

ANA'S TOP TIPS

Having a well-maintained property is really important to avoid potential issues

Get an accountant specialising in holiday lets from the beginning, as it can be quite complex to know what expenses you can claim for

Anticipate and plan for people's needs; we have written a comprehensive guide for how to use everything

You have to remember that the customer is always right. We've had the odd prickly guest, so be mindful that there might be a few tricky situations

Interiors



SPINKS NEST

'WE FELL INTO THIS BY ACCIDENT, BUT IT HAS REALLY TAKEN OFF'

Ana Perez and her husband, Alan, bought and renovated a 500-sq-ft cottage in Norfolk two-and-a-half years ago

Tech executive Ana Perez was looking for a holiday home in Norfolk when a property with a tiny outbuilding presented itself.

"We hadn't thought about it while searching, but realised it could be somewhere for friends and family to stay on weekends," explains Perez.

Fast-forward two-and-a-half years, over 200 guests (and three full visitors' books) later, and it's fair to say that Perez and Alan have forged a characterful and memorable boutique-like setting that has become a destination for proposals and milestone birthdays for people across the UK and beyond.

"It has taken off – but it was completely by accident," says Perez, who spared little expense when renovating the 500-sq-ft cottage using traditional and time-intensive building methods.

There was no choice but to install entirely new services – yet the silver lining is that she's never had calls from guests in the middle of the night complaining of a leak or a faulty boiler. She worked with a local interior designer to bring to life a petite but highly functional kitchen and create a cohesive colour scheme (the inspiration being that it belongs to a fictional gardener) throughout.

The sunken shower-bath, made out of micro-cement, is as far removed from a magnolia bathroom suite as it gets.

A stay at the Spinks Nest costs £200 a night midweek, with a minimum stay of two nights plus £45 cleaning fee.

For that, guests enjoy elevated touches, such as a welcome G&T (or an alcohol-free alternative), toiletries from Haeckels – a luxury natural skincare brand – as well as scent cones and music on arrival care of the Sonos speaker system.

"My husband had this idea that the cottage should touch all your senses, not just visually," explains Perez. "The space is inspired by places we've stayed at and which we would love to stay in."

The couple have busy jobs which mean they don't have time to get involved in the day-to-day running: "We might have three changeovers a week, so we quickly figured out that outsourcing the laundry and cleaning on set days was the best way a local company could service us."

They also set up their own website (spinksnest.bookstorb.com) as well as an Airbnb listing. They tend to attract guests with a taste for considered interiors, and those who meet Perez are often keen to discuss how it all came together and where she sourced particular items.

"It's great when people appreciate what you have done. It was such hard work bringing it to life, and the comments I see in the guest book make it so rewarding."

The renovation project gave them a practice run for their main property, and is now helping fund it. "It's helpful to have this additional income at a time of great expense," she says.



BASEMENT FLAT

'WE ADDED TO OUR INCOME WITH WHAT WE HAD ON OUR DOORSTEP'

Madelaine Cooper and her husband, Peter, moved from south-east London to the seaside town of Hastings in Sussex five years ago



Madelaine and Peter Cooper's Victorian house boasts seafront views and with a self-contained basement flat, was larger than they needed, so they have been renting it out short-term ever since moving.

"We've stuck to Airbnb's original ethos as much as possible – that hosts should be offering a part of their home to guests and not renting out investment properties," says Madelaine, formerly a talent broker for the creative industries. The flat's kitchen and amenities were up to a decent standard, so they invested in a good mattress (which has been replaced with an even better model since) and have prioritised its decor over their own home, elevating it with mid-century furniture and carefully considered embellishments.

"My mindset is 'Do as you would want to be done by' – if the bed is uncomfortable then you're wasting your time," Cooper advises including good-quality essentials such as a hair-dryer and iron, and that it's the small touches that make a difference, such as a home-made cake, fresh flowers and current magazines – "best to under-promise and over-deliver when it comes to delighting guests".

As a freelancer with a portfolio career (she switches from being a humanist wedding celebrant, a career coach and selling interesting properties in the area for the Unique Property Company), and with Peter also self-employed, they see the rental as an extension of their professional work.

"You've got to treat it like a business,

MADELAINE'S TOP TIPS

I've recently discovered washed linen bedding, which requires far less ironing than traditional crisp white sheets

I never take dietary requirements for granted: we always ask if guests would like gluten-free bread or alternatives to dairy milk

One guest complained about Hastings' hills, which we can't do much about, but we have included what to expect in our description of the property and how close or far amenities are so that there's no disappointment when guests arrive

and reply promptly to people, even if it's 11pm a night." The couple undertake the cleaning and changeovers themselves, having found the peripatetic schedule of check-outs difficult to coordinate with an external cleaning company.

And it's for this reason that they switched from no minimum length of stay to two nights: "We only have three hours between check-out and check-in, so doing that potentially daily can be intrusive when it comes to all the other commitments we have."

The Coopers have yet to have welcomed a "bad" guest – "apart from the odd broken glass, our experiences have been positive". So much so that the same faces return annually. Guests they connect with might be invited upstairs for a drink or supper, "but we never intrude and hang around the door, that would be creepy," says Cooper.

The extra income – their rates are from £105 per night midweek (rising slightly on weekends) – helps the couple to pay their bills. "We're supplementing our income with what we have on our doorstep. Doing this enables us to live in a lovely home, and I like making people happy – when people say they've had a lovely time, you feel as if you're doing something good."

They have proudly acquired "Superhost" status on Airbnb. The flat is almost entirely booked-up until the middle of December.

◀ "We like making people happy": the Coopers have prioritised the rented flat's decor over their own home

airbnb.com/h/thebestofhastings



Want to make an extra £6,000 a year from your house?

As the cost of living crisis begins to bite, canny homeowners tell Olivia Lidbury how they are using their property to boost their incomes

With rising energy bills having a knock-on effect on the price of practically everything we consume, if you're not feeling the squeeze now, chances are you soon will. But what if you could earn a passive income, simply by making the most of the four walls around you?

If you have an empty outbuilding, annexe or garage, it could have the potential to provide a fruitful opportunity to create a revenue stream averaging around £6,000 a year, and new

Home comforts: Ana and Alan Perez, with their daughter, at Spinks Nest in Norfolk

research (from IW Capital) suggests that 39 per cent of Britons see passive income sources as a way to supplement their 9 to 5 salary, although the word passive may be misleading when it comes to renting out part of your home.

Airbnb is no longer a novelty, hotels are fighting back and the government is tightening the rules on short-term lets. But hosts who get it right can flourish.

For Lucy Jones, a Sussex-based mother of three working part-time in PR, the chores associated with renting out

her family's garage as an Airbnb might take up time each week, but when Covid affected her husband's travel business, it was a way to top up the family finances. "And it has allowed us to do things we wouldn't have been able to," she says.

Last year, the former home office, which they spruced up with storage cupboards and a kitchenette, generated around £4,000 in income.

"Meeting new people adds a funny dynamic to your life," says Jones, "but it can be sensitive because it's your home –

you want everyone to have a nice time. One guest complained that he kept hitting his head, but you can't ask people how tall they are when they book."

Scroll through the holiday listings site Airbnb (and its more upmarket competitor, Plum Guide) and you'll see that there is no shortage of people being entrepreneurial with their extra space. So how do you stand out? John Severino, UK country manager for Guest Ready (guestready.com), a management company for short-term lettings, advises making a space feel lived-in with home comforts, rather than starkly basic.

"Another selling point is highlighting any special features, so if you have a garden or a private outdoor space, or a bathtub, then put that as one of your main photos," he says.

He also suggests highlighting sought-after amenities, such as fast Wi-Fi and if the property is pet-friendly, as well as noting distances from airports and rail stations, as Airbnb won't list exact addresses for security reasons. Then there's the tricky balance to strike of being a welcoming host without being overbearing: "It's good to make yourself available, but remember guests are there to have a good time on their own and not necessarily to hang out with you," he says.

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Keep your mortgage lender in the loop. David Hollingworth, a spokesman for L&C Mortgages, says that mainstream residential mortgage lenders will expect that the property is only used by

'Meeting new people and the kids going over to say hello adds a funny dynamic to family life'

the owner and won't be let out. Some, however, such as Metro Bank and Barclays, recognise the desire for Airbnb on a casual basis and allow a part of a home to be rented for up to 90 days per annum. "Many will want to be sure that there won't be any formal tenancy in place and that those renting the property won't have any long-term rights. Other things to look out for will include ensuring that buildings insurance will not be invalidated, a requirement of a mortgage lender," says Hollingworth.

According to David Hannah, group chairman at Cornerstone Tax, you should register with HMRC as soon as you start trading if you expect to earn more than £1,000 from self-employment (which this can be classed as), even if you are renting a room in your house. Saving for tax is crucial: "Work out what your personal top rate of income tax is and put away that percentage every month," advises Hannah.

Remember that you can deduct expenses on your earnings for utilities, internet, laundry, cost of repair and redecoration of the room and the fixtures, fittings and linens provided, as well as the cost of providing breakfast if that is offered.

Dig out your deeds. Is your home leasehold or freehold? If it's the former, you could be in breach of your lease if you rent it out. If in doubt, speak to a conveyancing solicitor.

Do you need to let your neighbours know? If there is a shared entrance or your front doors are in close proximity, this may help get them on-side with the stream of ever-changing visitors.

FINISHING TOUCHES...

Aller Dorset

The pair of luxury shepherd huts in Dorset decked out by a former luxury fashion PR might be small, but they pack an almighty punch on the decor front. Co-creator Cat Earp has made some of the sumptuous headboards, vibrant cushions and cocktail-worthy glassware available to buy online.

Maddie cushion – Dandaloo (£135) alldorset.com



Hot Pottery pasta bowl – pistachio (£20) alldorset.com



Bias Editions tumbler (£32) alldorset.com



Kip Kiosk

From the founders of Kip Hideaways – a members-only platform which handpicks stylish and under-the-radar places to stay across the UK – Kip Kiosk is a curation of the artisan-made pieces which feature across its collection. From unique ceramics to quilts to cherish, it's also a destination for gifts with meaning.

Bone china pots (£33-£42) kiphideaways.com



Daisy edge plate (£26) kiphideaways.com



Paper Icelandic poppy (£25) kiphideaways.com



Soho Home

With ranges inspired by its Houses worldwide, there's a Soho Home interior to suit everyone's taste. With a leaning towards contemporary furniture, you can buy the wiggly bed found in its Paris outpost, to the green glass chandeliers created for West Hollywood.

Amelia ceramic vase (£295) sohohome.com



Paris metal bed (£6,201) sohohome.com

Casa De Folklore small bowl (£20) sohohome.com

