



Learn more about
the regions of France

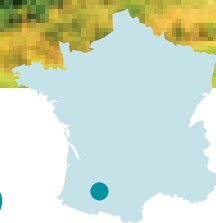
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For buyers looking to find a house in France, whether for holidays or permanent living, there are certain search criteria that come up again and again. Some of these are practical motivations such as the quality of life, the style and affordability of the houses, the climate, the people and – of course – the food and wine. Other reasons are less tangible and stem from the romantic picture many of us have in our minds of rural France.

It's for this reason that the Gers ticks the boxes for so many people looking to buy in France. Nestled in the heart of the southwest, it's the stuff of picture postcards, with rolling foothills stretching towards the Pyrénées and dotted with numerous fortified hilltop towns. It has culture, history and gastronomy in abundance as well as more than its fair share of beautiful stone houses, vineyards, rivers and unspoiled scenery – all barely touched by modern sprawl.

The region exudes a very typical rural French charm that

Gentle Gers



Discover the charms of the Gers department – part of the old Gascony region – and discover why it is one of the best places to buy a house in France, writes **Nadia Jordan**



A picture-postcard landscape of rolling hills with vineyards, rivers and hilltop villages, and the Pyrénées as a backdrop

“Nestled in the heart of the southwest, the Gers is the stuff of picture postcards”



‘Castelnau’ village Lavardens is also one of the *Plus Beaux Villages de France*



Regional hub Auch is a pretty market town that is popular with tourists

de France - will have a castle in its midst (or the remains of one), and a *sauveté* village will have a church. The best-known places in the Gers tend to be the *bastide* towns and villages, their houses surrounding a central square built for defence. One of the best examples of this is Marciac, also home to the annual jazz festival.

In terms of the style of houses you will find in the department, probably the most well-known is the L-shaped Gascon farmhouse, many of which have been renovated over the years to form holiday or permanent homes. With guest accommodation around a courtyard, they are usually south facing with lovely views over the Gers countryside.

Village houses are also very popular for buyers looking for holiday homes, as they tend to offer the perfect lock-up-and-leave accommodation. There are usually neighbours, who will keep an eye out and facilities such as bakeries and

attracts homebuyers seeking an authentic French lifestyle. While regions like Provence and the French Riviera often steal the spotlight, the Gers is shy and retiring, quietly offering its own understated blend of tranquillity, local specialities and natural beauty.

TRANQUIL SPOT

The Gers is one of most rural and least developed departments in France, with numerous beautiful stone farmhouses, pretty village houses and handsome town houses, as well as châteaux of all sizes. Property here remains good value with something for just about every buyer.

The architecture of the buildings and villages changes depending on which part of the Gers you are looking to buy in. Hence you will find pretty, half-timbered properties or farmhouses built with stones from the rivers in the south of the region, while in the north, houses tend to be built from local, white quarried stone.

A *castelnau* village, such as Lavardens - a *Plus Beaux Village*

FIVE REASONS TO LOVE THE GERS

Gentle rural life

The Gers probably has some of the most unspoiled and tranquil countryside in France, dotted with sunflower fields, vineyards and orchards. Away from the hustle and bustle and stresses of urban life, it is a region that encourages relaxation and a slower pace of life while the expansive landscapes provide the perfect opportunity for outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling and riding.

Rich cultural heritage

Steeped in history and tradition, the Gers boasts a rich cultural heritage that is reflected in its charming villages, medieval castles and historic sites. From the fortified town of Larressingle to the bustling market hub Auch, the area is home to a collection of architectural gems and cultural landmarks that offer a glimpse into France's past, which still

influences the patterns of daily life today.

Gastronomic delights

A paradise for food enthusiasts, Gers is well known for its gastronomic specialities such as foie gras and confit de canard and, of course, armagnac brandy and Floc de Gascogne. The department's culinary offerings are a testament to its agricultural bounty and long history of small farms, food culture and local delicacies. Farmers' markets and local restaurants are numerous and showcase local culinary traditions, making it the perfect place for anyone who appreciates France's gastronomy.

Strong community spirit

Known for its warm hospitality and strong sense of community, Gers hosts festivals, traditional events and communal celebrations throughout the year. From

village fêtes, to a wine tasting at a local vineyard, or a leisurely meal at a favourite restaurant, residents here embrace the art of living well and celebrating together whether you've lived here all your life, or are just passing through.

Accessible amenities

Despite its rural charm, the Gers is easily accessible either by air from Toulouse or Bordeaux airports, rail by the TGV from Bordeaux, or by car. There are no motorways in this department, but there are very few cars on the roads making driving a pleasure, especially on the rural roads with beautiful views in all directions. There are also good-sized, larger towns like Auch and Condom, which serve as regional hubs, providing residents with a wide range of amenities including theatres, cinemas, schools, galleries and lots of individual shops.



A town of art and history, Lectoure is on the Chemin de St-Jacques-de-Compostelle



Larressingle is a medieval fortified village in the northern Gers

cafés within easy walking distance. Many also have small gardens, a terrace or a balcony, perfect for that morning coffee or evening aperitif.

Much sought after in the Gers department - particularly by foreign buyers - is the classic château. These vary greatly in style from the later examples (17th and 18th century), which are generally built with comfort and looks in mind, to the much earlier defensive châteaux built to protect and intimidate.

Every château tends to be individual in style, with elements such as turrets and towers and large rooms with high ceilings and beautiful, stone fireplaces. Most also come with lots of land and are probably more suited to full-time living or a business proposition such as a hotel or retreat.

TUSCANY IN FRANCE

Thanks to the rolling hills, gentle landscapes, tree-lined



Sunflowers in the Pyrénées foothills



Armagnac is produced in the region

lanes and the numerous, old stone properties set on the top of hills, the Gers has become known as the Tuscany of France for good reason. In addition, it embodies the quintessential French rural lifestyle combining a perfect blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage and gastronomic delights with pretty architecture and small friendly villages.

The Gers makes an ideal location for exploring; everywhere is within reach from snow-capped mountains to the south to the wild Atlantic beaches to the west or even the sunny Mediterranean coastline to the east. You really can sit on a beach, ski in the mountains, eat tapas in Spain and explore the markets and historic towns and cities of rural France all in the space of one weekend.

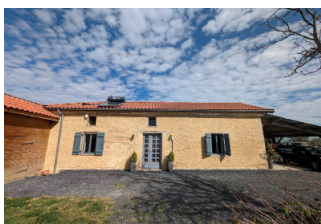
Whether you are seeking a peaceful retreat, a vibrant community, or a life closer to and more in harmony with nature, the Gers can offer a lifestyle to match your wish-list. As a place to unwind and slow down, it is hard to beat. So, if you are looking to embrace the art of slow living and concentrate on the simple pleasures while enjoying a very high quality of life, then the Gers might just be the perfect place for you. ■

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

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On the market

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€265,000, Pallanne: Renovated stone farmhouse with three bedrooms, open-plan kitchen/dining room, spacious living room with woodburning stove, large landing with office space and storage loft (Le Bonheur)



€365,000, Marciac: Three-bedroom home set in grounds of almost 6,500m² with swimming pool and breathtaking views of the Pyrénées, just a few minutes from shops and schools (Maisons et Manoirs)



€435,000, Masseube: Charming Gascogne stone farmhouse with five bedrooms, in a peaceful spot less than 10 minutes from a village; it has several outbuildings and more than a hectare of land, plus Pyrénées views (Abafim)



€1.995m, Marciac: Exceptional country property between Vic Fezensac and Marciac with seven bedrooms, eight bathrooms, heated pool, orangery with gym and landscaped gardens (Belle Maison Gascony)