

**Sept 2008**

## **Towns Position**

Why buying in the major towns and cities of France may be a solution to the difficult financial climate.

When times are tough the safest property purchases are probably in locations where there is a high demand. Apart from the exclusive or unique positions such as seafront or ski-in, ski-out properties the most concentrated areas of demand are in the major towns and cities where demand for housing is high due to the availability of work as well as accessibility to shops, restaurants, entertainment and all health and educational facilities.

Once again I mention the estate's agents' best advice – the 3 most important points when buying a property are position, position and position. And the best positions in a major town or city will always be in demand so that they make for a secure investment with great potential for a good capital gain over a period of time.

When buying from the UK you may be looking to purchase something that you can rent out all the time as a pure investment, or perhaps something that you can use occasionally and rent out for the rest of the time. If the latter is your plan then there are several cities that would be ideal because not only have they a high demand for rental properties but they also offer activities and interest within the city as well as the surrounding areas.

Take Bordeaux, with direct flights from several locations in the UK plus the airport at Bergerac not too far away, and TGV as well as the possibility of just a day's drive from the UK. It is a great city offering everything that cities normally offer plus the fact that it is set in the Bordeaux wine region, surrounded by vineyards of several appellations and the lovely towns and villages including St Emilion and Pauillac.

It also has the added bonus of being close to the sea and the Gironde river making it an ideal location for those that love wine, the countryside and the sea and are looking for a place to spend their holidays. It is a university town and an apartment could easily be let during term time and then be free to use during the holidays. Alternatively you could keep it for your own use as there are reasons to visit and enjoy the area at all times of year. Or just let it to friends and family or to those looking for holiday accommodation for a week or two when you are not using it. There has been a great deal of

investment into the town in the past few years including a new tram system making it even more attractive as prices have not risen too high as yet giving greater potential for capital gain.

Montpellier in Languedoc Roussillon is also a town that has been renewed and a large new area is continually growing as the demand for living accommodation grows due to some major multi-national companies setting up there. The population in the region generally is growing so that prices will be moving upwards with the increased demand. Montpellier is just a few minutes from the sandy Languedoc beaches and the wilder Camargue and once again it is surrounded by vineyards of various appellations and although the wine of the area does not have the same cachet it is becoming increasingly popular and the vineyards make for some interesting days out.

Montpellier airport is accessible from the UK by air as is Nimes airport which is around 30 minutes away. Montpellier is less than 3 hours drive from Cannes and the Cote d'Azur and just over an hour to Vaucluse and Aix en Provence and Marseille.

Marseille is another city that deserves some interest and another town where there has been a great deal of investment to improve the city and its facilities. The beautiful old port, the sophisticated shopping areas and its proximity to the sea, including the famous beach at Cassis make it a most sought after city. Being within easy reach of Aix en Provence, Avignon and lovely bastide villages of the Luberon, the vineyards of Provence and short ferry journey to the Ile de Porquerolles from the near by town of Hyeres, Marseille offers the opportunity of city life yet by the sea with some of the most dramatic rural scenery inland.

Nice on the Cote d'Azur is one of the largest cities in France and has the second busiest airport in France with around 20 flights from the UK every day. It is an ideal place for a holiday home being close to the beaches, and the resorts of the Cote d'Azur with their many wonderful restaurants and superb shops. It is within an hour of Italy, giving it an extra dimension of interest as well as being just over an hour to several ski resorts – offers all year round events and reasons to be there, from the skiing, to the flower festival and carnivals to the beaches, music festivals and museums. An ideal town for a pied a terre as there are flights direct from many UK airports and there is always lots to do and lots going on in Nice whatever the month.

If you are looking to rent it out part of the time you have a wide choice of options. It is a university town as well as having several private colleges so there is the possibility of term time rentals and then being able to use your property during the holidays, or you could just rent it out on short term rentals when you are not able to use it. There is also a strong demand for full time rental in the town and if you are looking for a pure investment, Nice

is highly recommended as there are still some reasonably priced properties there giving good and reliable rental returns plus the fact that prices are most likely to increase over the next few years as the town continues to grow. It is an extremely cosmopolitan town bringing a high demand for all types of properties.

Although Paris may be the city that immediately springs to mind when thinking of purchasing in a French city, it perhaps doesn't have as much to offer as the four cities I have mentioned. There is no doubt that it is truly one of the most beautiful cities in the world but its location means that the climate is not as temperate as ours and the city can be very cold in winter and very hot in summer. Although there are rural areas once you get right out of Paris and its suburbs, there are no vineyards or beaches within striking distance and because of the fact that it is the Capital of France prices are inflated as demand there has always been high rather than in some of the other cities where the prices still have a long way to climb to reach their potential. The flight time to Paris is only an hour but it is less than 2 hours to the other cities so that the travel time difference would be hardly noticeable by air – however the TGV journey from London at less than 2.5 hours makes it a shorter journey from London than to get to the North of England.

In any city in the world, there will be good areas and not so good areas which translates into expensive and not so expensive properties. The best plan is to buy in an up and coming area of the city which is close to the 'good areas' but has not yet reached its potential. The areas may be up and coming due to government investment in the surroundings, the transport system or perhaps the arrival of multi-national companies offering work. Different areas of large cities offer different types of lifestyle so you are likely to find that some appeal to you more than others so that it is a good idea to view properties in a few areas of the city you choose and take advice from our agents as to what would suit your budget and lifestyle best.

You might also want to consider large towns which offer the city life but not on such a large scale, towns such as Toulouse, Aix en Provence, Nimes have their own special atmosphere. It is a good idea to choose a university town as the presence of students keeps the town young and lively and offers good facilities as well as being ideal if you intend to rent your property out for part of the time. If renting out for part of the time is your intention do should definitely look at what events go on in the town which might bring possible lettings to you. Cannes on the Cote d'Azur for instance, has so many conferences, seminars as well as the larger events of the Cannes film festival, MIPIM, MIPCOM etc which bring thousands of people into the town who need accommodation so that rental prices during these events can be extortionately high.

To sum up, when buying a second home in a city, it is a good idea to choose one that has plenty of amenities, places of interest and surrounding areas offering the possibility of enjoyable days out and to take account of ease of travel to that city from your home if it is for a second home. If you are looking to rent out for part of the time, then make sure that there is a demand for short term rentals locally or plan to rent out through Uk advertising and to friends and family. If you are looking to rent it out full time then you need to be looking at areas of the city that are close to offices and places of work.