

The latest news from the Languedoc – January 2008

The average high temperature during December and January in **Montpellier** was

12°C

with 43 bright, clear days out of 62



Bienvenue !

Firstly, I would like to wish you a very Happy New Year and a prosperous 2008.

Secondly, welcome to the very first edition of our regular newsletter, where our aim is to inform you about a wide range of topics that you will find useful and interesting.

New flights to the area

Beziers airport has signed a deal with Ryanair and will start providing direct flights to the UK from May 2008, flying into Bristol. This opens up the area even further making your property search easier and allowing you to make full use of your holiday house or visits back to, or by, family and friends in the UK. This also makes it even easier to come to the Languedoc-Roussillon, especially to the Pezenas, Béziers and Narbonne areas whereas before this new airport opened, the closest were located in Montpellier, Perpignan or Carcassonne.

There is easy access to the South of France with flights from London, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Dublin, Liverpool, East Midlands, Glasgow, Shannon and Manchester airports into Toulouse, Carcassonne, Montpellier, Marseille, Gerona, Nîmes, Perpignan and now Beziers. Together with the TGV, the Euro Tunnel and the excellent motorway system in France, it couldn't be easier to escape to the sun; and with an average of 300 days of sunshine a year, making this the sunniest area in France, how can you go wrong?

New aquarium in Montpellier

A fantastic new aquarium has opened in Montpellier called Mare Nostrum in the Place Odysseum.

With an entrance fee of just 12.50€ one is promised a breathtaking array of underwater delights. There are 24 tanks replicating a particular ecosystem for 300 different species.

Apparently you should take your time to look around so should allow about one and a half hours for the visit. Something to do on one of those rare rainy days. Have fun !



Health scare

There has been much in the papers recently at the sudden retrospective withdrawal of state health care provision for British expatriates who have retired early in France, which has caused much concern and despair for many. However, the latest position is somewhat clearer since this issue was raised with the European Parliament and the British Embassy.

The Health Ministry has published its new guidelines and confirms that a healthcare ban will not now be retrospective, so if you are an early retiree ex-pat, resident in France and already in the French healthcare system (on or before 30th November 2008) you can remain in it. Also, if you have been resident in France for five years continuously, or already at normal retirement age you should not experience any problems.

However all newcomers who are not working, do not have an E106 or E121 must get private health insurance. The new rules affect 'inactive' foreigners so if you work part-time or are self-employed you would normally be eligible for state healthcare benefits. Part-time work would be defined as a minimum of 60 hours per month (and you should have been resident in France for a minimum of three months).



House prices continue to rise in Languedoc

Despite the cooling property market in the UK and France alike, one area that continues to attract investors and expatriates (whose purchasing power is higher than the French – often twice more) is the Languedoc-Roussillon. 6 out of 10 foreigners buyer property in France are the Brits.

After a sudden rise in house prices during 2001-2004, reaching 15.5% growth, property prices have now settled to an average growth of 11.4% in Languedoc compared to 6.2% in Provence, which is higher than most other regions of France. Although prices here continue to rise, many investment opportunities remain and buyers are finding that this area offers them much more value for their money than nearby Provence and other Mediterranean regions. The market is still strong and with the popularity of the region still riding high, there is no sign of demand weakening.

Much of this can be attributed to its warmer southern climate (the Languedoc is the sunniest area of France), and the multitude of low budget airlines and airports that serve the region and provide efficient links to the UK. The region has much to offer with its beaches, mountains, countryside, history and culture.

A high number of people look for a property within an hour of an airport, so the new low-cost flights from the UK into nearby Béziers in May this year will no doubt increase the area's growing popularity and push up prices further. Of the Languedoc cities, Béziers tops the list with an amazing 38% growth (the highest in France).

How to ...?

Get planning permission

So, you are now the proud owner of a property in France and you want to renovate it and/or make some structural changes. How do you go about getting permission?

You will need to get a *permis de construire*, which is a building permit, from the Mairie. Planning permission is granted when a project conforms to local and national regulations. You need this if you plan to change the existing structure, for example convert a loft or garage into a bedroom or if you want to modify the exterior, such as putting in a new window or changing the existing ones. There are various exemptions to small works and temporary installations but you should find out from your Mairie if you qualify. You will need an architect if the living space exceeds 170 m².

You will need four copies of the building permit form, available from your Mairie. You must include a map drawn to scale showing the property's location and a three dimensional scale drawing showing 'before' and 'after' of each side of the building. You will need to provide photos too.

You can submit it personally or by registered post and it usually takes two months to process and is valid for two years.

Our Tip: Always, *always* pop into the local Mairie *before* you sign a Compromis (or before your seven days of reflection are up) if you want to do any major renovations to find out, in principal, if they will be allowed. You will find the staff willing to assist and advise as best they can. Alternatively, add in a 'clause suspensive' into the Compromis that states the sale will only complete on successfully obtaining the relevant planning permission.

A selection of Featured Properties



Delightful terraced character house with exposed stone walls, in a Languedoc hamlet
260 000€



Modern villa in a village in the greater Montpellier area, Languedoc Roussillon, with pool on 800m² of grounds
352 000€



Maison de Maître in Languedoc Roussillon Narbonne area, heart of village with courtyard
470 000€



Very charming character house from the 19th, 3 bedrooms, lovely garden with pool, quiet
485 000€



Pretty Languedoc style villa in Béziers area with panoramic view over countryside, pool
598 000€



Maison de Maître in centre village in Carcassonne area with pool, workshop, garage on 575m² of planted grounds
695 000€



Maison de Maître with outbuildings 350m² in Languedoc Roussillon, Béziers hinterland, pool on 3000m² of park
864 000€

Restaurant Review

Le Petit Montmartre

2, Place Madeleine, Béziers

Tel: 04 67 28 56 54



This small and friendly restaurant offers a set price menu with a choice of two courses for 18€ or three courses for 24€, with half a dozen or so choices for each course. The menu is changed seasonally and the desserts are to die for. They have a good cellar too and David, your charming host, will gladly select a wine for you if you are unfamiliar with those on his list. All very reasonably priced and a relaxing and enjoyable gourmet experience.

During the summer months the restaurant tends to spill out onto the square where you can eat under the stars nestling beside the lovely stone church. If you time your visit right, there are often buskers and musicians who will serenade you while you eat your delicious meal. Parking is easily available in the underground car part at the Place Madeleine.

New Golf course near Pezenas

For golf lovers, you will be pleased to hear that Languedoc-Rousillon currently has 14 major golf clubs with a magnificent new 18-hole golf course, designed by Raymond Hearn, in the pipeline.

Just outside the village of Montagnac, 10 mins from Pezenas, Chateau Lavagnac sits in 450 acres of vineyards, olive groves and pine trees. This will be developed into a luxury 4 star+ hotel and spa complex with a brand new conference centre. The golf clubhouse will be located in the 17th century bergerie nearby. New houses of between two and six bedrooms with pools will be built within the vineyards, offering views to the Espinouse Mountains and south to the Mediterranean Sea. Purchase of the new build homes will be on both a 'leaseback' and freehold basis, offering both flexibility and a guaranteed return on investment.

À Bientôt

We do hope you found this letter useful and thank you for taking the time to read it. Any comments or suggestions would be gratefully received so please feel free to call us on

+33 (0) 4 67 36 36 80

or by email on

ab@ab-real-estate.com

Finally, do not hesitate to contact us with your queries and we will be delighted to assist you in any way that we can.

With best wishes

Annelise Bosshard

Managing Director

AB Real Estate

www.ab-real-estate.com

