

The beautiful St-Chinian area is a property hotspot

# Sun, sea and so much more

**Karen Tait** speaks to estate agent **Freddy Rueda** to find out what his region of Languedoc has to offer to property buyers



## How long have you worked as an estate agent in France?

I started in January 1995 as a property broker buying and selling properties and then qualified as an agent a few years after.

## Which area of France do you cover?

Hérault and Aude departments (both in Languedoc, now renamed Occitanie).

## Describe your region in five words

Sunshine, sea, mountains, food, wine.

## Why do people love your area?

We have everything here - the coast, rivers, lakes, mountains - and all this with an average of 300 sunny days.

## Is the area easy to reach?

Very easy, with low-cost

airlines flying to Beziers, Montpellier, Carcassonne, two motorways (A9 and A75) for quick access to everywhere.

## Is it suited to those seeking a holiday or permanent home?

It's really ideal for both. Property prices are still competitive compared to Provence or other expensive areas, there's sunshine even in winter, allowing you to have

breakfast and lunch outside. There are nice towns and different landscapes within a short distance.

## What's your favourite corner of the region?

The famous triangle between Pézenas, Béziers and St-Chinian, which is known for its microclimate.

## Are there any local hotspots?

## On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON [FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM](https://francepropertyshop.com)



**€515,000:** *Elegant architect-designed villa with breathtaking views, five bedrooms and three bathrooms, just a few minutes' walk to the shops; 20 minutes to Beziers, 25 minutes to coast*



**€749,000:** *Magnificent townhouse blending historical charm with luxurious modernity; stunning terrace and views; in a town with shops, cafés and restaurants and schools*



**€302,400:** *Former annexe of a 19th-century domaine, 'maison de maître' style, original features, large rooms, semi-converted stable and garden with space for a pool - rare in a village centre*



**€249,000:** *Large stone character house with three/four bedrooms, courtyard and garage, in the heart of a village, in a quiet street just steps away from shops and restaurants*

Yes, the St-Chinian area was elected the fifth best place in the world to retire in the US CNBC Overseas Retirement Index. The Pézenas area is also very much in demand and all the villages around Béziers would suit retirement or holiday homes.

#### What kind of properties can homehunters find?

Winemakers' houses are the most typical, then of course you have stone houses and new bungalows, or at higher prices, domaines with vineyards.

#### What would these budgets buy in your area?

- **Under €100,000:** Village house, with no (or very small) outside space.
- **€100,000-€250,000:** Village house with a terrace, garage, courtyard or new bungalow on a small plot of land.
- **€250,000-€500,000:** The perfect budget to purchase a house in our area; you could get a larger house with a garden, pool, views, sometimes with gîtes as well.
- **€500,000-€750,000:** All the above, but bigger.
- **€750,000-€1m:** Sumptuous character property, small domaine, stone *mas*, private mansion in a historic town.
- **€1m+:** Former farm or winemaking property, or a superb contemporary villa with indoor pool and sea views, or large domaines.

#### What's the cheapest property you have on your books?

€54,000 - a small house with four bedrooms located on a quiet square, for sale furnished (see listing below).

## “Property prices are still competitive compared to Provence or other expensive areas”

In a village with grocery and *tabac*, five from a village with all amenities, 25 minutes from Béziers and 30 minutes from the beach. A real bargain!

#### What's the most unusual property you have sold?

A former church dating from the 16th century (neo-classical style) and built on a Gallo-Roman warehouse used in the 1st century before Christ. In the village of Hérepian and for sale at €110,000, it needed complete renovation but it was a really exceptional property!

#### What would be your dream home in the region?

We have a gorgeous stone property for sale (see listing below) comprising a main four-bedroom house, a former *bergerie* that has been converted into a gîte, and several more stone annexes on a 2,564m<sup>2</sup> plot with pool and views. It's quite unique and very reasonably priced at €421,000.

#### Why do Brits buy houses in Languedoc-Roussillon?

Perfect climate, easy access and good property prices.

#### What advice would you give to anyone thinking of buying in your area?

I would simply confirm

'location, location, location', as some clients see properties in an area that's in high demand (so prices are a bit higher) and then compare them with areas where they can find cheaper properties but won't have the same climate, access to the coast etc. Also, only use an established English-speaking estate agent with experience of dealing with international buyers; this way you'll find that buying a house in France is easy. Look for recommendations on their Facebook page, ratings on Google etc.

#### What tips would you give to help people settle into life in the area?

Try to meet French people, don't just mix with international property owners speaking English all the time - half and half is a good point to have local friends and to benefit from the experience of expats who moved to France before you did. It will also help you learn French. People in our part of France are very friendly, they will say hello even if they don't know you. Neighbours will always help you if you have a problem.

#### What are your predictions for your local property market?

I think the first and second

half of 2024 will be different. I don't think it will be busy until June 2024 when interest rates should start coming down. Many buyers needing a mortgage have stopped looking as interest rates are too high and, also for that reason, there aren't as many approvals from banks as there used to be. We mainly had cash buyers at the end of 2023 and it will probably be the same for the first half of 2024. Then things should start improving. I don't expect any reduction in prices over 5% in our very sought-after area. In France, there is still a lack of available properties compared to the population so this should protect the market against a real drop in prices. ■

#### Freddy Rueda runs

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### HOW MUCH WOULD YOU EXPECT TO PAY FOR:

#### ● A detached property with land in good condition?

€350,000, and up for more bathrooms, more bedrooms, more garden.

#### ● A three-bedroom village house?

€90,000-€110,000 euros with no outside space.

#### ● A renovation project?

From €50,000 but with no outside space; €180,000 and up for a property with outside space such as a garden or a large courtyard.

## On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON [FRENCHENTREE.COM](https://www.frenchentree.com)



**€54,000:** The cheapest property on Freddy's books - a small four-bed house on a quiet square in a village half an hour from Béziers and the beach, for sale furnished



**€421,200:** Freddy's dream home - a gorgeous stone property with a four-bed house, gîtes and annexes on 2,564m<sup>2</sup> with pool and stunning views, in the Languedoc Regional Park



**€149,000:** Pretty house with two/three bedrooms, 20m<sup>2</sup> terrace with lovely views and a small garden, in a hamlet five minutes' drive from Roquebrun, for sale fully furnished



**Sold for €110,000:** The most unusual property Freddy has sold was this renovation project, a former 16th-century church built on the site of a Gallo-Roman warehouse