

# Clients Cornered

Marcella & Andrew Kirk ([www.gites-letilleul.co.uk](http://www.gites-letilleul.co.uk)) moved to France in autumn 2004. Their first season (summer 2005) has been a great success - but just over a year ago, their French dream was rapidly spiraling into a nightmare...



After a year or more of preparation and searching for a suitable French property, Andrew and I finally found our perfect home. It was an up-and-running gîte complex - *Le Tilleul* - near Saumur in the Loire Valley. The property comprised two gîtes and a farmhouse, with more than enough land for our three horses. The added bonus was that we were going to be right in the middle of sparkling wine country!

*Le Tilleul* was set up as a gîte business in 1995. The owners were only selling due to ill health, so we inherited many of their repeat clients, along with fully-equipped gîtes. Advertising for the 2005 summer season was already in place and we were delighted to see that the bookings were starting to come in even before we'd signed the *compromis de vente*.

Back in the UK, Sam, our eight-year-old son, was incredibly excited to be moving to France. And as we waited for the sale of our UK house to go through, we busied ourselves with finding him a local school in France. We also started to make plans for moving our furniture to France, bought new linen and towels for the gîtes and started to discuss how we might change the furnishings and décor at *Le Tilleul* in the near future. Everything was going according to plan...

... until the buyers of our UK house lost their buyers. Faced with this devastating news, we had to make the hardest choice of our lives. Should we stay in the UK and wait for a new buyer for our house, or should we go ahead with buying *Le Tilleul* and hope we could muddle through somehow?

The easiest option would have been, of course, to stay in the UK and pull out of buying *Le Tilleul*. But we had already paid our deposit and we were due to sign the final contract later that month - if we decided to pull out, we would forfeit our deposit which was a sizeable amount of money. There was also the sheer disappointment - once you make that enormous decision to move across the Channel, it's almost impossible to give up your French Dream!

So, trying to look on the positive side of the situation, we decided that our best option would be to try to muddle through. Luckily for us, Andrew had not yet handed in his notice, so we decided that he should stay in the UK and work for at least another year. I would move to France with Sam and run the gîtes, with Andrew coming over whenever he wasn't working.

It was certainly going to be a challenge for me, but I was relishing it! Sam was going to need lots of support starting a new school in a foreign language and I was going to have to make the day-to-day business decisions on my own, as well as integrating into a new way of life as quickly as possible, but we'd get through it somehow. The most difficult challenge, however, was that Andrew and I were going to have to get used to living apart for much of the time. Many of our friends asked if we were really making the right decision...

Well, one year on, the answer is a resounding "yes"! Sam is doing really well at school, I've made lots of French and English friends in the neighbourhood - and they're always willing to pop over to give me a hand - and our gîte business is now running smoothly, with lots and lots of bookings for 2006 already! And the only complaints I had during the last season were that there wasn't a milk jug and there wasn't a second tray for eating supper in front of the television!

Most amazing of all is how quickly the year has flown by. I miss Andrew all the time - especially when I need something heavy lifting! - but there's so much to keep me busy day-to-day, I don't have much time to sit around feeling sorry for myself!

And the best thing about our story is that there is going to be a happy ending. When Andrew's current job contract finishes and our house in the UK is sold, he's going to move to France to join us - and fingers crossed it will be sometime in 2006. So we're looking forward to a very *Bonne Année* - and we wish all fellow LetSites clients a *très bonne année*, too!

# LetSites Newsletter

Issue N°10 February 2006



[www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com)

If you'd like to be "cornered" in a future issue, please contact [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

## The LetSites Newsletter - February 2006

We would like to wish a very Happy New Year to all our LetSites clients - and to welcome you all to the first Newsletter of 2006!

We're delighted to start by announcing a brand new feature for your website - an online, interactive Visitors' Book (see the enclosure for more information). We also have details of the forthcoming annual Advertising Poll, which will be on line as usual from mid-March. This issue's article on search engines examines the tangled web that their spiders weave as they crawl around the internet. We've also "cornered" Marcella & Andrew Kirk from the Loire on the back page.

If you would like something featured or discussed in a future Newsletter, don't hesitate to contact [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

## More Questions... and Answers (finally)!

As promised, we shall again be running the annual **LetSites Advertising Poll** in March and hope, as ever, for 100% participation! In particular, we look forward to seeing whether the internet listings you chose to use for the 2005 season performed as effectively as traditional printed brochure adverts. Once the results are available in April, all participating clients will automatically be given access to last year's Advertising Poll results. This will enable you to make direct comparisons between this year's and last year's results - and to monitor the changes in advertising trends over several years.



Your response to October's **At Your Service Survey** was fantastic! But due to the sheer volume of detailed information received, the results have taken far longer than anticipated to analyse... but are about to go on line for all participating clients to read and digest! We would like to say an enormous "Thank You" to everyone who contributed.

## STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!

Derek & Nora Nicholson were featured in the December 2005 issue of *French Property News*. They set up a house sale website using LetSites' sister service **french property websites** ([www.frenchpropertywebsites.com](http://www.frenchpropertywebsites.com)) and are delighted to let us know that their house is now sold! If you would like to read their article, go to "What the press say" on [www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com)

By the way, if you or someone you know is interested in signing up for a house sale website, we will thank you for your recommendation with a **10% commission** (based on the initial invoice).

And don't forget our **Recommend-A-Friend** scheme: for anyone signing up for a LetSites website as a result of your recommendation, we'll give you **20% off** your next hosting renewal (sign up five friends and your next renewal is free)!



## Afraid of Spiders?

All the major search engines gather their information entirely automatically using three distinct components:

- **a spider** (crawler, robot, knobot, bot...) which finds web pages on the internet
- **an index** which contains information about the web pages which the spiders find
- **a ranking mechanism** which searches the index and "scores" relevant web pages in terms of how well they match search terms typed in by a surfer



The spider is a computer program which "crawls" around the internet from web page to web page and adds what it finds on each page to a huge index. The three best-known spiders are Googlebot (Google), Slurp (Yahoo!) and MSNBot (MSN Search). LetSites clients with statistics installed on their site will be used to seeing regular visits from these three spiders. Most sites will be visited even before the finished site goes on line, because spiders also visit domain name registries to collect recently registered domain names.

The major search engines not only keep a copy of the whole of the *visible* text on each web page "crawled", but they also pick up text which is *hidden* in the program code used to generate that web page. This hidden content includes any titles given to the images on the page and the text which comes up when you pass the mouse over an image or button. It also includes the text in the "description" and "keywords" meta tags - but while all spiders still retrieve this information, these meta tags are now pretty much ignored by the major search engines, as we'll see in the next Newsletter.

As well as the text on the page, the spider also looks for links to other web pages on the same website - and also to pages on other websites. When it finds a link, it checks in the search engine index to see whether it has already visited the linked page. If not, it adds it to a queue of pages to be visited (spidered, crawled...) in the future.

You might think that every page on the internet would (eventually) be visited just by following these links, but this is far from the case. Google - the biggest search engine of all - has about 8 billion web pages in its index, but this is thought to be *less than half* the total number of web pages in existence!

Spiders do not just visit pages they haven't seen before. At regular intervals (typically every month or two), they schedule return visits to web pages which have already been indexed so that they can check for any changes. The delay in returning means that the information in a search engine's index is always somewhat out-of-date. Worse still, many studies suggest that up to half the pages in a typical search engine's index have since been deleted and so don't even exist any more - this is known as "link rot".

To summarise... once your website is on line, search engine spiders will start visiting your site. As a result, the information from each page visited is stored in each search engine's index. When a surfer types in a query to a search engine, a ranking mechanism is used to decide how relevant your web pages are to what the surfer has asked about.

And strange as it may seem, when you type in a query to a search engine, it does not actually search the world wide web at all. All it is actually able to do is to look in its own (often rather out-of-date) index.



*Next issue: How search engines rank your site*