



Make sure your first French move results in you living the dream – not a nightmare

Benefit of hindsight

If you're all set to make the move to France, there are plenty of pioneers who have been there, done that and made the mistakes so you don't have to! Here are 12 tips that **Julie Savill** wished she'd known when she took the plunge...

1. GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Neighbours are a bonus – it's easy to slip into isolation. Living in a town or even a village in the UK, it can be easy to believe that to be private you need to be isolated. Seclusion in France is something to be considered quite carefully. Do you want to have to drive 30 minutes to the groceries or to visit a bar? That's quite possible in rural France. Perhaps you speak great French already. If not, wouldn't it be good to have someone nearby to chat with and practice on? We found that our neighbours were there when we needed them but didn't ever get overfamiliar. They were happy to lend a hand, have an occasional *apéro* for a special event, chat in the lane outside the front door, but

let us go about our daily lives (and we gave them and their space the same respect).

2. SOUNDS OF FRANCE

After a while, you don't notice church bells and frogs! Personally, I love the sound of church bells and a frog chorus just means you've got a helping hand in the garden keeping the slugs and snails down. We've all heard stories about people moving into a French village and then complaining about these typical country sounds and more besides. Roosters were a recent hot topic. If you're going to adopt the French country lifestyle, that means accepting it – warts, croaks, chimes and all. And honestly, I have to consciously

listen for the bells now – they are just part and parcel of life. The complaints mounted in recent years to the point where the French government have enshrined in law that certain sounds (and smells) are just another aspect of country life. Just as it should be...

3. FOSSES SEPTIQUES

Septic tanks are not scary. I grew up in a market town and until my 20s had never even heard of a house without mains drainage. Moving to France, it was one of the things I had the most trepidation about. It's an easy topic for a scaremonger, with their tales of smells and overflows... Some 20 years on, I can safely say that we never had an issue with any *fosse*

septique. As long as you have a decent *fosse* that complies, and you then comply with the 3P rule (only flush pee, poo and paper), life is simple and odourless. An occasional sachet of *Eparcyd* to feed the bacteria helps if you are absent for periods of time.

4. SECRET AGENT

You can buy a house and get a job. If you are making a permanent move and have the right visa, you might be considering working in France. You could put your enthusiasm for property and love of France to good use by joining an estate agency. There are different options, depending on your lifestyle and experience. Agencies have salaried support



€138,000

RIEUX-MINERVOIS, AUDE

This characterful south-facing three-bedroom cottage is located in a sought-after village, down a country lane overlooking vines. Opposite, the property's small garden has been landscaped to accommodate a plunge pool and summer kitchen.



€176,550

CASTANET, TARN

A delightful three-bedroom stone house with a courtyard in a quiet rural hamlet. Near one of France's Plus Beaux Villages and only 10km to the train station, this is a perfect house for either a permanent or secondary home.



€268,000

LE LÉDAT, LOT-ET-GARONNE

Set in wooded grounds of 1,500m², with four bedrooms and a lovely open-plan living space, this house has everything for a large family. It's close to all amenities and the River Lot with its 'green path' for walkers and cyclists.



€333,900

LORIGNÉ, DEUX-SÈVRES

Surrounded by its own private gardens, this charming four-bedroom village house with two-bedroom guest annexe has a heated swimming pool. Poitiers, with its TGV station and international airport, is just 50 minutes away by car.

staff covering things such as marketing, HR and admin. Or there's the freelance route of becoming an agent *commercial* and helping other people find their own dream property. Being freelance leaves you completely independent and means that you are free to work to your own schedule.

5. NEAR TO A BAR OR A BOULANGERIE?

Walking distance to a bar will help you integrate quicker than your proximity to a bakery. A nearby *boulangerie* is the dream but, given the choice, I'd go for a bar every day. Not that I'm a hardened drinker, but you get far more chance to exchange

a few words and make new contacts over a glass of wine than buying a bag of croissants!

6. MONEY MATTERS

Currency exchange can have a huge effect on your budget (and nerves). From the point of making an offer to the deal actually completing takes around four months on average. During that time the currency exchange rate can vary wildly and end up costing you tens of thousands of pounds. Ask your agency for a currency company recommendation and check with them if forward booking would work for you so you know just how much money you have to play with.

And you'll need an insurance recommendation for when you do find 'the one'!

7. HELPING HAND

Volunteering is a great way to get integrated and learn the language. Everyone loves a volunteer and there are loads of opportunities in France. Local dog and cat refuges always need helping hands, or you could join the village fête committee. All of this gets you connected, improves your language skills and makes you part of a community.

8. HOST WITH THE MOST

I'm way more private than I thought. Our first house here

had a little cottage at the end of the garden that we rented out for a couple of years. I had seen friends doing it and enjoying drinks with the guests and cheerily being on call. I just didn't like it, and at the end of the second season I took down my website and called it a day. For me, sharing my garden and pool with strangers was not worth the money.

9. FULLY FURNISHED

It's common for furniture to be included in a sale. When we sold our first house in France, almost all of the furniture stayed behind. The buyers walked in, loved it and wanted everything. This can work