

A local's view

Ema Augustyniak and **Peter Evans** moved to Creuse to set up singing, creative and wellbeing workshops and holidays from their 19th-century converted farmhouse in the heart of the Millevaches regional natural park

What attracted you to Soumeix?

The location - being in the heart of the Millevaches natural park and close to the beautiful Lac de Vassivière.

Did you know the area well already?

We discovered it by chance in 2009 while travelling around France in our camper van, then came back every year until we moved in 2013.

Did you find it easy to find a suitable property in France?

We spent several months researching properties online while still in Brighton, looking all over the Massif Central. On our second house-hunting expedition in Limousin we had viewed lots of unsuitable properties and were heading off to continue our search in Auvergne. The day before leaving, one of our estate agents contacted us about a house near Lac de Vassivière that had just come on the market. We loved it as soon as we saw it and moved in four months later.



Eric the dog

When did you set up De Tout Coeur Limousin and what do you most enjoy about running your creative and wellbeing retreats and workshops?

We set it up in March 2014. We really love sharing what we do, supporting others to nurture their own creativity and wellbeing. Being able to do this from our own home in this beautiful place is a wonderful thing. It's lovely to meet new people and see them grow in confidence and open their hearts.

What do the retreats entail?

We offer a space to relax, nurture and retreat in the peace and tranquility of Creuse. Roughly translated De Tout Coeur means 'from the heart'/'wholeheartedly'. Our focus is on doing what we love, with love and enabling and supporting others to do the same.

Guests can choose from activities including singing, holistic therapies, meditation, and new for 2019, combined yoga and singing retreats.

The retreats include group workshops, individual coaching and holistic treatments/training sessions.

The group meals are a big part of what we do too. Ema loves to cook and prepare dishes from around the world using our own homegrown and local produce.

We also run three weekly pop and rock choirs, who perform around the local area. During the singing retreats the choir members join the residential guests for the workshops and end of week concert in our barn. We invite our friends and neighbours to attend too and everyone brings food and wine to share (our neighbour Cyrille's homemade quiche is legendary). It's



Peter Evans and Ema Augustyniak

always a great night with plenty of singing from the heart.

There's always time to explore too, and we often organise group trips around the local area.

Did you have any experience of running something similar before?

Peter started off his musical life as a punk band frontman in the 1970s and has continued to work as professional musician ever since. He has over 30 years' experience as a vocal coach and ran summer singing holidays in French retreat venues from 1997 until we moved here.

He also studied spiritual counselling and graduated from the OneSpirit Interfaith Foundation in 2004.

Ema has a BMus degree and MA in group and intercultural therapy from Goldsmiths, University of London and a background in therapeutic group care.

She is qualified as a holistic therapist - Usui Reiki Master-Teacher, seated acupressure, Indian head massage and meditation teacher.

Ema loves to cook too and, as well



Above: Lac de Vassivière in the spring
Top right: The 19th-century converted farmhouse
Right: Ema and Peter run weekly pop and rock choirs



as her food blog (detoutcoeurlimousin.blogspot.com), has also published and won awards for her recipes.

Where is your favourite place to visit in the area?

It has to be the Lac de Vassivière - beautiful at any time of the year. There are lots of routes for cycling and walking, five swimming beaches and plenty of culture too at the International Art Centre (ciapiledevassiviere.com) on the Île de Vassivière.

As well as the exhibition centre there is also the renowned sculpture park, which includes a favourite land art piece by British artist Andy Goldsworthy; a granite stone wall spiralling between the shore and lake. At the centre of the Île is the lighthouse building, with an incredible, slightly scary spiral metal staircase. If you can brave it to the top you get a fabulous view of the lake, as well as the massive art piece etched into the land - The Unicorn of Vassivière by artist Yona Friedman.

Can you recommend a good restaurant?

During the spring and summer our favourite place to go is La Cabane de La Plage on Broussas beach. A friendly, relaxed place, with great service and a simple, fresh menu. A great place to

“There is a thriving live music scene in the area and we perform as an acoustic duo at local venues and events”

meet friends for an *apéritif*, enjoy some live music and watch the sunset over the beautiful Lac de Vassivière.

What's the best thing about living where you do?

Being part of the community. We were welcomed in quickly and love being part of local life.

There is a thriving live music scene in the area and we perform as an acoustic duo at local venues and events.

Peter also hosts a regular show (I wish I was a Punk Rocker) on Radio Vassivière - our local station.

And we can't forget Eric the pedigree ex-prize winning Cairn terrier and Gary the Griffon cross, our rescue dogs and new members of the family, the canines we'd promised ourselves when we moved to France. They are always guaranteed to

bring a smile to our faces, and are great companions for exploring Creuse.

Is there any aspect of living in Soumeix that surprised you?

We knew that living here in the heart of nature would be tranquil and peaceful but the daily reality of that is still a pleasure and surprise.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of moving to Creuse?

Get involved with the local community and make efforts to learn French. Be prepared for things not always going according to plan. Keep breathing! We took a leap of faith, and there have been some difficult times over the years, but the positives of living here have always outweighed any negatives.

What's next for De Tout Coeur Limousin?

We look forward to welcoming lots of new and returning guests and continuing to take the time to appreciate what we have achieved since our move. detoutcoeurlimousin.com

TURN OVER For a local estate agent's view