

FRENCH LETTER

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT



Since hanging up my thobe and ghutra last December life has not been dull or uninteresting here in Normandy. On Boxing Day morning we had the storm which devastated most of the countryside, luckily we only lost a few slates from the roof and a couple of trees in the fields. We were without electricity on and off for five days. Apparently 25% out of the French national Grid was down and the local stores quickly sold out of oil lamps and candles.

The storm also caused havoc with the railway network and Jeff and Lesley Perry, who were visiting for the New Year took seven hours to get to us from Paris, a journey which is usually only three hours. It took several large glasses of Calvados to help them recover!

Most of my time since leaving Saudi has been taken up with getting into the French system.

Some years ago the French government signed the Maastricht Treaty which in theory allows any EEC national to live and work in any other EEC country. The problem is that the French government forgot to inform the civil service, consequently as a Brit wishing

to live and work full time in France I have to obtain a Carte de Sejour (Aliens work permit).

Your first thought is why should I need to, a Frenchman can live and work in UK without a permit, but if you take this attitude with the local government office it gets you nowhere. The jobs-worth behind the counter gives a very Gallic shrug of the shoulder and says "Thank you very much, now fill out this form".

Needless to say I now have the required permit.

In addition I have had to fill out forms for a French driving license (the right to slaughter anything on the roads during August), Securite Social, extra phone lines and register as an Agent Commercial with the Chamber of Commerce. Bureaucracy is definitely a growth industry in France.

But some things never change, expats are the same all over the world, there is always something from home they can't live without and the British expat in France is no exception. Here we are living in a country famous for good food but if you say you are going to England for a few days people say can you bring me back brown sauce, malt vinegar, colemans mustard, tea bags or real bacon. Of course the plus side is that we don't have to resort to home brewing!!

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