

# luke tammer

Luke Tammer is a defence force aerospace engineer stationed in Aix-en-Provence, France.

Interview Suzy Zail  
Photography AFP/  
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**"I brought my Australian spoodle, Buckley, with me to France.** He loves it here because it's the smelliest place in the world. The relationship the French have with their dogs is bizarre. In Aix-en-Provence, the small southern town where I live, people dress up and stroll down the main street with little dogs sticking out of their handbags. You can take your dog anywhere – restaurants, shopping centres, hotels. It's expected.

"When I came here in 2005, I thought I'd be trading my house in Hawthorn for a shoebox. Instead, I moved into a 17th-century residence with three-metre-high ceilings and a hallway 20 metres long. The apartment is run down, the fireplaces don't work and the terracotta floor tiles keep lifting, but it's amazing.

"I was sent here by the Australian Defence Force. I'm an aerospace engineer and have been with the air force since 1999. I'm assisting the army with its acquisition of 46 MRH90 troop-lift helicopters. I work with 14 other Australians and we spend time together at weekends.

"I'm the only child of independent filmmakers. I was always hanging around on set, moving cameras, lights or sound equipment. Once or twice I had to act, which I hated. As a kid, two things interested me – aircraft and building things. I tried to build an aeroplane out of wood once. It was never going to work. It didn't have a motor.

"I studied medicine at Melbourne Uni for a year then transferred to law/arts. I didn't know what I wanted to do. By the time I applied to RMIT to do aerospace engineering, I was 26.

"I live on a medieval alley about 100 metres from the main street, which is paved in stone and lined with elm trees. There are four or five roundabouts, each with its own 18th-century fountain. All the buildings are three or four storeys, a yellow earthy colour with blue or lavender

shutters. Every few hundred metres there is an ancient church. It's like a postcard. The French all want to live here. It's a sophisticated town.

"It's only half an hour to the Mediterranean from here, so I often head to the sea. It's taken me a long time to adjust my thinking about water sports. The very best beach in the Mediterranean barely compares to the worst part of St Kilda beach. I've been trying to surf since I got here but the waves don't break properly. And there's no sand, it's all rock.

"It's not easy to get a good beer, either. You have to go to Germany where it's cheaper than water and better than French beer. The French drink in bars that double as coffee shops. They drink in moderation but they'll start their day at seven in the morning sipping away at a beer like it's orange juice. I take my coffee mug from home and go to the local coffee shop for a takeaway double espresso. They don't do takeaway in France, so they think I'm strange.

"There's a massive language barrier. In the south of France, they're not very good at speaking English and my French is pretty rudimentary, but they're very patient with me. The French are incredibly polite. We misinterpret French behaviour as rude when they are really just reserved. Living in a country of so many people, they learn from a very young age not to be in people's faces.

"The French dream of coming to Australia because it's the exact opposite of France. There are 60 million people here crammed into a country about a 15th the size of Australia, and they dream of our open spaces and our wildlife. There isn't a single wild animal running around in France any more.

"I really miss my friends and I'm dying to get down to the Great Ocean Road for a surf. I'm going to take a month off, rent a house at Wye River and just sit on the beach."