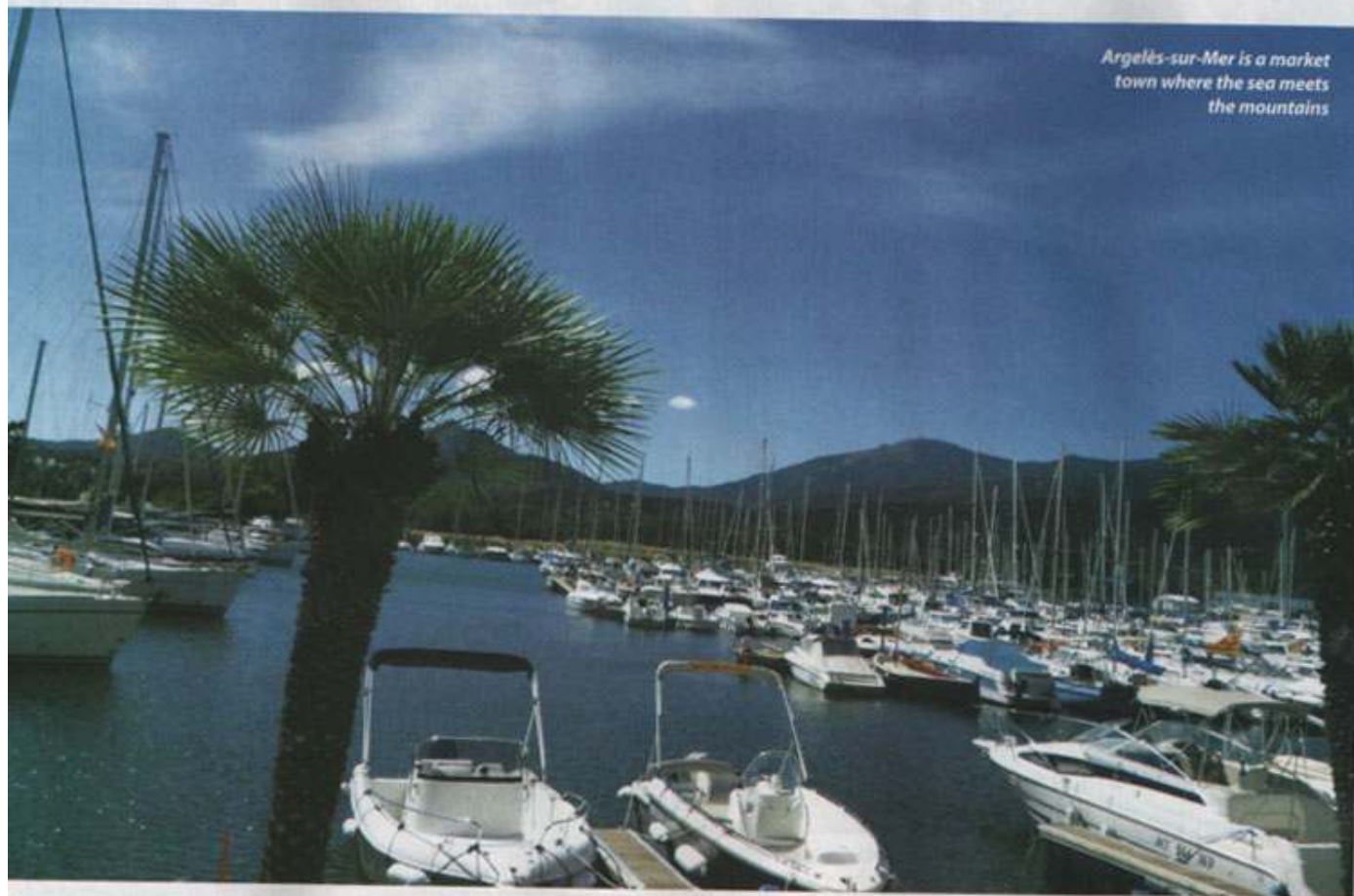


Perks of Perpignan

AT THE FOOT OF THE PYRENEES AND WITH THE MED AT ITS FEET, YOU CAN'T BEAT THE PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES CAPITAL, WRITES FRANCES PENWILL-COOK

Argelès-sur-Mer is a market town where the sea meets the mountains



Perpignan is the location of the 'centre du monde' (centre of the world), according to Salvador Dalí, and it was here that the theme of immortality inspired him so much that *La Gare de Perpignan* was born; a piece of art that was later recognised as one of the most exceptional examples of the Surrealist movement.

Perpignan is the capital of the Pyrénées-Orientales department in the Languedoc-Roussillon region. With approximately 120,000 inhabitants, it is the third biggest city in France in terms of annual population increase after Montpellier and Toulouse.

There is no doubt that its location, as the southernmost French department on the Mediterranean coast makes you feel as though you are

central to a huge variety of landscapes, activities and access options – and on top of that you can expect to enjoy 300 days a year of sunshine and mild winters.

LOTS TO OFFER

Pyrénées-Orientales is considered by some to be a land of culture and legend. With its Cathar and Roman heritage and its castles, monuments and music festivals, it has influenced many famous painters. The Catalan influence is felt and is visible everywhere – a constant reminder that you're not far from Spain; just a train ride from Barcelona, which will become even quicker once the TGV starts running between here and Perpignan in 2013.

Home to 740,300 acres of vineyards, the Languedoc-

Roussillon region is renowned for its wine and has been an important winemaking centre for centuries. For those wanting golf clubs, there are four in Pyrénées-Orientales, while skiing is offered at 10 different ski resorts just 90 kilometres from the city.

Boating and sunbathing are easy options, with 40km of sand, 20km of rocky shores and nine pleasure and fishing harbours to choose from – for example, just over 20km away is Argelès-sur-Mer a market town where the sea meets the mountains and sandy beaches stretch for seven kilometres.

ACCESSIBILITY

Perpignan is easily accessible from international and national locations. Daily flights to Perpignan Rivesaltes airport operate from London, as do

seasonal or regular flights from Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton. Girona airport, approximately 100km to the south, offers low-cost flights to 10 different UK airports, including East Midlands, London and Liverpool.

The TGV, which is planned for launch in 2013 between Perpignan and Barcelona, would make the Spanish city just 45 minutes away, so a Paris to Barcelona journey could be completed in under six hours.

There is also a TGV link planned from Montpellier to Perpignan, which would mean a high-speed rail link between London and Perpignan.

PROPERTY MARKET

After a difficult time over the last couple of years as a result of the economic crisis, estate

agents are reporting that the market has picked up in 2010. "There is a resurgence of interest in property, which in France is considered the *valeur-refuge* (the safest possible investment)," says Philippe Chauveau of Sud-Ideal Immobilier. This is a sentiment echoed by Annelise Bosshard, of AB Real Estate, an estate agency that focuses on properties in the mid- to up-market range. "The last three months have picked up and there are many properties on the market so the buyers can really pick and choose," says Annelise.

She says Languedoc-Roussillon is the perfect place to invest right now. "Prices have come down now by an average of 10% to 15% and compared with Provence and the Cote d'Azur they are very reasonable," she says.

POPULAR AREAS

In Sud-Ideal Immobilier's experience, the most favoured and expensive properties are located in the historical centre of Perpignan and the coastal areas like Canet, St-Cyprien and Argeles followed by the periphery of Perpignan to the east and south. The least expensive tend to be located in the northern districts and northern periphery of Perpignan.

According to Chauveau, apartments of all sizes and standing, village houses, townhouses and villas are popular. "What has become really rare is the typical *mas* in the countryside to renovate; the 'southern dream' for lots of foreign buyers," says Chauveau. "Those are now mostly renovated, often to a high standard and if they resell, the price is really high."

For Bosshard, clients are looking for villas or character properties in the Perpignan area, either in quiet, residential areas or in the countryside.

"We have very few clients looking for property in suburban areas. They want properties that are tastefully decorated, ready to move into and preferably with a view," she says. "Since the economic crisis, we have had more clients looking for property from which to generate an income; for example, holiday rentals, B&Bs and gîtes."

While AB Real Estate focuses on high-end, out-of-town



This spacious, modern four-bed villa in the Callioure area has stunning mountain views. There is a large pool and a summer kitchen and the property is only minutes from the sea – €636,000 (www.ab-real-estate.com)



This beautiful four-bed house is near the historical centre of Perpignan – €280,000 (www.sud-ideal.fr)



This three-bed semi-detached villa is set in a secure domain near Canohès – €230,000 (www.sud-ideal.fr)



This charming mas has seven en-suite bedrooms, two studios and a large pool. From the terraces you can enjoy breathtaking views over the sea and mountains – €1,855,000 (www.ab-real-estate.com)



Eating alfresco in Perpignan is a delight – after all, its location means that it enjoys 300 days of sunshine a year



The open kitchen of a large, airy and atmospheric house in the Céret area. It is split over four levels, with five bedrooms – €349,000 (www.ab-real-estate.com)



Perpignan is a thriving city, with a burgeoning population. Wandering among the hustle and bustle of the streets, it is easy to see why Salvador Dali dubbed it "the centre of the world". He immortalised it in the extraordinary work, *La Gare de Perpignan*. But you can find havens of peace too



properties, Sud-Ideal Immobilier are experienced in the sale of town-centre homes. "The price of new apartments averages €2,800/m² and €3,300/m² in Canet, St-Cyprien and other coastal cities," says Chauveau, going on to explain that an average house in Perpignan will cost €2,059/m² and up to €1,900/m² further inland."

Age, condition, grounds and fittings determine the real value. Village- and townhouses to renovate will be around €1,500/m², but if well renovated and including a garden or terrace, they will sell for around €2,300/m².

To give further ideas of price range, according to Chauveau, a 100m², 20-year-old villa in good condition, on 300-400m² grounds within a 15km range of Perpignan, will sell between €210,000 and €300,000, depending on factors like location, the type of house, the number of floors and features, such as barbecue, swimming pool and so on.

THE LOCATION OF PERPIGNAN MAKES YOU FEEL AS THOUGH YOU ARE CENTRAL TO A HUGE VARIETY OF LANDSCAPES, ACTIVITIES AND ACCESS OPTIONS

WHO IS BUYING?

AB Real Estate report that property buyers are, on average, in their 50s and are seeking a holiday home, a second residence in which to spend long periods of time, a permanent home or a future main residence.

"As well as English clients, the estate agency works with Scandinavian customers and those further afield – such as New Zealand, Dubai and South Africa," says Bosshard.

Chauveau notes that in his market two groups of buyers have become rare: the British, a trend that he feels is related to currency exchange rates, and retired people from northern France, as they are refraining from

selling their current homes.

Older and active clients are tending to buy villas with some grounds around Perpignan or large apartments that are more urban in style with budgets somewhere between €200,000 and €400,000.

Overall, he concludes, the region is very attractive to foreign buyers. "They are mainly interested in the coastal areas or more remote areas like Albères and Vallespir, and even the countryside," he says. "They are looking for a holiday home, or somewhere to settle for their retirement." ■

Philippe Chauveau, Sud-Ideal Immobilier www.sud-ideal.fr
Annelise Bosshard, AB Real Estate www.ab-real-estate.com

FACTFILE



Department: Pyrénées-Orientales
Department number: 66
Region: Languedoc-Roussillon
Prefecture: Perpignan
Subprefectures: Céret, Prades
Land area: 4,116km²
Population: 432,000
Population density: 105/km²