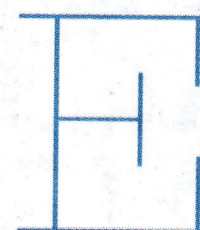


The Daily Telegraph

How to live in the best of both worlds

Is it possible to work in London and reside in a chateau in France, a villa in Spain or a townhouse in Brussels? *Liz Rowlinson* meets the continental commuters who have it all



Every Thursday, fashion director Karen Foster dashes from a magazine shoot in London to catch the 6.40pm easyJet flight from Gatwick to Toulouse. At the departure gate she will meet up with her usual "Thursday night speedy-boarders" and there will be plenty of chatter over a glass of wine or two on the flight. There are at least 40 regulars including Emma who is in advertising, Paul from HSBC, Guy the restaurant designer, Angela the literary editor and 83-year-old Lord Lawson, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer and father of Nigella.

On arrival at Toulouse-Blagnac airport, they will say their goodbyes, race to their cars and head off to join their respective families for the long weekend in the Tarn, Gers or Haute-Garonne – until Sunday evening or first thing Monday when they'll be back in departures bound for Gatwick.

Welcome to the "double lives" of Britain's weekly commuters who divide their time between work in the

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

UK and a home abroad. So what's the reality of having the best of both worlds?

For Foster, 49, the six-hour commute most weeks is more than worth it, because she gets to focus fully on her job or spend quality time with her family, without trying to juggle both seven days a week.

"I'm able to put in longer hours during the week because I don't have to rush back to my family, and when I'm back in France at weekends, I completely slow down and I'm 100 per cent a mother," says Foster, who has two teenage daughters. She and her husband, Will, 44, fell in love with the Haute-Garonne region of the Midi-Pyrénées in south-west France while on holiday six years ago. They hadn't been looking to move abroad but couldn't resist a handsome 15th-century, 12-bedroom chateau in the tiny village of Beauville.

Will, a landscape gardener, renovated the chateau and three of the outbuildings, which are now run as gîtes. "I am so lucky that I can enjoy a lovely rural life – we have 13 sheep, three donkeys, hens and a dog – before rushing back to the mad fashion world in London."

And she's made some firm friends along the way. "Us easyJet regulars even had a Christmas lunch in Mayfair last winter," she says.

Foster suggests that this style of commuting is far less stressful – and less expensive than you would expect. "When I lived in Sussex, I was commuting four hours a day, paying annual car park fees and an extortionate season ticket. I was

always clock-watching. Door-to-door between my flat in Pimlico and the chateau takes three-and-a-half hours and my flights work out cheaper as I can book them in advance, often €29 (£20). EasyJet is trialling a new system that enables you to change your flights for free, which would make sudden changes in my work schedule even easier to manage."

'I love being able to pick and choose work in both cities'



Day job: Fashion designer Foster with supermodel Erin O'Connor