

# ESCAPE TO... Barcelona

An enchanting, refined and cultured city, Barcelona was overlooked by many foreign buyers prior to the Olympic Games in 1992. Today, although pricey, it offers a secure and very enticing investment opportunity, as **Leanne Hall** reveals

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**S**ituated in the Catalan region of Costa Brava, the Catalan capital of Barcelona is set on a coastal plain that stretches far into the hills, blessing the city with breathtaking views. Barcelona itself is a heady blend of cultural delights and 24-hour hedonism, making it one of the world's most dynamic cities.

Its history is tumultuous. Established by the Carthaginians in 230BC, the amusingly named Wilfrid the Hairy founded the house of the Counts of Barcelona in 878AD, and by the 12th century, Barcelona had become a huge maritime trading centre. The 19th century saw the city flourish as an industrial and cultural centre, with modernism central to the Catalan Renaissance. The 20th century saw the city resist the rise of Franco, until the overthrow of the communists in 1939. This

was followed a period of repression that only ended in 1975, three years after Franco's death, when the autonomous community of Catalonia was established.

Today the city boasts a mix of traditional and contemporary architecture, the modernistic Sagrada Familia resting happily alongside Barcelona's gothic cathedral. Down by Port Olímpic, you'll find the popular man-made city beach, La Barceloneta, while on Las Ramblas you can partake of some incredibly tasty tapas while sipping Cava and watching the world pass you by.

#### WHY BARCELONA?

There are a million reasons why Barcelona would make a fabulous home – it's packed full of cultural attractions, boasts fabulous architecture and offers a great nightlife.

#### IN NUMBERS

POPULATION	2,500,000
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE	10%
FOREIGN POPULATION	24,000
SUNSHINE	300 DAYS A YEAR
CRIME RATE	43 PER 1,000
LANGUAGE	CATALAN
VISITORS PER YEAR	3,500,000+
AVERAGE PROPERTY PRICE	€580,000.
	135% ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE
NATIONAL AVERAGE PROPERTY PRICE	€247,000

Light: The incredible dragon fountain at the entrance to the Gaudi-designed Parc Güell, in the heart of the city  
 Main picture: The multi-coloured tile walkway that winds through Parc Güell offers spectacular views



© TIM HARDISTY



While the cost of living is considerably lower than it is in the UK. The city is also home to some of the finest galleries and museums in the world, with exhibitions from Gaudi, Miró, Dalí and Tapies, to name but a few. In fact, Barcelona is one of the few European cities that can rival the Italians in the culture stakes. Other noteworthy attractions are Parc Güell, Gaudi's surreal gardens; the Joan Miró Foundation; Montserrat monastery; the Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter); Montjuïc hill, which can be reached via cable car; the Museu Picasso; and Gaudi's Casa Milà, with its undulating façade and ornate chimneys.

Ease of accessibility is another plus point, and Barcelona offers excellent access and infrastructure routes. A new high-speed train link, which runs from the south of France through to Girona and Barcelona, is currently being built. The city is already accessible

from three airports (Barcelona, Girona and Reus), and flights are cheap and regular. In 1992, the airport was expanded and a new system of ring roads built to further improve access. This redevelopment project, which also took in the city's waterfront, helped to make Barcelona a major global destination. In fact, tourism now accounts for 20 per cent of the Costa Brava's GDP.

Barcelona enjoys good weather. While not as sunny as southern Spain, the winters are mild and sunny, and in July and August the temperatures soar. The city is also regarded as one of the world's shopping capitals, and there are numerous chic boutiques and shopping centres. Finally, the food and wine are fabulous. Barcelona's restaurants boast a total of nine Michelin stars, while tucked away down side streets are some delightful tapas bars and restaurants. Freshly caught

## PROPERTY INFO

**APARTMENT (100m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €580,000  
 135 per cent higher than the national average of €247,000

**APARTMENT (70m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €295,000  
 98 per cent higher than the national average of €149,000

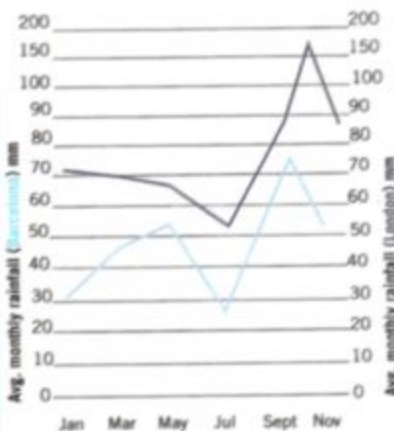
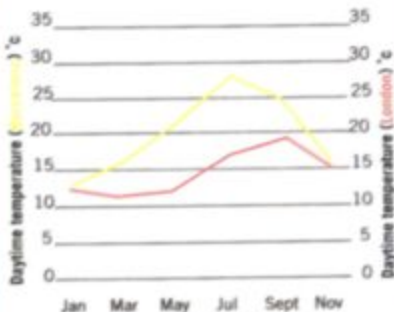
**APARTMENT (70m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €460,000  
 116 per cent higher than the national average of €213,000

**APARTMENT (100m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €588,000  
 121 per cent higher than the national average of €266,000

**APARTMENT (100m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €695,000  
 111 per cent higher than the national average of €330,000

**APARTMENT (100m<sup>2</sup>) IN CENTRAL AREA**  
 €1,100,000  
 176 per cent higher than the national average of €399,000

## CLIMATE



MAKE THE MOVE ■ BARCELONA

## GETTING THERE

## FLYING

Barcelona is the largest airport in the Costa Brava. British Airways (0870 850 9850; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies from Gatwick, Heathrow and Birmingham; easyJet (0871 244 2366; [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) from Bristol, Liverpool, Newcastle, Gatwick, Luton and Stansted; Iberia (0870 609 0500; [www.iberia.com](http://www.iberia.com)) flies from Gatwick, Birmingham, Heathrow and Dublin; Jet2 (0871 226 1737; [www.jet2.com](http://www.jet2.com)) from Leeds Bradford and Belfast; and Monarch (0870 040 5040; [www.flymonarch.com](http://www.flymonarch.com)) from Manchester. The smaller Girona airport receives Ryanair (0871 246 0000; [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) flights from Bournemouth, Dublin, East Midlands, Glasgow, Luton, Liverpool, Shannon, Blackpool and Stansted. Ryanair also flies from Stansted, Luton, Dublin and Liverpool to Reus airport, which is southwest of the region.

## TRAIN

The train from London Waterloo to Barcelona takes 16 hours, including a transfer in Paris from Gare du Nord to Austerlitz. Book through Rail Europe (0870 837 1371; [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)).

## ROAD

If taking a ferry or the Channel Tunnel (0870 535 3535; [www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com)) to France, from Calais you need to take the A26/E15 past Arras, then the A1/E15 to Paris. Follow the A10 to Orléans, the A71 (which becomes the A71/E11) to Clermont-Ferrand, then the A75/E11 to the south coast of France. Finally, take the A9/E15 to Spain and Catalonia. From Santander, drive to Bilbao on the A8, then take the A68 south. This becomes the A68/E804 near Miranda de Ebro, then after Zaragoza it becomes the A2/E90 Lleida. From Lleida,

take the N11 past Tàrraga into Barcelona, or continue on the A2-E90 to the coast and join the A7-E15 north to Barcelona.

## COACH

Eurolines (0870 514 3219; [www.eurolines.co.uk](http://www.eurolines.co.uk)) runs services from the UK to Barcelona, Girona, Figueras and Lloret de Mar.

## FERRY

P&O Ferries (0870 598 0333; [www.poferries.com](http://www.poferries.com)) provides regular services between Portsmouth and Bilbao. Brittany Ferries (0870 366 5333; [www.brittany-ferries.co.uk](http://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk)) travels between Plymouth and Santander. From there, use the road directions above.

## GETTING AROUND

Travelling around Costa Brava is relatively easy, with the N11 running north from Barcelona to Girona. The GI682 goes up the coast from Calella through Blanes, Lloret de Mar and on to Palamós. RENFE (00 34 902 243402; [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es)) provides mainline train services between Figueras, Girona and Barcelona, and numerous local services. The faster Euromed service runs from Barcelona to Valencia, while in Barcelona, there's an underground train service run by TMB (00 34 933 187074; [www.tmb.net](http://www.tmb.net)). Sagalés (00 34 902 130014; [www.sagales.com](http://www.sagales.com)) provides local services between Girona, Barcelona, the coast and Girona airport.



Buses in the region are regular, and Alsa (00 34 902 422242; [www.alsa.es](http://www.alsa.es)) operates services from Manresa to Barcelona and the rest of Spain. Continental-Auto (00 34 902 330400; [www.continental-auto.es](http://www.continental-auto.es)) also runs services throughout the region. EMT (00 34 922 235151; [www.emt-amb.com](http://www.emt-amb.com)) is one of the main transport operators in Barcelona, and it runs a comprehensive 24-hour bus service. In terms of getting around the city, there are regular Metro services, while the tourist buses start at the Plaça de Catalunya and run all over the city.

fish and seafood are central to the diet, and fresh vegetables, fruit, garlic and olive oils feature extensively. In terms of wine, Catalonia produces some superb tipples, most notably Cava, produced in Penedès, while Priorato and Alella export some rich reds.

## WHERE TO BUY

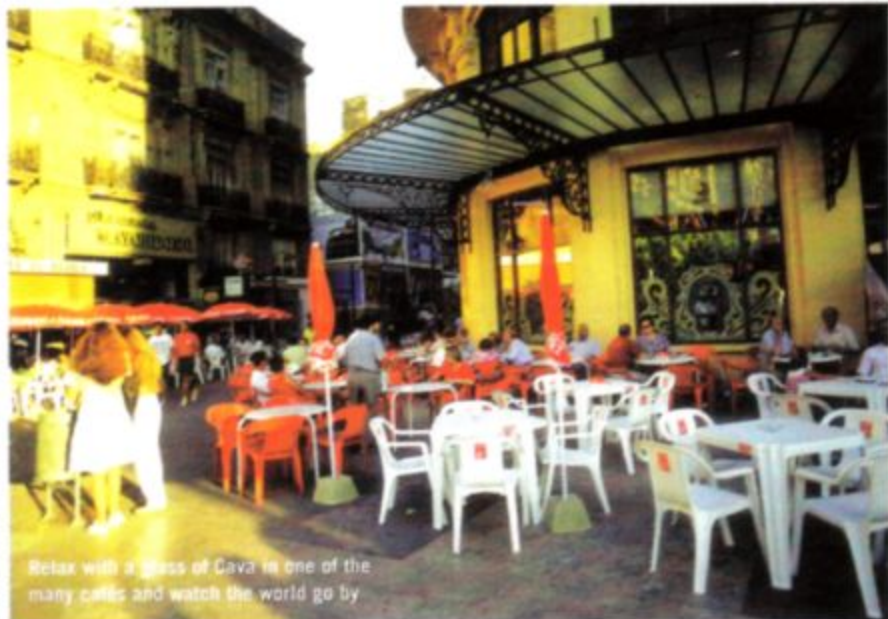
Prices and properties vary dramatically throughout Barcelona, depending on where and what you buy. As a rough guide, a renovated two-bedroom apartment starts from €400,000, while a larger apartment with a

terrace runs from €500,000 to €1,000,000. The most expensive areas are to the north and west of the city, where villas and townhouses can be found. In the centre, you'll generally only find apartments for sale, with loft conversions becoming increasingly popular.

Areas experiencing the most demand from foreign buyers are the Ciutat Vella (Old Town) and L'Eixample. Ciutat Vella dates back to medieval times and takes in the areas of Barri Gòtic, El Born and El Raval. It enjoys a fabulous ambience, with bars and restaurants on every corner and easy access to the beach

and Port Vell. It's still possible to find a renovation project that offers good rates of appreciation in the Old Town, although the prices are rising each year.

L'Eixample is one of Barcelona's newest districts. Essentially a local area, increasing numbers of foreigners are buying here. With an amazing choice of shops and restaurants, this is a great place to live – think Kensington or Knightsbridge. A network of smart streets and squares, this lively district is an interesting mix of modernist and traditional. Consisting mostly of apartment blocks, the



Relax with a glass of Cava in one of the many cafes and watch the world go by

© INTERNATIONAL PROPERTY SHOP

start of the district is marked by the Plaça de Catalunya, which means that this extremely popular area is in a great central location. A decent two-bedroom apartment here starts at around €500,000, although it's difficult to find renovation projects.

## PROPERTY MARKET

Property prices here are among the highest in Spain, and since the Olympics in 1992, they've increased by between 50 and 75 per cent. The last two years have seen price hikes of 25 to 30 per cent, and since 2005, resale properties have appreciated by 15 per cent.

The lack of space for development, combined with the high demand, means that properties will always sell, and at a good price. Another key factor is that Barcelona, unlike other parts of Spain, isn't dependent on foreign investment – the majority of sales are for local buyers, which means the resale market will always be strong.

## LETTINGS MARKET

The lettings market in Barcelona is superb – it's the only location in the Costa Brava where you can make a year-round return on your investment, especially if you can afford to

buy close to Las Ramblas. Yield for short-term lets is high – currently around five per cent per annum – and there's no shortage of people seeking a holiday rental. In terms of location, short-term lets should be focused around the Old Town, L'Eixample or the new developments at Diagonal Mar, where you can buy a newly built apartment with pool access for €500,000. A quality two-bedroom apartment will generate €1,000 a week, but wherever you buy, you need to ensure that it can compete with the local hotels.

As well as a healthy short-term market, long-term lets are also easy to secure. With plenty of business executives and students looking for a six-month let, although the yields aren't as high as with short-term lets, they still generate a good income and are more secure. You can expect to earn an average of €1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

## LIVING HERE

A large number of northern Europeans relocate to Barcelona every year, and being an international city, it offers excellent amenities for expats. The local residents speak good English, there are a number of English-speaking doctors and dentists, and there's a wide choice of expat societies and English cinema. Foreign produce is available from the bigger stores, as are English books and newspapers, and there's no shortage of language and international schools. Many Irish, Dutch, French, Germans, Swedish and South Americans are also purchasing here, making for a truly cosmopolitan community.

## BUYING BARCELONA



### PRIME LOCATION

€330,000 (£228,937)

This corner apartment is on the third floor of a beautiful building in one of the popular quarters of Barcelona, with good connections to the city centre. It has three balconies and two bedrooms, and is totally refurbished.

Paul van den Hout: [www.vdhenprises.com](http://www.vdhenprises.com)



### SUPERB INVESTMENT

€294,500 (£204,309)

This second-floor apartment is opposite the famous Sagrada Família temple. It dates back to the early 1920s and is in excellent condition. With two bedrooms, it has excellent investment and rental potential.

Paul van den Hout: [www.vdhenprises.com](http://www.vdhenprises.com)



### RENOVATED APARTMENT

€315,000 (£218,000)

This one-bedroom top-floor apartment in El Raval has a private roof terrace. It has recently been carefully renovated, retaining beautiful exposed beams and brickwork.

Lucas Fox: 00 34 933 562989

[www.lucasfox.com](http://www.lucasfox.com)



Barcelona's majestic Sagrada Família cathedral

The 1992 Olympic Games mean sporting and leisure facilities are first rate. Water sports are particularly popular in Barcelona, and football – the city is home to Barça at the Nou Camp – and there are two golf courses on the outskirts of the city. On the negative side, you should be aware of traffic congestion and noise pollution are a problem, and costs of property and parking are high. Petty crime is also rife, although the rates are dropping. However, despite this, Barcelona is a terrific place to live. With its different quarters, there's something to suit – and satisfy – every appetite. Ideal for families and singletons alike, Barcelona is guaranteed not to disappoint. ■

## HOSPITALS

**Hospital de dia Barcelona**  
Teodora Lamadrid, 21-23 Baixos,  
08022, Barcelona  
Tel: 00 34 934 175000  
Fax: 00 34 934 172625  
Email: em@hdiabcn.fem.es

**Centro Internacional Medicina Avanzada**  
Pg. Manuel Girona, 33, 08034 Barcelona  
Tel: 00 34 935 522700

## USEFUL WEBSITES

www.vdherentprises.com  
www.lucasfox.com  
www.bcn.es/english/ihome.htm  
www.aboutbarcelona.com  
www.barcelonaturisme.com

Thinking about buying a home in Spain? Then look no further than the new *Red Guides: Buying a Property in Spain*, now in its third edition and with over 180 pages of advice. It's available from WHSmith, priced £9.99.



## INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

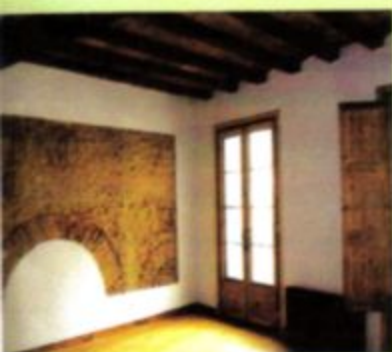
**The British School of Costa Brava,**  
C/ Ginesta, 26, Apartado 172, 08860  
Castelldefels, Barcelona, Spain  
Tel: 00 34 936 651584  
Fax: 00 34 936 641444  
Email: britishschool.bcn@retemail.es

**The American School of Barcelona**  
Calle Jaume Balmes, 7, 08950,  
Espulgues de Llobregat, Spain  
Tel: 00 34 933 714016 / 933 715012  
Fax: 00 34 934 734787  
Email: info@a-s-b.com  
Website: www.a-s-b.com

**Oak House British School Barcelona,**  
San Pedro Claver 12, 08017, Barcelona,  
Tel: 00 34 932 524020

**Benjamin Franklin International School**  
Martorell i Pena, 9, 08017,  
Barcelona, Spain  
Tel: 00 34 934 342380  
Fax: 00 34 934 173633  
Email: bfranklin@bfis.org  
Website: www.bfis.org

**Collegi Europa International School**  
Av. Pla del Vinyet, 110 – 08190 Sant  
Cugat del Valles, Barcelona, Spain  
Tel: 00 34 935 898420  
Fax: 00 34 936 755263  
Email: info@col-legieuropa.com or  
europa@intercom.es  
Website: www.col-legieuropa.com



### MODERN RENOVATION

€1,500,000 (£285,000)  
Renovated apartment in the Barri Gotic, with exposed brickwork and beams. It has two double bedrooms, while the living room has double windows opening out onto a balcony. Lucas Fox: 00 34 933 562989; www.lucasfox.com



### NEW-BUILD APARTMENT

€625,000 (£430,000)  
A modern apartment in Villa Olímpic, with a large communal area and swimming pool. It has three bedrooms, a terrace, car parking and storage. Port Olímpic marina is very close by. Lucas Fox: 00 34 933 562989; www.lucasfox.com



### HISTORIC HOME

€1,300,000 (£900,000)  
A unique apartment in a listed Palacete, minutes from Las Ramblas and the sea. It has high ceilings and original tiled floors, three large bedrooms, and a huge roof terrace. Lucas Fox: 00 34 933 562989; www.lucasfox.com