Is there still such a thing as a cheap home in France?

Yes, says Judith Larner, if you know which regions offer the best bargains.

1 - The dream of owning a second home in France has turned into reality for hundreds of thousands of people in Britain. Abbey National estimates the figure at more than half a million and the demand for accessible homes has pushed prices in parts of the country out of the reach of many. David Wells of Abbey National France says the Cote d’Azur is still the most popular with UK buyers. Prices rose 9% over the past year with the average property costing £232,000.

In the Dordogne, prices rose 12% over the past year pushing the cost of the average house to around £161,000. The French are also being priced out, and newspapers across the Channel are exhorting people to look at areas where homes in picturesque locations away from the coast can still be found for less than £50,000.

Bargain hunters head for the Limoges and Aveyron in central France and northern parts of the Auvergne. Even in popular areas such as Brittany and Normandy there are still bargains. One French estate agent says 65% of rural properties in Normandy are bought by the English.

Maurice Lazarus of UK-based Domus Abroad points money-conscious buyers in the direction of southern Brittany. "It very attractive," he says, "with lovely countryside. You can buy a habitable house from £50,000. It is also well-served with Ryanair from Brest and ferry services from St Malo."

If Brittany is the French Cornwall, then Mayenne is Devon. It’s a 90-minute drive from St Malo and is popular with French second home-owners because of its proximity to Paris - just an hour and 20 minutes by high-speed train. Cheap flights by EasyJet and Ryanair are opening up many regions.

Central France is not for everyone. It’s extremely rural and unsophisticated. Most people, when they buy a second home, are looking for somewhere with easy access to a major town or a region that is famous for producing something, wine or cheese, etc. Central France could come as a shock. If you live in Western Scotland you may feel at home, but people from a city could feel isolated.