

# CUMBRIA OR CHARENTE?



If you've enjoyed C4's *A Place in the Sun: Home or Away*, you're in for a treat. In this new feature, we show a couple what's available in the UK and abroad and see which they prefer. This month, Sabine and Mark are in search of a rural idyll. But should they head for the hills of Cumbria or the Charente region of France?

Words by Sharon Davies, pictures by Pictures Colour Library

Sabine and Mark bought their house in Frome, Somerset, a year ago for £123,000 and currently have an offer on it of £145,000. The couple would be happy to buy a property in the UK for up to £140,000 but are prepared to increase this if a really desirable property becomes available. In France they would rather spend up to €120,000 (about 174,000€) leaving extra funds available for any renovations, moving fees, taxes and generally settling into a foreign country.

Sabine works part-time as a social worker and Mark is a self-employed plasterer. Their three-year-old daughter, Maya, is due to start nursery soon. Sabine is keen for her to attend either a Steiner or Montessori nursery if they buy a property in the UK, or a local nursery if they move to the Charente region in France.

The couple's property criteria is a three-bedroom house, with a garden, garage and possibly an outbuilding to use as a workshop. Sabine would like to do some counselling from home and so would like a property that could accommodate this. A peaceful rural or village location is a major priority for them.

**S**abine and her partner Mark have never felt settled in their three-bedroom modern semi in Frome. Not the kind of people to sit still and make do, the couple have decided to embark on an exciting new journey of relocation.

Although they are undecided whether they want to relocate within the UK or move abroad, they have come up with two specific locations that they would consider moving to – the Charente in France and Cumbria in the UK.

Sabine and Mark are looking for a three-bedroom house with a bit of character in a village or country location where they can grow their own vegetables and enjoy a better quality of life.

Sabine wants to be able to stand in her garden, breathe in fresh air and be able to see the stars at night. She feels her house in Frome is just too modern and too cramped, and the area they live in feels very towny and at times unsafe.

Sabine has visited France several times and really likes the people and the landscape. She was attracted to the Charente after extensive research on the Internet. She explains: "It's a very hilly area, with lots of rivers and lakes. We'd love to be by the water. The Charente appears to be very peaceful and beautiful, with good weather and,

apparently, the most relaxed people in France. It must be all that cheese and wine! It sounds just like our kind of place."

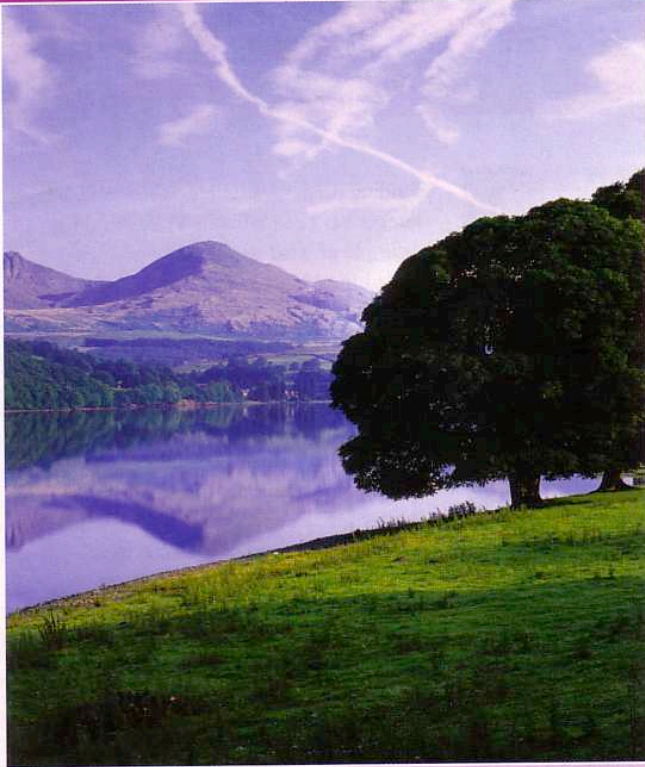
The Charente is easily reached from the UK. You can fly to Poitiers with Ryanair, and it's an easy drive from the Channel ports, too. And of course there's the attraction of the property prices, which are still very attractive in this part of France.

Originally from Germany, Sabine fully understands the implications of moving abroad and learning a language. "You are always the foreigner and it takes several years to learn to speak a language fluently." But she relishes the challenge, and the fact that "You can get so much more for your money in the Charente." Sabine also likes the fact that the education system in France is very similar to that of Germany.

In contrast, the couple are also attracted to Cumbria. Mark grew up in the area and had a wonderful childhood exploring the delights of the Lake District. They would love Maya to have that freedom and be able to enjoy a country childhood.

Sabine explains. "Having some familiarity with a place would help us settle. Although the weather may not be as good as in the Charente, the countryside and location are simply breathtaking." Cumbria also has good transport links for Mark and Sabine's work, and for visiting friends and family.

## A PLACE IN THE UK



The gentle slopes of the Lake District's Coniston Water. The area has long been an inspiration for artists and poets, but will it inspire our property-hunters to stay put on British soil?

Sabine and Mark realise that their budget of £140,000 is rather small for buying a country retreat in Cumbria and are prepared to increase this if necessary. Very much a sought-after area, Cumbria is on the doorstep of the Lake District with its rugged countryside, steep mountains and beautiful lakes. Property prices reflect this popularity. However, places near the coast such as Grange-over-Sands and Millom are only just beginning to pick up and offer more chance of finding a property bargain. Whilst the property market in the south is threatening to slow down, property prices are continuing to rise further north. If Sabine and Mark buy quickly, they could be making a very good investment.

So why move to Cumbria? Well, it has the knack of inspiring people. Could it be its beautiful coastline, or Lake District National Park? Famous artist John Constable thought the Lake District had "the finest scenery there ever was", while William Wordsworth declared that it was "the loveliest spot that man has ever known".

It's certainly one of the most picturesque areas of the UK. The Lake District includes England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike, and its deepest lake, Wast Water, and its longest, Lake Windermere. Whether you're a budding hill walker, a serious mountaineer or even a fell runner, the mountains offer a wealth of places to climb and explore. Then there are the lakes – ideal if you love fishing or sailing. For lovers of the great outdoors, Cumbria is certainly a place worth considering, particularly if you can work from home or have a skill which is in demand locally.

## A PLACE ABROAD

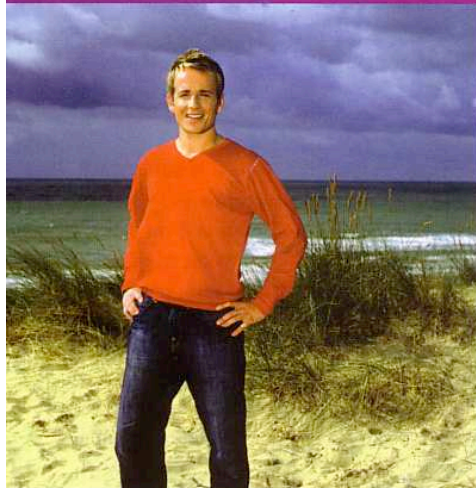
Sabine and Mark are very keen on the Charente in France. Located in the south-west of the country it is one of France's sunniest regions. With rolling hills, meandering rivers and pretty medieval villages, the region is a charming place to live. Often compared with the Dordogne, the Charente is becoming popular among overseas buyers. It remains less developed and less expensive than the Dordogne but has the potential to become one of France's property hotspots.

The region is overflowing with historical buildings, pretty villages and châteaux. Otherwise known as the Poitou-Charentes, it includes the Charentes-Maritime, the Charente, the Vienne and the Deux-Sevres départements. The Charentes-Maritime is on the south-west coast between the Atlantic beaches of La Rochelle in the north and Gironde in the south. Miles of sandy beaches offer clear waters, while La Rochelle is a mecca for yachting. It also has plenty of restaurants, bars, shops and pavement cafes.

The Charente and the Vienne are what rural France is all about. Full of vineyards, fields of sunflowers, picturesque villages and winding country lanes, it's like taking a step back in time. Cognac is a place to enjoy fine provincial shopping, and an endless supply of cafés and restaurants. Angoulême is a charming historical town, but has a thriving commercial sector and a TGV connection to Paris. Deux-Sevres is at the northern end of Poitou-Charentes. Away from the larger centres of Niort, Parthenay and Melle, it is a quiet, sleepy area. Largely agricultural, it is famed for its goat's cheeses and is home to Marais Pitevin, a low-lying area with a network of canals.



The Charente region is what rural France is all about: peaceful waterways, lush vegetation and a slow pace of life. But would the different culture and the search for work be too much of a challenge for Mark and Sabine?



Donnie Irwin is the UK-based half of the *Home or Away* property-finding team. He's an experienced surveyor and property agent, and gets a kick out helping people discover parts of the UK that are nicer than they realised. He also loves meeting people. "I learn their life story," he says, "and in exchange I give them some of my expertise."

### TIPS FOR MOVING TO CUMBRIA

- Relocating is a huge step. Make sure you can find suitable schools, local amenities, etc before moving.
- Cumbria is certainly not overflowing with job opportunities, so make sure your skills are transferable, or investigate working from home.
- If you're moving somewhere very rural, be honest about what's right for you. Will you feel isolated? Is it the kind of place you could imagine yourself walking around every day?
- Don't just visit in the summer. The Lake District gets very wet in winter...
- Don't skimp on surveys. Older properties will always merit a full structural survey.
- Make a wish list of what you want from a property and prioritise them, ie proximity to towns, schools, access to countryside, number of bedrooms.

### THINKING OF MAKING A MOVE?

Are you weighing up the pros and cons of relocating within the UK versus moving abroad? Send details of your dilemma to the address on page 7 or e-mail [ptsmag@brooklandsgroup.com](mailto:ptsmag@brooklandsgroup.com) and let *A Place in the Sun* magazine help you decide.

## A PLACE IN THE UK

### VICTORIAN FARMHOUSE, FLOOKBURGH, CUMBRIA

£170,000



Finding properties within Sabine and Mark's budget has been difficult. Here is a great example of what they could buy if they upped their budget. Situated just off Flookburgh's village square, this spacious converted farmhouse commands views over the countryside. Decorated in Victorian period style, the property includes a canopied entrance porch, large kitchen, lounge, dining room, laundry, three bedrooms, a bathroom and off-street parking. The property has double glazing and gas central heating. It is a short distance from Allithwaite, which has a Montessori nursery.

**For more details contact Halifax Estate Agents on 015395 33304 or visit [www.halifax.co.uk/estateagency](http://www.halifax.co.uk/estateagency)**

### EDWARDIAN COTTAGE, NEAR MILLOM, CUMBRIA

£125,000



The middle one in a row of railway cottages, this quaint property is in the hamlet of The Hill, close to beaches and the town of Millom. It has panoramic views over the Duddon estuary. It comprises an entrance porch, lounge, fitted kitchen, downstairs bathroom and three double bedrooms. It has double-glazed windows and gas central heating, a garden, yard and separate garden plot. Character properties in such a good location are hard to come by and it will go very quickly. Despite its smallness, Mark and Sabine should consider this one if they want to live in the countryside.

**For more details contact Your Move on 01229 774809 or visit [www.yourmove.co.uk](http://www.yourmove.co.uk)**

### MODERN SEMI, FLOOKBURGH, CUMBRIA

£130,000



This is a typical property that Sabine and Mark can expect to find within their budget in their preferred location. Situated on the edge of the Cartmel Valley, the property has convenient access to Grange-over-Sands and the Lake District. It is near Allithwaite, which has a Montessori nursery. It's in a cul-de-sac within the heart of the popular and historic village of Flookburgh, and comprises a lounge/diner and fitted kitchen, with bathroom and two bedrooms upstairs. There are garden areas to the front and rear of the property with parking to the side.

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## A PLACE ABROAD

Standing in an acre of land, this stone-built country house has been sympathetically restored, retaining fireplaces, beams and exposed stonework. It has a living room, fitted kitchen, a bathroom and three bedrooms. One of the bedrooms is on the ground floor and could easily be converted to an office or playroom. With fine country views this would be a great buy for Sabine and Mark. Located a short distance from schools and amenities in Chalais, the property is also half an hour's drive from the airport in Bordeaux.

For details contact **La Residence** on 01491 838485 or visit [www.laresidence.co.uk](http://www.laresidence.co.uk)

### STONE COUNTRY HOUSE, NEAR CHALAIS, CHARENTE

135,000€ (€93,000)



Well within Sabine and Mark's budget, this detached stone house is close to the small town of La Rochefoucauld and historic Angoulême, making it well located for local schools. It also has easy access to the countryside. Inside, there's a large living room with fireplace, dining room, fully equipped kitchen, four bedrooms and a bathroom. With an elegant exterior, the property has an enclosed mature garden of a third of an acre. With a TGV station at Angoulême, Sabine and Mark could make easy journeys to Paris and London Waterloo.

For more details contact **Jennings & Smith** 01473 384874 on or visit [www.jenningsandsmith.com](http://www.jenningsandsmith.com)

### DETACHED STONE HOUSE, LE ROCHEFOUCAULD, CHARENTE,

170,000€ (€118,000)



Just over budget, this attractive property would be a long-term investment for Sabine and Mark. Just south of the beautiful medieval town of Confolens, this stone house is set in four acres of land with wonderful views. It is just 100 metres from the River Charente and five minutes from restaurants, bars and schools. It has a large kitchen with fireplace, a utility room, three bedrooms, a bathroom, workshop, outbuildings and a garage. There is the potential to extend, or Sabine and Mark could consider running a bed and breakfast or gîte.

For more details contact **Jennings & Smith** 01473 384874 on or visit [www.jenningsandsmith.com](http://www.jenningsandsmith.com)

### ELEGANT STONE HOUSE, CONFOLENS, CHARENTE

174,724€ (€123,500)



Jasmine Harman is the jet-setting half of the *Home or Away* team. She lived in Portugal for three-and-a-half years, so she knows about living abroad – the frustrations as well as the joys. When Jasmine takes house-hunters abroad, "I show them more than just property. I give them a flavour of the place so they can make an informed choice."

### TIPS FOR MOVING TO FRANCE

- Never underestimate the hard work involved in learning a new language – or the benefits once you can speak it.
- Notaires are a good source of properties, as well as estate agents.
- Get your notaire or agent to talk you through the stages of buying in France.
- Property prices tend not to include fees and taxes of around eight per cent, so always allow for this extra cost.
- Do your research and really get to know an area first. Will there be work prospects? How are the transport links to the UK, if that's important to you?

### DECISION TIME

"The houses in the Charente all looked very spacious and tempting, but not knowing the language is very daunting, especially for Mark. I was more concerned about whether a local school would be right for Maya. In the end we decided to go for a modern three-bedroom house in Cumbria. We're looking forward to our first Christmas in this beautiful part of the country."