

Today, we are talking with one of our regular contributors, Michael Taylor, who is a director of the French estate agency, Properties in France, based in the Loire Valley.

Hello Michael. I thought it might be useful for our listeners to hear a little about your region. Weather is always of interest, what is it like in the Loire Valley

Well although we are only 200 miles south of the channel ports of Caen and Le Havre, the Loire Valley is the first region that you come to, where there is a marked difference in temperature.

The Valley benefits from its own microclimate that is influenced from the South West of France rather than the Atlantic Maritime weather patterns.

As a result, we have long warm summers and relatively mild winters. One of the nice things is that we do get all the seasons, but the winter is relatively short.

Our summer temperatures average about 30 degrees centigrade. We are often still sitting outside having dinner in a restaurant in late October.

We get rain, which is very important to the region, as this is big agricultural country. In fact, the area is known as the Garden of France and is the second leading agricultural area of France... so we need rain! Mostly our wet period is the winter, so we get it out of the way in late November, December and January.

If I remember my geography, the Loire River rises in the Massif Central?

You obviously were a geography swat! That is correct. In fact, the Loire is the longest river in France, flowing northwards from the Massif Central and then turning west, heading for the Atlantic Ocean. It is also the last free flowing river of any significance in the whole of Europe. No locks, no dams, allowing the river to follow its own natural rhythm.

The valley of the western and central Loire, encompassing the departments of Loiret, Loire et Cher, Indre et Loire and Maine et Loire is now designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. In their report, published in 2000, they described it as ‘an exceptional cultural landscape, of great beauty, comprised of historic cities and villages, great architectural monuments and lands that have been cultivated and shaped by centuries of interaction between the local population and their physical environment’

So, nice weather, nice scenery but nothing to do eh?

I think you should come and visit us. The region is blessed with some of the finest historic buildings in France. Chateaux abound throughout the area, many of them open to the public.

Then of course there are the vineyards. The Loire is home to some of France’s most famous labels: Muscadet, Anjou, Coteaux du Layon, Saumur , Touraine, the Bourgeil reds, Vouvray, Pouilly Fumé and Sancerre. I have tried them all and love the reds from our region, particularly those from Chinon.

Saumur, at the heart of our region is also home to the three most famous champenoise sparkling wines of France: Bouvet, Ackermann and Gratien Mayer.

Of course there is much more to do, perhaps we’ll do a whole feature just on having fun in the Loire – water sports, cycling, flying, horse riding and golf (in fact, we have six championship courses in our area). And, if like me you are a keen motorcyclist – this is great riding country with superb roads.

We have three main cities in the region my agency covers:

Le Mans, to the North, is of course the home of the 24 Hour Motor Racing Circuit and hints at its commercial base, as one of Frances premier car industry locations.

To the west of our region lies the ancient city of Angers, with its medieval fortress overlooking the city and the confluence of three rivers as they join the Loire in its journey towards the Atlantic. This is my wife's favourite city to shop – she prefers it to Paris and it is certainly a lot less congested.

To the east of our region is Tours. Known as the home of the French language, spoken in its purest form, this is a really historic and architecturally quite stunning city. It is a cultural centre for the region and, if you are a 'shopaholic', it is second only to Paris for its number of fashion boutiques.

So, with so much going on... are there still good deals to be had when it comes to buying a property?

I am always going to say 'yes' to that question. We start from a much lower base than UK property.....so a three-bedroom house, in excellent condition, set in its own ground, maybe an acre, can easily be bought for less than £150,000.

We do get clients turning up to view properties, who have £30,000 to spend.

Spin back eight years and there were some amazing properties on the market. With the increasing popularity of France as a destination for both secondary and principal homes, prices have risen dramatically across the country as a whole. Last year we saw an average increase of over 11% but with certain areas like Provence and the Dordogne seeing an increase of nearly 20% last year.

The Loire Valley has seen prices rise but well below the national average. This year I think it will be in the order of about 8%. Therefore, we can still accommodate those clients who are looking for something small and have less than £50,000 to spend. However, most of these properties will need renovation. For example, I have a nice little house in a village called Deneze-sous-

le-Lude, in the cloisters of the village church, going for 38,500 euros, which is about £26,000. Now, it is in need of restoration, a revision to the roof and connection to the mains sewerage. I reckon you would need to spend another £40,000 to get it into a fit state to live in...even so for less than £70,000 you would have a very cute property, in a lovely area, close to several historic towns.

Moving up the scale a little, I also have a very attractive cottage in a village called Mouliherne, not far from Saumur. The all inclusive purchase price is 61,500 Euros, which is about £42,000. The property is part of a small hamlet and has a nice garden opening onto farmland. It has a large loft that would develop into a further two bedrooms and a bathroom. The cost for doing this is about £27,000. Again, a lovely, fully renovated property for about £75,000. However, this particular property is already habitable, so the work can be done over a period of time.

So, there are some good deals to be had. Of course, I have properties rising through all price ranges right the way up to chateaux for sale at £700,000 (all-inclusive). You can view all of our properties, there are over 250 of them, on our website, which is www.propertiesinfrance.com

Many thanks Michael, you have mentioned the subject of renovating property, can we look at this in some detail next week?

Yes, of course. In fact, we have just launched a new service called PIFBuild that takes away all the hassle of managing a renovation, so I will be happy to go into this in more detail next week.

Now it is time for a glass of wine...a Chinon red I think ! So until then, au revoir from la belle France.