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Winter property hotspots abroad: a guide on where to look

Want to join the flocks of Britons who are investing in overseas bolt holes to escape our miserable weather?



Susan Emmett

It is cold and grey outside, and we are all deep into post-party-season depression, but Mike and Janice Murphy will have none of all that. While the rest of us are piling on the extra layers and turning up the central heating, the couple from Bar-low, in Derbyshire, will be toasting themselves by the pool in St Lucia, in the Caribbean.

Like the flocks of American and Canadian “snowbirds” who leave the frozen northeast and fly south to Florida each winter, the Murphys will be spending more than the usual two weeks at their former plantation house on the Cap Estate.

“We are planning to go out for at least a month, possibly more,” says Mike, 55, who owns MM Design, a graphic-design company in Sheffield, with his wife, Janice, 52. “It takes at least a fortnight to settle down, unwind and adapt to a different pace of life. I have been grafting for 30 years, wondering what it’s all about. Now I know. After years of working under pressure and beating deadlines, we have acquired enough cash to give us the freedom to be able to spend months away.”

Buying a home abroad specifically to avoid the harshness of the British winter is proving increasingly popular, as the weakness of the dollar, cheap flights and fast internet access allow more people to make their money stretch further away from the tyranny of the office.

Mike says that many of his like-minded friends are doing the same thing this winter. “My parents would never have done this,” he says. “But I know a lot of people who realise life is too short, and don’t want to wait until they are retired to have time off.”

For the Murphys, buying the run-down property has also proved a good investment. Their villa was recently valued at £1.78m: 80% more than two years ago, when the refurbishment was completed.

THAILAND

January weather ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Accessibility ★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Cost of living ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

The weather across the Far East is in dramatic contrast to the British winter. Thailand, where temperatures at this time of year are firmly in the 30s, is one of the most popular destinations for tourists and property investors alike, even if flights typically take about 11 hours and cost more than £600.

Wealthy expats living and working in the financial centres of Southeast Asia – Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur – have traditionally been the main investors in second homes in the area. But Europe-based buyers are piling in to take advantage of the economic boom.

On Ko Samui, £100,000 buys a two-bed villa with a shared pool on the boutique resort of Maenam Hills. For £163,000, you could have a three-bed penthouse at Siranya, a slightly larger resort with a spa (07894 469974, www.clairebrownrealty.com).

Foreigners are banned from owning land in Thailand, which means buying property there can be complicated. For that reason, it is crucial to obtain good legal advice.