

# Waggy ending

American **Debbie Haynes Jones** and her husband David loved their property in the Périgord Vert, but it just wasn't quite home-from-home without their beloved dog Tavis

We were three years into our French home ownership adventure when we finally felt we could spend more time relaxing and enjoying ourselves than working on home improvements. My husband David and I were delighted with our home in Excideuil and loved our time in the Dordogne. There was just one major downside – our dog was not in France with us.

A year ago, we went to work to resolve that issue. After a great deal of research, we overcame the logistical hurdles to bring our West Highland Terrier, Tavis, from the United States to France.

## NEW TRICKS

Our love of Europe was born when David was stationed in Germany in 1980-1984. We had our Scottish Terrier with us during that tour so knew how the Europeans loved dogs. We were young and adventurous and took every opportunity to soak up the European culture. Over the next 30 years we travelled almost every year to some part of Europe, always keeping in the backs of our minds that someday, just maybe, we would find a little abode we could call our own.

In summer 2014 we decided it was time. Our sons were grown, David had retired from two careers and time was ticking. Although we already spoke some German, we decided Germany was too cold. France was at the top of our list too, but we only knew about Paris and Normandy. Paris was

too expensive, and Normandy was not as warm as we wanted. So we started searching the internet for homes in various parts of southern France and only by accident came across the Dordogne. We had never heard of the Dordogne, but the houses were reasonably priced, the climate mild and, looking at the pictures, we fell in love.

We corresponded extensively with agents, used Google Maps to view the properties, and finally narrowed down our search. By August, we had a shortlist and were off to find our dream home. We quickly found out that pictures did not show the entire story and although we were unsuccessful in our search, our visit gave us a great deal of information about home construction, values and pitfalls to avoid.

Our second trip was in April 2015 and we had another list. Although we found some lovely country cottages we decided to start focusing on village properties due to new French regulations regarding septic tanks (*fosses septiques*) as we were not sure what buying in the countryside would entail in terms of inspections and potential costs.

We came back to Knoxville and continued our search via the internet. This time we focused on village properties that met our criteria for budget, size (about 100m<sup>2</sup>), access to services and location within an easy drive of larger cities.

## PAWFECT PROPERTY

By September, we had a shortlist of five houses in the Périgord Vert area of the



Tavis has adapted well to the French way of life



Debbie and David are from Tennessee

**“David just smiled and said: I think we are buying this house!”**



The house had been almost fully renovated when the couple bought it



...And is a big hit with Francophiles



Tavis loves exploring the walled garden...



Copper pans dress the handsome exposed stone walls

Dordogne. The first four houses were disappointing as either the villages were too small or there was too much renovation work to be done. With us being in Tennessee and the language barrier we were not sure how we could take on any major renovation work.

Feeling a little defeated we looked at our final house in a quaint village, Excideuil. It was over budget, but as soon as we walked in the door I gasped with excitement. The sunlight was shining bright on the golden stone walls, the ceiling had original wooden beams, the upstairs had three bedrooms with 10-foot-high ceilings and there was a lovely walled garden which I knew Tavis would love. The house had been renovated except for the kitchen and a half-bath downstairs. I wanted this house! I was going to get this house! Tavis would love this house! David just smiled and said: "I think we are buying this house!"

Our timing was perfect as the dollar was very strong, which gave us more buying power, and the British owners were anxious to sell. They agreed to our offer and made all the furniture available for a very nominal amount. We were thrilled to say the least, but also a little overwhelmed about what would come next. We were going to own a house in France!

**PAWCHASE AGREEMENT**

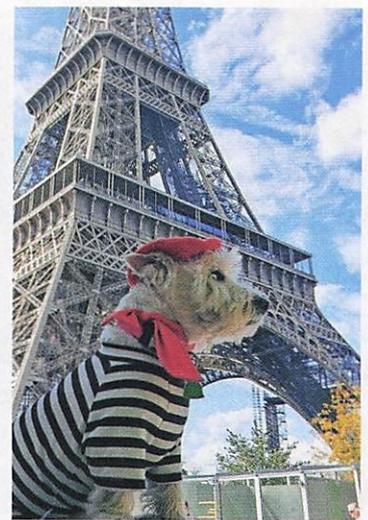
The procedure took about six months. We were fortunate that the seller was British and that the estate agent was in the UK. Additionally, they had employed a local English family to look after the house who were very helpful during and after the transition.

While we waited, we opened a French bank account, communicated with the utility company and internet supplier, purchased homeowners' insurance and stayed in almost daily contact with the owner's agent in England. We learned much about exchange rates and the ins and outs of how to wire money from the US to France.

In March of 2016 we returned to Excideuil and the *notaire's* office. An hour later, we had the



All together now: Debbie, David and Tavis



Tavis the très chic tourist

keys to our house in France. Over the next two weeks we got to know our new home and the charming village of Excideuil. We cleaned, removed unwanted items, painted and made many visits to larger stores 30 minutes away using translator apps on our phones to communicate. We found a kitchen store that we contracted to renovate the 1950s kitchen to a lovely country French design.

We would end each day sitting in our garden listening to the church bells, laughing about our French *faux pas* and planning the next day's adventures over a bottle of local wine. Our dream had come true and we were grateful. However, we still were missing an important member of the family: Tavis, our Westie.

### DOG DAYS IN DORDOGNE

Tavis finally stepped on board our American Airlines flight from Philadelphia to Paris in April 2019. He was a perfect gentleman – in fact, far better behaved than the children on the flight – and we were soon in our rental car on the five-hour drive to Excideuil.

Tavis was happy to end his long journey and explore his home-away-from-home. He immediately fell in love with the walled garden, exploring and sniffing every square metre, just as we'd always hoped he would.

During our three week visit to France Tavis joined us almost all the time, only



Evenings in the garden listening to the church bells

staying at home when we visited grocery stores and museums since dogs are not allowed. When we returned home we would find him perched on our new sofa as if to say, 'bonjour!'.

He adapted well to the French way of life, relishing days out in Sarlat, Beynac, Domme and La Roque-Gageac, a small and beautiful village on the Dordogne river. We had never taken a boat ride on the Dordogne so Tavis joined us for a water adventure. He sat at the edge of the boat basking in the bright sunshine and taking in all the beautiful river views on this warm spring day.

On Tavis's second trip to France in September, we took the TGV from Bordeaux to Paris. Dressed in his finest France attire Tavis walked from Notre Dame to the Eiffel Tower receiving constant requests for photos. At one red light, the Hop-On Hop-Off bus stopped at a red light and all the tourists on the top deck stood up to

take photos. He knew he was the toast of Paris and turned to pose for each tourist. Patient as always, Tavis knew we wanted one of him at the Eiffel Tower so with his red French beret perfectly positioned he waited for the sign that we were ready to take a photo.

As 2019 ends Tavis has visited beautiful villages, savored French markets, nibbled on wonderful baguettes, enjoyed rides on boats and trains, and toured Paris. He has met many of our new friends in Excideuil and gleefully enjoyed getting to know them and their dogs.

He is learning French slowly, as we are. His adventures by themselves are amazing but more importantly having our beloved companion with us to share our French adventures has been priceless. After three years, our home in the Dordogne is now complete. The final and best addition, Tavis the Westie, is now at home with us. *La vie est belle!* ■



Sniffing out the Dordogne food shops

### TAVIS' TOP TRAVEL TIPS

Before travel, make sure your pet has a check-up and that all necessary documents and vaccinations are up to date.

Check ears if travelling by plane as the change in air pressure can hurt.

Travel bag items to pack include a collapsible water and food bowl, food, toys, leash, pick-up bags, wipes and, of course, treats!

Check to see if the airport has a 'pet relief' station. It helps to take a potty break before boarding the plane.

Before a flight, don't feed your pet anything they are not used to having.

Pets are generally welcome in France, including most hotels and restaurants, but not grocery stores and not all parks or châteaux.

Have fun! Your pet will love to take in all the new sights and smells and be with you!