



## Secrets of success



Want to make sure that your holiday let is a failsafe hit? Glynis Shaw shares her insider advice to keep the bookings flooding in

If you are considering buying a property in France to offer as a holiday let, then it makes sense to be aware of the factors that will make it most likely to succeed. The most successful holiday lets take into account the property type, facilities, and location that the majority of holidaymakers are looking for in France, and are marketed accordingly. Of course, if you already own a French property, you can't change its location, but you could tweak the facilities you offer, or use more active marketing techniques.

### What type of property?

Period stone houses in the country are our most successful properties in France, and are often former farmhouses or barns. They have been sympathetically converted to retain original features such as exposed beams, stone walls and tiled floors, giving bags of traditional character. At the same time, they are furnished and equipped to a high standard with up to the minute comforts and simple modern lines. Furniture

may be a mix of period and modern, and the overall look is usually light and unfussy with splashes of dramatic colour for warmth and interest.

The majority of successful properties sleep between four and six people, so they are ideal for typical families. Larger properties are also popular for extended family parties and groups. It helps here if the accommodation is flexible, as gîtes often are; perhaps accommodating one large or two to three smaller groups.

Prices need to represent good value for the quality and facilities on offer. Of course they vary according to region and season, but we've observed that the average price per guest at full capacity in high season across a selection of successful properties is £165 per week, or around £24 a night. Everyone wants good value for money, and

as an owner, you can be confident of offering guests far more space, privacy and luxury than they would get for the same price in a hotel in most popular European holiday countries.

### What facilities to offer?

We know that access to swimming is important for holidaymakers in France, and yet the majority of our successful properties are in countryside locations that may be some distance from the sea. This makes a swimming pool a top facility. Ideally, a property should have its own swimming pool in a private garden for the exclusive use of guests who are staying, although sharing with the owner or a few other guests is also acceptable. Successful houses that have no pool are usually close to a beach, which may include a lake with swimming beach or a nearby river for wild swimming.

The pool and garden experience can be completed with attractive outdoor lounging and dining areas, with a barbecue and plenty of outdoor furniture. It is also good to provide some children's play equipment and bicycles.

When it comes to indoor facilities, relatively new kitchens and bathrooms have modern fittings that offer more than the basic requirements. In addition to a cooker and washing machine, there are often microwaves, dishwashers and even tumble dryers, while the bedrooms have extras such as a hairdryer.

For entertainment, successful properties offer Wi-Fi internet connection so that guests can use their own laptop or tablet, along with a television with English satellite stations, and a DVD player with a selection of DVDs. Most houses also have heating and some have a wood-burning stove in the lounge. Some properties have unique extras like river fishing, art classes, a fully equipped gym, home-grown organic vegetables and cooked meals to order.

Owners often live on site, or close by, or arrange for a local manager to run their property. This reassures guests that their needs can be met, and any queries they may have can be answered.

### Best location

Our most successful properties are in a quiet rural location, so holidaymakers can enjoy privacy, peace, tranquillity and beauty, surrounded by countryside and nature. But they are definitely not remote, being within walking distance or a very short drive of a village that will have basic amenities such as



a *boulangerie*, a bar, restaurant or weekly market. Holidaymakers also consider it important to have easy access to local restaurants and bigger towns so that they can eat out, shop for food and leisure, explore places of interest and mix with French people, taking the opportunity to hear and speak the language.

When it comes to regions, most holidaymakers are looking for warm weather and sunshine – and they are more likely to drive than fly to their destination; although a proportion prefer to fly-drive, so easy access from main routes and airports is important. Successful properties tend to be concentrated in the west and southwest, especially Dordogne or the Charente-Dordogne border. Tarn-et-Garonne and Languedoc-Roussillon are also popular, as are Côtes-d'Armor in Brittany, Aveyron and also Lot-et-Garonne.

### Marketing techniques

Successful owners create attractive and informative online pages for their property advertisements, using high-quality photographs to their full potential. Most display between 12 and 32 images, showing the exterior of the house and its main rooms, the pool and garden, views of the surroundings, and images of local places of interest or natural beauty. This gives browsers a full picture of the accommodation, entertainment and holiday opportunities on offer, so that they are prompted to book.

Owners also give an appealing written description of the property and its features, as well as the character and amenities of the nearest village and town. They use colourful phrases to describe the feel of the area and landscape, and write concisely but with feeling, conveying an enthusiasm for the property and area that is infectious to those reading the description.

Successful owners recognise that they are running a business and take a proactive approach to marketing the holiday property. On a listings website, they make regular use of techniques that get their property noticed, attract early bookings and help sell any remaining weeks of the season. 'Featured property' slots allow a photo and description of the house to appear either on the site's home page or in regular newsletters to holidaymakers, so they are high profile and grab attention.

Special offers give a discount or incentive for, say, Easter or summer bookings in the early weeks of the year, and are then used to make offers for any unsold weeks as the year goes on. The most effective offers are discounts of 10% to 25%, which are very much noticed by site visitors. Finally, proactive owners display guest comments, which show honest, vetted user reviews that give holidaymakers extra confidence and generate that all-important success. **LF**

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