

Focus

We're living the daydream

In March, when the rain is coming down and sunshine seems a distant memory, summer holidays fill all our daydreams. Whether you've booked already or are searching on the internet imagining yourself somewhere far away, such planning helps cope with the English weather. One Maidstone family went a step further than simply daydreaming – they all moved to the sun: Mum, dad, three sons, two of their girlfriends and a grandchild. Sarah Hills found out why they've joined the 15,000 ex-pats in Corfu.



Stepping off the plane with two weeks ahead of you to read, eat good food, sip wine in the afternoon and not listen to ringing phones is what many people look forward to as they start their holiday.

On the first few days it feels like you're never going home, but as they hurtle past and the tan tops up, all of a sudden it's day 13, you're packing your bag, wrapping your souvenirs in a towel ready for the flight home.

The Wood family (pictured below left), arrived in Corfu in March with the intention of never going back to Blighty, however. Emma and James Wood sold up lock, stock and barrel and took their family and belongings to Corfu during a series of roadtrips across Europe.

Their sons, Anthony, 22, David, 20 and Toby, 17, have all gone too, along with Anthony's girlfriend Jasmin Fordyce, 20, their 18-month-old son Joshua and David's girlfriend Danielle Washington, 17.

James did five trips across Europe via France and Italy in a lorry – he passed his HGV licence 10 years ago but had never used it.

Emma said: "It was an amazing adventure for him, but he was exhausted by the end of it. On the fourth journey Toby and I made the trip in the lorry alongside him. It was incredible to see the changing landscapes and scenery as we headed south crossing to Greece from Ancona.

"David and Danielle also drove across Europe and we were particularly impressed with the way they handled their trip considering their ages. They travelled across Europe north of Switzerland and then travelled down through Italy to catch the ferry at Venice.

"It was a significant operation to co-ordinate but we made it and all of our worldly goods made it safely too."

Emma and James sold their house in Maidstone to buy land on the north east coast of the island to build on. They are also developing a couple of villas. But what's occupying most of their time is the Corfu

Property Shop, the company they have set up together.

Emma, 41, said: "There was too much red tape and paperwork pushed down by the government in the UK. We also felt disillusioned with the lack of community and family values in the UK. We even wrote to David Cameron wishing him well with his campaign before we left but it was all too little too late for us and many others who have come here."

James, 60, has more than 20 years' experience in the property sector, while Emma has a background in marketing, advertising, promotions and public relations – she was the managing director of a group of UK companies for almost 15 years.

They opened their estate agency office in April and six weeks later had succeeded in securing the rights to an exclusive associate relationship with Savills International, the London-based estate agent with a global network of its own and associate offices.

Having relocated themselves, they are in the perfect position to offer advice to others following the same path.

The ever-increasing violent society of the UK also spurred them to seek another life. David was attacked two years ago by two foreign men hoping to take his money but soon realised they were only going to get away with a few pounds and left him, though not before hitting him over the head.

Anthony's home was broken into a year later last autumn and valuables were stolen, while just a few months later, around Christmas time, Danielle had to have 20 stitches to her face after a job threw a brick through a bus window in Sidcup.

Emma said: "Had she been looking out of the window she would have lost her eye. When crime affects your family in this way, when all you hear and see around you in Maidstone is swearing and spitting, when you constantly witness people on the take and not contributing to society, it is enough to send you looking for a better life."

And that's exactly what they have

found on the small Mediterranean island. Emma lived there in the 1980s and speaks Greek, which is a bonus for their business. Bills are cheap – the annual rates bill is around £70.

She said: "People here are devoted to the spirit of community.

"They work hard and don't expect handouts. Families stick together to make the most of their lives for better or for worse. Living is simple, but children are brought up to appreciate what they have got and it's still cool for young men to take their grans to the doctor or church on Sunday.

"You can leave your car parked down the road with the keys in and it will still be there in the morning.

"There is some graffiti in some parts of the Corfu Town suburbs, but young people don't walk around with cans of lager in their hands intimidating passers-by and generally making a nuisance of themselves."

Corfu offers the youngsters the chance to spend quality time together in the sun on the beach. They can also afford to be more independent.

David and Danielle have a spacious one-bedroom apartment, with sea views five minutes from the beach, while Anthony, Jasmin and Joshua live in their own apartment in Dassia. Their youngest son lives with them.

Emma said: "The plan over the next five years is to acquire land and build homes with no bank borrowing. It will be hard work, but they will at least learn the meaning of hard work and draw satisfaction from the experience when their properties are complete.

"The television is not the centre of their lives any more. Joshua is like a little dolphin with plenty of swimming and space to roam, whereas in Maidstone he couldn't have been allowed outside by himself in the area he lived."

■ To find out about living in Corfu or buying property, contact James or Emma.

ISLAND LIFE

■ Corfu, or Kerkyra, is the northernmost and second largest (after Cephalonia) of the Ionian Islands.

■ It has 42 tourist resorts

■ The island was lucky during the great earthquake that hit the Ionian islands in 1953. Many of the islands suffered great losses in both lives and buildings, but Corfu was unharmed.

■ In 1815 the British were the regents of Corfu and they stayed for almost 50 years

■ The Bond film For Your Eyes Only was shot here.

■ HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh – Prince Philippos of Greece and Denmark – was born on June 10, 1921 at Villa Mon Repos on Corfu.

■ Natives are called Corfiots

■ Corfu held the Union Jack between 1809 and 1815



CONTACT

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