

Known as 'the Tuscany of France', Gers has rolling, unspoilt countryside



In a striking shift over the past couple of years, Americans have surged to become the number one foreign buyers of property in Paris, and growing numbers are beginning to look to other regions of France in a way that is having an impact on the French property market.

According to Reuters, French government data for the first quarter of 2025 showed that long-stay visa requests from Americans stood at 2,383, compared to a total of 1,980 over the same period the previous year. Increasing numbers of Americans are turning their dreams of French home ownership into reality and they are expected to be among the top five nationalities looking for property in France this year.

They are increasingly looking to France not just as a dream holiday destination, but as a place to build a new life. Some are seeking a slower, more meaningful existence, tired of the relentless work culture and rising costs in the USA. Others are drawn by France's strong sense of community, excellent healthcare and emphasis on work-life balance.

More recently, the growing tension and divisive political situation in America, along with concerns over economic instability, gun violence and social unrest, have prompted many to rethink their long-term

The 'other' south

Nadia Jordan explains the reasons southwest France should definitely be on your property radar



future. Since Donald Trump's re-election, interest from American property buyers in France has surged significantly.

However, American buyers in France tend to purchase in either Paris or Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA); these are the two regions that seem to personify the French dream for Americans. But they are also two of the most expensive regions for property, as well as being the most crowded - especially in summer. In addition, Provence is becoming so hot in the summer months, with increasing wildfires, that the reality might not always live up to the dream.

Meanwhile, tucked a little further west and south, below the radar of many American buyers - but long popular with Brits - lies a part of France that offers a region equally as beautiful but also more authentic, less spoiled and more peaceful, where nature, culture, history and lifestyle come together and where the dream of French home

ownership is not only alive, but still affordable, unlike much of the southeast of France. Are Americans perhaps missing a trick, focusing on one small part of France and missing the best bit?

GENTLE PACE OF LIFE

Tucked between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, with the backdrop of the spectacular Pyrénées mountains, southwest France is one of those rare places that has it all. With its pretty villages, sweeping mountain views and a gentler pace of life, it offers exactly the lifestyle that so many Americans are dreaming about, if they only knew to look here.

This is a land of colourful local markets and café terraces, quiet, tree-lined country lanes and rolling hills where seasons still matter. Whether you are looking for a holiday home or a more permanent escape, the southwest quietly delivers on every front.

The Ariège, Haute-Garonne, Gers and Hautes-Pyrénées

departments are steeped in history yet brimming with possibility, offering character-filled properties at prices far below those of Provence or Côte d'Azur. These are places where dotting the hillsides are pretty farmhouses with thick stone walls, hand-carved fireplaces, beautiful views, blue shutters, vines, large gardens and lots of traditional charm.

The beauty of this part of France is not only in its houses, villages and landscapes, which shift from lush valleys to dramatic mountain peaks, but in its rhythm of life. It's a region that invites you to slow down and stay a while, to wander around ancient market towns like Auch or Marciac, or to sit with a coffee in a sleepy village square. It's not a curated postcard version of France, it's the real thing. And that is what makes it so compelling.

● ARIÈGE

The Ariège makes up much of the Pyrénées national park, an accolade awarded to recognise

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the unspoiled landscapes and natural beauty. Here, there's a winning combination of lush valleys, soaring mountain peaks and traditional French villages that seem unchanged for centuries.

The area prides itself on its organic local produce and artistic, down-to-earth inhabitants. In terms of property, you'll find affordable farmhouses, stone cottages and even the occasional château that would cost 10 times as much in Provence. If you're looking for a project then, yes, you can still find houses for renovation or updating here and barns crying out for conversion, which means you can create both the property and the lifestyle you want. Outdoor fans will feel instantly at home with wonderful walking trails, cycling, horse-riding, skiing, kayaking and beautiful picnic spots all on your doorstep. Along with peace and quiet.

● HAUTE-GARONNE

South and west of Toulouse, the Haute-Garonne offers a great blend of beautiful countryside, far-reaching mountain views, peace and quiet - and proximity to the thriving city of Toulouse, with its vibrant city culture and major international airport.

Charming villages such as Aurignac and Aspet provide French country life with local cafés, restaurants and *boulangeries* all within easy reach. For anyone looking to move to France full time, while continuing to work and stay connected to the rest of the world, this area is perfect.

● GERS

Known as 'the Tuscany of France', and of course Gascony, Gers is one of the best-known corners of France for traditional country cooking and produce. It's the land of *confit de canard*, *paté* and armagnac brandy.

The landscape is that of a French postcard: sunflowers and rolling hills, *bastide* towns, Romanesque churches and mountains on the horizon. The Gers is ideal for those seeking a

relaxed, deeply rural lifestyle, infused with gastronomy, tradition and a gentle climate with sunshine much of the year.

Property here ranges from grand *manoirs* and *maisons de maître* to simple village houses and traditional L-shape farmhouses, which often come with sweeping views and generous amounts of land.

● HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES

Like a prettier and gentler version of the Alps, Hautes-Pyrénées has all the same activities and quality of life on offer, but with significantly lower house prices. Wide open valleys are dotted with pretty sunny villages and farmhouses with a backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

Every sort of sport is available here. In the heat of the summer, it's not far to escape to the cooler mountain air, while in winter there are numerous ski resorts within an hour's drive. But, unlike the Alps, this is a mountain region that still feels undiscovered. It is also known for its thermal baths and spas, so whether you are drawn to the skiing, hiking or simply soaking in thermal waters while gazing at the mountains, there is something for everyone.

REASONS TO BUY HERE

The southwest of France may be

less well known than Provence and the southeast of France, but it's just as charming and beautiful while being quieter and less developed. In terms of buying property, you will also get much more for your money here, so it's also likely to be a good long-term investment - whether for a permanent home or holiday house.

Property is incredibly good value compared to many other areas of France, and you can still find generously sized stone houses with gardens and views of the Pyrénées for less than €250,000. Whether you are dreaming of a rambling countryside retreat, a lock-up-and-leave village house or a *gîte* business, the options here are as varied as they are affordable.

LIFESTYLE CHOICE

Then there's the lifestyle. The southwest of France offers something truly rare, a balance between tranquillity and connection. Toulouse airport, with regular transatlantic links via Paris or London, makes international travel surprisingly easy. The TGV (high-speed rail) reaches down into the region, currently as far as Bordeaux, but you'll soon be able to get from Toulouse directly to Paris in three hours.

The roads are empty and well-maintained, so you

are never very far from the mountains, the Atlantic coast, the Mediterranean, the vineyards of Bordeaux or the city buzz of Toulouse. You really can have it all.

Most importantly, life here feels sustainable - ecologically and financially. You don't need to be a millionaire to own your home, nor sacrifice modern comforts. The food is local, the feeling of community is strong and the sense of wellbeing is something buyers often say they didn't realise they were missing until they arrived.

The climate is also arguably more liveable than that of Provence and the Côte d'Azur. With more than 2,000 hours of sunshine a year, this is one of France's sunniest corners. Summers can be hot, but they are manageable and there is not the wildfire risk here that there is further east. There are four distinct seasons and winters are short, sunny and offer an intensity of light missing in northern climes in the colder months. So, what are you waiting for? ■

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Located in the heart of the Ariège valley in the Pyrénées, Tarascon-sur-Ariège has remained unchanged for centuries