



Villa Ty Graignic, Brittany (www.villarenters.com, ref 61100)



Les Oliviers in Arques, Pas-de-Calais
(www.french-country-cottages.co.uk, ref F62120)



Old Salt House, Port Launay, Brittany
(www.frenchconnections.co.uk, ref 152560)

market, and mention seasonal attractions. If there's an interesting history to the property or village then make sure you mention it.

When it comes to presentation of the property and its furnishings, James says: 'If you can, keep it light and neutral and go for understated rather than over the top – it will help it appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Fixtures and fittings don't have to be expensive, but don't go too cheap as it will a) be obvious and b) mean you are replacing items more regularly as they wear out more quickly. Think the decent stuff in IKEA.'

He adds: 'Small touches count for a lot – things like a welcome hamper with fridge and store cupboard essentials are hugely appreciated and for €50 you can build the cost into the rental price and the customer satisfaction is worth much more. A printed list of useful contacts is also a great idea – taxi, local restaurants, pharmacy, etc.'

Glynis Shaw of www.frenchconnections.co.uk continues: 'Identify your target market, consider the style and facilities they will be looking for and make sure that you meet their needs. Thoughtful details create great goodwill.'

Another good idea from Glynis is to 'test drive' the property yourself for a couple of nights before letting, to ensure that everything guests might need is present, in the right place and in good working order.

Building a network of local friends is also a good idea, says Sara Bing, regional manager and owner of two properties (ref W12803 and W13733) in Pas-de-Calais with Welcome Cottages, part of THG. 'Don't fall into the trap of only communicating with other English families living near you. Your real allies are your French neighbours. Make a point of talking to them, even if your language is poor, as they will appreciate your efforts.'

Pricing your *gîte* or villa can be tough to get right, so James Marchant of Villarenters and Rentalsystems advises that you do some research. 'Find properties in the same part of town with a similar specification and use this as your starting point. Think peak, mid and off season and remember things like school half terms and bank holidays when you will be able to charge peak season prices.

'Be prepared to offer discounts – once an empty week has gone it has gone! If your property is empty and there are two weeks to go, then it is almost always worth going to 33% or 50% off. Work out the running costs for the week and if you can make a bit more than that then it's worth doing. The owners who make the most money are those who price sensibly (and that doesn't mean starting too cheap either) and are prepared to discount heavily for last-minute deals. Discounts for advanced bookings and long-term lets are also worth doing. And do not charge extra for items that should be included in the main cost, such as heating the swimming pool – it puts people off.'