



Cycling along the Canal du Midi near Toulouse

# Ride of your life <sup>FPN</sup>

Keen to put some pedal power into your property plans? In cycling-friendly France you'll be in good company, says **Daniela Harris**

Some of the best ideas come from journalists. No, really! It was Henri Desgrange who, in order to boost the circulation for his paper *l'Auto*, invented the Tour de France in 1903. The famous yellow jerseys worn by the winner of each stage are yellow precisely because that was the colour of the paper the magazine was printed on. He knew cycling was part of the French DNA, although even he would no doubt marvel at its global popularity 118 years on.

## TOUR DE FORCE

Today there are cycling tours, events and competitions to cater for every ability and lifestyle. The varied landscape, culture and climate which make France the most popular

tourist destination in the world equally attract cyclists in their millions. If you are thinking of starting up a cycling-related business in France, you may be pleased to know that sales of bicycles in France increased by a staggering 25% last year as the Covid-19 pandemic bit. The total €3bn-worth of sales included nearly 515,000 e-bikes, according to France's Union Sport et Cycle.

And signs are that this is the tip of the iceberg, with both the threat of climate change and Covid-19 encouraging more people to get pedalling.

If you're planning a cycling trip to France, a good time to come is the spring when France is blooming, or autumn when the vines and forests are awash with majestic gold.

## VÉLO VOCAB

**Voies vertes:** Literally meaning 'green lanes', these are traffic-free paths, often repurposed railway lines, that provide a safe and leisurely space for cyclists, mobility scooters, walkers, horse riders and rollerskaters. Because they are open to not just bikes, these paths lend themselves to cycling for all proficiencies.

**Véloroute:** This is a medium-distance or long-distance cycle route, which can use all types of safe routes, including *voies vertes* or routes with low motorised traffic. Seamless, signposted and stunning, *véloroutes* are designed for all abilities and often encompass sections of the Tour de France.

**VTT trails:** VTT stands for *vélo tout terrain* aka mountain biking, and there are dedicated trails to suit every level. Shops and tourist offices offer local VTT trail maps and there are plenty of maps online too. Easy trails include the spectacular Lac Montbel in Ariège, and thrillseekers can try the ski slopes of the Pyrénées in summer, such as Les Angles.





€899,000

**VILLENEUVE-SUR-LOT, LOT-ET-GARONNE**

*This beautifully renovated 'maison de maître' has eight bedrooms, a landscaped garden with a large heated swimming pool, spa, fitness room, tennis court and other buildings, including a garage, an independent apartment, and a discotheque/bar!*



€189,000

**MAUROUX, LOT**

*This charming stone house set in over an acre of land has lovely views over the surrounding valley and is very close to a touristy village by the River Lot. It has an open-plan lounge-kitchen-diner, a smaller sitting room, three or four bedrooms, a pool and a workshop.*



€260,000

**LIMOUX, AUDE**

*Set in a lively village with amenities close to Limoux and Quillan, this elegant and flexible property could be used as a five-bedroom, four-bathroom house or as a three-bedroom 'chambres d'hôtes' with 'private owners' accommodation above. The choice is yours!*



€319,145

**CONFOLENS, CHARENTE**

*Magnificent 17th-century property full of charm, history and character. Boasting a four-bedroom main house, a garden and a second property currently used for storage. Located just 10 minutes from the medieval market town of Confolens in a quiet little village.*

**GREAT RIDES**

Here are some of my favourite *véloroutes*:

**Canal du Midi**

Toulouse to Carcassonne (100km)

The Canal du Midi was designed in the 17th century to connect the Garonne area to the Mediterranean. You can cycle the whole length of this green and pleasant waterway, stopping enroute to watch the boats glide by. Why not stop at Castelnaudary for a *cassoulet*, a tasty meat and bean stew?

**Passapais**

The old Haut-Languedoc railway (85km)

This former railway line derives its name from Occitan, meaning 'country pass', which refers to the connection of the two Midi areas of the Mediterranean and Atlantic. It traverses a varied landscape of mountains, forests, sandy stretches and moors, with incredible views across the Hérault and Tarn.

**Lot Valley (160km)**

At the confluence of the Lot and Garonne rivers, this *véloroute* takes you from Aiguillon to

*"Sales of bicycles in France increased by a staggering 25% last year"*

Cahors via quiet and beautiful roads. The journey boasts some interesting architecture in châteaux and villages, fields of orchards, and plenty of gastronomic hotspots along the way.

**Chemin des Filatiers (38km)**

This *voie verte* was redone in

2007 and criss-crosses the borders of Ariège and Aude. Starting in Chalabre and ending in Mirepoix, the trail bookends two beautiful medieval villages and traverses the ancient Cathar Trail. Most of its length is a former industrial railway line from which it takes its name - a '*filatier*' being a wool textile worker.



## LOCATION



€586,000

### ST-CIRQ-LAPOPIE, LOT

Set in one of the most beautiful villages in France and steps away from cafés, restaurants and galleries, this house was lovingly renovated in 2012 and is steeped in medieval history. It has five bedrooms, and a large terrace garden with views of the River Lot.



€524,700

### CAHORS, LOT

This holiday complex comes with a three-bedroom main house and eight rental chalets. It's set in an idyllic small valley with a tennis court, pool and restaurant/bar. Four of the chalets are privately owned, paying annual ground rent, with an option to buy them back.



€475,000

### LIMOUX, AUDE

A grand house in a medieval village close to the town of Limoux. There are five bedrooms (two with their own dressing rooms) and many features, including a sweeping staircase and stone fireplaces. Outside, the garden has two terraces and a large swimming pool.



€830,000

### MIREPOIX, ARIÈGE

Stunning country house situated close to Mirepoix with panoramic views over countryside and mountains. The main house has four bedrooms and three bathrooms, and the two gîtes have two bedrooms each. There is a large swimming pool and terrace.

## CASE STUDY



David Claydon, from the UK, is about to launch a cycling tour business in Aude.

### Why France?

We're attracted by the landscape, culture and nation's passion for the sport. Fewer cars, better roads and bigger hills (mountains!) mean it's the perfect destination for cyclists.

### Why south-west France?

The weather! The feeling of

the sun on your back as you climb a winding mountain road is amazing.

### Who are your heroes?

Recently, riders like Tommy Voeckler, Mark Cavendish and Tom Boonen have brought the sport into the mainstream, and the younger cyclists, like Senechal (FRA) and Kuss (USA) are now like rock stars really lighting up races.

### Where can we find you?

We'll be based in Alet-les-Bains, Aude, and aim to go live in the spring. [base-velo.com](http://base-velo.com)

## CYCLING FOR BUYING

There are many reasons why cycling may help you purchase your dream home in France.

Firstly, it can help you slow your pace right down so that you can actually soak in the environment and find those beauty spots you may otherwise have missed.

Walking into a tourist information office to check out cycling options is a good way of seeing what the area has to offer, whether the town you are in caters for tourists and what sort of people go there.

If you want to run a tourist-related business, what better way of finding out what works

locally than talking to someone already doing it – your bike hire company, the guide of your bike tour or the firm running bike-related events?

Lastly, househunting all week long can be very stressful. What better way to declutter your mind than by ditching the car and getting on your bike? So have fun and grab those handlebars with gusto! ■

**Daniela Harris is a property consultant at Beaux Villages estate agency**

**Tel: 0800 270 0101  
(Freephone from the UK)  
0033 (0)8 05 69 23 23  
[beauxvillages.com](http://beauxvillages.com)**