

SEIGNEUR GIVES SEAL OF APPROVAL TO SARK REPOPULATION INITIATIVE

Sark Society, an initiative aimed at repopulating Sark, was launched this week by Islander Swen Lorenz with the bold challenge: *‘Be one of just 500 people to create a new lifestyle for yourself. Repopulate a ‘secret’ European microstate where properties are standing empty.’* <https://www.swen-lorenz.com/sark-society/>. The initiative has attracted considerable local and national media coverage. Yesterday morning, Oscar Pearson of BBC Radio Guernsey introduced an interview with Swen Lorenz before speaking live on air to the Seigneur of Sark, Major Christopher Beaumont.



“A secret European microstate where properties are standing empty? Where could we possibly be talking about? Sark, and that’s exactly how one new relocation service is describing the island. It’s the brainchild of 45-year-old German entrepreneur Swen Lorenz who offers prospective relocators a huge portfolio, with all the information they need, for around £1,000. The website launched on Sunday, I think, and already has more than 20 people signed-up. First on this story this morning, my colleague Rory, spoke with Swen in a busy coffee shop, to find out more about what ‘bang’ people are actually getting for their buck.”



“I first moved to Sark in 2004 and, even though I’ve been away in the meantime for a few years, I very much know of some of the challenges that the island is facing, which, includes the drop in population over the last 10 years, and, as a resident, I am greatly concerned that we are reaching a point where the community is simply not viable anymore. I’ve just decided to, you know, step forward and put myself out there, and set up a website and a service, where people can get help if they want to move to Sark. I’ve already brought people over there, so it’s tried and tested.”

“And, of course, you are not doing this out of the goodness of your own heart. You are looking for a little bit of money. Some would say quite a lot; \$1,300. What are people actually getting for their money?”

“So, at the very heart of it, is a ring-binder with about 250 – 300 pages of very dense information about Sark. It’s a complex project to move to Sark. I mean, I have helped a few people already, and basically everyone has 1,001 questions and I wanted to pre-empt these questions and make sure that everyone can go into this from a very well-informed perspective. And then, on top of that, I

offer anything that someone needs help with, provided it’s not legal advice or tax advice, which I am not licensed to give, I am stepping in to help in a very flexible way. But I wanted to go in there now and sign up the first batch of, I call them, ‘settlers’ just to make it a bit fun. You know, like in reference to the 1565 settlers. We need a new generation of people to inject life into Sark.”

“And how many settlers have you brought over so far?”

“So, two have already moved over. They are late 30s, internet entrepreneurs from London. A married couple who’ve now fully settled; very happy. Another person has already signed their rental contract and one is just about to sign. So, it is already happening, and, over the last 48 hours, I’ve only launched this on Sunday, I’ve already had nearly 20 people sign up to the service and including some very high-profile people and some multipliers. So, I think there, we will see some very high calibre, worthwhile additions to the island in the next couple of months.”

“I was going to say, some of the information they could get, surely, they can get from local estate agents, or other people on Sark, for free?”

“All the information I provide, ultimately, is somewhere in the public domain. Nothing is secret per se. It’s just that, if you wanted to research that yourself, you would probably have to spend several weeks and take one or two trips and then there are the personal relationships that I can bring to the table, that not everyone has. So, yeah of course, you can do it for zero. It depends on what you value your time for, and the people that I’m speaking to right now, value their time very highly.”

“And what’s the feedback been like from the two that have moved over already? How are they finding life on Sark?”

“They can’t get over how amazing it is for them. I mean, never mind the current COVID issue, but the combination of the beauty of Sark, the unspoiled scenery, the quality of life. You know, you can go for a run mid-morning and you are always surrounded by nature. The birds are waking you up in the morning. It’s a lovely community.”

“I wonder what sort of conversations you’ve had with the local government in Sark and maybe even here in Guernsey? Were you asked to set up this venture? Or are you doing this in collaboration with them?”

“So, for me, the very key criteria for doing any of this was, I spoke to the Seigneur of Sark, and, I hope he doesn’t mind me saying, that he was supportive. And that basically came on the back of, he’d already stated publicly, two years ago that Sark needs a population of 800 to 1,000 people to be viable. So, right now, we’ve got 400. We have probably at least 150 empty properties on Sark.”

“I was going to say, I suppose some of the allure to Sark is the fact that it is so isolated and there aren’t a huge amount of residents there. There must be people thinking, I don’t need a lot of other people moving to the island, I am quite happy with the set up as it is?”

“And I respect everyone’s opinion in that regard. I would just add that, you know, once your community gets to a point where your local supermarket might have to shut down, then there maybe the writing on the wall, that the community is just getting a bit too small.”

“And do you have any sort of goal about how many people you would like to eventually help settle on Sark?”

“It’s very difficult to predict how all of this will pan out. I think eventually, and possibly sooner than I even imagine, this whole story will just circle around the globe. And it could well be that my job comes to an end much faster than I think, because it simply becomes a story that, you know, people latch onto in the media and then word spreads. And truth be told, you don’t absolutely need me for this, you know, people can do it themselves. I just save a lot of time for people.”

“Is there scope for your venture to be expanded, you know, if it is as successful as you foresee?”

“I’ll do that for Sark. I would love to create a real success story there, and also, I don’t want to call it legacy, because I am too young for that, but if we could just get to a place where Sark is a fully functioning jurisdiction again. In the sense that it has enough people, it’s economically stable and successful and, you know, then we’re there.”

“Swen Lorenz, founder of the Sark Society, speaking to our reporter Rory O’Reilly. What an intriguing concept. If you fancy moving to Sark, you’ll get a personalised 250-page binder with all the information you need, for the price of £1,000. Live to Sark this morning with its Seigneur, Christopher Beaumont. So, this guy asks people to pay him a grand and then he goes online and checks out some properties, that are all in the public domain, and maybe has a telephone chat with them as well?”



“I think that you’re belittling what Swen is offering. I fully support what he’s doing, and for the people that he deals with, as he said to Rory, he is looking, or

they are looking at saving themselves time, and that’s what he is doing for them. It’s investment advice, as far as they’re concerned, and people will pay money for good investment advice and the advice he is giving is good advice.”

“Yes, and you’ve been on the site?”

“Yes, I have seen his site. We’ve been discussing this for, well, a long time. Swen and I have done some business together. He was very instrumental in helping with last year’s Opera Festival and got us our principal sponsorship. So, Swen and I have been talking about this for a long time.”

“I suppose one of his points was about the population of the island, wasn’t it? Is the community a bit too small?”

“Yes, it is, and you know, if you come here in the winter, you’ll struggle to find a restaurant open seven days a week. So, if you increase the population, the chance of being able to have a more vibrant society, seven days a week, is there.”

“I wonder what you think islanders have or are, going to make of it?”

“Well we’ve always been an island of sort of flux. So, people have been coming on and visiting the island and finding they love it; finding a reason to stay and staying. Many have arrived and married and then stuck and stayed. It’s just that with the world moving as it does, then the viability of small organisations, small islands, is dependent upon its population. So, it is key to have enough people to make it tick.”

“I completely get that point and let me just challenge you about this service seemingly being all about tax savings, and not really reflecting how great island life is. It appears targeted purely at the wealthy?”

“Well yes, Swen may well target his thing at the wealthy. That’s the world he lives in, but that doesn’t mean to say that, as he said in his interview, you can get all this information for nothing if you choose to do that, but for the clientele that he has, they value time over the money and will make that judgement. So, it seems perfectly reasonable to me that people will pay for a service, if it saves them a commodity they’re prepared to pay for.”

“Yes. So, what happens next? Two people relocated, another nearly 20 signed-up. This could go big. It could be quite successful?”

“Yes. If it becomes successful, then we’ll find more people wanting to come to Sark than we’ve got space for, and I would prefer to be in that situation, than in a situation where we have piles of empty properties and nobody knowing that there’s a place to live.”