

Scottish travel group working in France helping Ukrainian refugees

LUXURY TRAVEL GROUP CARRIES ON WITH ITS REFUGEE INITIATIVE – HOUSING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN NORMANDY

A Ukrainian mother and daughter from the Donbas region have just been employed as housekeepers at Karma Lake of Menteith in Stirlingshire, and the worldwide travel group has explained how its Karma Refuge Programme, currently running in Normandy, France works.

Launched by Karma Group founder and owner, British born, John Spence, in March this year, the luxury Karma Residence Normandy, a fully staffed resort with numerous facilities, has been transformed into accommodation for 23 Ukrainian families, some of whom have now settled elsewhere, including the UK, and 13 families who have decided to remain in Normandy. Karma Refuge is now helping these families to settle and become self-sufficient.

During their time at Karma Residence Normandy, the families have been fed and looked after, with opportunities to learn English and French. The children have enjoyed a range of activities, including eight weeks of Summer Camps with volunteer students attending from the UK. They also had the opportunity to learn English and French.

John Spence said: “Having been turned into hotel accommodation for Ukrainian refugees, our resort in Normandy took care of multiple families, mainly women and children, who had endured

long journeys in freezing temperatures for nine, ten hours at a time just to cross the border.

“We have now secured social housing for the families who have decided they would like to continue to stay in France. All the apartments are within a twenty minute drive from Karma Residence Normande, so we can continue to make the resort a place for meetings and catch ups which is great news. We are visiting the apartments this week so we can work out what we will need to buy for them as they will only come with basic furniture.”

Involved in many philanthropic and charitable activities across the globe, Karma Group’s Head of Global Philanthropy, Victoria Williamson, has been heavily involved in Ukraine Refuge.

Victoria said: “Our task at the moment is to help the families who are settling here in Normandy. We’ve started a [Just Giving](#) page to raise additional funds for them.

“Some of the families that came in the Spring have had to return to Ukraine to care for elderly family members who were left there. They don’t want them to be alone this winter. We arranged transport for them to make the journey as easy as possible, and send them our continuing good wishes.”



John Spence said that, having bought his first property in Scotland, the former Lake of Menteith Hotel, earlier this year, he was delighted to hear from the management there that Olena and Daria, a mother and daughter from Bakhmut in Ukraine, have been employed as housekeepers, especially as this means they can work together.

He said: "It was our pleasure to do so as they are living with a local family in the area and were keen to find work nearby," he said. They will be well supported in these positions. Port of Menteith is a quiet rural area, much like Normandy, with a huge feeling of community."

Mr Spence is keen to find other hoteliers to take on refugees, whether housing or employing them.

"The war is dragging on, so we would appeal to other hospitality businesses and individuals to get involved," said John. "We were the first hotel group, as far as we know, to do something like this back in the Spring. We created a humanitarian channel bringing people from Ukraine into a safe shelter in Europe. Now that these people are here, we have to look after them well, ensuring they feel useful and valued, and can ultimately continue with their lives."