



Charming three-bedroom house in Beauville, Lot-et-Garonne (see listing right)

A plan for all seasons

Whether you are looking for a forever home, holiday retreat or business opportunity, buying outside the holiday season will give you a more accurate impression of your chosen patch of France, says **Julie Savill**

Do you ever wonder if those cool flagstones in the French farmhouse kitchen of your dream home become rather chilly when the leaves start turning? Do you even know when the leaves start turning? Is autumn mild and pleasant or violently windy in your favourite summer spot? When do those sun-drenched afternoons simply become... well... drenched?

For many of us who have built a new life abroad, the germ of that idea started on a holiday in our chosen destination. Whether in the height of summer, on a spring break or a skiing trip in February, that vacation was almost certainly in-season. For many of us the journey

in France really begins when we find out that you do actually need central heating during winter. For some of us it becomes clear that our favourite season is no longer summer, when the restaurants are packed with tourists and the nights are uncomfortably hot, but spring, when the well-trodden paths that have attracted tourists for years are now virgin walkways carpeted with orchids laid out just for us.

Every department in France has its own seasonal identity. The Languedoc area enjoys mild winters in the Aude and Hérault but it can be fiercely hot in some places during summer. In the Ariège and Pyrénées there is a snow line beyond which you can expect to have snow every year throughout

the winter but the place is a green and pleasant land during the summer. If your chosen destination is wine country, you may not realise that those beautiful rows of intense green leaves turn vivid gold and red during autumn.

BEAT THE CROWDS

France is the most popular tourist destination in the world. In 2018 and 2019, more than 20 million tourists arrived every month during July and August, with slightly lower numbers in September and June, dropping to around eight or nine million during December and January.

Visiting houses while on holiday can be fun, but if you are a serious buyer then you will be competing with plenty of other serious buyers who

have pre-booked time with agents to do viewings. As with booking a restaurant in high season, booking viewings in advance is an absolute necessity in peak season.

Even the most attentive property consultant will be rushed off their feet with viewings as well as coping with higher than normal volumes of enquiries. In addition, getting to places takes longer when there is more traffic on the roads. Many of France's most popular tourist destinations, such as the beaches along the Atlantic and the Mediterranean coasts, Carcassonne, the Cathar castles, *Plus Beaux Villages* and the Dordogne, are extremely crowded during the summer months but out of season they are a total joy to visit.



€235,400

MONFLANQUIN, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This charming three-bedroom village house has a lovely private garden. The living rooms open out onto a wonderful sun terrace overlooking the surrounding countryside. The property is on mains drainage and also comes with a barn and a large cellar.



€509,000

BEAUVILLE, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This wonderful three-bedroom stone house (see also main image) sits at the end of a tree-lined drive with views across a lake valley. It has been fully renovated and comes with 10 hectares of land and a barn. The popular local village is a few minutes away.



€296,000

PUYRÉAUX, CHARENTE

Beautiful stone property in a lakeside setting boasting three bedrooms (including a large attic), three bathrooms and lovely gardens. Located in a quiet hamlet close to the lively market towns of Mansle and Ruffec, it has an above-ground pool.



€3.72M

CARCASSONNE, AUDE

Exquisitely designed country residence, comfortably sleeping 14, set in a whopping 48 hectares of landscaped gardens, parkland, fields and hills in a Corbières valley. The property includes a caretaker's cottage, 15m heated swimming pool and an all-weather tennis court.

You can relax and enjoy the view uninterrupted.

PLAN YOUR BUSINESS

For those looking for a holiday home or a retirement bolthole, the out-of-season vibe of an area will be all important. Do the restaurants stay open? How good are the travel links (some low-cost flights only operate in the summer months)? And does the weather suit your lifestyle throughout the year?

One of the things that recommended south-west France to me was the fact that we get distinct seasons. I love getting the jumpers out in November but I'm also happy to pack them away again in the spring and not think about

“Do the restaurants stay open? And does the weather suit your lifestyle throughout the year?”

them for many long months. If, on the other hand, your purchase includes a business plan which is reliant on tourism, then it is essential you find out how long the season is, if there is more than one season, what type of tourists your location attracts and when.

You may want to know what activities could support what you do and who you can reach out to for advice in the area. Comparing the tariffs of similar

businesses in the area will only tell you one part of the story. A trip to your location out of season will give you a real feel for the place all year round. You will be able to see with your own eyes what places remain open, whether there is any life outside of season and whether or not the place is appealing to you all year round. You may therefore want to adjust your business planning accordingly.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Domestic travel accounts for 70% of tourism revenue in France, with the traditional month-long August holiday being a key component of that. Among those French tourists are the *notaires*, their assistants, the town hall *'fonctionnaires'*, the mayors, the technical experts, the property owners, the removals teams and even the locals who would normally be home to help you but have headed on holiday.

All the more reason to plan ahead. If you intend to come over earlier in the year, not only will all of your support services be less busy and more attentive to your sale, but you will not risk your sale being delayed



€380,540

LE BUGUE, DORDOGNE

This idyllic seven-bedroom house comes with two hectares of land, truffle trees and a swimming pool. It's only a short drive to the lovely riverside town with its bars and restaurants, shops and attractions. Perfect for a large holiday home!



€465,340

ISSIGEAC, DORDOGNE

This charmingly renovated medieval house is built into the old fortified ramparts of a village. It is on mains drainage and comes with many original features, six bedrooms, five bathrooms and a pretty terrace garden, plus a garage.



€715,500

LA SALVETAT-PEYRALÈS, AVEYRON

Boasting incredible views, this stunning four-bedroom farmhouse sits privately in five hectares, including a pool, veg patch, paddocks and woodland. The interiors have been lovingly renovated, including a bespoke oak kitchen and several eco-friendly features.



€899,940

EXCIDEUIL, DORDOGNE

This magnificent formal home with six bedrooms, six bathrooms and vaulted cellars is set on a hill with commanding views. The grand interiors have been restored to a very high standard and in the garden there is an exceptional pool.

by a full month when August arrives. An offer in the early spring will most likely see you sipping cocktails on your terrace under the Gallic sky in August. Alternatively, if you find your dream property in September, you'll be getting the keys in the early new year ready to enjoy all the beauty of a French spring.

SEASONED BUYER

Buying property is a big financial commitment for you in the same way that it is a big financial consideration for the seller. If you are active on the property market out of season you are already presenting yourself as a serious buyer, rather than just a property tourist. By approaching agents

and asking them to find you a property out of season you are automatically showing yourself to be someone with insight and a drive to achieve a purchase soon. Agents and sellers are likely to take you more seriously because of that commitment.

Your willingness to view out of season could also help your agent in negotiating the best price for you. Vendors can be tempted to hang on for a better offer during high season when they know more potential buyers are in the area. Vendors who put their properties on the market out of season are often among the more serious about selling, rather than testing the market during high season.

SIDE BENEFITS

Planning a viewing trip outside high season comes with some extra advantages:

- Travel is usually cheaper as airlines, ferry and train companies offer off-peak deals.
- A wide choice of accommodation is available at lower-than-summer prices.
- You can rock up to a restaurant and expect to get a table without needing a booking.
- Road travel is always good but outside July and August you can expect to never see a jam or a tailback.

■ In early autumn you get the best of all worlds - great weather, fewer people and attractions that are still open.

All that said, for some people high season is the only time available to come and view, and your agent and vendors will be delighted to see you. Book ahead to ensure you have the time and attention of the agent you most feel at home with. And above all enjoy the journey - it's the ride of a lifetime! ■

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