

MOVE TO *Murcia*



THESE PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The delightful beach at Isla Plana, with the social club in the background. Peter and Lis's apartment is near the beach, although there is a shared pool in the complex. The clear water at the quaint harbour is warm enough to swim in. The apartments have a lovely sea view.





Train to Spain

Retirees Lis and Peter Raymond from Manchester retired to Spain, searching for sun and sea, ease of travel and a stable civilised environment.



Until about eight years ago, Peter Raymond would not go to Spain. His image of the country was raucous tourists in large resorts on the costas.

Persuaded by his wife Lis that the country had more to offer, the couple flew from Manchester to Alicante in search of a new home in the sun. They rented a car for a week, driving down the coast from Alicante as far as Aguilas, visiting every building site in search of a three bedroom apartment with a pool.

They didn't find the home of their dreams, instead they discovered the sun-drenched shores of the Costa Cálida. They were so impressed with the area, they bought a villa off-plan at Camposol near Mazarrón, about 20 minutes drive inland in a new development.



During their first visit they discovered that Spain was well organised, friendly, with many English speakers. "We could very quickly find our way around a Spanish menu, although we didn't always get quite what we expected in those early days!" Lis recalls. "We are now more experienced and we certainly enjoy the varied local cuisine offered in the Mazarrón Bay area." They also found good roads and affordable property prices, with a cheaper cost of living than they had grown accustomed to in the UK.

Cutting bureaucracy

Peter and Lis found the legal system, legal fees and the use of notaries (giving power of attorney to a nominated person) to be efficient, low in cost, and useful for cutting out much of the dreaded bureaucracy they were used to. With all the bad press in the UK of British property owners losing properties and having problems with planning permission, the couple found the notary system effective, helpful and reassuring.

Despite living close to Manchester Airport, Peter and Lis decided to travel by rail when house-hunting, leading them to search for a home with close access to an efficient rail system. They have done over 42 round trips, using Eurostar, between London and Paris, the TrenHotel (RENFE) overnight from Paris to Madrid, and when the pair lived in Camposol, the local train from Madrid to Murcia. Now they travel to Cartagena, to their home in Isla Plana, where they have lived since July 2008.

Their new penthouse apartment has three bedrooms and two bathrooms with stunning sea views over the Mediterranean, roof top solarium and shared pool close to the typically old fashioned Spanish village of Isla Plana. The village has a variety of restaurants and bars to while away the

hours during those long hot balmy summer evenings, when not entertaining on their private roof top solarium. It also has a small selection of shops including a bank, a pharmacy, mini markets and a hairdressing salon. All the basics needed for day to day living, while Puerto de Mazarrón, less than 10 minutes drive, is great for larger shopping trips. Cartagena city is 20 minutes away and Murcia just 45 minutes.

Friends from home make frequent visits, many of whom have fallen in love with Peter and Lis's new home and the numerous sandy beaches which make up the Bay of Mazarrón. The area is particularly lively in July and August thanks to the influx of Spanish families taking their annual holiday, giving the area "a great buzz," according to Lis.

Tales of unreliable train services, dodgy roads and inaccessibility have not affected Peter and Lis. "Anyone who doubts the service here needs to make a visit and check it out for themselves. During our eight years here, we have seen the building of high speed rail links to Córdoba and Seville, high quality roads in and around Mazarrón, toll roads and excellent freeways to Alicante, Murcia and Almería. The new infrastructure has made the Costa Cálida far more accessible from northern Europe," explains Lis, who has found rail travel to be cheap, comfortable and interesting, some services even showing films to keep passengers amused.

"We pay €150 council tax in Spain compared to £1150 in the UK for the same services!"

Although electricity is expensive, the Raymonds have found all other local public services to be cheap, and waste disposal efficient. Low food and fuel costs, and more affordable eating out are just some of the benefits, despite the value of the euro. In fact they estimate that the overall cost of living in Spain compared to the UK is about 25% lower. "The council tax comparison is always one we amaze our UK friends and neighbours with. €150 council tax in Spain compared to £1,150 in the UK for more or less the same services! And for that we also get our refuse collected daily... yes I do mean daily!" exclaims Lis.

It is not without its problems though, as many Brits who have gone there to make a new life will know. Electricity and water supplies, which are

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THIS PAGE The dramatic coastline has rich colours, lots of coves and even an old Roman baths (below).

very reliable in the UK, are frequently disturbed. Lis says, “The long term question of water supplies to the whole of the south eastern coast is one that needs addressing urgently. The recently built desalination plant at Isla Plana near our new apartment is one solution for our area and surrounding areas.”

The poor opinion of the Spanish health System held by many Brits is not shared by this pair of expats, finding local clinics and ‘state of the art’ hospitals in Murcia and Cartagena to have good knowledge and excellent services.

“The quality of life and cost of living are excellent and the final ingredient of the sun – around 320 days of sunshine per year – makes Spain an ideal country to live in.”

ADS PROPERTY

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PETER AND LIS'S EXPERIENCE

There are many first class builders, whose build quality is excellent with good quality tiles, woodwork and an abundance of electrical sockets. There are however some very poor quality builders who create both a bad image for Spain, and real problems for the British people who live here.

Careful market research, legal advice and local knowledge are important when buying in Spain, but the notary system is a great help in this regard. When we bought our most recent property in Isla Plana, we bought it through the long established and well respected local property locators – ADS property, run by the husband and wife team Pat and Maura Dunne. They moved to Spain and set up this business to offer prospective clients the type of service that we have all come to expect. Their local knowledge is second to none and personally we prefer to deal with smaller companies where one can build a personal relationship and be treated as a valued customer.

Spain is a foreign country, and without speaking the language, life can be difficult. It is incumbent upon anyone deciding to live here

to learn the language, but you should use the facilities of a translator where necessary. Language is no real barrier for anyone determined to live in the country, but the local Spanish people greatly appreciate anyone making an effort to learn their language.

We do find some of the racism at football matches both surprising and disappointing, given Spain's history being so tightly interwoven with Moorish tradition. With the country's rich history of global trade and colonisation of South America coupled to the shared Christian and Muslim communities of Cartagena, this issue is a surprise and difficult to understand, but needs addressing to avoid any further conflict.

Spain is a wonderful and civilised country, with great cities, friendly people, beautiful beaches and a marvellous climate, although no country is without its faults. Spain and the Costa Calida are well worth visiting, and indeed moving to! Don't just take our word for it, come on down and see for yourself!

