

# ***La Maison du Bonheur***

Tel: +33 5 62 62 54 06 Fax: +33 5 62 62 06 65

## **LIFE BEYOND THE GITE**

### **Gabrielle Cleasby looks at business opportunities in the Gers**

An increasing number of people are wanting to move permanently to France. Many are retirees who simply want to enjoy a more pleasant climate and a more relaxed way of life. Others want to continue with their present employment and so they want to be within easy reach of an airport; we now have a number of clients who commute weekly between Toulouse and various parts of the United Kingdom. There are yet others who want to take perhaps the bravest step of all and leave whatever they are doing and seek new opportunities in France.

Making a new start which can provide a decent standard of living raises a number of problems. You need to think carefully about what kind of work it will be possible for you to do, given strict French regulations and often crippling taxation of one sort or another. It is usually prohibitively expensive to employ other people so you need to ask yourself if you can manage some form of enterprise with just yourself and maybe your partner, perhaps bringing someone in for casual and seasonal work. You need to check very carefully where you stand with the law and with the fiscal authorities. With certain activities you must be properly registered – you cannot work ‘on the black’. If you fall foul of the authorities then the penalties can be enormous.

A good grasp of the French language is essential for some work but less so elsewhere, so it depends how competent you are and how confident you feel dealing with others in French and often having to cope with a strong local accent. Do not be daunted by what will be a steep learning curve in some instances – not only in terms of language but also in relation to regulations and red tape in a foreign country – but do be realistic about your capabilities and expectations.

The most obvious route that many people take is that of gites and chambres d’hôte. You can get by with basic language skills which, I am assured by people in the know, rapidly come up to scratch when you really have to face typical problems! However, this route has been well documented elsewhere in FPN so I want to look at a few other possibilities, none of them easy options, that will provide sufficient income, as long as you are willing and able to devote enough time and energy to them, and as long as you have an adequate financial cushion to see you through the early stages.

Before embarking on any project it is essential to do some homework and to take advice from experts, either in person or by consulting the numerous books and articles that are available. Check out the area, the competition. Is there a real need for your business and is it sustainable throughout the year? If not, can you live

# *La Maison du Bonheur*

Tel: +33 5 62 62 54 06 Fax: +33 5 62 62 06 65

sufficiently well on income from the peak months? Is there anything you can do to attract business in the off-peak season? Is there a way of developing the business, perhaps to distinguish it from the competition?

We usually have a number of businesses for sale in the Gers, up and running, to suit varied budgets, with prices which reflect the size and success of the enterprise. Whilst some require management and organisational skills which can be adapted from your present job, others do need specific knowledge of the hotel and catering business, and I know from past enquiries that there is an interest in these sectors. For example, we have an auberge with restaurant and 20-room hotel; we have a 37-room hotel with large restaurant and function room, very popular with tourists and local clientele. We even have a golf course with restaurant, camping, and 8-room hotel, and the possibility to build a small number of chalets. On a slightly different tack, we sometimes have equestrian properties. If you want to do B &B with a different angle, we have a property which comes with a small vineyard where the owner will see you through a year to show you the wine cycle.

Probably the best value, and lower down the price range, are two properties with catering facilities. One is a restaurant with 20 covers in the main room, a smaller room for extra covers or private parties, and tables in the courtyard in summer. This could continue as a restaurant and the business could be developed by converting the first floor to several chambre d'hote rooms, or you could simply develop the chambre d'hote side, with or without table d'hote. There is a 2-bed private apartment on the top floor. The other is a small bar restaurant in a popular village. There are 40 covers in the restaurant with additional covers on the terraces in summer. Downstairs has been rewired, decorated, and has had new kitchen equipment installed. Upstairs is a 3 / 4-bed private apartment which is habitable but needs some more work.

Whatever you choose, do your research thoroughly. Prices obviously vary according to the region and I can only give an indication of my own region – the Gers in the heart of Gascony – so you need to talk to people locally elsewhere. Good luck with your search and bon courage!

© Gabrielle Cleasby April 2004

Martyn and Gabrielle Cleasby  
La Maison du Bonheur  
Tel. 00 33 (0)5 62 62 54 06  
e-mail: [info@gasconyproperties.com](mailto:info@gasconyproperties.com)  
website: [www.gasconyproperties.com](http://www.gasconyproperties.com)