

SELF-CATERING ACCOMMODATION IN AGRITOURISM

Introduction

Tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors. In 2018, it generated an estimated €5.6bn-€7.3bn for the economy. Increased flights to regional airports are improving accessibility to rural areas. Rural tourism can contribute enormously to different product offerings, such as: eco-tourism; health-related holidays; leisure pursuits; and, cultural, heritage and environmental experiences. Glamping pods, yurts, etc., may be a suitable

diversification option for farmers, landowners and/or rural businesses. Glamping has become a popular attraction for Irish and overseas holidaymakers seeking the luxuries of hotel accommodation, alongside the freedom and adventure of camping. Self-catering is a seasonal enterprise, usually from May to September. Many providers have found ways of extending the season by offering weekend breaks at other times, e.g., Christmas. Other self-catering providers offer products to boost income, such as farm produce, and breakfast and/or dinner in the farm home.

Marketing tips

- 1) **Photos:** put some money aside to buy a decent camera or pay a photographer. Put some open magazines in the shot, or a glass of wine, to bring a sense of friendliness.
- 2) **Video:** this is a good way of sharing the experience of a stay at your accommodation. Show the experience though, not a guided tour of the bathroom. It doesn't have to be super professional, just interesting.
- 3) **Website:** must be mobile friendly and have instant information regarding availability, as well as a booking system. Showing people when you are not available is as important as when you are

because you don't want people to have a bad experience. Do not enter into protracted negotiations about booking over email. It is important to connect your booking engine to other sites you feature on.

- 4) **Social media:** make sure you are capitalising on all buttons and calls to action. On Facebook, you can put a "Book Now" button that will connect to your booking engine. Don't duplicate content across channels. It's a bad user experience and it will hinder your Google ranking. Write your blog, refer to it from Facebook and promote a link to it on Twitter.
- 5) **Navigation:** it's important to give accurate directions. Sometimes eircodes

Marketing your self-catering accommodation



Marketing is very important

There is considerable demand for good self-catering accommodation in pleasant surroundings. It is difficult and expensive to market as an individual product, so it is important to be approved and achieve the highest available star rating. Approval and inspection are through Fáilte Ireland, which automatically creates linkage for marketing with the organisation. All listed self-catering properties are now approved as part of Fáilte Ireland's Welcome Standard Quality Framework. Most providers of self-catering accommodation offer complimentary extras to guests, such as a 'starter-pack' on arrival of tea/coffee, milk, a few pats of butter and some bread or scones, and even a bottle of wine to guests who stay regularly. Families often like to know about local farmers' markets.

01: Self-Catering Accommodation in Agritourism

can cover a big area. Go out and drive the route to your own property.

- 6) **Test the experience:** people won't always tell you about the small things that might hinder a stay. When the room is unoccupied, go and sleep in it yourself, so that you can check everything is working and comfortable.
- 7) **Clear terms and conditions:** share terms and conditions with guests when the booking is agreed. If the contract is there, there needn't be any confusion about payment terms or cancellation policies. Likewise, with rules of engagement, give guests a heads up about anything they need to know before the visit. Especially on a working farm, sometimes there will be additional noises or fields that aren't suitable for walking.
- 8) **Insurance:** make sure you are covered.
- 9) **Press coverage:** a new cottage is not news, so you have to think creatively if you want coverage. It's the inverse law of

PR. The wackier the idea, the more likely it is to get noticed.

- 10) **Don't go it alone:** speak to your local authority tourism agency. Most county councils have a tourism section, which can help you with promotion. You can register your accommodation with Fáilte Ireland and use its quality assessment schemes. They will help you ensure your property is top notch, and give you more of an idea about guest expectations and marketing.
- 11) **Trip Advisor:** embrace it and hope it works to your advantage. Respond to challenging reviews, and if you can find the time, respond to good ones too. If you have a tricky guest, you should work harder to make sure they have a good stay.
- 12) **Enter awards:** look for things that don't cost money, but may take a bit of your time instead. Entering local tourism awards can lead to great press coverage.

Pricing

Selling nights in rooms and cottages is different to selling shop merchandise that will still be there to sell tomorrow. It might sound obvious, but it helps focus the mind when looking at price and how to market your accommodation. When pricing, look at the local area and compare your prices to what your competitors charge. Look at your standard of room on offer and price them to fit different budgets.

If you want to keep busy out of peak season, you must be a bit more creative, such as offering three nights for the price of two. The other thing to consider if you do a winter deal is that the people may come back or tell their friends. Word of mouth is powerful.



Consider special offers during less-busy periods.

Financial returns, costs and margins

The margin in **Table 1** does not allow for own labour input. The revenue shown would be for a good quality unit in a good location, furnished to a high standard and well marketed. When contemplating an investment as outlined in **Table 1** consideration should be given to the possibility of developing two or more not necessarily attached. Trends are indicating greater demand for cottages, lodges or units at a distance from each other, rather than a complex.

Table 1: Returns, costs and margins from a three-bedroom unit.

| Income from one self-catering unit | | € |
|--|------------------------|----------------|
| High season (May-September) | 20 weeks at €750/week | 15,000 |
| Low season (October-May) | 10 weeks at €350/week | 3,500 |
| Christmas/New Year/Easter | Six weeks at €500/week | 3,000 |
| Mid-week breaks | Six weeks at €200/week | 1,200 |
| Extended weekends | Six weeks at €200/week | 1,200 |
| Total income | | €23,900 |
| Running costs (25%) | | 5,975 |
| Repayments based on €100,000 at 4.1% over ten years | | 4,140 |
| Total running costs | | €10,115 |
| Margin | | €13,785 |

Further information

For further information please contact Barry Caslin, Teagasc, Rural Economy Development Programme at:

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The following resources are also helpful

www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev

www.failteireland.ie

www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev

