



Britons are attracted to areas such as the Dordogne in New Aquitaine  
ALAMY

## Dream of a French home returns

The pandemic has shown Britons how to earn a living on the Continent

Adam Sage, Paris, and [Victoria Brzezinski](#)

Saturday August 08 2020, 12.01am BST, The Times

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It had been thought that the combination of Brexit and coronavirus would finish off the British dream of owning a little place abroad.

Britons have been flooding into France since the 1960s looking for a holiday home but now, despite everything, estate agents are witnessing record interest from people wanting to make the move permanent.

The summer increase is partly attributable to the lockdown, which meant that trips initially planned this spring were postponed until now. Yet the broader picture shows that Brexit, far from dulling the British desire to live in France, may have sharpened it.



Renée Kuo and Alastair Thompson, from London, moved to Aumagne in New Aquitaine

Leggett Immobilier, which is one of the leading agents in the property market, claimed that July was its best month since the creation of the agency in 1990, with the signature of 302 deals worth almost €80 million.

Its clients paid an average of €266,000 for a house and typically moved to the rural regions that are home to most of the 150,000 Britons already in France — Brittany, Normandy, New Aquitaine and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur.

Rob Longley, the owner of Beaux Villages Immobilier, had a similar tale. “Deals agreed in July broke all monthly records for all time,” he said.

Brice Bonato, the joint founder of Sextant France et International, which says that Britons comprise about a quarter of its clients, attributes the boom to the end of three years of dithering after the EU referendum. “There was a drastic drop in sales during that period. What was blocking people was the uncertainty,” he said.



The couple now run the house as a plush bed and breakfast

“But when the path that Britain was going to take became clear, they started buying again. It was like a cork coming out of the champagne bottle.”

Alistair Lockhart, a director at French Entrée Property, said the age of those looking to move appeared to have dropped, with many inquiries from couples in their 30s and 40s hoping to continue work in Britain from their French homes. “The appeal of being able to potentially work remotely from a country they

have been dreaming about, while maintaining their UK salaries, must be hugely appealing,” he said.

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Joanna Leggett, the head of marketing at Leggett Immobilier, said many Britons were keen to buy before the Brexit transition period ends on December 31. “There is a mad rush at the moment,” she said. “Britons are coming in droves and panicking that they need to sign by October to get the deal done by December.”

The panic may be unfounded, with rules likely to change little for buyers completing purchases in 2021, estate agents say. That is not stopping Anoushka Hughes-Lewis, 38, a theatre production manager from London, who has been looking at houses in Brittany such as a seven-bedroom home in Merdrignac on sale for €352,000, and who wants to get a deal done by the end of the year.

Ms Hughes-Lewis said she had been thinking about moving to Europe for a couple years, and was hesitating between Italy and France. “But I think Brittany has the edge for me because it is so easy to get to.”

Linda Taylor, 55, from Hayes, west London, is househunting in the Charentes-Maritime in the west. “One of the things that galvanised the move was that working from home was so easy,” she said.

Renée Kuo, 44, from California, and Alastair Thompson, 54, who is British, moved to France a year ago when they sold their Victorian terraced house in London to buy a house in the village of Aumagne in New Aquitaine. They have turned it into a plush bed and breakfast with four bedrooms. Mrs Kuo, who used to run Debrett's, the etiquette coaching company in London, said: “I used to take an hour to get to the office. Now I commute from my bedroom to get to my working quarters.”

### Growing numbers

**148,000** British people live in France compared with 546,100 Portuguese, 194,600 Italians and 157,400 Spaniards.

**53,000** Britons in France are pensioners.

**55,000** Britons in France are in employment.

**9.3%** Morzine in the Haute Savoie has the highest proportion of British residents: 794 people who comprise nearly 10 per cent of the local population.

**32,700** Britons, mostly pensioners, live in rural areas with very low density population. In the 1990 census, this figure was only 2,100.

**38,300** Britons, mostly students and workers, live in big towns. In 1990 this figure was 37,500.

**65,300** Britons lived in France in 1990, according to the census that year. From the French National Office for Statistics and Economic Studies, survey released on July 16, 2020, based on 2016 census

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