

OVERSEAS

Beauty and the beach

With its café culture and fashionable homes, Cascais is Portugal's answer to Brighton. **Laura Latham** checks out the Lisbon in-crowd's favourite resort

If you're seeking an authentic, luxurious escape in Portugal, you'd better give the Algarve a miss. But a seaside town, once favoured by royalty, with a cosmopolitan, vibrant community and a mere 10-minute journey to the capital - now that's a better option. It might sound like Brighton but, according to those in the know, the town of Cascais on Portugal's northern coast is so much nicer.

"It's more like the south of France," says Connie Vitto of Quadrant Overseas Property. "It's quite trendy and has long sandy beaches, beautiful palaces and a café culture. You spend most of your time outdoors, even in winter." The beauty of Cascais is that, unlike areas of the Algarve, it hasn't lost its character, and the coastal location, coupled with its relaxed atmosphere, pulls in a healthier mix of local and expat residents, as well as weekenders from Lisbon, surfers, the yachting set and overseas tourists.

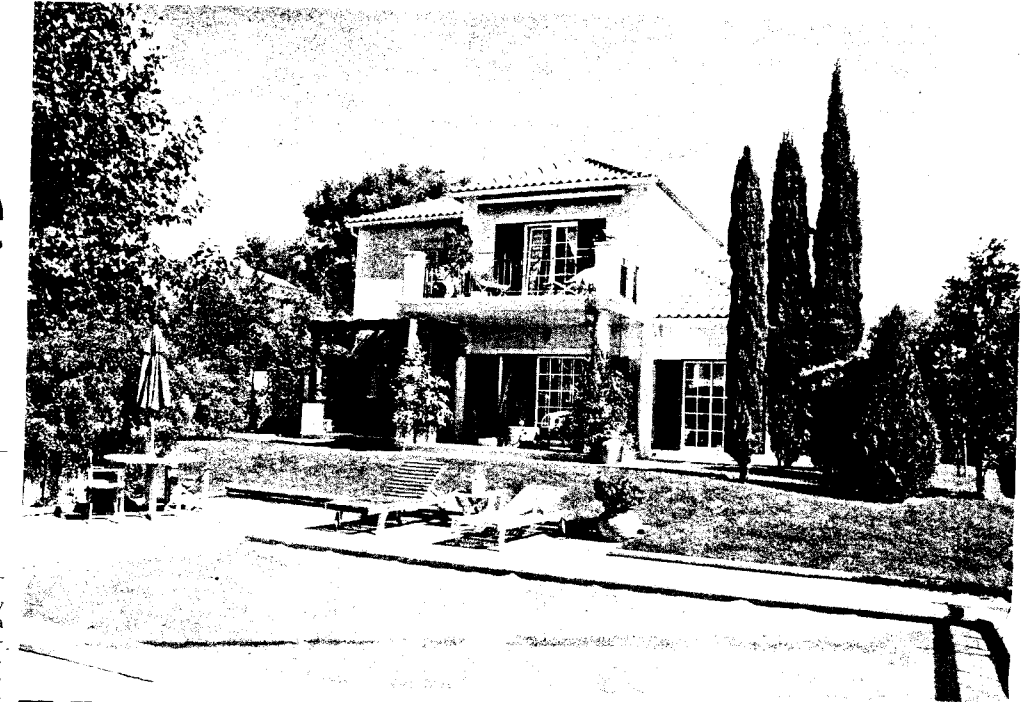
Vitto says that it's quite the thing for fashionable Lisbonites to own a beachfront apartment here and this has pushed up prices, but she also says there are properties that are actually pretty good deals when you consider the location. "You

can buy something cheaply if you're not insisting on sea views or facilities like swimming pools," she explains. "A one-bedroom apartment can cost from around £100,000 in some areas that are only a 20-minute walk from the beach."

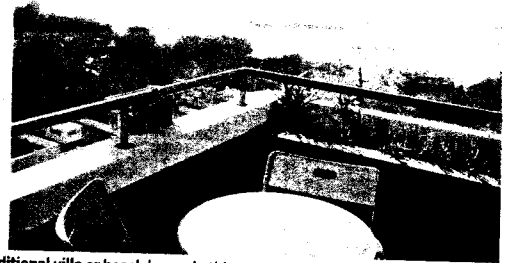
Vitto has several low-cost options on her books, including a two-bedroom flat for £170,000 and an attractively furnished apartment near the beach with good views for £159,000. Head to the seafront, though, and prices climb. If you want front-line coastal property, don't expect to get much change out of £500,000.

Vitto has a stunning traditional villa with six bedrooms for £576,000 and an imposing house for the same price that she claims would cost twice that in the Algarve. One three-bedroom property right on the beach is also available for £507,000, not cheap but the benefits are obvious. "The beach is your garden," she says.

If you'd prefer a house in the quaint cobbled streets of the old town, however, you might see your hopes dashed. According to Paul Houston of Lucas Fox, such property rarely comes up for sale and is so sought after it goes quickly for high prices. You'll have better luck with a huge three-



'It's like Brighton, but much better': choose an apartment with views, traditional villa or beach house in this attractive town by the sea



storey house in need of renovation for £288,000 or the stylish new apartments from £254,000, both currently on Lucas Fox's books.

Houston claims property in this price band is about as low as it gets. "Cascais is not especially cheap," he says, "it's a very popular area - coastal with good connections and prices are driven by the Portuguese, which makes it a safe investment as there's a good resale market."

This market is likely to get stronger, as the local authority has put a stop to new building, meaning prices could soon climb further.

Part of the attraction of Cascais for those who choose to live here is that though it's a prime holiday spot, it's escaped becoming a tourist resort.

This was one of the draws for teacher Sarah Cashmore, who settled here after finding a job in Lisbon. She was attracted not just by the easy commute but by the charm of the seafront town. "Cascais is a beautiful place," she says. "I love the relaxed pace, the culture and the fact that it's by the sea."

Cashmore bought her one-bedroom apartment last year for £136,000 and

says that she's one of a number of expats moving there, but that hasn't turned it into a little Britain. "Despite the number of foreigners buying here, it's still very Portuguese."

Cascais's thriving harbour and town centre, plus its mix of residents of all ages and lifestyles also means there's no off-peak season. "Cascais is a living, working town where people happen to go on holiday," says Paul Houston.

www.quadrant-property.com; 01276 507 513; www.lucasfox.com; 00 351 21 8141 830

Buyers' guide

■ British citizens can buy in Portugal, but need a fiscal number from the local tax department before purchasing.

■ The first step is to get an Escritura, which confirms the property is available for sale. Then a Contrato de Promessa de Compra e Venda is drawn up, this includes all the conditions of the sale.

■ A deposit of around 10 per cent is put down to secure the property and is forfeited if you pull out. If the vendor pulls out,

he must pay you double the deposit.
■ The Escritura de Compra e Venda, or final contract, is usually signed in the presence of a notary around three weeks later, after your legal advisor has done all the title checks and searches.
■ Before the purchase can go through, you'll need to register the sale with the Land Registry Office and pay a property tax to the local authorities. It varies depending on the value of the property.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

NOVA SCOTIA



PLAIN SAILING ON A CANADIAN ISLAND

Set in two-and-a-half acres, this 1,550sq ft wooden house is on the Canadian island of Nova Scotia. It may sound remote, but Heathrow is just a seven-hour flight away.

The house has south-westerly views over the sea, and its cedar deck and flagstone patio make it perfect for outside dining. Inside, the living room has a two-storey

vaulted ceiling and a 21ft-high stone fireplace. There's a separate dining room and the kitchen has all the latest appliances. The property only has one bedroom, with its own ensuite, but next door is a 576sq ft self-contained guesthouse plus a two-storey garage with an upper level in need of refurbishment.

The international airport at

Halifax is just a short drive away along Highway 103. Known as Moonraker, the property is in East Chester, one of the wealthiest spots on the island. Each August, keelboats from all over the East Coast of North America come to take part in its sailing regatta, Chester Race Week. The nearby waters of Mahone Bay and

its numerous islands are renowned for yachting, and a ferry from the town connects to Big Tancook Island and Little Tancook Island.

Moonraker is for sale for C\$349,000 (£155,000) through Mayfair International Realty and Tradewinds Realty. 001 902 275 5613; www.tradewindsrealty.com

by Gnetta Vedrickas