

European prime property

Homebuyers love the quiet charm of Cannes beyond the Croisette

Crowds throng the French city for the film festival but outside events season, it offers serenity and stable prices



The five-star Carlton hotel was a favourite of Elizabeth Taylor © Plam Petrov/Shutterstock

Zoe Dare Hall MARCH 7 2024

Springtime in Cannes for many people means one thing: the 12 days in May when the Hollywood stars align to bring glamour to the Croisette, as they have been for nearly 80 years.

“The film festival is enchanting. It’s an annual pilgrimage,” says Bruno Toussaint, a Paris-based film producer who, during the event, rents a studio flat a 45-minute walk — “uphill”, he stresses — from the waterfront Palais des Festivals et des Congrès, the venue for the film festival and other events during the year.

Located halfway between St Tropez and Monaco, the Riviera town of just 75,000 permanent residents attracts some 3mn visitors a year, and was voted the “world’s best destination for events” in the World Travel Awards for the past two years running. That adds up to a property market dominated by investors seeking to capitalise on high rental returns during conferences and festivals.

“Corporate clients are creatures of habit who rent the same apartments year after year,” says Adrien Willing-Lamy at Beauchamp Cannes estate agency. He cites one regular visitor to the Lions Festival of Creativity in June, for marketing professionals, who spends more than €200,000 renting two penthouses next to the Palais for the week: “At that price, this is about more than accommodation. It’s strategic on both sides — it has become part of the branding for the company that owns it, and the person who rents it invites his best clients to meetings there.”

Since the pandemic, estate agents have seen increasing demand from buyers “who want to live in Cannes permanently, for retirement or to bring up their families here and work at a distance,” says Harald Starke, founder of Riviera Keys.



The old port of Cannes © Marco Rubino Photography/Alamy

At the prime end of the local market, according to Willing-Lamy, €2mn-€5mn is considered the lower range and €15mn “mid-range”. “Local notaries tell me they have seen a drop in business by 30 to 40 per cent, but that’s in the mainstream market,” he says. “We deal mainly with cash buyers who aren’t affected by interest rate rises.”

Prices of apartments and villas in the prime market (€1m-plus) average around €20,000 per sq m, Willing-Lamy adds. At the highest end, a duplex penthouse on the Croisette with a private pool fetched €55,000 per sq m in 2019, says Sylvain Boichut at Savills Cannes. Apartments at Le Relais de la Reine, an Art Deco-style, 1990s building on the Croisette currently undergoing full refurbishment, are being marketed at around €40,000 per sq m.

But this league, which caters mainly to high-rolling events renters, skews the broader picture which shows average prices based on secondhand transactions in the past 12 months, of €5,460 per sq m for apartments and €5,740 per sq m for houses, according to Notaires de France.

“There are still affordable options for those who don’t require a fancy address,” says Michele Dropp, a Cordon Bleu-trained chef from California, who moved to Cannes with her husband Tony, a retired US naval officer, in 2015. The couple bought their 1920s, stone-built house in Petit Juas, an area north-west of the town centre, for €400,000 — they estimate its current worth at €500,000, after about €60,000 spent on improvements.

“We accept with pleasure that the festivals are part of living here, but we are in the fortunate position to be able to immerse ourselves in the buzz, then walk 10 minutes back to our quarter and never know all that was going on down on the Croisette,” says Dropp, who particularly enjoys their “100 per cent walkable lifestyle” in Cannes. “Every quartier has a different personality and dynamic.”

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Michele Dropp, a chef who relocated to Cannes from California

investors, he says.

The lack of drama in Cannes’ property market is part of its appeal for buyers, says Alice Watson-Smith, managing director at Fine & Country’s French Riviera office. “It’s a stable market that doesn’t see big peaks or troughs.”

It is not a property market without intrigue, however. Villa Bagatelle, a French-owned 3,000 sq m house on a one-hectare plot in super-prime La Californie, near the waterfront, Palais des Festivals and port, has gone under offer for an undisclosed asking price that agents say is close to €100mn. One agent describes it as “the most important gossip here at the moment”.

The town is also seeing substantial investment — including more than €1bn by hotel groups — “to compete with Monaco or St Tropez for accommodation and dining”, says Alexandre Goldstein, an associate at Magrey & Sons estate agency.

The old port is being expanded and three five-star hotels have been renovated, including the Carlton Cannes, once a favourite of Elizabeth Taylor’s, and the Martinez, which dates back to the late 1920s and is now part of the Hyatt group. This summer’s big event will be the reopening of Palm Beach, a former 1920s casino, after a €200mn redevelopment, as an entertainment and dining venue that will include France’s first Zuma restaurant.

Locals, however, prize the lulls in action too. “Cannes has two distinct faces — the serene winters where locals reign supreme, and then from late January to late October, the city is a hive of activity and the luxury lifestyle takes centre stage,” says Marisa Schwendemann, 31, yacht partnership manager for the Lions festival.

When it comes to higher-end homes across the Côte d’Azur, prices experienced zero growth in the year to June 2023, according to Savills’ Prime Residential Index. “It has been a tricky period,” says Willing-Lamy, who adds that the supply of villas priced around €5mn and above was exhausted during the pandemic. Given that buyers of properties in that range tend to be less keen on renovation projects, the “turnkey” homes that come on to the prime market are often those that have already been redeveloped by foreign private

Watson-Smith agrees that Cannes' lesser-known village-like charm is what attracts buyers who are relocating to the town. "It's a celebrity hotspot during the conference season, but it's the polar opposite out of season," she says. "In Palm Beach, which has sandy beaches on both sides, there is a real village feel with local restaurants and shops, a boules pitch in the middle and the baker knows you by name. It really is the old France."

At a glance

- Of all the homes in Cannes, 51.3 per cent are main residences and 46.6 per cent are second homes, according to Cannes Tourist Information. Across the French Riviera, 70 per cent of buyers in the prime sector are non-resident (Knight Frank Research).
- Prices in Cannes' luxury market fell by 7 per cent in 2023. Average prime prices are €21,000 per sq m (Q2 2023, Knight Frank Research).
- Buyers pay a transfer tax of 5.09-5.81 per cent of the sale price, depending on property type and location. Notary fees are typically 0.8-3.8 per cent.

On the market



Villa, La Croix des Gardes, €7.5mn

A six-bedroom, five-bathroom, 500 sq m villa with an infinity pool, multiple terraces and panoramic sea views ([Beauchamp Estates](#)).



Villa, La Californie, €8.9mn

A 300 sq m villa near the Croisette and beaches, with five en-suite bedrooms, a pool and landscaped gardens with palm trees ([Fine & Country](#)).

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