

# *La Maison du Bonheur*

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## THE REALITY OF REALTY

Gabrielle Cleasby considers the value of TV

I don't know about you, but I am becoming increasingly irritated by TV programmes about buying abroad, especially those which seek to highlight someone's misfortune and discomfort. What purpose do these programmes serve? I would like to think that their prime objective is to be helpful and informative – and some of them are – but others have a hidden agenda. Their appeal, such as it is, seems to be in their entertainment value, either in the manipulation and exploitation of the gullible and the naïve, or in the staged scenario, rather like a 'soap' – remember Nippy and Nigel?

Sometimes, we are approached by programme makers wanting us to supply contacts – perhaps clients who are renovating or re-locating. I suspect they would be more than grateful if some unforeseen disaster were unearthed to hype up their programme. Sometimes, they request a property search for anything from an ordinary house, usually at some unrealistic price for this area, to the slightly off-beat, a 10-bed hotel for nudists being a recent request! Whatever the subject, the programmes make the most of their victim's discomfort. However, it must be said that many of these people are the engineers of their own misfortunes, making impulsive decisions and showing a distinct lack of common sense. Frankly, if I had done the same, I would not want to tell my closest friends, let alone display my stupidity in front of thousands of viewers, 'Big Brother' style, so I really don't understand what possesses them to take part.

Surely, you would hear alarm bells ringing if some crook in Turkey wanted to put your property into his wife's name! Another couple bought a property in Bulgaria over the internet, happily paid their deposit to a total stranger, and went to Bulgaria to complete the deal, handing over the rest of their savings *in cash* to the agent before they signed, and still without having seen the property. Suddenly, one of the owners wanted more money, and it also turned out that the house had serious structural faults. Where was the 'engage' button of their brain when they did this?

Another programme showed a couple with children searching in an area of France that they clearly could not afford. Eventually, they ended up somewhere much cheaper and more suitable, but not before much heart-searching and worry. Moreover, they had little knowledge of France and did not speak French! What were they doing? Even more important, who misled them into believing they could start a new life with so little knowledge, and who falsely raised their hopes by directing them to the wrong area in the first place? Well, I suppose that was another one in the can for the director.

Yes, it is interesting to witness someone's experience of buying in a foreign country, to learn about the whole process, and to see how they negotiate the hurdles of foreign bureaucracy. It is quite right that potential buyers are alerted to possible problems, without frightening them unnecessarily, and that they are enlightened about a sales system which differs from that in the UK, but do we really have to see these unfortunate people paraded in front of us in this manner?

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What can we learn from it all? The sound advice is always: prepare thoroughly, do your homework, research your chosen areas, and don't be tempted to make snap decisions. As one of my former teachers used to say, "Think before you ink!" Choose your agents carefully and make sure they are working legally. There are so many new ones springing up now and the credentials of some of them are doubtful – if they are shifty about how they earn their keep, it could be that you will pay dearly. Nothing can beat on-the-spot knowledge and information so do listen to the advice of the professionals and the experts, even if you don't take it!

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