

# From little Britain to life in real Spain

The British are moving into authentic Spain after years of sticking to 'Spanglish' enclaves, reports Liz Rowlinson

**A**S THE plane touches down for your first Spanish house-hunting trip, the range of property on offer is so varied it's bewildering.

Estate agents' windows and websites are crammed with whitewashed fincas, beachside apartments, detached villas, multi-coloured townhouses, rural wrecks, golf resort homes, million-pound mansions and harbour duplexes.

But if you're looking to move to Spain permanently, the first question most buyers pose is not to find out where the best property is, but: 'Where do all the Brits live?'

So it's no surprise that Spain's costas feature clumps of mini-Britains, where most homes, shops and restaurants are owned by Brits.

Examples include Fuengirola, Marbella, Malaga, Torremolinos, Puerto Banus, Mijas and Nerja on the Costa del Sol, as well as Torrevieja on the Costa Blanca.

Such tight-knit, exclusively British communities horrify some people, but for others they are a reassuring and sensible first move if they don't speak Spanish and are preparing to tackle Spain's labyrinthine bureaucracy.

However, once you've got to grips with the language, know the area inside out and have sussed out the local property market, you might feel equipped to take the next step and move somewhere a bit less, well, British.

'The Brits have been moving to Spain for years now, but they are still wary of the land ownership battles taking place between homeowners and local government in the countryside and need the reassurance of an established community and well-known developers,' says James Dearsley, of agent Atlas International.

But rather than sticking there for ever, a new breed of British buyer is opting to move away from the coast to more authentically Spanish areas. 'They want to gain knowledge of the local market before going fully native,' says Dearsley.

We tracked down some Britons who have decided to strike out and live more like the locals.



**MARY PHILLIPS, 55, and her husband Brian bought an apartment in a new development in Mazarron, Murcia, in 2001. Brian had retired and they'd been looking to move to Spain for some time. They bought their home off-plan for £65,000. But a year later, after moving in, they sold it and bought a finca 15 minutes away for £130,000.**

Mary, a nurse and singer, says: 'We bought in the Mazarron because it was sold to us as an "exclusive" development of 350 homes, with a golf course and a pool. A year later it had 7,200 homes.'

'It was a really nice place to live initially, mostly British and quite friendly. We kept our house back in Worcester in case it didn't work out.'

'We learnt to speak Spanish and soon realised that we didn't feel as if we were living in Spain, and didn't enjoy living on a housing estate. We wanted to integrate more and buy a bigger place for our grown-up children to come and stay.'

The couple used their new-found language skills to track down a dilapidated six-bedroom house which had been on the market for two years.

'We renovated it and put in new bathrooms,' Mary says. 'Like the old place, it is five minutes from the sea, but a world



House swap: Mary and Brian's first villa. Above, the couple with their new home

apart. The neighbours are all Spanish and it is much more our kind of place. There are a few Brits here, but we don't know them, and we go to Spanish shops and bars.'

'It is odd how some people try to bring Britain over here and then moan about what they can't get. Having said that, we wouldn't have had the courage to move out here lock, stock and barrel without dipping our toes in the water for 12 months.'

'We have now sold our British house and plan to stay here for as long as possible.'

■ Blauverd Habitat: 020 7224 2202

## Top tips for a glitch-free buy

1. **SIGN-UP** an independent lawyer, not one suggested by your agent or developer. These can be found through the British Spanish Law Association at [www.bsla.org.uk](http://www.bsla.org.uk) or 07901 915311.

2. **ALWAYS** get a purchase/sale agreement drawn up between you and the seller (and not the agent or developer) so if the vendor backs out you get your 10 per cent deposit back.

3. **BEWARE** agents selling with 'power of attorney' as they are usually taking a cut of the sale price themselves.

4. **IF YOU'RE** buying a newbuild via an agent (which is common), check the developer's website to see if the price they are charging matches the one you're being asked to pay.

5. **DO NOT** hand over any money until you are sure the property deeds are registered in the vendor's name, that the address and property is registered properly with the town hall, that no new roads are about to be built nearby, and that the size and design of the property corresponds with the deeds.

■ More information from Stacks Relocation Spain: 0871 871 4687



Dave and Pat Goodall have discovered Spanish culture in Catadua

## Villa in the villages a wise buy

THE benefits of buying a house in a more Spanish neighbourhood are financial as well as cultural, as Dave and Pat Goodall, who are both in their 60s, know well.

Two months ago the couple paid £108,700 for a very basic three-bedroom villa in the Valencia region of Spain which now needs £24,000 spending on it.

But even so, it's astonishing value for money and when the work is finished it will be worth nearly £200,000.

When they first arrived in Spain to look for a property, the couple had originally planned to buy a new-build, ready-to-go property with all the fixtures and fittings —

something in one of the more British-influenced coastal resorts of the region.

In stark contrast, the Goodalls decided after many viewings to buy their villa in a village near the market town of Catadua.

They purchased it from an elderly Spanish couple who had let the villa go — some of the ceilings had collapsed, there was no hot running water or shower and the décor was extremely dated.

'The Spanish couple were very sad to sell up, but they'd been using it only at weekends and over the years it had fallen in disrepair,' says Pat.

The Goodalls contracted a local estate agent, Spain and Property, to manage the renovation of the villa, which will totally change the

layout. 'The villa is currently a three-bedroom property split over two floors with all the living space on the top floor and the garage and utility upstairs,' says Pat.

'So we're going to create two bedrooms upstairs and convert the garage into a living area which leads out into the garden. We can't wait to get stuck into the local Spanish lifestyle — and it's just a 25-minute drive to the city of Valencia and it's airport.'

Their agent, Conor Wilde of Spain and Property (0034 647 787350), says prices are still rising fast in this little-known and still very Spanish part of the country, and last year they leapt by nearly 30 per cent — so the Goodalls appear to have chosen wisely.