reservation tasks on behalf of its members. The agency will record the visitor's name, address, telephone number, and estimated time of arrival. Some agencies will collect a room deposit or guarantee the reservation by credit card. Many of them will arrange restaurant or theater ticket reservations as well. B&Bs are usually charged a fee for each room booked through an agency.

B&B associations are composed of individual operators who have collected together to promote business by focusing on some common service. They may all be located in a specific area, or they may have a common type of customer (e.g., hunters, hikers, canoers, etc.). These associations will match a customer's requirements to one of their members, but it is up to the traveler to contact the B&B directly to make reservations and deposit payments.

2.4 Other sources

To assist travelers in locating B&Bs there are a number of other sources of information:

- Chambers of commerce often have listings of local B&Bs. Some of them also provide reservation services.
- Tourist information centers may provide help locating B&Bs. Many of these centers are operated by government personnel who have access to the government publications mentioned previously.
- Private advertising is conducted by many B&B operators. They distribute business cards and brochures to various tourist locations, and they often advertise in selected magazines or tourist attraction pamphlets.

- Signs identifying B&Bs are permitted in some municipalities. Signs are usually located directly outside each establishment. In areas that have stricter bylaws, there may be a small, inconspicuous logo attached to the front of the building.
- Word of mouth is considered the best form of advertising, and it is an excellent way to find out about good quality B&Bs in a particular area. It is very reassuring to have a personal endorsement from another guest.

3. Who Are the B&B Customers?

The prevailing attitude in western culture over the last 40 years has been "more is better." As we all strived to acquire more wealth and more possessions, and as we succumbed to the images of success that advertisers would have us accept as "normal," we set ourselves unrealistic and sometimes unattainable goals. In striving for these goals, we have wasted our resources, polluted our environment, and sacrificed quality time with our loved ones, our friends, and our fellow citizens.

Fortunately, these attitudes are changing; many of us now recognize that our resources need to be managed, our environment needs protection, and people need to be the top priority in any civilized society. Many people now search for "quality in life" rather than "quantity in life." These people are interested in community involvement, the search for their historical roots, and the general pursuit of the arts. It is from these people with a new outlook that B&Bs draw many of their customers.

Many travelers are tired of staying in look-alike hotel or motel rooms. They seek out the friendlier atmosphere of a home, and they are interested in meeting local people and sharing in a family environment. They often are looking for a B&B host that has similar interests to them, such as a fellow antique collector, gardening enthusiast, or craftsperson. Some customers are attracted to a particular style of accommodation, such as an historic home in a small village, a townhouse close to the center of a large city, or a farmhouse in the peaceful countryside. Some visitors seek the companionship of a particular culture or language. Whatever the requirements of the traveler, they can be met by the diverse variety of B&B homes now operating across North America.

4. Can You Operate a B&B?

The vast majority of B&Bs are conducted from existing residential homes, and there are no “rules” about who may run one. Any adult member of the family can take it upon him or herself to operate a B&B as long as local zoning and licensing bylaws are complied with. There is such a wide variety of people running B&B establishments that it would be impossible to document them all, but the following list shows some of the more common operators:

- Homemakers
- Widows or widowers
- Adults caring for a family member
- Retired people
- People seeking a career change

Larger B&Bs usually require the full-time attention of couples or even entire families. In addition, they often hire employees to help ease the workload.

Of course, you must genuinely like people and be prepared for the type of work required in running a B&B. The attributes necessary for success are explored in Chapter 2.

5. How Will This Book Help You?

With the increase in demand for this type of accommodation, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of people converting their homes to a B&B operation. Some of these new businesses have succeeded, but many have not. The lack of proper planning, the absence of reliable reference material, and the risk of doing business by trial and error prove too much for many new operators.

If you are contemplating starting your own B&B, this book will get you started and keep you going successfully. Each chapter has been organized to represent one step of a complete start-up plan. As you progress through each step and each chapter, you will develop your own plan for your unique B&B. Information from each chapter is used in the following chapters to gradually build the total start-up plan, so be sure to work through the book in the order presented.

We follow a “case study” of an imaginary couple, Carol and Bob Morris, who are preparing to start a B&B. This couple encounter and conquer the same problems that you will face as you try to start your business, and we use information they gather to develop sample business forms and cost sheets, the same forms that you will need to complete in preparing your plan. Blank worksheets and cost sheets are included at the back of the book. You may photocopy these forms as needed, or you may print the forms directly from the CD-ROM.

The forms shown are actual examples used by existing B&Bs and their usefulness has been tested through experience.

We have included helpful tips from our own experience and from other B&B operators — tips that will steer you away from potential pitfalls. As well, reference material is

included to keep your business on track during its initial years.

Ultimately, your success as a bed-and-breakfast operator is up to you, but using this book will greatly reduce the amount of trial and error you will have to suffer in those first exciting but difficult months.