

WHAT'S OUT THERE?

You still get a lot of property for your money in the southwest of France



£278,155

PERIOD CHARM

Want original features aplenty? You won't be disappointed with this four-bed house in a pretty village in Entre deux Mers, which is considered one of the most picturesque areas of the Bordeaux region. The reception room even has a tiled floor dating from the 16th century. You get lots of space, too, with the cellar currently being used as a music room and a utility room. Bordeaux and Beyond (00 335 5661 0774; www.bordeauxbeyond.co.uk)



£299,448

LOCATION, LOCATION

OK, this four-bed, fully renovated stone house in Flaujacgues is completely gorgeous on the inside and out (it even comes with its own carp pond!). But even better is its location within easy reach of both the Bordeaux and Bergerac airports. It's also just a 25-minute drive from the hilltop village of St Emilion, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Leggett Immobilier (00 335 5755 0606; www.frenchestateagents.com)



£361,781

YOUR OWN WATER MILL

This three-bed watermill, just 15 minutes from the village of St Emilion, is perfect for anyone who wants to be really 'green'. The mill still works so you can reduce your carbon footprint by generating your own electricity. And if you're keen to break into the tourist industry there's an outbuilding in the garden that could be converted into accommodation. Capi International (00 334 9906 0459; www.capifrance.co.uk)



£392,316

BUY A VINEYARD

If you've always fancied yourself as a wine producer, this four-bed 18th-century house near La Sauve could be perfect – its one and a half acres include Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon vines. Inside, the two reception rooms have exposed beams and open fires. Plus, the house is only half an hour's drive from Bordeaux airport – ideal for picking up weekend guests jetting over from the UK. Sifex (020 7384 1200; www.sifex.co.uk)



£477,382

TWO HOUSES FOR ONE

Not only is this five-bed, three bathroom house absolutely gorgeous, but it also comes with a smaller house, too, so you could generate a nice income from a B&B business. The main house has a beautiful front garden, a terrace area beyond the pretty country kitchen and a large lawn leading down to a river – perfect for picnics. And it's near the beautiful hilltop town of St Emilion. Leggett Immobilier (00 335 5755 0606; www.frenchestateagents.com)



10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BUYING IN FRANCE

Dreaming of a home abroad? Do your homework before you buy

1 However good your French is, consider getting legal advice from someone bilingual.

There are various ways to own a French property, different mortgage options and English and French inheritance and tax rules to get your head around. Your local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can provide a list of lawyers.

2 Some estate agents may ask you to sign a bon de visite which ensures that once you've seen a house you can't deal direct with the seller or another agency to reduce costs.

3 A big difference between the French and English systems is that it's normal for a notaire (solicitor), appointed by the vendor, to act for both parties. He/she will draft legal documents, ensure all state taxes are paid on purchase and that the property is registered at the time of completion.

4 When an offer is agreed on, the vendor and buyer both sign a contract called a Compromis de Vente, drawn up by the notaire. It means you're committed to buy, but it's followed by a seven-day cooling-off period during which you can pull out without forfeit.

5 On signing the Compromis de Vente, a deposit (normally 10% of the property price) is paid to the notaire. If

the contract is broken after the seven-day cooling-off period you'll lose this deposit.

6 The Compromis de Vente must say whether or not the price to be paid is by loan. If the loan is refused and you can't get an alternative mortgage, you can still recover your deposit.

7 Due to the Compromis de Vente, it's almost impossible to be gazumped in France.

8 French banks and most British banks in France, only ask for a valuation done by a valuer not a surveyor, but it makes sense to get a survey done as you would in the UK unless your future home is a wreck you plan to rebuild. The estate agent, notaire or lawyer will be able to help you get it translated.

9 After signing the Compromis de Vente you'll be given a date for signing the final Acte de Vente, usually 12 weeks ahead. This has to be done in person in front of the notaire, but if you can't be there, you can sign a mandat, giving power to a notaire to sign for you.

10 It's a good idea to try and visit the property the day before completion to check that it hasn't deteriorated since signing the contract – if it has, contact the notaire and seek a reduction in price.