

# HOME



## COUNTY CHAMPIONS

Move over, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire: we reveal where the smart set are heading now p12

### SLASH AND GRAB

The seven-figure price cuts hitting prime central London | p21

PLUS What sort of empty-nester are you?

### NO MORE SPOONING IN SONNING

EXCLUSIVE Inside Uri Geller's £10m Berkshire mansion | p24

### PATTERNITY TEST

Our pick of the 20 hottest autumn fabrics and wallpapers | p62

PLUS Making the most of your garden

## GETAWAYS OF THE WEEK



\$15m

## UNUSUALLY TROPICAL

If you're in the market for some Barbados bling, Serenity, a new "super-luxury" 13,500 sq ft villa at St James, on the glitzy west coast, could be for you. It has six bedrooms, a pool with a waterfall and a swim-up bar, automatic sun screens and extraordinary views. In short, everything an aspiring Bond villain could possibly want — although an encounter with the koi carp in the lavish fishpond is unlikely to prove fatal.

020 7467 5330, [realtorsrealestatesales.com](http://realtorsrealestatesales.com)



From \$4.95m

## NEVER HADID SO GOOD

Apartments in New York's starriest starchitect-designed building have just gone on sale. Zaha Hadid's 520 West 28th — her first residential project in the city — is right next to the High Line, the elevated disused railway-cum-park that is now Chelsea's biggest attraction. With 11 storeys and 39 flats, the building offers a curvy contrast to Manhattan's traditional rectangles. It is due to be finished early in 2017.

001 212 502 5528, [520w28.com](http://520w28.com)



£458,000

## ISLAND FLING

You can get a slice of Indian Ocean paradise for the price of a two-bedroom flat in Hackney if you snap up this four-bedroom house near Port Louis, in the northwest corner of Mauritius. The Bel Air Townhouses are part of the Royal Park resort: each of the 2,600 sq ft homes has two parking spaces, a private pool, great views of the Bay of Balaclava and an outside gazebo. Restaurants, shops and spas are all easily accessible.

020 7016 3740, [savills.com](http://savills.com)

Spanish flyers Girona airport has made Costa Brava beaches such as Sa Tuna, in Begur, easily accessible



easy

**C**an you remember when flights to European destinations were only offered by scheduled airlines, at great cost — and probably ran only once a week? It is now 20 years since easyJet transformed the way we travel to the Continent, and it's hard to recall the days when you got a free packet of peanuts on every flight.

Back then, the appeal of even the most popular holiday hotspots was polarised. In Spain, for example, you either went on a package to resorts such as Torremolinos or Benidorm, or you were part of the aristocratic set, with a family pile in Gaucin or Deia. The middle market, with its golf villas and renovated fincas, didn't exist.

Then deregulation hit the airline industry and upstarts such as easyJet and Ryanair made a plane ticket more affordable than a meal out. "It led to the growth of peripheral airports in the UK — the Midlands, Bristol, Newcastle — and the pool of potential holiday-home buyers abroad multiplied exponentially," says Mark

Harvey, a partner at Knight Frank estate agency. "It became realistic for someone living in Bournemouth or Bath to buy a home in Marbella or Bergerac that they could visit regularly."

Other factors helped to put second-home destinations across Europe on the map. "Our own property boom led to the growth in equity, which you could use to buy a second home," Harvey says. "And new technology meant people could work abroad, creating a generation of professional expats."

Low-cost flights have had a huge influence on the property business ever since. Huge areas of rural France were opened up to an army of would-be property developers, who bought up farmhouses dirt-cheap, hoping to sell them on at a huge profit, as long as they got in before prices crashed. A fly-to-let boom in central and eastern Europe in the early Noughties was ended

suddenly by the economic crash, leaving overoptimistic investors with houses they couldn't sell in places such as Slovakia, Bulgaria and Latvia.

According to Bob Atkinson, resident industry expert at TravelSupermarket.com, the crisis hit the airlines as hard as it did the property market. "Passenger numbers have only recently returned to 2008 levels, just as people are snapping up bargains again in places such as Spain," he says.

The arrival of the low-cost airlines meant we could visit places we had never been to before — and they allow us to travel far more often.

Here are the places they really put on the British property buyers' map.

## SPAIN

## Girona

Many of Ryanair's first Barcelona-bound passengers were mystified to find themselves in Girona, a completely different city an hour's drive away. This was just one of the secondary airports the carrier used to get a foothold in Europe's main destinations, and we didn't seem to mind too much: passenger numbers at Girona jumped from 500,000 a year in 2004 to 5.5m by 2008.

It wasn't only Barcelona that benefited. The airline has opened many eyes to the charms of Girona itself, and of the surrounding Costa Brava.

The city has become more trendy, with Michelin-starred restaurants and a handsome old town — where Lucas Fox estate agency has just sold Lance Armstrong's beautifully restored one-bedroom flat in a historic *palacete* for €320,000 (£235,000).

Not far away are the beautiful medieval town of Begur and idyllic beachside enclaves such as Calella de Palafrugell, where the same agency is selling a seafront three-bedroom flat for €670,000 (00 34 972 562 989 [lucasfox.com](http://lucasfox.com)).

Girona's appeal (and airport) have driven business at the nearby PGA Catalunya Resort — where two-bedders start at €365,000 (00 34 972 472957, [pgacatalunya.com](http://pgacatalunya.com)).

"The Costa Brava was the first Spanish coast to embrace mass tourism, and for some people that image is hard to shake off. But Ryanair's route to Girona has opened up a new part of this beautiful region," says Tom Maidment, director of Lucas Fox Costa Brava. "Brits tend to like inland renovation projects — there are plenty — or coastal apartments."

"Someone living in Bournemouth or Bath could buy a home in Marbella or Bergerac"

# Pickings

It's 20 years since the low-cost flight revolution opened Europe up to British buyers. Zoe Dare Hall looks at our favourite destinations



Prisma Bildagentur AG/Alamy, Doug Pearson/Karol Kozlowski/Getty

## Barcelona

The Catalan city was the most popular budget-airline destination last month, according to low-cost-airline-guide.com, but its popularity scarcely wanes from one month to the next.

Carrie Frais, 45, founder of MumAbroad.com, was one of the first "Euro commuters", shuttling between her home in Barcelona and her job as a television presenter in London in the early Noughties. "I could work 10 days a month and have a comfortable life in Barcelona — though flights were a lot cheaper back then," she recalls.

"Before easyJet, Barcelona was a weekend destination. Now people recognise it as an investment hub for business and property, an architectural paradise and a gastronomic and cultural capital."

British buyers tend to focus on the old town, near the main attractions, the beach and the shops. One-bedroom flats start at about €250,000; a large four-bedder in a 16th-century building in the Gothic Quarter is on sale for €825,000 (00 34 933 562989, lucasfox.com).

## The Balearics

Perhaps surprisingly, the arrival of cheap flights has

Right and below, Palma, in Mallorca, now has the busiest airport in Spain



helped Mallorca to shed its reputation as a lurid package-holiday playground for hard-drinking Britons. Palma is now the busiest airport in Spain, and thanks to regular flights from London City, many of the arrivals are well-off weekend commuters who want to combine a London salary with a Mediterranean lifestyle.

"Mallorca was the blueprint destination for the package holiday from the 1960s, but when Palma's new airport opened in 1995, it marked a fresh start for the island's tourism," says Hans Lenz, managing director of the local branch of Engel & Völkers estate agency. "Palma is now recognised as a destination in its own right, which has come about since people started flying there for short breaks."

The city's old town is newly chic, with boutique hotels, a "golden mile" of designer shops and Michelin-starred restaurants. Renovated one-bedroom flats in the area start at €225,000.

Ibiza's new accessibility in high season — there are BA

flights throughout winter, too — has turned the island into an upmarket second-home destination. The focus is on high spenders, and Ibiza Town is the priciest area, with good-quality villas with sea views from €3m and apartments from €700,000. New developments include Calacanta, on the west coast, where huge indoor/outdoor villas start at €2.95m (00 34 622 458022, calacanta.es).

## Costa del Sol

The Costa del Sol was a fixture on the British holiday map long before low-cost airlines. But it became a destination for bricks and mortar as well as buckets and spades from the late 1990s, when cheap flights and a buoyant property market brought tens of thousands of holiday-home buyers to the coast, often with a set of golf clubs in hold. More than anywhere else, the "place in the sun" dream took off here.

The market suffered badly in the recession, but overseas buyers are coming back. Prices are half what they

were before the crash, the exchange rate is back near its 2007 peak, and tourist figures are on the rise.

The first new-build developments to be completed since the crisis promise a level of quality that didn't exist a decade ago. "Marbella, San Pedro and Benahavis are taking on a much more luxurious feel, and the days of 'Stack it high, sell it cheap' won't return," says Barbara Wood, founder of The Property Finders, a buying agency in Andalusia. The key now is to stay focused on prime locations: "Renovating an older house or apartment is preferable to compromising on location."

## FRANCE

### The Alps

Buying here is all about being within the magical hour's drive from the airport — and that is possible for so many more people since Geneva opened up to budget flights.

"It has made smaller resorts much more



## CHÂTEL - LES PORTES DU SOLEIL NEW LAUNCH IN 2015'S TOP RESORT

Within the French Alps' most popular resort of 2015, this new collection of apartments enjoys an extremely convenient position close to the centre, yet private enough to offer a piece of true alpine serenity.

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→ popular,” says Nicholas Leach, a partner at Athena Advisors. “Morzine and Les Gets were the first to really benefit, but places like Châtel and Samoëns, where property is still much cheaper, are now profiting most.” Leach’s agency has just launched L’O Rouge, a development in Châtel; the 18 flats should be ready in 2017, and prices start at €275,000 (020 7471 4500, athenaadvisors.co.uk).

Chamonix is also within striking distance of Geneva. “It can be cheaper and quicker to go up the mountain there for a weekend than to drive from London to Cornwall on a Friday after work,” says Roddy Aris, head of Knight Frank’s French desk. Two-bedroom flats in Les Praz, a mile or so from Chamonix, start at €450,000 (020 7629 8171, knightfrank.com).

### Southwest

The arrival of low-cost flights coincided with – and helped to drive – the “Bergerac boom”, when thousands of

**"It can be cheaper  
and quicker to go to  
Chamonix than to  
drive to Cornwall"**

Brits descended on the area, seduced by a bottomless supply of dilapidated but beautiful farmhouses ripe for renovation – and of cheap but decent wine. “The whole Dordogne exploded in popularity 10–15 years ago, and it’s popular again because prices have fallen so much,” Aris says.

“If you bought back then, you won’t walk away with anything like what you put in. But for someone coming into that market, there’s a lot for sale. Whereas €1m wouldn’t have gone far 10 years ago, €500,000 will get you a lot.” He recommends the Gascon town of Marciac, famous for its summer jazz festival, where a four-bedroom farmhouse in five acres, with a pool, costs €320,000 (020 7629 8171, knightfrank.com).

The Languedoc is also well served by low-cost routes to several airports, including Carcassonne, Toulouse, Béziers and even Girona, just across the Spanish border.

## CROATIA

It was a no-go zone in the early 1990s, but the Balkan country is reinventing itself through tourism, claiming Europe’s fastest-growing visitor numbers this year.

It has worked hard to make its property more appealing, too. Until 2009, foreigners could only invest through a Croatian company. That has changed, and further reassurance came when Croatia joined the EU two years ago (though it retains its currency, the kuna).

The picture-postcard appeal of Dubrovnik and the beauty of the Dalmatian coast and its islands encourage many to hop on cheap flights. Good property, however, has always been hard to find. New-builds are scarce and old properties within Dubrovnik’s Unesco-protected walls are

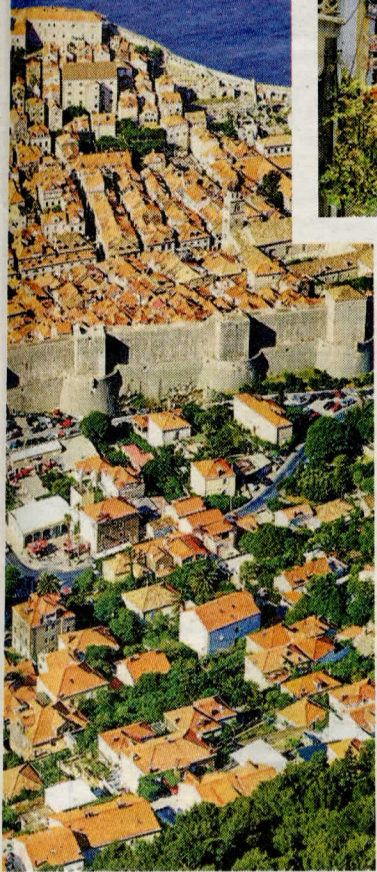
The place to be spotted  
Dubrovnik, on the  
Dalmatian coast, has  
helped to make Croatia  
the fastest-growing  
tourist destination in  
Europe. Right, Porto’s  
charming old town





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Tiul &amp; Bruno Morandi/Martial Colomb/Getty

onto the market, more than at any time in the past decade. These are at three Oceanico resorts on or near the sea, all built during the downturn, used as holiday lets and now available to buy. One-bedders at the new Belmar resort, near Lagos, start at €120,000 and achieve 8% rental yields (020 7016 3740, [savills.com/oceanico](http://savills.com/oceanico)).

According to Chris White, founder of Ideal Homes Portugal estate agency, most of the British buyers he sees have about €200,000 to spend. "This would buy them a two-bedroom apartment in the more popular, vibrant areas of the central and western Algarve," he says.

One area that has improved hugely since the advent of

the low-cost airlines, he says, is Praia da Rocha, where one-bedroom flats start at €55,000 and three- or four-bedders on the seafront cost €400,000-€450,000.

### Porto

The northern Portuguese city has a historic centre that is a Unesco World Heritage Site, beautiful empty beaches and the wine-growing landscapes of the Douro Valley on the doorstep, yet its abundant charms might never have been discovered by many, were it not for easyJet flights.

"Tourism has grown in the past few years and we've seen growth in property investment," says Sergio Amaral, director of Engel & Völkers Porto. "It's mainly in historic buildings that can be renovated, as there are grants available.

"Prices range from €80,000 for a studio apartment in the historic centre to €3m for a luxury house in the most exclusive beach area."

## TURKEY

### Bodrum and Dalaman

When Spanish property prices started to get out of hand in the years before the 2008 crash, Turkey stepped in as a better-value Mediterranean option that offered beaches, views, golf and properties for half the price, and meze to rival any tapas.

Fethiye, 45 minutes from Dalaman airport, was one of the first places to benefit. Other areas embraced by British buyers include Calis Beach, the Uzumlu Valley and Oludeniz. Apartments in the Fethiye area start at about £45,000, while inland villas can be had for £110,000.

Bodrum has its eye on the rich crowd. It's still possible to find flats from £50,000, but there are also luxury villas topping £1m. "Increased interest in Bodrum, as a result of cheap flights from Easter until late October, has created upmarket resorts around the peninsula, including in Yalikavak, Gundogan and Bodrum itself, all within an hour's drive of the airport," says Julian Walker, founder of Spot Blue estate agency.

It seems easyJet's orange revolution hasn't only changed our attitude to travel – and the price of a small tube of Pringles. It has also transformed whole landscapes.

## Beware turbulence

### Granada, Spain

Monarch stopped flying from Gatwick to Granada in 2007 – just as the area was starting to find favour with holiday-home buyers. Suddenly they were left with a two-hour drive to Malaga airport instead. The local property market has yet to pick up.

### Eastern European 'fly to let' locations

Boosted by low-cost flights and cheap property, the likes of Latvia and Romania made temporary blips on British buyers' radars in the early Noughties. They soon disappeared again. Poland also looked shaky five years ago, when Ryanair cut 19 routes to nine destinations.

### Western France

The prospects for this region looked bleak in 2012, when Ryanair's boss, Michael O'Leary, hinted that near-empty planes to some of the airline's destinations here would be prime contenders for the axe. So far, the likes of Poitiers, Limoges and Angoulême have survived, much to the relief of second-homers reliant on these flights.

### Gothenburg

The Swedish city was axed by easyJet in 2012, though Ryanair continues to serve it from Stansted and Edinburgh.

expensive. Dubrovnik Sun Gardens offers something new: a purpose-built holiday resort on the beachfront, with one-bedroom flats from €225,000 (00 385 20 361901, [dubrovniksungardens.com](http://dubrovniksungardens.com)) and a management company to take care of rentals.

The British brothers Adam and Alexander Pinion, founders of the development company Pin & Pin, aim to take Croatia's holiday homes upmarket with Villa Ivy, a four-bedroom, 500 sq metre waterfront home on Brac island, with moorings and an infinity pool, for €2.8m; and Hills Dubrovnik, four large villas with pools in Orasac, priced from €900,000 to €1.3m (00 385 21 553299, [pinandpin.com](http://pinandpin.com)).

"Tourism is booming, but buyers will be disappointed by the property on offer and will look towards new-build, professionally managed homes," Adam Pinion says.

## PORTUGAL

### Algarve

The Algarve began to attract British homebuyers in the 1970s, but low-cost airlines changed the game. Traffic at Faro airport grew by 56% between 1996 and 2007, and the number of Britons, usually clad in pastel golf garb, with clubs in tow, doubled during that time.

Even swanky resorts such as Quinta do Lago, where the average property costs €2m, rely on the low-cost flights, allowing owners to nip out for a couple of rounds at any time of year.

Savills has recently released 480 properties in the area



**What's the pull?** Osaka is the third largest city in Japan, and the second most important. It's gritty, lively, bustling, friendly – and seriously built-up. While it is an economic powerhouse, its biggest pull is its reputation as the food capital of Japan – and, according to some, the world.

The city has its share of high-end restaurants, notably the three-Michelin-starred Fujiya 1935, but it's the fantastic array of regular dining spots and street food that really tickles the taste buds. Local specialties include udon noodles, *takoyaki* (octopus doughnuts – more addictive than they sound) and *kushikatsu* (deep-fried breaded kebab skewers).

Different areas specialise in different foods, but the dazzling, neon-lit canalside restaurant street of Dotonbori is a big draw for tourists and locals alike. If you need a break from eating, there's plenty of designer shopping,

as well as a Harry Potter theme park.

**Where to live** With 2.5m inhabitants in the city itself, and 16.5m in the wider metropolitan region, Osaka is one huge urban sprawl, interrupted only by Osaka Bay, on the west, and surrounded by satellite cities such as Kyoto, the elegant imperial capital, and Kobe. Most foreigners move here for a job or to study, so where you want to live will depend on where you work.

Prices are highest in city-centre areas such as Namba, Shinsaibashi and Umeda, but public transport is great, so many people go for suburbs such as Ishibashi or

Senri. The smartest areas are to the north.

**The cost of living** Osaka is a lot cheaper than Tokyo. An 800 sq ft flat in the centre will set you back between £250,000 and £300,000 – a third of the price in the capital. Further out, a similar home would cost about £180,000. Mortgage rates are low, and many people think property here is undervalued. If you're in Osaka for a short-term work contract, or to study, you're more likely to want to rent. Expect to pay about £900 a month for a three-bedroom flat in the centre, or £400 for a one-bedder.

**What the locals say** What's for breakfast/lunch/dinner? There's even a special word for their gluttony – *kuidaore*, or "ruined by food".

**Who to contact** [century21global.com](http://century21global.com); [japanre.net](http://japanre.net)

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