



■ **PETER FRIEND AND MARK BARBER**
MAZAMET, FRANCE | CCF | GMT + 2 |
POPULATION 11,480

“Most people celebrate their 40th birthday with a party - not us! Instead, we chose to buy an eight-bedroom period “maison bourgeois” in France (quite a birthday present!) where we now own and operate one of the country’s most successful B&Bs.

The whole process of finding the right property was quite a journey, not only metaphorically but literally, travelling through many countries trying to find the right place, at the right price! Ending up in the market town of Mazamet, in the foothills of the Montagne Noire in South West France, was certainly no accident and it took us almost three years to get here.

One of the most bizarre viewings we encountered in this journey was near Clermont Ferrand. After viewing the main house we were shown to an annexe where, we were told, some of the extended family lived and would make an ideal owner’s apartment. We entered the front door and were asked to wait a moment whilst they asked Granny to get out of the bath so they could show us around. True enough, on entering the lounge, there sat Granny wrapped in her dressing

gown and clearly bemused by the proceedings! We didn’t buy that house, but assumed Granny returned to her bath for a long, uninterrupted, soak.

It was on this ‘granny in the bath’ trip, and property five out of six, that we arrived in Mazamet on a beautifully warm and sunny morning in late August. The owners of “La Villa” had opened every shutter and window to show off the gem of a property. Sitting proud and upright, they knew the moment we walked through the front door that this was the one. So commenced a three-and-a-half year renovation project that restored La Villa de Mazamet into our luxury B&B. ‘Grand Design’ type plumbing and wiring dramas besieged us, at one point, our toilets flushing with hot water and all our new kitchen appliances going walkies. Then factor in mastering the French language and planning system whilst continuing to work in the UK to fund the renovations and you’ll see why this turned out to be a journey. But with 15 years experience of managing UK hotels and marketing experience combined and some true Brit spirit, we held our nerve.

La Villa de Mazamet has now been open for 18 months and we have no regrets at all - as the famous Piaf song goes. We often joke that the most difficult decision of the day is how many croissants we have to buy for breakfast, it is hard to believe that my once rat-race 50 mile commute around the M25 highway has now been replaced by a 50 metre walk to the local bakers!”

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