

Sian Griffiths

FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS



The market is bustling in this old town

On the market



In a quiet street of Cimiez, a hilly suburb of Nice, on the Côte d'Azur, the large studio flat (62sq m) is on the fifth floor of a 1970s building angled to take in views of the town, mountains and sea. It is for sale for £175,000 and has high ceilings, a large main room, separate kitchen, two balconies and a carport. Whitworth, 020 330 686 565 T&F. www.foxtons.co.uk



A one-bed flat in a traditional Nîmois building in the heart of the old town is for sale for £110,000. Near the beaches and main shopping areas, the 32sq m property has recently been renovated. It has a kitchenette, a bathroom and an upper mezzanine level for the bedroom. The building has a lift. Astia International, 020 7746 9000. www.astiamain.com

A flat on the Côte d'Azur provides a hassle-free holiday home, discovers Sian Griffiths

I took Sue Philipe to one leisurely lunch "with lots of wine" to decide on buying a holiday home on the Côte d'Azur. "I flew out to Nice on Thursday evening and met the agents for coffee on Friday morning," says Philipe, 50, who is London bureau chief of AP+Kiers, the Audi-owned real-estate firm. "I saw one flat that had four more on the market, and then they made me look at several others. We had lunch and I made an offer on the flat one I had seen in the afternoon. The agent said it was the fastest sale they had ever done: within two months it was mine. We asked longer to choose a date."

Traditionally, most Britons looking to buy in France would be drawn to picturesque old villages, farmhouse or chateau, despite, or often because of their need for renovation. Philipe, by contrast, opted for a new lease of life with a modern holiday home plumping for flat – also new-build – that she can lock up and leave without having to deal with grumpy builders, or worry about who will look after the garden when they go back to Britain.

With plenty of daily flights to Nice in the summer from the UK and prices on low-cost airlines such as Ryanair as low as £10 one way, the route of France is easy to access. It can also be a good investment, prices there have been rising at an annual 10% in the past three years and are still going up, says Andy Hewison, senior international property consultant for The Dawson White Group. Philipe

bought her four-bedroom flat in Nîmes old town 18 months ago for £200,000. Since then, she says, it has appreciated by more than £60,000. She expects it to rise even more when a programme of refurbishing and spreading up Nice with piazzas and fountains is completed later this year.

"It's been done here," she says. "The planning allowed the flat to have you have the staircase and the door and don't think about it and maintain."

Philipe, who used to own a farmhouse near Périgord in south-west France, says her two (then) daughters were one of the reasons she switched to a flat to own. "They didn't want to be buying around in the countryside, they wanted something big with water, and that's what Nice, the fifth largest city in France, provides."

There are rental opportunities, too. Philipe uses her flat once a month, flying out for a leisurely weekend. The flat plans to rent it out via Airbnb, she has designed and thinks she can get a £1,000 a week in the height of summer.

Across the Côte d'Azur, from Nice to Cannes, new developments are springing up, similar ones for another £100,000. There are the same opportunities to spot celebrities or rub shoulders with the beautiful or otherwise on the Riviera, but you can do so from a base that is increasingly white and sea led.

"Once we sold our villa for every apartment, now it's more like 10 flat units only," says Pierre Grandjean, a

former journalist who runs [Foxtons.com](http://www.foxtons.com), a property-finding website. "There is a trend among Brits now for buying new-build on the Côte d'Azur and especially new flats."

"Renovation is more difficult than it was, more run down," he says. "For a lot of people, new-build is now seen as the way of having a holiday home in the south of France. You can lock it up and leave for six months and not worry about coming back to leaky pipes and a flooded kitchen."

Some 30 minutes' drive along the coast from Nice is Monaco, a hot town for some of the wealthiest people on the planet. You may not have a hope of affording a home close to the city properly, but at the little French hillside town of Beauséjour, on the border, you can buy a studio flat overlooking the port of Monte Carlo from about £210,000.

That's exactly what Julie Whitaker, 49, who would be considered property to Manchester, has done. The two-bedroom flat she bought recently off-plan in the Villa Monébelle development there cost £230,000. Getting to her holiday home wouldn't be much quicker: it's 25 minutes on the rail from Nice to Monaco, and then a 10-minute walk up the hill to her apartment block. If you own a really speedy yacht, then there is the option of reaching by helicopter from the airport.

Beauséjour lacks the sea advantage of Monaco, of course, but these properties are a fraction of the price they would cost in the principality.

"I am definitely part of a trend," confesses Whitaker. "English people used to buy old places in France and then live in them. I just wanted a new place with no headache."

Because of its location, her flat is at the higher end of the price scale for new-build flats along the coast. But if you are just wanting out in the second-home market and wish to get a foothold in the south of France, Cannes is a marketing boom in the centre of Capricorn-Min, a 15-minute drive from Nice. There, developer Kallias & Grand are building 64 flats ranging from £115,000 for a studio to £320,000 for a three-bedroom flat. At Villeneuve-Loubet, a market town between Cannes and Nice, the same developer are building a 100-apartment block of 64 flats, also for sale through Cheeseman, from £150,000 to £1.2m.

Some of the developers of the new-build schemes offer rental deals, often as part of the popular French government-backed leaseback scheme. Under its terms, owners lease back their properties, usually for a minimum of three years, to the developer and receive a guaranteed return, which will vary according to the amount of personal usage. At a further incentive, the state also pays back the VAT.

Whitaker, for one, needs no convincing. "I didn't want a damp French one [house] that I could have bought for the same price," she says. "I wanted a new property where I didn't have to deal with builders or worry about leaving it. I wanted a holiday home, in other words." ■ Charlotte, www.foxtons.co.uk



The great thing is that you shut the door and don't think about it until