

Buying a Property in Spain

Paul Payne



2012 UK Edition

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The guide to buying a property in Spain

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“To my mind, the greatest reward and luxury of travel is to be able to experience everyday things as if for the first time, to be in a position in which almost nothing is so familiar it is taken for granted.”

- Bill Bryson

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

- Mark Twain

"A day without sunshine is like, you know, night."

- Steve Martin

"If you want your life to be a magnificent story, then begin by realizing that you are the author and everyday you have the opportunity to write a new page."

- Mark Houlahan

"A year from now you may wish you had started today."

-Karen Lamb

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As far back as I can remember I have always had a positive connection with Spain. Like most people, my love affair with the country started as a child with family holidays to the Costas, Balearics and sometimes the Canary Islands.

I remember being about 9 years old when I met another kid of a similar age as me (called Tom) while playing football on the beach in Calpe during one family holiday in the early 80s. In fact there was quite a large bunch of kids of various ages and origins who had joined in this game on the beach but it was Tom who did something that impressed me so much that the memory and its effect on me has stayed with me to this day.

Tom did not make this lasting impression by an amazing show of skill with a football - (he was English like me after all) - no... he spoke in Spanish to another kid who was playing with us. I asked him where he learnt to speak Spanish and he replied, "er... here, I live here". Ask a silly question I suppose, but at that moment all I could think about was how lucky this kid was. He got to live there in Spain, in the sunshine, playing football on the beach, in the pool every day and probably consuming his own body weight in ice cream most weeks. It was fair to say I was very envious.

Our family was flying back home the next day and on the way to the airport, on the flight and even in the car on the way home, I pressed my parents as to why we couldn't live in Spain like Tom and his family. Looking back, I must have been a real nuisance to my parents as their explanations as why we could not move to Spain just didn't wash with me. I can honestly say that from that moment I never lost the desire to one day live in Spain myself and enjoy the things he did. After studying Travel and Tourism as part of my HND in Business & Finance, I took a position at Thomas Cook and specialised in Spanish Tourism at their head office. This experience only accentuated my desire to spend as much time as possible in Spain and I was fortunate enough to travel extensively throughout the country during this time.

In 1997 I began working with MASA International at the UK head office in Croydon. After a period of training in Spain I started a career that, although the job titles have changed over the years, has always essentially involved me in helping others to buy a property in Spain for either holidays or a long-term move - a permanent move that my family and I finally made some 28 years after meeting Tom on the beach in Calpe all those years ago!

Speaking to people on a daily basis, listening to their own dreams and being instrumental in helping them fulfill their plans is something that gives me immense job satisfaction. I am sure this sounds corny but maybe, now you know a little more about where I have come from, you can see that this is my vocation and I cannot imagine doing anything else.

So much has already been written about Spain and Spanish property, some good and some bad. I wrote this guide for one reason: I want to show you that, while there are many things involved and considerations to make when buying a property in Spain, the whole thing essentially boils down to people, the relationships we form in order to get the right help and assistance to make it work. It's not just a property that we want when we buy a home in Spain. More importantly, it is the feeling we get once we arrive and start living in this warm, sometimes bizarre and always lifestyle-enriching country.

The rest of this guide will detail the different elements that make up a property purchase or move to Spain. At no point should you feel overwhelmed by all the information because you have already done the most important part of the process and that is finding me! I am at the end of a phone when you need me or at the end of a computer/Blackberry if you want to drop me and email.

If you decide that you would like to spend all or part of your life in Spain then we have already started what will become an important relationship for both of us.

UK Direct Line: 0208 603 0180

Spain Mobile: 0034 629 251 747

Is Spain the right place for you?

Maybe you already know enough about Spain to know that it is the right place for you. If you are at an early point in your research it would be understandable if you are still undecided on whether Spain is somewhere where you want to live or spend a great deal of your time. If this is the case then I want you to think about a few key points now.

It may seem a strange thing for me to say but Spain is not for everyone and, just because I and thousands of others choose to move or have a second home here, it does not mean it is automatically the right choice for you.

So before you get too far down the line, let's be clear on a few things

You shouldn't come to Spain if...

- you are not willing to accept that things take a little - sometimes a lot - longer to happen. Spain is incredibly bureaucratic. Take it with a pinch of salt and (try to) smile or else you're going to find it tough here.
- you are not willing to embrace the culture if not the language. There are a lifetime of new experiences waiting for you in Spain; grasp them with both hands or your social environment is going to be very limited.
- you can't put up with a little noise now and then. You are never far in time or distance from the next fiesta and when it's fiesta time you can expect colour, tradition, noise and not much sleep!

You absolutely should be in Spain if...

- you want to enjoy a better climate. Stay here for long enough and you'll be complaining that it is cold at 20°C in January!
- you would prefer a slower pace of life. When you live here you will notice a huge difference.
- you can see yourself as part of a truly cosmopolitan and vibrant community.
- you want out of the rat race, at least for a while if it's a holiday home you want. There is much less importance put on material things here and far more by way of family values and improving quality of life.

If we are still together at this point - great!

The idiosyncrasies of Spain

From a personal point of view the greatest thing about living in Spain is not the weather, the beaches or even the lower cost of living. It is the never ending stream of smile-inducing cultural differences that I encounter on a day to day basis.

While some are just downright funny, others could be frustrating if not viewed with the right attitude. This subject is a whole book in itself and, funnily enough, nowhere is it better documented than in Dave Bulls book '[It Just Is](#)'. (I asked Dave to write a section for this guide and to give us a very brief idea of what's in store for you when you spend time in this fantastic country).

You'll be needing some Flip Flops

When Paul asked me to sum up Spain on this page I immediately thought of 1960, not because Spain is behind the times, although it is in the best possible way, but because the words of a famous book came to mind.

Now, far be it from me to put myself in the same sentence as an author such as Harper Lee – but I will anyway. You see, when Atticus Finch said in To Kill a Mocking Bird, 'to understand someone you need to walk a mile in their shoes...' he was spot on. Well, except for the footwear actually. As for my use of this famous phrase, we shall be using sandals, or flip-flops, but certainly nothing more sturdy than that will be needed should you wish to join us in a place where you feel at home as soon as you get here – but you still need to 'walk the walk'.

The reputation that Spain has earned (and encouraged) for being laid-back is well founded and something to be cherished. It works both ways and the best method of adapting to the idiosyncrasies that you will discover in Spain is to do as they do, or in other words (Harper's) 'walk in their shoes.'

If the plumber doesn't turn up on the Tuesday when he said he would, well...he'll probably come tomorrow. Head to the beach and he'll soon call and, as you head into town and try and find somewhere to park, be aware that a friendly local copper may well tell you to park illegally – and he'll keep an eye on

it... if you're going to be quick! Again, it works both ways in Spain because they don't take life, or themselves, too seriously. What sounds like a shouting match in a bar is just another daily discussion in Spain and will likely end in hugs, I guarantee. The 'cool' teenager getting told off by his nan (sister/mum/aunty) in front of his mates in the town square is a common sight still but all will be smiles in no time.

Spain is a fast evolving country that has the latest technology – but only when and where it wants it. A trip down to the agricultural region of Murcia, or in fact any village, and you'll see an ancient farmer on an ancient tractor chugging through the streets, on the way to his mum's house, no doubt.

Spain is a country where kids still get to enjoy fireworks and fiestas without having to wear a safety helmet and stand behind a fence. It's a place where exploding fish in the playgrounds of schools is commonplace. (At least during fiestas it is!) It's a country where the older you are the more respect you get. It also means that a Spanish gran can swear her head off in the high street and nobody bats an eyelid. And it's a place where people make time for themselves, no matter what else is going on, because that's what life is really about.

Trust me when you've walked a mile in sandals in Spain...you'll want to walk a good few more!

Dave Bull has lived in Spain for 12 years and writes about his life as an expat. In his new book 'It Just Is...' he gives a humorous and helpful insight into what you can expect when you make the move to Spain.

['It Just Is' available on Amazon now](#)

Choosing the right location

In the early stages of your plan to purchase a home in Spain I would like you to take a little time out to consider exactly what is it that you want from the location where your home will be.

Properties of all shapes and sizes exist in most areas of Spain and, while your budget will determine which type or size of property you can buy, having a clear idea about what would be the right type of location for you is something I want you to think about.

By that I don't mean you have to establish the name of the town where you want to be before even visiting Spain to look for a property. (That would be really difficult to do without experiencing every area for yourself.

What I would like you to do is list all the things that you want to have both within walking distance and within a short drive (if you drive, of course).

Just a few examples of things to think about...

How important is a warm climate to you? Not all of Spain is sunny all of the year round. This may or may not be a factor.

How do you plan to use your property in Spain?

As a holiday home in the summer/winter? For retirement or moving to Spain to work/set up a business?

What do you want or need to be close by? Is it important that you are close to an international airport? Some properties that you can find on the internet appear to be super cheap and it's not always clear why. There could be many reasons for that and it's often because they are in a remote or less desirable location with fewer transport links.

Do you have any mobility issues? If you use a wheelchair or have difficulty walking this will be an important consideration when visiting suitable areas.

Are there certain activities that you plan to do when you come to Spain? For example scuba diving, golf, bowls, cycling, dancing etc. Whatever it is you would like to do, make a note now so that you don't forget when you decide to visit

Spain to find a property.

Have you dreamed of being in the countryside, on a golf course, in a city or near the sea? Think it through carefully now. What are the consequences of living in these types of location? Living in the countryside usually means peace and quiet with fewer services but a strong community feel; living in the city or right on the coast could mean a busier area in general and a smaller property.

These are just a few possible considerations and you will have your own of course. Remember: the process of finding a property in Spain becomes so much more efficient if you think about all the things that you want from a location early on.

As you know I am fortunate enough to have visited and worked all over Spain. If you would like to first establish which area is most likely going to suit your needs, call me on UK 0208 603 0180 and we can make a start.

Which type of Spanish property?

Let's take a look at the main types of property you will come across during your search for a home in Spain. With the exception of one type - (which I will get to later) - all should be considered when planning any property viewings.

New Properties

A new property is a home being sold by a builder that has not previously been lived in. There are two options when it comes to buying new properties in Spain.

a) Off Plan/In Construction

Over the last twenty years, buying property off plan has been by far the most common way to purchase a home in the coastal areas of Spain. When demand outstripped supply a build/waiting time of 12 months was quite normal. When the prices in the market were rapidly rising, buying off plan was also the cheapest way to buy as the purchase price was fixed with a deposit. Buying a comparable existing property usually carried a premium, a bit like jumping the queue if you like.

When the worldwide financial crisis hit, the Spanish property market was affected massively. Demand for property was a fraction of what it had been for the previous decade. The consequence of this meant that no new projects were started for several years and the priority for builders became to sell their existing, unsold properties.

In 2011 we saw the return of, and a considerable rise in, the popularity of new property once again. It is expected that during 2012 we will see a further increase in new projects again.

As the supply of quality key ready properties has been reduced (note 'quality key ready properties') mainly due to an influx of buyers from Scandinavia, Holland and Belgium; early 2011 saw a number of new projects being launched and completed. The new developments we are seeing today are being constructed by a relatively small number of very established builders who are able to build in prime (usually coastal) areas without the need for financing from banks.

Though the supply of quality, key-ready properties was being reduced (note 'quality' key-ready properties), early 2011, mainly due to an influx of buyers from Scandinavia, Holland and Belgium, saw a number of new projects being launched and completed. The new developments we are seeing today are being constructed by a relatively small number of very established builders who are able to build in prime (usually coastal) areas without the need for financial assistance from the banks.

While the number of new projects starting is now increasing all the time, there are still very few around if you compare to five or six years ago. Equally, there are fewer numbers of buyers than at the height of the Spanish property market boom therefore the ratio of high quality, well-priced properties that are actually interesting to buyers has remained comparable to the years when there were far more transactions taking place.

In order for new off-plan projects to compete with the regular market of resale and bank-owned properties, builders must understand that they need to provide a product that is far superior in quality, location and, of course, price. Those builders that can and have delivered these things have found their properties selling as fast as ever.

Average build times are now around 12 months although this will vary depending on the project. Expect to pay normally 30-40% over the first few months and then the balance on completion. Importantly any stage payments you make should be 'Bank Guaranteed' as this means your money is secure while construction takes place.

b) Key Ready

A completed new, unsold property aka 'key ready' property can be an expensive problem for a builder. The builder may have a mortgage on the property plus local rates and community fees to pay. For these reasons, many key ready new homes have often been greatly reduced in price in order to sell as quickly as possible. The amount of key ready properties on the market and, more importantly, ones that have good reductions, is getting smaller all the time as the market in popular areas begins to recover and investors once again look to Spain. Homes are sold and the builders' cash flow improves, leaving fewer cherries to be picked.

Finca/Farmhouse/Rural Properties

The idea of a small holding (finca) in the country is quite an idyllic one and often the whitewashed, old-style villa is where you can imagine yourself to be when daydreaming about your future place in the sun. Without wanting to shatter any dreams, the reality of this type of purchase can be very different. In addition to the obvious language issues when renovating, there are many legal hurdles to overcome before you can buy and even more potentially waiting for you in the future that you simply can't legislate for.

Reliable connection to utilities cannot be taken for granted with this type of property. Not least to mention, the property may well need considerable work doing that could potentially cause more stress than it will ultimately alleviate. Buying this type of property has undeniable risk attached and should only be considered if you are prepared to take on that risk and potentially invest a lot of time, money and energy (and some heartache) into the project.

Due to our guarantee of only selling safe and legal properties, we are unable to offer any property that is on rural or rustic land.

Resale (pre-owned property)

The sale of resale properties in Spain has many similarities to the resale market in the UK: similar in that they come in all shapes, sizes and locations. Similar also in that they are being sold for many different reasons, i.e. trading up, trading down, births, deaths, marriages, re-locaters and those selling for financial reasons. The re-sale market is definitely worth considering, though, and there are some good opportunities out there at the moment.

Bank Repossession Properties

Another unfortunate by-product of the economic downturn has been the rise of repossession properties in Spain. Pre-crisis banks would often lend up to 100% of the purchase price and now some of these properties are back on to the market as repossessions. Buying a bank repossession property is by no means a guarantee of a stunning deal as, in the vast majority of cases, a traditional resale, new build or a 'key ready' property can be a much better value for money overall and therefore a better proposition.

Good properties in good locations rarely get repossessed, even in these tough economic times. If you want to look at bank-owned properties, be prepared that it is very unlikely you will find a genuinely good one (even from the hundreds of thousands on the market). If the bank that owns the property is offering a higher than usual loan to value (sales price) mortgage it is because the property probably cannot compete with other similar homes in the area on the regular market.

The offer of a lower deposit to the buyer is the only tool available to the bank to try and attract a buyer to what is, typically, an unattractive proposition.

Ensure your property purchase is safe and legal

Ensuring that your home in Spain is legal is usually the first - (and rightfully so!) - concern that anyone should have when considering a purchase.

You would have had to have been living on the moon not to have seen at least one episode of Holiday Homes from Hell or read one of the many tabloid stories damning the virtues of overseas property ownership. This type of media coverage does tend to err on the side on negative sensationalism. On the other hand, TV shows such as 'A Place in the Sun' perhaps paint an unrealistically carefree picture of buying an overseas property. I would say that the reality lies somewhere between the two ends of the media spectrum!

There is a need for genuine caution and due diligence, and with those comes a clear route to a happy experience.

Land Grab

One of the most publicised issues of recent years has been the Valencian Land Grab Law or the Ley Reguladora de la Actividad Urbanística (LRAU).

In 1994 the government of the Valencian Community passed this controversial law with the aim of speeding up the process of urban development. The law was made with good intentions: to ensure that developments were built with the necessary services, green areas, roads, lighting and sanitation that you would expect as an owner/dweller or tenant.

The problem with this was that some unscrupulous developers used the new law to their advantage by forcing some small land owners to either give up their land through its reclassification from Rural to Urban land, or by presenting these small rural landowners with bills for 'urbanising' their own land. In 2006 this loop hole was closed when the Valencian Government replaced the LRAU with a new law known as LUV or the 'Ley Urbainística Valenciana'. The new law has certainly strengthened the position of small rural landowners, but the first step towards ensuring safety in this regard is to only consider purchasing a property in an area that has already been classified as urban.

New Properties

You may well have heard about people buying 'off plan' properties and, due to lack of necessary paperwork and building licenses, ending up with problems regarding delays in completion, or, in some cases, no completion at all.

A lot of these issues came about when there was a huge rise in demand, from UK and other European buyers, for new properties on the Spanish coast. This demand meant it was not uncommon for some builders to apply for the various licences, but start to sell and build before these documents were finalised and received. Failure to obtain the paperwork in time for completion of the property sometimes meant a delay in the buyer being able to move in. Often building works were delayed while these important documents were being issued. In some extreme cases building work was never completely finished as licences were never issued at all!

With the recent new surge in coastal property sales, mainly to buyers from Scandinavia, we have seen new, high quality projects starting, selling and being completed on time. The builders who are busy constructing again are well established names who ensure that all legal paperwork is in place before they even lay a foundation or begin to issue purchase contracts.

Once a property has been completed a 'License of First Occupation' will be issued by the local town hall. This document confirms that the house has been built in accordance with the building licences, that there is no outstanding work to be done and that the property is fit and safe for habitation.

Properties without the 'License of First Occupation' can still be legally bought and sold, however, in recent years, banks will not consider arranging a mortgage for a property without one. So buying without an LFO could have a serious effect on the future resale value of your property and I would not recommend even considering completing on a property without this.

Sometimes a property on the market for what seems an unusually low price can often be missing one or more of these important documents, even if they are not a legal requirement for the purchase. It may be a hackneyed expression, but

you really do get what you pay for!

Now, of course a good lawyer will be able make all these checks for you when you decide to buy. Should a problem be identified at this stage you may be thankful the lawyer saved you from an expensive mistake, but also angry that you have spent time and money on travelling to view the property in the first place. Make sure before you arrange any viewings that your agent only sells properties that will have complete paperwork in place.

Lorena works in the Products Department at MASA International. Lorena and her team collect and check the legal documentation from each property prior to the company listing the home and arranging any viewings. These checks are made so we are satisfied that our clients will be able to move into their home without any problems now or in the future.

Resale Properties

Buying a resale property means there is some additional due diligence that needs completing before you should be satisfied enough to buy. In addition to the land registry checks, building licences and the Licence of First Occupation/Habitation Certificate, we also need to consider a few other things. As long as your lawyer carries out these checks you will have no problems at all. By having a little up front knowledge of the things to look out for, you can cut down on the time, travel and cost involved in coming to Spain to view resale properties.

Extensions and modifications to the property...

Careful consideration is needed when it comes to buying a property with any modifications or extra work that may have been carried out by the seller. It is common to see an extra room or extension added, much the same as it is in the UK. It is not uncommon to even see an extra floor added to a bungalow.

Unfortunately, in many cases, this extra work has received no official approval from the Town Hall. The consequence of such work varies and depends on the degree of modification. Firstly, any extension or rebuilding of the property that

is not on the official plans held by the Town Hall will not be given any value by the bank. This, of course, could affect you or any subsequent purchaser of your property should a mortgage be required.

A neighbour or local resident may object to the work that has been done on the property. In Spain, this is known as a 'Denuncia'. The consequences of a Denuncia could be a fine or even an order to remove the offending addition.

The resale department of MASA International checks for this type of issue prior to listing resale properties to ensure our customers never face this particular problem or its repercussions.

Debts and Encumbrances...

In Spain, unlike the UK, debts stay with the property. Buying a property which has outstanding bills such as water, electricity, community fees, taxes or even mortgage payments means you, as the new owner, could now be responsible.

Unfortunately, with all too much regularity, potential purchasers can be swayed by what appears to be a very cheap, bargain property, advertised locally or on the internet, only to find out later that there are unpaid bills. Again, a good local lawyer will have checked this before it's too late, but by then you are again back to square one in your search for home in Spain.

If you have decided that you would like me to help you find a property, you can be assured that these checks are always made before we allow any viewings.

Your Fiscal Obligations in Spain....

When owning a property in Spain, either as a holiday home or primary residence, comes an obligation to pay taxes. Don't be alarmed: in fact you'll probably be pleasantly surprised - if that's at all possible - when it comes to paying tax.

Paying taxes in Spain is a whole book in itself - (one day maybe!) I recommend

speaking to a [Tax Specialist](#) , who, for a small fee, will take care of form filling and give you the best advice.

When you visit Spain I can arrange for you to meet a local tax specialist who will clarify your tax obligations.

Six tips on how to negotiate the best deal on your property purchase

I really enjoyed writing this chapter and I want to share with you the most effective ways to get the best possible deal on your property purchase!

1) Understand the differences between the UK and Spanish property markets

In the UK it is fairly standard procedure for a vendor to listen to an offer of around 95 per cent of the asking price. It's all fairly predictable given that even in a good market the asking price is rarely the ultimate sale price, but equally rarely is it under 90% of the asking price.

Property prices in Spain are in general far less predictable. Some vendors price their properties with the expectation of ultimately selling for several thousands of Euros less; some give all their discounts (sometimes as much as 30-35%) upfront and show the reductions openly to viewers of their property. Equally, it is perhaps surprisingly common for those selling property in the first line, or very close to the sea, not to sell for a single Euro under the asking price. There is also almost never any price negotiating on a new off plan property. The one size fits all UK style strategy of negotiating a 5-10% discount is not necessarily going to be the key to the best deal on your Spanish property.

2) Be Informed

Find out how long the property has been on the market and, more importantly, how long at the current asking price. A property that has been on the market for a year at the same price is probably overpriced. On the other hand a property that has been on the market for a year and has just been reduced by 30% could well be a bargain waiting to be snapped up. Your agent/property advisor will be well placed to know what price a builder or vendor is likely to accept. Use this knowledge to your advantage so you can rule out viewing any properties that are not going to fall within your budget.

3) Sell yourself as a buyer

Owning a property in the sun is something almost everyone has considered at some point. However tough the market is, the dream of a place in the sun is as

popular, if not increasingly so, today as it ever has been. Vendors and in particular builders are very much used to seeing a procession of people viewing their properties before they are in a position to buy. Many make offers and try to negotiate a purchase price long before they have arranged finances or have the cash in the bank. Vendors and builders simply do not take this type of buyer seriously and tend not to waste much time considering what is, in reality, an empty offer, even if they do remain polite and courteous so as not to upset the viewer on the off chance they may return one day in the future as a buyer.

Present yourself to the seller as someone who has all their finances in place, even if there's only an agreement in principal from the bank, or as someone who has the necessary money already in the bank. Be clear that you are ready to seal a deal while you are in Spain; reassure the seller that you are reliable, ready to complete quickly and that you will make yourself a very difficult prospect for them to walk away from.

4) Get your goodies

Some builders even now are reluctant to publicly reduce their prices. They *may*, on the other hand, be responsive to a suggestion that they include 'gifts' in the sale such as furniture, air conditioning or even a private pool. The value of these gifts can easily add up to a sizeable discount and sometimes, most importantly for the developer, the price that the house sells for will still be the advertised price.

5) Know your limits

Before starting any negotiation, decide on the maximum price you will pay and try to stick to it. This is a decision to make before getting caught up in the emotion of the moment. Don't advise the seller of your price limit until you really have got to that point. Once you have reached your ceiling make it clear you can't go any higher and that this is your final offer. This will save you lots of time in the event of your offer not being accepted and will allow you move on swiftly to other properties.

6) Be realistic

Pride is a terrible thing when negotiating for a property in Spain! A derisory

offer that gets an immediate rejection often leaves the buyer in a position where they are either surprised at the refusal, or embarrassed to be seen as climbing down if they make another higher bid. Be sensible with offers. A cheeky offer is one thing but never let it get personal if you don't succeed in getting the price down and you really do want the property.

I will help you put these tips in action and negotiate with builders/sellers on your behalf, under your instruction, if that is what you require. If you are buying through MASA you will automatically benefit from a 'Lowest Price Guarantee', so you can be sure that the builder is not selling the property cheaper anywhere else.

Banks in Spain

In Spain there are two types of bank. There are regular clearing/commercial banks and also savings banks known as 'Cajas'. Cajas operate in a similar way to how building societies operate in the UK.

Both types of bank provide the normal bank services and products you would expect, such as credit/debit cards and cheque books.

Different Types of Bank Account in Spain

Non Resident Bank Account: If you're from another country and spend or plan to spend less than 6 months of the year in Spain you are considered a non resident and, as such, you will have to open a non resident bank account. To open the account **in** the branch you will need to supply identification such as passport and or NIE numbers. You may also be required to prove your non resident status because, as a non resident, the bank does not withhold a percentage of the interest earned for tax. If you become resident at some point in the future you will need to tell the bank and give them your NIE Certificate.

Resident Bank Account: Really, the main difference between the non resident and resident accounts is there are less fees to pay on a resident account. If you plan to be in Spain for more than 6 months of the year you will be required to open a resident's account once you are living here.

Credit and Debit Cards in Spain

Once you have opened an account and signed the forms you will typically be issued with a debit card. This card can also be used to obtain cash from ATMs. If you have a regular amount coming in to the account you may also be able to apply for a credit card. If you plan on making any online purchases try to use your credit card rather than debit card as debit cards offer less protection, should your details ever be obtained and used fraudulently. Some banks will not consider applications for credit cards from non residents.

The Direct Debit System in Spain

All of your utility bills such as water, electricity, telephone, internet, etc. will be paid by direct debit. If you ever have to cancel a direct debit you will need to

contact your branch to ask them to remove the direct debit from your list. Direct debits can be set up easily by supplying your bank account details. It is very important that you check your statements regularly as there is a time limit for reclaiming any money you feel has been debited incorrectly.

Bank Charges in Spain

Most banks will charge you between €10 and €25 per year for 'maintenance' of your account. Non resident charges often total around €160 per year. There may also be other charges applied for certain transactions. Check with your bank in Spain for a list of these charges when you open the account.

Using Cashpoints in Spain

Whenever possible use the cashpoint from your own bank to avoid paying a commission on your withdrawal. Your bank debit card may also be part of a network of ATMs such as Servi-Red or Euro 6000. Using cashpoints with these symbols will ensure you do not pay any commission for withdrawing money while in Spain.

Internet banking in Spain

Internet banking is widely available and make sure you register for it when you open your account, as it's the easiest and quickest way to keep track of your account in Spain.

We will assist you in opening up a bank account in Spain and setting up any regular payments you may need or want to make.

Foreign exchange and transferring money to Spain

How to get the most Euros for your Pounds

If you are buying a home in Spain, sooner or later you are going to need to buy Euros to cover your property purchase. You are also likely to have smaller monthly or regular Euro purchases to cover your bills or mortgage payments in Spain and, of course, will want spending money while you are enjoying your time in the sun. After deciding which Spanish property you want to buy, deciding where to buy your currency is the next important financial decision to make.

These are the four main places where you could buy currency for the purchase of your property in Spain.

Bank/Building Society

This is often the first place people think of when they need to transfer money anywhere. Because we all know how to contact our bank we probably have faith in their services, and, if the truth be told, we are probably a bit too lazy to think about any alternatives. My advice would be to get a quote to compare with other means of currency exchange from your bank/building society and check what the bottom line is. The bank/building society may well make charges to forward money to Spain, so watch out for this.

Travel Agent

Some high street travel agents offer foreign exchange services. You may have visited them many times to pick up your holiday spending money in the past. This option is likely to be very expensive and the exchange rate not very competitive at all. Again, satisfy yourself by asking for a quote.

Post Office

The Post Office offers a very similar service to those of the travel agents. Again,

this option is likely to be expensive and not very competitive at all.

Foreign Currency Specialists

Choosing a good, established foreign currency specialist is almost certainly going to be the most sensible option when it comes to transferring the money to pay for your home in Spain and for the regular payments into your Spanish bank account.

There are several good companies operating in this field. They will typically save you up to 10% when compared to high street banks/building societies.

MASA international clients get a preferential deal on their currency transfers. Drop me an email (paul@masainternational.com) and I'll get further information over to you.

Financing a property purchase in Spain

Mortgages in Spain

Currently around half of UK buyers who purchase a property in Spain take out a mortgage through one of the Spanish banks. The rates offered by Spanish banks, tend to be very competitive when compared to other borrowing options such as a re-mortgage, equity release or personal loan in the UK.

As rule of thumb, the banks in Spain will lend up to 70% of the purchase price. This lending is, of course, subject to a number of factors including the borrowers age, income, credit history, current financial commitments and the valuation of the property they wish to purchase.

There are set up costs involved when taking out a mortgage in Spain and you should budget for 2-3% of the loan amount as part of your overall calculation of costs. Interest rates for repayment mortgages are typically (Jan 2012) 4.0% - 4.5%

Releasing Equity from a property in the UK

The idea of equity release is to allow property owners to raise cash from their current home's value without selling and down-sizing to a cheaper property. Whilst it is rare that a buyer uses equity release to fund the entire purchase of a property in Spain, equity release is often used to raise part or sometimes all of the deposit and additional costs associated with buying a home in Spain.

If you have a good relationship with your bank, sufficient income and, of course, sufficient equity in your UK home, a telephone call to your bank should be all it takes to find out how much you could borrow and importantly how much it will cost.

A Big difference between UK and Spanish Banks

One of the frustrating things about banks in the UK is the lack of them! Well, certainly the lack of them on the high street and, if you happen to be lucky enough to find one, the chances of speaking to your bank manager in person are

slim at the very least. Now one major, positive difference in Spain is that banking here is all about building relationships. Speaking to your bank manager is easy and you will generally find the staff in banks to be friendly and helpful. Now more than ever, your bank manager in Spain will want to know you if they are going to lend to you.

Julia Gadalla from the MASA Mortgage Department helps hundreds of people every year to find a mortgage for their property in Spain. When I asked her about this 'old school' way of banking, she replied "It's true, once you get to know the people who work at the banks they will help and advise you to a level we are not used to in the UK. The banks are always willing to listen and help me and my clients who are looking for mortgages find the best solution possible"

Fixing your budget for a Spanish Property

It's a good idea to work out how much you can afford to invest in to a property in Spain before getting too far down the line with property information, let alone visits or viewings.

Julia Gadalla from the MASA Mortgage Department has supplied this simple 3-step process towards getting that all important figure.

- 1.** Calculate how much cash/savings you want to set aside for the purchase.
- 2.** If your cash or savings is not enough for an outright purchase of a property or the type of property you want, firstly look into how you can raise the rest of the deposit. You will need at least 30% of the total purchase price plus purchasing costs. Speak to your bank/building society about your options in raising this finance, possibly through the release of equity from your UK property. Once you have done this, you have a clearer idea of how big a deposit you have.
- 3.** Speak to an expert in Spanish mortgages. They will be able to give you a guide as to how much a bank will potentially lend you plus give you an idea of what the monthly mortgage payments will be. Before your Spanish mortgage advisor can give you these figures they will want to know how much of a deposit you will be able to put down, along with details of income and other financial commitments.

At this stage it is important to remember you are NOT making a mortgage

application or committing to anything. You will, however, now have a good idea about how much you can potentially afford to spend on a property in Spain should you find one that ticks all the boxes. Your Spanish mortgage advisor will also be able to tell you what documents you will need to supply if you decide to go ahead with a mortgage application.

For further information on Spanish mortgages contact Julia Gadalla by email (mortgageinfo@masaint.es) or by phone 0034 96 692 3444.

Additional costs for buying a property in Spain

In addition to the agreed sale price of your Spanish property, you will need to budget for the additional costs that are always associated with a purchase.

Now I can't stress enough that this is merely a guide for costs. Your property advisor and/or lawyer will be able to give you a much more precise figure once you have identified a particular property that you would like to buy.

If you buy a resale property without a Spanish mortgage you should budget 10 - 12% in total on top the sale price. If you are using a Spanish mortgage then budget for 12-14%. The additional costs will be made up of legal fees, notary fees, land registry, stamp duty and VAT (in Spain this is called 'Impuesto sobre el Valor Añadido' or 'IVA').

STOP PRESS: For NEW build properties purchased during 2012 the rate of purchase tax (IVA) has been halved by the Spanish government to 4%. This means you should budget 6-8% for overall purchase costs for a cash purchase or 8-10% for a purchase that involves a Spanish bank mortgage.

Below is a breakdown of the purchasing costs as a guideline:

Notary Fees

These are calculated on a scale of fees which are related to the property purchase price.

Property Registration Fees (Land Registry)

These are normally around 40% of the notary fees.

Legal Fees

This of course depends on the lawyer you use. Lawyers' fees will average around €2500 but may be charged as a percentage of the purchase price.

Mortgage Legal Costs

You will need to advise your agent and lawyer if you intend to use a Spanish mortgage to complete the purchase of your property as additional charges are usually incurred from the bank.

Administration fee

This is currently €495

Water/Electricity Contract

A fee charged by the utility companies for the set up of the water/electricity contracts. This fee will vary from area to area but should be in the region of €420

Transfer Tax (Resale properties only)

This will be 7% of the purchase price

IVA Tax (New properties only)

This is the Spanish equivalent of VAT and will be **4% of the purchase price of the sale if it is completed before 31st December 2012**. The usual rate of IVA Tax is 8% for new properties.

Spanish Property Lawyers

You wouldn't dream of buying a property in your home country without using a lawyer would you? Unfortunately, some people have (and still do) choose to cut this vital corner and decide not to use a lawyer when buying a home in Spain and we already know the problems this could cause.

If we discount the possibility of not using a lawyer then there are two options to think about.

Choose a lawyer in your home country

There are lots of lawyers in the UK (and around the world) who will have the conveyancing of Spanish property added to their list of services. For a start they speak English, which is a must. They may be local to you, which could be useful for peace of mind but the downside to using a lawyer in your home country to do the conveyancing of your Spanish property purchase is that all the legal checks and paperwork need to be done in Spain. The notary, land registry, seller, etc. are also all in Spain. This invariably means your UK lawyers will outsource the job to a local lawyer and add his/her margin on top. Using a lawyer based in the UK will be the slower and certainly more expensive option.

Choose a lawyer in Spain

An English speaking lawyer in Spain might be a preferable option (if English is your first language!) Ideally the lawyer should also have a long history of property conveyancing in the area where you intend to buy. Check that they can offer you a complete package of services such as conveyancing, power of attorney, the making of a Spanish will and NIE Numbers*.

*What is an NIE Number?

NIE or Número de identidad de extranjero to give it it's full name, literally translates as 'Identification number for foreigners' and identifies the holder to the Spanish Tax authorities. The NIE is required by law before you can sign at the notary for a property purchase. It is also a requirement if you are starting a business or plan to work in Spain.

If you are buying a home in Spain, you will need to have the NIE number by the time you go to the notary to sign the deeds of purchase.

NIE Numbers are issued by the National Police of Spain. The process involves going to the nearest issuing Police Station to the property you are purchasing, completing several forms and supplying identification including passport and passport photos. While it is possible to do this process yourself, I highly recommend you use an NIE specialist as the legal documentation needs to be 100% accurate to avoid having to come back another day and start the application all over again.

When I moved to Spain I used Abaco Asesores. They prepared all the paperwork, advised on what documents were needed and collected us on the morning to take us to the Police Station in Elche - our nearest issuing station. Police Stations see a limited amount of people each day so an early start is unavoidable.

I must say, obtaining the NIE was not the most exciting aspect of the move to Spain, speaking as someone who abhors waiting in line for their number to be called! The paperwork is quite extensive so the thought of having to return to queue up another day if I got it wrong was unthinkable! I am so glad I used Abaco to facilitate the process.

NIE Numbers, like every other aspect of purchasing detailed in this guide, are something we take care of for every customer when they buy their home in Spain.

Working in Spain

A few years ago finding work in Spain was relatively easy. There were almost untold opportunities for jobs within the construction industry; estate agencies absorbed thousands of foreigners and bars and restaurants also afforded many a good living. Meanwhile, the provision of services such as garden and pool maintenance and holiday changeovers (for second home owners) meant that there was plenty of work for the unskilled or those looking for part time work.

However, sadly, the present economic conditions in Spain (as in much of Europe) have changed everything. It would be disingenuous, in the extreme, for anyone to claim that working in Spain is 'easy'.

In fact, some 22% of the Spanish population has no work. So, is working in Spain a hopeless prospect or are there things that you can do which will enable you to earn enough of an income?

Well Spain is *not* a 'hopeless prospect', if you are seeking work. There are still things that you can do here to make money - albeit that the days of coming here and muddling through until you 'pick something up' have gone, for the time being at least.

In reality, there are two obvious choices of work in Spain available to those who lack a specific, high-grade specialty (such as a profession or hi-tech skills):

1. English Language Teaching.

You may scowl at the prospect of teaching English and you may even consider it a clichéd way of earning money - but, if you dismiss it, then you may be missing out on the best conventional work available in Spain. It is almost risk-free, can have minute overheads, is easy to do (as a native English speaker) and is a massive growth industry.

Indeed, the demand for learning English in Spain is insatiable. This has much to do with recent Spanish government legislation and the requirement for all young Spaniards to learn English and this has meant that they now *have* to have a good level of English as a *pre-condition* to going to university. It is an obligatory subject at 'bachillerato' ('A' Level equivalent) and taught from

primary school level onwards.

English is also a vital language for Spanish adults. It is considered an essential skill within corporations and, of course, is considered vital by any Spaniard (of which there many) seeking work outside of Spain.

Of course, there are Spanish state teachers teaching English but there are only a minuscule number who are native English speakers due to the restrictive Civil Service (*funcionario*) system in Spain. Accordingly, there is an untold demand for native English teachers both within private schools and after class academies and crammers. You may consider there is every opportunity to start your own business within this sphere.

2. Earning a living through use of the Internet

If ever there was a time to learn how to make money using the Internet it is now - and yet I can hear you sigh and tell me it is impossible, that you are too old or not sufficiently 'techie-minded'.

Well, to dismiss the Internet as a route to making money is extremely short-sighted particularly as you certainly do not need to be a computer 'techie wizard' to make the internet work for you, any more than you need to be able to write code or describe yourself as a geek.

On the contrary, using the internet to make an income is accessible to almost anyone irrespective of age, education or past experience, so long as you know *how* to make it work for you. This is far less difficult than you imagine and many of your existing skills can almost certainly be used, albeit in cyberspace rather than within the strictly conventional, three-dimensional world.

What has this got to do with working in Spain?

The really brilliant thing about the internet is that it depends upon only one thing: a good ADSL connection! With that in place you can work from anywhere and sell goods and services to almost anywhere in the *world*. To state the obvious, this is ideal if you are in Spain or thinking of coming to Spain where most places outside of 'rustico' areas have landline access to ADSL.

So, seriously researching into how you can earn money on the internet is very worthwhile. It can be a superb way of side-stepping the conventional work

problems of Spain - whilst providing you with a way of making a living that is almost overhead-free, that can be very profitable and that enables you to retain your freedom and independence.

Nick Snelling has written five books and is the co-author of [Laptop Entrepreneur](#) the book that shows you, simply and clearly, how to take advantage of the internet to make a living anywhere in the world.

Learning the language

Let me introduce you to my good friend Vicki Riley who is the Director of El Principe Language Centre in San Miguel de Salinas, Alicante. El Principe Centre. Vicki runs semi-intensive courses in Spanish every month at Levels 1, 2 and 3 for only 5 euros per hour. The classes are held in small groups and all explanations are in English. There is also a book and CD available for home learning.

For further details visit the website on www.elprincipecentre.com, email info@elprincipecentre.com or ring 0034 965 999 047.

I asked Vicki to write a few words for the guide on the subject of learning Spanish.

Breaking the language barrier

Though many Expats live here in Spain perfectly happily without the benefit of having learnt Spanish, there are many reasons it is advisable ranging from the practical to the downright enjoyable!! Although we are very lucky that English is such a widely spoken language we all know how annoying it can be when other nationalities don't even bother to try to learn the language of the country they are living in.

Therefore, I think the first reason for trying to learn Spanish is probably that it is common courtesy to make some effort. Not everyone will become totally fluent in Spanish, but you will find the Spanish people will be friendly, patient and helpful if you make some effort, and they will try to help you along with it as much as possible. They will laugh with you not at you on your mistakes and you will find knowing at least a little bit of Spanish will open doors, make life easier and help you to embrace the rich Spanish culture and traditions.

The Spanish are proud of their language, which is now the fastest growing language in the USA, notorious for not valuing foreign languages. It has also grown in importance in Europe, and is now widely considered the foreign language of choice after English. After English, Chinese and Hindustani, Spanish is the fourth most commonly spoken language in the world, and arguably has more native speakers than English. It is the official language on four continents.

Learning at least a basic level of Spanish will make your day to day life here so much easier. You won't have to rely on interpreters for every little thing, or feel powerless because you can't complain about bad service or a faulty product.

Apart from the practical advantages of learning Spanish, going to Spanish classes can have an unexpected and enjoyable secondary purpose. When we leave our home to start a new life in a new country, we leave behind our existing social structures, i.e family, friends and our support network. Learning Spanish in a group is also a good way to make new social contacts. Many of my students who have met through Spanish Classes have become firm friends and some have even eventually gone into business together. In class you will meet people in the same situation as you, you will be able to swap ideas, advice and information on being an Expat and this will help to prevent you feeling isolated in a foreign country.

However, if you are thinking of taking the plunge and buying a property in Spain, there are lots of things you can do before you even arrive to prepare yourself. Evening classes, books and CD's, internet courses etc are all ways that you can start off before arriving here. Learning Spanish will be fun, will help you learn a lot about your own language, will broaden your mind and make your Spanish experience a better one. Good luck!!

Vicki

STOP PRESS: If you do buy your home in Spain with me in 2012 and you really do want to learn the language, I will include a FREE place on one of Vicki's excellent semi-intensive courses for you. Just let me know that you want to enroll before you complete on your property purchase!

Schools in Spain explained

If you are a family who wants to relocate to Spain, one of the most important decisions you will need to make is where to educate your children. Whether to choose state run Spanish schooling or one of the many private international schools is a subject much debated by those intending on moving and by those already in Spain.

In this chapter we will go through the different options available to you.

International Schools in Spain

There are essentially two types of international school in Spain. There are those that teach primarily in English and follow the UK curriculum with Spanish taught as a second language and those that teach in English and follow the Spanish educational curriculum. Under the Spanish curriculum education is compulsory between the ages of 12 and 16. Between the ages of 16 and 18, students can opt to study the Bachillerato which then gives the opportunity for successful students to go on to university in Europe and the USA. Even though schools are called 'international', the majority of students are usually Spanish thereby your child will integrate easily and, of course, learn Spanish very quickly.

Spanish State School System

Although the school timetable, calendar dates and languages studied can vary depending on region, all state run schools in Spain follow the same format and regulations set by the central Ministry of Education. School is obligatory from 6 to 16 years, however free schooling is provided for children from the age of 3. There are also a limited number of subsidized state nurseries for children aged 4 months and upwards.

Here are the different elements of the Spanish state school system:

Guardería (Nursery) 4 months to 3 years :

The majority of guardería/nurseries are privately operated, however there are a

very limited number of state nurseries too. It is best not to depend on a place in a state nursery as they are quite difficult to get and are awarded via a means-tested points system.

Centro Educación Infantil y Primaria (CEIP)

a) Educación Infantil 3 to 6 years :

Although it is not obligatory to attend school at this age, the government will provide your child a place if required. You have to be registered (on the pardon) at the town hall. Places are allocated during a two week application period in March/April. We have found that most town halls will still find a place for your child outside the application window. As in the UK, places are awarded on a points system and your first choice of school is not guaranteed.

b) Educación Primaria 6 to 12 years :

Education in Spain is compulsory from the age of 6. Again, places are awarded via the points system during after the March/April application period. All children are guaranteed a place in a local school although there is no guarantee of a place in your first choice school. The period of primary education is split in to 3 cycles. Year 1 & 2 – Inicial, Year 3 & 4 – Media and Year 5 & 6 – Superior. At the end of students' time in primary education, each child is given a final report (Historial Academico) and a copy is sent to their secondary school.

Instituto de Educacion Secundaria (IES)

a) Educacion Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO) 12 to 16 years :

From the age of 12 to 16 students study to achieve the 'Graduado Escolar' which is a globally recognized certificate that demonstrates proficiency in the six core subjects plus three optional subjects. Students are continually evaluated and those who have not reached the required standard in more than two subjects will be required to repeat the year again. A particular year can only be repeated once and a student cannot 'repeat' more than two times during their secondary education.

Like primary place allocation, the town hall is obligated to provide a place for every student and places at particular schools are awarded via a points system during the March/April two week window. Again, we have found that most town halls are willing to accept students 'outside the window' if you are moving to the area.

b) Educacion Secundaria No obligatoria (Bachillerato) 16 to 18 years :
Students study for two years to receive the 'Bachiller' which demonstrates a proficiency in seven of the core subjects plus an additional seven/eight subjects chosen by the student.

Some exemplar Bachillers are below - (availability can differ depending on the 'Instituto') :

Art – art, image and design
Performing Arts – music and dance
Science and Technology
Humanities and Social Sciences

Assessment is internal and continuous. The teaching staff decide if each student has reached the required level in each of their subjects and has the required maturity to be awarded the 'Bachiller' title. Students considered to have not acquired the necessary level or maturity are required to repeat a year. Students who have been awarded the Bachiller can then apply to University by sitting an external entrance exam, set by the University board for that region, in which they are examined in language and literature, a foreign language, history or philosophy and other subjects of their choice.

Formación Profesional 16 years upwards

The Formacion Professional is another type of further education with emphasis on vocational study such as catering, design, fashion, I.T. etc. Usually some form of extended work experience/placement is made with a relevant company. This form of further education is available to students who have achieved Graduado Escolar or Bachiller level.

We'll help you find the right school for your children when you move to Spain. It is all part of the service!

How the Spanish property completion procedure works

Before you complete the purchase of your home in Spain you should make a final visit to the property, just to check everything is in order. In the case of a new property, a snag list should be made to present to the builder.

NIE Numbers

You will need the NIE numbers before you can sign in the presence of the Notary. This process involves going to your designated Police Station with the correct paperwork and identification. Although you can do this yourself, I would strongly recommend utilising the service of an expert as any mistake in the application could delay the completion of sale.

Signing in the Presence of the Notary

The purchase of your home in Spain is finalised before the Notary, with the purchaser and seller signing the 'Deeds of Sale'. The Notary is an appointed public official and his/her duties include verifying the identity of the buyer and the seller, ensuring that all of the necessary legal requirements have been met and that the monies due have been paid. If you are not able to be present when the deeds are finalised, your lawyer can sign on your behalf, if you have given them Power of Attorney.

Taking possession of your home in Spain

Once the title deeds have been signed, you will be handed the keys to your new place in the sun and you can take possession. Cava time!

Shopping

Now you have the keys to your property in Spain, you might need some furniture or other goodies you have had your eye on. Don't be tempted to order anything until you have the keys firmly in your hand though as delivery is usually very quick!

Property Registration

Property registration happens once all the relevant taxes have been paid and the title deeds have received the final register stamp. This guarantees the successful transfer of the property to you. Note that it can take several months for this to happen and for you or your lawyer to receive the title deeds. The speed at which you receive them will depend upon the individual Property Register. Your lawyer will let you know as soon the title deeds have been received and that they are ready for collection.

If you are a customer of MASA International you will be appointed a 'Moving-in' Co-ordinator who will look after you throughout the time you are in Spain for completion. From furniture to getting you to the lawyer and Notary - it is all taken care of.

Letting your property

Part of your plan to have a home in Spain may include receiving some income from rentals. If receiving rental income is in your plans then careful consideration regarding the location and property type is essential if you are to stay ahead in the extremely competitive holiday rental market.

Buying a Holiday Home Mostly for your Own Use

1. Always give priority to your own needs rather than what's perceived to be the best option for rental yield. For example, that 2 bed 2 bath apartment on the golf course may be ideal for year round income, but, if you and your family have no interest in golf, is it going to be the best choice for you?
2. Don't get caught up in worrying about what the property will be worth in 15 or 20 years time. You're going to get years of great times on holiday using it in the meantime.
3. Go with what feels best for you - don't have your head turned by promises of emerging markets or areas that won't have the facilities you need right now, but buy where you and your family would actually enjoy spending a great deal of time on holiday.

Buying a Property in Spain Mainly for Profit

1. You don't always have to ignore your own feelings and tastes - advice from your agent is useful but what feels right for you is probably right for others too.
2. Do give more consideration to the capital growth prospects of the property over rental yield - capital growth will be much more important to your overall profit in the medium and long term if not so much in the short term.
3. Don't forget, renting your home to holidaymakers may give you a good return but it won't necessarily be the important factor if you choose to sell the property.

If you are somewhere between buying for yourself and renting out:

1. Make sure you get the balance right between buying for profit and making

the right choice of holiday home for you

2. Never compromise on the location of the property in Spain. After all, it's you that's going to need those all important holidays.

3. Give some consideration to things like the length of season, ease of access from where you and target market live, and so on. These factors will have a big effect on your rental return.

Steps towards Marketing your Holiday Home Effectively

1. Get listed on the UK's largest holiday lettings website: holidaylettings.co.uk

The cost of listing on this website will be covered with your first rental. Make sure you have really good pictures and a detailed description that fully points out the benefits of your property and its location.

2. List your property with a good local rental agency.

Check to see what exposure they will give your Spanish property. They should have good local knowledge and be experienced in attracting new customers for clients. Your selling agent should be able to recommend a suitable agency.

3. Create your own website dedicated exclusively to your property

You will have a space where you can really go to town with detailed information about your property in Spain. Fill your website with the best pictures of the property and area you can. Send an email to your friends to let them know about your property and give them a link to your website. Ask your friends to send it on to their friends.

Creating a website is not as difficult as you might imagine. Of course, if you don't know how or don't want to learn how, you could always pay someone to do this for you. Around £350 should get you a basic set up.

4. Get that 'niche' appeal

Could your property appeal to a particular market? Maybe the property has good disabled access or is close to a diving centre? Find the 'niche' then look for

forums on the internet. You may be able to advertise your property for a small fee or even free if you become a regular user of the forum.

5. Include those little extra touches

Sometimes the difference between your property getting the booking or not is those little extras. So many people who try and rent their property have the attitude that it's not worth spending on the property if it's being rented out. This could not be more untrue! A nice BBQ set up, board games or a games console can make all the difference. Why not speak to your favourite local restaurant and see if they will sell a "menu del dia" voucher that you could include for all your bookings? That extra touch will pay for itself in no time and guarantee you valuable repeat bookings.

6. Get to know your neighbours

Wherever you buy your property, the chances are you will have a good mix of holiday home owners and those living in Spain full time. Those living in Spain permanently will, at some point or another, be looking for a property for their own friends or family to stay in. This word of mouth marketing is very effective and will cost you no more than a bottle of wine every now and again.

Visiting areas & viewing properties

Time to think about planning your property viewings!

There comes a point when thoughts of having your own place in Spain can progress no further until you get on the aeroplane and go to see for yourself.

By now you are better informed than most about how to buy a property in Spain. You know the things you need to do to be safe and, hopefully, you've picked up a few tips along the way on how to save yourself a lot of money.

Assuming you still want to buy a home in Spain, then you have now reached what I would call the 'critical stage'. Allow me to explain...

I once read a quote by Woody Allen in which he said, "eighty percent of success is showing up." I think, in the case of buying a property in Spain, we could comfortably up that to ninety five percent! For all the looking at websites, emails, brochures and pictures of properties nothing is going to happen until you have set some time aside to visit Spain, to see some of these areas and properties for yourself. Only then will you know if having this place in the sun is really something that is going to be good for you.

The Pre-Visit Check-list

There are a couple of different ways you can view areas and properties in Spain. We will come to those shortly. Before booking a trip to Spain it makes a lot of sense to check that you have prepared yourself to be in a good enough state that, once you arrive in Spain, all you have to do is soak it all up, enjoy it and get a real feeling for the locations you choose to view. By doing this you will not waste time on things you could quite have easily covered before arrival in Spain.

1) Must have /like to have

This really is essential! Spain is a big place and there are a lot of properties here. Write a 'must have/like to have' list and it will become the platform for your viewing arrangements. You will never be one hundred percent sure until you actually see the property but you will have some features that you want present both in the property and at the location. The list will also serve as a practical reminder of what **you** really need while you are viewing.

2) Price range

If you know how much you can afford to spend on your Spanish property then, by default, the range of properties is already being nicely tailored for you. If you are going to need finance to complete a purchase get the figures before you book your flights and, of course, make sure that the finance will be available to you should you see a property that ticks all your boxes. Starting your viewings without this figure means you are shooting in the dark and potentially wasting a lot of time, energy and probably money too.

3) Is the time right?

Other than the small matter of actually finding a location and property that will meet all your requirements, is there anything else that could potentially stop you? Perhaps you need to sell a property before you can buy another, or maybe you are waiting for a lump sum or an investment to mature? The right time to view is when all these obstacles are out of the way. Sellers won't take you seriously if you're viewing before being ready to buy and Murphy's Law dictates that you will almost certainly fall in love with a property and it will be sold by the time you come back with the money.

Don't be tempted to skip this step. Being eager to visit Spain is good but Spain will not run out of houses any time soon. Get yourself prepared and you'll have an enjoyable, stress-free buying experience.

4) Are you being realistic?

So, you have your list of the things you must have/would like to have. You know how much you could potentially afford to spend on the property and you are ready to swoop on a bargain should you find one while you are visiting.

One last thing worth checking: are there actually properties that meet your requirements for the money you have, in the type of location you want? This is where your agent or property consultant can help you. Check with them to see if what you are asking for is realistic.

If there is nothing on the market to suit your budget, property type and location, you have three options if you still want to buy:

- 1. Consider other property types**
- 2. Consider other types of location**
- 3. Revise your budget (if possible of course!)**

Options for visiting Spain...

There are really two types of property visit to Spain: a self-planned trip where you book the flights, accommodation and car hire and arrange property viewings with an agent(s) locally. The other type is a subsidised viewing trip. Let's look at both options.

The Self-Planned Trip

Making all your own arrangements for a trip to view properties in Spain does require some planning. If you don't know the area well, you can spend more time looking at maps than enjoying the area or viewing properties. There are accommodation, flights and car hire to be booked and property viewing appointments to be made.

Three Tips for Self-Planned Property Trips

1. Schedule your time wisely

Don't be tempted to fill every day with property viewings with different agents. Always allow more time than you think for travelling to viewings and schedule in at least fifty percent of your time for seeing the area. Endless property viewings will lead to confusion, if not exhaustion!

2. Choose the right base for viewing

Try and book your accommodation in an area that is central to the region you wish to explore. The less time spent in the car means the more time you have for enjoying Spain and viewing properties. Try <http://www.holidaylettings.co.uk> if you are looking for a villa/apartment or <http://www.tripadvisor.com> if you prefer a hotel.

3. Choose a good agent(s) for your property viewings

Obviously, I'm a little biased here, being an agent myself, but you really should choose your agent wisely. Only choose agents affiliated to the National Association of Estate Agents (NAEA) in the UK and are ISO Certified in Spain. This will ensure that your agent is committed to a quality of service that you would

expect. Many agents have access to the same properties so booking appointments with more than one agent does not guarantee you will see a different selection of homes.

We are happy to meet you while you are in Spain looking for your property. In addition to arranging property viewings we can also help you with local transport and accommodation if required.

The MASA Low Cost Spanish Property Viewing Trip

We can organise the whole viewing trip for you! We will arrange all the travel, accommodation, local transport and property viewings for you. The cost for a 3 or 4 day trip is usually £99 per person (from the UK) although it can be higher during school holidays.

Here are a few of the most common questions I get asked with regard to viewing trips.

Why is the trip subsidised?

Look at it from the point of view that our 'shop' is in Spain and you are not. In order for you to find a home and hopefully one with us, we really do need you to be here. To that end we are happy to contribute to the cost of your viewing trip as you will get to spend a bit of time with us to see the area, the properties and, equally important, you'll get the chance to meet us and see if we are the people you want to work with to find your home in Spain.

Why is the trip 3 or 4 days?

This is really down to advanced planning. You only want to view properties that meet your requirements and, of course, your budget too. Remember the list of 'must have/want to have' requirements that we suggested you draw up? Well, we only need to show you the locations and properties that match those requirements. We allow plenty of time for seeing the areas, not just the properties, and, because we've been selling property in Spain for over 30 years, we know our way around so there's no getting lost or wasting time with upside down maps!

Experience tells us that 3 or 4 days is just enough time to fit everything in

without ever feeling rushed.

What about sales pressure or hard sell?

I think it's natural to think that, because you're not paying very much for the trip, there has to be a catch. The most obvious 'catch' would be a hard sell approach during your trip. I can only speak for the way we conduct our MASA viewing trips. The company's whole ethos is to provide a safe, pressure-free way of buying a home in Spain. I am certain that a company that has been around for over this long couldn't get away with any other approach.

If there is a 'catch' it is that we only offer these trips for people who have prepared themselves well, both financially and in their requirements. If we don't have the right property for you or don't think we have a possibility of doing business we'll be upfront about it as we do not want to waste either your time or ours.

How often do your viewing trips run?

We have daily departures all year round from across the UK and can usually fit in with your schedule.

If you would like to know more about visiting Spain, viewing specific areas and some of their properties then simply give me a call on UK 0208 603 0180 or send me an email (paul@masainternational.com)

Did you find this guide useful?

I really enjoyed writing the guide and I sincerely hope it has been useful to you. I would really like your feedback as I want to continually improve the guide for anyone considering the purchase of a property in Spain.

Can I ask something of you now?

If you really did like the guide then please share it with others. Doing this for me would be really appreciated!

You can share the guide easily via one of the social links below:

Twitter: [Share with twitter](#)

Facebook: [Share with Facebook](#)

Let's connect...

You can call me anytime on UK 0208 603 0180
or on my Spanish mobile 0034 629 251 747

Email me paul@masainternational.com

Follow us on twitter: [@masaspain](#)
or on Facebook: facebook.com/masa.spain

Thanks and Viva Espana!