



# Family first!

Family life is at the heart of everything in rural France and by choosing the right location for your family, you will have plenty to enjoy says **Jessica Randell**

ong summer evenings, the conviviality of a village square as locals and tourists alike enjoy an *apéritif* and children of all ages run around after each other laughing to their hearts' content... It's enough to make anyone dream of leaving the hustle and bustle of a busy life behind in the hunt for a more relaxed lifestyle in rural France where family comes first.

In many ways France represents an idyllic family life. Family is at the heart of everything, particularly in rural areas, and the French often spend weekends savouring regional produce bought at a local market with extended family members. Bedtime tends to be later and children are regularly included in family gatherings, outings to restaurants or a visit to a local night market in summer.

The lengthy school holidays mean children can make the most of their time off school and enjoy other activities, like swimming and canoeing or making new friends at the local *centre de loisirs*.

## NOT JUST A NEW LANGUAGE

For many families with children who are thinking of relocating to France, education will be a top priority. Parents in will likely have many questions and wonder how their children will adapt to a new school, language and culture.

It's important to know that, despite the differences, the education system in France has a very good reputation and an impressive literacy rate.

There will be adjustments though: say goodbye to packed lunches and say hello to three-course meals in the school canteen; gone will be the 3pm finishes as French school days are much longer and after-school activities will require a new type of organisation!

Most villages or their neighbours will have a school for younger children, this could be a *maternelle* (ages three to six) or a primary school (ages six to 11). The distances between home and school often means children are not within walking distance of their school. The likelihood of

this increases when children head off to *collège* (ages 11 to 15) or *lycée* (ages 15 to 18), as these establishments tend to be in larger towns. It isn't uncommon for children to travel for up to an hour every morning and evening!

The school days can therefore be quite long, but it is rare for children to have school all day on Wednesdays. Depending on their age and which school they attend, some may not have school at all on a Wednesday whereas others may only have to go in during the morning.

Your village *mairie* will be able to provide you with information about local schools and how to register.

One thing that might surprise you is the list of school supplies you are given at the beginning of the school year. It's an extensive inventory of notebooks, stationery and reading books, and it may even include slippers and a toothbrush! While you will likely be able to purchase these supplies in a large local supermarket, it might be the

perfect opportunity to have a day out shopping in your nearest city.

You may also need to stock up on 'back to school' clothes as children in France don't wear school uniforms, and even the slightly larger towns in rural France don't tend to have shopping centres or high street stores like you would find in the UK. It isn't really a case of popping to the shops here but more of a full family day out!

## CITY SHOPPING OR LOCAL MARKETS?

Cities like Angoulême, Périgueux, and Toulouse are all of a good size and offer a range of high street shops and independent boutiques. The larger city of Bordeaux also offers excellent retail facilities with several shopping centres on the outskirts of the city and wonderful city-centre shopping. Bordeaux is home to the longest shopping street in Europe, the Rue Sainte Catherine, which is 1.2km long and definitely worth a visit!

French shops tend to have good sales which are tightly



**RIBERAC, DORDOGNE**

*A beautiful country residence with three ensuite bedrooms, a large garden and outbuildings. Situated 10 minutes from both the market town of Ribérac and the picturesque town of Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, this property offers a quiet location with amenities nearby.*

**CROZANT, CREUSE**

*Renovated four-bedroom, three-bathroom stone farmhouse with a garden located five minutes from the historic village of Crozant with its museums and restaurants, and three minutes from a large lake with swimming and watersports.*

**SERVIÈS-EN-VAL, AUDE**

*On the edge of a charming village within walking distance of the market and swimming lake, three-bedroom property with pool and terrace nestled among rolling hills and vineyards offering walking and cycling routes, just an hour from the Mediterranean coast.*

**VERTEUIL-SUR-CHARENTE, CHARENTE**

*In the heart of the sought-after village of Verteuil-sur-Charente, and walking distance to amenities and schools, superb detached property with a large garden and 10x5m swimming pool. Just over half an hour from the lively town of Angoulême.*

regulated by the government and happen twice a year between set dates so don't forget to look these up. Bear in mind that many shops in France are closed on Sundays, so always check opening days and times if you are planning some Sunday shopping!

If you'd rather stay local, most villages and towns will have a weekly market. They are popular with residents and vary in size from one place to another. Some, like the *marché de Ribérac* in the Dordogne, are very well known and aren't just an opportunity to pick up local produce but also a social event which your children are likely to enjoy as well.

They offer the perfect opportunity to enjoy a hot drink and freshly baked pâtisserie at a local café while catching up with neighbours, local news and purchasing fresh and regional produce.

**TURN YOUR HAND TO SOMETHING NEW**

As there is rarely school on Wednesday afternoons, these are normally reserved for extracurricular activities, along with Saturdays. With sports like football, tennis and horse riding being universally popular, you won't struggle to find a local club to sign up to. The southwest of France is also renowned for being

rugby territory. It is home to some very successful rugby teams, and the further south you go, the more popular it is with places like Tonneins and Castres being the birthplaces to some famous rugby players such as Philippe Sella and Yannick Jauzion.

Sports like cricket, hockey and netball are not very well known in France and are rarely played by French people. While you may be in luck and find a relatively local cricket team, such as the ones in Eymet or Catus, for you or your children to join, netball teams are often only found in the larger cities and hockey teams are very few and far between.

You will likely discover new sports though; handball is far more popular in France than in the UK and despite there being a debate about whether *pétanque* is a sport or not, you'll likely have the opportunity to play it. You will quickly notice that most villages and towns in rural France have their very own *pétanque* or *boules* court where generations play together throughout summer.

The large outdoor spaces in France are brilliant for families who love the great outdoors. The southwest is home to stunning landscapes filled with lakes, rivers and rolling hills, which give children plenty of opportunities for swimming, ▶



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€795,000

**CORDES-SUR-CIEL**

Just over an hour from Toulouse and 10 minutes from the nearest village, a charming five-bedroom manor house and two one-bedroom annexes offering friends and family the perfect place to stay. With fabulous country views and a 12x5m swimming pool.



€314,000

**MAURIAC, GIRONDE**

A six-bedroom stone property just an hour from the attractions of Bordeaux. This lovely family home offers an open-plan living space, three ensuite bathrooms, a large south facing terrace and air conditioning.



€424,000

**BERGERAC, DORDOGNE**

A generous plot for this four-bedroom provincial-style villa in an exceptional location with stunning views and a 14x5m swimming pool. The property is just 10 minutes' drive to the bustling, riverside town of Bergerac with its fantastic markets, diverse commerce and excellent schools.



€152,600

**NANTEUIL-EN-VALLÉE, CHARENTE**

A four-bedroom property in a small hamlet close to the picturesque village of Nanteuil-en-Vallée, with its restaurants, park and schools. Just 15 minutes to amenities in the larger town of Ruffec and 10 minutes to riverside Rejallant for picnics, swimming and canoeing.

walking and cycling. So for those who don't enjoy club sports, there is still plenty to do to keep active.

Family life in France may look different to family life in the UK, and while it may not suit everyone and the distances between activities and friends can be an adjustment, it definitely has its perks. The education system is of a high standard and very affordable, there is an abundance of sporting activities and the local markets make it easy

to consume regional and sustainable produce.

Many parents also feel their children benefit from greater freedom than they would in the UK, providing them with opportunities to discover the outside world! ■

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**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION...**

A few top tips when moving to France with your family:

- Do your research - look into local schools and the support they can offer your family.
- Try not to be surprised if the local school suggests keeping your children back a year. Depending on their age, it is common for children learning French to be kept back a year so they don't fall behind in their schoolwork (this is even common for French pupils).
- If you or your children have a hobby which is not particularly common, ensure you are within a reasonable distance of where the lessons take place.
- Choosing a location which caters to all of your needs will contribute to making your move a great success!