

Chapter 1

So You Want to Open a B&B

In This Chapter

- Understanding what a bed & breakfast is and isn't
 - Surveying the skills and personality traits being an innkeeper requires
 - Looking at the pros and cons of being an innkeeper
 - Filling in the gaps: Ways to find out more of what you want to know
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You've been cutting out recipes for years, everyone tells you you're the perfect host or hostess, and you've stayed at more B&Bs than you can count — but will you be a good innkeeper? Maybe. The fact that you can cook doesn't mean you have the persistence and stamina to run an inn, nor does being handy at restoring an old building mean you have the leadership skills it takes to run a business.

Some equate the job of an innkeeper to that of an actor or actress in that you must be “on” whenever you're working. The differences are that you can't be acting, and the show never ends. When you're an innkeeper, it's show time 24 hours a day.

In this chapter, I give you a clear vision of what a B&B is (and isn't) and what being an innkeeper entails — without rose-colored glasses. Parts of this chapter may sound discouraging, but they're not meant to dishearten you. Rather, the intention is to make sure you enter the world of innkeeping with your eyes wide open, the skills you need to succeed, and the support you need to thrive. I want you to be sure that you have what it takes not only to run a successful inn but also to be happy in your new profession.

Defining B&B: It's Not Just a Bed and a Breakfast

A bed & breakfast is more than the simple combination of a bed and a breakfast. It's a business and a unique lodging experience for your guests. You can be the best host or hostess in the world, but if you don't run your B&B

as a business, you run the risk of not being able to pay your bills. Equally as important, you must see your customers as guests. If you run a rigid business without providing warmth and hospitality, you miss out on the joys and satisfaction of innkeeping, and your guests leave your inn deprived of the special B&B lodging experience.

The next sections clarify exactly what constitutes a B&B, and point out some fallacies you may encounter among those who are less enlightened.

Clearing up confusion: What a B&B is

You may be a bit confused by various impressions that you've had over the years about the term B&B, so before taking the leap into innkeeping you want to know: *What exactly is a bed & breakfast?* You can't run something if you don't have a clear picture of what it is in your mind.

Comparing a B&B to a country inn and home-stay

Because the word inn is used interchangeably when referring to bed & breakfasts and country inns, and because home-stays rent rooms and provide breakfast, there can be confusion in the distinctions between B&Bs, country inns, and home-stays.

✓ **Country inn:** This kind of lodging property has many of the characteristics of a B&B, but serves an evening meal in addition to breakfast. Some country inns serve dinner to overnight guests only, and the cost of dinner and breakfast is generally included in the room rate (called the *Modified American Plan*). A country inn with a *full-service restaurant* serves meals to the general public. Generally the owner or owners are actively involved in the daily operations of the inn, and often live on site. To be a country inn, a property does not have to be located in a rural area, although historically

restaurants were added so that travelers in remote locations could enjoy a good evening meal.

✓ **Home-stay:** This is an owner-occupied private home that rents rooms to earn additional income while the owners continue their present employment or retirement. Although breakfast may be included in the room rate, in general, home-stays lack the emphasis on unique accommodations and personal service typical of a B&B stay.

If you provide a high level of service with a personal touch, offer generous hospitality and good value with unique ambiance and surroundings in individually decorated rooms that are clean and comfortable, then you are providing your guests with a fabulous lodging experience — no matter what you call it!

According to the Professional Association of Innkeepers International (PAII), a bed & breakfast is a lodging establishment where the owner/host typically lives on the premises. Breakfast is served to overnight guests and may be quite lavish. A professional B&B meets all the appropriate zoning, safety, health, and legal requirements of the state and local government. The owner or owners provide a high degree of personal service to guests. Many B&Bs have been inspected by state associations or inspection rating services such as AAA, Mobil guides, or Canada Select. Small B&Bs usually provide a part-time or seasonal occupation for the owners, who do most of the work, often with some help for housekeeping and other chores. Larger B&Bs provide the primary financial support for the owner(s) and generally require their full-time, active involvement in the daily operations with the help of employees.

From there, the choice is yours. You can open a bed & breakfast in the city or in the country, in a quaint Victorian mansion or in a conventional home (see Chapter 2 for more about your options). I've even heard of B&Bs on boats, in treehouses, and in old jails!

Dispelling myths: What a B&B is not

As an innkeeper, you need to know and confront head-on some of the misconceptions and general perceptions that the traveling public and the media may have about bed & breakfasts. Some of these are based on out-dated notions, and others have evolved as a result of confusion with home-stays. Tackling these mistaken beliefs and knowing what information you need to provide, especially for first-time B&B goers, is helpful in your marketing efforts (see Chapters 8 and 15). Some mistaken notions and their clarifications are:

- ✓ **B&Bs are cheap and second-rate.** While the values offered by bed & breakfasts can make them an economical alternative to other accommodations, B&B guests generally find upscale amenities, such as luxury linens, fresh flowers, fine china, gourmet breakfasts, and special touches not found even at higher-priced hotels.
- ✓ **Breakfast is family-style with other guests.** This is true at many inns, and part of the appeal of a B&B is the camaraderie. However, many B&Bs offer individual tables or even breakfast delivered to the guest's room. Knowing who your guest is allows you to offer a breakfast setting conducive to your target guest (see Chapter 10 for information on breakfast settings).
- ✓ **Bathrooms are shared.** According to PAII, nearly 95 percent of inns include private baths, and many now offer private in-room Jacuzzis for two.

- ✓ **Privacy is limited.** Actually, professional innkeepers use their people skills and know when to engage guests in conversation and when to give them privacy (see Chapter 12 for more on honing your communication skills). They also take into account thin walls and squeaky staircases by soundproofing when possible.
- ✓ **The breakfasts are fattening and unhealthy.** Most innkeepers offer a variety of food choices at breakfast, and many ask about dietary restrictions when taking guests' reservations. (See Chapter 10 for information about dietary requests that you will encounter.)
- ✓ **Running a bed & breakfast is a hobby.** By reading this book and following the advice it contains, you know this notion is far from true; however, don't be surprised by how often guests will ask "*So, what do you really do?*"
- ✓ **B&Bs are just a room, and they're boring.** On the contrary, many bed & breakfast inns provide activities for their guests free of charge or have deals with local vendors to offer guests discounted rates. Embrace this aspect of a B&B stay and offer activities and services appropriate for your guests.
- ✓ **B&Bs have too many rules.** While it is true that a few innkeepers take creating policies to such an extreme that guests can't relax and enjoy their getaway, the majority of innkeepers focus their concern on the safety, comfort, and enjoyment of their guests. (Chapter 7 focuses on establishing your policies.) Not furnishing your inn with irreplaceable, valuable personal property and priceless family heirlooms will help you to relax, welcome, and enjoy your guests.

Finding Out What It Takes to Be an Innkeeper

You must have multiple skills, personality traits, and personal characteristics to be a successful innkeeper. The following sections describe these qualities in greater depth and comprise a job description of sorts for aspiring innkeepers.

Communicating effectively

Before taking the plunge into innkeeping, you need to take an inventory of your own people skills, past the point of being a friendly person. To be a

successful innkeeper, you must like people, be willing to interact with them on many levels, and possess some innate higher-level communication skills, such as:

- ✔ **You should have the ability to break down communication barriers gently and graciously by taking cues from your guests.** This means being able to figure out what the guests' needs are and what, if possible, can be done to make your guests comfortable. It also means knowing when guests want to be engaged in conversation and when they'd rather be left alone. Some people are naturally better than others at reading situations, but luckily, making guests comfortable is a skill that you can continue to perfect with each guest interaction.
- ✔ **You need to be a skillful leader, which means being competently in charge.** Guests sense incompetence, so you always want to appear confident and in control. If you're not in charge, guests will immediately try and take advantage of you. From your first contact with each guest, be it by e-mail, by phone, or in person, always remain in charge by creating policies and an environment that you're comfortable offering to guests; then stick within the boundaries that you create for this environment. Guests will try and dictate everything from your reservation policies to room assignments and menu choices, but you must remain in control.
- ✔ **You need to be skillful at communicating nonverbally.** Studies have shown that only 7 percent of what we "hear" from in-person communication is actual words. The remaining 93 percent of the message we receive comes not from the literal words spoken, but rather from the following:
 - The tone and pitch of a voice
 - The speed at which words are delivered
 - Facial expressions, including mouth, chin, eye and eyebrow movements, and the position of the head as well as hand and body gestures and eye contact
 - Emotional responses such as sighing, laughing, snickering, and crying
 - Physiological responses such as rapid breathing, eyes filling with tears, choking on words, and so forth

These signals make nonverbal communication a very powerful way of "hearing" guests and communicating with them. Listening to guests' nonverbal communication and being in command of your own nonverbal correspondences is an art and a skill that savvy innkeepers employ and perfect over time.

Examining other necessary traits

Don't underestimate the value of your strong passion to become an innkeeper. Not only is it an important factor in determining your success, it's also what carries you through the roughest and most exhausting times. But passion and determination alone aren't enough to make your bed & breakfast successful. In addition to the high-level communication skills I discuss in the preceding section, here are some other key traits you must possess:

- ✓ **Endurance and stamina.** This is a biggie and a lot tougher than it sounds. Even when you're tired or don't feel well, beds have to be made, breakfast must be prepared, toilets must be cleaned, and everything must be done in a cheerful manner. At 10 p.m., you may find yourself still manning the fort because guests you're expecting haven't called to let you know they're running late or, worse, not coming at all. And so you wait, knowing all the while that you need to be up at 6 a.m. to start breakfast.
- ✓ **A willingness to see damages as a part of doing business.** Even when you take precautions to protect your inn, some damages are bound to occur. Guests spill things, drop things, break things, wet the bed, and more, so you should never put anything in your rooms or common areas that you can't bear to part with.
- ✓ **Tolerance to entertain a variety of people — even those you don't like.** You know who I mean, those who insist on talking politics from their point of view as if it were the only point of view, discuss their medical conditions with a level of detail that is not only inappropriate but annoying, share their religious views with complete disregard for anyone else's beliefs, or monopolize the conversation and talk only about themselves. Add to this the fact that many of these people are always complaining about something. Not only do you need to entertain these people, but you also need to skillfully manage the situation to minimize their interference with your other guests' enjoyment.
- ✓ **An affinity for multitasking.** You need to be adept at working in a fast-paced environment with frequent interruptions. This could mean anything from taking a reservation while cleaning a bathroom to telling guests about area activities while buying tomatoes.
- ✓ **Organizational skills.** You need to be organized in order to keep a housekeeping schedule, plan and prepare meals, shop for the inn, manage your advertising, take care of bookkeeping and banking, handle repairs, meet required reporting deadlines, take care of current and future guests, and more.
- ✓ **Willingness to learn from your experiences.** Successful innkeepers constantly find more efficient ways to use their time, from streamlining meal preparation to making their housekeeping routine more productive. They discover new bookkeeping functions and marketing techniques. Having an open and flexible mind makes the job easier over time.

- ✓ **Patience.** An innkeeper's days are filled with answering the same questions over and over, even after the requested information has been provided. Say you show a couple at check-in how to use the remote for the TV and point out the card in the room that provides complete instructions on operating the TV. You go to their room later and patiently help them with it again, only to get another call from them that night asking you to show them how to use the remote. Each time, you respond with patience and a smile, even though you can't help thinking to yourself, *Why don't they get it?* or *How many more times will I have to show them?* At first, you're happy to help your guests, but fast-forward to the 100th and then the 1,000th time you've answered the same question: Can you still do it with the same patience and smile?
- ✓ **Willingness to make personal sacrifices.** Being an innkeeper invariably means missing some family and personal functions. When this happens, you must be able to hide your feelings of disappointment for your guests' sake.



In addition to all of this, you must find time to take care of yourself. An innkeeper's job is never done. Even on days when there are no guests at your inn, you should expect to be preparing for them by working on your marketing plan, baking ahead, cleaning, and performing maintenance and upkeep. When guests are staying at the inn, you may be hoping for a little quiet time alone in the afternoon, only to find that your guests prefer to hang around and visit. None of these dynamics are bad; they're simply a reality of innkeeping and the lifestyle you sign on to when you decide to run a bed & breakfast. But remember, your job description doesn't come with personal leave, vacation time, or days off, so you have to carve out this time for yourself (Chapter 16 shows you how). Be wise, and build it into your business plan.

Being a Jack or Jill of all trades

If I were to write a job description for the position of innkeeper it would probably read something like this: *Knowing how to do everything and being ready to do it at any time.* Innkeepers wear many hats and walk in many shoes, from cook to cleaner and from greeter to gardener. I can't think of any other profession that combines the knowledge from as many different disciplines as innkeeping does.



Many new innkeepers make the mistake of downplaying the need for experience, or at least a little knowledge, and overestimating their abilities in the many areas that affect the success of a bed & breakfast. While many jobs can be outsourced, knowledge in some areas is indispensable. For example, you may outsource your accounting and tax preparation to a CPA or accountant, but knowing how to generate and read a profit and loss statement (also called an income statement) from your bookkeeping software is essential for gauging the health of your business and comparing its success from year to year (see Chapter 15 for details on assessing your success).

Making personal sacrifices

Many stories come to mind of professional innkeepers who understand that it's show time 24/7/365. One in particular is of innkeepers who were welcoming their guests when one of the innkeepers excused himself to take a phone call. It was on this call that he found out that his father had passed away. His partner continued checking in the current guests and the next group of guests. By the time yet another group of guests arrived, he was back helping to

check them in. The guests never knew what the innkeeper was going through personally and enjoyed their stays immensely. It's this type of personal sacrifice that many innkeepers make. Situations like these are also why it's important to have an interim innkeeper or competent staff on hand should you need to be away from the inn suddenly. (See Chapter 14 for information on finding an interim innkeeper.)

While the following list by no means includes every role an innkeeper may be called upon to play, it gives you an idea of those areas in which a degree of proficiency is necessary. How do you measure up? You should be prepared to be a

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| ✓ Bookkeeper | ✓ Interior decorator |
| ✓ Chef/short order cook | ✓ Safety coordinator |
| ✓ Concierge | ✓ Negotiator/mediator |
| ✓ Gardener | ✓ Marketer |
| ✓ Handyman/woman | ✓ Personnel Director |
| ✓ Housekeeper | ✓ Webmaster |

Lucky for you, this book helps you brush up on these skills and more. Turn to Chapter 6 for information on record-keeping, Chapter 10 for food preparation and recipe suggestions, Chapter 14 for help with hiring help, and Chapter 9 for decorating tips. Chapter 13 gives you the lowdown on inn maintenance. Chapters 11 and 12 cover communication and guest relations, while Chapter 8 provides an overview of marketing, including capitalizing on the possibilities offered by the World Wide Web.

Making your job look easy (and other secret skills)

The best innkeepers have a secret: They make everything look easy. Because successful innkeepers are so good at this, new innkeepers often underestimate the variety of skills required to be a successful innkeeper, the energy necessary to be on duty 24/7/365, and the stamina to bring it all together.

Guests can't enjoy themselves if they feel they are an imposition, so innkeepers go out of their way to hide the fact that, sometimes, they are.

In addition to making your job look easier than it is, to be a successful innkeeper you need to have the following “secret” skills, which aren't always revealed to your guests:

- ✔ **A competitive streak:** Even though you may be on friendly terms and generally work cooperatively with other innkeepers in your area, innkeepers are competitive. You want your inn to be the best at meeting your guests' needs and expectations.
- ✔ **A talent for managing time wisely:** Out of sheer necessity, you must call upon your creative flair to practice good time management. You need to quickly decide which items or tasks are time wasters and must be eliminated, which tasks need to be minimized, and which need to stay in place and be streamlined so that more time is carved out for running the B&B and taking care of yourself.
- ✔ **A well-calculated focus:** Innkeepers are akin to magicians in a lot of ways — their focus, preparation, and practice make everything fall into place and seem so easy! With a lot of hard work and a little bit of magic, your guests can enjoy the fabulous mouth-watering breakfast you prepare, your immaculately clean inn, and your beautifully manicured lawn without ever knowing how many hours go into the details to make all of this possible during their brief visits.

Knowing What You Want from Your B&B

If you have the personality traits and skills described in the previous sections of this chapter, you have most of what it takes to be a successful innkeeper. But while having these skills and traits may enable you to go through the motions of being an innkeeper, to be a really great innkeeper you need to have a clear understanding of what you expect to get out of your B&B.

In much of the rest of this book, the focus is on what you will provide to your guests, but this section is about what's in it for *you*. Will you be happy? You probably won't be a good innkeeper if you're not. Will your bed & breakfast and the love and sweat that you put into it provide you with a good return? This doesn't have to be defined only in terms of monetary success. Your success is also defined by the achievement of the goals that you set for yourself — your reasons for running a bed & breakfast. Figuring out how you define your own success and happiness can help you decide whether running a bed & breakfast is the right choice for you.

Looking at your motivation: The pros and cons of innkeeping

The most common reason to start a new business is to make money. While innkeepers do want to run a profitable bed & breakfast, this is often not the only reason — and many times not the first reason — they give for getting into the industry. Although this doesn't mean you won't make money, the point is to understand fully what you plan to invest in the business in terms of money, time, energy, and commitment, and then decide whether you have realistic expectations of what you intend to get out of it.



If you decide to forgo taking a salary in the beginning, be sure to get financial advice. Although you'll be working, you won't be contributing to social security, which could adversely affect your benefits later in life.

Ask ten innkeepers why they decided to become innkeepers and you'll probably get ten different answers. Popular reasons include, but are not limited to,

- ✓ To be my own boss
- ✓ To live in a nicer home than I could afford otherwise
- ✓ To work from home so I can be around my family and my children
- ✓ To work with my spouse or chosen partner
- ✓ To meet new and interesting people and/or relieve loneliness
- ✓ To take advantage of my love to cook, entertain, and be creative
- ✓ To be able to restore an old property

Your list may look completely different than the list above, or it may be a combination of some of the above reasons and some of your own. The most important thing is to have a firm list of your goals and a clear understanding of your motivation and expectations before you start out.

You can't look only at the bright side. Before making the decision to become an innkeeper, you need to weigh the disadvantages of innkeeping as well, some of which include:

- ✓ Long hours
- ✓ Limited income
- ✓ Heavy startup costs
- ✓ Lack of privacy for you and your family
- ✓ Reduced family time
- ✓ Hard manual labor
- ✓ Menial and repetitive tasks that are performed over and over

Pulling all the pieces together

Being an innkeeper can be exciting. However, just because it seems like a good idea, it may or may not enable you to meet your personal and financial goals. Without setting these goals, you can't judge your success. Start by making a clear list of what you want to achieve personally, then figure out exactly what type of commitment you're willing to make to get there. With all this in mind, use your business plan to determine how closely you will come to meeting your financial goals. (See Chapter 3 for help in creating a business plan and using it as a road map for your business's growth.) By looking at the combination of your business plan and your personal and financial goals, you'll be able to clearly define what success means to you and whether innkeeping is the best means to achieve it.

Juggling the Lifestyle of Innkeeping

Adapting to the innkeeping lifestyle is tough for new innkeepers. Figuring out how to juggle the reality of the demands that this lifestyle brings is no easy task.

Balancing your business and personal lives

When you live where you work and work where you live, separating your business life from your personal life can be a challenge, but it's a necessity. Even if you're among the nearly 15 percent of innkeepers who live off property, you still have a lot invested in your bed & breakfast and a vested interest in making sure it maintains your personal touch. Either way, you're going to find yourself juggling business decisions and personal obligations.

Running a bed & breakfast involves a huge time commitment. If your family will live at the inn, they should be involved in your decision to open a bed & breakfast because entertaining guests in your home will affect them. If you expect them to work in the business, you need an even greater commitment from them, and they should be part of establishing the division of labor.



See Chapter 3 for help allocating the responsibilities of various tasks, and check out Chapter 14 for details on getting extra help when you need it.



Family and friends may not share your devotion to your new profession. Some may think you've gone overboard, and many may not understand the tremendous commitment you are undertaking. When possible, educate them and enlist their support.

Life happens, and you need to have a plan for how you intend to handle personal invitations and commitments that come up, such as attending a family wedding or scheduling required medical treatment for yourself. If you're running the bed & breakfast with a partner, discuss ahead of time how you'll handle various job duties and situations. If you're a solo innkeeper, spend some time planning how you'll make time for yourself and handle emergencies.



Budget time for yourself, whether it's to take a walk in the park or to take a vacation. Personal time has a different meaning for everyone. Know what you need for yourself and carve out time for it in advance. (See Chapter 16 to find out how.) Otherwise, you're unlikely to find the time you need, a situation that can lead to bitterness and, ultimately, poor guest services.

Understanding uncertainty

Getting used to uncertainty is part of settling in as an innkeeper. The best way to handle uncertainty is with flexibility. Being flexible means creating a plan for your business and understanding that your projections are only an educated guess. It also means knowing that your plans for each day are always tentative. You may begin your day with a list of chores and baking that you plan to do and end up spending the entire day rebuilding your kitchen drain after the waste disposal fails in the middle of breakfast.



Check references for repairmen and have their emergency numbers on hand ahead of time — preferably programmed into speed dial. You never know when you'll need them. Don't forget numbers for services such as pest control and tree removal.

As an innkeeper, you need to be flexible and ready for the unexpected not only in your activities, but in cash flow as well. This might sound scary — and it is. However, those who don't overextend themselves — in either time or financial resources — can usually weather any storm.

One way to be prepared for uncertainty is for you, your partner, or a family member to keep an outside job. This may be beneficial for a variety of reasons, two of which include:

- ✓ **Extra income:** Having an outside income may provide the necessary cash flow to support your lifestyle and bed & breakfast until the inn begins to turn a profit. Even after your inn is profitable, you may continue to work outside the inn to provide additional income or to enable you to hire staff. Having an outside source of income also helps to insulate you from the effects of uncertain economic and environmental factors that may affect your revenues. If you're counting on an outside income to support your bed & breakfast, be sure you're prepared for the possibility of losing your job.



- ✓ **Benefits:** Providing your own health and retirement benefits is expensive, and many innkeepers keep their day jobs in order to keep their benefits.

If you have benefits for yourself through your inn, you may be required to provide the same level of benefits to all employees. Check with your attorney to find out what's required.

Your business plan (see Chapter 3 to devise one) can help you determine the projected amount of time you'll need to spend working a job outside of the inn. Innkeepers juggle the running of their inns with their day jobs in a variety of ways, including:

- ✓ Hiring an assistant innkeeper either full- or part-time
- ✓ Catering only to weekend guests
- ✓ Running the inn on a part-time or seasonal basis
- ✓ Working just part-time outside the inn

Before You Take the Plunge: Finding Out All You Can about the B&B Biz

Fortunately, a plethora of resources is available to show you what it's like to be an innkeeper before you invest a substantial amount of time or money. Use this book as your guide, and read and re-read every chapter to ensure you absorb all the valuable information. Then seek out and talk to other innkeepers by looking for one or more innkeeper networks, which offer a wealth of information and support. Too often, innkeepers fail or burn out because they haven't done their research or feel alone in the major endeavor of running a bed & breakfast. With so many good resources available, there's no reason for this to happen to you!

Talking to other successful innkeepers

No matter what stage of innkeeping you're in, you're not alone and never need to feel that you are. Savvy innkeepers take part in industry associations and forums to get support from others and answers to their questions. New innkeepers benefit from the wisdom of experienced innkeepers, and seasoned innkeepers benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of new innkeepers. Innkeeper groups come in all shapes and sizes. I encourage you to get in touch with several. Here is some help in finding them:

- ✓ **Innkeeper recommendations:** Ask local innkeepers what associations and forums they find helpful. In addition to organized associations, many innkeepers have informal gatherings amongst themselves and you may be invited to participate.
- ✓ **Local and regional associations:** You can find these associations by doing a Google search. Enter your city or region and then the keyword phrase “bed breakfast association,” for example, *Mystic CT bed breakfast association*.

- ✓ **State associations:** Innkeepers in many states have joined together to form state associations. To see whether such an association exists in your state, perform a Google search by entering your state followed by the keyword search phrase “bed breakfast association,” for example, *West Virginia bed breakfast association*.

Many state B&B associations have kits, research, and courses specifically for aspiring innkeepers who are thinking of opening a bed & breakfast in their state.



- ✓ **The Professional Association of Innkeepers International:** Known as PAII (pronounced “pie”), you can look them up at www.paii.org. This worldwide organization provides education, information, networking, advocacy, business opportunities, online forums, and industry research for all aspects of the bed & breakfast industry. Each year the association hosts an industry conference and trade show that offer a wealth of educational seminars, panels, demonstrations, and opportunities and bring aspiring and seasoned innkeepers together with industry vendors and suppliers.

The PAII annual conference and trade show and many state bed & breakfast associations offer seminars just for aspiring innkeepers.



- ✓ **Innkeeper forums:** A forum is an online discussion group. It can be private or public, and may or may not be monitored by a forum leader or group. Many forums are open to all innkeepers — all you have to do is register or join a particular association. Private forums are by invitation only. These forums aren’t trying to be exclusive; rather, they’re formed by innkeepers who want to converse freely amongst themselves without moderation or vendor involvement. Here are two of the most popular forums:

- **The PAII Forum (www.paii.org):** Participation in this active forum requires membership in the PAII. Innkeepers, aspiring innkeepers, and vendors interact, seeking and giving advice and referrals.
- **Innspiring Forum (www.innspiring.com):** This active forum is comprised of a group of innkeepers and a few vendors who daily share stories, ask each other questions, and discuss topics of interest to the group, such as vendor recommendations, occupancy rates, handling specific guest situations, and so on.

Finding a class for aspiring innkeepers

Many classes and workshops are devoted to training aspiring innkeepers. The format and schedule of these classes differ, so take some time to find a class that you feel is best geared toward your needs. Classes are offered across the country and at a variety of times during the year, so with a little research, you should be able to find a convenient class near you. For help in finding classes for aspiring innkeepers, check these resources:

- ✓ **PAII.** Go to www.paii.org and click on Resources, Vendor Marketplace, Education & Events, and Workshops, respectively.
- ✓ **State, local or regional B&B associations.**
- ✓ **Industry consultants.** (See Chapter 3 to find a consultant.)
- ✓ **Online B&B directories.** (See Chapter 8 for information on how to find an online B&B directory.)

Taking a test drive

If you're ready to roll up your sleeves and give innkeeping a test drive, you may want to consider taking a hands-on course offered at an individual inn or volunteering as an innkeeper.

- ✓ **Hands-on training at an individual inn:** Inns across the country offer these classes, usually on an individual basis. You should expect the class to be about a week in length with an organized course outline. At the beginning of the week, you typically learn through observation, and by the end of the week, most classes have you taking care of guests with the help of an experienced innkeeper in the background. The best way to find a hands-on training class is through bed & breakfast associations, by asking for a referral in an innkeeper forum, or by checking the new innkeeper resources section in many online directories.
- ✓ **Volunteering as an innkeeper:** You may consider contacting some inns in the area where you live to see whether any B&B owners would be interested in having you as a volunteer innkeeper. This arrangement could be for a few hours each day or for a few days at a time. While you aren't paid, the experience you receive is invaluable, and you have a B&B owner or manager to ask questions about the business. If you volunteer, remember that your primary focus is to be dedicated to keeping their inn running — not to constantly be asking questions.

