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FRENCH AGENCY URGES BREXIT-SCEPTIC BRITS TO SET UP SHOP ACROSS THE CHANNEL

A provocative advertising campaign launched by the French region of Normandy will urge British entrepreneurs worried about Brexit to “vote with their feet” and set up business across the Channel.

With negotiations over the future trading relationship between Britain and the EU still mired in disagreement, the Normandy Development Agency (AD Normandie) is targeting British businesses which want to guarantee continued access to the European market.

The ad features a mock-up of a fictional newspaper, The Normandy Times, with the tongue-in-cheek headline “British business owners can now vote with their feet and leave post-Brexit fears behind”.

“If you didn’t vote for Brexit or it’s not right for your business, why not vote with your feet and open an office, or settle a production unit, in Normandy,” urges the paper’s front-page story.

“Now is the time to act,” it adds, pointing out that: “It’s nearly a year since Article 50 was triggered and there is still no sign of an agreement toward ongoing trade with the EU when it comes to goods and services.”

Next to the story, marked out with a red heart, is a mock classified ad: “Hot Entrepreneur Wanted.....someone allergic to post-Brexit tariffs, legislation and restrictions preferred.”

An AD Normandie spokesperson said the aim of the campaign, created by London-based creative agency Splash Worldwide, is “to strengthen ties with our British neighbours” and that it is “Normandy’s answer to gloomy Brexit: a charm operation to seduce British Businesses”.

Hervé Morin, the region’s president who set up AD Normandie in 2016, said Brexit presented “a real opportunity for the development of the Norman economy”.

Morin, who heads the Normandy Regional Council (Le Conseil Régional de Normandie) based in Caen, added: “Brexit gives Normandy a unique opportunity to welcome British businesses who decide to stay at the heart of the European Union. The Brexit deal might not happen tomorrow, but British entrepreneurs are given the choice to decide for themselves if they want to expand their companies in Normandy.”

Among the benefits on offer to British businesses which set up a base in the region are a special economic zone with reduced tax rates, help accessing grants of up to €100,000, legal and tax advice and help finding housing and schools for employees with children.

Just 125 miles across the Channel from England, Normandy is famed for its cheeses, apples and landscape of sandy beaches, lush meadows and bucolic farmland as well as historic gems such as the Bayeux Tapestry, the cathedrals of Rouen and Coutances, and the abbey of Mont St-Michel.

It is now home to an estimated 9,000 Britons while 6,300 Britons have second homes in the region, the largest number owned by any foreign nationality.

The number of applications for French nationality by British citizens in 2016 has increased by 254%, from 385 in 2015 to 1,363 in 2016, according to a report in Le Monde in July 2017.

More than 600 foreign owned companies have set up base in Normandy attracted by its excellent transport links to the rest of Europe, strong agriculture, industrial, logistic, health, energy and digital sectors. Among them are 53 British companies in sectors such as agrofood, health, tourism and microelectronics.

One such company is gin manufacturer C'est Nous Gin in Caen, which was set up in 2016 by David Granville and his wife Julie. The couple met in England but decided to move to Julie's native Normandy in 2015.

Mr Granville said: "We soon realised we could not find the small batch Gins we had grown to love in England - so we decided to create our own. With Normandy being close to the UK, with plenty of international tourists and Julie already knowing the area, it was the perfect place to base our business which we created in summer 2016. Since then, we have worked at developing 'C'est Nous Gin' selling to caves, hotels, bars and restaurants throughout Normandy and France.

He added: "Not knowing the area before I moved over to Normandy, I wasn't sure what to expect. However it quickly became apparent that the people are friendly, welcoming and patient with my French! With beautiful countryside, the quaint villages of the Pays d'Auge and plenty of regional food and drinks to try, there is always something to do. Having the same surname of a Norman town helps to fit in!"

Another British businessman, Simon Frost, set up "Hibou Communication" in Saint Brice de Landelles in 2014.

He said: "Previously, I lived in Portsmouth on the south coast and I continue to have business interests in England, as well as wishing to visit friends and family; as does my wife. So we need to have the ability to travel back to the UK from time-to-time...With Normandy's excellent communication routes - including several ferry ports, regional airports, as well as excellent road links - it is fairly easy. Also, Normandy is close to Paris (connection to the fast TGV network). It has the beautiful Manche coastline we enjoy and from here, it is easy to travel further south into France to appreciate the stunning countryside and towns."

EDITOR'S NOTE

The AD Normandie campaign will appear in The Guardian, The Times, Metro, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard and The Economist from the 14th to the 16th of March.

L'Agence de Developpement Pour La Normandie was launched in April 2016 by the Conseil Régional de Normandie to attract foreign investment and assist foreign companies in setting up business in Normandy.

Its Welcome Package for foreign companies planning to move to Normandy is a free and confidential service which provides help developing partnerships with local companies and accessing funds, advice on legal and tax procedures as well as help finding housing and schools for the children of employees.

The Normandie Participations programme provides funding of up to €100 000 for foreign companies willing to relocate to the region. Once there, foreign companies can benefit from six different types of funding in areas such as strategic analysis, the property market, development, innovation expertise, environmental projects and exports.

Another programme, FFWD Normandie, provides support to foreign companies planning to establish and expand their business within the European common market.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Further information on AD Normandie and the services it provides to foreign companies wishing to locate to Normandy can be found at www.adnormandie.fr or email: michelle@adnormandie.fr tel: +33 6 86 40 84 62

For information on Splash Worldwide go to www.splashworldwide.com or call 020 7324 1420