



## La vie en rose

Variety is the spice of life in France, with its cornucopia of landscapes and lifestyles open to property buyers. Arabella Youens makes her top 10 recommendations



### Best for food: Gascony

Earlier this year, the *New York Times* described Gascony as the 'most delicious corner of France'. The largely agricultural region of the south-west has escaped the blights of mass tourism, motorways and TGV lines and, according to Knight Frank's long-standing associate Ian Purslow, locals are fiercely proud of their local cuisine.

'Eating in Gascony is fresh, hearty, fun and unpretentious, with recipes rooted in tradition more than in trendy fusion. Restaurateurs are obsessed with sourcing produce locally and the Cittaslow—the Slow Food movement—is catching on,' he explains. Duck plays a leading role and the confit is delicious.

↑ This five-bedroom *manoir* sits on the edge of a small hamlet. It boasts ceiling heights of 11ft on the main floor, a modern kitchen, a fantastic library and a covered outdoor dining terrace. €890,000. Knight Frank (020-7629 8171)



### Best for high peaks: Mont Blanc valley

According to Roddy Aris of Knight Frank's Alps desk, there are two types of buyers in his patch: the 'powder junkies' and those who want to use their Alpine property all year round. 'Those who care only for skiing must go high, with Val d'Isère and Courchevel both being the destination of choice for the majority. On the other hand, if someone is looking for a chalet to use in winter and summer, then there is really only Chamonix.'

→ Chalet Arpont is a newly designed contemporary interpretation of the traditional Savoyard vernacular. When complete, it will have five bedrooms with accommodation set over four levels, including a sauna, spa and gym. €3.9 million. Knight Frank (020-7861 1727)



↑ Located just on the edge of L'Isle sur la Sorgue, this 19th-century house would be perfect for entertaining. It has 10 bedrooms, a large swimming pool and a beautifully landscaped garden of about five acres. €2.08 million. Knight Frank (020-7861 1139)

### Best for families: Île de Ré

Long regarded as the summer bolthole for well-heeled Parisians—with its sand dunes and pine forests, it's often likened to the Hamptons—the little Atlantic-coast island is growing in popularity with British buyers. Families like it for its cycle paths and endless beaches, which, even at the height of the season, never get too crowded. It's much more informal than the Riviera, too—no superyacht marina and no one discusses the merits of Michelin-starred restaurants.

← This house in Sainte-Marie de Ré offers the best of both worlds: proximity to both the beach and the town centre. It comes with two bedrooms (one in a separate studio). €344,500. Leggett Immobilier (0870 011 5151)

### Best for collectors: L'Isle sur la Sorgue

Known as Provence's antique capital, Isle sur la Sorgue has more antiques shops than any other place in France. There's a market twice weekly (Thursdays and Saturdays), but the town also hosts major events such as the Foire Internationale à la Brocante et à l'Antiquité. The Tuesday market in Curcuron, in the Lubéron, is also worth a visit, as are the ones in Bonnieux and St Saturnin-les-Apt. 'L'Isle sur la Sorgue is also well located for the route from London St Pancras, with a direct train to Avignon TGV,' adds Jack Harris of Knight Frank.



### Best for now or never: Paris

Now that Président Macron has taken up residence in the Élysée Palace, there are high hopes that he'll keep France on a steady economic course. However, whatever happens in the world, Paris will always be Paris—and there will always be a demand.

'Whatever may be happening on the international stage, in the national elections or in the local economy, events very rarely have an effect on the property market here,' says Susie Hollands of Vingt Paris. 'The city has an eternal appeal. In simple terms, stock is low and we have more buyers than available property; the market here is *über-resilient*.'

↑ A few steps from the Hôtel des Invalides and down a secluded dead-end street is this five-bedroom house, which overlooks a Japanese-inspired patio garden. €9.8 million. Savills (020-7016 3740)



### Best for accessibility: the Dordogne

For the price of a family apartment in Paris, you can buy a *château* or mansion in the Dordogne, set in beautiful countryside, with nearby markets brimming with delicious, seasonal produce, enthuses Jane Berry of Leggett Immobilier.

The Dordogne, which is part of the Aquitaine, has been a particular favourite with the Americans and British; the region is home to the highest number of expatriates in France outside Paris. One of the reasons is its accessibility: there are four airports serving the area, including Brive, Limoges, Bergerac and Bordeaux-Mérignac, so it's not challenging to find a property less than an hour from the nearest flight back to the UK.

↑ This *maison de maître* is just over six miles from Bergerac airport. The house has seven bedrooms, two of which are in a converted wine store. Outside is a heated swimming pool with a Jacuzzi and *hammam*. €466,400. Leggett Immobilier (0870 011 5151)



### Best for sports: Annecy

Annecy is an ideal second home for people who love winter and summer sports, says Joanna Leverett of Cluttons. 'In the summer, there is cycling in beautiful scenery and at different levels of difficulty in the mountains or in the valley.' The lake is a big draw, too; not only does it provide one of the most famous cycling routes in Europe, but it's an ideal spot for boating, swimming and paddle boarding.

In the winter, world-class ski resorts La Clusaz and Le Grand Bornand are only a 20-minute drive away.

↑ Set on the banks of Lake Annecy, in Véryrier du Lac, this six-bedroom villa boasts panoramic views from the main living rooms and bedrooms. It comes with a swimming pool and cinema. €1.7 million. Cluttons (020-3813 9175) ➤



### Best for oenophiles: Bordeaux

Bordeaux's star is in the ascendancy—first, it was voted best European destination in 2016, then best city in the world in 2017. 'The combination of outstanding food and wine, 270 acres of vineyards, the beach and a gorgeous climate is being discovered and, with the new TGV line arriving this month, it's easier than ever to get here,' says Michael Baynes of Maxwell-Storrie-Baynes, Christie's affiliate in the city.

'Bordeaux vineyard prices started to recover from their lows a couple of years ago, but they have a long way to go to equal the highs of 17 years ago,' adds Michael, whose office was responsible for 10 of the 28 *chateau*-vineyard sales in 2016. Of those, three went to Chinese buyers, one to a Taiwanese, four to Americans and the rest to Europeans.

↑ There are about 150 acres under vines at this magnificent 17th-century Bordeaux *chateau*, which is in good condition. It was formerly owned by a member of Napoleon's personal guard and enjoys a private rural position in one of the most attractive parts of the wine region. €3.7 million. Maxwell-Storrie-Baynes/Christie's International Real Estate (00 33 5 57 84 08 82)



### Best for views: the Lubéron

When it comes to postcard-perfect Provence, you can't do much better than the Lubéron. Probably the most photographed lavender fields in the whole of France are in front of the abbey at Sénanque, near Gordes, but each and every hillside village along the valley offers dramatic and far-reaching views that are punctuated by beautifully managed vineyards and stone farmhouses.

'Some of the special houses in the Lubéron villages have little gardens or outside spaces, so here you can have the best of both worlds—in the action, with views to die for, but with private outdoor space,' says Jelena Cvjetkovic of Savills International.

↑ This four-bedroom house is in the heart of Bonnieux, a popular village that was once home to John Malkovich. The south-west facing property offers uninterrupted views onto the Lubéron, the village of Lacoste and the valley below. €820,000. Savills (020-7016 3740)



### Best for *pieds-dans-l'eau*: Juan les Pins

The area around the marina and port of Old Antibes has some spectacular beaches, from La Garoupe in Cap d'Antibes to the long pebble beach between Antibes and Villeneuve-Loubet, and many smaller ones in between.

One of the best for sandy toes and glamour gazing is at Juan-les-Pins. Once known as a slightly seedy second cousin to Cap d'Antibes, the town is now up and coming, according to local agents, and boasts an annual international jazz festival. It's perfectly placed for access to Cannes, which is five miles away and it's 16 miles from Nice and its international airport.

↑ Parc du Cap is perfect for those looking for a fully equipped home within stumbling distance of the beach. Just 650ft from the Pinède and Juan-les-Pins, this new-build development has a spa, concierge and parking—a rare beast on this stretch of coastline. €599,950. Savills (020-7016 3811)



### More ways with fennel

#### Fennel-slaw dogs (below)

Combine 250ml of Greek yoghurt, 1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard, 1 teaspoon of lemon juice and a little salt in a blender, then trickle in 50ml of olive oil. Finely slice a quarter of a spring green cabbage, 1 large bulb of fennel and a sweet apple, then mix together with a few spoonfuls of the dressing. Serve the slaw heaped on hotdogs.



#### Fennel-and-sausage ragu tagliatelle

Remove the skins from 400g of high-quality sausages. In a large pan, fry a couple of finely sliced red onions, 1 fennel bulb and the sausagemeat. Sprinkle with seasoning, freshly chopped basil and oregano. Pour a glass of red wine over them, then simmer to reduce before adding a tin of chopped tomatoes and a handful of fresh, chopped ones. Reduce everything down with a splash of balsamic vinegar for sweetness, stirring well. Cook pasta until *al dente* and stir through the sauce. Serve topped with a sprinkle of Parmesan.

#### Fennel gratin with Parmesan

Cut a few fennel bulbs into wedges and arrange them in an oven-proof dish. Season well, then scrunch up slices of Parma ham and nestle them between the wedges. Mix double cream and crushed garlic in a jug and pour it over the fennel, to just cover. Grate Parmesan over the top and bake for about 25 minutes in a moderate oven.

Melanie Johnson

‘Fennel is a fabulous vegetable to grow—not only does it work well in a variety of dishes, the tall fronds also look beautiful in the garden. The only downside is that you either love it or hate it’



### Miso cod with warm fennel-and-yuzu salad and nori potatoes

Serves 4

#### Ingredients

4 cod fillets  
100g white-miso paste

400g potatoes  
1 sheet *nori*  
15g sea salt

25ml olive oil  
2 thinly sliced fennel bulbs  
2 halved and sliced red onions  
15ml yuzu  
Zest of 1 orange

Micro *shiso* and *oba* leaves to serve (optional)

#### Method

Put the cod and the *miso* paste in a freezer bag, then rub gently so fillets are coated. Leave to marinate in the fridge for at least a few hours. Preheat your oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 3. Arrange the fish on a foil-lined tray and bake for 15–18 minutes or until just cooked.

Peel the potatoes and cut them into even-sized pieces, then simmer in a pan of boiling, salted water until tender. Meanwhile, pass the potatoes through a spice grinder or roll up and slice thinly with a sharp knife (a grinder is preferable as it will create a 'glittery' dust). Once the potatoes are cooked, drain, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with the *nori* and sea salt.

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan, then add the fennel and red onion, frying gently until almost tender. Season, then pour it over the yuzu and add the zest. Stir well to combine.

Divide the warm fennel salad between four plates, top with the cod (I served mine on *oba* leaves) and add a few *shiso* leaves. Serve with the *nori* potatoes on the side.