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Country Properties – Position, Position, Position

The beautiful character properties that France has to offer from small country cottages to imposing maison de maitre, country estates and chateaux are one of the main attractions to those looking to own a property in France.

Prices vary considerably even for country properties as outside influences have a very definite effect as well as the property's position within the area. For instance a country house in the Gironde which is not too far from the sea on the West coast of France and within easy access of Bordeaux is going to be much higher priced than one in the Cantal where a beautiful water mill with half an acre will cost only 220.000 Euros – because it is in central France, a long way from the coast and major city.

It is in the most rural areas that you will find the lowest priced properties, often in need of some work. They are ideal low priced purchases – costing less than 100,000 Euros and will be ideal to enjoy the countryside, and provide a superb family holiday home to get away from it all – and most people are more than happy to potter about their home making various adjustments gradually. If you do buy a property in need of a substantial amount of work then either be prepared to spend most of your time working on your property or have the extra money available for the work to be completed for you. Buying a property that requires work without the funds or wherewithal to do it will result in owning an unusable and unsaleable property.

For instance an ensemble of buildings to completely renovate in the Charente priced at 38,500 Euros is only ideal if you have enough money to restore and a property at a higher price such as a small stone built cottage with 2 outbuildings, set in over quarter of an acre priced at 89,675 Euros in Normandy might prove a better buy if your budget is limited and your diy capability is not superb.

As well as these outside influences there are areas that have a certain 'cache' which over the years have become more popular and this demand brings higher prices. However if you look carefully at the areas there is usually a good reason for the popularity and higher price – as already mentioned closeness to sea and cities, easy accessible by road, rail and air from other major cities, particularly Paris will increase demand.

Northern France has always been a little less expensive than the South but there are pockets within the regions that command extremely high prices,

notably Le Touquet, Deauville plus a few others. As well as sandy beaches these two resorts are easily accessible to the Parisiens who have bought weekend homes there and over the last 100 years have made sure that they offer everything they could want from race tracks and superb stabling, indoor and outdoor tennis, a selection of golf courses within easy reach, sailing and sand surfing clubs, casino and superb hotels and restaurants.

But once you go a little inland from these resorts to the more rural areas you will find wonderful properties at superb prices.

In rural areas you will find that some properties have been made into gite complexes, ie a home with some rental units on site and usually a communal pool. The gite complexes were originally on farms where the farmers' wives rented out small units to supplement their income – more recently they have become extremely popular providing home and income to many UK buyers who perhaps are taking early retirement and still want something to do plus need to supplement their income. A gite complex should be reasonably rural but still be within reasonable reach of amenities, perhaps a few pretty villages, or a tourist attraction – there has to be a reason that people will want to come and spend their holidays there so something that is really inaccessible is not such a good idea.

In Normandy a property with a gite to rent out and outbuildings that possibly could be converted would cost around 250,000 Euros (670A). An attractive Norman manor offering direct access to Deauville beach, set in very well kept landscaped gardens of almost 5 acres is on the market at 6,360,000 Euros. A recently built superb detached house with almost three quarters of an acre in Le Touquet is on the market at 1,272,000 Euros. An L-shaped colombages house with outbuildings, set in over an acre situated inland from Deauville and in a situation 4 kms from the nearest amenities is priced at 395,000 Euros.

Similarly on the Southern coast where properties are probably the most expensive in France, once you come inland, say within an hour of coast it is possible to find some rural properties that are quite well priced. For instance a Provencal style house set in over half an acre of south facing grounds with boules pitch, swimming pool & guest apartment, surrounded by huge sun bathing terrace situated near the town of Lorgues in the Var is for sale at 430,000. A charming stone house set in 2.5 acres of grounds surrounded by vines & meadows is on the market at 642.000 Euros.

When looking in an area you will also notice that similar properties in what seems to be a similar area are priced very differently. This could be the way the property is facing, perhaps it is in a dip between hills and therefore doesn't get the sun very long, perhaps its immediate surroundings are blemished with factories, shopping centres etc or perhaps it just doesn't have a view whereas the higher priced property may look out over rolling fields towards mountains etc. Then you need to take into account whether it is

situated in a position that is 'walkable' to some shops and within a very short drive of a market town or whether it is totally isolated and you will need to spend 30 minutes on the road to do the shopping.

For some people an isolated property is exactly what they are looking for, and it will normally be cheaper the further away from amenities and other properties that it is.

It must be remembered that prices are set by demand in an area – position, position, position does not always mean that a cheaper property is in a bad position, but that it is in a position that is not so much in demand. It follows that there will be a smaller number of people looking to buy such properties when you come to sell which in turn will mean that the price cannot be inflated. Buying in a city or close to the sea where the demand is huge for reasons of work opportunities or the enjoyment of the coast means that prices may escalate when the market is booming and slow down when it is not – whereas very rural properties will increase more gradually and be extremely stable in their pricing.

The current market with all the difficulties of the present financial climate has made it difficult to sell properties in the UK and made people nervous to invest in a property. In France, where the mortgage system has kept people's borrowings within a much more limited percentage of earnings, the difficulties are not so great and the market is stable, but with the worldwide financial concerns at present it will allow ready buyers to negotiate a purchase to a lower level than previously so that in fact it will negate the increase in the exchange rate for the UK buyer.