

The Pont de la Pierre in Bellac



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# La vie est Bellac

**Chris Summers** presents an Haute-Vienne town of two halves where modern convenience meets old-world charm



**W**hat would you want from a holiday home in France? Or from a holiday, for that matter. Easy accessibility for you, family and friends? An all-year-round community so there is somewhere to go and something to do any time you visit? A mix of town facilities and the beauty of the countryside within a minute or two from home? We've got just the place for you!

## OPEN SECRET

We can't claim that Bellac is a best-kept secret - it's been justifiably popular among a select number of people for a

long while. Yet its attractions are still far from well known. So, what can I tell you?

Well, I had a holiday home here for several years and then, last year, I finally decided to up sticks and move permanently to make the most of the community that had wholeheartedly welcomed me on a part-time basis.

This is a thriving town split into two distinctive parts. Alongside the River Vincou you'll find the old medieval part with its historic Pont de la Pierre bridge and the 12th-century church of Our Lady of Bellac. There are many winding cobbled roads lined with specialist shops (more

of which are opening all the time). At the top end of town the architecture is more recent and more modern with more commerce. A population of just under 4,000 gives shops, bars and restaurants a really good, local clientele and that support has been at the heart of the growth of the town.

Among the 4,000 is a real mix of nationalities. Of course, as a thriving, living, working French town, the majority of the residents are French. Then add in a lively mix of Brits (around 240 are resident in the area), Dutch, Belgians and Americans and you get quite a cosmopolitan city feel in a small and personal town.

## BELLAC BOASTS

- 5 restaurants
- 3 pharmacies
- Cinema
- Doctor
- Dentist
- Hospital
- Banks
- Many artisan shops
- Large supermarkets
- DIY shops
- Edge-of-town retailers

## THE PRICE IS RIGHT

While Bellac property prices have increased in the last year due to the very active French and British market in the town,

**BELLAC**

*Beautiful six-bed character property with a courtyard, large storage room, vaulted cellar, garden plus a small house comprising two studio flats with a separate entrance. Fantastic central village location with amenities close at hand.*

**DOMPIERRE-LES-ÉGLISES**

*Magnificent farmhouse situated in a fabulous rural idyllic location. The property comprises a six-bed main house, three-bed gîte and a one-bed gîte. Outside there's a large garden with no fewer than four barns, a swimming pool, terrace and panoramic views.*

**BELLAC**

*Fantastic three-bedroom country house and two detached cottages in need of some renovation, set in 8,000m<sup>2</sup> of land with a field and several different garden areas with terraces and mature trees.*

**PEYRAT-DE-BELLAC**

*Two charming fully renovated cottages providing a great income opportunity, situated in a lovely village. Both cottages boast a bedroom, living room, kitchen and shower room. Outside there is a lovely courtyard, a separate garden, a garage and a workshop.*

property is still surprisingly affordable in this pretty part of France. The price of a small two-bedroom house that may need some finishing off, for example, could start at around €45,000. With €200,000, you could buy a larger townhouse in the medieval part with views of the church, bridge and river.

There are many smaller hamlets within 10km of the town which offer a more rural living experience and houses can be bought with land and many outbuildings. Prices vary depending on the work required, the amount of

land and facilities such as a pool. A budget in the region of €250,000 should secure a renovated property with three or four bedrooms, a manageable garden and a pool.

**OUT AND ABOUT**

Of course, getting to know a town is only part of the story; exploring the surrounding area is a key part of the experience.

If you don't fancy the upkeep of your own pool, make a beeline for the Lac de St-Pardoux. Around half an hour away, this makes a

**GETTING THERE**

■ Bellac has a mainline train station with 40-minute access to Limoges and Poitiers.

■ From Limoges, you can get the train to Paris in 2h.

■ La Souterraine is also just a 23-minute drive away where you can park for free and catch the train direct to Paris and be sipping a favourite tippale on the Champs Élysée within 2.5h.

■ Bellac sits just 10 minutes

from major motorways and is pretty much central between Calais and the south of France.

■ You can drive to the Spanish and Swiss borders in just six hours to experience two very different cultures.

■ Limoges also has its airport (35-minute drive) with regular flights to six UK airports.

■ A 90-minute drive gets you to Poitiers airport with flights to French cities and the UK.

## LOCATION



€175,500

### BUSSIÈRE-BOFFY

*Gorgeous three-bedroom house dating back to the 18th century (when it belonged to the Lord of Bussière) and a second property that would make a lovely gîte, both set in a large garden with vegetable plot and several outbuildings in a picturesque village.*



€445,200

### BELLAC

*Beautifully renovated character property set in 1.7ha of gardens, with woodland and a lake. The main house has six bedrooms, four bathrooms, garages, a gym area and a wine cellar.*



€84,000

### BELLAC

*Charming semi-detached property in a lively village. The property boasts four bedrooms, a large kitchen, two reception rooms and lovely views. Outside there's a spacious garden and a large barn.*



€298,530

### BELLAC

*Lovely Charentaise-style manor house, attached gîte and small house to renovate, situated in a large wrap-around garden at the top of the village with a field, several outbuildings and amazing views.*

great day out with the family. The 750-acre lake (yes, 750 acres!) offers all manner of activities including quiet walks, swimming, boating, *accrobranche* (treetop trekking) and abseiling. There is also a 1.3km fitness course which should wear everyone out before a leisurely beach picnic. A number of bars and restaurants are also available.

One unmissable location around 25 minutes from Bellac is the 'Martyr's Town' of Oradour-sur-Glane. The location of a wartime atrocity where the residents were

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rounded up and executed before the village was burned to the ground, it has been preserved respectfully and carefully to create a museum of remembrance. It's a striking, if sobering, visit. Leave yourself time to walk the ruined streets and to visit the underground memorial and the adjacent

cemetery. You can also see the new village that has sprung up next to it, now home to some 2,500 people.

And then there is the array of pretty towns and villages, from Rochechouart and St-Junien to Le Dorat and Mortemart (one of France's *Plus Beaux Villages*), all worth a look and you'll find

plenty of others along the way. It's been a great ride getting to know Bellac and the local area over the years and, much as I love its relatively undiscovered status, I'm happy to open my little black book a chink and hope to see you in one of the bars one day soon. ■

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