

OVERSEAS

Take a very different Tour de France

Ben Clatworthy reports on the market in châteaux and cottages along the famous cycle route

The Tour de France is not only about the Lycra-clad competitors — for potential buyers the 3,351km race offers an armchair tour of some of France's prime property hotspots.

From striking urban architecture to the lofty peaks of the Alps, the Tour, which runs until July 29, showcases the best of France.

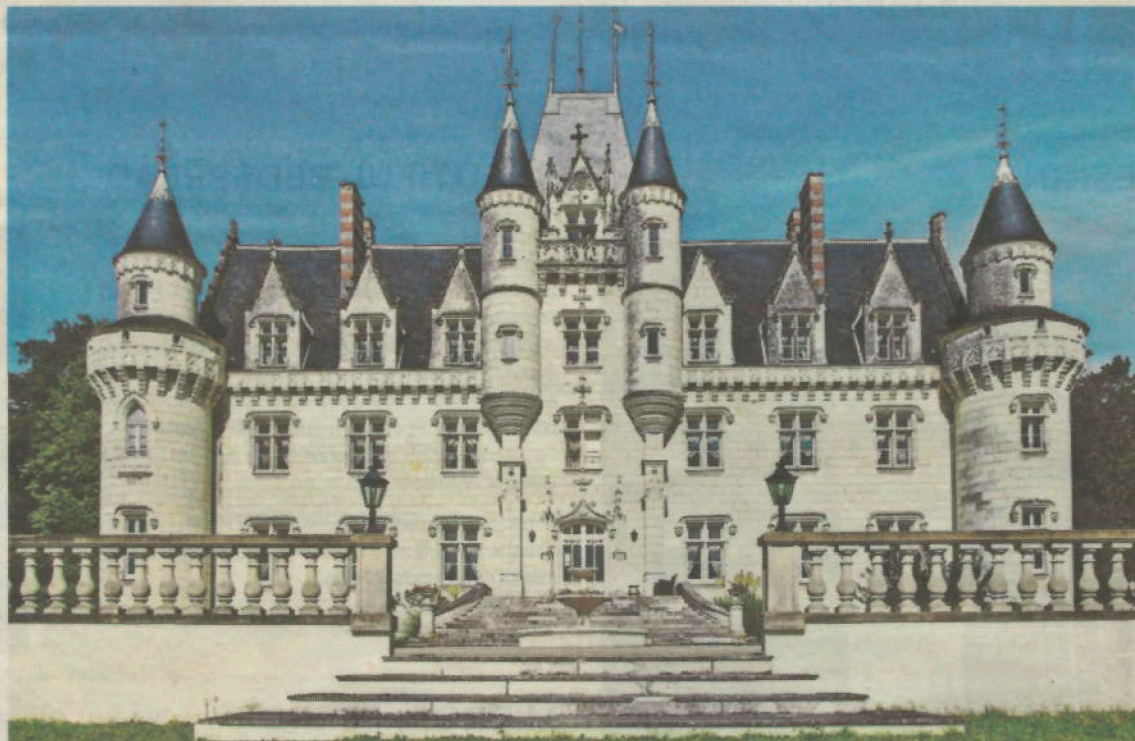
In the past year the country's residential markets have begun to flourish. One of Emmanuel Macron's first moves on being elected president last year was to slash the country's controversial wealth tax, and "l'effet Macron" has caused a "ripple of optimism from Paris to the Côte d'Azur, Provence and the Alps", according to Knight Frank, an estate agency.

The French property market has been waiting for such a recovery after being hit by the double whammy of the financial crash in 2008 followed by the election of François Hollande as president in 2012. Hollande raised taxes for high earners, which simultaneously prompted people to move out of France and deterred others from moving in. Foreign buyers were further put off by a series of terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice, on the French Riviera.

There is disparity in the strength of the recovery, though, with a gap of 9.6 per cent between average property price rises in Lille in the northern Hauts-de-France region, up 1 per cent in the past year, and Lyons in the central Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, up 10.6 per cent.

Figures compiled by BNP Paribas International Buyers, a mortgage lender, show that property sales to British buyers are booming, especially in the southwest of the country, where the Tour will arrive in its final stages.

Although last year the number of Britons buying second homes in France declined — down from 5,492 in 2016 to



This ten-bedroom chateau near Poitiers in the Poitou-Charentes region is on sale for €2.4 million (Leggett)

4,527 in 2017 — the number purchasing homes across the Channel as their main residence has increased as people seek to make the move before Britain finalises its divorce from the EU.

Paris

The Tour de France will end on the Champs-Élysées, near some of the most desirable property in the French capital. Not far from

the finish line, in the 16th arrondissement, property prices fell by 35 to 45 per cent when Hollande was in power, although they are rising again and discounts are less readily available. "It's true that we saw a drop-off from British buyers immediately after the EU referendum," says Susie

Hollands, the founder of Vingt Paris, an estate agency. "Since then demand has soared, especially as it looks likely that Britons residing in France by the end of 2020 will be able to continue living as they do now. There has been a surge of people wanting to snap up their pied-à-terre in Paris before then."

A three-bedroom apartment at the centre of Lepic market in the 18th arrondissement is on sale for €1.7 million (£1.5 million) with Knight Frank, while



A three-bedroom flat on the Champs-Élysées in Paris is on sale for €7.3 million with Savills

a 127 sq m two-bedroom flat in the 6th arrondissement near Place Saint-Sulpice is on the market for €3.25 million.

"Paris is really on the front foot under Macron," says Roddy Aris, a sales manager at Knight Frank. "Last year the prime property price increases in Paris were among the strongest in the world, up 12 per cent."

However, according to Knight Frank's Global Cities Index, published this week, average property prices across the city were up only 3.7 per cent in the first three months of this year compared with the same period last year.

The Alps

The French Alps are home to some of the most famous ski resorts in world, as

well as serious climbs for the cyclists, and prime properties command a high price. Apartments rule in this vast ski area, which is linked to neighbouring Les Arcs by a double-decker cable-car. For example, Erna Low Property has two-bedroom flats in the new White Pearl development from €325,000. The 81 apartments are spread across eight chalet blocks, with a spa, indoor and outdoor pools; five-bedroom properties cost €690,000.

Properties in glitzy Val d'Isère and Courchevel 1850, off the Tour route, command the highest rates per square metre, with prices at €25,700 and €31,400 respectively, according to Savills. Knight Frank says that prices per square metre rose 2.5 per cent last year in Val d'Isère. That looks set to continue after the resort announced a £170 million redevelopment plan.

"The market as a whole is incredibly strong in the resort, mainly at the top end, which had been quite quiet for the past five years," Aris says.

En route to smaller La Rosière, the chocolate-box resort that has ski-lift links to La Thuile in Italy, the cyclists will whizz past Ste-Foy Tarentaise, where prices are lower. For example, Chalet Marigold, a 445 sq m eight-bedroom/bathroom property with a hot tub and wine cellar, is on the market for €1.999 million with Alpine Property Search. In La Rosière, a south-facing three-bedroom apartment in Le Hameau de Barthélémy residence is for sale for €547,500 with Erna Low Property.

The south of France

In the hotspots of the south of France the buyer demographic is changing, according to Jelena Cvjetkovic at Savills. "There is definitely a shift towards slightly younger buyers. They are still high-net-worth, but are also likely to split leisure time between multiple destinations."

St Tropez is the most active market in the area, according to Cvjetkovic, with most transactions taking place in the glitzy resort in the past 18 months. For example, a four-bedroom apartment overlooking the port is on the market for €3.2 million, while in nearby Ramatuelle, a seven-bedroom villa with tennis court and helipad is €8.5 million, both with Leggett Immobilier.

The Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, including the French Riviera, remains the main draw, with sales up year-on-year, according to Joanna Leggett of Leggett Immobilier. Prices are on the rise, with the average amount paid per square metre for a house in Vieux Nice at €3,818 — a 5 per cent increase in five years.



ASK THE EXPERT

Q I own a rental flat with five months left on the tenancy agreement. Can I end the tenancy early if I want to sell?

& A

In England most private-sector lettings are assured shorthold tenancies under the Housing Act 1988, although new lettings in Wales will generally be "standard contracts" under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016.

A tenancy agreement can quite properly include a break clause allowing a landlord to end a tenancy early, provided that this does not take effect during the first six months of the letting.

If there is no break clause, a landlord can only end a tenancy early by giving notice under section 8 of the 1988 act. The notice must refer to a ground for

possession in Schedule 2, which includes situations such as unpaid rent (grounds 8, 10 and 11), damage to the property (ground 13), breaches of the tenancy agreement (ground 12) or where the landlord wants to return to the property to live there himself (ground 1). None of the statutory grounds applies where a landlord simply wants possession to sell.

Some landlords who want to sell occasionally rely on ground 9, where "suitable alternative accommodation" is available for the tenant. But since it is unrealistic for most landlords to meet the criteria for suitability laid down by

part III of the schedule, it is cheaper and more simple to market the property with the tenant in place. A landlord can still ensure that the property will be vacant when the fixed term of the tenancy ends by giving advance notice to the tenant under section 21 of the act.

So to end a tenancy to sell, the easiest thing is to give a section 21 notice requiring possession at the end of the letting period.

Mark Loveday

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