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The bargain properties tempting Britons to move to the wild French West



The walled city of St-Malo, Ille-et-Vilaine is just one of the areas of Brittany fast becoming a hotspot for British ex-pats CREDIT: WALTER BIBIKOV

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By **Fred Redwood**

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With its dramatic cliffs, tiny rugged bays and vast sandy beaches, Brittany has long been a favourite with British holidaymakers. Now, according to local estate agents, there is a sudden spike in the number of Britons who want to move there as full-time residents.

“It is largely francophiles who have been promising themselves for years that some day they would relocate to Brittany,” says Lisa Greene, of Leggett estate agency.

On the face of it, this seems like the wrong time to take such a life-changing gamble. The exchange rate – at around €1.14 to the pound – is less than favourable, and Brexit itself casts a shadow of uncertainty (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/house-prices/property-predictions-2019-should-buy-now-wait-brex-it-will-house/>) over the kind of deal awaiting Britons in France.

Yet Greene believes that the Breton lifestyle, together with French interest rates of around one per cent, make it worth taking this leap in the dark.

“The hospitals and healthcare are good, crime is low (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/uk/revealed-affordable-places-live-lowest-crime-rates/>), we have toll-free roads and the education system is excellent,” she says.

“We have a low population density and it is altogether a healthier place to live.”



This nine-bedroom chateau near Vitré is €1.78 million with Group Mercure

The price of property in Brittany is another enticing reason to buy. According to Greene, most homes currently sell for between €1,200 and €1,400 per sq m (around £99 to £116 per sq ft). You can expect to pay a premium in a town or on the coast.

Prices are higher near Rennes, which is expanding dramatically due to the arrival of the TGV railway that will link the town to Paris with a travel time of a mere one hour 23 minutes.

The housing stock in Brittany is rich and diverse. In country towns such as Morlaix and Quimper, you will find some lovely half-timbered town houses. Stone maisons de capitaine – captain’s houses usually featuring a spacious cellar used to store valuables while le capitaine was away at sea – are traditionally found in port towns.

Contemporary villas, with their white walls and garages under the house, are particularly popular with French buyers, while the longère is something of a collector’s item – a typical Breton granite farmhouse built with their backs facing west, the direction from which the roughest gales blow.



This three-bedroom longère near Plouay is €339,200 with Leggett

You could find a cottage for €100,000 or a “doer-upper” for €80,000. In general, between €150,000 and €200,000 buys a four-bedroom family house.

As most visitors stay reasonably close to the ferry ports, many are unaware of Brittany’s scale. Similar in size to Wales, it is a three-hour drive east to west, and two hours north to south.

The landscape in its four departments is varied. Morbihan, in central southern Brittany, is famed for its mild climate and pristine beaches around the Bay of Biscay.

A favourite spot for Parisians, the average house was €1,750 per sq m (€160 per sq ft) in the first half of 2018, according to the French Notaires index (similar to the UK Land Registry).

Finistère, with its fjord-like inlets and national park, is wilder and more rugged, and it has two stunning towns in the historic port of Morlaix and medieval Quimper. Here, a four-bedroom house goes for €135,000.

Ille-et-Vilaine in eastern Brittany is a heavily agricultural department where a four-bedroom home costs around €170,000, and Côtes d’Armor in central north Brittany is popular with Britons due to its good transport links and the beaches of its Emerald and Pink Granite coasts. The same house here costs €130,000, but prices are higher around the 600-year-old walled town of Dinan.



A seven-bedroom manor in Dinan is €990,000 with Group Mercure CREDIT: DIMITRI LAMOUR/WWW.DYMFILMS.COM

Karen and John Pearson chose to settle in Dinan when they made the move to Brittany 10 years ago. They bought a big, stone townhouse near the centre of town. They set up a successful business, hosting French secondary school-age children for total-immersion English-speaking weeks and holding cramming sessions for A-level students from Britain.

They have never, however, formed close friendships with the locals. “We were received with courtesy and respect, but we didn’t crossed the ‘vous’ barrier – they never used the informal ‘tu,’” says John, 64. “Socialising for the locals revolved around the family, which put us at a disadvantage.”

When the time came to sell, they were frustrated by the property market. Breton houses hardly appreciate at all in value and nobody buys as an investment.

Consequently, it took them three years to find a buyer for their property. Friends of theirs have had their homes on the market for even longer. Now, having moved to Chichester to be near family, they have mixed feelings about their decade in Dinan.

“We loved a lot about the way of life – the cinema, theatre, the lovely architecture, the galleries and the restaurants – and we don’t regret the experience,” says Karen, 63. “But starting up in a different country is challenging. We had previously lived in Paris and this was more difficult. So my advice to anyone else considering a move to Brittany would be to learn the language and make sure you have a plan B.”

It’s another story for former Jethro Tull bassist Dave Pegg, who is now something of an honorary Breton. Pegg, also of the veteran folk-rock band Fairport Convention, has taken to the local way of life.

He spent £340,000 on a longère four miles from the coast, in between Port Louis and Merlevenez in Morbihan, when he split up from his wife 12 years ago.

Dave Pegg of Fairport Convention is loving the Breton lifestyle CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

He was attracted by the Breton culture as much as the good-value housing.

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“Brittany has a Celtic feel, which I love,” says Pegg, who previously lived in Oxfordshire before setting up home with his partner, Ellen.

“The language is undergoing a revival, the folk music is fabulous and the people are very welcoming in a kind of Scottish or Welsh way.”

Pegg, 70, was keen to be accepted by the neighbours in the tiny local community, so as soon as he moved in he had cards printed inviting a few of the nearest to an apéro, a small drinks and snacks gathering. He was surprised when about 50 people turned up.

“It had got out that I was a rock musician and the rumour then grew that I was The Edge from U2,” says Pegg. “These people turned up hoping to meet a multi-millionaire megastar.

“Mind you, at two in the morning when the guitars came out and everyone was singing, nobody seemed to mind me being me.”

Pegg has settled in easily to his Breton village. This year he hosted the village fête, arranging for music from professional friends. He puts his acceptance from locals down to the fact he always attempts to speak in French.

Soon after moving in, he had an extension built, the roof repointed, a porch added and a garage turned into guest accommodation – work that cost £200,000 and took nearly two years to complete. The property now has a one-acre garden with a swimming pool and spa, and a large pond full of carp.

If it were transported to north Oxfordshire, it would doubtless cost upwards of £1.5 million.

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