

DON'T MAKE CASTLES IN THE AIR. LIVE IN ONE!

By Ishan Raychaudhuri

Ever considered adding 'chateau' to your address? Here's how to make a reality of living life kingsize...

What is it about castles that draw us? Is it the sheer grandeur of their size and structure or is it the ancient medieval winds which still run freely through their walls, without any reins on them? Perhaps it has something to do with our subconscious minds which still hold on to stories of the times when knights crossed lances for their lady loves, for power, for honour and for justice. Aristocratic associations or otherwise, if you, dear sir/fair maiden, yearn for a castle of your own, there sure lies a way. And if it is one you fancy in the land of cheese, wine and ba-

guettes that is France, you might just be able to curl up in front of your own lake in your own 'chateau', with a glass of wine in your hand.

Happy to be of service in your quest for that premium address is Eric Louvet who, in the classic French manner of extreme politeness and a certain joie de vivre, told me, "French castles are known because of the history and the architecture. France is very well known for its chateaus and manors. And it is a dream for many foreign people to own such property." Monsieur Louvet is the manager of Agence Internationale Mercure Bourgogne Franche-

Comté, one of the agencies which deal in castles and manors.

But why France, you may ask. It is because no other place is perhaps as charming and romantic as the French countryside and as M. Louvet says, "What is important is not only the château, the building itself, but also the park, the gardens 'à la française'. Generally speaking it is a quiet place just as it was before. People like the idea to be in a place with authentic elements. That contributes to its romanticism."

Buying a castle however is not as easy and simple as

buying another house or plot of land. There are a few things which one must keep in mind before approaching the entire idea of owning one. Says M. Louvet, "The buyer should take into account that a château needs a lot of maintenance: roofs, heating, electricity, gardens, etc. Sometimes, it also has outbuildings that need the same maintenance. I should say that the purchaser needs to have money not only to buy, but also to maintain."

Ten thousand euros per year is the average maintenance cost of a medium sized castle according to M. Louvet. You could choose to keep a caretaker who would look



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after the castle when you are away. You might even hand your castle over to one of the many agencies whose expertise lies in maintaining and keeping castles habitable as these places do tend to degenerate just as easily, if proper care is not taken.

Every castle has a tale to tell. Some speak of wars and bloodshed like the Dordogne chateau which has seen not just the clashing of hundreds of swords and shields in its turbulent history, but has also survived long enough to whisper about those times and legends.

No two castles are the same. Some might look similar from a distance, but they might have a completely different

system of tunnels running underneath them. The more intricate the design of the castle, the more history and fame it possesses, the higher is its price tag.

M. Louvet says, "In France the cost of a chateau ranges between 500,000 euros and 30 - 40 million euros; sometimes more. Renovation depends on the condition you buy it in. Sometimes it needs total renovation from cellar to roof and sometimes you only need to redecorate. A property we sold a couple of years ago at the price of 1.1 million euros has totally been renovated by the actual owners for 2 - 3 million euros."

You can head out to the Beaujolais or the Bordeaux regions, where can be

found castles with vineyards, and try your hand at some wine making. Though in France, the wine maker mostly does nothing much apart from owning the land, you might still have a go at choosing the right kind of grapes and the right time to ferment them.

The entire process, from selecting a property to moving into one, is quite tedious and this is where agencies like Agence Internationale Mercure Bourgogne Franche-Comté come in. They dedicatedly deal in such properties and can guide you in the search for the perfect castle, to doing all the non-romantic bits of it: the paper work, taxes, payments and renovations.

Once all that is done and you finally hold the giant keys to the portcullis, you too shall revel in the ancient medieval winds and be the proud owner of a piece of history... Maybe a bottle of vintage Romanée-Conti to complete the picture. **G&B**