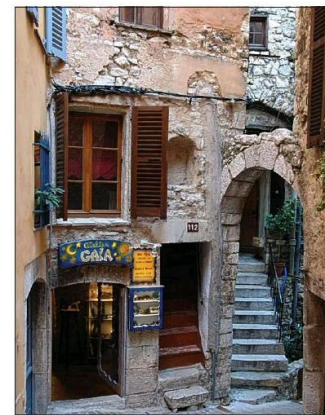


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Homes abroad **Homes & Property**

Leave the Côte d'Azur behind and discover the real France inland



Tucked away: an alley in the village of Tourrettes-sur-Loup



£1.18 million: villa with separate guesthouse in Roquefort-les-Pins. Through Savills

THE south of France needs little introduction. Royalty, celebrities and millionaires have transformed the sweeping bays of the Côte d'Azur into a much-photographed summer playground for the rich and famous. Yet turn inland from the glossy super-yachts packed along the waterfront and you can find the real France at a much more realistic price.

"Nine months of almost guaranteed good weather, a fabulous quality of life and a location that is easy to reach for a weekend from London make the south of France an easy choice," says Nic Brennan, of Savills France (savills.com). "A 90-minute flight from London means that within four hours of leaving the office on Friday, you could be on your terrace in France. It's quicker than going to Cornwall."

Sleepy fishing village-turned-celebrity magnet St Tropez remains a bestseller, with buyers attracted to the fizzing party atmosphere, but it is striking just how much more you get inland. Savills' average sale price in St Tropez is about

Find low-priced village homes and the French good life 30 minutes from Nice airport and the coast, but well away from the crush, says **Cathy Hawker**

£2.12 million, but last year sales up to £17.5 million were achieved. Inland, £1 million buys a substantial five-bedroom house with a pool, a garden and true privacy, but it might only get you a flat in St Tropez.

WHERE TO BUY
Character-packed villages and small towns with local markets, offering a taste of gentle Provençal life, attract British buyers, including Valbonne,



Saint-Paul de Vence, Tourrettes-sur-Loup and Roquefort-les-Pins. Tim Swannie, of property specialist Home Hunts (home-hunts.com), points out that while price falls inland have helped to boost interest, many Britons actively prefer being away from the frenzied coastline pace. He has seen sales surge by 90 per cent this year compared with last.

"A village environment with local shops and restaurants is top of many people's dream list," says Swannie. "They want to be part of a community. The beauty of a holiday home inland, aside from the financial savings, is that you can dip in and out of the coast, but not get caught in the busy summer traffic. You can relax by your pool, visit markets to buy local food and

High society: above, the hilltop village of Tourrettes-sur-Loup is becoming popular with Britons seeking a second home

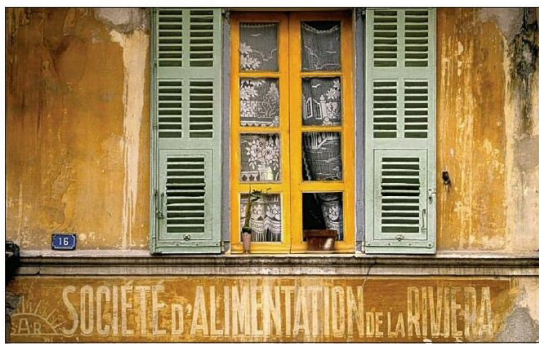
wine and enjoy days out to the sea or mountains." He tips the thriving village of Opio between Grasse and Valbonne, 15 minutes from the coast, 40 from the nearest ski resort and under half an hour from Nice airport. There are three international schools nearby and a range of restaurants, from Michelin-starred to local pizzerias.

HEAD WEST
Further west, 30 minutes inland from St Tropez and still within 45 minutes of Nice airport, villages such as Seillans and Fayence in the Var offer even better value. Three-bedroom family homes here start from £318,000 and these prices have ensured there is plenty of renewed British and American interest, says Tim

Clark of Leggett Immobilier. Leggett (frenchestateagents.com) has a pretty three-bedroom village house in the centre of medieval Fayence at £162,000, and a detached four-bedroom home in half an acre of gardens on the edge of the village for £371,000.

Oscar-winning English actress Dame Helen Mirren deserted the celebrity-studded coast for a home in St-Paul-en-Foret more than a decade ago. She has restored half a traditional Provençal stone farmhouse into a three-bedroom home, leaving scope for further renovations. This spring, she put the house up for sale for £449,500 and, after an agreed sale fell through last month, it is back on the market through Home Hunts.

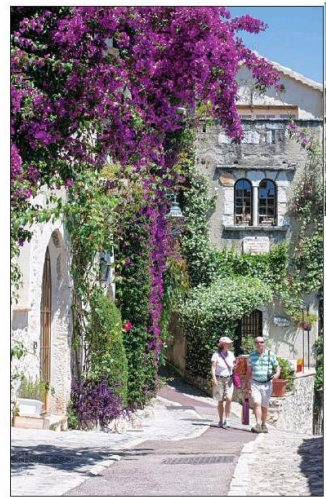
Rustic charm: right, an old shop in Valbonne. Below, a four-bedroom villa in Fayence, on the market for £293,000 with Leggett Immobilier



THE PERFECT STORM

SUBDUED property prices, a resurgent pound against the euro and recent changes to France's tax regime have created the perfect storm for anyone with money to spend. President François Hollande's much-heralded social charge was reversed and, for many, the property wealth tax can be bypassed by taking out a mortgage. There is no tax on assets (less all

outstanding debts) of up to €565,300, 0.3 per cent on homes up to €919,000 and 0.7 per cent on property worth €919,000 to €1,816,000. "Capital gains tax has recently been reduced for non-residents following an EU court ruling which also removed the social charge element, bringing the charge down from 34.5 to 19 per cent," says Nic Brennan, of Savills.



Provençal pearl: the medieval town of Saint-Paul de Vence