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Where to buy property in the Dordogne, France

Cut-price holiday homes in magical villages make the region a magnet for British expats



An 11-bedroom property on sale for €3.2 million through Knight Frank

Liz Rowlinson

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During one of those big life-rethink moments of last year's first national lockdown, Trevor Nicholson in West Yorkshire was weighing up whether to buy a second home in Cardiff city centre or the Dordogne.

While the climate of southwest France, its abundance of gourmet restaurants and beautiful medieval villages would have been the clincher for most people, it was affordability and easy access that tempted Nicholson last September to buy a property for €240,000 (£217,000) – without even going to view it.

“It will be quicker for us to hop on a 60-75 minute flight to Bergerac than drive for five hours to Cardiff,” says the 56-year-old from Kirklees who works in insurance and whose wife, Sarah, is a lawyer. “I’d rather be working remotely from a converted farmhouse with a swimming pool than a two-bedroom flat in Wales.”



A 17-bedroom château for sale at €1.286 million with Savills

Neither Brexit nor Covid has stopped the British buying homes in the perennially popular Dordogne. A family favourite for gîte holidays and second homes as it’s a manageable six to eight-hour drive from Calais, the Dordogne can also be reached via airports at Bergerac, Toulouse, Limoges, Brive, Bordeaux and Rodez.

It's also still surprisingly affordable, with the average family home of 150 sq m (1,600 sq ft) costing about €166,500, according to data from the Notaires de France, the legal specialists.

The most active section of the market is between €150,000 and €200,000, according to Angela Martyn, an agent for Leggett Immobilier. “For this budget you can get a traditional stone property with three bedrooms and a pool, or an annexe,” she says.

One of the most popular destinations is the Périgord Noir, an area of outstanding natural beauty, with historic villages such as Sarlat, the famous Lascaux caves and with its undulating green hills and four rivers enough to keep active types happy with mountain biking, kayaking and riding. Foodies are kept content with nine Michelin-starred restaurants featuring local specialities including foie gras, duck confit, truffles and Bergerac wines.



Castelnaud-la-Chapelle
CALLE MONTES/GETTY IMAGES

French buyers predominate, with Covid-driven full-time moves from Paris or Bordeaux to rural homes, but there are also Belgians, Dutch and Americans too. Marc Hines, a lawyer from California, has just bought a seven-bedroom château in Plazac, near Sarlat, for remote working (it has high-speed internet) — also after a virtual viewing.

“We researched online at least 100 different French castles and got fortunate that the one we loved the most was in a region that is unbelievably beautiful, with magical little villages around it,” he says. These include Beynac-et-Cazenac, a medieval village on the cliffs along the Dordogne river, and the pretty village of Montignac on the Vézère river.



With eight bedrooms, guest accommodation and a lake, this home in Bergerac is €1.264 million through Savills

You can find châteaux from about €550,000. There’s a [13-bedroom](#) one in Périgueux ideal for running as a B&B at €583,000 through Leggett, or a [17-bedroom](#) “petit château” in Monpazier for €1.286 million (from Savills).

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Martyn says that families often ask about schools: “They won’t find any international schools here, but village schools are of a high standard and will bus children from the age of five.”

The Dordogne is home to more expat Britons than any other department, with 7,198 in 2019, according to the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. This might be reassuring for those who want to find PG Tips and Bird’s Custard (try the Taste of Britain shop in Eymet), but it is possible to escape this.



This five-bedroom stone house with a swimming pool is on the market for €295,000 through Leggett

Proximity to Bordeaux and Bergerac, vineyards and a little more sun than the northern Dordogne is why the southern Dordogne around Eymet has been so popular with Britons. Yet Sandy and Kevin Jones from Southwark in London chose the village of Allemans near Ribérac in the north, where in March they bought a four-bedroom property.

“We liked the fact we are in a hamlet of French owners and can immerse ourselves in the locals’ lifestyle,” says Sandy, 59. “After retiring in April I plan to spend half the year over there gardening, lake swimming or going to food markets.”



Close to Le Bugue, this property with four acres and a stream is for sale at €599,000 with Leggett

The Périgord Vert area is becoming more popular because money goes further, says Tracey Hudson from the estate agent Beaux Villages/Savills. “Characterised by forests, valleys and the beautiful town of Brantôme, it offers more choice than the south if you have a budget of €150,000.”

Like Americans, non-resident Britons in France will have to ensure they don’t stay for more than 90 days in every 180 each year from January 1, 2021, but Brexit will not mean the end of Britons moving over, says Hudson. “Non-EU citizens will have to prove greater financial self-sufficiency when applying for residency, but the Dordogne is the most popular area of southwest France for our buyers and I cannot see that changing overnight.”