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Holiday homes **Homes & Property**

You play away – and let your holiday home pay

Letting isn't the only way to profit from your place in the sun. **Cathy Hawker** considers the options

FROM letting for a few weeks each year to hosting weddings or opening a hotel, owners are keen to make their second homes pay. And online businesses are making it easier than ever to profit. HomeAway and Airbnb websites help occasional landlords compete with big hotel chains by attracting regular rentals.

LET YOUR HOLIDAY HOME One of the easiest ways to make a holiday home pay is to rent it out when you aren't using it. Cities that attract visitors year-round – think Paris or Venice – generally have the longest potential rental season, but if you own a rural property you can still let it for up to 30 weeks a year, says Jelena Cvjetkovic of estate agent Savills.

WHERE TO BUY

"The golden rule is to buy in an area that offers activities year-round and not just sea and sand in the summer," says Cvjetkovic. "Southern France and Tuscany both have historic towns and villages, museums and galleries. Cultural tourism will extend the season significantly."

Belforte House in Tuscany is a prime example. South of Volterra and within easy reach of Florence, this handsome stone property is owned by an Italian architect and his wife who live in Siena with their four children. The owners have restored the building to create a light, open-plan house with beamed ceilings.

Through HomeAway and their own website, the owners rent out the four-bedroom house for 30 weeks a year from £2,000 a week. Belforte House is also for sale through Savills, priced £864,500.



£864,500: buy Belforte House, above and left, in Tuscany (Savills), or rent it from £2,000 a week (homeaway.co.uk)

crowding in for pizzas straight from the woodfire oven. Regulars include Mariella Frostrup and Grand Designs host Kevin McCloud. At The Chapel rooms start from £100 per night.

DO A HOUSE SWAP

Owning a holiday home used to mean returning to the same place year after year, but exchange website 3rd Home solves that problem.

The online company for luxury holiday homes has 3,000 properties in 73 countries with an average value of £1.6 million. No money is exchanged between owners. Instead, they receive "keys" depending on where their own holiday home is and which weeks are free. These are used to "pay" for other homes on the website.

Gaelle and Marc Deschamps, who live in Hyde Park with their three children, have renovated an 18th-century chateau in the Loire Valley. It has enabled them to holiday in Greece and Marbella.

"We joined 3rd Home because of the good selection of high-end properties," says Gaelle. "Now we're planning a ski holiday for next year."

Membership of 3rd Home is currently free, but there are charges from £255 for each exchange.



Celebrity fan:

At The Chapel, left, in Somerset, bought as a weekend retreat by restaurateur Catherine Butler, ended up as an eatery where regulars include TV and radio presenter Mariella Frostrup, inset

CREATE A BUSINESS

Restaurateur Catherine Butler and her partner Ahmed, a furniture designer, were confirmed Londoners when a day trip to see friends in Somerset led them to buy a run-down, 19th-century chapel in the High Street in the small town of Bruton. They started to renovate it as

their weekend retreat, but after many weekends commuting down to oversee the work, they fell for country living and relocated permanently.

In 2008, they opened the restaurant At The Chapel, added an eight-bedroom hotel and they now live and work in Bruton full time. "We thought the

country was where you went to walk or retire," says Butler. "The biggest shock was discovering sophistication outside of London."

"We never fell out of love with London, but we love living here. We built this with a passion and discovered a new life." Local families love At The Chapel,

■ Savills: savills.co.uk (020 7016 3740)

■ At The Chapel: atthechapel.co.uk (01749 814070)

■ 3rd Home: 3rdhome.com (020 7193 3091)