

## Sark population grows by 100 due to one man

A GERMAN entrepreneur living in Sark has single-handedly grown the island's population by more than 100 people over the past year through three global lockdowns. Financial adviser and fund manager Swen Lorenz first visited in Sark in 2004 after reading a book

by Emma Anderson  
eanderson@guernseypress.com

about the island. He was curious about its unique system of governance and how it had managed to survive in the modern age.

He liked it so much he moved to the island, but soon realised that the place was struggling and needed a lift. 'I thought I can use my skills to help Sark get back on its feet,' he said. Seeing an opportunity under the

EU Settlement Scheme for EU citizens to take British residency, Mr Lorenz wrote a book called *How (and) Why to Move to Sark?* which he marketed to financial services clients.



### It took over my life for a few months, says entrepreneur

It sold well, particularly in his native Germany.

He started his campaign to woo people to Sark in August, acting as a private relocation consultant and hosting a wealth of information on his website.

After one interview on the BBC, the story was picked up by national newspapers and the story went viral worldwide.

'It took over my life for a few months and it has reinvigorated Sark,' he said.

Half of the new arrivals to the island are German. Others who have made the move with Mr Lorenz's guidance have come

**'I can realistically attract and handle around 25 to 30 people this year. The main constraint is the availability of real estate on Sark and my time'**

Entrepreneur Swen Lorenz

from all over Europe and as far afield as Canada and Singapore. Most are involved in what he described as 'portable' businesses. All of the first wave of residents have rented properties and are looking to buy, renovate or build.

Mr Lorenz believes that more people could follow his path to

Sark, attracted by lifestyle and the island's approach to tax.

'Sark's advantageous tax system was also very much of interest to me [when he was first investigating the island] and that's something I am entirely unapologetic about. Choosing tax-advantageous jurisdictions is not some-

thing I'd be ashamed of, and we all have the freedom to legally use these options.'

The 49-year-old is scaling back his relocation services, however.

'I can realistically attract and handle around 25 to 30 people this year. The main constraint is the availability of real estate on Sark and my time. I do believe that Sark would easily have capacity for another 100-150 people if some of its derelict or under-utilised real estate was put to better use.'

'There's an unfinished ruin of an apartment building and one has to ask if one or two hotels should be converted into housing.

'Sark's development laws are very strict and no one wants to see the place over-populated but there is still plenty of scope for, and need for, more residents. Is the right figure 700 or 1,000? I don't know. Chief Pleas needs to come up with decisions on questions like that.'

Sark Seigneur Christopher Beaumont and island estate agent Kevin Delaney agree that Mr Lorenz has made a huge positive impact on life in the island.

'There is no shadow of a doubt that Swen Lorenz's initiative has driven the population increase and a wider global interest in Sark as a place to live,' said Mr Delaney.

## Sarkneighbour can see only good

SARK Seigneur Major Christopher Beaumont is a big fan of Swen Lorenz's relocation initiatives.

'We now have over 100 people who have moved or are moving here thanks to Swen, his manual and his sound financial advice, and we see more coming in the future,' he said. Major Beaumont said all the newcomers have a similar outlook on life to Sarkneighbours.

'The newcomers are not tied to their locations and have the means and motivation to try somewhere new.'

'Digital nomads if you like. They choose Sark and stick, and we are definitely looking for people who plan to stick in Sark.'

Major Beaumont believes Sark's population could easily go above 800 without issue.

'Having a larger population would give a massive impetus to the local economy,' he said.

'We have cafes and restaurants but they're not open all the time because there just isn't the population to support them.'

'We pride ourselves on Sark produce, but unless you know the fisherman you can't buy fish.'

'We could have a clothes shop, a butcher's, a fresh produce market and a fishmonger's if we had enough people living here to keep them in business.'

'More people stimulate the economy and drive demand for goods and services. I would love to see our disused bakery brought back to life for instance.'

Like Mr Lorenz, Major Beaumont said the biggest, single issue in Sark was accommodation.

'We have many sub-standard properties but, now we have had the first influx of new residents, we have no



Sark Seigneur Major Christopher Beaumont.

excuse for property owners not to invest in upgrading their properties to accommodate all these eager newcomers.

'Buyers and tenants will make their feelings known about our housing stock. It is overpriced and not up to scratch, but the buyers will make that clear when they don't buy.'

'Prices will come down or owners will do the work to ensure their property reflects the higher price.'

Major Beaumont does not believe there is any impediment to living in Sark, noting that Mr Lorenz sets out a number of ways keen relocators can gain permission to live on the island in his blog and in his book.

'With 800 residents there will be no noticeable difference, except perhaps more of a buzz in the Avenue, and the ability to buy a pair of knickers locally,' he said.

## 'Extraordinary people help enrich the culture'

'SARK is full of extraordinary people and a surprisingly interesting social life with people from all sorts of backgrounds and stories to tell,' said the island's unofficial relocation adviser Swen Lorenz. 'It's full of characters and it attracts equally extraordinary people who help to enrich the culture and society here.'

Mr Lorenz's relocation efforts on behalf of the island have added 20% to the island's population over the past year.

Post-Brexit, he still has a steady, but slower, stream of enquiries, mostly from the UK but also America, New Zealand and Australia.

'The way the Bailiwick handled Covid has also been a major draw for many people - that and the lack of crime and the lifestyle,' he said.

Mr Lorenz is due to open his own fund management business in Guernsey later this year, and has plans to bring a small manufacturing business to Sark.

The 49-year-old first rented when he came to the island, and then bought a cottage which he renovated extensively, and ended up selling before he ever moved in.

'I've had an ongoing relationship with Sark ever since and now it is my primary and only home,' he said. 'Sark is my forever home. I have no plans to go anywhere else ever.'



Andy Boast.

### First to move were already his friends

SWEN LORENZ has become friends with many of the people he has helped move to the island, but the first couple to do so were already his friends.

Entrepreneurs Andy Boast, an accountant, and Claudine Boast, a lawyer, are in their late 30s and run a number of businesses as well as supporting digital start-ups.

While visiting Mr Lorenz twice in Sark, the couple discovered a renovated 16th century farmhouse and they moved from London in October, the first of Mr Lorenz's relocators. 'Claudine had already moved

to Sark when she fell in love with the cottage and where the wife leads, the husband follows. I fell in love with Sark too,' Mr Boast said.

Mrs Boast added: 'The beauty of Sark, the lifestyle and the head space the island lets you have, have only grown as reasons to be here. That, and our dogs are welcome everywhere.'

'Covid cemented our move, quarantining here was good as it could be. In Sark, you can be at your desk working hard, then out running in minutes watching the waves crashing and the dolphins play.'

## Worldwide search ended in Sark

AN AUSTRALIAN couple settled on Sark as their new home having conducted a worldwide search for the ideal place to live. Keegan and Kathi Smith left New South Wales in October with their two children - a girl

of seven and a boy of three. They are renting with a view to buying when the right property comes along.

Mr Smith runs an international online business educating personal trainers and elite coaches, and Mrs Smith

home-schools their children. 'We enjoy nature and wanted somewhere quiet and beautiful to raise our two children. Sark is beautiful and everyone is very friendly and welcoming. We have settled in really well,' they said.

## Estate agent can see a property boom

SARK is on the verge of a mini property boom which could be sustained for at least a decade, according to Sark Estate Agents owner Kevin Delaney.

Mr Delaney said that legislation, approved last year, which made mortgages available on Sark and allowed landowners to sub-divide their land, was an important factor, along with the work of Swen Lorenz.

'There is no shadow of a doubt that Swen Lorenz's initiative has driven the population increase and a wider

**'Our favourable tax situation and people's desire to live somewhere which is considered safe, particularly post-Covid, are other factors'**

Sark Estate Agents owner Kevin Delaney

global interest in Sark as a place to live. 'Our favourable tax situation and people's desire to live somewhere

which is considered safer, particularly post-Covid, are other factors,' he said. 'So far an increase in property activity

in the island had been more for long-term rentals, rather than sales. 'I would echo the Seigneur's views that, unfortunately, our legacy housing was built when there was no real planning or building regulations and that spooks both banks and other lenders as well as potential buyers,' he said.

'The population surge will drive landlords to offer 100-year leases far more readily and compel them to do the work on their properties to take advantage of the renewed interest.'

Mr Delaney said property prices, land value and rents in Sark had dropped by 30-40% in the last decade, but he now anticipates a mini-boom. 'Landlords, lenders, property owners and tenants will drive continued improvements and better housing stock. All of the signs are there for a sustainable mini boom. Prices will rise, mortgage lenders will feel confident as the market becomes more liquid, and property owners will find it irresistible not to invest in their properties.'