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## IN A NEW LIGHT

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Life on the Côte d'Azur doesn't have to mean full-time glitz and glamour. **Rachel Johnston** compares life in a cluster of inland villages with that in their coastal counterparts

Iconic and internationally renowned, the Côte d'Azur is the place to see and be seen – a golden thread on France's south-eastern coast. Its glamour attracts holidaymakers in their droves every year, whether they come to browse boutiques, wine and dine in style or simply sit and bronze on the beach while deciding which yacht is their favourite.

Basing yourself in one of the coastal resorts has great benefits, not least being able to access all the culture, amenities and beaches on foot from your front door. For those who love being out and about, owning an apartment in Nice's Old Town just a few steps from art galleries, boutiques and cafés would be idyllic; or for those who love sea views, a pad on Cannes' Croisette would keep you permanently on the balcony. There's always something to do on the coast and, with the influx of visitors to the resorts every year, there's a calendar of exciting events to match.

### Best of both

On the other hand, if living at the heart of the action doesn't quite represent your French dream and you're after a slightly slower pace, you could consider one of the inland villages. There are plenty to choose from and many enjoy panoramic sea views from their often elevated positions, while offering a slice of Provençal village life that can be harder to come by on the developed coast.

"A village environment with restaurants and shops is at the top of many of our clients' dream lists," comments Tim Swannie of estate agency **Home Hunts**, who explains that the beauty of basing yourself a short distance inland is that you can dip in and out of the coast as you choose, without getting caught in the busy summer traffic. "Instead you can relax by your pool, visit markets to buy local food and wine and just enjoy day trips out to the sea or mountains."

Another great beauty of the Riviera is its accessibility, not only by air from the UK (Nice airport is two hours' flying time and served by multiple airlines) but also within the area. Most of the inland villages are connected to the larger resorts by bus (with journeys costing just €1, [lignesdazur.com](http://lignesdazur.com)), making quick beach or shopping trips a breeze if you don't have a car. It's perfectly possible to be lying on the beach in Cannes at 5pm and be having a 7pm *apéritif* on a café terrace in a village in the countryside. Furthermore, the coastline from Cannes as far as Ventimiglia in Italy is threaded together by a train line ([paca.ter.sncf.com](http://paca.ter.sncf.com)), so there's no need to limit yourself to one place per visit either; so sit back and enjoy the sea views as you're whisked efficiently from resort to resort.

Tim Clark, an agent at Leggett Immobilier, is quick to enthuse about the Riviera's surprising diversity. "One imagines the Côte d'Azur to be a place of glitz and glamour, and of course this is true of destinations such as St-Tropez, Cannes and Nice. But our minds were blown by the sheer diversity of the region and landscape. We enjoy the wonderful coast with its beaches, but also the truly spectacular wild landscape in the back country too, from magnificent mountains and viewpoints to stunning gorges and historic perched villages."

### Going to market

Property on the Riviera is always in demand and with world-class beaches, stunning seascapes and a tropical climate it makes the

perfect location for a holiday home. However, as it also has an impressive range of excellent schools, a booming economy and an ever-growing international population, more and more buyers are investing in primary residences and choosing to settle permanently in this part of France.

Average resale property prices in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region are, unsurprisingly, significantly above the French national average (€157,600), at €293,400 – those within the Alpes-Maritimes department, which includes Nice and Cannes, are higher still at €424,400, while those within Var (encompassing St-Tropez) are at €300,000.

But should you choose coast or country? To help you decide where to focus your search, I've put three of the Côte d'Azur's most popular resorts under the spotlight, before heading inland to villages up to a distance of 25km away from them to compare the lifestyles on offer.

Wherever you decide to buy, the area's attractions both on the coast and inland mean you are guaranteed a lifestyle to be proud of – and its enduring popularity will ensure a return on your investment if you choose to rent out. ■

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