

Saint Antonin Noble Val Owners' Clubs



Twelve top tactical tips for travellers taking a trip to south west France (before take off!!)



So you want to rent a holiday home in south west France: Here are twelve things to check before you book to ensure your holiday is all that you wish it to be.

- **Location, Location, Location:** OK this phrase has been a bit overused, so how about **Situation, Setting, Scene?**

What kind of locale would you prefer, remote with beautiful views across the countryside, rural surrounded by green fields or even slightly urban just a short walk to the cafes, restaurants and shops Don't forget if you want remote or rural you may not get a mobile phone signal and nipping to the pub or dinner

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at a local restaurant or popping to the shops can mean twenty to thirty minutes in the car, so don't forget the milk/wine/bread/reservation!!

What type of property are you looking for? Brand new all white IKEA or homely and lived in with French characteristics but English bathrooms? What do you want from your holiday? Lots of historic places to go, close to the sea, peaceful fishing, the excitement of kayaking in some of France's great rivers or a quiet tranquil garden with a fabulous pool and a good book?

- **Communication:** Always try and speak to the owner/manager of any self-catering accommodation in person or email your questions (they won't mind) to make sure it is going to meet your requirements in full so as to maximise your holiday experience. We pride ourselves on helping choose your holiday heaven either through emails or phone conversations, we know the house, its location, its best points and its foibles? So should everyone else that runs this type of business!
- **Home Comforts:** Facilities vary greatly so check what's available, if its not on the advert or web site.... just ask!! Some places will have washing machines, TV's with UK satellite channels, broadband Wi-Fi, well equipped kitchens etc while more basic accommodation might not. Most properties should also offer childrens' DVDs, toys, books and games and don't forget the adults! (It does occasionally rain here in the summer months).

The more equipment available the less you have to take. If there is a large fridge freezer the less shopping you will have to do. If there is a washing machine, you won't have to pack as much, as you'll be able to do washing whilst your away, or there may be a laundry service you can utilise for a reasonable extra charge? Don't hesitate to ask those additional questions, have a think about what will make or break the perfect holiday?

- **How much will Michael O'Leary charge me for that?** Think about the general supplies you will have to take with you either in the car or on the aeroplane. (Don't forget loading it all in to the economical hire car you have requested at the airport with its economical boot)

Some venues supply everything from bed linen, bath and swim towels and toilet roll, to a welcome hamper. At others you have to provide everything yourself, including t-towels and a sharp knife!.

Make a check list before you go so you don't forget anything vital. Don't forget weight limits, when going home you would be surprised how much a good saucisson or deluxe cassoulet weighs.

- **Let them eat croissants:** Ask about the nearest food shops, and equally important their opening times. Will it still be open when you arrive? Even in this day and age in south west France most shops close Sundays and an awful lot stay closed until Tuesday. Will there be a welcome pack including

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some essentials (such as a very cold beer straight from the fridge) if you are hot, tired and a little stressed?

Can you arrange for a supermarket shop to be provided at your holiday home on your arrival day.

Do you have special dietary requirements? South west France is still not totally tuned in to vegetarian, vegan, low carb, irritable bowel syndrome, skinny latte goats milk chocolate, so again just ask the owner or manager for their help and advice.

All these little extras will help to make your arrival stress free, allowing you to just get right on with enjoying your holiday.

- **And the baby came too:** Ask about any baby equipment you may need such as a cot, travel cot and if the bedding is provided for these. Will you need a high chair. Do you need a stair gate or black out blinds. Is it included in the price or do you have to pay extra? Are there any secure recommended local babysitting services?

All these issues can easily be addressed by a call or email to the owners or managers before you confirm, don't forget trying to ensure your peace of mind and confidence level that it's the right holiday location and accommodation for you.

Whilst on the subject of additional guests what about pets? In France it is now illegal to refuse to accept pets in a holiday home. Is there an additional charge or special rules, check before you sign! (The French have not actually defined a pet so I have no idea what rules there are for a boa constrictor or a black Vietnamese pot bellied pig.)

- **Extramural activities:** It's always good to have a pool and garden or outside space if you're staying in self catering accommodation. If so, check that it is child friendly and the garden is enclosed and the pool has French specification security (alarm or fence). Never forget to read the swimming pool rules. Ask about pool depths, has it got a deep, deep end or is it the same level all over and if so what? Are garden toys or equipment such as swings, trampoline, table tennis provided. Are there enough sun beds for your party? Is the pool checked and /or cleaned during your stay?
- **Love thy neighbours:** If you're going away with family or friends, think about what type of holiday you want. Will you be doing everything together or having some time apart? Do you want to go for accommodation that is big enough for all of you or would you prefer separate but neighbouring accommodation? (Don't forget that sleeps twelve doesn't mean it can, feed twelve, seat twelve, sunbathe twelve or provide enough hot water to bathe twelve!!)
- **Are we there yet?:** Good directions are vital Getting lost on the back roads of rural south west France is not a lot of fun, especially late at night bursting

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for the loo, with kids squabbling on the back seat and the designated driver strangling the steering wheel.

There is now an assumption that everyone has GPS of some kind. If you don't (and even if you do) it's worth reading the website/email directions carefully before you leave home. Check on Mappy or just...ask. Owners or managers will help. If GPS is useless, (a lot of properties are "in the middle of nowhere", try putting that into a satnav) request detailed information, especially if arriving late or after dark .

If you are planning a late arrival don't forget to ask the owner or manager to leave some outside lights on for your arrival!

Days out are always a exciting part of the holiday...even if its not raining. Does the owner/manager offer suggestions for interesting visits to local towns, lakes, museums, theme parks and of course restaurants?

- **Home sweet home for a week or two:** When you arrive, can you park close by to unload, and then to actually park – what are the arrangements? This is particularly relevant if you are bringing small children and all their paraphernalia. How quickly can you gain access to the house? Are you being met and shown around or do you have to gain access with a key hidden in some secret hiding place or safety deposit box somewhere obvious or perhaps less so in the dark after a 12 hour drive! Don't laugh – this really can happen. Do you have the owner/managers contact details to hand to inform them of delays, or for directions if you get lost and do they operate 24/7 if you have problems?
- **Vous parlez Francais?:** Do you speak French? Will you need a phrase book? Will the instructions to the property, pool rules and the house book be in your language and will the people meeting you be able to speak your language, or you theirs? What contingency planning will help overcome any potential obstacles you may face?

Is there someone local to your holiday home to call if there is an emergency or a problem, someone that can talk with you and then speak to the French doctor, emergency services or police??. Make that all important contact with the owners/managers before your booking and definitely before your arrival just to make sure all your questions are answered so in case of an emergency you have someone by your side.

- **The Bible:** Do the owners/managers provide a house book? Places to eat and drink, places to visit, bank holiday dates, up to date fetes, brocantes, markets, emergency numbers for lost credit cards or passports, doctors and just about everything else you may need on your holiday.

Have a fabulous self catering holiday in south west France!

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There is no doubt that renting a holiday home can be both an administrative and practical nightmare. By making use of a local rental company with bilingual staff, expertise and resources it will help to ensure peace of mind

With years of experience behind us we are confident that this guide will help you choose the right property for your family and friends.

We now have three successful franchised "owners clubs" operating rental management companies and we are always on the look-out for more.

For more information about our operations go to:

<http://www.midipyrenees.me> or <http://www.ownersclub.me>