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Blue skies: A holiday home revolution, Italian-style

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Meet a family who've had a ringside seat in a hilltop holiday village saved by the digital age



At first the Clarke family's story is familiar one. After six years owning a pretty holiday home in an Italian village they have put their three-bedroom apartment **on the market** within a converted stone house and are planning their next adventure.

But what many people won't realise is that the family, which includes father Steven, mum Rachel and children Eleanor and Charlie (pictured, below), have been involved in one of the world's most extraordinary property experiments.

Colleta di Castelbianco (pictured, left) is a small, 13th century Ligurian hilltop village an hour by car north east of Monaco which, until the early 1990s, was just another crumbling Italian village disappearing back into the earth.

But in 1996 a group of Italian developers bought it and set about both restoring its buildings and turning Colletta into one of Europe's 'e-villages'. Each property within the village has been rebuilt lavishly but with high speed broadband Internet wiring and connections as standard - plus satellite TV and access to a business centre with teleconferencing, fax, e-mail and audio-visual equipment.

Colletta, which is in a fairly isolated position, might not normally be considered an ideal holiday location. But the idea was to use its broadband capabilities to attract owners who could work while staying at or living village - so-called e-business people.



"It was access to the high speed internet connection that first drew me to buying a holiday in Colletta," says Steven. "Initially we were looking to buy in France and then I read a double page article in a national newspaper about the clever renovation work that had perfectly restored this unique village - but it was the fact I could run my car leasing business back in Preston while on holiday that clinched it."

Other attractions of Colletta include communal gardens, swimming pool, sauna, solarium and open air theatre as well as stunning walking and hiking routes all around. There are skiing resorts an hour away in winter time, and one of Italy's most stunning harbour towns, **Portofino**, is two hours away although the nearest beach is just 20 minutes away in Albenga.



The Clarkes have also claim to have been making money from their apartment, which is one of the biggest in the village.

"In high season, which runs from the beginning of May to the end of September, the apartment - which sleeps six comfortably and up to eight if required - is rented out for up to €1,500 euros a week."

But the Clarke's weren't the only Brits to be one of the first to buy a property within Colletta. **Peter Moule**, a businessman who made his fortune making electrical gadgets and found fame when he appeared in the Dragon's Den TV series, bought a £500,000 property there in 1998.

The Clarke's property is for sale with **Realitalia**, the company from whom

they purchased and which was involved in the original renovation of the hilltop properties

