

How British gîte owners are changing tactics as the cost of living bites

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Brexit, rising taxes and fewer bookings are eroding the earnings for owners of French holiday lets — so they are having to get creative



La Maison Rose in the Tarn-et-Garonne

BEL CREWE

The vibes at Bel Crewe's gîte couldn't be more different. [La Maison Rose](#), a pink semi-fortified manor house in the Tarn-et-Garonne, has been in her family for 40 years. In the village of Miramont-de-Quercy, the hilltop gîte dates to the 12th century. Crewe, 59, whose day job is manager for a charitable foundation in London, has taken over the running of the place as her mother, Sally Ashburton, is 90 and widowed. Because they live in the UK, they have to pay for full-time management of the house and one-acre garden — about €50,000 a year — and let it to cover costs. When Crewe approached Gite Guru for advice, they advised her to get classified by the French tourist board to lower their taxes —this requires that you pass an inspection and provide things like sockets by bathroom sinks and grab bars in the shower if they wanted a high star rating. For their niche, Springfield advised them to make the most of her family's incredible history.





The art studio

BEL CREWE

Crewe's grandfather was the artist John Spencer-Churchill, nephew of Winston, with whom he used to paint. The house is filled with art, including her grandfather's landscape paintings, as well as a smattering of Winston memorabilia. So last year the family started offering an art week — the next starts on June 10 — during which guests (the gite sleeps 14) paint in the studio and en plein air under the guidance of the artist Francesca Shakespeare. Vistas include the Pyrenees, sunflower fields and her mother's garden, which has a pond fringed by lavender; artists booking at other times of the year can also use the studio.



Sally Ashburton painting a mural at La Maison Rose

BEL CREWE

Crewe's mother was a textiles designer in the 1980s and 1990s, and her floral patterns give the gîte the feel of an English country house in France. "You enter a courtyard through these old carriage doors. Once you shut the doors behind you it is like being in Narnia, you are in a little sort of oasis, your own kingdom," Crewe says.

