



L-R Debbie Mullan, operations manager,
Fay Pead, holiday lettings specialist,
Julia Harding, director.
Photo: Casper Hopkins

Hot holiday homes

Crown Gardens prove that sophisticated holiday lets offer a successful business solution and a fantastic alternative break

It's hardly a year since we introduced readers to Crown Gardens, but since then the company has gone on to become Brighton's leading holiday letting specialist.

Specialising in boutique residences, from only 15 this time last year, they now have almost 50 properties in their catalogue and, despite the credit crunch, business is booming. So much so that the company has moved to larger offices upstairs in Gloucester Yard to accommodate the growing team.

It has become clear that people who would perhaps have gone abroad for leisure breaks and weekends are now staying in the UK and Brighton has reclaimed its reputation as the best destination in the UK. As a consequence Crown Gardens have seen no downturn in bookings at all, on the contrary there has been a massive increase.

Crown Gardens pride themselves on a high level of customer service. Their motivation is keeping customers and clients happy and there is always someone to speak to either face to face or on the telephone. Staff are always available to show potential guests around and they all know the properties first hand. As a result there is a far greater potential for making longer bookings such as corporate lets and relocations.

Managing director Julia Harding's background in graphic design and new media, means that she is fully aware of how important it is to increase efficiency with investment in new technology and systems. "Our new database and website means we can get new properties on the market within a matter of hours. And we have a new booking systems that will be launched in early 2009, making our customer's experience smoother and more user friendly. The new systems have been created by Andy Baker – a web genius, friend and ex-Epic colleague (07968 119324)."

Initially, Crown Gardens concentrated on city centre properties with a stylish urban appeal. But in 2008 they were approached by a new client with a very different property to market,

"If you can't sell your home why not turn it into a holiday let investment that can make you great returns"

a stunning rural home converted from a tiny village chapel. Owner Darren Fell was letting independently, but simply was not getting the bookings. Crown Gardens took the property on because Julia felt her customers would snap it up – and they have! Darren was about to move back in, but having seen how popular it has proved to be, is now letting it on a regular basis.

Zion Chapel is a stylish contemporary conversion with open-plan styling, a mezzanine galleried bedroom and the bonus of the indispensable service offered by the Royal Oak next door, a vibrant village pub with award-winning gourmet food and ever helpful staff. There are some unique special touches to be found at Zion Chapel – such as personalised robes and towels, plus a wood burning stove.

"Alex, general manager from the Royal Oak brought us freshly chopped wood for the stove direct to our door – we even wanted our desserts back at the Chapel in front of the fire and he brought them to us hot from the oven, it made our holiday!"

The pretty village of Fulking is steeped in tradition, but is also only a short drive from the more urban delights of Brighton and Hove. Within no time at all Zion Chapel has become one of their most popular lets and on the day we visited the occupants had extended their stay from three nights to a whole week as they were enjoying its charms so much.



Alex Tipping (right) general manager and Wayne Cortilla (middle) head chef

Looking for new properties

Spurred on by this rural triumph Crown Gardens are even more confident that their policy of 'think unique think unusual' is the key to their success, presenting properties to the market that really stand out. They already represent a plethora of gorgeous properties, but are now confident that this is the time to stand out and be brave.

"There is little point in holding back, despite a recession. If you can't sell your home then why not turn it into a holiday let investment, something amazing that can potentially make you great returns. Windmills, barns, follies we want them all! And right now we are actively looking further afield in rural and out-of-town locations like Lewes, Ditchling and even into Kent and West Sussex."

Interior design services

To get an impression of a typical Crown Gardens property take a look at crown-gardens.co.uk. If you have any doubts that your home matches up to the standard then the company are happy to offer advice and will even offer services from styling and makeovers to 3D walk throughs. Crown Gardens can help you to make the very most of your property as a holiday let developing and marketing it to its full potential.

Who would have believed that we would be able to run such an exciting success story in the current market? Crown Gardens have proved that by applying sound business principals and using the services of experts it really is possible. Seeking out a niche market and offering an excellent and stylish product has made Crown Gardens market leaders and in doing so created a portfolio of very happy clients and customers who simply keep on coming back.

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