

WE HELP YOU PLAN, FIND AND BUY AN OVERSEAS PROPERTY

France Buying Guide

Your definitive guide to buying a home in France, safely



Your guide includes:

- Your timetable to buying in France
- Focus on where and what to buy
- Set your budget
- Understand the legal processes



Property Guides was set up after a close relative of one of the company's founders fell foul of a property scam overseas nearly twenty years ago, with tragic results. Since then, our aim has been to make buying in France safe.

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Speak to the experts

Buying a property in France is a simple matter of putting one foot in front of the other. But you do need to ensure that you are on a firm footing by having a team of professionals behind you. At Property Guides we call the perfect team our **Golden Three**: estate agent, lawyer and currency specialist. Contact us to be introduced to your Golden Three.

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Buying safely in France – about this guide

Generally speaking, the international property business has been cleaned up over the past few years. Still, many of us are understandably nervous. We want to spend our holidays, long weekends or even our retirement enjoying the French lifestyle, but we're nervous about sending so much money to another country with an unfamiliar legal system, language and currency. We've read stories about British people who have run into difficulties when buying property abroad. We're worried about getting a properly-built home, about signing contracts we don't understand, about healthcare, pensions, currency and now Brexit!

The France Buying Guide's aim is simple – to help you to buy safely in France. Our founder's tragic experience could have been avoided if honest, up-to-date and reliable information had been available to her. Since 2004 we have been putting that right.

Not everyone delays buying because they're worried. Some just don't know where to start! We can help you too, with a roadmap and clear explanation of the buying process, the costs and timescales.

Along with a trustworthy estate agent and a good, specialist lawyer, the third way to eliminate risk is to stop exchange rate movements wrecking your budget. You wouldn't agree to buy a home in your own country where the price could move by 10 or even 20% before you have to pay for it, yet that is the risk you take if you don't lock in your exchange rate. We will explain how you can prevent that.

The France Buying Guide will help you achieve your dream of homeownership in the world's favourite holiday destination. It's easy if you follow our simple steps.

Visit our website propertyguides.com/France for more information about buying property in France. You can read property market updates, news and area guides. Sign up to our fortnightly blog written by our British writer in France – lifting the lid on what life is really like in France.

Happy house hunting!

Elaine Ferguson

Customer Service Manager
France Property Guides Resource Team



Is this the year?

Why the world loves France

Strolling through the fresh produce market on a Saturday morning, watching the world go by at the pavement café with your chocolat chaud and fresh croissant, practicing your French.... Many of us are in thrall to the wonderful French quality of life. The French work/life balance, the politeness, the family values, the 35 hour week, the sheer nerve of a whole country just taking August off!

Then there are the tangible advantages of France: the climate, the fresh food, the wine, the beauty of the countryside, coastline, mountains, rivers and valleys. The natural beauty may be stunning, but so is the culture, art, architecture, music and cuisine too.

Here is why this is the year to buy that home in France:

1. A Better Life

You probably think that France enjoys a better quality of life because you're on holiday when you're there. Fortunately, the subjective data backs up the anecdotal evidence! According to the OECD's Better Life Index, "France ranks above the average in income and wealth, housing, health status, civic engagement, work-life balance and personal security."

2. Beautiful homes

France has style! For many of us, French homes are simply the most beautiful in the world, inside and out. Whether you want a lovely stone cottage,

a Haussmann apartment on a Parisian boulevard or a villa overlooking the Cote d'Azur, a French home is more likely to be better built and stylishly designed than in most other countries.

3. Safe and stable

The British (as well as Americans, Australians and people from every nation), have been buying homes and living in France for nearly 200 years. There are now hundreds of thousands of international residents there, and the property buying processes are well organised and safe (with the right legal team behind you).

4. Cost of Living

The cost of living in France is broadly around the same as in the UK. Groceries are roughly on a par with the UK, but eating out, particularly in the countryside and in villages, is cheaper. The wine is less expensive, and you know that the French keep the best back for their domestic market don't you?!

5. The weather

France may be just 22 miles away across the Channel, but it enjoys at least 30% more sunshine. While Nice picks up a tan from 2,724 hours of sunshine a year, Lyon 2,000 and Paris 1,660, in the UK we average around 1,500 per year! France enjoys four real seasons too, including long hot summers and winters where you can ski.

“France ranks above the average in income and wealth, housing, health status, civic engagement, work-life balance and personal security.”

Deciding what to buy

Step One: Essential Decisions

Your dreams and intentions may change throughout the process, but organising your initial plans is the place to start. You should ask yourself these five basic questions.

1. Why are you buying?

So you know you want to buy a property in France, but why, exactly? Analysing and articulating your thoughts can help motivate and direct you, so write down your ideas. Here are some examples:

- “We want to enjoy more space, sun and the French lifestyle.”
- “Our pension will go further in France.”
- “We want the freedom to drive to the ski slopes all winter”
- “Now the kids have left home, we need a new adventure.”
- “Property investments in the UK look a bit iffy, why not try France?”
- “I don’t want ever to look back on my life with regret, never having made the move.”

2. How will you use it?

This is crucial to ensuring that you really enjoy your property. What will you do with it? Long weekends, three weeks over the summer, for investment, for relocation, for holidays and then eventually retirement? Be honest with yourself. If you really don’t think you’ll be nipping down for weekends, you can save money by being further from the airport. If you don’t want other people using it and don’t need the money, why worry about rental or investment potential?

3. How much can you afford?

There may be ways to raise more money, or even share the costs, but get an idea of your realistic budget from the off. (See our finance guide on page 18). You should budget for at least 10% extra for buying costs.

Don’t forget also that you won’t quite get the “interbank” rate for your currency that’s shown on the

news and the FX sites, but a percentage point or two below that. (See our currency guide on page 20). On the other hand, you might be able to knock a little bit off the price of the property too.

4. What MUST your French home have?

What are your deal-breakers, the must haves? How many bedrooms or bathrooms do you need? Is a pool essential or would a local beach be better? Outdoor space? And what would you like your French home to have? What would make it perfect for you? Do you want a terrace, garden and/ or a swimming pool? (See our checklist on the next page).

5. What are your turn-offs?

It’s nice to be positive, but focusing on what we can’t stand can be quite liberating too!

Would you hate queueing for a hire car every time you go to France? Fortunately France’s public transport is fantastic, but do check the routes work for you. Do you find a beach less appealing than your own pool? Or are you worried that you’ll be saddled with all the pool cleaning? Now is the time to say it loud and clear. Would you find the presence of holidaymakers on your doorstep all summer a little irksome? Then go off the beaten track.

You want to love this home, so spell out what will stop that happening, then see if your partner or spouse feel the same!



Buying Tip

Pull together as much information on moving to France as you can – both positive and negative. Research newspapers, magazines, books, etc.

Visit **overseas property exhibitions** to get first-hand information before paying out for a viewing trip.

Checklist to a perfect property

The location:

	Essential	Preferable
Which part of France?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Department?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Expat area or avoiding Brits?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
City, town, village?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Maximum distance to shops?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Max distance to airport?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Max distance to hospital?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Max distance to beach?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Need public transport?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other location requirements?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

The property:

Budget (in pounds)?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Old or modern?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
House, flat?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Detached, semi or neither?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Bedrooms?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Bedrooms with ensuite?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Bathrooms?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Living area – open plan?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Separate dining room?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Wheelchair accessible?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Rough square metres?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
View?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
State of repair?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Outside space:

Garden?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Terrace?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Pool, private or communal?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Garage?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Step Two: Countdown to Buying

Working out a timetable is a powerful tool in turning dreams to reality. Many people wait until the spring or autumn to start looking – but why wait until everyone is buying? High demand, after all, generally means higher prices. Not only can you start looking at property at any time, but quiet times can be good for picking up bargains too. Estate agents will be keener and sellers more motivated, fearful of being stuck with a property for another season.

A tactic that we find works well is to set an end date and fix in your mind being in the property by then. Then work your way back from that. Tick these off as you achieve them.

Six months from being a French home owner:

- Narrow down your choices using our checklist and propertyguides.com/France articles. Prepare a list of must haves and nice-to-haves.
- Speak to Smart Currency Exchange. Until you have consulted our currency partner it will be impossible to set your budget. Remember, you will not be able to access the “interbank” rate that you see on the news and on the property websites, so it is essential to get an idea of your real buying budget and lock that in.
- Speak to a mortgage advisor, if required.
- Set your budget.

Five months from owning:

- Begin your detailed property search.
- Speak to a lawyer about how best to structure the deal.

Four months from owning:

- Speak to estate agents.
- Narrow down properties for realistically achievable viewing trips.
- Book viewing trip(s).
- Detailed discussions with lawyer and Smart Currency Exchange.

Three months from owning:

- Attend property exhibitions (see box below).
- Viewing trips.
- Make an offer.
- Contract notaire.
- Protect your budget with currency specialist. Consider forward contract.
- Book a survey, if required.

Two months from owning:

- Sign reservation contract, if required.
- Sign deposit contract, *compromis de vente*, and pay deposit.
- You now have a 10-day cooling off period. (Plan removals and decoration!)
- Ensure utilities will be connected.
- Make final payment. Sign final contract, *Acte de Vente*.
- Receive keys and move in.



Your Overseas Home

France Property Guides will be at several Your Overseas Home shows this year. It's a special show for those people in the final stages of buying in France. It is for those who have decided they are definitely buying, but they just need to get a few niggly legal, tax or inheritance questions answered first, and then to look at some properties. Check out the website for **FREE tickets** and details of new events. www.youoverseashome.com

Step three: Where to Buy

France's regions and coasts vary quite in character, climate and the cost of homes.

Aquitaine

Aquitaine has the longest beaches in Europe: La Côte d'Argent stretches 150 miles north to the south broken about half way by the Bassin d'Arcachon. This charming French seaside town offers huge diversity: a large lagoon for watersports and sailing, wildfowl watching, eating local oysters, and enjoying the panorama of Europe's largest dune, Dune de Pilat. The coast is famous as the best place for surfing the great Atlantic rollers.

The grand city of Bordeaux and the surrounding vineyards are just 30 miles away, while further south is the pine-fringed beach of Les Landes that plunges uninterrupted to Bayonne and Biarritz.

Places of interest: The wine region, Pauillac in particular, is the home of Château Lafite Rothschild, Château Mouton-Rothschild and Château Latour, St Emilion. Check out the spa town of Dax and boat trips from Royan.

Price of property: You could be looking at €1.5million for a three-bedroom house in central Arcachon and even more in Bordeaux, but look inland for pastoral beauty and tranquillity. There, you will find fine houses on offer from €300,000 or, if you are lucky, even less.

Getting there: There are flights from Heathrow with a change at Paris (Charles de Gaulle). The TGV from Montparnasse takes about three hours and costs from £80.

Brittany

Brittany stubbornly braves the assault of the Atlantic like its people, Celt by origin, who resist the tide of government influence. Known as Armorica, *the Land of the Sea*, it provides great diversity from the broad beaches in the north, the rugged coastline of Finistère in the west, pretty sheltered coves and islands in

the south and forests in the east. In the centre is the Argoat, famous for Arthurian legend.

To escape the summer crowds, it's best to head for the peace of the attractive countryside. It is not that hard a choice as there is nowhere in Brittany that is much more than 40 miles to a coast and the roads are good.

Places of interest: Dinard, Mont St Michel, Rennes, Quiberon, the fortress cities of St-Malo, Combourg, Fougères and the pre-historic megaliths near Carnac.

Price of property: House prices have been stable for some time. You can get a one-bedroom house for as little as €50,000 but it will need work; €200,000 will get a decent three or four-bedroom house with a garden. There is plenty of property for sale particularly in the Morbihan Département in the south.

Getting there: Brittany Ferries sail between Plymouth and Roscoff, Portsmouth and St-Malo. There are flights into Nantes.

Burgundy

Sip a Côte de Beaune, swirl it around your palate and you're experiencing just a hint of the majesty of Burgundy, the richest province of France culturally, gastronomically and economically. Its history is told in its palaces, abbeys and churches, art collections, vineyards and customs. Franche-Comté in the east does without this opulence but offers the excitements of outdoor pursuits and a wonderful variety of natural phenomena.

Places of interest: Dijon, of course, with its architectural splendour, university, Musée des Beaux Arts, and epicurean restaurants; Beaune cocooned in its ramparts and encircled by boulevards; golden Vézelay with its abbey in effect an exhibition of architectural gems; the prehistoric Roche de Soloutré standing defiantly among Macon vineyards. In

A guide to France and its regions

See the map for the cities and regions, then search for them at [propertyguides.com/France/buying/where-to-buy](https://www.propertyguides.com/France/buying/where-to-buy) for more idea of what they are like.



Speak to the experts

Visit our website [propertyguides.com/France](https://www.propertyguides.com/France) for more information about buying property in France. You can read property market updates, news and area guides.

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Franche-Comté, Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp and the spectacle of the Cascade du Hérisson near the wine town of Arbois.

Price of property: There are some interesting properties that need renovation in rural areas from around €50,000. Three- and four-bedroom rural properties cost about €120,000. For a good two-bedroom apartment in Dijon budget for around €125,000.

Getting there: The TGV from Paris takes just over 90 minutes. There is also a three-hour train service from Charles de Gaulle Airport. The A6 from Paris leads to Dijon where it meets the A31 to Beaune, Macon and Lyon.

Languedoc-Roussillon

For those who like their French cool spiked with the fire of Spain, Languedoc-Roussillon fits the bill - and there's so much more. The Romans left architectural treasures like confetti, the Spaniards built fortresses and left a legacy of Spanish flavoured food, wine and festivals. The beaches of Golfe du Lion are as fine as any in the Mediterranean but without the excesses of the Côte d'Azur.

Places of interest: Catalan Perpignan parades its colourful shops next to the aromatic Arab quarter; Carcassonne is a mighty fortress city; the rugby town of Montpellier; gastronomic Narbonne; the inspiring Grotte de Clamouse in Parc Régional du Haut Languedoc; the 2,000-year-old Pont de Gard aqueduct; the Roman amphitheatre of Nimes and, by contrast, the modern beach city of La Grande-Motte with its ziggurats. You need two lifetimes to appreciate it all.

Price of property: Inland properties sell for €300,000 to €500,000 but you get a lot for your money: three, four or even five bedrooms in villa-type houses with swimming pool surrounded by big gardens. Look for bargains, there are plenty of them right now.

Getting there: There are flights from Heathrow to Perpignan, Montpellier, Marseille. The TGV serves Nimes, Marseille and Montpellier but there are also good SNCF rail services to Perpignan, Beziers, Agde, Carcassonne, Narbonne and Sète.

Le Nord and Picardy

The channel ports of Northern France – Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne – lead to many places of interest inland and on the coast: Arras, Amiens, Beauvais, Abbeville, Le Touquet and more. The challenge is to grasp that French property, separated by only 50 miles and a Channel crossing, is around a third to half the price of the equivalent in England, yet you feel culturally and gastronomically a long way from home. It is an appealing thought for those who want to keep in close touch with family.

Places of interest: Le Touquet for its long sandy beach, golf and horse racing; nearby Montreuil for its rampart walk and abundant restaurants; Arras with its cobbled squares, Grand Place, and the huge Abbaye St-Vaast; Amiens, capital of Picardy, home of Jules Verne and its glorious cathedral whose nave soars above the delightfully carved choir stalls; Beauvais' magnificent 90,000-part astrological clock in the vaulted cathedral; Chantilly, home to paintings by Raphael, Poussin and Ingres the centre of French horse racing with its palatial stables.

Price of property: Three-bedroom houses with gardens go from around €250,000, but more in the coastal resorts.

Getting there: By car, less than four hours from London via the Eurotunnel to Calais. From Calais, the A26 goes straight to Paris and there is a good network of roads.

Loire

The River Loire is France's longest river. From its source in the Massif Central, it flows over 600 miles to the Bay of Biscay. Known as the Garden of France, it feeds the vineyards of Sancerre, Vouvrey, Saumur, Angers and Muscadet, many more if you include its tributaries. The Loire valley travels an historic path: Orleans (Jean of Arc), Chinon (birthplace of Rabellais), Clos Lucé (where Leonardo da Vinci died) and, of course, the magnificent châteaux that tell their own stories.

Places of interest: Nantes dominates the centre of the Muscadet region. The great châteaux along the river are now decorative palaces that command your attention. The severe façade of the fortress in Angers contrasts with fairy tale Château de Saumur. At Amboise the picturesque Château once hung slaughtered Huguenots from its battlements - French history was always dramatic and rarely as peaceful as today. Arguably the grandest of all is Château de Chambord, said to be planned by Leonardo da Vinci. At Château de Blois, do not miss the extraordinary octagonal staircase.

Price of property: The price of houses increases as they get closer to the coast. Three-bedroom houses near Angers sells at about €325,000 rising to €400,000 on the outskirts of Nantes.

Getting there: There are direct flights to Nantes from many UK airports. The TGV serves Nantes hourly in about two hours from Montparnasse. There is an excellent network of roads throughout the region.

The Rhone Valley

Wine is not the only attraction of the Rhone Valley. To the east lie the Alps, high and majestic, while to the west is the wilderness of the Ardeche. At the centre is Lugdunum, founded by Julius Caesar in 44BC, now Lyon. Since then, central Lyon has become a fairy tale city of Renaissance palaces, chic little shops in cobble-stones streets, *boucheurs* (bistros) and journey's end for gastronomic pilgrims!

Places of interest: The two Roman theatres, one of them the oldest in France, the Basilique Notre-Dame de Fourvière that crowns the city and reached by funicular, and the Chemin du Rosaire, a path that zig zags through the hillside garden. Lyon's Musée des Beaux Arts comes second only to the Louvre. First class restaurants are everywhere, including the quayside at the confluence of the Saône and Rhone. Lyon is where haute cuisine gets happily married to the region's finest wines.

Price of property: A comfortable two-bedroom apartment in the city varies from €200,000 - €350,000 depending on location. Three-bedroom apartments start from around €350,000 and a three-bedroom house with garden may cost you €350,000-€450,000.

Getting there: There are frequent flights to Lyon from UK airports. The TGV from Paris is also fast and frequent.

Massif Central

It is possible you have driven through the Massif Central and been unaware of the treasures to be found there. It is volcanic and it shows; in the black stone used for buildings and fountains, the thermal spa of Vichy and in the countryside where a string of 119 extinct volcanoes stretch across the plateau; the largest being Puy de Dôme whose summit can be reached by car on the spiralling road ascending at a constant 12%.

Places of interest: The capital, Clermont-Ferrand, home of Michelin tyres, welcomes visitors to its lively markets, elegant architecture and steep, narrow streets. Limoges is famous for its porcelain, while nearby Aubusson produces the dyes to colour tapestries and rugs. Issoire is a glider pilot's heaven. The basiliques will fascinate you, but none more so than Chapelle St-Michel d'Aiguille that stands improbably on huge finger of lava rock.

Price of property: On the whole property is very affordable. You can buy land for less than €15,000 or two bedrooms for around €50,000. For €75,000,

Case Study: Louise Beresford bought a home in Western France

We bought a holiday home in France with two other couples. It's a large house in a village called Le Pouliguen, near La Baule in western France. Divided by three though, the price was only around €100,000 each.

We liked the area because La Baule has a huge great sandy beach going on for miles. In the summer it's like a holiday paradise; so well-kept and clean, and backed up in the town by amazing cafes and restaurants. Oysters are big around here, and crepes of course, being Brittany, which the kids love. We also like it off-season when the tourists have gone home. The coast here where the beach ends is called the Côte Sauvage, and you get these great Atlantic rollers crashing onto the rocks.

We researched the France buying process through France Property Guides, and as we were buying as three couples it was very handy to be on the same page (literally, of the guide!) as we went through the process.

The men did most of the work of finding the property, buying it and working with the architect, and that worked out fine. One of them spoke French, another has legal training, and my husband dealt with currency, using Smart Currency Exchange. That all worked out fine too, using a forward contract after we had paid the deposit so we wouldn't be stuck if the pound fell. It didn't, as it happened, but we couldn't take that risk when it was already complicated enough with three of us buying! Smart was really helpful with all that too.

We divide the property into three two-week blocks over the long summer holiday and other periods as and when. No fallings out yet! We are discussing rentals, but we would prefer to keep it to ourselves really. As you may imagine with three couples, there are huge numbers of extended family to fit in too.

It has been a fantastic purchase. Exactly what we wanted. We love it here and would advise anyone to do the same.

One step at a time

As Louise's experience shows, buying a property in France is a simple matter of putting one foot in front of the other. But you do need to ensure that you are on a firm footing by having a team of professionals behind you.

At Property Guides we call the perfect team our **Golden Three**: estate agent, lawyer and currency specialist.

Call our Resource Centre on 020 7898 0549 to be introduced to your Golden Three.



you will find pretty countryside cottages of three bedrooms or more, most with fantastic views.

Getting there: There are good services by train from Paris to Vichy, Clermont-Ferrand, Limoges and Uzerche. The A71 motorway runs down the middle of Massif Central feeding hundreds of smaller roads leading to many places of fascination.

Paris

The 2024 Olympic games will be held in France; the majority of events in central Paris, Le Bourget, St Dennis and the Stade de France. So, if you want to exploit the situation, now is the time. The Games and the Paralympics will come and go in a flash in August but Paris is Paris and to be enjoyed always and in all ways.

Places of interest: The art museums arguably hold the largest and most priceless art collections in the world. The buildings of Paris escaped the desecration of war so there are many fine buildings including grand palaces like the Louvre, the courageous Grand Arche and, of course the iconic cathedrals of Notre Dame and Sainte-Chapelle. Comédie-Française and the Paris Opera satisfy the thirst for drama. For a walk through history, there is Cimetière Père Lachaise. For culture of another kind, the restaurants, bistros and cafés not only serve up epicurean food and wine as no one else can but also make the ambience part of the pleasure.

Price of property: City centre properties command huge prices but in Hauts-de-Seine, 11.5 km outside Paris, €1m will buy a four-bedroom house with a quarter acre of garden. Go further out, and the price drops by about half for a similar property.

Getting there: Paris is easy to reach by car, train or air.

The French Pyrenees

Travelling east from the resorts of Bayonne, Biarritz and St-Jen-de-Luz, lies the rugged area of the Pyrenees, a paradise for skiers and lovers of nature. You will find the variety of wildlife – plants and animals – in abundance. These magnificent mountains and foothills offer over 1,600 km of walking trails and once gave refuge to the Cahars. Their great castle ruins appear unexpectedly amongst the trees in the steep hillsides. A wonderland of adventure.

Places of interest: Biarritz, Bayonne, St-Jean-de-Luz in the west and Perpignan in the east; Pau with its Belle Epoque architecture; Tarbes, a prosperous town and home of the French National Stud; St-Jean-Pied-de-Port is a fortress town on the way to Santiago de Compostela where the spirits of history roam its narrow streets; Lourdes, second only to Paris for its visitors.

Price of property: Surprisingly you may find your neighbour is British. They have been hiding here for a century or more. Convenience is important so look for homes in and around the cities. There are many fine four- and five-bedroom properties selling for around €450,000.

Getting there: There are flights from Heathrow to Biarritz, Pau, Agen and Perpignan. And the TGV serves Irun (for Biarritz), Lourdes and Perpignan.



How to buy

How to pay for your house in France

You need to know exactly how much money you can spend, and what your financial sources are: savings, the sale or re-mortgage of your UK property, etc. It's also important to think about the costs involved in buying a property.

The key financial points to consider are:

Funds available:

Work out the total amount of money you have available to purchase a property. It could include cash, savings, items you can sell, pension drawdown, investments you can cash in. Consider buying with friends or family read our guide, *Buying Abroad With Family*.

Additional finance:

Can you buy with a mortgage? Speak to an estate agent, independent financial advisor, bank or other lender to assess your options. If so, how much deposit will you need, and how will you service the monthly repayments? What would you do in an emergency, such as unemployment or illness?

Do you have a property in the UK from which you can release funds, either by remortgaging or by equity release?

Our Resource Centre can recommend mortgage advisors and equity release specialists. Email France@propertyguides.com or call us on 020 7898 0549.

Ongoing finance:

There are costs that will come after you have bought your home, including local property taxes, maintenance and traveling expenses to get there. How will you cover these? Don't forget too, that exchange rates can change, and a pension or investments paid in pounds will not guarantee an income in euros. (Although, see *Managing Your Currency Risk* on the next page, for Regular Payment Plans where you can lock in a rate).

Investments:

If you're moving to France for good, you could benefit from moving your pension overseas into another scheme, such as a self-invested personal pension (SIPP) or a Qualifying Recognised Overseas Pension Scheme (QROPS).

Conditions do apply, but typically you could gain greater control over your pension and reduce your tax bill. Please note: the UK authorities will only allow you to transfer your pension into one of these schemes if you meet certain criteria: you need to be living, or going to live, abroad and you must remain living abroad. It's important to remember that it takes ten years of being a non-resident and moving the pension for a QROPS to show real benefits, making it really important to consider your options now rather than later.

Getting a mortgage

With interest rates so low, it's no wonder that many buyers are choosing to borrow to invest in France's affordable but rising property market.

To apply, have the following documentation ready:

- **Income tax declaration for the past two years**
- **Bank statements from the past year**
- **Payroll or other proof of income for the past six months**
- **A list of mortgage loans already held**
- **A statement of your assets and liabilities, confirmed by an accountant.**
- **A copy of your passport.**

Your lawyer should ensure that your mortgage takes into account consumer protection legislation. The contract of sale and signing of the mortgage will normally happen altogether, with a staff member from the bank present at the signing of the deeds in the notaires office, forwarding the money to the seller.

Managing your Currency Risk

Exchange rates are the great unknowns when buying property abroad. The risk of currencies moving is often overlooked in the excitement of buying, despite the fact that the price of your property will be changing by the minute. As a 'live' market, the cost of buying euros in the morning will be different to that in the afternoon. Over the course of days, weeks and months that fluctuation can be dramatic.

During 2017 your British pound would have got you anywhere from €1.20 to €1.08. If you had agreed to buy a €200,000 property in June, when the pound was at €1.15 it would have cost you just under £174,000 (at the "interbank" rate). But if you were completing on it just two months later when the pound had fallen after the General Election, that same property would cost over £185,000 and you would have to find another £11,000. If you couldn't find it, you might have lost the property and your deposit.

Such variations (known as "volatility") over the course of the buying process are perfectly normal; indeed they can be much worse. So while it is perfectly natural to want to buy in France when the pound is looking strong, unless you lock in your currency with a Forward Contract you are taking a huge gamble.

What many people don't realise is that you can lock in an exchange rate today for a purchase later –

securing the price of the property in pounds having already agreed the price in euros.

We recommend getting in contact with our trusted partners, Smart Currency Exchange, as early as possible in your process.

Smart Currency Exchange has been one of the UK's most highly regarded currency exchange experts, dedicated to the overseas property market, since 2004. Smart has an "Excellent" rating from the thousands of its clients on the independent ratings service Trustpilot, and is the trusted currency partner of Rightmove.



What our readers say

"I cannot speak highly enough of the professional and friendly service we received from Smart Currency Exchange during our house purchase. At all times we were kept fully informed by our trader Dalvinder (and, on other occasions, David) and the whole process was streamlined, simple and efficient. Highly recommended."

Stephen Vallely

Don't leave yourself exposed to currency risk



Buying Costs

The costs involved in buying a property in France generally amount to between 7 and 10% of the value of the house for an older property and about 2 to 3% on a new build for the taxes and notaire's fees on top of the estate agent's fees.

Estate agent's commission

This will be anything from 4% to 10%. As a buyer you are normally liable for the estate agent's fees but bear in mind that most properties are advertised with these fees included. The fees and net price are required by law to be clearly shown on the listing.

Notaire's fees

The notaire's fees encompass not only their own fees but stamp duty, land registry fees and taxes and are paid by the buyer. You should allow anything between 6 and 10% for these. The notaire will estimate the total and add it to the price of the property. Very often they over estimate them and after the Acte de Vente (completion) is signed, you may have a reimbursement. If two notaires are involved, the fees are no greater; they are simply shared between the two.

Safer

This is the agricultural organisation who may have to be consulted if a property comes with over one hectare of land. If this is the case, the fees will be added on to the notaire's overall package but rarely amount to more than a few hundred euros.

Diagnostic tests

Diagnostic tests are compulsory when any property is sold and must be paid by the seller. The DPE, which is the energy efficiency report, must be done and shown when a property is put on the market and the other tests must be done once an offer is accepted and the results included in the Compromis de Vente (exchange of contracts). These normally include tests on electricity, gas,

natural risks, lead paint, asbestos and termites. The reports are purely for information for the buyer aside from termites. If a property has termites the burden is on the seller to put this right and pay for the treatment. Any anomalies in, say the state of the electricity may entitle you to lower your offer to take account of the cost of this.

Surveys

Structural surveys are far less common in France but they can be carried out at your expense. Costs will vary according to the size of the property but expect to pay on average around €700 to €1,000.

The Estate Agent

A good estate agent will be the most important ingredient to successfully finding a property in France. You need one that is legal, reliable and, most importantly, understands the type of property you want.



Download our guide

In its FREE report, **The Property Buyer's Guide to Currency**, David Comber, Senior Trader at Smart Currency Exchange, shares his top tips for a successful property purchase. He explains why currency market movements make such a big difference and how to protect your budget from currency risks.

For Smart Currency's free guide: **The Property Buyer's Guide to Currency**, and the latest currency forecasts, Call our Resource Centre on **020 7898 0549**

A good agent:

Operates legally and ethically

Estate agencies in France must be registered with one of the official bodies: FNAIM, SNPI or UNPI. There must be at least one person at the agency holding a "carte professionnelle" issued by one of the above.

Check that the agent is still a member by looking at the organisation's website.

Is proactive and offers a good service

If you ask a question, you want an agent who calls you back. If you have a problem, you want someone who takes action to get it resolved. Determining up front if an agent is helpful will give you a better chance of getting things done properly. Send them a brief or an email before you go to France, asking them a question and see how long they take to get back to you – and how enthusiastic they are about helping you. You could fill in our checklist on page 14, photograph or scan it and send it to a few agents.

Has experience working with UK buyers

You want an agent who speaks your language, knows the popular areas for British buyers, understands the market and knows the politics and planning involved to make things happen. In France, agents will typically focus on a particular patch – so make sure you get one that knows your favourite area well.

May not give you the property address!

With estate agent commissions being higher in France, agents are understandably nervous about clients going behind their back to do a private deal. That is why they will usually not give you an exact address for the property until you have visited it with them. If you insist on getting an address before making the trip, you have the option of signing a document called a *bon de visite*. This is simply an agreement that if you do buy that property you will do it through that agency.

Stays with you until the end

Any agent should help you throughout the buying process, as earning their commission depends on it. They may also help you open a bank account too, and find a surveyor, builder, notaire and anyone else to smooth the sales process.

A really good agent will help you further than just the final contract, however, suggesting a good local doctor, school and whatever else you need. You can find out if your prospective agent does this by asking for past-buyer feedback. Most estate agents working in the British buying market stay in contact with happy buyers and will be only too pleased to introduce you.

The Viewing Trip

Five tips for a successful viewing trip:

- 1. Avoid peak time.** Even apart from the obvious downsides of expensive flights, hotels and tourist crowds, many of the best rental properties will have guests inside them. If looking off-season, do some research into how different the resort is in the height of the season.
- 2. Use technology.** There's nothing more frustrating than driving miles to a property which you hate as soon as you lay eyes on it! Use Google Streetview to weed out properties that lack kerb appeal (although do read about the *bon de visite*, left). Once you're back home, you won't be able to pop back for another look as you would if you were buying somewhere in the UK, so use your smart phones to take photos and video clips of properties.
- 3. Don't be too polite.** Avoid any estate agent that tries to control or take over your time or schedule while there. A good agent might offer to find you a hotel, drive you around, even take you to dinner, but equally they will be happy to leave you to your own devices.

4. Engage the imagination. Sure, it looks a bit rough around the edges now, but picture it with a John Lewis kitchen and coat of Farrow & Ball...! Even the most sparkling pool can look like a little swampy after a month or two of neglect. Do consider that ugly duckling property – it might be tens of thousands of euros cheaper but cost just hundreds to turn into a beauty of a home for generations to come.

5. Don't part with any money. The vendor is not allowed to ask for a deposit at the offer stage (*offre d'achat*). However, you should still talk to Smart Currency Exchange. If you make an offer now, you will be committing to paying that amount in euros - what will you do if the exchange rate then changes?



Making an offer

How to bargain

Once you've had a viewing trip or two, narrowed down your property search to a handful of options, and know how you are going to pay for it, it's time to start making offers. Your agent should be able to let you know what an acceptable offer is, and make recommendations.

Remember, though, that the agent is working for the seller, and paid a higher commission the higher the price. It can be hard to gauge what is a fair price when you're buying abroad, in a country you're new to, so here are seven simple tips to staying in control during the negotiation process:

1. Know what you are talking about

By conducting the market research and reviewing recent local sales you will be confident in asking for a fair price. Being well-informed and asking educated questions will show you mean business.

2. Get your game face on

Don't come across too keen, nor too blasé. Be polite yet serious, let the selling team know you've viewed a lot of houses and know your stuff. Just like a poker player, read your seller's emotions: with some sellers you might want to show how much you love the property, with others you want to play it cool.

3. Charm

You are buying something that someone loves. Being too aggressive in your attitude or pricing will kill off all your good work. You should normally negotiate via the agent but writing a letter to the seller introducing yourself and explaining why you're interested in their property can help you stand out from competition.

4. Take control of the negotiations

You are the one making the offer. The seller wants to make a sale and understanding their vulnerability puts you at an advantage. You can walk away at any minute and buy something else; the seller needs to sell that property.

5. Counter offer quickly

Any delay in responding leaves room for a seller to consider other offers. Make sure you are prepared for what you are willing to pay before entering negotiations and respond quickly and confidently to any counter-offers.

6. Don't stress if it falls through

Stay rational and if a deal falls through, don't worry. In many cases buyers look back on deals that didn't happen with relief, finding the ideal property later down the road.

7. Contact Smart Currency Exchange

Do this before you make an offer on a property in France. Otherwise you could make an offer and then find that the exchange rate has moved against you before the other side has even responded.



Download our guide

Read more about how to bag yourself a great deal by reading our guide, **How to Negotiate Abroad.**



The legal process

France's buying system

The British have the same right to buy in France as the French do, but the legal processes will not be like those you are used to in the UK.

It is highly advisable to invest in the services of an independent, English-speaking

French solicitor, who specialises in property law. They will not only oversee and organise the whole purchase process, but will often advise you on tax and inheritance issues too. This is even more important if you aren't a fluent French speaker, as they will be able to guide you through the details of the transaction, so that you fully understand the contract and supporting documentation. It is important to establish in whose names the property will be put and who will inherit (especially for unmarried couples with children from previous relationships), among many other vital issues.

To be introduced to a recommended and trusted Anglo-French law firm, [click here](#) or call the our Resources Centre on 020 7898 0549

Buying a property in France is not complicated. The buyer is well protected in France since once a seller accepts an offer, he is bound to sell it at that price. The buyer has a ten-day cooling off period after signing the *Compromis de Vente* (exchange of contracts) during which time she can walk away from the purchase without penalty.

Here is your step-by-step guide to the buying process in France.

Bon de Visite and making an offer

If you are buying through an estate agent, you may be asked to sign a *Bon de Visite*. This is normal practice in France and simply means that should you decide to proceed with a purchase, you will make the offer through them and not go off with another agent or privately approach the vendor. It is no commitment to an actual purchase. You can make an offer just as you would in the UK and the agent must put that forward to the seller.

Bilingual solicitor

We advise employing the services of a bilingual solicitor to act on your behalf so that you clearly understand the *Compromis de Vente* and the *Acte de Vente*. Although some notaires speak good English and your estate agent should provide you with copies translated into English, it is important for your own peace of mind to have the benefit of a solicitor who will explain the whole process and also make sure you have everything required written into the *Compromis de Vente*.

Compromis de Vente and the notaire

Once your offer has been accepted, a notaire must be appointed to take care of the legal process. The buyer can choose his own notaire and the seller may have his own too but the buyer pays the notaire's fees. Note that where two notaires are involved, the fees are no greater; they are shared by the two notaires in this case.



What will your notaire check?

It is a legal requirement to have a notaire. They take a more proactive role than in Spain, for example, hence the larger fees. Among the matters they will be checking (over two to three months) are:

- **Who owns the property and has the right to sell it.**
- **If anyone else has an interest in the property or rights over it, such as neighbours with rights of way or access.**
- **If there are debts against the property, such as a mortgage or loans.**
- **If there are guarantees or certificates on property under 10 years old.**
- **That any recent renovation work complies with building permission.**

The notaire will draw up the *Compromis de Vente* after obtaining all personal information from both parties, the diagnostic reports and if applicable, a list of furniture. This is signed by both parties. You do not have to be present in France for this; the notaire can prepare a "procuration", power of attorney, to enable him to sign on your behalf. The ten day cooling off period then starts. If the buyer does not pull out of the sale, he must pay normally 10% deposit which is kept in the notaire's client account. After the ten day period is over, the buyer would forfeit this deposit if he pulled out of the sale.

Clauses Suspensives or suspensive clauses

These are clauses inserted into the contract to cover the buyer in case they are unable or unwilling to proceed in certain specific circumstances. The most common are related to the buyer's finances. However, they could include a clause stating that the purchase will only proceed if building improvements will be allowed, or if the buyer is applying to put a swimming pool in the garden, for example.

Searches

Once the *Compromis de Vente* is signed, the notaire will start carrying out searches on the property including Land Registry rights to ownership, boundaries and the like. In France the searches don't include looking at any private planning permissions that may be in existence close to your house. Every property is offered first to the local Mairie who have to respond within two months. You can ask at the local Mairie about any regional planning applications that may exist near the property you are buying.

Acte de Vente (Completion)

It usually takes two to three months to get to this final stage when you become the proud owner of your new French property. The Acte is signed at the notaire's office and the buyer must ensure the

full funds are in the notaire's client account at least three days ahead of the date of the signing. Again, if you are unable to be present, a procuration (power of attorney) can be prepared for you. Your estate agent will arrange for the transition of the utilities to your name, read the meters on the day of signing and safeguard the keys.

Note that regarding the two property taxes, *taxe d'habitation* and *taxe fonciere*, the former is paid by the owner of the property on 1st January so if you are buying a property at any time after this, you will only be liable to start paying this the following year. The *taxe fonciere* is paid around October each year for the following year and this means you will reimburse the seller from the day you buy the property. The notaire will handle this and give you a final account for your file.

You will receive an "attestation" of purchase which proves you are now the owner of the property. The actual deeds will be sent to you several months after the purchase.



Power of attorney

If it's inconvenient to return to France to sign each document you can grant power of attorney to your lawyer or other representative, authorising them to sign on your behalf before the notaire. This is called a *procuration*.

Don't confuse this with the *mandat de protection future* which is closer, although not identical, to the UK's lasting power of attorney. It allows you to name someone to make decisions for you in the future should you become mentally incapacitated.

Thank you for reading the France Buying Guide

We hope that this guide will help you on your journey to buying a home in France. We also publish news, feature articles and blogs from our resident writers in France. Find them all via our website: www.propertyguides.com/France.

Here at the France Buying Guide, we are also regularly in touch with companies that operate in the overseas property industry. We can recommend a wide range of service providers operating in the French property market, including estate agents, a mortgage broker, currency transfer specialist, law firm, tax and financial advisory firm, rentals website and more.

Please do take advantage of these contacts!

On a final note, a highly respected lawyer we recommended to our readers once said that there are three key things necessary for a successful overseas property purchase:

- A good estate agent
- A good lawyer
- A good currency exchange specialist

If there is anything else that we can help you with, call the Resource Centre on **020 7898 0549**, and we'll try our best to point you in the right direction.

Best of luck with all your plans!

Christopher Nye

Senior Editor, France Buying Guide

020 7898 0549

Your Overseas Home

France Property Guides will be at several Your Overseas Home shows this year. It's a special show for those people in the final stages of buying in France. It is for those who have decided they are definitely buying, but they just need to get a few niggly legal, tax or inheritance questions answered first, and then to look at some properties. Check out the website for **FREE tickets** and details of new events. www.youoverseashome.com

Finally, if while buying property in France, you learn something that you feel others should know about, or you simply want to share your own buying experience, please email me, the Senior Editor at Property Guides on chris.nye@propertyguides.com. We publish dozens of stories and suggestions every month.

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First published in Great Britain in 2022 by: The Overseas Guides Company Ltd, 1 Lyric Square, London, W6 0NB.

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