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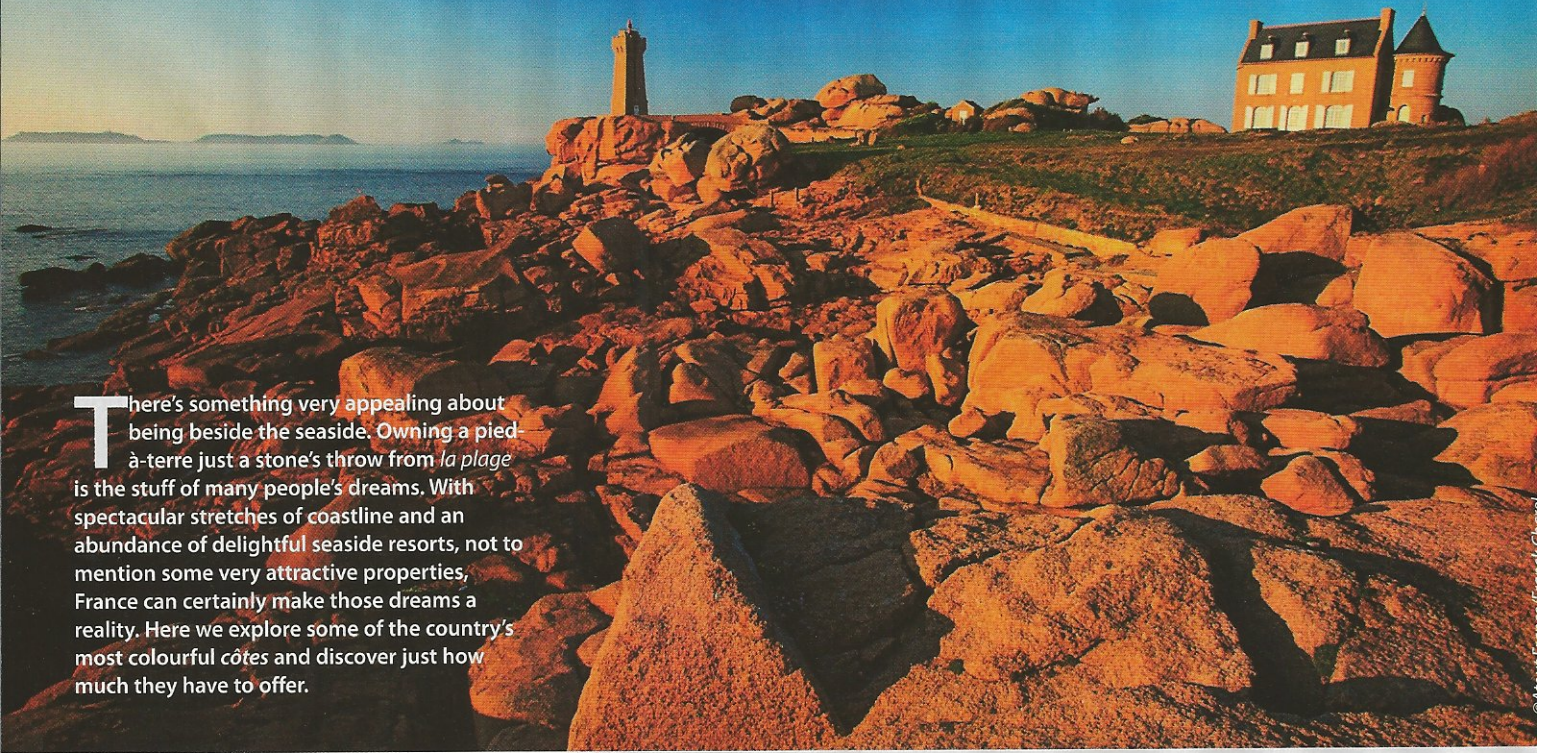
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# Coast to coast

From France's glorious northern shores to the glamorous resorts of the Côte d'Azur, there's plenty of coastline to go around, discovers **Vicky Leigh**



**T**here's something very appealing about being beside the seaside. Owning a pied-à-terre just a stone's throw from *la plage* is the stuff of many people's dreams. With spectacular stretches of coastline and an abundance of delightful seaside resorts, not to mention some very attractive properties, France can certainly make those dreams a reality. Here we explore some of the country's most colourful côtes and discover just how much they have to offer.

## BEAUTIFUL BRITTANY

Covering more than 2,500km, Brittany is blessed with the longest length of coastline of any region in France. Stretching around the four departments of Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes-d'Armor, Finistère and Morbihan, the Breton coast is the second most popular seaside destination after the Côte d'Azur, and it's easy to see why. When you add in Brittany's proximity to the UK and easy accessibility it becomes all the more appealing.

While the azure blue water lapping the shores in the south gives the Côte d'Azur its name, the colour palette in this corner of France paints an equally attractive picture. From the vibrant green of the Côte d'Émeraude (Emerald Coast) to the dusky pink of the Côte de Granit Rose (Pink Granite Coast), Brittany's colourful character is clear to see.

Taking its name from the colour of the sea, the Côte d'Émeraude is the section of coast from Cap Fréhel in the west almost to Mont-St-Michel in the east, stretching between the two

departments of Ille-et-Vilaine and Côtes-d'Armor. The Pointe du Grouin headland to the north of Cancale provides the ultimate viewing platform for the sparkling waters below and the spectacular scenery, while the town of Cancale itself is worth a visit to sample mouth-watering seafood.

Set around a picturesque harbour it is responsible for two thirds of France's oyster

Covering more than 2,500km, Brittany is blessed with the longest length of coastline of any region in France

production and has earned a reputation as the country's oyster capital. In fact the Brittany region is responsible for 80% of France's total shellfish production, and with so much coastline it's hardly surprising that it has such a special relationship with the sea.

The bustling seaport of St-Malo was the earliest important town to develop along the Emerald Coast, and the ancient rampart walls still

guard the charming maze of cobbled streets and alleyways within. Ferries arrive here from Portsmouth, so visitors from the UK can immerse themselves in Breton culture the moment they set foot on dry land.

Much as they did with the French Riviera, American and British aristocrats made Dinard a fashionable summer resort in the 19th century, and with sandy

beaches galore it continues to be a popular destination. Often referred to as the Cannes of the north, local legend has it that following a visit to Dinard, Alfred Hitchcock based the house used in his most famous film *Psycho* on a villa overlooking the Plage de l'Écluse.

## FROM GREEN TO PINK

The Emerald Coast is by no means the only glittering jewel in

Brittany's coastal crown. The picturesque Pink Granite Coast in the Côtes-d'Armor department runs for 30 kilometres along the northernmost part of the Breton coast, and this dramatic landscape has inspired many famous artists including Marc Chagall. Brittany is only one of three places in the world where these rare pink rocks can be found, the other two being Corsica and China, and the Breton towns of Perros-Guirec and Ploumanac'h provide the perfect vantage point.

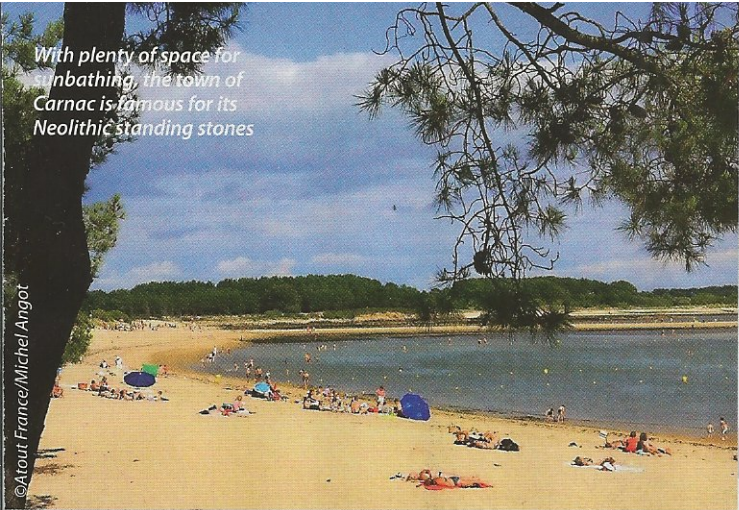
Weathered by centuries of wind and tide, over time they have been sculpted by the elements into some spectacular shapes, with many visitors claiming to be able to see an elephant, a bell and even Napoleon's tricorne hat.

The *sentier des douaniers*, a former customs patrol path used in the 19th century to prevent smuggling, winds its way among the impressive rock formations and provides a modern-day public footpath for exploring.

The resorts along the coast boast a number of attractions for visitors,

With plenty of space for sunbathing, the town of Carnac is famous for its Neolithic standing stones

©Atout France/Michel Angot



Cancale is known as the oyster capital of France

from swimming and cycling to pony rides and museums, while there are boat trips from Perros-Guirec out to Brittany's largest bird sanctuary, Les Sept-Îles.

### COASTING ALONG

The Finistère department holds the title of most coastal department in metropolitan France, and is home to the chic resort of Benodet with its casino and thalassotherapy centres.

For those keen to ride the waves, the unspoilt beach at Baie des Trépassés lies at the westernmost point of France and, pounded by the Atlantic and guarded by 250ft cliffs at each end, is a paradise for surfers.

"The 'Breton Riviera' may not be as well known as the other famous Riviera in France, but one thing that is not in doubt is its natural beauty," comments Colin Abel of Getaway2France, which specialises in mobile home sales and has a site in Pont l'Abbé. "With miles of unspoilt beaches and coastal inlets visitors have plenty to explore. Benodet has

been attracting holidaymakers for years, with its immaculate beach front, bars, restaurants, and boutique clothes outlets."

Situated on Brittany's south coast is the department of Morbihan (meaning 'little sea' in English), where you'll find a further 800km of sandy beaches. Ideal for history buffs and sporty types alike, the town of Carnac provides plenty of cultural interest in the form of its famous Neolithic standing stones, as well as premium conditions for windsurfing and sailing.

"There are certainly bargains to be had in Brittany at the moment, with well renovated properties available for between €80,000 and €100,000," says Sally Stone of LBV Immo. "So much of the region is coastal and that is a huge attraction for property buyers. This is reflected in the prices, especially if you want to be in southern Brittany in the spectacular Golfe du Morbihan, for example, where property prices really do carry a premium for the location." ▶



Just 200m from the sea, this three-bedroom property in Finistère is on the market for €252,000 ([www.clefrance.co.uk](http://www.clefrance.co.uk))

### PROPERTY PRICES

Coastal locations may well come at a premium, but in Brittany you'll find that you won't necessarily have to part with as much money as you might think. According to Notaires de France figures, the average resale price across the region is €7,000 below the national average at €155,000, while in Côtes-d'Armor the departmental average is just €127,800.

"The department of Côtes-d'Armor may be historically less popular with British buyers who have in the past favoured Morbihan, but in recent years we have found that househunters are realising that they can get more for their money in Côtes-d'Armor than anywhere else in Brittany," says David Evans of estate agency Clé France. "We have properties for sale here ranging from renovation projects priced at just €15,000 up to coastal manor houses in excess of €1m."

Although the average resale price increases to €141,500 in Finistère this is still considerably less than the national average of €162,000, and in Morbihan it isn't too much higher than this at €167,500.

"In times past Finistère was a particular favourite with those who could make the best use of the Plymouth to Roscoff ferry route, but with the advent of low-cost, short-haul flights to the region the market has been opened up far more widely," comments Chris Slade of A House in Brittany. "Finistère tends to appeal to those who prefer a wilder environment. There is plenty of coastline for all tastes, and properties with an open sea view will command a higher price."

The most expensive department in Brittany is Ille-et-Vilaine, where you can expect to spend an average of €182,800. In addition to being home to St-Malo it is also where regional capital Rennes is located, and here the average property price rises to €200,000.



This property in the Baie de Morlaix includes a mill and a second house, all set in two hectares of land, €517,000 ([www.ahouseinbrittany.com](http://www.ahouseinbrittany.com))



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**RIVIÈRA ROAMING**

From striking pink and green coasts to a stunning blue one, the colourful theme continues in the south-eastern corner of France.

The Côte d'Azur was given its name by the writer Stéphen Liégeard in his book *La Côte d'Azur*, which was published in 1887. Born in Dijon, Liégeard was inspired to replace the gold in the name of his home department Côte d'Or with the azure blue colour of the Mediterranean.

Often referred to in English as the French Riviera, the Côte d'Azur has no official boundary. While it is usually considered to extend from the Italian border in the east, there is a difference of opinion when it comes to how far it stretches in France. Some consider St-Tropez to be the western boundary, while others include Hyères, Toulon or even Cassis in Bouches-du-Rhône.

Most people will be familiar with glamorous Cannes and St-Tropez, but these are certainly not the only gems in the Riviera's crown. It is home to a number of attractive seaside resorts, including

St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Antibes, Juan-les-Pins and Ste-Maxime, and also surrounds the principality of Monaco.

One of the first modern resort areas, the Côte d'Azur began as a fashionable winter destination for the British upper classes at the end of the 18th century. The arrival of the railway in the 19th century opened up the Riviera to visitors

Most people will be familiar with the glamorous resorts of Cannes and St Tropez, but these are by no means the only gems in the Riviera's crown

from across Europe, including royalty such as Queen Victoria who came regularly, while in the first half of the 20th century it attracted artists including Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse with its bright colours and clear light. The writer F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda arrived in 1924, stopping in Hyères, Cannes and Monte Carlo before eventually staying at St-Raphaël, where he

wrote much of *The Great Gatsby*. A long-time playground of the rich and famous, modern-day visitors include celebrities and Hollywood A-listers, especially during the annual Cannes film festival.

**A REAL HOTSPOT**

Popular with tourists and second homeowners alike, the Côte d'Azur benefits from a

Mediterranean climate, with dry summers and mild winters making it an ideal year-round destination. And then, of course, there are those 300 days of sunshine each year, not to mention some 115km of beaches, so there's no shortage of sand on which to soak up those rays.

The fact that this corner of France is so easily accessible from the UK, thanks to direct flights

with low-cost airlines to Nice airport, makes this part of the country even more attractive.

"The British love affair with the Côte d'Azur is still going strong," observes Betty Bloom of SPA Properties. "The journey has been made much easier with several daily flights to Nice, and Paris is less than five hours away by TGV."

The Côte d'Azur is lively throughout the year, with numerous festivals celebrating everything from citrus fruit to flowers and jazz music providing plenty of entertainment.

Launched in 1946 the Cannes film festival continues to be a highly anticipated event, with visitors hoping to be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the glitterati as they mingle on the red carpet.

Each year in February, Riviera capital Nice hosts what is one of the world's largest carnivals and a major event on the Côte d'Azur. Colourful floats adorned with flowers and musical parades advance along the Promenade des Anglais, the city's main seaside thoroughfare that has become a world-famous stretch of pavement. ▶



On the market for €1.13m, this five-bed villa in Valbonne benefits from a swimming pool (betty@spa-properties.com)



This waterside property on the west side of Cap d'Antibes has a separate apartment, home cinema and wine cellar, €27.5m (www.home-hunts.com)

## PROPERTY PRICES

Considering the location and the wealth of attractions on offer, it shouldn't come as too much of a surprise to discover that, outside of Paris, property in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur is more expensive than anywhere else in France. The region's average resale price of €298,000 is close to twice the national average of €162,000. Three of the region's six departments are located on the Côte d'Azur and it's here that you'll find the highest prices, so you can expect to pay an even greater premium for coastal properties too.

Alpes-Maritimes is the most expensive of the region's departments, where the average property price climbs to €440,000. Again this comes as no great surprise, as the department is home to both Riviera capital Nice and world perfume capital Grasse, as well as the seaside resorts of St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Juan-les-Pins, Antibes and Cannes. In fact, the average resale price increases even more in the Grasse sector, where it reaches €470,000, but you'll find that your euros actually go a little bit further in the Nice sector, where the average price comes in at €365,000.

"Cap d'Antibes and the areas around Valbonne and Mougins are the most active areas for us at the moment on the Riviera," comments Tim Swannie of Home Hunts. "Cap d'Antibes is one of

the most expensive areas in which to buy property on the Riviera, along with Cap Ferrat, parts of Cannes and also St-Tropez, and attracts some of the world's wealthiest clients."

Moving further along the Côte d'Azur into the Var department, where you'll find the resorts of St-Tropez and Ste-Maxime, the average resale price falls to €320,000 although this is still the second highest departmental average for the region.

"Ste-Maxime has preserved the Provençal charm of the old town while at the same time it has embraced the modern age and developed with the times," says Hans Huygens of estate agency Agence Bird. "It has long been popular with the British and other European nationalities and the variety of property options available, from seafront apartments to Provençal villas, make it a great place to invest and live."

Completing the expanse of coastline is the department of Bouches-du-Rhône, where the town of Cassis is located approximately 20km to the east of Marseille. Property prices decrease once again here, falling to an average of €290,000.

While prices are considerably higher than the national average of €162,000 and can run into millions of euros, there are still affordably priced properties to be found, so you won't necessarily need to have Brad Pitt's bank balance to buy one.

"Although there is still a demand for the Belle

Époque properties of the early 20th century, there is a constant demand for apartments in the main coastal resorts such as Antibes, Cannes, Cap Ferrat and St-Tropez, with their beaches, marinas, restaurants and famous boutiques, at prices ranging from €300,000 to €1million and above," comments Betty Bloom. "Riviera property prices did not really drop during the recession, although most vendors have now become ready to negotiate."

With France recently named as the world's favourite tourist destination, many of whom flock to the Côte d'Azur to bask under the sun-filled skies above the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean, there is of course a high demand for holiday accommodation. For those keen to invest in their own seaside bolt-hole but for whom a financial return is also a priority, this could provide a golden opportunity.

Yet another colour to add to France's already dazzling palette. ■

[www.getaway2france.co.uk](http://www.getaway2france.co.uk)

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[www.home-hunts.com](http://www.home-hunts.com)

[www.agencebird.com](http://www.agencebird.com)



Situated in Ste-Maxime, this four-bedroom house is close to the beach and enjoys views of the surrounding countryside, €695,000 (www.agencebird.com)



This one-bedroom apartment in a 'co-propriété' is located in the centre of Ste-Maxime and is just 150m from the beach, €395,000 (www.agencebird.com)