



How to series

How to run a B&B

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—LLP—

Are you thinking of buying a B&B, Guest House or small Hotel or have you just bought one? Here are some things to think about.....



People taking short breaks or longer holidays are looking for good quality, well-equipped places to stay. Gone are the days when guests had to leave the B&B after breakfast and not return until the evening; establishments have guest lounges and often allow use of their gardens.

First and foremost, you should enjoy meeting and dealing with people. This sounds like an obvious thing to say but there are some establishments that just want the money and feel they are doing the guest a favour by letting them stay!

A B&B should be clean and comfortable. You'd think this would be a given, but if you look on Trip Advisor and other review sites, you'll be amazed at the amount of negative comments left with regard to the general cleanliness of the accommodation.

A Warm Welcome

Guests may have travelled a long way to get to your B&B and after a long journey, a smile and genuine welcome makes a big difference. Guests often don't think to call ahead and warn an owner that they are stuck in traffic or held up and will be late arriving, so you need to be accommodating no matter how irritating it may be at the time. Guests often assume that because you live on the premises you will be there to let them in no matter what the time.

Minimise any issues by clearly stating arrival times and providing a contact number so guests can call you in case of any problems.





Good Quality

The quality of both food and accommodation is extremely important to visitors.

Food

Many owners now source their produce locally and offer a choice of breakfast, whether a cooked Full English or a lighter continental option. Ensure you offer the facility for guests to advise you of any dietary requirements (vegetarians, diabetics, gluten free, nut allergies, etc.), so you're prepared and have appropriate dishes available.

Rooms

Should include tea and coffee-making facilities and must be cleaned daily. If the guest is staying longer than one night, ask if they mind you moving belongings when cleaning and if they do, then clean round them. People do not take kindly to instructions being disregarded.

Accommodation

Good quality fixtures and fittings, linen and towels all give a sense of luxury and makes the guest feel as if they have gone somewhere 'special'. These are particularly important if you charge a premium rate for staying at your establishment. For instance, guests often comment on the luxury of 100% cotton sheets as opposed to polyester.





Marketing

It's not enough nowadays to put an ad in a directory and sit back and wait for bookings. You need a modern, user-friendly website which preferably incorporates an online booking tool so people can book direct. This saves you having to pay commission to other booking sites – some charge around 15 per cent per booking; that's 15 per cent extra you could earn. Many B&Bs now offer their best rates if booked direct and advertise this fact on their websites.

To reduce the amount of trade that goes through agencies, you need to make sure your website has the best possible ranking in the search engines, particularly Google. It is worth paying for some on-going search engine optimisation (SEO) for your website, to increase your search visibility and get you the best results.

Links with local and national tourist boards are also very helpful. It may be worth advertising on their sites, as visitors new to an area often visit the tourist information websites before deciding where to stay.

Trip Advisor & other online review sites

Love it or hate it, Trip Advisor carries a lot of weight with people looking for nice places to stay. Most people understand if there are one or two negative comments about their B&B, but they need to be balanced in amongst a healthy dose of positive posts. If there are lots of negative comments, the issues must be addressed and corrected. If you are new owners, make a point of telling people who you are and that things will improve going forward under your new management.

If anyone does leave a comment about your B&B on a review site, wherever possible try to respond with thanks or by addressing the complaint. If a negative comment is unjustified, don't start an online argument. Instead, suggest the complainant contacts you to discuss their experience. This will demonstrate your concern and willingness to deal with issues to other site users.



Day-to-day duties

Even though it may be your lifestyle choice to run a B&B, it doesn't run itself. It requires some hard work and commitment. You'll probably be up early preparing breakfasts, you'll need to clean all your rooms, offer suggestions on places to visit, monitor bookings daily, be around to say goodbye to guests and to greet new arrivals. This doesn't leave a huge amount of time in the day to go off and do other things.

If you are looking to trade on a limited basis, remember that the income has to cover the mortgage repayments and your living costs *all year round*. You are, at the end of the day, running a business and it needs to be profitable. If you decide at some point to sell up and the B&B hasn't made a good profit, it will affect the value of your business and ultimately make it much harder to sell.

Finances

Whilst good quality doesn't come cheap, bear in mind that you still need to make a living out of the concern. You need to keep good financial records of your income from bookings and the costs involved. It often pays to have an accountant draw up your year-end accounts and to make sure you claim for everything you are entitled to. This will minimise your tax burden and can often make the difference between a viable and non-viable lifestyle. You also need to monitor what your competitors are charging, so that you stay in line with local rates. It may even be worth networking with other local owners so that should they receive any enquiries when they're full, they can pass them to you and vice versa. A win-win for both parties.

Enjoy

Most of all, you need to enjoy running your B&B! You will meet a wide range of diverse personalities and life will never be dull - possibly hard work, but never dull!

www.stewarthindley.co.uk