

European property appeals

It's a good time to buy, carefully, writes **Natalie Puchalski**.

WHETHER it's a chateau in rural France or an apartment in Spain, investing in property overseas is becoming an increasingly attractive prospect for many Australians.

While it can be a rewarding venture, financially and culturally, it is crucial that adequate research is done.

International lawyer and notary Michael Bula said Australians buy property overseas for several reasons, ranging from use as a short-term rental to company investment.

Bula said more than 50 per cent of his practice, Michael Bula Solicitors, "is dedicated to some property acquisition or dealing in Europe".

"Our clientele is very much a mixed bag — we can be talking about mums and dads, to syndicates of friends to superannuation funds and corporate investors as well."

While France and Italy remained popular



A Provence beauty.

PICTURE: BLOOMBERG

destinations for Australian purchasers, Bula said Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland and eastern European countries such as Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria and Hungary also sparked interest.

Since opening his practice in 1985, Bula said he had seen an upward trend in purchasing in Europe.

"I think I could safely say there are more Australians buying in Europe today than ever before, just looking at

the figures of clientele coming through this office," he said.

Bula said the economic climate made purchasing overseas property particularly appealing to Australians.

"It's a great time to buy because, in a lot of the villages in European countries, the real estate markets are flat and on top of that, you've got an Australian dollar which is very strong."

Nonetheless, Bula said "due diligence" was an essential element in any property purchase and even more important in foreign jurisdictions.

He said it was important to realise that most of Europe had a civil law jurisdiction, "therefore the laws are completely different to Australia, which is common law".

"That goes not only for the conveyance of a

transaction itself, but were you to die, divorce, wish to dispose of the property, sell it, etc, you must receive good up-to-date advice."

Unlike in Australia, buyers were only able to acquire real property in Europe with the use of a notary. But while notaries could perfect the transaction, Bula said the legal advice they provided "would not have any Australian sensitivity or context".