

OVERSEAS

The best affordable holiday-home hotspots in France

Whether you are looking in Normandy, Provence or the Alps, there are plenty of bargains to be found



Bellac, a town in the Haute-Vienne department

ALAMY

Karen Tait

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F scaping the daily grind for your own place in France is
many a Brit's dream. From a village bolt-hole in

the appeal of the better-known hotspots? Not too far off the beaten track, but still under the radar of most British buyers? Here are a few up-and-coming destinations where interest is on the increase.

South

Languedoc and Provence

The Languedoc-Roussillon region (now part of Occitanie) has seen its fair share of British buyers but there are still pockets that offer good value and where demand is rising. Over the past year, Freddy Rueda of Real Estate Occitanie has sold more properties in the triangle between Pézenas, Béziers and Saint-Chinian in Hérault. “Prices are still affordable compared with other places in the south of France,” he says. “It’s the perfect location in terms of climate and distance to the coast, with rivers, lakes and mountains all within a 30-minute drive, as well as easy access to motorways and airports.”

Trevor Leggett of Leggett Immobilier agrees: “There’s a glorious stretch of towns between Narbonne and Pézenas, taking in Béziers, that runs parallel to the Mediterranean around ten miles inland. You’ll pay €1,940 per sq m in Béziers, which is around a third of what you’d pay for an inland town of similar size on the Riviera.”

Further south, Arnaud Masip of Sextant Properties recommends the Aude department, where buyers benefit from access to ski resorts as well as Mediterranean beaches. “The area has long attracted those moving from northern Europe to a warmer climate, and since the start of the year we’ve registered an increasing number of UK buyers,” he says. “Still, demand is low in comparison to areas such as the Dordogne so prices have remained fairly stable. Buyers can find a charming holiday home with outside space for under €150,000.”

Covering the Vaucluse department for Knight Frank, Laetitia Hodson says that her clients are willing to consider less familiar areas an hour and a half’s drive north of Marseilles airport, where their money will go further. Vaison-la-Romaine, for example, is a Roman town with year-round life, unlike some of the Mediterranean hotspots.

“The landscape is hillier than further south and you’re more likely to find a property with views of vines and lavender,” she says. “I particularly like the villages of Séguret [cobble streets, medieval architecture, hilltop views], Villedieu [pretty square, shady plane trees] and Richerenches [truffle centre] — and they’re on the doorstep of Vaison for the weekly market.”



West

Poitou-Charentes, Limousin

While Charente (now part of Nouvelle-Aquitaine) doesn’t fly completely under the radar, it’s still not as well known as its neighbour Dordogne, and prices remain competitive. Chris Summers of Beaux Villages Immobilier suggests looking around

town. It has bars and restaurants, a weekly market, summer festivals, a mainline station, is close to major road links, and is 30 minutes from Limoges airport,” he says. “A two-bedroom cottage in town would cost from €70,000, or €55,000 in a village within 15 minutes of town.”

James Rolt of Beaux Villages recommends Ruffec in northern Charente. “A lot more clients have been looking for holiday homes here since the end of the Covid lockdowns. The area has rolling countryside, pretty villages and towns, great transport links to the UK, easy access to the Atlantic coast and much lower house prices than other popular areas. A budget of up to €200,000 can secure a detached three-bedroom farmhouse with a half-acre garden. Move up to €250,000-300,000 and you’ll find larger properties with pools and bigger gardens.”

Another town that often gets overlooked is Saintes in Charente-Maritime: “It’s one of the most significantly historic towns in southwest France yet is often ignored by UK buyers who either head for the coast [Royan and La Rochelle] or inland to Cognac country,” Leggett says. “The beaches are only half an hour away while property prices, at €1,900 per sq m, are around a half of what you’d pay in Royan.”

For some of the best property bargains you should head for the Limousin. Historically remote, the region (now part of Nouvelle-Aquitaine) has opened up to holidaymakers and house buyers in recent times. The scenic Corrèze, bordering Dordogne, is a good place to start your search; head further east into the Creuse department and average prices drop even lower, to €910 per sq m.

“On the borders of Dordogne, Corrèze and Haute-Vienne, the

appealing village atmosphere and is within striking distance of all the main tourist sites.”



Cité de Carcassonne

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Southwest

Gers

Most people have heard of Gascony, now part of Gers, but few can name its towns and villages, and the area retains an air of exclusivity. Properties are typically built from the local golden stone, and you can choose from a charming Gascon farmhouse, with a pool and barn, surrounded by countryside and sunflowers, or a pretty village bolt hole.

For those seeking year-round life, Jack Harris of Knight Frank recommends Condom, a vibrant town in the north of the Gers department, an hour from Toulouse airport. Further south, Marciac is internationally famous for its jazz festival but remains unknown to many people. “It’s busy in the summer, but sleepy out of season — and it’s that quality that makes it popular,” Harris says. “People go there for escapism, to switch off; they know they’ll have privacy there. It’s sought-after as a second-home destination with politicians, diplomats and the like.

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“You can buy a character property in Gers for a fraction of the price elsewhere [average €1,490 per sq m]. We’ve received more inquiries here post-Covid, with the ‘race for space’. I think it’ll become increasingly popular, in fact I don’t see why it couldn’t be the future Provence.”

Northwest

Normandy, Brittany, Pays de la Loire

“One area that is definitely under the radar for UK buyers is the triangle between Calvados, Laval and Le Mans,” Leggett says. “This takes in the bottom of Normandy and the top of Pays de la Loire. We’ve seen a big jump in French clients buying holiday homes, for two reasons. Firstly, the climate, as it doesn’t have the extreme temperatures found in Spain, Italy and parts of the Mediterranean. Secondly, the prices, which are among the lowest in France. Even in Le Mans you will only pay around €2,000 per sq m, a bargain for petrol heads like me!”

Suzanne Jenkins-Pearce reports that her agency, Suzanne in France, has seen high demand around Sourdeval, a town in the south of the Manche area of Normandy. “Being a bit inland — one hour from the coast — the prices are lower and properties represent great value for money,” she says. “A habitable property starts from under €50,000.”

Further west, Joanna Galpin of Agence Arguenon says that the coastal resorts of Erquy, St-Cast and Val-André are the unsung heroes of Brittany, and are all accessible from Roscoff and St-Malo ferry ports. “A budget of €500,000 will buy you a substantial house within 30 minutes of the coast, or a smaller cottage or renovation project closer to the coast,” she says. “In the hinterland of Jugon-les-Lacs, your budget will stretch to a larger property with land.”

Southeast

Alps

investing in infrastructure. It's no surprise that properties are some of the priciest in France.

After two years of above-average price gains in the top resorts, are there still pockets of value, offering a good ski range and snow-sure credentials? Yes, says Charlie McKee of Alpine Property Intelligence. "Two resorts that have been relatively overlooked by UK buyers are Alpe d'Huez and La Rosière. Both have extensive, high, sunny slopes, above 1,800m and reasonably priced property. Thanks to some new developments there is plenty for sale in Alpe d'Huez. Prices start in the €210,000 range for a three-bedroom apartment in the Quartier du Vieil Alpe development — rare for a high-calibre resort at this altitude.

"Also worth a mention are Les Menuires in the Trois Vallées [one and two-bedroom apartments below €400,000] and La Clusaz/Grand-Bornand in the Massif des Aravis, where the Angelus and Les Cristaux developments offer one to three-bed apartments starting in the €350,000 range."

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One way to achieve better value for money is to buy in a lower-altitude village with links to the higher ski areas. "We've seen a big increase in inquiries over the past couple of years for Les Gets and Châtel [Portes du Soleil]," comments Richard Deans of My Chalet Finder, "not big-name, huge-altitude resorts but low-lying attractive villages close to Geneva with superb summer activity as well."

Towns that are more than just a ski station are rising in

The average price for an apartment here is €4,110 per sq m, around half the cost of the better known resorts.”

You can be pretty sure of a good investment too — the annual Cimalpes Panorama report expects prices to rise by 9 per cent in St-Gervais-les-Bains in 2023.

For sale



This open-plan villa is just five minutes from the centre of the historic town of Pezenas

Hérault, €399,000

Recently reduced in price, this four-bedroom villa with a terrace and pool is five minutes from the centre of Pezenas, a small town located between Béziers and Montpellier, and a 20-minute drive from the Mediterranean. [frenchestateagents.com](https://www.frenchestateagents.com)



Haute-vienne, €234,960

A quaint wooden-beamed stone farmhouse that is ripe for a makeover. The living space includes a rustic living/kitchen/dining area and four bedrooms. Bellac is a 20-minute drive away, and Limoges an hour. beauxvillages.com



Original features in this property include marble surround fireplaces and parquet floors

Dordogne, €299,000

This maison de maître is in Lanouaille, a town halfway between Périgueux and Limoges. With eight bedrooms in 230 sq m of living space, plus a stone barn and 11,280 sq m of land, you get serious bang for your buck. limousinpropertyagents.com



Gers, €399,000

This stone property with four bedrooms is a ten-minute drive from Condom. The cosy house includes a wood-burner and a pantry. Outside there is a courtyard, a large terrace, a pool and charming blue-shuttered windows. bellemaisonngascony.com



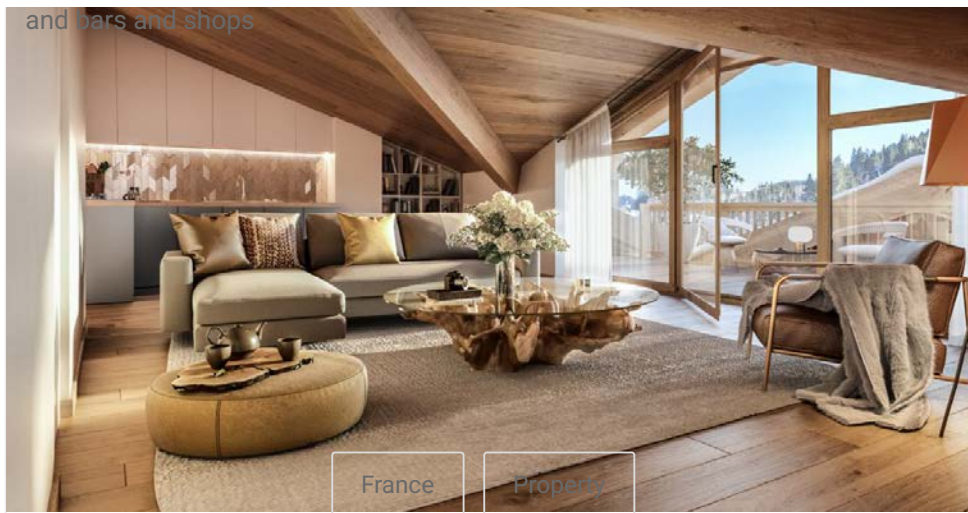
This four-bedroom home is on the edge of a national park and just 3km from St-Sever

CHRIS YOUNG

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Calvados, €186,500

A four-bedroom home equipped to get the most of any Norman sunshine, as it includes a conservatory and large gardens with a terrace. The wetlands park of Cotentin and Bessin Marshes is a 30-minute drive away. frenchestateagents.com



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