

ABROAD OUTLOOK

A CITY REBORN

Valencia is fighting back from scandal, says Gordon Miller

PROPERTY prices in Valencia are on the rise as Spain's third city prepares to host the America's Cup, the world most high-profile yacht race, this summer. And with the old port and waterfront being given a makeover, Valencia seems determined to make its well-publicised land-grab scandal a thing of the past.

About 20,000 compulsory purchases have so far been allowed by the authorities, leaving foreign home owners with huge bills or even the complete loss of their dream home. But with the matter now in the hands of the European Court, which has ordered Spain to clean up its act, investors are flooding back.

They should not be complacent, however. Solicitors in the area are warning potential buyers that rogue estate agents are just as much of a hazard.

Conor Wilde, of the estate agent Spain & Property, urges investors to buy through an agent who has an office and who is a member of one of the local professional bodies. He says: "Don't buy from someone who offers only a mobile phone number, who has a Hotmail address and asks to meet you in a supermarket car park."

Martin Hayes, of Poveda Hayes, a locally based firm of solicitors, agrees and says that the public can lessen its expo-

on the purchaser's behalf, the pitfalls of this law may be entirely avoided," he says.

But if you tread carefully, there are plenty of bargains, especially for families. Valencia is home to 800,000 people, and could have been designed with children in mind. It has acres of sandy beaches and parkland, outdoor entertainments aplenty; best of all, Valencianos love children.

"The attitude here is all about the family," says Duncan Smith, originally from Edinburgh, who recently bought a villa with his wife, Natalia, and three-year-old daughter, Ana, 20 minutes from the city centre in La Cova, near Monserrat. "Everywhere you go you see extended families eating, sitting and

Rogue agents are as much of a problem as land grab

playing together." One of the places you can see playtime in action is at the L'Oceanogràfic, a complex of seven aquariums at the eastern end of the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences. The park is home to sharks, dolphins, sea lions and

month for my three-year-old to attend nursery five days a week; the hospitals are excellent and put the ones in the United Kingdom to shame. It's no wonder that so many people from the British Isles

are moving over here."

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Playtime: Gulliver's Park, in the old river bed of Valencia

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Martin Hayes, of Poveda Hayes, a locally based firm of solicitors, agrees and says that the public can lessen its exposure to the effects of the ruling by following the correct legal steps when purchasing a property. "If the proper pre-contract inquiries are undertaken by an independent lawyer working

ums at the eastern end of the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences. The park is home to sharks, dolphins, sea lions and penguins, and is situated in the dried bed of the River Turia, which was diverted away from the city in 1957.

"The gardens are at the centre of the outdoor way of life that we have in the city," says Conor Wilde. "I've lived here for 14 years, the last three with my wife, Susi, and son, Niall, and I think this is a grand place to raise a family. Property remains affordable and living costs are virtually next to nothing."

For example, a three-bedroom 240 sq m new-build house Wilde is selling in Altury, a development 25 minutes from the city centre by car, is for sale at €320,000 (£220,000). The annual service charge for all amenities, including refuse collection, road and pavement upkeep and communal street lighting, is €347. The residents of the 800 or so properties at Altury are mainly Spanish, British and German.

Wilde says that it is important to work only with builders on whom your agent has undertaken rigorous checks. His mission to ensure that buyers are not conned comes from a genuine enthusiasm for his adopted home. "This city is a great place, especially for families," he says. "The schools are superb — it costs only €300 a

FACTFILE

Is it for me? Families would love it for its great beaches, parks and the child-friendly locals, as would trendy couples looking for an alternative to Barcelona.

How to get there? Easyjet, Ryanair and BA fly to the city's Manises airport, a 20-minute car journey from the centre.

Where to eat? Valencia is the birthplace of paella. Check out the seafood version at one of the many restaurants on the promenade at Las Arenas beach.

Where to stay: Parents who prefer to stay in a stylish hotel should head for the Petit Palace Bristol (www.hthoteles.com) near the main plaza and ten minutes from the Turia Gardens; family rooms from 85 euros (£56).

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