

Alex Charles lives near quiet Hérault, Languedoc

**'I have a simple, healthy and relaxed lifestyle'**

### Southern France

IT TAKES six-and-a-quarter hours from London by Eurostar to reach Nimes in the Languedoc. Local property prices peak in elegant Montpellier, says Roddy Aris of Winkworth, while Narbonne and Béziers are up to 30 per cent cheaper.

For buyers such as Alex Charles, who left London in 2003 to buy a stone village house near Hérault, the area has all the charm of Provence but is more affordable and less crowded. "It's like England 40 years ago," says Charles. "I have a simple, healthy and relaxed lifestyle focusing on good, local food and wine, mixing with neighbours in the village and having time to enjoy life."

On the Provençal border close to beautiful Uzès and the Pont du Gard, Chesterton International is selling 19 new-build stone villas at Le Hameau du Temple. The villas have three or four bedrooms with gardens, pools and garages and cost from £442,655, well below similar property over on the Côte d'Azur.

Or further west, 22 miles from Carcassonne airport and beside the tree-lined Canal du Midi, Château de la Redorte is a restored property with 38 one- and two-bedroom apartments in two new wings and a restaurant, bar, children's club, spa and pool. The fully furnished leaseback apartments will cost from about £203,600 to £277,800 for 560sq ft to 750sq ft.

# Track down a new life



Find your French holiday home via an eco-friendly Eurostar journey through the countryside, says **Cathy Hawker**

**E**UROSTAR, the high-speed train link between London and mainland Europe, has this year quietly benefited while air travellers have been suffering strict security procedures, problematic new terminals and lost luggage. More than 4.83 million travellers used the service in the first six months of 2008, that is an increase of an impressive 18.3 per cent on last year.

The train is certainly a civilised option and a greener one too — all Eurostar journeys are carbon neutral at no extra charge to passengers. And thanks to Eurostar's glistening new home at St Pancras, and its much talked about lengthy champagne bar, international rail travel is glamorous once more.

### Pas de Calais

Closer than Cornwall, the Pas de Calais is the nearest French region to London — 55 minutes by Eurostar — with a very earthy French character and all the ingredients of rural French life without the hot sun. "Not



Historic Béziers in southern France is only six miles from the Mediterranean on the Canal du Midi

fewer flower boxes on its front windows and has darker grey stone cottages but its charm

church. "The average price for a three bedroom home in Burgundy is about £141,000

close to a village, spending about £221,000."

Venturus has a four-bedroom house and garden for sale, 10 minutes from Châtillon-en-Bazois at about £214,000, and a three-bedroom cottage close to Dijon for about £210,000.

### Contacts

**Eurostar:** 0870 518 6186; [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)

**Château de la Redorte:** Premier Resorts (0800 520 0614; [www.premierchateau.co.uk](http://www.premierchateau.co.uk))

**Le Hameau du Temple:** Chesterton International (020 7201 2070; [www.chesterton.co.uk](http://www.chesterton.co.uk))

**French agents:**

**VEF:** 020 7515 8660; [www.vefuk.com](http://www.vefuk.com)

**Latitudes:** 020 8951 5155; [www.latitudes.co.uk](http://www.latitudes.co.uk)

**Winkworth:** 020 8576 5582; [www.winkworth.fr](http://www.winkworth.fr)

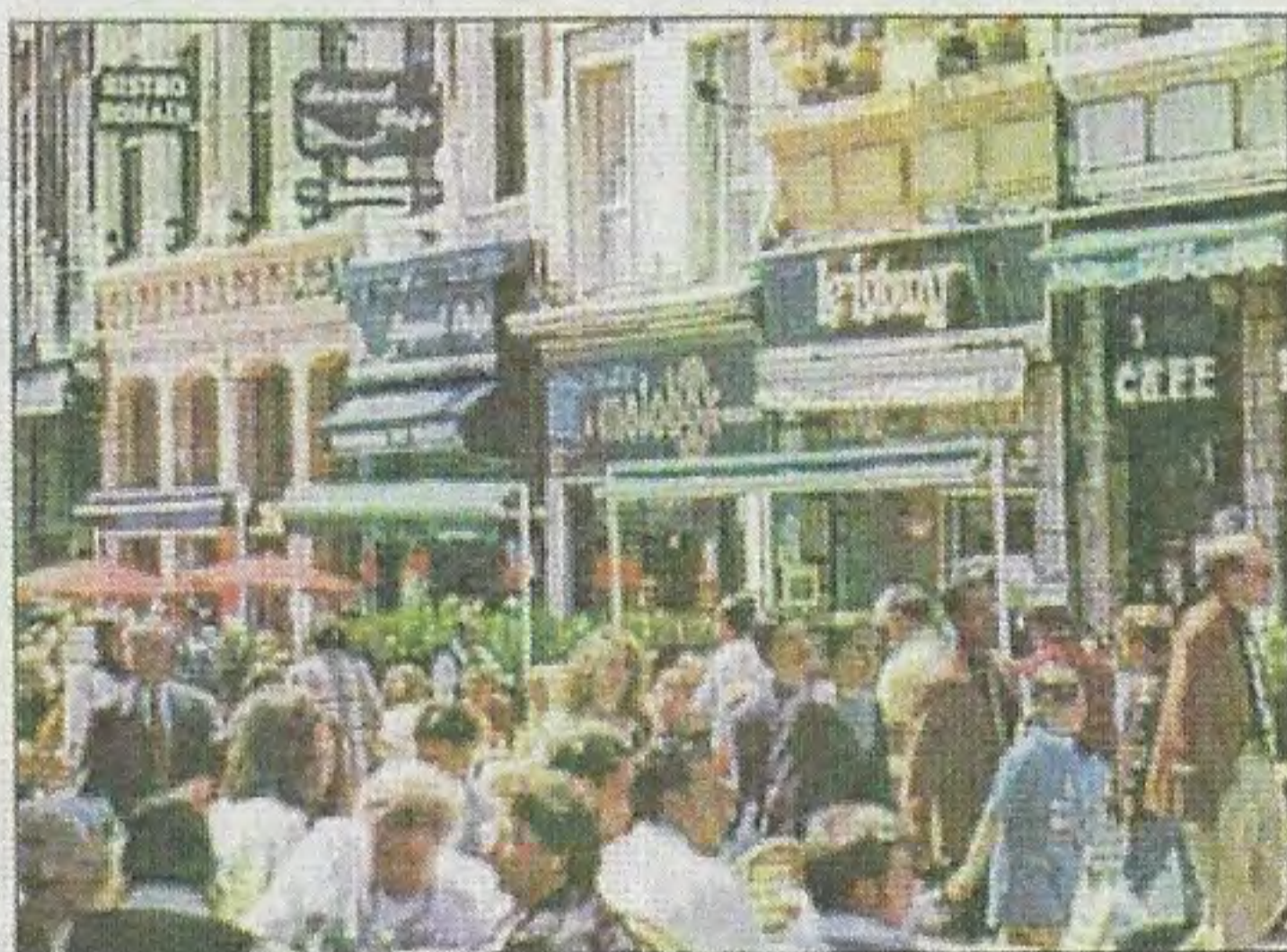
**Venturus:** 020 7517 0585; [www.be-venturus.com](http://www.be-venturus.com)

For more on travelling by train in Europe see page 29

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Fortified Carcassonne in south-west France is a World Heritage Site



Vieux Lille hosts Europe's largest annual flea market

In upmarket, elegant Le Touquet, with its art galleries and restaurants, and surrounding forest, expect to pay £200,000 to £300,000 for a three-bedroom house but look at typically French villages near Hesdin and Frevent and prices tumble, with cottages from £100,000.

Agent VEF has a selection of renovated three-bedroom cottages close to St Omer priced from less than £200,000. "Pas de Calais is an interesting area,"

says Trisha Mason of VEF. "It's close to the UK but wonderfully rural with attractive waterways and wetlands to explore. It has

### Lille and Europe's largest flea market

EIGHTY minutes by train from St Pancras, the Flemish façades of medieval Vieux Lille provide the backdrop for Europe's largest annual flea market, La Braderie. Held on the first weekend in September (this year it is the 6th and 7th), it dates from medieval times and today attracts more than a million visitors.

The market covers an astonishing 120 miles of pavement, with stalls selling antiques, furniture, clothes and bric-a-brac. There is street

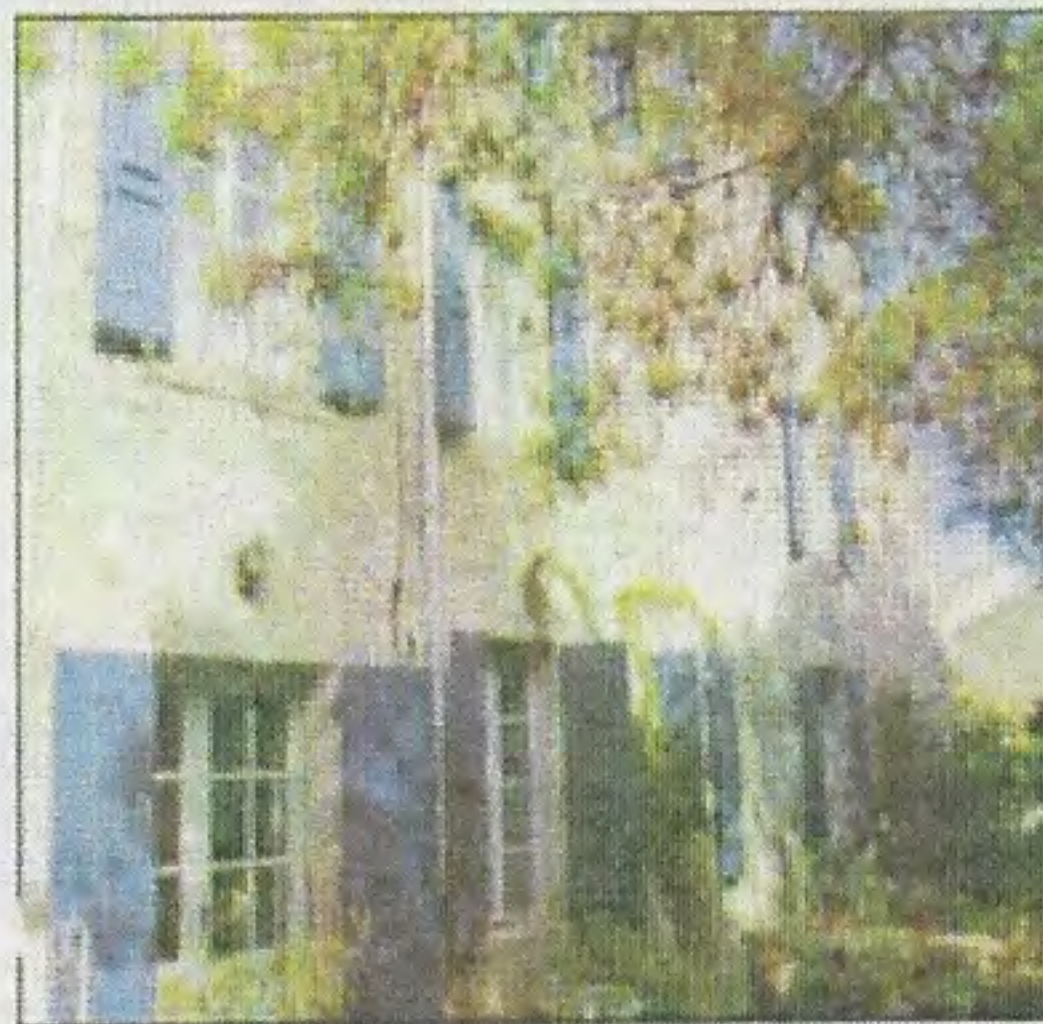
entertainment, food stalls and an interesting competition among restaurants to see who can claim the highest pile of moules shells at the end of the weekend.

Lille is France's fourth-largest city and has art galleries, museums and good shopping. There is high fashion from Hermès to Louis Vuitton, department stores and plenty of treasure troves around Rue Esquermoise and Place Rihour to stock up on one-off treats.

### WHAT'S ON OFFER



From about £200,000 to about £280,000: Château de la Redorte in Languedoc is being restored to provide 38 one- and two-bedroom flats in two new wings. Call 0871 218 2103. (All priced in Euros)



About £395,000: between Narbonne and Carcassonne, a five-bedroom 18th century stone house with small pool and garden. Call Winkworth on 020 8576 5582



About £200,000: 30 minutes from Calais is this 17th century three-bedroom cottage near St Omer. For more information, call VEF on 020 7515 8660