

OVERSEAS

## Where to buy property in Cognac, France

Wines, vines and sunshine — just a few reasons why life in western France is the toast of British homebuyers



Bouteville, a village near Cognac  
ALAMY

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Liz Rowlinson

Wednesday December 28 2022, 12.01am GMT, The Times

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**T**en years ago Nicki Brown swapped a life working on consumer magazines in London for Cognac between the Loire and Bordeaux in western France. The town is famed for being home to the world-famous brandy since 1715, but for Brown the area simply offers a better quality of life for her and her two children than if they had stayed in St Albans, Hertfordshire.

“We’d had a holiday home in the area since 2004 and loved the riverside town surrounded by vineyards and the general lack of pressure,” says Nicki, 54, who runs a design business and has a

French husband, Alain. “It’s a small town with elegant architecture and good sport facilities.”

Trips on *gabarres* (flat-bottomed boats) that were used to transport cognac along the River Charente, and stops at *guinguettes* (open-air cafés), are traditions but a recent addition is Indigo, a smart rooftop bar atop Maison Martell, the cognac house’s headquarters in the town.

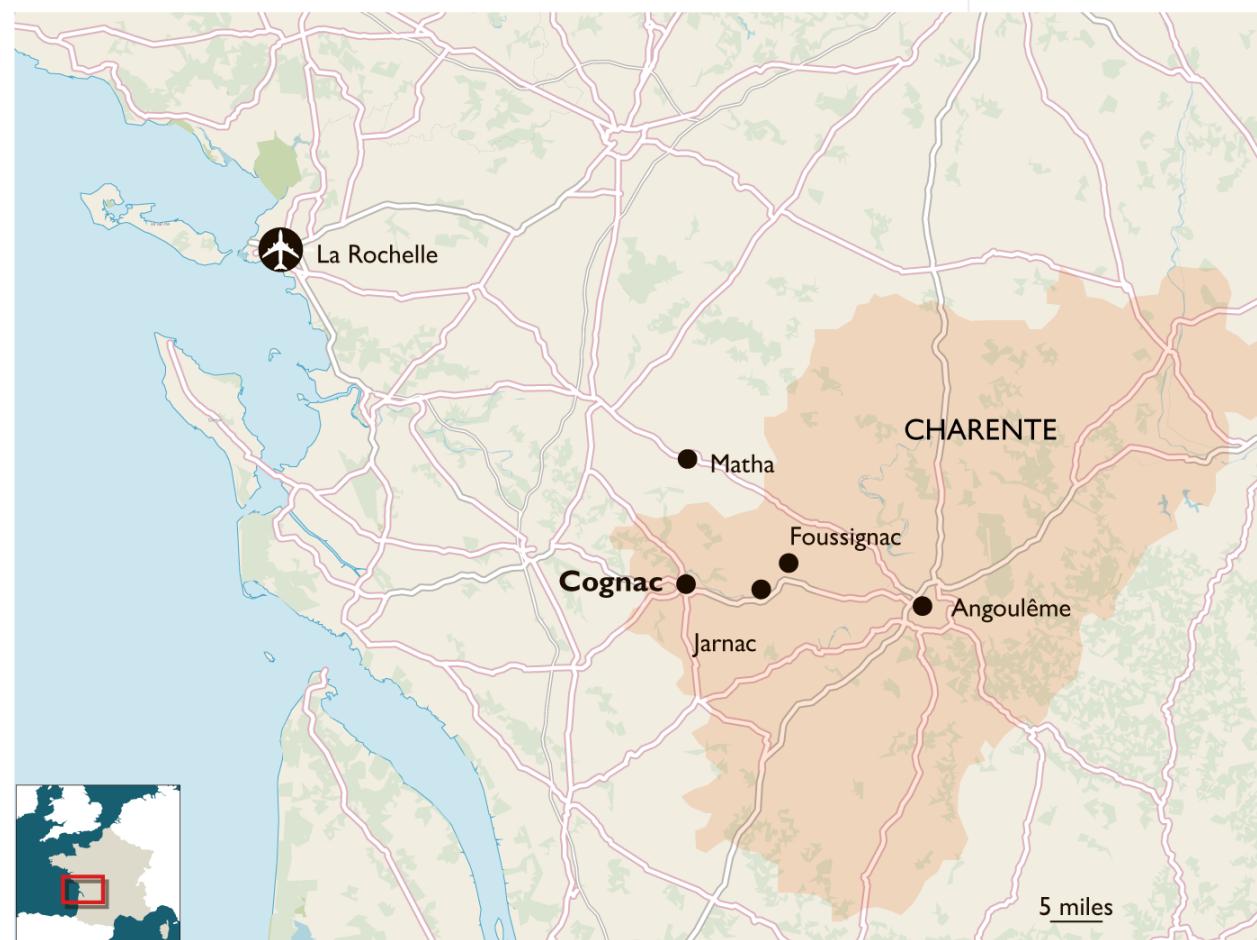


A nine-bedroom maison de maître in Mérignac, with two gîtes and a pool, is on sale for €745,000 via Leggett

The presence of the cognac houses, who often sponsor local events, lends the area a cachet that draws tourists and house hunters, according to Julie Hill from the estate agent Leggett Immobilier. “The area around Cognac has an upmarket feel,” she says. “Every summer the area is full of restaurant pop-ups and live music with the two big festivals, the Cognac Blues Passions and Fête de la Musique Cognac.”

The Charente is a popular region for its vines, sunflowers and sunshine but also affordable property. The average property is €1,361 (£1,200) per sq m, according to the French property portal SeLoger, compared with the Dordogne’s €1,589, which means that €250,000 (£220,500) can buy you a detached house with a garden. A four-bedroom townhouse in Cognac with a workshop and a garage is on sale at €285,000 (through Leggett).

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Homes in the south of Cognac — where the finest brandies are produced — command a premium but you can still find the often-requested *maison de maître* (detached master's house) with a pool for about €400,000. Along with the British, the Dutch and Americans like to buy homes in the area, and the villages of Brives-sur-Charente (west of Cognac) and also Foussignac and Jarnac to the east are popular.

The riverside market town of Jarnac is the home of Hine and Courvoisier cognac houses. South of Jarnac, in the village of Saint-Même-les-Carrières, Anne Casey from Harrow, northwest London, has run a B&B from a three-bedroom Charentaise house for 20 years. “The area drew me because it was sufficiently south to enjoy great weather, cheaper than

Provence and not full of expats like the Dordogne,” says Casey, 68, who quit her job as a school administrator for a “new chapter in France”.



A four-bedroom maison de maître with a swimming pool, near Jarnac, is on sale for €599,000  
via Beaux Villages

“I love walking my two dogs along the chalk paths through the vines. It’s a practical place to live — I’m half an hour from Angoulême and this little valley has four airports about 100km (62 miles) away.”

Your money will go further in the north, towards Matha and Niort in Deux-Sèvres, where it’s possible to find a little house for €150,000, says Glenn Elsen from the estate agent Beaux Villages Immobilier. The Belgian gave up stockbroking to move his family to Châteauneuf-sur-Charente.



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“It’s a relaxing way of life, living among the vineyards without traffic jams, even when there are tourists in the summer. The key is to choose a village where there’s a bar/restaurant. You might pay slightly more because they are more popular with [overseas] buyers,” he says.

He lives near Angoulême, whose annual comics festival and classic car rally draw interest in both winter and summer.



A beautifully renovated five-bedroom maison de maître in Bourg-Charente is available for €449,000 with Leggett

Stephen Sadler, from North Yorkshire, has had a holiday home in the area for 11 years. “We visit four or five times a year and we like the restaurants and small distilleries,” says Sadler, 62, who owns a stone five-bedroom Charentaise house in Juac near producers of pineau des Charentes, a fortified wine aperitif, and cognac.

“The Maison Brillet distillery is a great little place for a drink and a chat, and then there’s the great L’Essille Hôtel-Restaurant in nearby Bassac. As a fisherman, I was drawn to living by the sea,” he says.

Charente river, and the area reminds me of the Cotswolds with all the beautiful cream limestone buildings," he says.



A typical café in Cognac  
ALAMY

## Need to know

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- The area is served by four airports: La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Limoges and Poitiers
- The Cognac area — Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) — of about 79,000 hectares of vineyard is the second largest wine region in France after Bordeaux
- To stay in France more than 90 days in any 180 days you will need a long-stay visa

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