



ADVICE *Holiday rental*

15 WAYS

to boost your holiday rental income

Ian Ravendale gives us some handy hints to get the best out of your holiday home.

A property abroad is an asset that can give you and your family memorable holidays for years. It can also generate revenue as a holiday rental, eventually paying for itself and, if things go right, provide much needed additional income. But are you realising the full earning potential of your property?

Here are a few tips to ensure your villa or apartment is correctly marketed and equipped, to help get you started.

I **Marketing your property correctly is one of the most important things you can do**, says James Marchant of Villarenters & Rentalsystems. "It sounds obvious but take care to make sure photos are in focus and bright and that the rooms are uncluttered. Use the outside shots first in your advert and make sure you include any views that the property might enjoy. Try to work with a website that allows you to upload video; we've noticed a marked improvement in sales if a video is added to listings.

"In the description, keep sentences short but let your enthusiasm show through – imagine you are telling a friend why you bought the place and why you enjoy going there. Capture the local flavour, describe the local bakery, bar and food market. Mention seasonal attractions. If there's an interesting history to the property and/or village then make sure you mention it. Many people rent holiday homes for their authenticity so the more character you can add the better.

Angela Southall at Owners Direct agrees. "Take photographs on sunny days! That's when your property will look at its best."

2 **See who is running activity holidays** in your location (golf, photography, painting etc) and offer to provide discounted accommodation for participants during periods when your rental is likely to be empty, such as winter months.



3 You don't need to show photographs of every room in your house, **a beautiful view** or extra **shot of your pool** will be far more useful than the one of your cloakroom!



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4 Take it one step further and cater exclusively for a particular specialist market,

says Wendy Shand of totsotravel.co.uk, the child-friendly letting agency that has 300 properties worldwide. "There is more of a need for niche marketing in Spain than anywhere else, because there are lots of very similar rental properties on lots of very similar complexes.

"Tap into people who aren't restricted to going on holiday in just July and August. It may seem counter-intuitive to narrow rather than broaden your market but you need to identify what your niche is."

Try and offer something different and if you decide, as Wendy Shand did, that your niche is families with pre-school children, promote the fact that you have access to a good babysitter. Provide cots, bottle warming and sterilising, toys, and DVDs of cartoons. Parasols that can be taken to the local beach to offer children shade from the sun are also a good idea. Make the property as child-safe as possible, with a fence around the swimming pool and toddler-proof locks on cooker knobs and outside doors.

Other niches could include walkers, surfers, cyclists and lots more. Equip the property with books, DVDs, guides, maps and anything else that would be of specialist interest. These are items that are easily removable for standard holiday lets in peak season.



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5 If you live locally to your let and know owners who don't, offer to manage their rentals as well as your own. It could be cheaper for them than employing a large management company to do the change overs, and they will have peace of mind that their property is being carefully looked after.

6 Be responsive – if you get a booking enquiry react quickly! It gives people confidence they are dealing with someone reliable and the sooner you respond the better. Angela Southall says, "Maintain good communication with holidaymakers once they have booked, and go that extra mile for interested parties, as it will encourage repeat bookings or recommendations." James Marchant of Villarenters agrees. "Rentalsystems software allows for instant confirmation – showing live availability and confirmation to the holidaymaker and in our experience, it can dramatically increase booking volumes."

7 If you do short-term holiday lets, market the winter months as long lets. Apartments tend to be easier to find winter bookings for than larger properties, as Vivien Storey, who, with husband Rod, has a rental in Tenerife's

Los Cristianos, explains. "It's usually couples on holiday then, and they do not want to be rattling around in a villa. Due to the warm climate, winter is our busy season and we're always fully booked."

Alison Frank has also successfully tapped into the winter market with her one-bedroom apartment in Benalmadena on the Costa del Sol. "It's near the sea and the town, so it's in a good position. An apartment is ideal for retired couples and there are plenty of them looking for long stays. I can be fussy and won't take families or young people. I only take older couples."

Having a smaller property and using energy saving heating like economy panels or inverters should prevent large energy bills, as Alison Frank confirms. "My apartment doesn't take much to heat during the evenings and the days are usually warm enough."

Conversely, if you normally do long lets and are having trouble finding three- or six-month summer bookings, advertise short lets at holiday let prices.

8 Have an arrangement with a local taxi firm or transfers company for airport arrival and departure runs for your guests. That way your clients won't have to brave horrendous change over day taxi queues.

9 Focusing on the small touches can make all the difference,

says James at Villarenters. "They count for a lot – things like a welcome hamper with fridge and store cupboard essentials are hugely appreciated. It might cost you €50 but you can build this 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 – it's all about putting people at ease and letting them know that they can start relaxing as soon as they walk through the door."



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10 Keep it **light and neutral** when choosing furnishings

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.

11 For some of today's holidaymakers, **WiFi is a must.** Many properties now include it as standard, with the cost being part of the rental. Other owners charge extra for WiFi and you'll need to decide which option to go for. If you're going for a specialist market, how interested would your niche clients be?

Alison Frank says, "Most of my over-50s tend not to bring laptops! I do have broadband in the apartment, though, and have had bookings because of it."

Many Spanish holiday locations have companies who specialise in short-term internet provision. Alternatively, you can have your own WiFi or hardwired internet which interested guests can use at a cost.

12 Arrange excursion referrals. The all-inclusive package has made many holidaymakers less inclined to leave their hotels, reducing the numbers booking trips. As you're offering self-catering accommodation,

you have direct access to clients who are much more likely to go out and about. Mention some noteworthy excursions in your marketing material and include leaflets with your booking confirmation. These could include a referral code that will get them a discount; the company might even pay you a commission.

13 Rooms in holiday accommodation which generally have to be vacated before midday can be problematic for holidaymakers who have an evening flight home. If you don't have new guests following the same day, offer paid late check out. The relief of not having to kick around for 12 hours will be worth £20 to most families, particularly those with young children.

14 Refer guests to luxury experiences. Wendy Shand says, "The private rental market is following the boutique hotel trend and going upmarket. People will pay for spas, massages and the sorts of things that they probably wouldn't at home."

15 Have an informal reciprocal agreement with other local holiday rental owners to swop dates you can't fill. And if your holiday home is in, say, Tenerife, contact owners in the other Canaries and work out a referral system between you. ("Turned on by Tenerife? You'll love Lanzarote!") You could also use these contacts for personal exchanges.



"Offering your guests something special that they may not be expecting is the route to a better holiday for them and extra income for you. Don't be afraid to try out new ideas and discard the ones that don't work."