

OVERSEAS

Joseph Robinson, a yoga teacher, is looking for a farm in rural Andalusia, with some yurts, to set up a yoga retreat. He and his Canadian fiancée, Sammy, are combing the dramatic valleys and hilltop villages half an hour inland from Malaga for the perfect property.

"We are looking for somewhere that feels cut off, yet is not too far from the coast," says the 38-year-old from Herefordshire. "The attraction is the affordability — it feels like a good time to buy in Spain."

Robinson is not the only buyer eschewing the Costas, and in rural Andalusia your money can go a long way. Prices fell 40 to 60 per cent after the 2008 property crash and have not bounced back. The well-heeled British buyers who had been inspired by the tales of remote Andalusia extolled in Chris Stewart's 1999 bestselling book *Driving Over Lemons* dried to a trickle, and rural Spain has never held quite the same allure as rural France.

Yet a new generation of globally mobile and remote-working buyers are taking a fresh look at the Spanish hinterland. "Post [the] Brexit [vote] buyers are looking to relocate to Europe, with inland Spain a favourite, because of the established services and facilities for foreign nationals, and a more authentic Spanish life," says Gemma Bruce of the property portal The Viewing.

"An increasing number of buyers looking at inland Spanish properties are also investment-savvy, looking for more property for their money."

They are not the only ones, however. The annual survey by the Spanish property service company Aktua found that among Spanish buyers there has been a shift in demand this year away from the coast. Last year 38 per cent of those looking for a second home searched inland, but this year it is 49 per cent.

The Spanish property commentator Mark Stücklin says: "There is local discontent [with tourists] along the coast, and with it the vigorous enforcement of restrictions on Airbnb holiday lets," he says. "In contrast, the largely empty and dramatic interior is untapped."

So where are buyers looking? Research carried out by Spanish property portal Kyero shows that three of the five locations with the biggest increase in buyers in the past year are 20-30 miles inland of Malaga — Alhama de Granada, Coin and Alhaurin el Grande. The four locations where interest has dropped off most significantly are coastal, including



This cortijo in Gaucin has five bedrooms and is on the market for €2.75 million with Hamptons International

Want a lifestyle shift? Head for rural Spain

Buyers starting a business or switching to remote working are shunning the coast for the countryside, says Liz Rowlinson

Marbella, where sales have fallen by 31 per cent in a year. "Two factors are behind this move away from the main coastal areas," says Richard Speigal, the head of research at Kyero. "The first is the weakened pound, which has led British buyers to expand their searches outside the

traditional hotspots. The second is demographics; the fall in demand from older Britons concerned about Brexit has made the average buyer noticeably younger, mid thirties to early fifties, and with more adventurous tastes than [wanting] an apartment by the sea."

These enterprising types, such as Robinson and his fiancée, are seeking fitness and yoga retreats, or year-round bases for equestrianism, cycling and walking tours that can maximise the climate in Andalusia. In the Axarquía region east of Malaga going skiing and surfing in the same day is a real possibility.

So what can you buy? Close to



In Alt Emporda, this country house has seven bedrooms and is on sale for €2.25 million through Lucas Fox

need of work for €150,000, but be careful if you are hunting for a rural cortijo for a home or business, says Barbara Wood of The Property Finders agency. "Following on from all the town hall corruption scandals, the Andalusian authorities are vigorously enforcing planning rules on rustico [rural] properties. It's very difficult to get a change of use or get permission to extend," she warns. "Check carefully the boundaries and the size of the property cited in the title deeds. Also if you are being offered a property with an AFO [assimilated out of planning ordination], beware that this declaration indicates that it has been built outside of planning regulations."

The trend for yoga retreats, warm-weather training areas for cyclists and triathletes has also spread to the Emporda region of rolling countryside and medieval villages between Girona and the Costa Brava. It is referred to by some as "Spain's Tuscany". "The market for inland property in the region has rocketed since the beginning of the year after years of inactivity," says Tom Maidment, the partner at the agency Lucas Fox. "It's not only wealthy Catalans from Barcelona buying second homes, but also international buyers looking for country properties in which to set up businesses. The volcanic hills, and Lake Banyoles in the Pla de l'Estany region are ideal for cyclists and rowing teams."

Maidment says the typical budget is €1.5 million. The agency is selling a five-bedroom vineyard estate for €1.25 million, or an 11-bedroom estate with tennis court, pool and stables for €995,000.

Budget a bit smaller? Have a look at the northern Costa Blanca. "The Orba and Jalon valleys are popular with buyers who will happily drive 15 minutes farther inland rather than compromise on their dream of a villa with a pool," says Clare Johnston, the new business director at the agency Home Espana. "The plots are bigger, the views more expansive, you just need to be prepared for the purchase process to take a bit longer on rural homes." The agency is selling a four-bedroom house surrounded by olive and almond groves in Muria on the Costa Blanca for €575,000.



Near the village of Alcaucin on the slopes of the Sierra Tejeda mountains is an estate with a six-bedroom house on sale for €1.4 million, with The Viewing

sought-after locations such as Ronda and Gaucin, you can get a good quality country property with up to ten acres of land for about €1 million (£909,000), or pay less than that in more remote areas. Savills has a five-bedroom villa on sale for €1.4 million. Only 20 minutes' drive from the coast, near the picture-postcard village of Alcaucin on the slopes of the Sierra Tejeda mountains, you can get an estate with avocado and olive groves and a recently renovated six-bedroom house for €1.4 million (the-viewing.com).

In many off-radar villages towards Granada you can get townhouses in