

House&Home

Spain property | The rhythm of sultry Seville is being restored as the pandemic eases and buyers reinvigorate the market.

By *Zoe Dare Hall*

September feels like the start of a new year for many Sevillanos. It's the month that marks their return to the Andalusian city after a summer spent escaping the heat on the nearby Cadiz coast.

The tourists are drifting back too, with French, Belgian and English voices heard again in the streets, cafés and around the historic centre's monuments (minus the queues for now). Seville is clearly banking on them returning in great numbers: 25 new hotels are set to open in the city by next spring.

This September, though, there's the added sense of new beginnings after 18 months of pandemic — a period that has left a city known for its flamenco, heat and passion, feeling unnervingly subdued. “Not to see hugging on the streets is to miss the heartbeat of the people and their warmth. Everyone is keeping their distance,” says Alison Rogers, a teacher from London who visited this summer.

The city is “gradually getting back its rhythm”, says Mónica Granados Cabrera from estate agency Lucas Fox Seville. At least the local property market has been a metronome. “It's one of the only Spanish cities that didn't see a fall in median prices during the pandemic,” says Miguel Ángel Loubet, an analyst whose *Microanálisis Inmobiliario* blog cites price rises of 5.8 per cent in 2021 compared with 2019.

The bulk of demand has been domestic — like everywhere else this past year, local residents have been busy ditching cramped city-centre flats for roomier homes further out. You needn't go far — just 2km from the historic centre to Nervión, the business district, to find family-friendly flats, or to El Porvenir, for houses next to the shaded paths in María Luisa park, the city's green lungs.

The city's wealthiest local buyers, including footballers and chief executives, head to the private estates around the Real Club Sevilla and Zaudín golf clubs a 20-minute drive east and west of the historic centre,



Passions and palacios

respectively. “You'll pay around €1.1m for a 300 sq m villa with a 1,000 sq m garden,” says Sergio André at Seville Sotheby's Realty, who expects his agency will finish this year selling 30 per cent more homes than in 2020 or 2019, which were roughly similar.

But for foreign buyers — including an influx of individual or institutional investors seeking to turn 17th or 18th-century *palacios* into boutique hotels or tourist-let buildings — Seville is all about its historic core. Their starting point is the Santa Cruz neighbourhood, where the Moorish, Unesco World Heritage bell tower atop Seville Cathedral provides a compass to navigate the ancient streets. Nearby is the Real Fábrica de Tabacos, famed for a certain Carmen and her way with rolling cigars. “Sevillans don't want to live in Santa Cruz because it's too touristy,” says André, “but foreigners like the

(Above) The banks of the river Guadalquivir attract those trying to escape Seville's sweltering heat; (right) a four-bedroom house, €1.2m

Mara Brandl/Getty Images



buildings with their internal courtyards and columns.”

Newcomers to the busy centre soon become expert at working out where to find respite from temperatures that have recently hit 44C, whether it's in squares shaded by orange trees — do not

be tempted to bite into any, they're deeply sour — or along the banks of the Guadalquivir river, whose wide expanse brings a sense of space and natural air conditioning to the sweltering city.

Since the pandemic, Seville's residents have also discovered a newfound

appreciation of their roof terraces. “Most rooftops on residential buildings are communal and have only ever been used for laundry. But in recent months, people have started to make them part of their living space,” says Cabrera. “We are seeing high demand for *áticos* [top floor flats], either with private terraces, or with access to a shared terrace where they can divide off their own space with some plants.”

Such access to fresh air comes with a premium. “For a flat on a lower floor, expect to pay €1,300-€1,800 per sq m. For an *ático*, it will be €3,000 per sq m or €4,000 if you have a cathedral or river view,” Cabrera says. “There's very little stock and most of it needs work, so for investors, the prices often don't work as, apart from some very, very special properties, such as those on the riverfront, Seville doesn't have much capacity to go above €5,000 per sq m.”

i / BUYING GUIDE

The average price in Seville centre is €2,977 per sq m (August 2021, Idealista).

Andalucía's newly lowered property transfer tax is a flat rate of 7 per cent (previously 8-10 per cent) until the end of 2021. Stamp duty, payable on new-builds, has been reduced from 1.5 to 1.2 per cent.

Seville now only grants new touristic licences to flats in dedicated tourist-let buildings.

What you can buy for . . .

€295,900 A two-bedroom apartment in a newly renovated building in the old town, on the market with Lucas Fox.

€510,400 A new-build three-bedroom flat in Nervión, through Aedas Homes.

€1.2m A four-bedroom house with an 8,000 sq m garden, through Lucas Fox.

