

THE B&B ABC



A former Gippsland B&B operator shares her tips, tricks and techniques ...

There are basically two main types of accommodation, B& B and self-contained and there are various combinations of both.

Model A.

Traditionally a bedroom in the owner's house with breakfast served in the owner's kitchen (English traditional version)

- Disadvantages:

- Lack of privacy for guest and owner.
- Guests in your lounge/ bathroom etc.
- Unacceptable to majority of guests in 2010.

- Advantages

If you have a spare bedroom with ensuite it could be used (less cost to set up)

Model B (My experience)

B & B with bedrooms/ensuites custom-built near or adjacent to owner's home

- Disadvantages:

Breakfast served in dining room in house (ie full breakfast) any time b/n 7am and 9am so there's long hours and much sitting around. However guests loved a home-cooked breakfast with home-grown eggs etc.

- Advantages:

Ensures privacy for both parties. You could do breakfast supplies (i.e. no cooked food) in rooms.

Requirements for running a B & B

Usually need council permit. Council will charge a fee registering the business and will conduct annual health checks of your kitchen.

Food safety handling and food supervisors certs. Required one-day course from TAFE (if serving food to public.) Might not apply to self-contained where they bring their own food.

Liquor licence: check recent laws.

GST compliance (depends on your taxation advice)
Credit card facilities. (arranged by your bank). NO cheques. Most people don't carry cash.
More commonly, internet access in rooms.

Advertising budget

Website - professionally created ** YOU MUST DO THIS* with email address.
Links to tourism and booking sites; this will bring in extra bookings but you pay 5% commission e.g totaltravel.com.au
Professional brochures and business cards ... leave them at info centres and elsewhere.

Expenses:

Your expenses should be 1/3 of your income but be prepared for them to be higher if you have debt.

Cleaning: if you need to employ someone try on a casual basis but remember they get paid 2½-times the rate on Sundays and public hols. Otherwise it's you. I washed all sheets/towels etc but this could be a problem with farm water supplies. Perhaps BYO linen??

Rooms/showers/toilets/linen/towels must be spotless and fresh.

Gardens etc need to be well maintained. If doing farmstay suggest they bring warm clothes and gumboots or at least have a back up supply of your own.

City people use lots of water/ heating and cooling .. they need to be educated and you need to budget accordingly.

Other matters:

I had a no dogs/no smoking policy. Dogs can be a potential problem on farm and BE ADVISED ... they will have fleas and they will sleep on the beds!! I used the "Health Dept Regulations" argument.

ALWAYS answer your emails on the day they arrive... NO EXCUSE here.

Always reply to missed messages on your landline or mobile ASAP

When taking bookings you can either take a deposit (you must have a published cancellation policy) or credit card number. If people turn up and then decide not to stay – this can be tricky- if you have their ccard no. you could take the full amount but I often took the easy way out and said" No worries" This is not good business but I knew they had driven a long way and now they had no accommodation!! After all, your website will have photos and an explanation of your facilities.

Guests when booking need to be very clear that they room sleeps four not 14. If they try to slip an extra person in – charge them. It's dishonest on their part.

This is a seven-day-a-week, most months, commitment. However, it is possible to block off some time for yourself either by getting someone reliable to babysit or by just saying (not quite truthfully) you are fully booked that weekend. If you don't have a break it will become a drudgery ... and that will be evident to guests.

Income/salary

It is unlikely you will have much left over to pay yourself a decent salary. My partner was employed full time so it wasn't an issue. However, there are tax breaks so check with your accountant first.

Farmstays or cabins on farm

Insurance

Access all areas?? Be prepared for them not to understand the usual rules about farm/ gates/fences.

Maintain a high standard of accommodation with good quality matching furniture, coordinated and spotlessly clean. Don't furnish with odds and ends from the op shop. (Don't laugh.. it happens!)

Sheets/ towels /pillows/duonas.. buy the best you can afford. This all helps to make their experience enjoyable and you will get return bookings and "word of mouth" recommendations.

Guest enjoy log fires but this can have safety implications with city folk.'

Avoid the chocolates on the pillow syndrome but think of something extra for them.. fresh flowers from the garden, good tea and coffee (plunger) in the room. Instant coffee belongs in motels.

And finally....

You need to be able to talk to anyone and everyone, so if this is a problem for you, don't run this type of business.

A friendly smile, willingness to fix any small problems or helping with maps and places to go. Have a good stock of local info on hand (I used to put a folder in their rooms) but be prepared.. there are people out there who will try your patience.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and met some wonderful people, some rich and famous, some not so ,but in general they treated my B & B and rooms with great respect and their children were, on the most part, very well behaved.

From Stephanie Hume shume@tpg.com.au