



# The high life

The Hautes-Pyrénées and Pau area is riding high with French property buyers, whether as permanent homes or holiday houses, and here's why, says **Nadia Jordan**

One of the lesser-known departments of southwest France, the Hautes-Pyrénées is also one of the most unspoiled and diverse corners of the country. With its gently rolling hills, vineyards and dramatic mountain peaks, pretty villages and classic food and wine, it encapsulates all that is best about France.

Nestled between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, sharing a border with Spain, and with an array of landscapes and architecture, it provides an idyllic backdrop for daily life. The region is characterised by medieval villages with stone houses, historic châteaux, and local

## FACTBOX

**Region:** Occitanie  
**Department:** Hautes-Pyrénées (65)  
**Main city:** Tarbes  
**Area:** 4,464km<sup>2</sup>  
**Population density:** 52/km<sup>2</sup>  
**Average house price:** €1,481/m<sup>2</sup>

markets selling the organic and delicious produce for which this region is famed.

The Hautes-Pyrénées is steeped in history and culture. The department boasts numerous castles, abbeys, medieval and historic towns as well as Lourdes, the second-most-visited pilgrimage site in

the world after Mecca. Local festivals, traditional music and regional cuisine also form part of the deep historic roots of this region, and it is known for having a particularly strong sense of community.

## OUTDOOR PARADISE

The towering peaks of the Pyrénées are the ever-changing backdrop to the region, offering year-round opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. In summer, the mountains are a paradise for walkers, with an extensive network of trails winding through lush valleys, dramatic gorges and picturesque villages. The famous GR10 hiking route crosses the Pyrénées from the

Lourdes is a world-renowned pilgrimage destination

Atlantic to the Mediterranean, passing through some of the most spectacular landscapes in France.

For those who prefer a more relaxed pace, the natural hot springs of Bagnères-de-Bigorre offer the perfect way to unwind after a day of exploring, while the traditional mountain villages provide charming spots to stop for a coffee or local delicacies. The Unesco-listed Cirque de Gavarnie and the Pic du Midi observatory are two of the region's most popular attractions.

In winter, the area transforms into a skier's haven, with resorts such as La Mongie and Cauterets offering excellent facilities for all levels. La Mongie, part of the Grand Tourmalet ski area, boasts some of the best skiing in the French Pyrénées, while Cauterets combines great slopes with a beautiful historic spa-town atmosphere.

Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and even dog sledding are also popular activities for those who want to experience the magic of the Pyrénées in winter.

## WINE LOVERS' HAVEN

Away from the mountains, the landscape turns into valleys and rolling hills, providing a picturesque background to pretty villages and towns and a patchwork of pasture and vineyards as you travel into the winemaking area of the Madiran.

For those with a passion for fine wine, Madiran is a name that resonates.

## On the market



**€598,000, Lourdes:** In a private setting in an exclusive residential suburb, spacious five-bedroom home with pool, looking out over manicured grounds onto natural woodland



**€310,000, Trie-sur-Baïse:** Beautifully restored three-bedroom farmhouse in the heart of picturesque countryside with sweeping views of the Pyrénées, close to a lively town



**€253,000, Castelnau-Magnoac:** Renovated three-bedroom detached townhouse with wine cellar, garden, courtyard and roof terrace, in the heart of a market town



**€899,000, Monfaucon:** Country estate comprising a main four-bedroom house, second three-bedroom house, pool and covered area with pizza oven, all set in 4.5ha of land

## "It is a place where nature and culture intertwine; where adventure meets tranquillity"

This picturesque village, surrounded by rolling vineyards, is at the heart of one of France's most distinctive wine-producing regions. Madiran wines are known for their deep, complex flavours, particularly those made from the robust Tannat grape. These wines are rich in procyanidins, a type of antioxidant believed to have cardiovascular benefits, which might explain why people in Madiran, like other parts of southwest France, enjoy remarkable longevity (combined with lifestyle, diet and environment one presumes).

A vineyard visit is a great day out and an opportunity to sample some of the region's finest vintages, often accompanied by the delicious local cuisine, which includes

duck confit, *garbure* (a hearty regional soup), and foie gras.

Beyond its wine, Madiran offers a peaceful rural lifestyle with a strong sense of community; a great location for anyone relocating or looking for a holiday home and family base in southwest France.

### GATEWAY TO THE PYRÉNÉES

Pau, the capital of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, is a city of charm, history and breathtaking views. Overlooking the snow-dusted peaks of the Pyrénées, this elegant town has long been a favoured retreat for nobility and intellectuals.

The grand Boulevard des Pyrénées, lined with palm trees and offering spectacular panoramas, is the perfect place



The Pyrénées form a stunning backdrop to the whole region

for a leisurely stroll, while the historic Château de Pau, birthplace of Henri IV, provides a fascinating glimpse into the town's regal past. Pau is also a modern and vibrant city, home to a renowned university, a thriving gastronomy scene, and a lively calendar of cultural and sporting events.

The Pau Grand Prix and the equestrian events at the Hippodrome de Pau attract visitors from far and wide, while its proximity to both mountains and coast makes it an ideal base for exploration.

### RELAXED LIFESTYLE, AFFORDABLE HOMES

For homebuyers, the Hautes-Pyrénées presents an attractive mix of affordability, natural beauty, friendly villages, historic towns and accessibility. Compared to the Alps, for example, property prices remain excellent value, with options ranging from charming village homes and vineyard estates to mountain chalets with spectacular views.

Many buyers are drawn to the region's relaxed lifestyle, rich heritage and the promise of an outdoor lifestyle with skiing, hiking, and cycling right on the doorstep.

Transport links are also a major advantage: Pau-Pyrénées Airport and Tarbes/Lourdes Airport offer direct flights to several European destinations, while Toulouse and Bordeaux airports provide further options for international travel. The region is also well connected by road and rail, making it easy to explore both France and northern Spain.

Whether you are drawn by the allure of the mountains, the rich flavours of Madiran wines, or the cultural sophistication of Pau, the Hautes-Pyrénées offers an exceptional quality of life. It is a place where nature and culture intertwine, where adventure meets tranquillity, and where visitors often find themselves dreaming of making a permanent move.

For those seeking an escape from the stresses and general busyness of everyday life, the Hautes-Pyrénées offers a slower pace and a gentler rhythm. The quality of life here is arguably the best you will find anywhere, and the people of this region are also some of the longest-lived in Europe. Whether that is down to the lifestyle, the huge variety and abundance of local, organic produce or whether it is purely down to the local Madiran wine is hotly debated but it might be worth experimenting with some or all of the above.

Whether you're looking for a tranquil retreat, a place to retire, an opportunity to immerse yourself in typical French country charm, an investment opportunity or a new place to call home, the Hautes-Pyrénées has something for everyone. This remarkable corner of France is waiting to be discovered. ■

**Nadia Jordan** runs the [frenchpropertyfinders.com](http://frenchpropertyfinders.com), a network covering the most sought-after regions of France, and [foothillsoffrance.com](http://foothillsoffrance.com), a property search agency in southwest France



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**€108,000, Mauléon-Barousse:** Two-bed, two-bath penthouse apartment with two balconies, parking and communal pool in a picturesque mountain village with shops and bar/restaurant



**€209,999, Thermes-Magnoac:** Four-bedroom bungalow with 10x5m pool, barn, garage and workshop, set in 3ha of land with lovely views of the snow-capped Pyrénées