

Workaholic?

Spain has the cure...

If you think you're too busy to consider buying a place in Spain, you're overlooking the biggest prize the country has to offer – an opportunity to slow down, and enjoy life to the full

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IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK



British culture almost encourages us to overwork, prioritising financial and professional success above all else. Go to any social function in the UK, whether it's a dinner party or a wedding reception, and you'll find the first question most people ask to get a sense of who you are is: "What do you do?"

Hobbies, religious and sexual inclinations, and even our families seem to say less about us than our jobs, making it the key means for strangers to quickly assess what they have in common with us and how well we can expect to get on. This all contributes to the pressure we feel to achieve at work, far more than in our private lives.

Nothing could be further from the truth in Spain, where work is seen as a means to live, rather than a reason to live. Instead, love, family, friends and general enjoyment are the major values, and ones we Brits could learn to appreciate a little more, if only we had the time.

Dave Brett, who moved to Andalucia after retiring from the Army, says: "I find the Spanish in general just do enough to get by and pay the bills and won't do any more. Family comes first."

Timekeeping challenges

Moving to Spain can mean having to adjust your view of life, especially when it comes to punctuality.

Jim Porter lives with his family in Arcos de la Frontera, one of Andalucia's white towns.

"Recently we had arranged to meet at a friend's house between 6pm and 6.30pm," he says. "When we arrived she was nowhere to be seen, though her husband was in. So we waited, and waited."

"My wife, Emma, made the tea herself in the end. At 8.30pm our friend returned from a walk around town. No apology. No 'I completely forgot'. She just treated the situation as normal. That's Andalucia and you just have to take it as it comes!"

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Dave Brett found this attitude particularly difficult to adjust to.

"I was in the army for 25 years and had a regular routine and work ethic, and that has really had to change! At first I couldn't understand the philosophy of arranging to meet at 2pm, and then not actually meeting until 4pm – it used to drive me mad."

"Everyday life here couldn't be more different to

ABOVE: Having a good time comes before work in Spain

TOP RIGHT: Enjoy outdoor pursuits in the warmer climate

MIDDLE RIGHT: Spend your days off cycling through countryside

BOTTOM RIGHT: Jim and his family enjoy a more relaxing life

life in the army!” he exclaims.

However, he agrees that in many ways this has been a positive thing to have to learn.

“My pace of life has changed dramatically,” he says. “Our life has become much more relaxed and we have a lot more time together as a family. I get to see my young daughter grow up. I have more time to enjoy and value life, and to do the many things I missed out on before. There’s a lot of respect for the family and family values, and I love the fact people here all say ‘bola’ to each other and take the time to talk.”

Dave and his wife, Miriam, run an adventure holiday operator for outdoor pursuits, AndalucianAdventure.com.

“We set up tailor-made holidays with lots of activities on offer, including mountain biking, hiking, sight-seeing, horse riding, sailing and rock climbing,” Dave says. “It’s taken me two years to be acknowledged by the local firms as a respected company.

“However, it was worth it and I can hold my head up high in the street and people will say ‘hello’ and shake my hand. I like that.”

Dave acknowledges that being his own boss hasn’t meant working shorter hours, though.

“With my own company I have also been working harder to ensure it is a success,” he says.

Working hard

Jim agrees that hard work is still a part of his life, but says his priorities are different now.

“We have been running our home in Arcos de la Frontera as a guesthouse called Casa Campana for two years, and I have to admit I have only just started thinking about statistics and targets again for the first time since leaving England,” he says.

“But I would be overstating the situation if I said I was taxing myself. In the UK I got to a point where I had been working long hours for years, with little in the way of holidays, and I was suffering from burnout. I feel I have learned my lesson from my experience in England. Simply put, I am not going to stretch myself like that again.”

Many Brits find when they move to Spain to set up their own business, they end up working longer hours than in the UK, because that’s what’s required. When you are your own boss, it isn’t always easy to know when the working day ends, and you can find you expect more of yourself than you would as an employee, as you are always aiming to achieve the next goal. This may mean you have to let your family and social lives slide for a while, but it doesn’t make you a workaholic, as long as it remains a short-term measure. If it does start to get out of hand, the first step is to admit that to yourself.

Life coach Dr Sally Ann Law says: “Take a step back and write your job description as though you’re writing it for someone else, then hold yourself to that as much as possible.”

If you’re working long hours because tasks need completing, to meet commitments and reach targets, that’s not a problem, provided you are managing to balance this with a fulfilling home life. You may need



to delegate more or cut down on some areas of your work, but on the whole, providing these long hours are a temporary situation while your business takes off, you have no need to worry.

Dr Law says: “Being a workaholic points to something being out of balance with your life. You may spend too much time at work because it feels less challenging than other parts of your life; you know your role there and how to behave, and that”



makes you feel safe.

“It may have nothing to do with your workload at all. Work should never take over your life. You have to admit you have a problem, and learn to accept you’re unhappy about something rather than using work as an avoidance technique.”

Christine Quinlan, who runs a holistic health company, Body Harmony Therapy, on the Costa Blanca, agrees: “Often people work long hours as a way of ‘running away’ from problems they don’t want to deal with or to avoid boredom due to the fact they have nothing else in their lives they enjoy.”

The right balance

The easiest cure is to ensure you have a healthy balance in your life, so work doesn’t become the most important thing in it. The Spanish way of life is ideally suited to this, as they demonstrate a thirst for enjoyment that many of us, in choosing to own a property in Spain, hope to emulate.

Take some time each day to remember why you bought a home in Spain – it’s unlikely that your main aim was to earn money.

If you wanted to have a richer relationship with your partner or children, make a point of spending time with those key people.

Do as the Spanish do, and put as much energy into appreciating the people in your life as you do in your work. When your new neighbours invite you to social functions such as the Sunday afternoon paella feast, the local fiesta or even just a few drinks at a tapas bar, try to accept, instead of using work to avoid the effort of interacting with them. In the

long run, the rewards will be immense.

Part of the challenge is learning to allow yourself time off, something the Spanish are very good at.

Christine says: “Life here in Spain has a much more relaxed feel to it and the Spanish make time to enjoy themselves and be with their families. The

“The Spanish have a thirst for enjoyment that many of us, choosing a property in Spain, hope to emulate”

weather is better and a lot of time is spent outside. Even small details, such as the shops not being open after lunchtime on Saturdays and not open at all on Sundays can help, as there is more time to relax.”

When you are socialising, unless you are actively networking, shut all thoughts of work from your mind. If you enjoy a few hours of chatting about other things, it will make you feel refreshed and better able to tackle tasks that may have stumped you the day before.

Enjoy life

Spain’s warm climate is ideally suited to romantic strolls, outdoor sports and splashing around in the pool, which will help you relieve stress while having fun.

Many Spaniards now forgo the siesta in favour of taking a few hours windsurfing, or chatting in cafes with friends.

Fiesta time, which comes around frequently in Spain is another good chance to unwind, as offices across whole regions shut down and lock their doors, meaning you couldn’t work even if you wanted to.

Take your example directly from the laid-back locals as they demonstrate their verve for life. The good news is this exuberant attitude is contagious.

“Spaniards work hard, but they play hard too!” reveals Kathryn Bullock, founder of Villas For Travel.

“Nightlife in Spain mainly takes place in the streets where outside terraces are usually full to capacity creating an exciting atmosphere and pleasant ambiance. Most bars open late, with night clubs closing in the small hours of the morning.”

The Spanish are also an incredibly proud nation, and never shy about their achievements.

Learn from this positive point of view and cast off your typically British sense of shame of being boastful. When you have accomplished something, allow yourself to revel in it, and it will make your work life less stressful and more rewarding.

It will also prevent you overworking too much, as



ABOVE: Christine finds life in Spain is much more relaxing

RIGHT: For the Spanish, family definitely comes first above all else





you will look at what you have managed to do, rather than what has yet to be completed.

Speeding up, then slowing down

Christine Quinlan has noticed on the occasions people do get stressed in Spain, it tends to be due to a temporary or easily fixed problem rather than any ongoing issues.

“When I was back in Cardiff I used to treat people

“Fiesta time, which comes around frequently, is another good chance to unwind, as businesses lock their doors”

who were stressed out by their busy lives,” she says.

“I’ve noticed that although some people here are stressed, it seems to be for different reasons. In Spain, people have stress from moving and settling into a new way of life, so after a few treatments, they can be encouraged to relax more and recognise what is important for them.

“The stress in the UK often comes from work pressures and commuting, which makes people’s lives

so busy they lose the ability to enjoy a bit of ‘me time’ without feeling guilty.

“This kind of stress causes many types of illnesses because the body is constantly trying to deal with the ‘flight or fight’ adrenalin rush.

“People find themselves working harder than their bodies can comfortably deal with because of pressure from their employer or financial matters.”

This may sound daunting, but the advantage of so much work and play is that by the time you crawl into bed, you will be exhausted.

That fact, coupled with a generally more active lifestyle, healthier food and the satisfaction of a good social life means that you should sleep well, and wake up with enough energy to face the next morning with a smile. The increased chance of waking to a sunny day will also help you get out of bed!

Once you have admitted to yourself there is a problem, put some of the effort you usually save for work into embracing your new lifestyle in Spain.

Furthermore, as you ease into your new life, you may find the office doesn’t appeal as much as it used to, with a whole wealth of options for you to fill your time with, and chances are the majority of them will be far more fun and fulfilling than sitting at your desk could ever be. **SHM**

GET IN TOUCH

Have you found your life has been a lot less stressful since moving to Spain? Share your tips with other readers on our forum at: <http://forums.homesworldwide.co.uk>

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