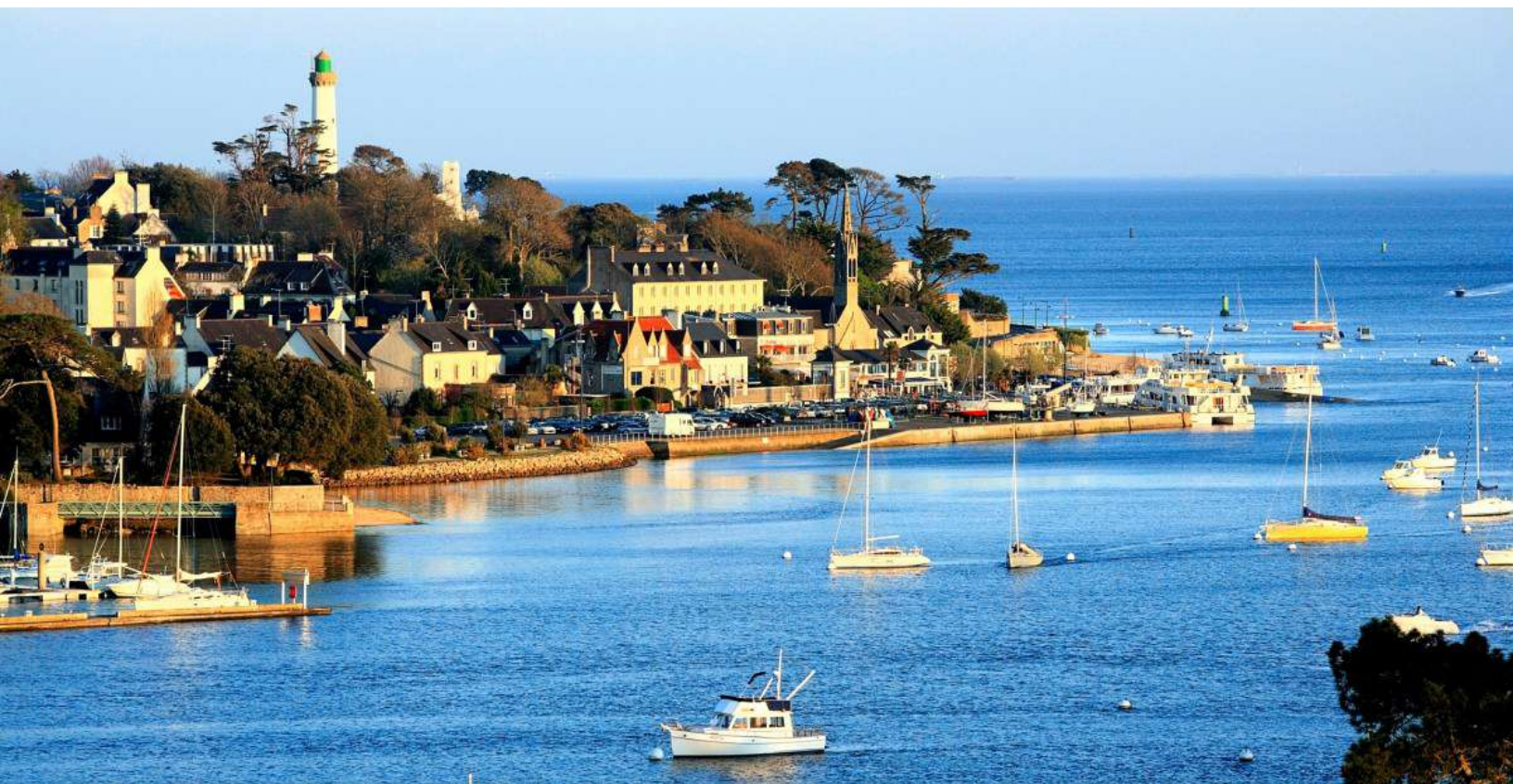


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Where to buy a holiday home in France — without having to fly

If a long drive doesn't put you off, the country is your oyster — from Brittany down to the Languedoc



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Climate change is making many holiday homeowners reassess how they travel to their properties overseas. In addition to unpredictable weather conditions, airline strikes don't make flying seem so attractive.

Northern France has long been attractive to homebuyers in the UK for its easy access by car, ferry or LeShuttle — or a combination of those — but an increasing number of second-homeowners are happy to drive much further, even if they have a dog, small children or DIY jobs (yes, really).

Factor in the ease of using France's motorways — and the many historic towns and wineries en route — and you can appreciate that for some it's not the destination but the journey too.

Normandy: close to home

With its quaint harbours and great beaches, Normandy has long been popular with UK homebuyers. It is also an easily accessible destination for those who prefer not to fly to France. That's why Elaine and Nigel Fraser-Gausden from Eastbourne, East Sussex, bought a four-bedroom manor house there — close to Cherbourg, on the Cotentin peninsula — 30 years ago.

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Nigel and Elaine Fraser-Gausden

“We spend three months there in the summer, so it was important to be able to get back quickly for any family emergencies,” says Elaine, 69, who runs a gardening business. “We take a carful of DIY stuff with us — owning an old property means there’s always lots to do. We drive door to door in about three-and-a-half hours. Which ferry we take depends on the best deal at the time.”

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Lorraine Sharif, from Epsom in Surrey, also likes to DIY on her travels.

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Lorraine Sharif's four-bedroom home in Calvados, Normandy

“The cheapest way for me to get there is Dover to Calais, while the most convenient way is the overnight ferry from Portsmouth to Caen,” she adds. “I can have a glass of wine on the ferry to Caen, wake up in my cabin at 8am the next morning and then it’s just an hour to the house. The fastest route is via LeShuttle (35 minutes then a three-and-a-half hour drive) — it’s also the most flexible as it’s easy to change your online

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expensive department in Normandy. Venture inland, though, and you can find charming detached stone houses that will give you change from €250,000 (about £215,000) — for example, a three-bedroom cottage with outbuildings is on sale for €224,700 (reduced from €251,450) with the estate agent Leggett Immobilier.

Brittany and la Loire: make the most of the ferries

With two ferry ports — Roscoff and Saint-Malo — and a long coastline with beautiful beaches, Brittany is also an excellent choice for those wanting a French property. If you're feeling adventurous, there are great surfing and kitesurfing spots on the Quiberon peninsula.

Many homeowners from the UK are members of the Brittany Ferries Club Voyage, enjoying discounts and treating the ferry journey to France as an extension to their holiday, says Lisa Greene, regional coordinator for Leggett. "Taking an overnight cabin means they arrive at their destination refreshed — it's a civilised way to travel."



A four-bedroom home with outbuildings in Louvigné-du-Désert, Brittany, is on the market for €626,000 with Leggett Immobilier

Brittany is easy to get around on mostly quiet roads, with many properties at the affordable end of the scale: you can find a three-bedroom detached house for about €150,000 or a stone longère (a single-storey farmhouse) for €250,000.

Not all buyers driving to northwest France are from the south of England. When deciding to move to Saumur in the Maine-et-Loire region — south of Brittany but still very much in the north of France — Katy Dobson calculated the drive back to her native Gateshead, in the northeast of England, could be done in one day, albeit a long one.

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costs about €1,000. We now have a tradition of eating at a particular bistro in Calais.”

Dordogne and Charente: great for families

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The Dordogne remains top of the list for many homebuyers, for its beautifully preserved medieval villages, great restaurants and family-friendly lifestyle. Many families love to drive there, especially dog owners such as Keith and Kay Barker from Gravesend in Kent, who own a four-bedroom former tannery in Verteillac.

Kay and Keith Barker



“It’s an easy drive, about ten hours door to door,” says Keith, 60, an oil

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times a year.

British dog owners with a property in the Dordogne will often take their pet in a suite on the ferry when they come over, says Samantha Khoury of the local agent Richard Immobilier. “Retired owners can afford the extra time that driving takes but for those that just want to get there fast, Bergerac airport is an hour away.”

Khoury says holiday homebuyers typically spend €300,000 to €500,000 on a detached house with a pool, with village homes available for as little as €150,000.



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A five-bedroom stone house next to the village church in Rouillac, Charente, is on sale for €599,000 with Beaux Villages Immobilier

North of the Dordogne, the Charente has become increasingly popular for its affordability and easy access to the Atlantic coast —and the drive from Calais can be done in less than eight hours. Clare Rolt of the agent Beaux Villages says she stops off at Rouen for lunch when she travels to the UK from her home in Verteuil-sur-Charente. “Many second-homeowners come here for several weeks at a time and need to have a car to get around. For a group it can also be less expensive to drive than fly.”

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Languedoc and Provence: a change of scenery

A 12-hour drive down the length of France may be a stretch too far but for some sun-loving homeowners, even the sun-drenched hills of Provence are within reach by car or train.

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When the cost of car hire became “prohibitive”, Emily and James Morris decided to drive their car to their village home in the Luberon in southeast France, which they bought seven years ago.

“We used to fly and pick up a car at Marseille airport but now we sometimes drive all the way,” says Emily, 59, from Haywards Heath in West Sussex. “It takes us around 13 hours without stopping, so it’s not for everyone.”

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An 18th-century ten-bedroom house run as a rental unit in Uzès in the Languedoc is on the market for €595,000 with Leggett Immobilier

Another homeowner in the Luberon, Eva (surname withheld), prefers to take the train. The 91-year-old from Cardiff visits her family's farmhouse twice a year. "When my husband was alive we drove — and I hate airports. It takes 12 hours by train from Cardiff: to Paddington and then St Pancras, changing at Lille to Avignon. Once you are on the train you are moving so I really don't mind it."

Anthony Lawrence, 69, loves the long drive down through France. Driving from his home in Chippenham, Wiltshire, to his second property in Le Somail in the Languedoc, which he bought two years ago, takes him about 17 hours. "I drive east of Paris and sometimes stop at Troyes [in the

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Lawrence to the area. “Plus there’s more space, fewer people, it’s two hours from skiing in the Pyrenees and half an hour from great beaches,” he says.

In the Narbonne area, near the southeast coast, you can find a three-bedroom country house with a pool for €500,000 to €600,000.

Travel tips

- Avoid Paris if possible — the traffic is a nightmare.
- A toll tag (autoroutes.sanef.com) automatically pays charges, which means you can skip the longer queues.
- Be savvy about where to fill up: fuel costs vary widely.
- Check for ferry deals — even flexible ferry tickets can be cheaper than taking the Eurostar.
- Take the right equipment. LeShuttle has good tips: eurotunnel.com
- If you’re travelling by ferry with a dog, check if they provide onboard kennels or pet-friendly cabins.
- It’s easier and cheaper to travel in France if your four-legged friend has a [European pet passport](#).

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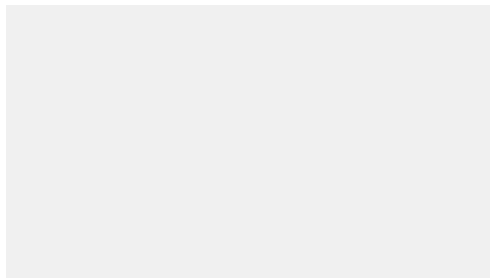
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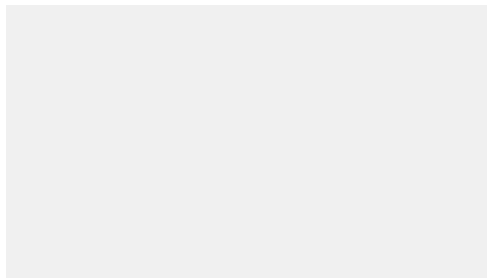


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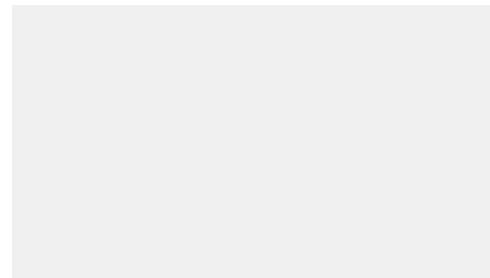


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