

FRENCH property bulletin

REQUIRED READING FOR INVESTORS & HOLIDAY HOME BUYERS

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**"The
Languedoc is
a huge and
varied region"**

Alex Charles,
page 13-18

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01/02

05/06

News:
Flights
Stones
Outlook

09/10

Properties of
the month

13-18

Resort report:
Languedoc-
Roussillon

21/22

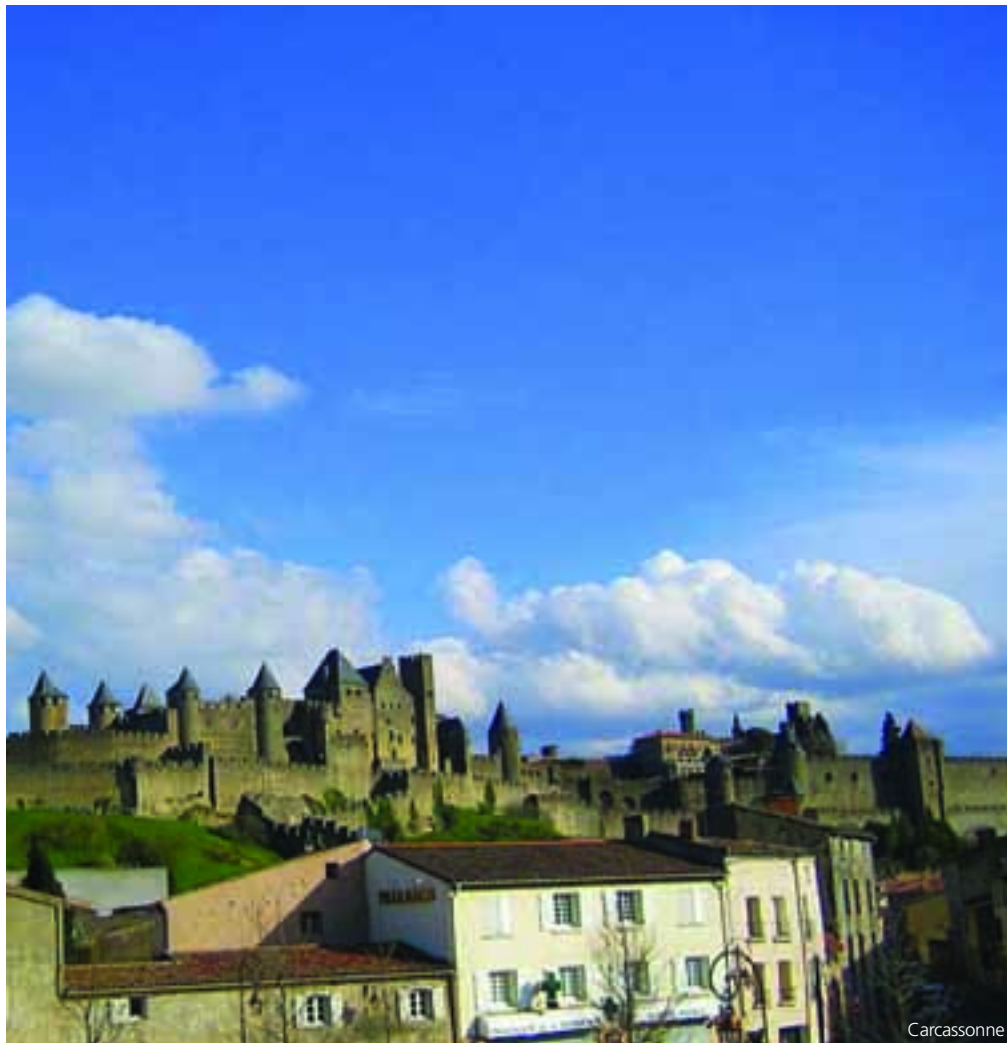
Q&A:
The Alps and
global warming

23/24

Property search:
Var

13/14

resort report: languedoc-roussillon



Carcassonne

WHERE	Southern France
WHY	Beaches and skiing; quality of life; already good access and links improving
WHAT	Properties vary depending on proximity to coast and ski



WHERE

This southern region may be viewed by some as the 'other' French Mediterranean province, but to savvy investors this area represents a land of opportunity.

As neighbouring Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur sees prices in the popular resorts escalate beyond the reach of most people, Languedoc-Roussillon is seen as an attractive and more affordable alternative.

Montpellier is the capital of the Hérault department as well as the Languedoc-Roussillon region. It is not yet a very large city, but it is the fastest growing in France. The city has seen much investment in the last few decades, with a smart new tram system, the Corum concert and exhibition complex and the establishment of the postmodern Antigone quarter. The atmosphere also remains vibrant thanks, in part, to its large student population.

Elsewhere in this region, Nîmes has a rich Roman history. Situated conveniently on the road from Italy to Spain, it was chosen for much development in Roman times, with an amphitheatre and temple that remain well-preserved today, as well as the famous Pont du Gard aqueduct.

Other highlights of this area include Narbonne, Beziers and Carcassonne. Narbonne has Roman origins and was once a thriving port. Today it is the capital of the prolific wine-producing region of Corbières, is a centre for industry and home to – arguably – southern France's most impressive cathedral. The medieval fortified town of Carcassonne, however, is the place for architecture as it is a UNESCO World Heritage site and attracts as many as three million visitors yearly. A million people also visit Beziers every August as the town hosts a five-day bullfighting contest.

15/16

RESORT REPORT

why?

Well served by low-cost airlines into Carcassonne, Nîmes and Perpignan, in addition to the international airport at Montpellier, Languedoc-Roussillon has skiing in winter and long, hot summers, as well as 200 miles of sandy coastline.

A survey carried out by magazine *L'Express*, published at the end of last year, identified the best departments in France for quality of life to be in this region. All departments were judged on criteria that included proximity to the sea and mountains, cost of housing, average temperatures and the number of rainy days. In the number one spot was the region's Aude department, earning a score of 15.75 out of 20 – owing largely to its relatively low housing costs and good weather; while Hérault was ranked fifth – thanks in part to its average yearly temperature of 14.7°C.

In recent years, the Aude has also become home to more retired people in France – due to its proximity to the sea and mountains.

Expected increases in visitor numbers to the region may also increase rental return potential in 2008 and beyond. Veolia Transport – the company managing Nîmes airport – and tour operator Eurociel are offering several new European and Mediterranean routes to and from the airport from this spring. The routes should help Nîmes airport reach its target of getting 400,000 passengers through the terminal by 2010.

Additionally, the newly laid train track from Perpignan to Figueres in Spain is to carry new high-speed TGV trains and connect the French and Spanish rail systems by 2009. Another line under construction from Barcelona to Figueres will then form a new high-speed train axis.



"Sunny climate, sandy beaches and relatively slow pace of life"

Alex Charles

Journey times will be 50 minutes from Perpignan to Barcelona – opposed to 2.45 hours today – and between Paris and Barcelona is estimated to be 5.35 hours. This will mean an opening of the area to French and Spanish tourists and shoppers. Another rail project in early planning stage is the Montpellier to Perpignan line.

This improved access is likely to drive up prices and offer investors a good return when it comes to selling, plus potentially better occupancy rates.

"Languedoc has its fair share of foreign holiday home owners and permanent residents," says Alex Charles of area specialists Crème de Languedoc.

"They are all attracted by the sunny climate, sandy beaches and relatively slow pace of life.

"If you're looking for property in Languedoc-Roussillon, it's essential to decide which areas of this huge and varied region are most likely to meet your needs. If you thought all of Languedoc was

Mediterranean – hot, sunny and beautiful – think again. The terrain of the region's five départements – Lozère, Gard, Hérault, Aude and Pyrénées-Orientales – forged five diverse cultures and economies."

Property agent Catriona Waterhouse of Styles Immobilier recommends Montpellier, though.

"We are encouraging people to buy-to-let," says Waterhouse. "Apartments can be easily rented due to a large student population and the city's growing popularity with French holidaymakers escaping overblown areas."

● www.creme-de-languedoc.com

● www.styles.fr

THE RIVALS

Midi-Pyrénées: Like the Rhône Alpes, the Midi-Pyrénées is also very popular with property purchasers looking to take advantage of the region's excellent ski facilities – which, as you have no doubt already guessed, are based in the Pyrénées mountain range. Stretching 400 kilometres in length and 70 kilometres in width between the border of France and Spain, the Pyrénées do not have the same high reputation as the Alps in terms of quality ski resorts, but this means the slopes tend to be less crowded and less expensive than some of the 'premier' resorts found in the Alps.

Auvergne: One of France's central regions, Auvergne is situated at the heart of the Massif Central – a mountainous plateau in south-central France, which covers one-seventh of the entire country. Although not as synonymous with ski resorts as either Rhône-Alpes or Midi-Pyrénées, with over 150 alpine ski trails and several thousand kilometres of cross-country courses, ski enthusiasts are well catered for in Auvergne.

However, while property prices in this region are among the lowest in France, if you're a serious skier it's worth noting that the quality of these slopes are not a patch on that found in either the Alps or Pyrénées.

17/18

RESORT REPORT

what

Prices in this region of France can generally be found to climb in line with proximity to the Mediterranean.

“Within an hour of the sea, townhouses to renovate are changing hands for 320,000 to 350,000 euros,” Charles says. “House hunters who want the best possible value for money should head for Languedoc’s least populated and most northerly département of Lozère, where farms with outbuildings and land can be found from 180,000 euros upwards.”

Alternatively, apartments in the regional city-hub of Montpellier start from 180,000 euros and – with its large student population – studios may well offer good buy-to-let options for investors.

LOCATION	Eyne (1 on map)	LOCATION	Montpellier (2)	LOCATION	Near Nimes (3)
BEDROOMS	One, two and three	BEDROOMS	Two	BEDROOMS	Eight
DESCRIPTION	A development of 203 chalet-style lease-back apartments available from mid-2008. The new resort will include pools.	DESCRIPTION	Loft apartment with view, one bedroom en-suite. Has dining room, lounge, kitchen and a garage in 'les beaux-Arts' area.	DESCRIPTION	Nineteenth-century château with pool and 1.5 hectares of park. Living space currently split into six apartments on three floors.
PRICE	From £110,098	PRICE	£243,727	PRICE	£1,709,799
WEBSITE	www.maisonindividuelle.co.uk	WEBSITE	www.styles.fr	WEBSITE	www.creme-de-languedoc.com



1-3: The locations of the three properties featured on the opposite page.

4 Carcassonne: Carcassonne is a fortified French town, in the Aude département. It became an important trading place as early as the 6th century BC and Romans first fortified the hilltop around 100 BC. Today, it is a popular tourist destination. Local industry includes the manufacture of shoes, rubber and textiles. There is also an airport receiving low-cost airlines.

5 Perpignan: The administrative capital city of the Pyrénées-Orientales département. As well as the production of wine, olive oil, cork, wool, leather and iron, it boasts a successful rugby league team, the Catalan Dragons.

6 Beziers: Another town with a successful rugby heritage, its other major sporting attraction is the annual bullfight in August. The town offers other cultural attractions, including museums and galleries.

7 Florac: At the foot of the Causse Méjean, this town is a good starting point for a trip through the Gorges du Tarn (Tarn Gorges) which follow the course of the Tarn River for 50 kilometres. They are the deepest gorges to be found anywhere in Europe. The area is very popular for outdoor sports, including hiking and canoeing.