

SLEEP EASY

Sharing your second home with holidaymakers can be a great way to earn money but can also be cause for concern. **Glynis Shaw** offers some useful tips to help allay your fears

These days, many owners of holiday homes in France are looking to cover costs by letting their property to holidaymakers. It is a viable plan, but also quite a big adjustment and owners often feel concerned about whether guests will have the same respect as they do themselves for their precious home and its contents.

Years ago, when I started letting a holiday home in Lot, I too was wondering whether there might be damage or breakages, whether some guests might leave everything in a dreadful mess. The concern is exacerbated by knowing that you are miles away in your home country and any crisis will have to be handled by the local cleaner or keyholder.

Now, after years of working with owners of French holiday homes, I can pass on both my own and their experience, together with a few pointers that will help to ensure that your property is taken care of by guests.

Firstly, some reassurance about the statistics. In 18 years of bringing owners and holidaymakers together, I can honestly count on one hand the occasions when we have had feedback from an owner that guests have behaved inappropriately. And I assume that if an incident is not reported, then it is likely to be pretty minor. I can also think of only one case when an owner complained about specific mess and damage by a guest – and that was the spreading of a great deal of tomato sauce around their kitchen. The cause remains a mystery!

The fact that complaints from

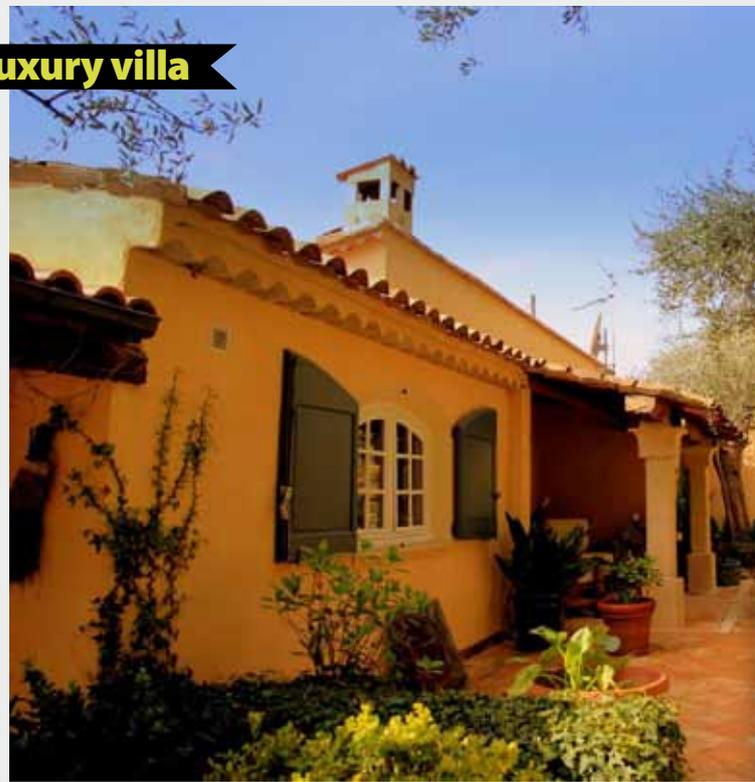
owners about guests are so rare indicates that the statistics in favour of properties being well cared for are favourable. Two factors may be at play here. The first is the nature of the market and the second is that if a property starts off in good shape, then it is likely to stay that way.

The people who choose to holiday in France and to rent a self-catering house, villa or apartment as their holiday home are generally mature couples, prosperous 30-somethings and families, all of them representing the middle to high end of the market. Often they start their holiday ventures to France by staying in hotels, then get more of a feel for the French culture, lifestyle and landscape, and consequently choose to dip into that – and often to ensure their own privacy into the bargain by renting a holiday property.

This type of guest is sensitive to the fact that they are staying in somebody's home. They will definitely respond well to a property that is nicely presented as a 'home from home', a place that feels homely. However, there is a fine balance to strike because for the time they are there, they want to feel that the house is their own. So owners would do well to present the place well, but not in an obviously personal way that reflects too much about their own family and taste.

So much for reassurance about the statistics and the market. Now for some practical advice on measures you can take to ensure that all goes smoothly with your guests and that they leave the house as they found it. ▶

Luxury villa





La Lavande is a stunning four-bedroom villa near Valbonne on the Côte d'Azur that was once the full-time home of Simon Englander and his family. Since 2005, he has been letting it for holidays to international clients, who love the peaceful, secluded location, glorious views and proximity to the coast.

"I am always security conscious," explains Simon. "When I get an enquiry, I send them an email and then I make personal contact by phone. I always have lots of contact before a guest leaves for their holiday.

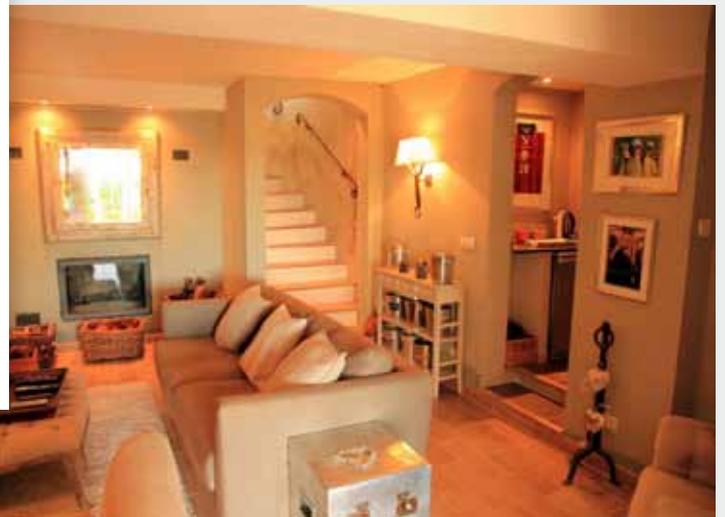
"These days everyone seems to bring their tablet on holiday, so in advance I send a PDF so they have it on their device to refer to – things like keys, fuses, how the gates work. Probably because of good screening and personal contact, we have never had any substantial damage. In fact, I would describe anything that has happened as tiny and insignificant."

Another factor is the returnable damage deposit. La Lavande lets from around £2,000 to £4,000 per week and the deposit is normally between £1,220 and £1,650, depending on the length of stay.

"I give guests the option to send the deposit shortly before their stay, and when they leave my manager organises a thorough clean and check. There could be irritating small things, or children could have broken an item accidentally and hidden it under the bed while the parents are unaware. When I get the report from my manager, I return the deposit as soon as possible.

"There is a lot of trust, but I find that people who are spending at this level are usually genuine and care for the property. Also the house is very quiet, far from the crowds, so it doesn't attract the party set!"

La Lavande is ID 160097 at www.frenchconnections.co.uk



Top tips

1 Make personal contact with guests

When you have an enquiry or booking, have a chat on the phone or at least exchange friendly emails to make personal contact and form a relationship. This will help to make the business arrangement more personal and engage visitors in taking good care of the property.

It's good to pass on your own enthusiasm and to give advice that is to both their benefit and yours. "Don't miss the view of the sunset from the end of the garden," for example, or "Do feel free to water the plants."

2 Make the property attractive

If guests feel that you have taken care to make the accommodation really appealing and have been thoughtful about their needs, then they will most likely respond by taking similar care themselves.

Provide starter basics like soap and washing-up liquid; leave local wine in the fridge; have a selection of books, games, CDs and DVDs; add finishing touches like a bedside clock and a good coffee maker; if possible, have a vase of flowers from the garden in the house.



The people who choose to holiday in France and rent a self-catering house generally represent the middle to high end of the market

3 Keep suggestions and notes friendly

It makes sense to leave two folders of information in the house – one with details of the house, garden and pool, as relevant, and one with local information on places to eat, shop and visit.

Be sure to give your notes a friendly tone and pass on any of your own traditions and rituals. For instance, I used to advise

guests to stroll the vineyards with a glass of wine at dusk, as we would, mentioning a route that was just long enough to last for one slowly sipped glass.

4 Take a refundable deposit

It is standard practice to ask for a refundable deposit to cover for any accidental damage. Owners often set this as a percentage of weekly rent. Generally, guests are

perfectly accepting of this as the norm and it does serve to sharpen their awareness, especially families with young children. Whether all goes smoothly or damage does occur, act promptly to return the funds due to the guest after their stay.

5 Find a reliable local manager

For peace of mind, you need to be able to completely trust the person responsible for keyholding, cleaning and responding to emergencies. It's important to know that an emergency or problem will be handled calmly and efficiently.

Of course, you want to know what's happening at your property, but at the same time you don't want to be trying to manage a crisis from a distance.

Whether your property manager is an individual or a management company, get references and even ask holidaymakers for feedback after their stay. ■

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