

# Live and let live

 Renting out a property in France as holiday accommodation is a popular choice so how do you make yours stand out from the crowd? **Glynis Shaw** shares her top tips for successful letting

If you own a property in France and offer holiday lets to guests – or are thinking of doing so – there are lots of ways of helping ensure it's a success. Here are our 10 top tips for successful strategies, based on years of experience with online advertisers and holidaymakers.

**1 SET THE RIGHT RENTAL RATE**  
Search online to assess the weekly prices charged by other holiday rental owners in your area. Every property is unique but compare like with like as far as you can, and if possible take a drive around to get a feel for the properties and their location.

Set your own rates with the aim of accurately and competitively reflecting the quality, size, location and facilities of the property. Most owners charge a premium rate in peak summer season and at Christmas/New Year, with lower rates for the 'shoulder seasons' of spring and autumn. If you offer longer lets in winter, be prepared to negotiate rents by the month.

**2 KEEP PRICING CLEAR**  
Keep your pricing policy simple and clear. Try to avoid setting too many seasonal variations throughout the year and avoid charging extras – especially hidden extras. Holidaymakers much prefer an all-inclusive rate and resist paying more for cleaning, laundry, etc. An exception to this is optional extras such as meals and activities. Always show rental prices in your advertising, as prospective guests don't like to have to ask and you may lose bookings. Sometimes people will ask for a discount, so have a prepared strategy in response to these requests. Consider setting your prices in sterling for even greater customer confidence in the face of fluctuating exchange rates.

**3 SELL YOUR USP**  
A great strategy is to decide on your unique selling point, which will help clarify the market you are aiming at. Your USP



does not have to be totally unique, it just needs to relate to your particular strength, such as your location, the activities you offer, your luxury or family-friendly facilities, even the warm welcome or extra service you give guests. These days people value good customer service and like to know that an owner will go the extra mile to make sure they have a great holiday. Make your USP prominent in your online advertising description and post testimonials from other guests that verify your own claims, as many holidaymakers really study guest reviews. Emphasise your unique identity by giving your house a name.

**4 SHARE YOUR ENTHUSIASM**  
Feel free to write your property description with a personal touch, especially if you live on-site and will be meeting and engaging with guests. Say why you love the place, how you can help, what your local knowledge can offer guests, that they can be as private or sociable as they wish. Say a little about the history or story of

the property, describe the glorious sunsets or rolling countryside. Make your information accurate and honest but also interesting and enticing, so the reader wants to be there and can visualise their holiday. In addition, give lots of local information – details of activities such as walking or cycling and local attractions like markets and places for a day out. List the dates of festivals, parades, concerts and special events, especially those with regional character.

**5 OFFER GREAT FACILITIES**  
Guests expect good-quality mattresses and bedding, good outdoor facilities with an adequate barbecue and plenty of crockery, cutlery and kitchen essentials. If you're equipping on a budget, make these your priorities. People also appreciate thoughtful finishing touches such as flowers in the room and local wine in the fridge. Make sure what's on offer is appropriate for the needs of your market. For instance, couples tend to like privacy, while families need entertainment and a space that can be flexible to their needs. When planning rooms, think hotel style and introduce colour and personality with pictures and fabrics, but avoid cluttering rooms with excessive ornaments and furniture. Guests will appreciate the feel of a beautiful home for their holiday and they want to feel it's their home for a week or two, so avoid too many personal clues such as family photos.



**6 GOOD MAINTENANCE**  
Make cleanliness your top priority, especially in the kitchen, where the oven, fridge and equipment should be spotless. If you don't live on-site, organising a good, reliable cleaner is key.

If you have a swimming pool, then do ensure that proper pool maintenance is carried out and that the surrounding lounging area is also well maintained for safety and appearance. Arrange cover in case of problems or emergencies and make sure that guests have a contact number that will be answered immediately, or that somebody will quickly return their call and respond to fix the problem.

**7 INVEST IN ADVERTISING**  
Advertise on one or more online listing sites, as many holidaymakers look online to choose accommodation. Check their traffic, search ratings, special promotion costs and features such as the option to click through to your own website. Make judicious use of special offers to boost bookings at quiet times or for unfilled summer weeks. Also make use of the opportunity to get your property noticed by having it featured on the home page or other key pages. Get listed in categories that also get you noticed, such as long winter lets and Christmas and New Year accommodation. In challenging times it's counterproductive to cut back on your marketing spend. Instead, be creative and proactive to ensure that your property is as prominent as possible.



Pick the best image possible for your 'lead' photo and be sure to show the garden and surrounding area

**8 USE THE INTERNET**  
Only make your own website if you can't create or pay for a good one, as a poorly designed or functioning site will make you look amateurish and could put people off. Have a click-through facility from your listing hosts, but don't assume that you can get your site noticed independently without search engine optimisation. Social media can be a very useful tool when it comes to promoting your accommodation, so consider setting up a Facebook page for your property and post regular photos and comments about local events, improvements you're making, special offers, the lovely weather, etc; anything that reminds holidaymakers of you and engages with them positively.

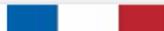
**9 SHOW GREAT IMAGES**  
Take lots of photos in bright conditions and then select the very best so it shows that you've taken the trouble to display plenty of top-quality photographs. Pick the best image possible for your 'lead' photo as this is your crucial image to make the browser want to know more. Choose one that works at thumbnail size, showing the appeal of the property itself very clearly and drawing the viewer in. In addition, be sure to show interiors, especially bedrooms and kitchen area, the garden or land and images of the surrounding area as these show guests the fabric of their holiday – the type of terrain for sports and activities, the potential for sightseeing and the charm of the local area.

**10 BE RESPONSIVE**  
Monitor your enquiries every day on a regular basis. Potential guests can reasonably expect a reply within 24 hours and will assume that you are uninterested or unprofessional if you ignore them for longer. An email reply is acceptable but a phone call is best. Don't miss a selling opportunity because you don't want to invest in a phone call, which gives you the chance to establish personal contact and really sell your property. Build any costs into your marketing budget.

Use SMS alerts to make sure that you know when an enquiry has been received, even if you are away from your own computer, and be sure to log on and read it. Make the most of modern technology! 

**Glynis Shaw is joint managing director of French Connections holiday rentals and property sales online [frenchconnections.co.uk](http://frenchconnections.co.uk)**





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