

Living the dream!

The thought of waking up every morning to a bright blue sky was enough to inspire one couple to make the move to the Costa Cálida, write **Liane Voisey**



The numerous beautiful beaches, hidden coves and varied countryside make Mazarrón and the Costa Cálida, a paradise for holidays or for those looking for a new way of life.

The coastal areas of Mazarrón boasts some of the finest beaches in Spain and the generally untouched nature of the coastline and countryside appeals to those who seek a tranquil environment for their holidays.

It is perhaps not surprising that, the summer months, the region is a big draw for a number of tourists. At other times of the year, however it is known to be blissfully quiet.

And the sun always shines in Mazarrón. The surrounding mountain ranges gives Mazarrón a "microclimate" which invariably results in better weather than the rest of Spain. In fact Puerto de Mazarrón boasts more than 320 days of sunshine every year.

Among those enjoying the sunny weather are Irish couple Pat Dunne and his wife Maura. They recognised the unspoilt and uncommercial appeal of Mazarrón back in 2003, when they decided to leave their home in England and move out there permanently. Pat tells us about how they made the move to Spain.....

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO LEAVE THE UK?

Maura took redundancy in early 2003 and this was the trigger that we needed to sell our property in the UK and this also provided us with the opportunity and challenge that we were both looking for.

We considered the move to be an exciting and new chapter in our lives. Also, I guess the time was right for us; as we do not have any children, so uprooting children from their education was not an issue that we had to consider.

Our families live in Ireland and so leaving the UK did not entail leaving family behind. Visiting family in Ireland is just as assessable from Spain as it was from the UK. In the UK we both had good jobs and worked very hard, but our perception was that "we were running but we were getting nowhere fast...."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE SPAIN?

The weather, the cost of living the relaxed lifestyle and the easy access to the UK and Ireland. The thought of waking up every morning to a bright blue sky was one of the first attractions.

MEET THE READERS

Maura and Pat Dunne



AGE:
41 & 42

JOB: Specialist Independent Property Locators

WHERE : From Ireland originally, the Dunnes also lived in Olney, Buckinghamshire for many years, before moving to Puerto de Mazarrón in southeastern Spain in 2003

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The part of Spain that we have chosen to live in has been recognised by the World Health Organisation as having one of the healthiest climates, with its 320 days of sunshine per year.

The cost of living in Spain is still a lot less than in the UK and all the reports that we read highlight the fact that in Spain, "you work to live", rather than "you live to work"



4 TOP TIPS FROM THE DUNNES

1. Choose a location that will give you a good return on your investment if you ever need to sell
2. Spend time researching your chosen area and read as many publications as possible before spending your hard-earned money
3. When moving to Spain, don't bring your right hand drive car, as re-registering it can be quite costly and new cars are cheaper there
4. Try visiting your chosen area during different seasons of the year and speak to as many expats as possible to avoid any pitfalls

The lifestyle here is very different to the average UK lifestyle.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE IN THE COSTA CÁLIDA ?

We read much about the Costa Calida in the UK before we left, and it was described in those days as "the last undiscovered part of Spain". This appealed to us, as we did not want to be in the very commercialised, highly populated parts of Spain.

We saw many television programmes about the Costa Calida and read a number of magazines. We first visited the area in our motorhome and fell in love with it almost immediately. When we returned to this area, it felt like we were coming home.

This area has everything from rugged coastline, to golden sandy beaches, mountains, towns and villages - many of which still have that old Spanish charm.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR LOCATION?

The Costa Calida is primarily a Spanish holiday resort and is still relatively undiscovered compared to some of the other Costas. Package holidays have not reached this part of Spain yet, even though we have a very good infrastructure and good airport facilities. This area boasts some fantastic beaches which, even in high season, remain uncrowded. It is also becoming a mecca for golf, with new golf resorts being developed locally

Many of the Spanish traditions are still practised in this area and village fiestas seem to happen at the drop of a hat -

these are always good fun and a good way of immersing oneself into Spanish customs. We live by the sea and yet we are only 25 minutes drive from the old Roman city of Cartagena and 45 minute drive from the capital city of the region - Murcia. Everything from beaches to cities are all within easy driving distances.

WHAT PREPARATIONS DID YOU MAKE BEFORE YOU BOUGHT YOUR HOUSE?

We read many books about living and working in Spain. We also spoke to friends who had moved to other parts of Spain. This helped us avoid many of the pitfalls one hears about when moving to Spain. Our philosophy was; ask the same question to lots of different people, this way you get a more balanced answer.

WHAT IS YOUR PROPERTY LIKE?

We live in a two bedroom, two bathroom luxury apartment on a small urbanisation with fantastic sea views. We have a fabulous pool, lovely gardens, and a tennis court, (facilities looked after by our caretaker) and we are within easy walking distance of the local town, which has all the amenities that one needs for day-to-day living. About 70% of the residents in our urbanisation are Spanish which is a good way of brushing up on our language skills. Our balcony has fabulous views of the mountains and the bay of La Azohia, a small fishing village four kilometres away

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS?

Maura studied a little Spanish a number of years ago, but other than that, our command of the language was almost non-existent. When we first arrived in Spain, we employed a Spanish school teacher to give us private lessons. We followed this up with CD's and videos and Maura recently attended an intensive Spanish course at one of the local colleges.

The best way we have found to learn the language is by "having a go" when we deal with Spanish people on a day-to-day basis.

ARE THERE GOOD TRAVEL LINKS IN THE AREA?

Yes, we have three airports all within two hours drive of Puerto de Mazarrón - Alicante (90 minutes), Murcia San Javier (45 minutes) and Almeria (100 minutes). A new airport at Corvera is planned for 2007. These airports are all well served by both scheduled and low cost airlines from the UK and Ireland.

There is a new motorway under construction at the moment from Vera to Cartagena, which will have a slip road to Puerto de Mazarrón. The main motorway which runs from Portugal to France can be accessed at a slip road some 30 minutes drive from Puerto de Mazarrón. The quality of the roads in Spain has improved tremendously in the last few years as a result of funding from the EC. The rail network in this area is also very good, with a new high speed train link from Cartagena to Madrid under construction.

HOW HAVE YOU BENEFITED FROM YOUR MOVE TO SPAIN?

We enjoy a much better lifestyle, with less stress, and have a very good social life. And we now drive on the same side of the road as the rest of Europe (excluding the UK and Ireland!)

The roads here are less crowded and you can plan your journey almost to the minute. We are much healthier, less stressed and have more time to appreciate the good things in life. Walking, cycling and fishing are some of our hobbies and there are many places to enjoy these whilst taking in some of the fabulous scenery.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE COST OF LIVING?

We find the cost of living very cheap. You can have a three course meal “menu del día” with wine and coffee for under 10€ The cost of petrol and diesel is much cheaper, as are electrical goods and furniture. The most noticeable cost saving is the council tax; it is almost non-existent compared to the UK and yet the services provided by the local councils are just as good. The facilities on offer in hospitals certainly rival any of those in the UK. Public transport is also very cheap and the services are very reliable.

WHAT DIFFERENCES DO YOU SEE IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

We no longer work nine to five, Monday to Friday. Our lifestyle is more flexible and we don't spend hours clock watching. We have lots more time to relax and enjoy our surroundings. In the summer time we enjoy the siesta and have been known to squeeze in a couple of hours by the pool in the middle of the day.

WHAT WAS YOUR OCCUPATION PRIOR TO MOVING TO SPAIN?

Maura worked as a Human Resources Manager for the Volkswagen group and I worked as a Sales Office Manager for Grundfos Pumps.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS THAT YOU HAVE SET UP?



We set up ADS, a Specialist Independent Property Locating business in January 2004 - this was as a result of the many frustrations we encountered ourselves when we first tried to buy property in Spain. Our free service is aimed at those who do not have the time to make several visits to Spain in order to find their dream home.

The aim of ADS is to provide as much information as possible about the property, the area and the whole buying process. The information we provide is totally unbiased. We are a family run business with minimal overheads and our promise is to avoid the hard sell.

We act as the eyes and ears for our customers and living here we have an extensive local knowledge. We do not have any staff, but work with a number of local business people who offer services which compliment ours from cleaning services to builders and gardeners.

WHAT ARE YOUR BUSINESS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

ADS started out as a property locating business but in its first year, we expanded our services by offering an after-sales consultancy and project management service. We oversee everything, from furniture delivery to swimming pool maintenance to providing a project management service for extensions or alternations. Our plans for the future are to carry on doing what we do well, keep the business personalised and not to grow too quickly. All of our customers have received a very personal service from us, which they like and we want to keep it that way.

There is a certain amount of flexibility in the service that we offer - if in the future the requests from our customers change, then we will change to accommodate them.

HAVE YOU FOUND IT EASY TO BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY?

Becoming part of the community was very easy for us, having kissed the Blarney Stone (more than once!) and having made the move to a foreign country once before, becoming part of the community here was relatively easy.

We are naturally sociable people and adapt very quickly to our surroundings. We know more people here than we ever knew in the UK or Ireland. Many of our clients have become our friends and our Spanish neighbours are very friendly and always keen to stop and have a chat.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR LIFESTYLE?

We love meeting people and helping them find their dream home in Spain. Living in such a fantastic location with all year round sunshine is the icing on the cake. One of Maura's hobbies is photography, which she has very nicely incorporated into her day to day work.

With our new lifestyle in Spain, we can say hand on heart, “we have a life” and it is wonderful. The predictability of the weather just makes such a difference - you can plan a barbecue months in advance and not have to worry on the day.



WHY BUY THERE: MAZARRÓN

This unspoilt, rural area is surrounded by spectacular mountains. It lies just half an hour's drive west from the historic towns of Cartagena and Murcia and just 80 minutes from the international airport in Alicante. Puerto de Mazarrón is known as the Cornwall of Spain - it is a fishing port that is growing in popularity with property investors. The regions' 35km of unspoilt beaches, pretty coves and harbours are a pull for sunseekers. The region has the lowest rainfall in Spain for the winter months. An up and coming area, planned new developments are expected to expand the town in the next few years.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

We would have moved here years ago, but the time wasn't right. Also we would have brushed up a bit more on the Spanish language before we got here but we are doing OK.

WHAT DIFFICULTIES HAVE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME?

The main difficulty that any foreigner has to encounter, when moving to a "strange country" is coping with the bureaucracy and legal requirements of that country and the Spanish bureaucracy is world renowned! Buying property in a foreign country where you don't speak the language and you don't understand the process is doubly stressful. This is where we can help - we explain everything to our clients and tell them what they can expect. Visiting the police station to apply for your Spanish identification number can be a daunting process, especially if you don't speak the language - this is where we come in, we know the ropes and we guide our clients through the process, making the whole experience as stress free as possible.

HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY PECULARITIES IN EVERYDAY SPANISH LIFE?

When we first got here, the siesta took a bit of getting used to. All the small shops close at lunch time and open again in the evening. This can be quite

frustrating at the beginning but you soon acclimatise. Also, we find that the Spanish people don't seem to have embraced the concept of returning phone calls or responding to emails on the same day. Perhaps their way of life has never encouraged this type of response and they are not going to change now.

DO YOU HAVE ANY AMUSING ANECDOTES?

I visited a snack bar one day with some clients and we ordered some filled baguettes from the waiter! Five minutes later the waiter returned to our table and said "we have no bread today because the tobacconist across the road was not open this morning". We all looked at him rather bemused, he forgot to mention that the tobacconist doubles up as a bakery.

Also in Spain, we have "social clubs" which are similar to working men's clubs in the UK. At our local social club, you can have a coffee, tapas or a beer. You can also get your hair cut, your feet pedicured, have a game of dominos or sign on the voters roll - all under one roof.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU MISS FROM THE UK?

Most foodstuffs are available here, however we have not been able to break away from our favourite mature cheddar cheese - we get a steady supply from visiting friends.

We miss seeing the daffodils in spring and good old Radio 2, however we can tune in to that on the internet. Staying in touch with friends and family in the UK and Ireland is very easy, either by phone or email and they are never more than a few hours away by plane.

WHAT DO YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS THINK ABOUT YOUR DECISION TO MOVE TO SPAIN?

At first most people thought that we were either brave or stupid. They said "you've sold your house, you're moving to Spain, you've no jobs and you don't speak the language" However now they say "we knew that you could do it, we knew that you would make a success of it"

What they don't realise is that when you first get here, there were a number of hurdles to overcome and it is not as easy as it might sound. They also comment on how well we both look and how the move to a more relaxed lifestyle suits us. We love our new lifestyle and as far as we are concerned there's no going back.....

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

If you would like to share your experiences of relocating to Spain with our readers, then you can write to Spanish Magazine, Merricks Media, 3 - 4 Riverside Court, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, BA2 3DZ or you can email: liane.voisey@merricksmedia.co.uk