

Earning Remotely From the “Rome of France”



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For freelancer Maggie Montanaro, France has been an integral part of life since childhood.

As the daughter of a high school French teacher, the Ohio native visited France a few times during her mother's school trips. Maggie would go on to study French and spend more and more time there. She participated in a study abroad program, worked as an English teaching assistant, and eventually earned a master's degree in Paris. Today, Maggie is a well-established freelance translator who works from home.

"I have been working as a translator for more than 10 years now. I specialize in technical translation, mostly in engineering and industry. I only work from French into English," she says, explaining that professional translators virtually always translate into their native language.

Initially, Maggie lived in the southern city of Avignon. But in 2013, she moved to Nîmes, which has a population of about 150,000 people. Once a part of Roman Gaul, it boasts a Roman amphitheater, temples, and a state-of-the-art museum that houses archaeological treasures unearthed in the area. This has earned Nîmes the nickname, "the Rome of France."

Maggie especially enjoys Nîmes' roughly 300 days of sunshine. "I also just like the size and feel of the city and of course the beautiful Roman ruins," she adds.



Built around 70 A.D., the Arena of Nîmes is one of the best preserved Roman amphitheaters in the world. @istock.com/saiko3p

In the past, Maggie freelanced for a nuclear energy company and reported to an office. These days, however, she mostly works from home or at a co-working space. "I still work for [the nuclear energy] company today, though remotely and they are no longer my one major client," she says. "I also work for three or four translation agencies who specialize in technical translation and I have a few other direct clients in various fields (online dating app, video games, etc.)."

Maggie estimates that most of her jobs pay about €0.10 (US\$0.11) a word. "In the end, I am calculating the number of hours or days I estimate a translation will take me when I accept work," she explains. "There are averages out there, of how many words you can translate in a day. We often say about 2,500 words a day for technical texts."

While Maggie gets a lot of her work through connections she made during her master's program, she still recognizes the value of online networking.

"I am a member of ATA (American Translators Association) and people can contact me through their directory. I have had a few job offers that way," she says. "I have also looked at the Proz.com job listings in the past. A potential new client recently asked me to join an exclusively French platform for freelancers in all fields, called MALT. I haven't really gotten going on there yet, but it seems like an interesting space for freelancers to find work with some of the biggest companies and most successful startups in France. I also know that some of the larger translation agencies, Transperfect in particular, have online marketplaces where translators can bid on jobs."

Maggie explains that it's important for freelance translators to be comfortable with asking questions.

"You have to be willing to admit you don't understand something every once in a while. I am not an engineer, but I have built a specialization in a very technical field because I was lucky enough to work with clients and fellow translators who could answer my questions and were willing to trust me to ask those questions. I am still not an engineer. And I never will be. But I know my limits, I know when I'm not sure of something and I need to dig deeper in my research or reach out to my client. That ability to question yourself is essential if you want to build a client base and ensure your translations are accurate."

When it comes to learning a new language, Maggie says that living abroad is one of the best ways to become fluent. "I studied French starting in middle school, and all the way through college, but I didn't become fluent until I had lived in France for a year. So for me it was a combination of study and experience in the country."

For those who are not able to immerse themselves in another culture, Maggie suggests creating opportunities to be exposed to your target language. "Listen to the radio, watch movies in the language. Join meetup groups or take conversation classes. Volunteer with an organization working with a population that speaks the language."

If you're already abroad, but still having trouble learning, Maggie stresses the importance of mingling with non-expats. "Seek out activities where you will be forced to practice the language. Do a language learning exchange with someone who is interested in practicing English," she says.

By Tricia A. Mitchell

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