

Hidden gems behind walls

Walled cities are charming places to own successful international property

BY INKY DRESNER

Some of the most interesting places to visit are walled cities, from Lucca in Italy to Girona in Spain and even further afield to Jerusalem and Ping Yoa in China - old walled cities hold a special fascination. They also offer wonderful opportunities to own international properties in popular cities, says international property specialist and founder of Hurst & Wills, Lisa Bathurst.

Throughout history city walls have been built to offer protection from enemies. Some cities were built on hills to make invasions more difficult. Others fronted the sea to protect the towns from invaders in ships or even pirates. "Today well-preserved walled cities bring tourists and have become wonderful cities to live in," says Bathurst. "They also offer South African buyers a great opportunity to own successful property abroad. Portugal has some of the most impressive walled cities in Europe and to add to the appeal, this country also offers South Africans Golden Visa opportunities," she says.

The medieval village of Obidos in Portugal is situated only an hour by bus, costing €8, away from the hustle and bustle of Lisbon. "This village is a wonderful example of a medieval town completely surrounded by intact fortified walls, made out of local limestone and marble," says Bathurst.

"The charming look of its streets, squares, houses and walls, along with the massive castle have turned the picturesque village into a very popular tourist destination in Portugal." Tourists flock there to immerse themselves in the village's visible history, while tasting the local cherry liqueur known as ginjinha or ginja.

To add to the appeal of owning property in this village, Obidos is located on a Portuguese property hotspot, the Silver Coast. With its white beaches, championship golf courses and mild climate, this area offers the ideal location for relaxation and fun outdoor activities like hiking, surfing and golf. Properties range from traditional homes to modern villas with sea views. This is an excellent alternative to expensive areas of Lisbon and Cascais, while still being close to the city and international airport, says Bathurst.

Another walled gem is Evora, about 2 hours south of Lisbon. Historically, Evora was a major trading and religious centre contained within the city's ancient walls. These days it is a young and vibrant city, with a large student population attending one of the world's oldest universities. The city is surrounded by the wine region of Alentejo, known for its vineyards, olive groves, fortified towns and traditional villages. Bathurst says, "This city has a warm climate, great wine and fine restaurants. The cobbled streets are charming and overlooked by an impressive, colourful cathedral that offers fantastic views of the surrounding wine region, it's a real gem, says Bathurst.

"Evora has some excellent property opportunities from delightful new townhouses to refurbished places and vineyards in the Alentejo wine region. The area also falls within the low-density rehabilitation criteria for Golden Visa, meaning that there are Golden Visa opportunities from only €280,000.

Another walled city is Portuguese Lagos, situated on the

Western side of the Algarve. Lagos is a mecca for outdoor sports especially known for its surfing and mountain biking. It also offers wonderful cultural attractions and a well-preserved old town with town walls dating back to the 16th century, says Bathurst. "The old town is full of beautiful, colourful architecture," says Bathurst. "There is no shortage of churches but one of the most interesting is the Capela dos Ossos (the Chapel of Bones), at the Church of San Sebastian. The marina is the town's social hub, with a throng of bars, restaurants and shops. The area is famous for its beaches, the best on the Algarve, it's great for swimming and kayaking as you search for orcas, dolphins and whales," she says.


"There is a huge variety of property in Lagos, says Bathurst. "From central historical townhouses to villas and modern apartments. The area is popular for holiday rentals which, though seasonal, can earn good annual yields. It's also popular with lifestyle retirees looking for sailing, relaxation and golf. Some resorts offer guaranteed returns," she says.

Walled cities, especially these three in Portugal offer good value for South Africans looking to diversify their wealth portfolio with international property. Hurst & Wills offers personalised advice and, thanks to our experience in the market, can assist anyone looking to purchase property abroad.



RESOURCES

Hurst & Wills, location Evora

An aerial photograph of London at sunset. The River Thames flows through the center, with the Houses of Parliament and the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) on the right bank. The Westminster Bridge is in the foreground, crowded with pedestrians and vehicles. The city skyline is visible in the background under a dramatic, cloudy sky.

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