



To let: your home for the holidays

Renting out your home can help fund your travel plans, pay bills and mean your property isn't left empty. But is it worth the extra packing?

More of us than ever are watching what we spend and trying to reduce our bills. But what if you could make money from your property, instead of simply cutting back? Covering the costs of a holiday by hiring out your home via a rental agency isn't new, but an increasing number of people are now choosing this option to help earn a little on the side, either by renting out a spare room or an annexe while they are at home, or letting the entire property while they are away travelling or visiting family and friends.

This change isn't about people

renting out second homes; it's about earning income from a primary residence – a trend that has risen post-pandemic and gained traction as mortgage rates and energy bills rise.

'The pandemic and the adoption of remote work has untethered many people from the need to be in an office every day, and offered them a newfound flexibility to continue their work from home,' explains Amanda Cupples, general manager for Northern Europe at Airbnb. 'As a result, people are spreading out to thousands of towns and cities, staying for weeks, months, or even entire seasons at a time.'

REASONS TO RENT

Renting out your home may enable you to experience living and working elsewhere, with the security of knowing your property isn't left empty and can earn its keep while you are away. 'The property owners we work with may be retirees who like to travel, others who have a second home overseas that they tend to escape to during the winter months, or people who want to spend time with extended family. We have properties that we market for as little as six weeks a year,' says Jess Clark, creative director at Unique Homestays, which offers luxury



holiday homes in stunning locations, many of them in the countryside.

For homes like these – period properties or contemporary architectural gems, which require expensive upkeep both inside and out – renting creates a circular economy that helps to preserve the beauty and longevity of the building.

‘We decided to rent out with Unique Homestays for multiple reasons,’ says Kate, who owns The Walled Garden near Bath. ‘Firstly, the grounds are just so magical that we realised this special secret deserves to be shared. Having not received much love since the Victorian period, the garden was a huge project, so renting out the property meant that we could bring in revenue which we were then able to pour back into the garden to continue to fund its restoration and development. I was also eager to have a passion project of my own; one where I’m in charge and can oversee all the decision-making.’

You can earn up to £7,500 tax free by renting out a room or your entire home, as long as it’s your main residence, under the Government’s Rent a Room Scheme. ‘With Airbnb, a typical host earns just over £6,000 a year, and one in three hosts say the

extra income helps them stay in their existing homes by affording rising living, energy and mortgage costs,’ says Amanda Cupples.

While the Government is happy for you to rent out a room or your home, your insurance company, mortgage provider, landlord, or leaseholder may not be as accommodating – so check the terms and conditions of any agreement before you go ahead.

WISH YOU WERE HERE?

Dream holiday lets elevate your everyday experience, providing a setting that’s comfortable but feels like a luxury. ‘Our guests are seeking the antithesis of holiday homes when they stay, so we encourage our owners to be braver in their design choices to create standout schemes,’ says Jess from Unique Homestays. ‘It is not a negative for a property to be divisive in its nature; the more guests feel that they genuinely cannot find similar elsewhere, the higher the demand for such a property will be.’

Unique Homestays has an in-house design team for homeowners that want help creating the perfect look, and has collaborated with brands such as The White Company and Toast to ensure that all the basics –

from towels and linen to kitchenware and candles – meet expectations.

Amanda Cupples agrees that standout design is a selling point. ‘Be bold with wallpaper, and don’t be afraid to add texture or mix patterns,’ she says. ‘Incorporate artwork you love, repurpose wall and ceiling treatments that add visual interest, or add lighting that will make your space feel extra cosy.’

And remember, it’s not just relaxation space your guests may require. ‘We suggest that hosts highlight amenities that attract remote workers, whether that’s a dedicated workspace, great Wi-Fi, or excellent travel connections,’ Amanda continues.

THE SHARING ECONOMY

Part of the charm of a rented home is that it feels real and lived in. But →

LEFT Guests have chosen a home, rather than a hotel, for its connotations of comfort, personality, privacy and ease

ABOVE A frequent traveller, the owner of Rhapsody (and left) likes to feel his home isn’t left ‘sad and empty’ when he is away



there's a difference between a holiday let having personality, and it feeling just too personal.

'Guests are seeking an authentic experience, so while they want a flavour of the owner reflected through the property, they don't want to see their clothes in the wardrobe,' says Jess. 'Only keep items in drawers that might be useful to guests, and remove all personal paperwork. Family photographs displayed in a gallery wall could remain in living spaces, but not in bedrooms. Often owners will have a lockable room where they keep their personal items.'

'At first, I had reservations about renting for reasons of privacy,' admits Tim, who uses Unique Homestays to rent out Rhapsody, his Tudor house in rural Surrey, when he travels. 'I put away all of my personal belongings and store family photos safely prior to a guest's arrival. When I return, the towels, plates, glasses, etc, are replaced with my own.'

'While I'm away, the house and grounds are being enjoyed, rather than sitting sad and empty, and are providing an income which then gets regenerated into the property. This allows me to constantly improve the large gardens, which are such a USP.'

LOVE IT AND LIST IT

Just as with an estate agent's listing, great photos will 'sell' your property to potential guests. While some platforms will provide professional photography, Airbnb lets you upload your own images.

'Make sure your rooms are clean and free of clutter for a spacious look, and take the shots in daylight,' advises Amanda from Airbnb. 'Another tip is to turn your phone on its side and take photos in landscape format, as these display better in your listing. And make sure that you upload hi-res images so they're clear on the page.'

'At Unique Homestays, the photography highlights the idiosyncrasies that define each property,' says Jess. 'The images should set the scene for the style and essence of the home.'

Pictures are only one part of the story; you need to spell out what makes your home distinctive in the listing in order to entice the most guests. 'As you're writing about your place, describe what makes it special,' advises Amanda. That might be features of the property itself, or attractions and amenities close by. Airbnb Categories organise homes by what makes them unique, which

helps people discover places they wouldn't have otherwise found,' explains Amanda. 'This can help alleviate over-tourism by attracting people to new locations beyond the same popular destinations.' It can also put your property on the map, even if it's not in a must-visit hotspot.

When it comes to pricing your property for a holiday let, the platform you choose will be able to advise. It's worth noting that demand for longer rentals is growing – stays of 28 days or more increased by 18 per cent in the first three months of 2023 on Airbnb, across all regions and age groups – and many homeowners are embracing this trend of longer stays and remote working by offering discounts on monthly stays.'

A WARM WELCOME

Your pictures are taken, the listing is written and you have your first booking. Beyond presenting a clean and clutter-free space, it's the details that will generate great reviews and reward you with more bookings.

'I make a real point of ensuring this element of the stay is as unique and personal as possible,' says Kate, owner of The Walled Garden. 'For the hamper, I will pick seasonal fruit



from the hedgerows and garden, such as blackberries, plums and mulberries, to make homemade jam. I also pick figs from the trees in the garden for guests to enjoy, as well as fresh flowers that I make into bouquets to dot throughout the property. When time allows, I will also bake cakes and have been known to surprise guests with a cake still warm from the oven at 8pm after they informed us they'd be arriving late.

'Wherever I can, I will meet and greet guests, too. It's these little personal touches that help to give guests an insight into us as owners and what we enjoy – we want guests to feel as though they are coming to stay in our home, rather than a hotel, and are absolutely welcome.'

PEACE OF MIND

This is your home that you're letting people live in for a while, so you want to feel reassured that you're protected for any damage or loss. Airbnb offers damage protection of up to \$3 million for your property, plus liability insurance of \$1 million in the unlikely event that your guests are hurt in your home. The platform has also expanded its identification verification, with guests going

through an ID process before they can book a stay with you. However, there are exclusions, so read the small print so you know what's covered and what's not.

'Lock personal items away, share your mobile number with neighbours so they can contact you if they have a concern, and set house rules for guests, especially around noise,' says Amanda. 'Parties are banned by Airbnb, and if you believe your guest is going to throw one, you can cancel their reservation prior to check-in without consequences.'

To reduce risk of mishaps when using appliances, heating or the shower, it's a good idea to provide a brief manual for instructions, the Wi-Fi code and any other essential information. Write an inventory of everything that's in each room, and take photos of any existing marks or damage, so you can be sure your home is returned to you as you left it.

STAY IN CONTROL

That counts for everything from the heating, what rooms you allow your guests to use, your rental calendar and who you allow to stay. While Airbnb has default settings, you can set these to suit your preferences. For

example, you can turn off the Autobook setting, so you get to check out potential guests before agreeing a let. You should keep your calendar updated so that you don't agree to a booking on a weekend you thought you would be at your cousin's wedding but which is now next year instead. And set a minimum booking period – if you don't want the hassle of preparing your property for a one-night stay, you can make your minimum booking a week.

Finally, if you're worried about guests leaving your heating on 24 hours a day, a smart heating system will be your friend. You probably wouldn't want to invest in one if you're only renting out for a couple of weeks a year, but if you have one already, you can set it to go on just before a guest's arrival time and check it's not been left on all day.

LEFT Thoughtful details such as cosy throws and fresh flowers in the rooms make your home more appealing for guests

ABOVE Renting The Walled Garden (and left) via Unique Homestays helps to fund the upkeep of the house and garden