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OVERSEAS

## Where to buy property in Bordeaux, France

Raise a glass to this petit Paris where you can dream of buying your own vineyard

Cathy Hawker

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The pont de pierre and river Garonne in Bordeaux  
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Bordeaux is a city built on wine. Two thousand years ago the Romans came, saw the potential and planted vines, but it was thirsty English drinkers who brought real prosperity to the city. They discovered Bordeaux wines after the union between the future King Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 and immediately approved. Over the centuries, the city's port on the Garonne River grew ever wealthier on glittering names, Lafite Rothschild, Latour and Margaux among them.

Today Bordeaux remains the largest prestigious wine-producing area of France thanks to its predominant grapes of merlot, semillon, sauvignon blanc and cabernet sauvignon. Yet while the surrounding vineyards and their historical heritage remain delightfully intact, the beautiful and sophisticated city itself has had a monumental facelift under the visionary former mayor Alain Juppé.

Centuries of dirt were removed from the elegant 18th-century buildings, revealing the palest, light-reflecting limestone. The wine warehouses that cut the city off from the mighty Garonne were torn down and a substantial part of the city was pedestrianised. Gardens were planted and the world's largest reflecting pool, Le Miroir d'Eau, was created in front of the supremely grand Place de la Bourse. A quiet and clean tram system was introduced, free of all overhead cables, in the historic centre, and most recently an upgrade to France's high-speed TGV railway line brought travel time from Bordeaux to Paris to just over two hours.



The town of Saint-Émilion  
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Indeed, Bordeaux is often called a mini Paris. It has more protected buildings than anywhere in France outside the capital, and in 2007 it became the largest protected city in the world when it was awarded Unesco world heritage status for its architectural and cultural value. Add in mild weather, several universities and an international school that ensure a youthful population and excellent restaurants and bars serving gourmet meals or a simple verre de vin, and Bordeaux is an up-to-date, efficient and highly liveable city.

The French certainly think so. They regularly vote it as a city they would like to move to, and well before Covid encouraged an exodus from the capital; increasing numbers of Parisians swapped the boulevards and squares of their city for the remarkably similar but scaled-down ones in Bordeaux. Their arrival has not always pleased the Bordelais, who have witnessed house prices soar. Official figures from the French notaires show that property prices in Bordeaux rose 48 per cent between 2008 and 2018, outpacing any other French city.

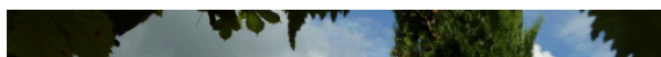


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Alexander Hall arrived in Bordeaux in 2006 after leaving a career in finance in London to immerse himself in the wine trade. He founded Vineyard Intelligence, a company advising on all aspects of buying, running and investing in vineyards, and is an accredited tutor at École du Vin, Bordeaux's excellent wine school. He lives with his wife, Emma, and young family in Entre-deux-Mers, 35km east of Bordeaux.

"The changes of the past 15 years have been substantial," he says. "Bordeaux was not considered a weekend destination at all back then. Now it's a cool, safe and walkable city, with a wonderful restaurant scene, a perfect blend of the historic and modern. I'm not a city person, but I love going into Bordeaux, wandering around or sitting in a café in a quiet square. The TGV has made a massive difference too. Where once a journey to Paris meant an 18-hour day, now I can catch a train at 7am and return after a day of meetings in time for dinner at home."





This seven-bedroom chateau with a vineyard in Saint-Émilion, 25 miles from Bordeaux, is on sale for €1.369 million with Home Hunts

Investment in the city is continuing. “The skyline is full of cranes,” Hall adds. “In the south, Bordeaux Euratlantique is a huge urban renewal project centred around the station involving construction of housing, office and retail space. To the north, next to the impressive Cité du Vin, is the similarly ambitious Bassins à flot development around the old docks.”

The French property agency Sextant Properties has studio and one-bedroom apartments in the city starting at less than €100,000, but in prime areas expect to pay from €300,000 to well over €1 million for good-quality two and three-bedroom homes. The golden triangle of streets around Notre Dame Cathedral are the most prestigious, and demand is high for the central neighbourhoods of Saint-Bruno and Quinconces.

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Alice Storrie from Savills estate agency grew up in the region, attending school in Libourne and spending her free time in Bordeaux. Her favourite areas of the city include the recently regenerated on-trend riverside area of Chartrons and the beautiful squares and cafés around Place Camille-Jullian and Saint-Pierre.



“Bordeaux is just 90 minutes by plane from London and close to wonderful places,” she says. “There’s the Atlantic coast and bay at Arcachon, skiing in the Pyrenees and fabulous countryside. I especially like the area where the Gironde heads towards the Dordogne around Saint-Émilion.”



With spacious city centre apartments or townhouses difficult to find, most clients look for a country property with easy access to the city, says Tim Swannie of the Home Hunts agency. “They like stone homes with character, a garden and pool, preferably already renovated, though some will consider a project, in the €1 million to €2 million price range.”

A seven-bedroom château in Saint-Émilion for sale at €1,368,950 ticks those boxes. It's a pretty property in a peaceful area with vineyard views, set in just over an acre of grounds with a small guesthouse and a hobby vineyard. Alexander Hall warns that even small-scale hobby vineyards can catch out unprepared buyers.



This four-bedroom house with a seven hectare vineyard is on the market with Home Hunts for €1.295 million  
JEFF ROSS

“There’s an undoubted appeal to serving your own wine at your table, but it’s important to remember that it’s very challenging to produce and sell wine,” Swannie says. “The vineyard market has changed recently. There was plenty of interest from Chinese investors, especially in smaller estates, but that has largely disappeared. For serious buyers, a vineyard is very much a business. We see strong interest from wealthy French families and international family offices who want to acquire vineyards in the most famous wine regions, and there is strong competition for prime assets in the most prestigious wine-growing areas.”



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Vicky Goodall



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Arriving by train into Bordeaux is great, especially by TGV, but the roads traffic is awful, especially on the rocade - ring road. And the airport is appalling. The infra structure has not kept pace with the population growth, despite the excellent tram system.

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agreed the ringroad is a nightmare in summer traffic. getting from right bank to left bank for winery trips is a very long day trip.

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This article would have been improved by photos showing the price range of properties not just the expensive ones.

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