THE FREE GUIDE FROM TINYAMAZONHOMES.COM

The Tiny Home Buyer's Checklist

Everything to verify **before** you order a tiny home or cabin kit — permits, foundations, the hidden costs nobody mentions, and the exact questions to ask the seller. Work through it once and order with confidence.

Five parts · 31 checkpoints · 15-minute read

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PART 1

Rules & permits (do this first)

More tiny-home regret comes from this step than any other. Twenty minutes of phone calls can save you a five-figure mistake.

- ❑ Call your county/city building department and ask the permit-exempt size limit.
  Many areas exempt structures under 100–200 sq ft. Some kits are designed in sections to stay under the limit — confirm whether *connected* sections still qualify.
- ❑ Ask whether your zoning allows an additional dwelling or accessory structure.
  An office/studio is usually easy; a structure someone *sleeps* in often triggers ADU rules — setbacks, utilities, sometimes minimum size.
- ❑ If you're in an HOA, get their rules in writing before ordering.
  HOAs can be stricter than the county and can force removal.
- ❑ Check setback requirements (distance from property lines).
- ❑ If living in it full-time: ask what's required for a certificate of occupancy.
  Insulation, egress windows, smoke detectors, and permanent utilities usually apply.
- ❑ Renting it out? Check short-term rental rules separately.

■ **Worth knowing:** Rules vary wildly even between neighboring counties. The seller cannot answer these questions for you — only your local building authority can.

PART 2

Your land & foundation

Kits ship as materials. What they sit on — and how the truck reaches your site — is on you.

- ❑ Confirm freight access: can a semi truck with a liftgate reach your site?
  Kits arrive on pallets weighing hundreds to thousands of pounds. Remote or steep sites may need delivery to the nearest road.
- ❑ Choose and price your foundation before ordering.
  Concrete piers, gravel pad, or slab — typically $500–$5,000+ depending on size and frost line.
- ❑ Check your ground: slope, drainage, and frost depth.
- ❑ Plan utility runs now: how far will water, power, and sewer/septic travel?
  Trenching long distances is one of the biggest surprise costs.
- ❑ Confirm sun orientation and tree cover.
  Big-window kits like sunroom-style cabins live or die by their light.

PART 3

The real budget (kit price is the start)

A useful rule of thumb: a livable build often lands at 1.5–2× the kit price once everything below is added. Budget it up front and nothing here will hurt.

- ❑ Roof shingles — often NOT included with wood cabin kits ($150–$500+).
- ❑ Foundation materials and labor.
- ❑ Insulation, if you'll use it beyond summer.
  Most wood kits are single-wall construction — beautiful, but not insulated.
- ❑ Electrical: panel/subpanel, wiring, fixtures — and an electrician.
- ❑ Plumbing or alternatives (composting toilet, outdoor kitchen).
- ❑ Stain/paint and exterior sealing — required to protect raw wood.
- ❑ Tools, hardware extras, and a helper for assembly days.
- ❑ Delivery surcharges for remote addresses.

■ **Worth knowing:** Expandable steel prefab units typically arrive closer to move-in ready (some include a bathroom), which is why they cost more per square foot than wood kits.

PART 4

Questions to ask the seller

Message the seller through the listing before you order. Good sellers answer fast; slow or vague answers are themselves an answer.

- ❑ "What exactly is included — and what's excluded?"
  Get the exclusion list in writing: shingles, foundation, glass, hardware.
- ❑ "What's the real delivery window for made-to-order items?"
  Made-to-order cabins can take 30–60 days even when listings show faster.
- ❑ "What's the wall thickness and wood type?" (wood kits)
  Thicker tongue-and-groove planks = sturdier and warmer.
- ❑ "What snow load / wind rating is the roof built for?"
- ❑ "What's the warranty, and what voids it?"
- ❑ "What's the return policy on freight items?"
  Returning a 2,000 lb pallet is not like returning a toaster — know the terms first.

PART 5

Final pass before you order

- ❑ Read the most recent reviews, not just the rating.
  Sort newest-first. Look for repeated mentions of missing parts, delays, or damage — and how the seller responded.
- ❑ Verify the seller and who fulfills shipping on the listing page.
- ❑ Screenshot the listing — price, inclusions, delivery promise.
  Listings change. Your screenshot is your record of what you bought.
- ❑ Confirm someone can be on-site on delivery day to inspect the pallet.
  Note any visible damage on the freight bill before signing.
- ❑ Recount your full budget with Parts 2–3 included.
- ❑ Sleep on it one night. The right home is still there tomorrow.

Ready to browse?

We keep a hand-picked gallery of tiny homes and cabin kits — filterable by budget, with live pricing and reviews on Amazon.

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