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GUIDE TO THE CHARENTE

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This practical guide gives you a great overview of the department of Charente. Giving you clear, no nonsense advice about what your new life in the Nouvelle Aquitaine region could look like.



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CHARENTE

NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE CHARENTE?

The Charente offers a relaxed, authentic slice of south-west France, combining rolling countryside, vineyards and historic market towns with a lower profile and often better value, than some of its more famous neighbours.

Known for producing Cognac and Pineau des Charentes, the region has a strong food and drink culture, while its gentle pace of life appeals to those looking to escape busier areas. With attractive stone properties, plenty of renovation opportunities and good access to travel routes via Angoulême, Cognac and nearby airports such as Bordeaux and Limoges, the Charente is particularly popular with expats seeking space, affordability and a more traditional French lifestyle without feeling too remote.



PROPERTY *in the charente...*

Property in the Charente offers excellent value and a wide variety of options, from traditional stone farmhouses and village houses to renovation projects and larger homes with land.



€60,000 - €100,000

You can find some really nice, small cottage type properties that could perfectly lend themselves to a lock-up-and-leave situation, as well as some well maintained homes for permanent living.



€100,000 - €300,000

For that little bit more money, the land that becomes available per property greatly increases. You can get some really nice, farmhouse type properties within this price range, with plenty of land and potential.



€300,000 - €500,000

A lot of rural properties in this region for this price range. Lots of glorious views, lots of space, and a lot of potential. These properties can vary a lot, so viewing a variety of properties is recommended.



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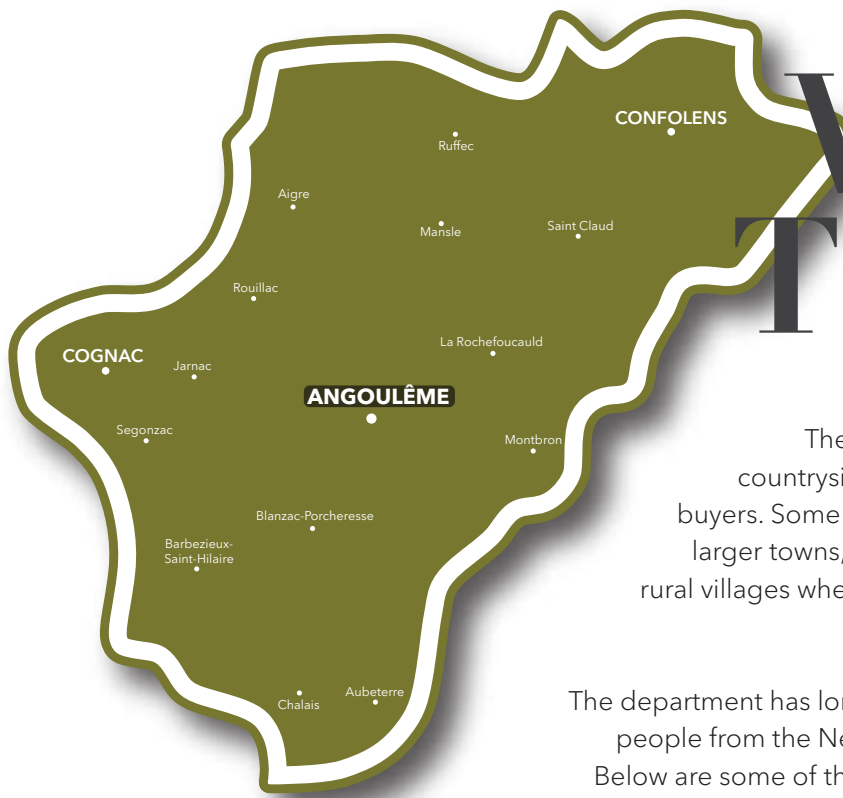
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WHERE TO LIVE

in the charente...

The Charente offers a diverse mix of towns, villages and countryside locations, making it appealing to a wide range of buyers. Some expats prefer the convenience and transport links of larger towns, while others are drawn to smaller market towns and rural villages where property is more affordable and the pace of life is slower.

The department has long been popular with British buyers, but also attracts people from the Netherlands, Belgium and increasingly North America. Below are some of the most popular areas where expats choose to settle.

Angoulême

Angoulême is the capital of the Charente and the largest town in the department, with a population of around 40,000. Perched on a hill overlooking the surrounding countryside, it's known for its historic old town and international comic book festival. It offers the best range of services in the department, including shopping centres, hospitals, schools and excellent transport links. The TGV station provides fast connections to Paris (around 2 hours) and Bordeaux, making it a popular choice for those who want accessibility alongside a manageable city lifestyle.

Cognac

Cognac is a picturesque riverside town with around 20,000 residents, world-famous for its namesake spirit. The town has a strong sense of history and elegance, with grand houses, distilleries and a lively centre filled with cafés and restaurants. It offers a good range of shops, markets and services, and has a more international feel due to its global brand connections. Many expats are drawn to the surrounding countryside and vineyards, where properties often offer space and views.

Jarnac

Jarnac is a smaller, charming town located between Angoulême and Cognac, with a population of around 4,500. Set along the Charente River, it offers a peaceful lifestyle with easy access to both larger towns. Known for its links to cognac production and its attractive riverside setting, Jarnac appeals to those looking for a quieter alternative while still having essential amenities close by.

Ruffec

Ruffec, in the north of the department, is a popular choice with expats due to its affordability and good transport links, particularly its train line connecting to Poitiers and Angoulême. With a population of around 3,500, it offers supermarkets, schools, healthcare and a weekly market, making it a practical base for everyday living. Property prices here tend to be lower than in the south of the department, attracting buyers looking for value.

Confolens and the Charente Limousine

The town of Confolens and the surrounding Charente Limousine area are popular with those seeking a more rural lifestyle. This part of the department is greener and less densely populated, with plenty of lakes, forests and countryside. Confolens itself is a small historic town with a strong community feel and hosts a well-known international folklore festival each summer. The area is particularly attractive for buyers looking for larger properties, land and renovation opportunities at competitive prices.

ANGOULÊME

Angoulême is the capital of the Charente and its largest town, with a population of around 40,000 people (and a wider urban area of over 100,000). Built on a hill overlooking the Charente River, it combines a historic old town with more modern districts, offering a good balance between character and practicality. Known as the “City of Comics” thanks to its famous international comic book festival, Angoulême has a lively cultural scene and feels like a proper working French town rather than a tourist hotspot.

What it’s like to live there

Living in Angoulême offers a mix of convenience and charm. The old town (the “Plateau”) is full of narrow streets, cafés, restaurants and independent shops, while areas outside the centre provide more modern housing, supermarkets and easy parking. The city has a year-round buzz thanks to its events, student population and local businesses, but it still feels manageable and relaxed compared to larger French cities. Many expats choose to live either within walking distance of the centre or in nearby towns and villages such as La Couronne, Ruelle-sur-Touvre and Gond-Pontouvre, which offer more space while remaining close to amenities.

Shops and everyday amenities

Angoulême has the widest range of shopping in the Charente. The city centre offers bakeries, butchers, cafés, boutiques, pharmacies and independent food shops, along with regular markets supplying fresh local produce. There are also several large retail parks and shopping centres on the outskirts, with supermarkets such as E.Leclerc, Carrefour and Intermarché, plus DIY stores, furniture shops, clothing outlets and cinemas. This makes it easy to manage both day-to-day shopping and larger purchases without leaving the area.

Transport and getting around

Transport is one of Angoulême’s biggest advantages. The city has a TGV train station with direct high-speed connections to Paris (around 2 hours) and Bordeaux, making it ideal for those who need to travel regularly. There is also a local bus network serving the city and surrounding suburbs, which is practical if you live in or near the centre. By road, Angoulême is well connected to major routes, making driving around the region straightforward. While a car is useful—especially if you live outside the city—it’s one of the few places in the Charente where you can realistically manage without one for daily life.

Why expats choose Angoulême

For many expats, Angoulême offers the most convenient and connected lifestyle in the Charente, combining strong infrastructure with a relaxed pace of life and easy access to the surrounding countryside.

COGNAC

Cognac is one of the most well-known towns in the Charente, with a population of around 20,000 people, and is internationally famous for producing the world-renowned spirit that shares its name. Set along the banks of the Charente River, the town has an elegant, historic feel, with grand townhouses, cobbled streets and impressive distilleries such as Hennessy, Rémy Martin and Martell. Despite its global reputation, Cognac remains a manageable and relaxed place to live, offering a good balance between character, convenience and lifestyle.

What it's like to live there

Life in Cognac is sociable and well-paced, with a strong café and restaurant culture centred around the old town and riverside. The town has a slightly more international feel than other parts of the Charente due to the global nature of the cognac industry, which attracts visitors and professionals from around the world. Many expats are drawn to the surrounding vineyards and countryside, where properties often offer space and views, while still being within easy reach of town amenities. Cognac remains active year-round, with markets, events and a steady local community, rather than being overly seasonal.

Shops and everyday amenities

Cognac is well equipped for daily living, with a good mix of independent shops and larger retailers. The town centre offers boulangeries, boucheries, cafés, wine shops, boutiques and pharmacies, along with a regular market where you can buy fresh local produce. On the outskirts of town, there are larger supermarkets such as E.Leclerc, Intermarché and Carrefour Market, as well as retail zones with DIY stores, furniture shops and other everyday services.

This makes it easy to balance traditional shopping with modern convenience.

Transport and getting around

Cognac has a train station with regional services connecting to Angoulême (for TGV links), Saintes and La Rochelle, making it relatively well connected for a town of its size. By road, it's well positioned within the Charente, with Angoulême around 45 minutes away and Bordeaux approximately 1.5 hours by car. The nearest major airports are in Bordeaux and Limoges, both within reasonable driving distance. There is a local bus network, but like most towns in the region, a car is recommended for everyday life, especially if you live in surrounding villages or vineyards.

Why expats choose Cognac

For many expats, Cognac offers a refined yet relaxed lifestyle, combining history, food and wine culture with practical amenities and strong connections to the wider region.

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ARIEGE €925,000
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JARNAC

Jarnac is a small, attractive town in the heart of the Charente, with a population of around 4,500 people, ideally located between Angoulême and Cognac. Set along the banks of the Charente River and surrounded by vineyards, it is closely linked to the cognac industry and is known as the birthplace of former French President François Mitterrand. Jarnac offers a peaceful, picturesque lifestyle while still being well connected to larger towns nearby.

What it's like to live there

Life in Jarnac is calm, friendly and community-focused, with a slower pace than nearby Cognac or Angoulême. The town centre has a traditional feel, with riverside walks, small cafés and local shops, making it ideal for those who enjoy a quieter lifestyle. Many expats are drawn to Jarnac for its balance of rural charm and accessibility, often choosing properties in the surrounding countryside where there is more space, while still being only a short drive from larger towns. The river and surrounding vineyards add to the overall sense of tranquillity.

Shops and everyday amenities

Jarnac provides the essentials for daily life, including boulangeries, boucheries, cafés, pharmacies and small local shops, as well as a weekly market offering fresh produce and regional specialities. While the town itself is relatively small, it is well supported by nearby larger centres. For more extensive shopping, supermarkets and retail parks, residents often travel to Cognac or Angoulême, both of which are within easy reach.

Transport and getting around

One of Jarnac's key advantages is its central location. The town has a train station with regular services connecting to Angoulême and Cognac, making it easy to access TGV connections or other regional routes. By road, both towns are within 20-30 minutes, and Bordeaux can be reached in around 1.5 hours. While there are some local transport options, a car is recommended for day-to-day living, particularly for those living in surrounding villages or vineyards.

Why expats choose Jarnac

For many expats, Jarnac offers a quiet and scenic base in the Charente, combining rural charm with convenient access to the region's main towns and services.

RUFFEC

Ruffec is a practical and affordable market town in the north of the Charente, with a population of around 3,500 people. It has long been popular with expats—particularly British buyers—thanks to its good transport links, lower property prices and strong sense of community. While it doesn't have the same historic grandeur as some towns further south, Ruffec makes up for it with convenience and everyday livability.

What it's like to live there

Life in Ruffec is straightforward and community-oriented, making it a good option for those looking for an easy transition into French life. The town has a mix of traditional French residents and an established expat population, which can make settling in a little easier for newcomers. It's less touristy than areas like Cognac, so it retains a more local, authentic feel.

Many expats choose to live either in the town itself or in the surrounding villages, where properties are often larger and more affordable.

Shops and everyday amenities

Ruffec is well equipped for day-to-day needs. The town centre includes boulangeries, boucheries, cafés, pharmacies, banks and small independent shops, along with a regular weekly market offering fresh produce and local goods. There are also several supermarkets in and around the town, including Super U and Intermarché, making grocery shopping easy.

For more extensive shopping, residents may occasionally travel to Angoulême or Poitiers, both within reasonable driving distance.

Transport and getting around

One of Ruffec's biggest advantages is its rail connectivity. The town has a train station on the main line between Poitiers and Angoulême, providing access to TGV connections for travel to Paris and beyond. By road, Ruffec is well positioned for exploring both the Charente and neighbouring departments, with Poitiers and Angoulême both around 45–60 minutes away.

While there are some local transport options, a car is still recommended for everyday life, particularly in rural areas.

Why expats choose Ruffec

For many expats, Ruffec offers a simple, affordable and well-connected base, ideal for those who prioritise practicality and value while still enjoying the charm of rural French life.

CONFOLENS

Confolens is a charming historic town in the north-east of the Charente, with a population of around 2,500–3,000 people, set at the meeting point of the Vienne and Goire rivers. Known for its medieval architecture, stone bridges and scenic riverside setting, Confolens offers a peaceful, rural lifestyle and is at the heart of the Charente Limousine, one of the greenest and least densely populated parts of the department.

What it's like to live there

Life in Confolens is quiet, traditional and community-focused, with a strong sense of local identity. The town has a picturesque historic centre with narrow streets, old houses and riverside walks, creating a very classic French atmosphere. It's much less busy than towns further south, which appeals to those looking for a slower pace of life. One of the highlights of the year is the international folklore festival, which brings music, culture and visitors from around the world, adding a lively contrast to the otherwise calm rhythm of daily life. Many expats choose the surrounding countryside for larger properties and more space.

Shops and everyday amenities

Although small, Confolens has a good range of essential services. The town centre includes boulangeries, boucheries, cafés, pharmacies, banks and small independent shops, along with a weekly market where you can buy fresh produce and local goods. There are also a couple of supermarkets, including Intermarché and Super U, making it possible to cover most day-to-day needs locally. For a wider range of shopping and services, residents typically travel to Saint-Junien or Limoges.

Transport and getting around

Confolens is more rural and less connected by public transport than other towns in the Charente, so a car is essential for daily life. The nearest larger town is Saint-Junien (around 30 minutes away), while Limoges is approximately 45–50 minutes by car, providing access to major shopping centres, hospitals and Limoges International Airport. There is no train station in Confolens itself, so rail travel usually involves driving to nearby towns such as Saint-Junien or Limoges.

Why expats choose Confolens

For many expats, Confolens offers a truly rural French lifestyle, ideal for those looking for tranquillity, character and space, while still being within reach of larger towns for services and travel.

MARKETS & SHOPPING

in the charente...

Everyday Shopping

Even smaller towns in the Charente typically have essential shops such as boulangeries (bakeries), boucheries (butchers), pharmacies, cafés and small grocery stores. Larger towns like Angoulême and Cognac offer a wider range of shops, including clothing stores, banks, opticians and specialist food shops, making day-to-day living straightforward.

Supermarkets and Retail Parks

For larger shops, residents rely on supermarkets such as E.Leclerc, Carrefour, Intermarché, Super U and Lidl, which are found in and around the main towns. Angoulême and Cognac have the biggest retail parks and shopping zones, with DIY stores, furniture shops, electronics retailers and garden centres, allowing you to cover all household needs in one trip.

Opening Hours

In line with traditional French habits, many smaller independent shops in the Charente close for a long lunch break (typically 12:00-14:00) and may shut on Sunday afternoons or all day Sunday. Supermarkets generally stay open throughout the day and often on Sunday mornings, offering more flexibility for weekly shopping.

Overall, shopping in the Charente combines the charm of local markets and independent shops with the practicality of modern supermarkets, making it easy to enjoy both traditional French food culture and everyday convenience.

Major Weekly Markets

Markets are held across the department, from small village gatherings to larger, bustling town markets.

- **Angoulême** - Les Halles Market & outdoor markets: A key food hub with fresh produce, meat, fish, cheese and regional products, alongside regular outdoor markets during the week.
- **Cognac** - Tuesday, Friday & Saturday Markets: Popular markets with a wide variety of local produce, food stalls and household goods.
- **Jarnac** - Tuesday Market: A smaller, traditional market serving locals with fresh produce and regional specialities.
- **Ruffec** - Wednesday Market: A lively market offering a mix of food, clothing and everyday items.
- **Confolens** - Saturday Market: A friendly local market with a strong community feel and fresh seasonal produce.

MARKET CULTURE

Markets in the Charente are an important part of everyday life, not just for shopping but for socialising. Locals often meet for coffee before or after visiting the stalls, and many prefer to buy directly from producers. Most markets run from early morning until around midday, with the best selection available earlier in the day. Seasonal produce plays a big role, with offerings changing throughout the year.

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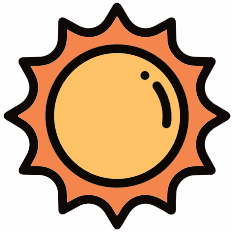
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WEATHER & CLIMATE *in the charente...*



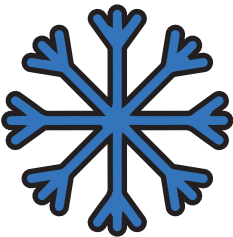
Summer (June-August)

Summers in the Charente are typically warm and sunny, with temperatures usually ranging between 22-30°C, and occasional hotter spells during heatwaves. This is when the region really comes to life, with bustling markets, outdoor dining, festivals and long evenings. The Charente River and surrounding countryside are popular for kayaking, walking and relaxing outdoors.



Autumn (September-October)

Autumn is a particularly pleasant time in the Charente, with warm early autumn days gradually cooling to around 15-22°C. The vineyards and countryside take on rich autumn colours, and harvest season brings local produce to markets and restaurants. Tourist numbers begin to drop, giving towns a quieter, more local feel.



Winter (November-February)

Winters in the Charente are generally mild compared to northern Europe, with temperatures typically between 3-10°C. Frosts can occur, but snow is rare and usually short-lived. The region becomes quieter, especially in smaller towns, but larger towns like Angoulême and Cognac remain active. It's a great time for peaceful living, cultural activities and experiencing authentic local life without crowds.



Spring (March-May)

Spring sees the Charente come back to life, with blossoming trees, green landscapes and gradually warming temperatures, usually between 10-20°C. Markets become busier, cafés reopen terraces and villages feel more lively as the season progresses. The weather can be changeable, with a mix of sunshine and showers, but it's one of the most beautiful times of year.

TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

in the charente...



Airports

There is no major international airport within the Charente itself, but several are within easy reach. The closest options are Limoges International Airport (around 1-1.5 hours from much of the department) and Bergerac Airport (roughly 1.5-2 hours), both offering flights to the UK and other European destinations. For a wider range of international routes, Bordeaux Airport is the main hub, typically around 1.5-2 hours by car, with connections across Europe and long-haul destinations.

Rail Connections

One of the Charente's biggest advantages is its high-speed rail access. Angoulême is on the TGV line, providing direct services to Paris (around 2 hours) and regular connections to Bordeaux and beyond. Other towns such as Cognac and Ruffec have regional train stations linking to Angoulême or neighbouring cities, making it relatively easy to connect to the wider French rail network.

Road Network

The Charente is well connected by road, with the N10 dual carriageway running north-south through the department, linking Poitiers to Bordeaux. This makes driving between major cities and regions straightforward. Smaller towns and villages are connected by well-maintained local roads, although journeys can take longer due to the rural nature of the area.

Local Transport

Public transport within towns such as Angoulême includes a local bus network, which is useful if you live in or near the centre. However, services in smaller towns and rural areas are limited, and timetables can be infrequent. For this reason, most residents—especially expats living outside main towns—find that owning a car is essential for shopping, appointments and exploring the region.

TRAVEL IN & AROUND...

The Charente is well positioned for both domestic and international travel, with good rail connections, nearby airports and a solid road network. While it retains a rural feel in many areas, getting around and travelling further afield is relatively straightforward—especially from the main towns. As with much of the French countryside, a car is recommended for everyday life, particularly if you plan to live in villages or more rural locations.

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LIFESTYLE & CULTURE

in the charente...

Life in the Charente is relaxed, traditional and centred around food, community and the surrounding countryside. Compared to more tourist-heavy regions, it offers a more authentic slice of French life, where daily routines are shaped by local markets, seasonal produce and a strong sense of community.

With its vineyards, rivers and historic towns, the Charente provides a lifestyle that is both sociable and outdoors-focused, making it particularly appealing to expats looking to slow the pace and enjoy a better quality of life.

Outdoor Activities

The Charente's landscape of rolling countryside, vineyards and rivers makes it ideal for outdoor living. The Charente River is central to many activities, including kayaking, paddleboarding and riverside walks.

The region also offers excellent opportunities for cycling, hiking and exploring quiet rural roads, as well as fishing and nature-based activities. Its relatively gentle terrain makes it accessible for all ages and fitness levels.

Community & Expat Life

The Charente has a well-established expat community, particularly among British buyers, along with residents from the Netherlands, Belgium and increasingly North America.

Many expats are drawn to the region for its affordability and lifestyle, and there are plenty of social groups, clubs, language exchanges and community events that help newcomers settle in. While learning French is important for day-to-day life, most people find the local communities welcoming, making it easier to integrate and build a social network.

Food & Drink

The Charente has a rich food and drink culture, most famously known for producing Cognac and Pineau des Charentes, which are enjoyed locally and exported worldwide. The region also offers excellent local produce, including fresh vegetables, cheeses, meats and seafood from the nearby Atlantic coast.

Daily life often revolves around visits to boulangeries, boucheries and weekly markets, where fresh ingredients are a staple. Café culture is an important part of life too, with locals gathering for coffee, long lunches or evening apéritifs, while restaurants range from simple bistros to more refined dining experiences.

Festivals & Events

The Charente hosts a wide variety of festivals and events throughout the year, helping to create a lively and sociable atmosphere.

Angoulême's International Comic Book Festival is one of the largest of its kind in the world, attracting visitors globally, while Confolens' International Folklore Festival brings music and culture to the region each summer.

Many towns and villages also hold night markets, food festivals and local fairs, particularly during the warmer months, offering opportunities to eat, drink and socialise with locals.

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PRACTICAL LIVING *in the charente...*

Healthcare & Services

Healthcare in the Charente is generally good, with a range of services available across the department. The main medical hub is Angoulême, which has a large hospital offering emergency care and specialist services, while towns such as Cognac and Ruffec also have hospitals, clinics and healthcare centres. Most towns and larger villages have access to local doctors (médecins), pharmacies and dentists, making everyday healthcare relatively easy to access. As with many rural areas in France, waiting times for certain specialists can vary, but overall the standard of care is high and costs are typically lower than in the UK, US or Canada once you are part of the French healthcare system.

Education

Education in the Charente follows the French national system, with public primary and secondary schools available in most towns and larger villages. Many expat families choose local French schools, which are well regarded and provide a strong foundation for integration and language development. Angoulême also offers further education options and colleges. Dedicated international schools are limited within the department, so some families opt for private bilingual schools, homeschooling or online international programmes, depending on their needs and the age of their children.

Cost of Living

The cost of living in the Charente is generally lower than in many parts of France, particularly when compared to larger cities or more tourist-driven regions. Property prices are often more affordable than neighbouring areas like the Dordogne, making it attractive for buyers looking for space or renovation opportunities. Day-to-day costs such as groceries, dining out and utilities are usually reasonable, especially if you shop locally and make use of markets. However, prices can vary depending on location, with towns like Cognac and Angoulême typically being slightly more expensive than rural areas.

Language

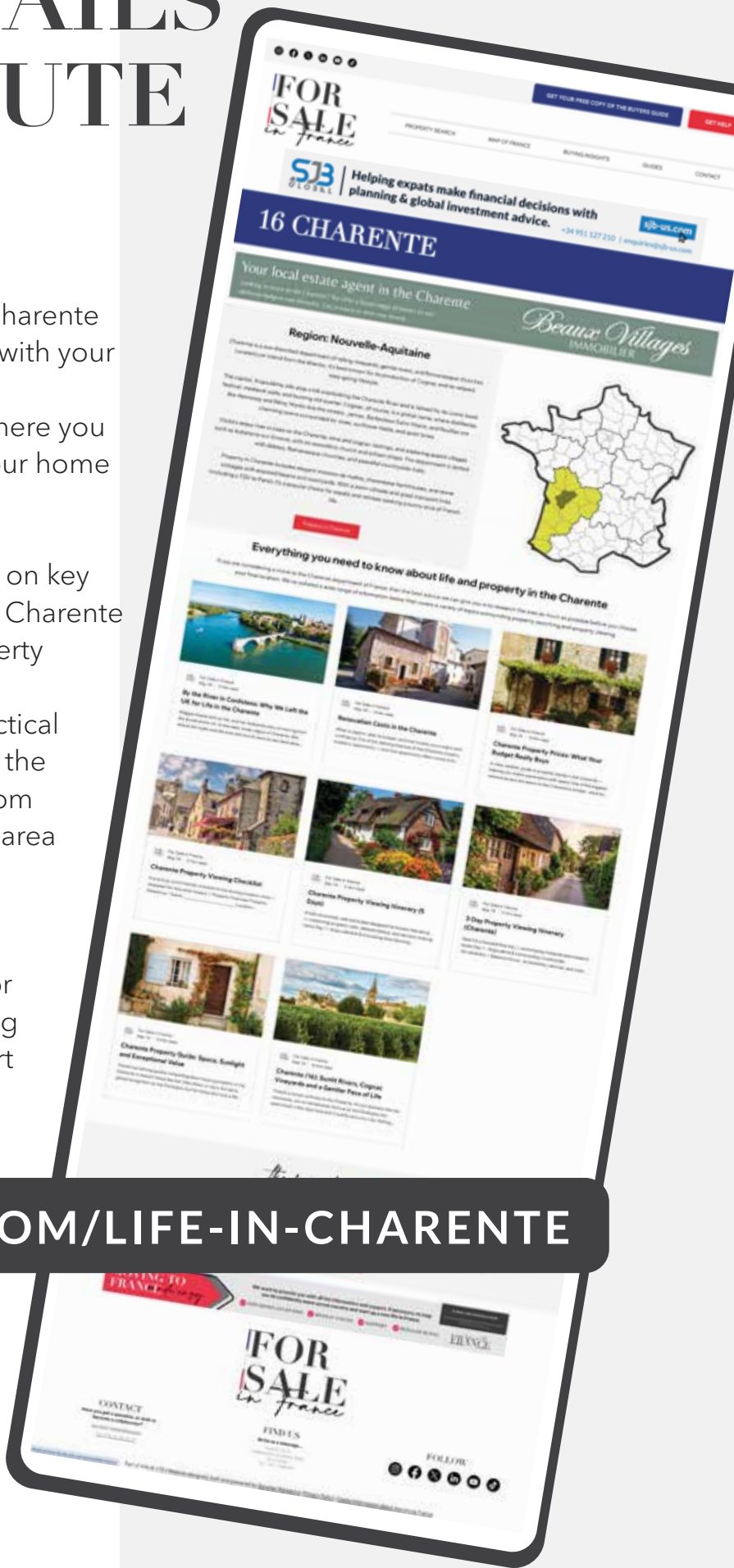
French is essential for everyday life in the Charente, particularly when dealing with administration, healthcare and local services. While you may find some English spoken in expat communities or tourist areas, most day-to-day interactions take place in French. Even a basic level of the language can make a big difference when settling in, helping with everything from shopping to building relationships with neighbours. Many towns offer French classes, informal conversation groups and language exchanges, which can be a great way to improve your skills while becoming part of the local community.

MORE DETAILS ABOUT HAUTE VIENNE

For a further dive into property in the Charente department and personalised support with your move, head over to forsaleinfrance.com/life-in-charente where you can explore current listings and start your home search right away.

There you'll also find tailored guidance on key topics like running costs of living in the Charente department, renovation budgets, property finding options, what your budget can realistically buy in different areas, a practical property checklist to help you navigate the process with confidence, and stories from those who have made the move to the area for a real first person account.

Whether you're looking for detailed living-cost insights, renovation advice or hands-on help with viewings and buying logistics, the team is on hand to support you at every step.



[FORSALEINFRANCE.COM/LIFE-IN-CHARENTE](https://forsaleinfrance.com/life-in-charente)



YOUR GUIDE TO THE CHARENTE

