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The fuss-free guide to bagging your dream home in France

Buying the perfect home in France can be a daunting prospect, but it doesn't have to be - professional property finder **Nadia Jordan** offers her tips and advice

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Research is the key to finding the perfect property. Keep in mind Abraham Lincoln's quote: "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

It is important to have a dream but also to have a realistic plan to achieve it. A successful property purchase is usually the result of good planning and research - before house viewings begin.

Househunting in your own country can be difficult but looking for a new home abroad is even more so. Sometimes this can lead to people diving in,

overlooking important things and compromising on too many aspects. Doing initial research will help keep you on track.

It's worth looking at lots of different types of properties for sale online to get a feel for what you like and don't like, what different regions offer, and approximate house prices in the areas you like. You can also identify what factors you are willing to compromise on should the need arise. If you've thought through what would and would not work for you, you can start your search with a clear idea of what you're looking for and will waste far

less time travelling to view unsuitable properties.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT HOUSE

Make sure you choose the right property for you for now, but also for the future. Once you have narrowed down a specific region, you can think about what style of home will suit you best. Do you want a large farmhouse with lots of land in the middle of nowhere, a smart *maison de maître* in a village or town, a lock-up-and-leave village house or an apartment in a ski or spa town with all facilities?

Consider the number of bedrooms you need and outdoor space. Do you hanker after a character property or something more modern? How about taking on a renovation project or would you rather move straight in? If you'll live full-time there, do you plan to work from the house, in which case you will need a good internet connection and office space. And if you want to be part of a community, you won't want to be too isolated. How much land do you want? Ask yourself if you like gardening or would you prefer to sit on a terrace or balcony?

“Try to keep an open mind when viewing; sometimes a few simple alterations could transform a house, making it perfect”

of spaces and every family has different needs. Try to imagine yourself in the space.

When you view a property, it is a good idea to know what you are willing to be flexible on and where you are not willing to negotiate. If you have too many non-negotiables, you may never find that perfect house as it is unlikely you will get everything on your wish-list. Try to keep an open mind when viewing. Sometimes a few simple alterations could transform a house from ticking 80% of the boxes on your wish list to making it perfect.

Second viewings are vital, as this is when you start to see the house as it really is - and yourself living there. Ask the seller questions if you can, and explore the local area if you haven't already. Above all, remember that when buying a house, you have to have the right feeling about it, so even if it ticks every box on your wish-list, it may not be the house for you if it doesn't feel right.

MAKE AN OFFER

Wait too long to make an offer on a property and someone else could nip in and buy the house of your dreams. If you have done your research, viewed a number of properties and have a good feeling about one, which satisfies your list of non-

negotiables, then now is the time to make an offer.

READ THE SURVEYS

The seller is required to supply a series of obligatory tests called the *Dossier de Diagnostic Technique* (DDT). These cover asbestos, electrics, energy efficiency, gas, lead, natural or technological risks, and termites. You get to see the results before you exchange contracts (*compromis de vente*). These are just for information for the buyer, not a means to re-negotiate the agreed price - although they are very useful for knowing where improvements are needed.

GET SOME HELP

If all of this just seems too much, you could always engage the services of a property finder. When time is precious and getting it right is important, a property finder can do all the research and legwork for you and will already have a feel for what is on the market in the region that matches your search criteria and budget. They will deal with all the agents but also the *notaires* and private sellers and will be able to find houses not yet on the open market.

Once they have done the initial research, they will pre-visit all of the houses

that appear (on paper) to match your criteria and it will be their time wasted rather than yours rooting out the properties that don't match up to their promises or meet your requirements.

When they do find a house that seems to be a good fit, they will take photos of how it really is and write up a report for you so that gradually you will have a shortlist of properties that really do match your criteria. An experienced property finder can give you impartial advice on best locations and market value.

FINAL WORD

It is safe to say that you can find pretty much any kind of property in France but a perfect house in the wrong location is the wrong house even if it ticks every other box. So, before you begin your property search, you need to understand the sort of lifestyle you want and how you are going to achieve it, as well as your budget and where you want to live.

It's a lot to think about but, if you keep all these things in mind as you search, you are much more likely to end up with your dream home. Having said all this, plenty of people end up buying something completely different to what they had originally planned and are very happy.

The perfect property might not be what you think you want, which is why keeping an open mind is also critical when buying a home. Sticking rigidly to a plan can be just as bad as having no plan at all so be prepared to be flexible. As Winston Churchill said: "Plans are of little importance, but planning is essential." ■

Nadia Jordan runs thefrenchpropertyfinders.com, a network of property finders covering the most sought-after regions of France, and foothillsoffrance.com, a property search agency in southwest France



Looking for your dream home? Buy with your head as well as your heart

If the property is to be a business, consider the clientele you are looking to attract and whether the income will be enough to support you, especially if it is a seasonal business. And if it is to be a holiday home, think about how you, your family and friends will use it while you're there and what activities you're most likely to do - cycling, walking, skiing, riding, visiting local attractions and towns, or just sitting on the beach?

ARRANGE VIEWINGS

Viewing your potential dream home for the first time is one of the most exciting aspects of househunting. There are, however, a few things to bear in mind during and after a viewing to help you decide if it really is the house for you.

Be realistic and consider the practicalities as discussed but also remember the bigger picture, which is to find the kind of house that works for you and your family and lifestyle. Everyone responds differently to different types



A wonderfully rural setting may seem great, but how isolated do you want to be?