

WHAT TENANTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RENTING

Before renting a property, you should shop around, keeping in mind important factors such as location, price, transport, shops, number of bedrooms, furnished or unfurnished etc. Consider your requirements carefully.

This guide provides a general outline of what you need to know.

Who is a Landlord?

A landlord is the person who grants the right of occupancy to premises under a tenancy agreement and includes an agent of the landlord. An agent might be a real estate agent, a friend, a family member or a live-in caretaker. It doesn't make any difference whether you deal with a landlord or an agent; the law is exactly the same, and your rights and responsibilities are the same.

Who is a Tenant?

A tenant is the person who is granted the right of occupancy to premises in return for the payment of rent.

Types of agreement

Although the Residential Tenancies Act 1999 does not require tenancy agreements to be in writing it is preferable that they are. There are two types of tenancy agreement:

- fixed term
- periodic.

The most important thing to do once your tenancy agreement is prepared is to read and understand it. Take particular note of any special conditions added to the agreement and make sure you are happy with them BEFORE you sign. If you don't understand any of the clauses, take the agreement to someone who can help you. Remember that once you sign, the agreement becomes a legally binding contract and there is no cooling off period.

Fixed term

A fixed term tenancy agreement is where you agree to rent a property for a fixed amount of time (such as 6 or 12 months). If you remain in the property after the expiry date has passed and a new tenancy agreement is not entered into by you and the landlord, and you are not asked to leave, the tenancy agreement becomes periodic.

Periodic

This type of agreement is not for a specific term and can continue for an indefinite period. The agreement can continue until the landlord or tenant gives the appropriate notice to end it.

Inspect the premises

The landlord should fill out and sign a condition report within three days of the tenancy commencing and give it to you to sign and make any amendments. It is important that you check the contents of the condition report carefully before accepting it by signing.

Payment and receipt of rent

Generally, rent is payable in advance, usually either fortnightly or monthly. Rent is not payable again until it falls due at the end of the nominated period. How and where the rent is payable should be noted in the tenancy agreement.

Security deposit

A security deposit is the amount of money a tenant is required to pay under a bond. It is security against damage caused by the tenant, unpaid rent, paying to clean the place if it is left unreasonably dirty or paying other costs that are prescribed by law.

The security deposit must be held by the landlord in trust on behalf of the tenant.

Payments

It is almost certain that at the beginning of a lease you will be asked to pay a security deposit equivalent to four weeks rent and pay rent two weeks in advance.

In addition you may also have to pay other costs such as the connection of electricity and telephone.

What you should know when renting

Before entering into an agreement, be sure you understand your rights, duties and responsibilities as a tenant and the rights, duties and responsibilities of the landlord.

Tenants must:

- Pay the rent on time and in the way outlined in the tenancy agreement.
- Keep the property clean.
- Notify the landlord of any maintenance or repairs required.
- Comply with the tenancy agreement.

Landlords must:

- Ensure the property is safe to live in and is in a good state of repair.
- Ensure the property is reasonably secure.
- Maintain all fixtures and fittings.
- Observe the tenant's right to 'quiet enjoyment' of the property.
- The landlord/agent may need to enter the premises for maintenance or inspection purposes. The landlord must make sure that they give you the required amount of notice.

If you have concerns about your rental rights and responsibilities, please contact NT Consumer Affairs on 1800 019 319 or at consumer@nt.gov.au.

For comprehensive information about renting in the Northern Territory, download the [Guide to Renting in the NT](#).