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Property deals for British buyers in the French Pyrenees

Snowsured slopes, a good-time lifestyle and super property deals await in the other French mountain range



The ski resort of Peyragudes
ALAMY

Liz Rowlinson

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Unseasonably warm weather did not make for great skiing in Europe over Christmas but on Boxing Day Ian Elwes and his daughter Poppy enjoyed a blue-sky

day on the slopes in the French Pyrenees. With ice rather than fresh powder they enjoyed some “surprisingly challenging runs” in the resort of Peyragudes, paying €37 (£32) for a day pass, finding no queues at the lifts and enjoying a plat du jour lunch for €15 each.

“The ski area’s not as big as the Alps but the skiing is just as good for variety; you might have to hop off to a different mountain,” says Ian, 62, from Streatham Hill in south London. “Everything feels less expensive than in the Alps and many of the villages remain authentically French.”

Being locked down during Covid persuaded Ian and his wife, Deborah, a former teacher, to move to the mountains. The ski-loving couple, who have with two daughters, decamped to the ancient spa and ski town of Bagnères-de-Luchon where they bought three apartments as holiday lets and a four-bedroom farmhouse — all for €450,000 (£396,000). “We wanted somewhere that also offered hiking, cycling and mountain-biking,” Ian says. “The flats will earn us an income through Airbnb and it’s a stunningly beautiful place to live.”



This eight-bedroom maison de maître in Nay, near Pau, comes with a swimming pool and tennis court and is on sale for €875,000; [frenchcharacterhomes.com](https://www.frenchcharacterhomes.com)

The rugged allure of the Pyrenees in southwest France attracts far fewer British visitors and homebuyers than the Alps; there are only 30 ski resorts, and its less commercial feel doesn’t suit those seeking glitz or chalets with all the bells and whistles. During the summer cyclists from across the world come to try the iconic climbs of the Tour de France.

You can buy studio apartments to renovate from as little as €30,000, one-bedroom properties from €60,000 or townhouses from €130,000, says Carole McGregor of the estate agent Leggett in the Hautes-Pyrénées and Haute-Garonne departments. From Bagnères-de-Luchon, with its tree-lined streets of chic cafés and art deco casino, it's possible to take the gondola to the ski resort of Superbagnères.

“[Bagnères-de] Luchon is good for rental investments as people also come from all over France for three weeks to take *les thermes* [the thermal baths],” McGregor says. “A regular stream of tourists and a nice balance of holiday home and permanent residences mean it's vibrant all year round.” The town is a one hour, 15 minute drive from Tarbes-Lourdes airport and one hour, 50 minutes from Toulouse.



This eight-bedroom property in the village of Rébénacq would make an ideal boutique B&B or rental property. It is 30 minutes

from ski resorts and on sale for €590,000;

[frenchestateagents.com](https://www.frenchestateagents.com)

Like the Elweses, James and Lucia Hobart were fed up with the “urban life” of southwest London and keen to tap into mountain tourism. The keen snowboarders moved to Libaros — an Hautes-Pyrénées village 45 minutes east of Tarbes, the capital of the department — to run a chambre d’hôte (a bed and breakfast lodging) from a six-bedroom maison de maître (manor house), which they began shortly after having a daughter, Estelle, now two.

“We wanted to be mortgage-free and get a return on our investment and that wouldn’t have been possible in the Alps,” says James, 51, who runs a digital design agency. “We could buy a house with 3.5 hectares here and it’s so peaceful; nights are properly dark; the stargazing is amazing. We’ve had a fantastic summer for business.”

The area has had many French buyers, from Paris and Bordeaux, during the pandemic, says Joanne Davey of the estate agent French Character Homes, who left Lincolnshire for Pau, in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department, 20 years ago. “Buyers like to be midway between the Pyrenean ski slopes and the beaches of the Atlantic coast around Biarritz, [for] easy access to Spain [the city is 22 miles from the border]. We sell a lot of properties to Australians who discover the area due to the Tour de France.”



A two-bedroom house with renovation potential, in a village near Bagnères-de-Luchon, is on sale for €100,000; frenchestateagents.com

Interest is focused on the foothills of the Pyrenees, west of Pau around the pretty villages of Navarrenx and Salies de Béarn, for traditional stone character properties with a guest annexe or gîtes. Well-renovated ones tend to cost €600,000 upwards, such as one in the riverside town of Nay with heated pool and tennis court [see below], for sale at €850,000.

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The area's lakes offer yet more activities, says Yvonne Russell, Leggett's regional co-ordinator in the Hautes-Pyrénées and Pyrénées-Atlantique departments. "There are lakes close to all the ski resorts – Loudenvielle is a lovely example, ideal for kayaking, windsurfing, canyoning and paragliding."

It was the spectacular views of Aneto, a 3,404m peak across the Spanish border, that persuaded Rowan Norrie and her husband,

Tony, to buy a “typical” L-shaped farmhouse when they moved from Glasgow to the village of Manas-Bastanous eight years ago. The couple run consultancy businesses and as “huge skiers” always planned to live in France when their three children left home.

“This area takes more effort to get to [than the Alps] but the house, the land, the quality of life you get is just so worth it,” says Rowan, 63. “In the next few years we’ll move into a town for the convenience, but we are staying in the area. Tony, now 70, gets a cheaper ski pass and when he hits 75 it will be free.”

Need to know

- The biggest ski area in the French Pyrenees is the Grand Tourmalet Barèges/La Mongie resort (going up to 2,500m)
- From the UK there are flights to Toulouse, Tarbes-Lourdes, Bordeaux and Biarritz
- If you wish to stay more than 90 days in any 180, a long-stay visa is needed

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