

# STAYING TREND



## CASE STUDY

La Flotte is a restored manor house with four gîtes and a swimming pool, set in 16 acres of private grounds in Charente-Maritime



As the holiday season approaches, **Glynis Shaw** takes stock of what the market taught us last year – and shares the trends she believes will be popular in 2015

France is consistently among the world's top tourist destinations and its charms have an enduring allure for holidaymakers. But there is no room for complacency, as the tourism market is as subject to change as any other. If you run a holiday rental, gîtes or B&B in France, you always need to keep in mind that holidaymakers have a huge choice at their fingertips, just a click away.

So what can be learned and predicted as we head into the 2015 season? Each year, the World Trade Market produces a travel trends report. It acknowledges that we live in an increasingly unpredictable world where sudden events can have huge implications, but also tracks more stable underlying trends in what holidaymakers are thinking and desiring. Some findings are really worth knowing for property owners and holiday hosts in France.

### French flavours

The first trend is that holidaymakers are looking for value for money combined with more authentic experiences when they visit another country. These experiences include interacting with people who are residents with local knowledge – and also sharing insights over meals made from typical local food. Sampling local food is seen as a good way into the country. By eating with their host, holidaymakers get to meet people and gain a new perspective on the destination.

Where France is concerned, many property owners are offering B&B plus *table d'hôte* or gîtes with regular or occasional communal meals. Guests have the opportunity to share a meal and sample local food and wine, as well as hear about the area and get insights from local knowledge. The experience may be even richer still when fellow visitors hail from

several different countries.

If you already offer this experience, then make sure you give clear and enticing details in your online property descriptions, spelling out the benefits to visitors looking for a taste of authentic France.

### Up close and personal

The second trend identified by WTM is the increasing desire for in-destination services to personalise a holiday.

This includes booking restaurants and activities – the perfect opportunity for owners of gîtes and holiday rentals to go the extra mile and perhaps earn extra income by offering options like a welcome meal, a booking at a recommended restaurant, arranging therapies like massage and organising sports trips like horse riding, golf and cycling. Another excellent personalised activity in France is

**Clockwise from top:** Make use of all of your property's assets; gourmet breakfast baskets give guests an authentic taste of France; good first impressions are crucial; Tim and Amanda Walsh partner up with local suppliers to offer wine-tasting events; they also offer occasional extras for their guests, such as an Easter afternoon tea

winetasting, ideal for bringing guests together and enhancing their stay at gîtes.

When it comes to activities, the WTM says that cycling is taking over from golf as the primary leisure activity for middle-aged men, so cycling holidays are becoming increasingly in demand.

Of course, there are different kinds of cycling but France, as home of the Tour de France, is naturally linked with this so it is an obvious activity to promote.

State clearly if you have bikes available to hire to guests or cycling knowledge to share with them and mention local routes, especially if they are associated with the Tour. ▶

### Charente-Maritime manor

Tim and Amanda Walsh offer holidays at La Flotte, a tastefully restored *manoir* and four gîtes set in 16 acres of private grounds near Royan in southern Charente-Maritime, close to the coast and vineyards.

The Walshes place importance on quality customer service and personalised extras and Amanda offers breakfast and a meal option to guests on their arrival evening. "It's hard to provide a hot meal when guests arrive at different times and want a tour around, so I make life less stressful by offering three cold courses, which will be a savoury tart and big herby green salad with a cheese platter and a very indulgent chocolate pudding. Very fresh, robust flavours all washed down with a decent local wine."

The Walshes also make local wines available in the gîtes for guests to sample and buy. "For guests who are interested in wines, we organise tastings. Gerald, our local producer, comes along and opens up about eight exquisite Bordeaux wines, I provide some hot and cold nibbles afterwards and we all finish off everything we've tasted earlier. It's great fun and Gerald takes orders from the guests and delivers their wine a couple of days later. It helps the local economy and everyone has a nice, convivial evening."

Occasional extras for guests include an afternoon tea at Easter, and all year the Walshes ensure that their online listing spells out a range of local activities that can be organised, like cycling and private fishing in a neighbouring farmer's lake.

La Flotte is ID 100427 on frenchconnections.co.uk



Tim and Amanda Walsh and their family enjoy sharing the French lifestyle with their guests

## Demographics

Our own survey found that the market for France is characterised by three different categories. The traditional markets of mature Francophiles and families are increasingly being joined by younger visitors in their thirties discovering France. This is important for introducing a new generation to the charms of French holidays.

As you might expect, family holidaymakers and established Francophiles are looking for traditional rural holiday rentals and gîtes. Their survey responses indicate that they are attracted to France due to its scenery, food, weather, wine and relaxing atmosphere. Most preferred the south-west followed by north-west and the south, and 73% travelled by ferry or Eurotunnel, taking their own cars.

The smaller but still sizeable audience of urban couples in their twenties to forties are more likely to consider city breaks. They are looking for good food and drink, followed by relaxing and romantic locations in the countryside. Favourite destinations are more broadly spread across the south-west, Normandy, the south and Paris. Their preferred travel method is flying and they like holiday rentals and hotels.

Of all the holidaymakers surveyed, 64%

found travel to be the worst part of holidays in France – factors such as driving, getting lost, congestion, toll queues and hassles with budget airlines. Of course, owners cannot fix these factors, but they can give help with journeys by suggesting routes, recommending quieter roads and advising on where to stop or stay en route. Your listing website may have guides to travel, so help your guests to make use of these.

**Holidaymakers are looking for value for money combined with more authentic experiences**

## Engage with guests

All markets – especially younger visitors – are increasingly using social media, so owners should not be scared to set up a Facebook page for their business. Use it to post news of upgrades and special offers at your property, chat briefly about local events and weather, and share appealing images of your area.

The aim is to engage with guests and potential guests who can 'like' your page, share comments and stay in touch. Keep the information light, brief and enthusiastic, and include a link to your online listing where bookings can be made.

Another big change is in the greater use of tablets and smartphones. Mobile devices are increasingly key in the travel industry for both customer service and bookings. Mobile

bookings are expected to reach 35% of online travel bookings by 2018. You should therefore make sure that your lead photo is clear and eye-catching, create a good headline and, when a booking is made, email the guest a PDF of your property and local information so that they have it on their tablet, which they can bring on holiday.

Consumers who are constantly connected present a challenge to owners to be constantly available and easy to reach. Quick response is key, so give a mobile number, answer the phone if at all possible, or leave a personal message to tell people you'll call back soon – and do it. Have your email on your phone and reply to online enquiries quickly – within hours at most. If you can't give a full reply, send a brief holding reply saying you'll call or email more details later.

So, for marketing success this year, evaluate your existing services and consider new ones, market your property confidently with the emphasis on inspiring photos and enthusiastic descriptions, really grab the viewer and sell them a complete picture of the holiday you offer. Finally, post a spectacular image as your lead photo and put everything in place to respond to enquiries immediately. ■

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