

Horse-racing at Chantilly - France plays host to more international competitions than any other nation in the world



Horses for courses

Daniela Harris explores France's enduring passion with equestrian pursuits and explains why the country and its properties are ideal for horse-lovers

If, like me, you've ever wondered why - in a country known for its baguettes, chocolate and cheese - the women are so elegant and slim, then perhaps the answer lies here: horse riding is the number one sport for women in France. With its wild and beautiful landscapes, often deserted beaches and lack of traffic, it is little wonder that the sport is so popular here.

France plays host to more international competitions than any other nation in the world and there is even a dedicated television channel, Equidia, where you can enjoy the sport non-stop. The country's love of our equine companions permeates every aspect of French life. The luxury brand Hermès began life as a saddle-maker in 1837, which it still does today, making saddles by hand and to order at its Paris headquarters.

If you want to find out how far back France's love affair with the horse goes, we need to go back a very long time. The famous cave paintings at Lascaux, Montignac, feature the

'Chinese Horse', which dates back to roughly 15,000 BC. More recently, the renowned Impressionist artist Degas was a prolific painter of horses, with paintings such as *The Parade* letting horses take centre stage.

A BREED APART

Did you know that France is the largest exporter of thoroughbred horses in the world? Nor did I. Horses played a key role in the advancement of French farming and military strength. As in other European countries, in France the military helped embed high standards of riding, and that ethos still stands today through Cadre Noir, the French military riding academy, based in Saumur. The Cadre Noir was founded in 1828, and gets its name from the black uniforms its members wear. The academy is open to the public for events throughout the year.

After France's industrial revolution, the breeding focus changed from working horses to top-class sport horses, and in 1958 various saddle horses were bred to produce the

quintessential sport horse, named after the French word for saddle - the *Selle Français*.

Today, France breeds over 20 different other horses such as the French Saddle Pony, the wild Carmague and French Trotter. Throughout the year, an average of 130,000 different riders excitedly watched by eight million spectators compete for a staggering €70m of prize money - mainly in show jumping.

If you aren't satisfied watching from the sidelines, according to the French Equestrian Centre, there are 9,531 riding centres in France. You have to try very hard to find a department that doesn't cater for riders of every ability.

If you want to ensure that your new life abroad can include horses, be it riding at commercial stables or owning your own, France is probably the best place in the world to do that.

Throughout this horse-lover's paradise, you will find properties with stables (*ecuries*) that are either actively still being used as such or have been

converted into charming living accommodation that still gives a nod to its equestrian roots.

PROPERTIES FOR HORSE LOVERS

The Thoroughbreds, €1m-plus

If you have the budget and you want to keep horses, you will find most châteaux and *manoirs* in France will have stables attached to them.

When you are househunting, make sure you let your agent know that you are looking for somewhere with stables so they can bear it in mind when selecting properties to present to you. There are clear advantages to buying somewhere already fit for purpose. Make sure when you are buying a property that you are clear whether it is going to be a home or a business.

It may be that there are stables at your dream property that are no longer in use. Make sure you double check that these are still classified as stables and that the land is still classified as agricultural and appropriate for horses. If you



€3,900,000

MONFLANQUIN, LOT-ET-GARONNE

A magnificent eight-bedroom fortified farmhouse, with a cottage and guest house, atop a hill surrounded by 68 hectares of land. Its large barn of 2,200m² has been used as a covered riding arena, and there's a sand school and a gallop track for the horses.



€583,000

SEGONZAC, CHARENTE

Set on the edge of a small hamlet near historic Cognac, this beautiful country house has four bedrooms and several elegant reception rooms. There is a total of 5,270m² of land, as well as a run of former stables that could be brought back to life.

See
BEAUX VILLAGES
at the *French*
Property Exhibition
Stand 49



€450,500

VERTEILLAC, DORDOGNE

This delightful, spacious character home has a flexible layout. It can be used as a large four-bedroom house or closed off to provide independent guest accommodation. On its 9.3 hectares of land, there is a pool, large barn, two smaller stables and sand school.



€337,600

EYMET, DORDOGNE

With over five hectares of land, this charming property includes two gites that could be rented out after a few minor updates, plus a four-bedroom main house and separate studio. The land would be ideal for horses and there is a great pool area and solar panels.

are buying a home with horses and you don't intend to be there full time, make sure you have caretakers in your absence

Workhorses, €600,000 plus

If your dream château also provides you with a dream income then you will be purchasing a *fonds de commerce*. While buying a business can be extremely rewarding, it also demands huge amounts of patience and consideration. You need to ensure that your venture is sustainable and that you approach the purchase in a more thorough way than if you were simply buying a home. Make sure you get good advice,

and from more than one source. If the business is being sold through a reputable agency, they should be able to facilitate the provision of past accounts. You will need to hire an *expert-comptable* (accountant) to view the place and investigate its viability on your behalf. Buying a business comes with its own set of liabilities, make sure you understand every step of the process and if you are not sure, get an expert to advise you. It may be helpful to contact the Fédération Française d'Équitation (FFE) for advice.

Simply Horseplay, €150,000 plus

You might find that the

properties available in your price range do not come with established stables, but do have suitable land attached to them. In this case, there are a few things you will need to do to ensure you are allowed to keep horses. Check the *Plan Local d'Urbanisme* (PLU). Ask at the local *mairie* and tell them about your plans to keep a horse and see if the land has any restrictions (such as being in a flood zone) stopping you building a shelter for your animal. Houses with a single barn attached are often the most suitable.

HORSING AROUND

If you want to ensure that your

equestrian lifestyle can be achieved, then our number one tip is to network. Here are a few ways to go about it:

- **Join a riding centre:** With so many equestrian centres in France, you will find many people to talk to about the process of keeping a horse in France. Why not combine a holiday or course with making new friends in the industry, exploring the area and househunting?
- **Contact the Fédération Française d'Équitation** (*ffe.com*): It can offer all sorts of useful advice.
- **Contact your estate agent:** Tell them about your project, they will be happy to help.

Read more
property buying
guides on

frenchentree.com



€1,450,000

TOURNON-D'AGENAIS, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This 17th-century fortified farm sits on 18 hectares with fabulous new equestrian facilities including an arena, 10 stables and three barns. The luxurious seven-bedroom farmhouse has seven bathrooms, three kitchens and a stunning pool with views.



€455,800

MONTBRON, CHARENTE

A horse-lover's paradise of almost 13 hectares set in glorious countryside. There are six generous-sized stables with automatic water feeders and two sand arenas. The recently renovated four-bedroom house has bright and spacious interiors.



€254,360

MOULISMES, VIENNE

Beautiful and set in picturesque countryside, this five-bedroom stone house is currently arranged as two rental apartments that could easily be reverted back to one spacious family home. Outside, there is 6,000m² of gardens and a two-block stable.



€853,300

MARMANDE, LOT-ET-GARONNE

With over five hectares of land, this stunning five-bedroom chateau has been partially renovated and has some grand reception rooms and a new kitchen. It could work as a wedding venue or boutique hotel and has lots of outbuildings including stables.

● **Meet the locals:** Across France there are many smallholdings on which the owners keep horses. Go and talk to some of the locals, contact the tourist boards and get out there on a hack to meet likeminded people.

So start your journey today and enjoy the ride! ■

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UPCOMING EVENTS

● **The Generali French Open, Lamotte-Beuvron, 8-29 July 2023**

The world's biggest equestrian competition, it even got into the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest number of participants (13,838 in 2012). All the clubs in France come together to compete.

● **The Olympic Games, Château de Versailles, 26 July-4 August 2024**

This is such an important event in the French calendar, it's worth

noting now. France initiated the revival of the equestrian events at the modern Olympic Games in 1900 at the Paris Olympic Games and is the fourth-most successful equestrian nation.

● **Festival Equestria, Tarbes, 18-23 July 2023**

No historical account of the town of Tarbes can ignore its *haras* (stud farm), which is a beautiful eight-hectare park, stud farm and now equestrian museum at its very centre. Created in 1806 by Napoleon, it is where the Anglo-

Arabian breed originates. The place was bought back by the town from the French Institute of Horse and Riding (IFCE) in 2016 and now hosts this family festival.

● **Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, Longchamp Racecourse, Paris, October 2023**

France's £3.7bn-a-year horse-racing revenue comes from just a handful of prestige meets. This one is considered the most prestigious in the world and is certainly a great place for spotting stars.