

£282,000: a modern one-bedroom loft apartment, left, in Gràcia, Barcelona (Engel & Völkers)

£451,400: a four-bedroom villa, right, with a pool in popular Sotogrande Costa. Through Lucas Fox



SPAIN is the European country set to dominate our overseas plans this year. It might not be the road less travelled for us Britons, but that is one reason why we love it. It is tried and trusted, reliably welcoming, with reasonable prices, good weather, miles of coastline, cultural cities and, once again, an economy on the up.

Tourist numbers are also rising. The Spanish Tourist Office says the country had 60 million visitors last year – including 15.5 million from the UK – up more than three per cent on 2014, with a similar increase predicted for this year. Meanwhile, estate agent Lucas Fox reports an increase in British buyers throughout last year, up a whopping 53 per cent on the previous year in the third quarter, with Barcelona, Ibiza and the Costa Brava the big favourites.

CULTURAL SPAIN: MADRID AND BARCELONA

It takes less than three hours to travel between Spain's great cities of Madrid and Barcelona by high-speed train, making it easy to start the day with a café con leche by the sea in Barcelona's Old Town before finishing it with late-night tapas over a glass of rioja in Madrid's Plaza Mayor.

The cities offer culture overload: museums, art galleries, theatre and architecture combined with a truly buzzing all-night social scene.

"Two-bedroom apartments in a renovated classical building in a central location, priced between £360,000 and £720,000, are most requested in Madrid," says Rod Jamieson, of Lucas Fox. "Popular city centre areas include Salamanca, Chamberi, Justicia and Cortes."

In majestic Barcelona, with its wide

We're off to sunny Spain – again

London buyers are back for sun, sea, sport and culture as Spain's economy recovers, says **Cathy Hawker**

avenues, winding and characterful Old Town and thriving harbour scene, demand for new-build developments is outstripping supply, though new projects are coming to market this year.

British buyers also like investment opportunities, with prime apartments in the Old Town or Eixample offering good long-term rental returns.

In Madrid – a city to walk through, with landscaped parks and towering palatial architecture – Lucas Fox has a lovely three-bedroom apartment in a restored convent in central La Latina for £487,500, while in Barcelona, light and modern one- to three-bedroom apartments in Eixample start from £241,000.



£715,000: a four-bedroom villa, above, set in an orange grove on the outskirts of Sóller in north-west Majorca, through Engel & Völkers. Sóller, left, in a bowl-shaped valley full of citrus trees, is popular with international tourists

COASTAL SPAIN: MAJORCA AND IBIZA

Along the Spanish coast, the golf course is king. It is home to some cheap and cheerful resorts, but it caters for high rollers, too. Last summer, Aylesford International saw clients paying £72,000 a week to rent the best villas on the fashionable island of Ibiza. On the neighbouring Balearic island of Majorca, humming with regeneration, five-star hotels were fully booked in the peak months. Nearly 20 per cent of all visitors to Spain head to these islands. Palma airport, the gateway to Majorca, is the 12th busiest in the EU.

Areas to watch this year in Majorca, according to Hans Lenz of Engel & Völkers, include the outskirts of Sóller,

beautiful Fornalutx in the west and Canyamel in the north-east, where buyers can find good value in seafront property. New seafront developments in the prized south-west are already attracting investors, too, along with new villas from £360,000 in Cala Pi, in the south.

Little sister Menorca, beloved by sailors for its deep-water harbour and delightful bays, is the quieter Balearic island, where strict environmental laws have preserved its natural beauty.

Demand from overseas buyers rose last year, says Engel & Völkers, especially for rare seafront plots on the largely undeveloped coast and for townhouses in the historic former capital of Ciutadella, from £218,000.

SPORTY SPAIN: SOTOGRANDE

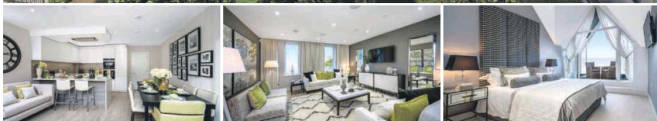
Even the hyperactive find it hard to get bored in Sotogrande. The Andalusian resort has polo fields, football pitches, a marina and five golf courses. There are restaurants and bars, but it concentrates on providing a healthy environment for active people.

Savills have property priced from £210,000 for a marina apartment with two bedrooms and terrace. Similar-size apartments in Sotogrande Alto next to prestigious Valderrama Golf Club start from £357,500.

■ **Lucas Fox:** lucasfox.com
■ **Engel & Völkers:** engelvoelkers.com
■ **Savills:** savills.com



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