

# Holiday highs

Finding it tricky to narrow down the best place to buy a holiday home and rental property in France? **Nadia Jordan** offers some advice



France is the most-visited country in the world, which is already a good argument for investing in property with the potential to appeal to the holiday rental market as well as somewhere to be used as a holiday home. In addition, around 80% of French tourists stay within their own country so, in terms of rental demand, the market is large and varied.

Buying a house in France and capitalising on the buoyant holiday rental market is a growing trend for property investors. With annual rental yields in rural France exceeding the returns from buy-to-let properties in London, Dublin and Paris, it is easy to see why.

In addition, France is, arguably, one of the best places in the world to own a holiday home - both for your guests and your own use - because it has a bit of everything for everyone, with unspoiled countryside, mountains, rivers,

ancient villages, beautiful architecture, culture, food and wine, varied coastline, cities, history and culture.

Each department is very different from the next. Which, of course, begs the questions where on earth do you start your search and what do you focus on when looking for the perfect place to buy a holiday house in France? If you are already a regular visitor to the country, you will probably have favourite areas and an idea of the sort of place that might appeal to potential guests. The difficult bit comes when you have to start narrowing down your search to a particular area and pinpoint the factors that make the perfect holiday house and location.

If earning an income is your goal, then your best bet is to look at easy-to-maintain, smaller properties where tourism is popular and prices relatively low. It is worth having a look at popular rental sites to get an idea of nightly



Buying somewhere with a pool makes sense in an inland location



Anney's old town is charming and popular with tourists



The Occitanie region is hugely diverse in terms of landscape and property prices



## "If you and your family and friends plan to travel there frequently, then it is important to look at travel links to the region"

Are you prepared to heat the property in the winter?

### SURROUNDINGS

Would you like to be by the coast or in the middle of the countryside? Is proximity to mountains or to city culture important or perhaps somewhere in between?

Are you hoping to be part of a community - perhaps a small village where you can get to know your neighbours in the village café? Bear in mind that some seaside towns can be very busy in summer and almost devoid of life in winter with all the bars, restaurants and shops that first attracted you, shut during the off-season. Likewise, while the countryside may be beautiful and peaceful, if you are leaving your property unattended for long periods of time, is it perhaps too isolated?

And if you are planning to rent it out, it may be difficult to find someone locally to manage it.

### TYPE OF PROPERTY

Do you hope for something old with character and some land, or a more modern property; perhaps a lock-up-and-leave apartment with a balcony or terrace? Are you happy to take on a renovation project or would you prefer to move straight in? Is it a long-term property? Is it practical if you are planning to rent it out to holidaymakers as well as use it yourself? What about running costs? Is it safe for children? Would you like a pool or the potential to install one?

### LOCAL AMENITIES

Are there plenty of things nearby to visit, tourist sights, commerce, year-round life? ▶

rental rates and occupancy levels in different regions.

If, on the other hand, you have your heart set on a rural farmhouse in deepest France, surrounded by sunflowers and vineyards, which you let out occasionally to cover the running costs, this is certainly achievable but make sure you do your research.

A property that is comfortable, French in character, attractive and set in beautiful countryside is likely to attract holidaymakers in peak seasons, even in less well-known regions (although bear in mind that this type of property might not be ideal if you hope to use it yourself in July and August).

So where to start looking and what to consider? A good way to begin is to make a list of what you and potential guests are looking for in a holiday property and how you will spend your time when you are there. Key points to consider include accessibility, climate,

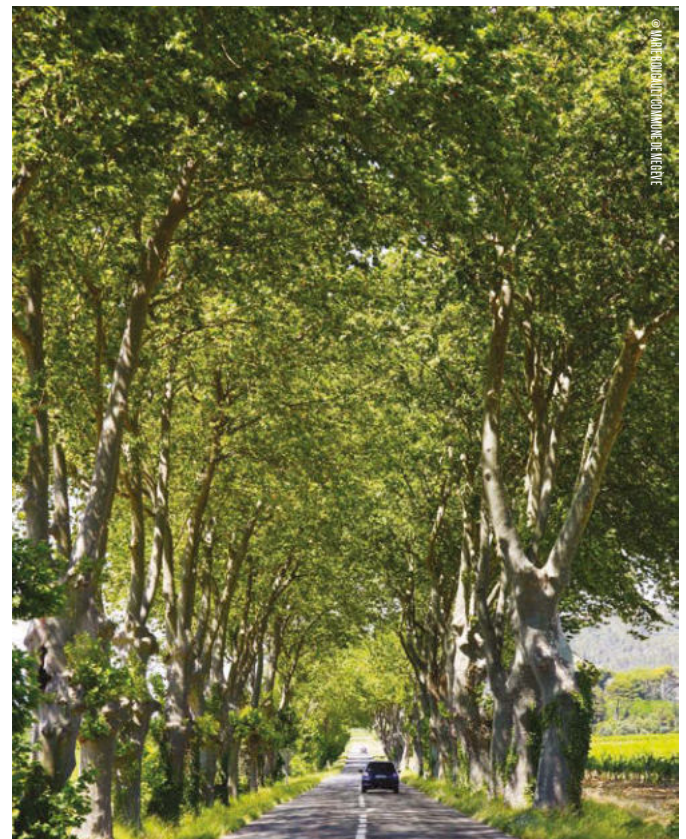
surroundings, property type, amenities, how photogenic it is and, of course, budget.

### ACCESSIBILITY

If you are planning to let your property to tourists, and if you and your family and friends plan to travel there frequently, then it is important to look at travel links to the region. This means proximity to an international airport, but also to TGV rail stations and road links. Ideally, it is best to have a major travel link within 60 to 90 minutes of the property.

### CLIMATE

Are you planning to visit or rent out the property all year round? If you are, you should probably look south of the Loire. If you are focused on sporting or outdoor activities, a climate suited to walking, cycling or riding would be better. How about skiing, is that of potential interest? Do you like a Mediterranean climate or do you prefer cooler weather?



Travel links are a vital consideration when choosing a property





Setting is all-important when it comes to selecting a property people will want to spend their holiday at

Can you easily stock up with food, go out for coffee? Are good restaurants close by? Do you like cycling, walking, skiing, sailing, visiting local markets, museums, events?

**IS IT PHOTOGENIC?**

This might seem very low down the list of priorities for a holiday

house but, for rentals, it really helps to attract potential guests if both the house and the region are photogenic.

Most holiday rental bookings now come through specialist websites where there is a lot of competition, so your property needs to stand out, and beautiful photos are the best

way to ensure this. The same goes for social media sites - good photos win bookings.

**BUDGET**

Once you are clear what your budget is, have a good look online at the property prices in different regions to make sure you have an idea of

what you can afford, to avoid disappointment once you begin your search in earnest.

At this point, it makes sense to decide whether a particular region is more important to you or a certain style and size of property. If it is the region, then are you prepared to compromise on the type of house so that you can afford to buy there? If it is the house that's the deal-breaker, make sure the region is not too much of a compromise in terms of what you are looking for in a holiday location. There will always be compromises, but you should have a good idea of your main priorities.

In addition, remember to factor the costs of buying into your budget. Usually, the agency fees will be included in the asking price of a property, but the *notaire's* fees are in addition, and these are around 8% of the purchase price. Then, of course, there are the costs of any renovation or redecoration, and of furnishing the property (it's important that these are good quality and practical if it

**WHERE TO BUY**

While any part of France that is popular with tourists will have its own merits, for me, these four regions meet the criteria for the perfect holiday home and rental location.

**PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR**



This is the most expensive area of France after Paris but, if you have the budget, it is also one of the most popular spots for visitors and tourists - and for good reason. Provence, with its plethora of historic hilltop towns, picture-perfect villages, olive groves, vineyards and lavender fields, plus the Riviera with its beautiful beaches and Mediterranean lifestyle, is many visitors' image of true France.

In addition, it has a hot and sunny climate, attracts visitors

year-round and has good rail, air and ferry links. Hence, a property in this region would seem to be a sound investment - whether that be as a holiday home or a rental property.

Types of property include old stone farmhouses and modern villas, and the average price per square metre is over €3,000. Expect to pay a minimum of €200,000 for a small apartment, rising to €2m or more for larger properties with land and a pool.

**ALPS**

The most popular resorts for second homes in the French



Alps tend to be those at the highest altitude where the ski season lasts longest, but also where there is a summer season for year-round holidays and

holiday rentals. For example, Chamonix is busier with tourists in the summer than in the winter thanks to the numerous activities on offer for all age groups.

Also popular are the towns in the valleys that are close to the ski resorts, but which also have good access to a larger choice of towns and cities and year-round facilities. Annecy is particularly sought-after for people who love both winter and summer sports. The old town is charming, full of narrow cobbled streets and teeming with restaurants, shops and cafés. The lake is a big draw too, ideal for swimming, boating, paddleboarding and with a great cycling route. Plus, of course, in the winter, world-class ski resorts are within an hour's drive.

All of this makes the region ideal for a holiday property and holiday rentals year-round.

However, this popularity is reflected in the property prices, which have consistently risen by more than the average for France over the past 10 years. Its average property price is one of the highest at around

€450,000. Types of property include wooden mountain chalets, farmhouses and modern apartments. Price per square metre is high at around €2,000.

**OCCITANIE**

The formation of Occitanie in January 2016 created the largest region in France, which contains 13 departments. Formed from the union of the former Midi-



Pyénées and the Languedoc-Roussillon regions, it includes a rich variety of landscapes and microclimates, including two mountain ranges and 220km of



Outdoor space is a must for alfresco lunches in sunny climes



Choose a chalet in the Alps for fun in the snow (and the sun in summer)

**"For holiday rentals, it really helps to attract potential guests if both the house and the region are photogenic"**

is going to be a rental property) and the ongoing running costs - even when you are not using the house - such as property taxes and maintenance.

Remember to budget for the long term, for instance, allowing for the expense of paying someone to keep an eye on the house for you, tend the garden or clean and change linen if you plan to take some holiday rental bookings.

France is one of the most attractive countries in the world to buy a holiday home or invest in a rental property. It is certainly much more rewarding to own your own holiday home, become part of the community and get to know the area and the best restaurants and places to go

rather than simply renting from someone else. It is, however, important to do your research to ensure that both the region and the property will give you the results you are hoping for. Focus on the location, the type of property and the target market of holidaymakers you want to attract, but also make sure the property speaks to you so that, whatever happens, you will get many years of pleasure from your French home. ■

**Nadia Jordan runs [thefrenchpropertyfinders.com](http://thefrenchpropertyfinders.com), a network of property finders covering the most sought-after regions of France, and Foothills of France, a property search agency in south-west France [foothillsoffrance.com](http://foothillsoffrance.com)**

Mediterranean coastline. The region's capital is Toulouse.

**Midi-Pyrénées:** With Toulouse at its heart, Midi-Pyrénées has hugely diverse landscapes and the same can be said of its property prices. These range from top end in and around Toulouse, becoming more affordable the further from the city you go, particularly to the west and south-west towards Gers. This largely agricultural department has escaped the blights of mass tourism, motorways and TGV lines and is very unspoiled and still very good value.

The types of property in this region vary hugely from grand châteaux, *manoirs* and *maisons de maître* to farmhouses and small village dwellings. Prices range from €100,000 for a small village house to well over €700,000 for a large fully renovated property and upwards of €1m for a château.

Prices per square metre are approximately €1,500 on average, but are highly variable depending on a property's

proximity to Toulouse. Prices are likely to increase further with the green light having been given recently to the new TGV line from Toulouse to Bordeaux and Paris, the move away from the daily commute to more home-working and increased interest in rural property.

**Languedoc-Roussillon:** Also now part of the Occitanie region, but very different in character with a much more Mediterranean influence, Languedoc-Roussillon is one of the more expensive areas of France, and might eventually catch up with the Côte d'Azur in terms of property prices, thanks to pressure on property and increasing demand in the region.

This, in conjunction with a very dynamic tourist industry, makes it a good location for a holiday property rental investment. This year, it is the most in-demand region for holiday rentals after the Côte d'Azur. The larger cities such as Montpellier, Perpignan, Narbonne and Carcassonne, as well as coastal areas and villages such as Collioure and

Port-Vendres, Peyriac-de-Mer, Bages and Gruissan are the most sought after. Cheaper and bigger properties are available inland in the countryside, away from the coast.

Old stone houses, as well as modern new-builds, are available here. However, many properties do not have gardens, this being the largest winemaking area in France with land hard to come by. Expect to pay at least €150,000 for a small house rising to over €1m for larger homes. Prices are also likely to increase with the advent of the new TGV line to Barcelona from Perpignan. The average price per square metre is approximately €2,000.

#### LOIRE VALLEY

This is an area that has grown greatly in popularity with holidaymakers over the past 10 years and as many as 20% of properties here are second homes. A landscape of forests, small towns and villages dotted along the River Loire, as well as the famous châteaux

and vineyards, lends itself particularly well to tourism with an established rental market and a high volume of tourists during the summer months.

This area offers varied property styles from châteaux and *manoirs* to *longères* and smaller stone cottages and barns. The average property price is around €240,000, but it is still possible to pick up a renovation project with a garden or small piece of land for less than half this. At the other end of the scale, a large château will set you back from €800,000 upwards. The average property price per square metre is around €1,700.

