



An exquisite chateau close to Bergerac (see listing opposite)

House party

A spare room or three in France could add up to a nice little earner running a bed and breakfast, says **Julie Savill**

FPN

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If you love your privacy, don't shine in the mornings and subscribe to the Quentin Crisp school of housework ("There is no need to do any housework at all. After the first four years the dirt doesn't get any worse") this might be the time to quietly turn the page!

If, however, you feel the sociable early bird in you needs

a new challenge, then running a French B&B (or *chambres d'hôtes*) might be your calling.

For most B&B owners in France, this is the way to supplement an income or pension rather than create an entire living. Renting out one or two rooms for one or two nights a week might be as much of a venture into

the hospitality trade as you need. If, however, you are looking at several rooms to let and want to maximise your occupancy, there are different considerations - location being the first.

WHERE IT'S AT

Depending on where you live and how you choose to set up your B&B, you might be looking for year-round occupancy or more seasonal summer trade.

People travelling for work are some of the most likely candidates for a year-round B&B business. If you are in or on the edge of a sizeable town or city, there will be people on business trips. Even post-Covid in this new Zoom world, there is something that happens when people meet in person that simply doesn't happen online. Call it chemistry if you like, but getting together is how we discuss and negotiate most effectively and the thing that people are missing most, even in a business environment, is personal contact. Business travellers are well served in and

around French towns and cities by major chains of affordable but impersonal budget hotels. Those who want something more than an identikit box of a room will choose a B&B for the more personal welcome and the attention to detail.

If your dream is of a lifestyle like the idyllic summer holidays you have spent in France, then a country or village property might be the way to go. This is more likely to attract holidaymakers who are either touring and might spend one or two nights with you or who are looking for something other than a gîte. *Chambres d'hôtes* can work out at roughly the same price as renting a small gîte on a weekly basis but you get your breakfast provided, an on-tap source of local information from your hosts and you'll never be asked to clean the property before you leave.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Nicola Jones and Paul Brown retired from their police careers



Nicola Jones and Paul Brown, owners of Le Patio



€895,000

ROUFFIGNAC-DE-SIGOULÈS, DORDOGNE

This exquisite five-bedroom formal chateau near Bergerac would be perfect for a B&B. The manicured grounds with swimming pool boast uninterrupted views over the surrounding countryside. (See also main image)



€227,900

MIRADOUX, GERS

This chocolate box B&B dates from the 12th century. In the heart of a historic village, it comes with a total of five bedrooms, including a one-bedroom gîte and separate owners' accommodation.



€318,000

BELLAC, HAUTE-VIENNE

Within easy reach of bustling Bellac, this beautiful formal house is set in lovely gardens with a pool. There are currently nine bedrooms, plus several outbuildings with renovation potential.



€1.1M

DURAS, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This quintessential French 'manoir' sits around a very pretty courtyard flanked by towers. It has been completely renovated to a very high standard and provides seven bedrooms.

in their native Scotland and set up home in the idyllic little town of La Tour Blanche in the north of the Dordogne. Their place, Le Patio, has become a home-from-home for dozens of tourists each year who relish the forensic attention to detail the two lavish on their guests.

"We set out by looking at all the things that had been done well in places we had stayed over the years," says Nicola. "When it comes down to it, it really is quite simple. Create the sort of place that you would like to stay in yourself."

For several years now Paul and Nicola have enjoyed stellar ratings on Booking.com, with most reviews coming in as a 10 and an overall average of 9.9! They run two double rooms in their home and have shared

their tips on what lifts a B&B out of the ordinary.

Firstly, cleanliness is key now more than ever, says Nicola. "We've always prided ourselves on cleanliness but this last year we've stepped it up a notch with things like disinfecting light switches and handrails regularly."

The bed is the key feature, so it should be super-comfortable and the linens of excellent quality. "If someone has a good night's sleep, they'll be happy," says Nicola.

The Browns make sure that as many things as possible are

homemade and that there is a choice of items at breakfast. They make all their own jams and yogurts ("people are so appreciative of that") and offer a choice of hot drinks, pastries, boiled eggs, ham etc. "It's the homemade items that get the best feedback every time," says Nicola. "We also do *table d'hôte* so guests can choose to eat their evening meal with us. We did a one-day course with Uniformation which cost €288 and that lets us cook and serve food with wine or beer. It has been massively popular this last year and, even when

restaurants were open, guests have chosen to stay and eat at the *chambres d'hôtes*."

The couple don't skimp when it comes to the food and drink. "We buy fresh ingredients at the local market whenever we can and decent wine from the excellent *cave* at Mareuil," Nicola says. "We also make sure people feel welcome and at home when they arrive. We don't just hand over the room key; we show people to their room, make sure they have the wifi code and everything else they need. We light scented candles and offer free tea,

"Those who want something more than an identikit box of a room will choose a B&B"



€530,000

MARMANDE, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This quirky property is in the heart of a lively village. It has been lovingly restored to provide five bedrooms. Outside there are beautiful walled gardens with a swimming pool.



€344,500

ASSIER, LOT

This charming four or five-bedroom property sits on the edge of a tranquil hamlet in the heart of the Causses du Quercy regional park not far from St-Cirq-Lapopie, a favourite village of the French



€590,000

PUYLAURENS, TARN

This 17th-century townhouse oozes history and charm. There are seven contemporary bedrooms and lovely bright spacious living spaces. A self-contained gite overlooks the gardens.



€360,000

JUMILHAC-LE-GRAND, DORDOGNE

Sitting idyllically on the banks of a river in a touristy area, this established B&B has six ensembles. The current owners have renovated all the accommodation while retaining plenty of character.

coffee or a glass of wine with biscuits or nuts. Guests can take that in their room, in the sitting room or in the garden in spring and summer.”

HOME FROM HOME

Setting up as a B&B is quite straightforward - or has been up until now. See the box (right) for details on moving to France and setting up a business post-Brexit.

The definition of a *chambres d'hôtes* is that you provide furnished accommodation for tourists in your home for one or several nights and with additional services (normally the breakfast). You can have up to five letting rooms that

accommodate up to 15 people so, depending on how hard you want to work, how big your house is and just how much of a house party you want to host there are plenty of options for a decent business and income.

Let us know if you are taking this route. We'd love to hear all about your adventures and if we're ever in your neck of the woods, we'll be booking ourselves in! ■

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POST-BREXIT RULES APPLY

Following the UK's departure from the EU, it is still possible to move to France and to work there too. What's required is a little more of that thing that France has always been so fond of - paperwork.

The first step is to apply, in advance, for a long-stay visa. This covers you for trips of three months to one year.

Once in France you can apply for a residence permit which must be done at your local *préfecture* within two months of arrival. This permit is renewable each year for

five years and then is renewed every five years.

To run a business in France you will need to provide a business plan. It should include the type of business you want to run, your target market, customers and information on the amount of money you may be investing.

It may be beneficial to buy an existing business for a quicker start.

Final details are still being worked on but the UK and French government websites are useful sources of the latest information as the Brexit situation evolves.