



GLYNIS SHAW is joint managing director of French Connections online holiday rentals and property sales

Rental potential

Glynis Shaw advises a reader who is considering buying a house in France to rent out as a holiday gîte

Q I'm thinking of buying a property in France to set up as a gîte. Have you any tips on what I should be looking for as a buyer?
Toby Jenkins, Lincolnshire

A Owning a gîte or rental property in France can be fun and rewarding. There's certainly the potential for grabbing a good deal in the current property market – but perhaps that's even more reason to be clear and realistic in what you are hoping to do with your property.

What you should be looking for in terms of property depends firstly on your own expectations, plans and finances. Do you have the time and resources for a renovation project or would you prefer to buy something ready to use? Even the latter will need furnishing and equipping to the highest possible standard and if you opt for renovation, you'll need to have adequate funding available, not to mention the capability and language skills to undertake the project. There is also the timescale to consider. While renovation is in progress, you won't be earning rental income, so if you know you need an income stream in May and the property isn't finished until September, then you could be in trouble.

Location, location: the old cliché still holds good. Setting and style are obviously important as people must feel the desire to spend their precious holiday time at your gîte – but access is also crucial. Self-catering holiday-makers typically travel to France by car so ideally you should look for a property that is within reasonable striking distance of an *autoroute*. Failing that, find out whether one has been earmarked for construction in the near future. Also, make sure that you research access to railway stations and airports. The ideal situation would perhaps be a location within about 40 minutes' drive of an *autoroute*, a station that links to a TGV line and an airport offering both budget and scheduled airline flights!

Another consideration is who your market will be. Think about your own target preferences – couples, families or groups – and establish whether a potential property is suitable. This will depend on the style of the accommodation, the number of bathrooms as well as bedrooms, the size of the kitchen and living area and the extent of the outside



space. Is there a pool or room to install one? Is there space for children to play and somewhere to store equipment such as bikes?

Check out, too, whether the appropriate type of things to do and places to go are available locally. Eating out, shopping, sightseeing, local life, sports and activities can all be very important to holiday-makers when they are choosing accommodation. They will become part of the total holiday experience that you need to market. Will you let only in summer or do you want to attract winter lets? If the latter, then find out what's available in the area all year round, especially at peak times such as Christmas and New Year.

In my opinion there are three particularly important facilities to consider offering at your gîte in order to meet the current needs and wants of holiday-makers. First is broadband internet access. This may not seem crucial to you but for some guests it can be a deal breaker. Not all areas of France have broadband yet so it's worth asking the sales agent, owner or local computer shop.

The second facility is access to water, whether it's

for swimming in, sitting beside, boating on or cycling and walking by. This might be a swimming pool in the garden, private or shared, or a beach – but it could equally be a local lake or river with *plan d'eau*. The French are often active and innovate in creating 'beaches' to enhance the enjoyment of inland areas of water.

“To be a ‘hands-on’ owner, you need to research events and activities, so you can really get the maximum out of your area”

The third facility is local shops, ideally within walking or cycling distance, but certainly within a short drive. If they are in a village, how viable is their long-term future? Is there a danger that the *boulangerie* might disappear? This really could matter as visitors like to walk for their fresh bread and

croissants as part of the French rural experience. And if you are going to live on site, then of course the local shops will be of interest to you, too.

This, finally, raises another question. Do you plan to manage and let the property from a distance or will you live alongside your guests? If the former, then you will need to make sure not only that the gîte is practical for this arrangement but also that there is a reliable local point of contact for key holding, servicing and responding to emergencies. It would be wise to establish options for this at the time of searching and buying.

If you plan to be a 'hands-on' owner, then you need to research, discover and advise on local events and activities, so you can really get the maximum out of an area that at first glance might seem unpromising. Also, consider what activities you could organise or courses you might run. These days, every gîte needs its unique selling points! ♦

Fact file

French Connections

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