

## INTERNATIONAL



**HEAD OVER HEELS**  
Lorna Cairney's Nardò property, main and below, is €196 per night on Airbnb; a five-bedroom villa near Lecce, left, is €1.6m via The Viewing

the vast coastline of southern Puglia with stunning crystal-clear water was captivating. I looked across all of Italy, but kept coming back to Puglia."

The Salento region's wonderful *cucina povera* ("poor kitchen", or simple local food) and Primitivo wines were part of the appeal, but the property prices also helped. "Compared with what you could buy in Tuscany or the Italian lakes, it seemed very worthwhile, at €120,000 (£107,000)," she says. "Being further south with a longer warm season was attractive – for personal visits and for rental income."

Cairney's three-bedroom, four-bathroom property, with a courtyard garden that seats 16, has been restored to eco-friendly luxury with a €280,000 budget. It lets for £246 per night.

It would now be valued at €430,000 and, in the meantime, will bring in an eight per cent yield, says Caroline Edwards, who has lived in Puglia for 12 years. She writes a blog about helping people to buy in the region ([personal-puglia.wordpress.com](http://personal-puglia.wordpress.com)). "Although I fell deeply in love with the place, I am very investment-minded and I focus on finding properties that will make a good profit on resale or a healthy rental income," she says.

Edwards says the discovery of fabulous Greek-like coves in southern Puglia is attracting buyers to the region. In

Nardò, availability of properties has decreased rapidly, and prices have increased by 30 to 40 per cent in the past two years. "There is a shortage of upmarket rental accommodation," she says, "and it's relatively simple to add value to the property you buy."

A one-bedroom apartment with vaulted ceilings and travertine stone floors in the historic town centre was bought 18 months ago for €53,000. Given just a lick of



'Being far south was attractive – for personal visits and rental income'

**PACE OF LIFE**  
Caroline Edwards' at her home in Nardò, Puglia



white paint, it has now been valued at €65,000 by local agents. "Putting in a swimming pool for €20,000 to €30,000 will usually guarantee that you make money. But make sure you are allowed to add one."

Simone Rossi of gate-away.com, an Italian property website, says Salento has become a hotspot for foreign buyers. "Interest has shifted south from the well-known Valle d'Itria, land of the trulli," he says. "The British are the biggest group of property hunters across Puglia, accounting for one in five, followed by Germans at 17 per cent, Americans at 12 per cent, and Belgian, Dutch and French buyers at around seven per cent," he says.

In more rural locations, there are also some traditional farmhouses, known as *masseria*, some of which have become boutique hotels. You can buy a *finer* upper from around €250,000, says Edwards, or €400,000 for something already habitable, but renovation budgets can be hefty. You can also buy one ready to move into. New Zealand-based Barne Jovicic owns a five-bedroom *masseria* near Monopoli, on the Adriatic coast, with a tennis court, pool and yoga area, which he is selling for €1.595 million.

"We wanted somewhere to spend our summers. Puglia has some of the best beaches in the world, as well as Lecce – the Florence of the South and the best-kept secret in Italy – and Otranto, which is as charming as Dubrovnik but not crowded by day tourists," he says. "We love the fact that all that you eat here is organic and affordable: one kilogram (2.2lb) of tomatoes for 90cents, or a kilogram of figs for €1."

It can be hard to source properties in Puglia, as there isn't the same support infrastructure for foreign buyers in southern Italy as there is in the north.

You also need to be especially wary of renovation costs, especially for *trulli*, specialist buildings that typically cost far more to restore than they do to buy. Always use a lawyer for a purchase.

One final piece of advice? Embrace the slowness of southern Italian life, including the siesta, suggests Cairney. "Enforced peace in the middle of the day drives me mad as I work 24/7," she says. "But I also know that Puglia is good for my soul."

# 'I looked at all of Italy, but kept coming back to Puglia'

*It's still seen as rough around the edges but is increasingly popular with celebrities, writes*

**Liz Rowlinson**

**A**dored by TV chefs and foodies, who make regular pilgrimages there, the sun-drenched heel of Italy is growing in popularity with the fashion pack.

Michelin-starred chef Giorgio Locatelli calls it "paradise" and owns a home there, as do actresses Helen Mirren and Meryl Streep. Yet Puglia remains refreshingly unspoilt, and is even perceived as a little rough around the edges.

Being trickier to get to from the UK than Tuscany or Milan helps to keep it this way – the options are Ryanair flights from Stansted to Brindisi or British Airways flights from Gatwick

to Bari – but those who do make the trip are smitten by its rustic charm.

Lorna Cairney from South Ayrshire was initially attracted by the hive-shaped stone *trulli* houses punctuating the rugged landscape of ancient olive trees. Yet she ended up purchasing part of a baroque palazzo in the historical centre of Nardò, on the eastern shore of the heel. Unlike beach resorts such as nearby Gallipoli, Nardò is a vibrant year-round town, with a beach suburb of Santa Maria al Bagno a 15-minute drive away.

"There it feels like much more of a 'real' place where Italian is still mostly spoken and you are not among lots of tourists," says Cairney, currently based in Singapore. "We love scuba diving, so