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EXPERT
OPINION

Quality of life

Susie Hollands details the Provence region of France, explaining why it is still so popular and why prices in some areas remain high

"If God were to come down to earth, he would seek shelter in Provence" – Henri Matisse. This region is legendary; from the glamour of Saint-Tropez, Nice and Cannes to the wilds of the Luberon's sloping vineyards and lavender fields. A former Roman province in what is now south-eastern France, Provence is beautifully situated between the Mediterranean Sea and Mt. Ventoux.

An area of outstanding natural beauty, the Camargue, with its wild horses is my favourite pocket of Provence. Visit the Capital Arles with its famous Feria and take a side trip to see the gypsy pilgrimage in Saintes Maries de la Mer at least once in your life.

The climate and proximity to both the sea and the mountains means Provence is one of the most expensive regions of France. Summers can reach hot temperatures, and the winters are sunny as the region boasts 300 days of sun a year, which may explain its popularity with the British. Active buyers are French; many Parisians have their second homes here, as well as English, Americans, and Scandinavians.

Connectivity to Paris by TGV and via Eurostar from London to Aix-en-Provence is swift and easy. In addition, Marseille is well-served by Air France, BA and easyJet. Air France, BMI Baby, easyJet and BA all fly to Nice and Ryan Air flies into Toulon.

In the chic locations along the coast prices are high and there is demand for quality apartments and villas. For capital return, prices in the Côte d'Azur have continued to rise and it is still an exceptionally strong investment market; one hard to break into for a smaller investor. As the distance from the coast grows, prices drop substantially and the benefits of the sleepier pace of rural France are evident. Anticipate spending between €500,000 and €1,000,000 for a sizable (three plus-bedroom) property in Provence with approximately five to 15 acres of land. A typical village house could cost between €50,000 and €600,000.

An interesting investment is land, still attractively available at €1,000-7,000 per hectare, depending on the area. Currently, prices have stabilised, but they could take an upward turn again. There is still good-value property with

great rental potential in the region, while there is a general lack of accommodation for visitors in the summer months. It's a great time to buy with the correction in prices and interest rates so low.

AREAS OF INTEREST

Aix en Provence

The prices are high and the properties rare. The proximity of good international schools and great connectivity to Paris by TGV are large contributors. Around Aix-en-Provence, the countryside ranges from high-perched villages and old vineyards to farmhouses.

Luberon

The region made famous by Peter Mayle's "A Year in Provence". The Luberon mountain range stretches from Cavaillon to Manosque and there is a good connection to the region by TGV to Avignon. High prices and wealthy Parisian neighbours are the downside. The world famous Avignon theatre festival takes place every summer.

Alpilles

The name of a range of mountains between Arles and Avignon, the region attracts buyers in search of 'the real Provence'. Favourites with Americans are the charming Saint-Remy-de-Provence and Glanum, an antique village. Outside of the Baux-de-Provence and Saint-Rémy there are still affordable properties.

Var

St. Tropez is still the place to be for international jet setters, with eye-watering prices to reflect this. And hordes of tourists. Outside of St. Tropez and further into the Haut Var, more affordable property can be found among the peaceful villages.

French Riviera (Côte d'Azur)

With 120km of coastline and plenty of luxury hotels, the region is well-known and rightly so. Nices, Cannes and Antibes are all world-renowned resorts and property there can provide a great return on investment. ●