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The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to Gîte Changeovers

Your house is up together and you have bookings for the summer. The money is coming in. You have someone, maybe even a team, on hand to deal with the changeovers. What should you expect of them? What should you do, as the owner, to ensure they can perform their tasks on time and to a satisfactory level?



A changeover day always has the potential to be frantic, even with a small property that doesn't take too long to prepare. It is therefore necessary to *ensure adequate time is allowed* for that preparation and that the day is planned in advance. We strongly recommend that the outgoing guests should be gone by 10h00 and that the incoming guests should not expect the property to be ready before 17h00. Different times can be agreed *by the team* of course, but your contract should be clear on this matter.

Your contract should also state that 'damage' includes unreasonable dirtiness, excessive rubbish left behind etc. It is a sad fact that the British have by far the worst reputation in this respect.



Don't just assume everything is OK after guests have left and return the damage deposit, only to find out a couple of days later that there was a problem. You'll probably want to deal with these matters promptly, and a speedy return of the deposit helps to generate good reviews on your website. **You should insist that the cleaner/management company emails you to confirm that the outgoing guests' damage deposit is safe.** Get them to email the guest as well - it's good PR. When there is a problem, *photographic evidence should be available as most guests who face losing their deposit argue about it.*

Any decent commercial website will delay bad reviews from being posted until they are satisfied that the complaint is justified, so photos and emails from your team are essential.



Some damages are a matter of judgement. A broken kettle lid is hardly serious, albeit a nuisance because of the need to replace it quickly. More serious damage will require some sort of *post mortem*. Some will clearly be accidental, some sheer recklessness. Broken wine glasses, for instance, are just wear and tear. All but the most minor breakages should be reported to you for *you* to make the judgement.

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The devil is always in the detail, so it's a good idea to [have the team fully briefed on how many guests will arrive and what bed configuration is needed](#). Don't just assume that two adults will need just one double bed. Four adults may in fact prove to be Mum, Dad, and two adult-ish children, so two doubles doesn't fit the bill. If babies/toddlers are arriving, safety gates, cots, high-chairs etc. may be needed. It looks unprofessional and haphazard to be rushing around putting things like this right after guests arrive.

The guests should ideally be greeted by a member of your team.

First-time visitors to France may well be confused by even the simplest things - they need some reassurance. In any event, important information can be imparted. The location of the water stop-cock; fuse board; pool safety measures; rubbish collection; explanation of the washing machine (the handbook will probably be in French); how to connect to the wifi; local parking restrictions that may apply; location of shops and opening hours; what to do with the keys on departure (assuming they leave before the team arrives on departure day); who to contact if there's a problem with the property; and any other matters that arise. And any errors with beds and/or towels can be corrected with minimal delay.



All the above items should be in a guest handbook, and maybe even emailed to the guests when they confirm the booking. You'll be surprised how many will read it. Tourist information should be in abundance as well. A guest-book, for hopefully nice comments, is standard. But beware. If bad comments are left (and on some rare occasions, even obscenities) tearing them from the book can look even worse than leaving them in because the reader will speculate as to what was written that he's not allowed to see. Most information should be in English, French and as many other languages as you like!

The Meet & Greet is also a good opportunity for the team to establish how the guests are likely to treat the property. Any guests that ask about cleaning when they leave will present few problems. Some even offer to start the laundry before they go!

The Meeter & Greeter should inform you the guests have arrived and are happy. Or not as the case may be. You need the peace of mind that all is well. Equally, you need to be forewarned if guests are unhappy for whatever reason, whether justified or not.

If you have a pool, ideally it should be cleaned on changeover days, though the day before is usually OK. But not the day after! A clean pool is a welcoming sight for weary guests. If pool cleaning is needed mid-term, let them know roughly when it will be done.



Maintenance can be an issue when there's insufficient time on changeover days to deal with it. The Meet & Greet can be used to establish when will be convenient for any essential work to be done. The cleaners and maintenance people must communicate with each other. Cleaners should be aware of most issues even if outgoing guests haven't reported any problems.

Adequate cleaning materials/tools should be available to guests to allow them to look after your house. *If a vac, mop and bucket, and basic cleaning fluids and cloths are available, there's no excuse for unreasonable dirtiness when they leave.*

How the house is presented is to a large extent dependant on personal taste. Do you want towels in the bathroom, or folded neatly on the beds? Pillows on top of the duvets/sheets, or underneath? All beds made even if it isn't a full house? All bedding ironed, or just the bits that show? *Insist that the pillow cases match the sheets that match the duvet.* You'd be surprised how many cleaners lack even this basic skill. How many loo rolls? Just one per loo, or half a dozen? **Give clear instructions.** Ensure that all bedrooms are presented in the same way. It just looks that much better. Cushions nicely pumped up and arranged on the sofa always instils a feeling that someone cares. Indeed, when **Handyman France** goes into a recently vacated house, cushions are the first thing to be checked. If guests have left them tidy, all will be well in the house. If they're just thrown onto the sofa, the rest of the house is usually a tip.



Be careful not to overload the team with requirements that may seem minor but in fact become onerous. If there's a BBQ, don't tell guests that charcoal is provided because someone has to go and buy it. Similarly, having milk, bread, butter and cheese awaiting them is a nice idea, but who's going to get it? And at what cost?

Travel arrangements can often go awry and if guests arrive at awkward hours the Meet & Greet may not be feasible at the actual time of arrival. Have a key-safe installed so that entry isn't delayed while they wait for someone. But only issue the code on the day in case it's been necessary to change it.



Cleaning an entire house from top to bottom, as well as changing all the beds, is quite a challenge. When a tight schedule is also factored in, the task becomes daunting. It should be remembered though that because it is done so regularly, the house should never be so dirty as to need intense cleaning in any area (assuming the last guests weren't second generation Clampetts). Properly organised, no time should be wasted playing hunt the thimble for some illusive article that wasn't thought about in advance or is kept too far from where it's needed.

Allow the cleaners to have the system of their preference for storage of bedding etc. It's them who will be doing the work after all! Whilst clear instructions from you as the owner is a good idea, don't be too pedantic. **Handyman France** once had a client with OCD. She could not understand that the guest neither knows nor cares that the salt and pepper pots should be 3cm from the kettle and at a 45° angle to the hob!

With adequate planning and organisation, changeovers should run to schedule. Guests will arrive to a house that is well presented and clean. And calm. With everything done. To a high standard.