

## From country home to stylish bed-and-breakfast retreat

A stylish B&B is the fashionable career choice for London families who want to enjoy a big country home, says Ruth Bloomfield

When Penny Ledger and her husband Ian were expecting their first child they did some hard thinking about their lifestyle and finances. Three things quickly became clear. They didn't want to bring up children in the city, they needed two incomes to survive and, once childcare and expenses had been taken into account, if Penny returned to work she would be left with about £5,000 a year from her salary, which hardly seemed worthwhile.

So the couple made a radical decision to buy a property and turn it into a high-end bed-and-breakfast. The Ledgers' move is not that unusual, as commercial and domestic property agents are reporting a high level of interest from couples wanting to run a small family business, keen to offer tourist accommodation to subsidise their household income and enable them to live in larger family homes.



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The epic renovation of the farmhouse, the barn (above) and the two-bedroom oast house lasted five years

The couple's three children — Tabitha, six, Matilda, four, and Flynn (one) — love the life on a smallholding complete with alpacas, chickens, peacocks, dogs and cats. The family enjoys the spacious old farmhouse while Penny's parents often stay in the oast house. And they rent out a three-bedroom barn, two cottages and two lodges that they have built on the grounds.

Rather than go the traditional B&B route guests can either self-cater or have meals provided by a local chef, and the couple will arrange activities from falconry to horse riding. Ian uses his hour-long journey into London to deal with bookings and enquiries. As well as looking after the children, Penny, who used to work for a record company, greets guests, handles maintenance and cleaning (with the help of a part-time housekeeper) and tackles a mountain of laundry herself.

Although East Sussex is not a traditional holiday location, Ian says that bookings are strong, particularly at weekends. He suspects that because there is little local competition when people want to visit the area they tend to head to the farm. Room rates vary depending on the time of year and length of stay but range from £20 to £80 per person per night.



© Ian Ledger

Each of the two eco-lodge tree houses at Fair Oak Farm provide luxury self-catering accommodation for two people ([fair oak farm.co.uk](http://fair oak farm.co.uk))

The farm has its own website ([www.fairoakfarm.co.uk](http://www.fairoakfarm.co.uk)) but most business has been generated by registering with specialist websites such as Holiday Lettings ([holidaylettings.co.uk/18479](http://holidaylettings.co.uk/18479)) as well as repeat customers.