

# Caribbean Property Buying Guide

For UK buyers and investors purchasing in the Caribbean

An insider's guide to purchasing a property in the Caribbean – helping you to understand the facts, minimise risks and ensure your property purchase is a total success.



## **Don't let this happen to you!**

My name is Kim Brown, and I am a director at The Overseas Guides Company (OGC). Before you start reading, I wanted to say 'Hi' and thank you for taking an interest in our educational materials. I truly think that buying overseas is a wonderful idea. Anyone in their right mind would like a slice of the overseas lifestyle. The fantastic climate, wonderful food, space and stress-free environment are just a few of the positive aspects. And when you consider that you can often buy a beautiful detached home with land for the same price as a one bedroom flat in many major towns in the UK, the idea becomes even more attractive.

HOWEVER, it is important for you to realise that there is a BIG problem that potential buyers face when buying an overseas property. The problem is that there are many steps when planning, visiting, financing, buying and completing on your property purchase and, if just one step is missed out, trouble can arise. Overlooking just one of the essential steps could cause a huge upset and a loss of money, time and even detriment to one's health. I know this first-hand and therefore this publication has been created to give pointers as to what to do and what not to do along the journey. Let me explain...

A few years ago, my parents-in-law lost well over £20,000 when purchasing their overseas dream home, having made many really poor decisions due to a lack of knowledge (and overlooking important steps). Sadly, because of the stress, my mother-in-law is no longer with us and my father-in-law has moved back to England, wondering how things could have gone so terribly wrong.

They unintentionally hired a 'cowboy' developer, failed to retain a solicitor, lost ££££s buying currency from a bank and not a currency specialist (like Smart Currency Exchange) and ultimately paid well over the market price for their property. Yes - their story is extreme, but when things like this happen in our lives it makes us want to do something about it.

Due to my in-laws' disaster and the inherent lack of REAL, TRUTHFUL and EDUCATIONAL information and resources in the marketplace, my business partner and I decided to start a company that produces guides and recommended services that help buyers through the entire process of buying in various overseas countries. I hope this 'taster' guide provides you with helpful information. Please remember to visit the main website at: [www.CaribbeanBuyingGuide.com](http://www.CaribbeanBuyingGuide.com). On the website you will also find weekly updates, including new informative articles, personal experience web journals, videos and more!

*Kim Brown, April 2011*

## How to read this guide

I have researched the Caribbean property buying process and I hope to share my findings and my knowledge with you during the course of this guide so that your experience is a happy and successful one. My objective is that you get a well-rounded perspective on how to buy a property in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Property Buying Guide and online resources are laid out chronologically in the following manner:

- Getting started
- Finances
- Property
- Legalities
- Moving
- Settling in

The best approach to reading this Caribbean Property Buying Guide is to flip through the sections quickly, noting the areas you're most interested in, and then to go back and read those sections in more detail. However, if you're just starting out on your journey, your best bet is to read this guide from cover to cover.

Wherever possible, I've made reference to resources where you can get more information or request the services of a reputable expert or organisation, so please use this guide as a foundation upon which to build. Keep in mind that our website is updated weekly with new articles, personal experiences, videos, new guides, worksheets and more. For notification that the website has been updated, make sure to subscribe to our weekly newsletter.

While reading, if you have any comments, unanswered questions or thoughts on how we can improve the guide, please send an email to: [Kim@OverseasGuidesCompany.com](mailto:Kim@OverseasGuidesCompany.com). The key to our service is that it is a personal one and we are always delighted to hear from our readers.

I truly hope that this guide offers you helpful information and provides you with all you need to know before you embark on your overseas property search.

For more information on buying a property in the Caribbean, please visit:

**[www.CaribbeanBuyingGuide.com](http://www.CaribbeanBuyingGuide.com)**

## Getting started

### **I can't really buy a property overseas – can I?**

What is the difference between people who make their dreams come true and those who don't? It's not the act of making painful decisions, nor does it have much to do with having lots of money. People who live their dreams didn't get what they wanted by selling their soul, struggling against the tide or gaining a windfall from the lottery!

Achieving the dream of living overseas is possible for anyone. Like any big project, it takes a vision and small steps that take you closer and closer to living that dream. People who have successfully made the move to The Caribbean didn't wake up one day and think, "It's official, I'm moving overseas today!" Instead, they started with a niggle in their stomach. Something inside them felt excited at the thought of a sea view from a Caribbean villa, a field of exotic flowers behind a cottage or a condo offering incredible mountain and ocean views. And from that niggle, tiny actions were taken – one leading to another.

Sooner or later, if small actions towards a vision continue, the momentum starts to build and the vision becomes more and more achievable. Looking on the Internet for properties on Monday could lead to emailing an estate agent on Wednesday. After a phone conversation with an agent, a fact find regarding visas might follow. Then perhaps a few hours on expat blogs (web journals) a month later and you will understand how to find employment. Perhaps the next step will be to visit a property show and discover financial options that you never knew were available.

When faced with a large project or massive change, many people tend to freeze and think, "I'm nuts. How could I actually follow that dream? I don't have enough money...I don't know the culture...I don't [fill in the blanks]". These are usually the same people who have had the same job and the same complaints (about the same job) for years and years and years. These are the people that want more, constantly complain about how they deserve more, but never actually take any action. These are the same people who bumble along, accepting whatever life puts on their path. Are you a bumbler? I hope not!

Why not make this the year that you start taking action? Search the Internet, go to an exhibition, book a Caribbean visit, buy a book or create a journal outlining everything you want. You have a choice – you can focus on how miserable you are living in the UK or you can focus on how great it will be when you are sitting in the sun, eating fresh fruit and watching your family play in the garden.

When I first felt the call of an overseas move, it scared the pants off of me. I was £30,000 in debt, had no assets, no job and my destination country made it almost impossible for me to move there. Added to this, there was no easy way of obtaining a visa to work, let alone to stay. Objections aside, my first action was to write in my journal announcing my intentions. I wrote something like this: “I would like to meet a handsome prince [from my country of choice] who will marry me, buy me lots of clothes, and pay off my debt.”

A few months later I met a guy during a networking event – he almost fitted the bill. He was wealthy but he wasn’t a prince nor did he have all his teeth. Needless to say, within six months I had sold my possessions and moved overseas. That was over 14 years ago and I still think it was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.

Not only am I living my dream, but I’ve applied my ‘small step’ approach to all things in my life – I now have overseas homes (yes – more than one), an amazing husband (who has all his teeth), no debt and, all round, a wonderful life. So – don’t be a bumbler. Start taking small steps and discover what life in The Caribbean has in store for you!

### **Before you begin – is it possible for you to buy a property overseas?**

The term ‘The Caribbean’ encompasses a vast number of islands including Dominican Republic, St Lucia, Antigua, Grenada, Margarita Island, Cuba, Barbados, the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. It therefore stands to reason that there will be a number of variations in terms of the property market regulations.

Over 7,000 islands in the Caribbean region permit foreigners to buy property; however some place restrictions on the type of property they can buy and there are a variety of stringent laws that need to be observed and licenses which need to be obtained. For instance in Tobago, foreign nationals are required to apply for a licence to purchase residential property. However, certain areas have been named as Designated Development Areas and here licences will be freely granted to foreigners to purchase land or property once they have supplied the relevant information. In other areas applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. You will need to check all this out upfront, or get an expert property lawyer to do so for you.

### **The first small step – create your intention**

To get things moving, you can start your Caribbean property buying process right now. All you need is a piece of paper and a pen. Better yet, grab yourself a journal so that you can keep notes throughout the whole process.

Before putting pen to paper, start thinking about the specific reasons you have for buying a property in The Caribbean overseas. Get an idea of why you want to purchase overseas and what benefit you're looking to achieve. After that you can start to consider more specific questions such as what type of property you want, how many bathrooms you need, whether or not you want a garden and so forth.

It's important to take time to consider your dreams and formalise your intentions. These may change or you may head off in another direction, but at least you're organising your thoughts. For example, if you're going to emigrate or buy a holiday home, what would be the perfect home and the perfect location? At this stage, you may be totally off the mark about what is available – or indeed possible – but you need to start somewhere. Furthermore, most people buy a property in The Caribbean with at least one other family member so formalising your desires helps to determine if your partner or other family members want the same things.

Once you've had a chance to mull over your intentions, write them down. This will allow you to successfully do your research and start your search. After you've determined your budget, done a few sums, researched information and gathered data from a variety of sources, you'll then be in a position to think about accurately setting an objective.

The more time you take to really get to grips with what you want, why you want it and when you want to achieve it, the easier it will be for you to achieve your ambitions. Many people set out not knowing what they want and end up getting something that is not really 'perfect' or not getting anything at all! With a bit of time for daydreaming and a log of your notes, you'll set yourself up for a better outcome than just 'winging it'.

An example of what you might want to put in your journal is something like this: I would like to buy a property in Caribbean for the following reasons three reasons: 1. I want to have a better quality of life – more space, more fresh air, more sun, better food, less hustle and bustle. 2. I want something new in my life – an adventure that will give me a new lease on life. 3. I've always wanted to live in Caribbean and I don't want to wake up at the age of 80 never having made the move and regretting it.

Aside from determining the benefit of buying a property in The Caribbean, now is a great time to put some thoughts down as to the location and type of property you want in addition to other important factors. Consider the questions that follow.

## **What would make your perfect property perfect?**

### Questions to consider about the property:

- Located in what area/region?
- In a city, suburb, town or the countryside?
- What sort type of property – house, apartment, bungalow?
- How big does it need to be?
- An old house or something new? If old, are you happy to manage a serious renovation? Or perhaps a redecoration is more inline with your plans?
- How big a garden/terrace?
- What kind of terrain –hillside, by the water, in a valley?
- What does the view from the property need to have in it?
- What else is needed to fulfil your property requirements?

### Questions to consider about distances:

- Distance from shops/restaurants?
- Distance from airport?
- Adequate pharmacy and medical facilities in the area?
- What else needs to be in the area – schools, entertainment, gym, etc?
- Will you need to use public transport?

### Questions in relation to timings – when is this all going to happen?

- When can you realistically think about viewing properties?
- When would you like to have the property?

## Become an information gatherer

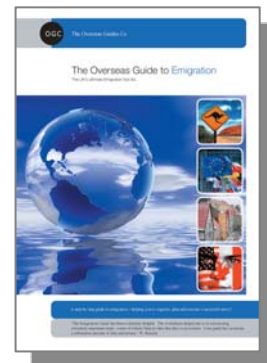
On an ongoing basis, starting now... gather information – both positive and negative – on Caribbean from sources such as newspapers, magazines and books. Search the internet for expat forums/groups and look at Caribbean property agents websites. Aside from visiting overseas property shows there are also an increasing number of UK estate agents who have links with agents overseas.

Make notes as to locations you like, style of properties that seem suitable, the costs of properties, good property websites, and jot down in your journal questions you can't find the answer to. Check out forums and chat rooms where expats hang out. What are they complaining about – are there any issues that seem to stand out?

By gathering information you'll start to paint a picture as to what's out there. The more you understand the finance, property buying process, legalities, potential issues/risk and the overall journey, the easier you'll find the process.

## Must-have resource for 'Getting started'

- ❑ **Emigration guide.** If your plan is to emigrate, check out The Overseas Guides Company's 'Emigration Guide'. This guide was designed specifically to help remind readers of everything they need to do before leaving the UK. Tick lists include finance, buying an overseas property, health and medical, children, pets, removals, important documents to bring, things to cancel, change of address list and much more. Find out more at: [www.EmigrationGuide.com](http://www.EmigrationGuide.com)



## Financing your overseas property and lifestyle

### Finances – what are the financial elements involved in buying an overseas property?

The first step to financing your overseas property and lifestyle is to analyse, or get help to analyse, your financial situation – how much money you can comfortably use from your savings, the sale or re-mortgage of your UK property or a variety of sources to finance your Caribbean property? You'll also want to understand the costs involved in buying a property along with the annual expenditure you should budget for to maintain a property in The Caribbean.

After you decide on your intention, it's very important to take a long, hard look at your finances. There is nothing worse than spending time and effort researching areas and opportunities that you will not be able to afford. No matter how excited or interested you are in a particular area, you must treat a property purchase with extreme care. Spending tens and even hundreds of thousands of pounds is a HUGE decision and you need to understand your exact threshold. You also need to know all those niggling costs that sometimes pop up unexpectedly.

Without a firm handle on your available funds, how you're going to get those funds, and when the funds need to be released, you may fall into the trap of getting emotional about a particular place and agree to buy something you can't realistically pay for. Many purchasers have fallen into a trap where they've failed to calculate all the costs and then, prior to getting their property, they've run out of money and have had to make some very difficult decisions. Furthermore, many Caribbean property buyers fail to understand the risk involved with changing currency exchange rates (more on this later).

The most important things for you to determine is what price range you can afford – how much cash do you have available for the deposit and buying costs and how do you want to finance the full purchase of the property? These figures will determine where and what type of property you can purchase. Knowing these details (along with others to come) will help you to transform your intention into a firm objective. Paying for the property is only half of the equation – the other half is understanding the day-to-day costs of maintaining the property and your lifestyle. To summarise, below are the financial elements to consider:

- The amount of money available to purchase a property
- Cost of property
- Cost of buying the property
- The amount of money available to maintain a property/lifestyle
- Cost of maintaining property and living the lifestyle you want

## How much does it cost to buy a property – over and above the purchase price?

It is impossible to give a generalised overview of costs in this region as they vary considerably. What you do need to do is to decide on the place that you want to buy and then to research your costs very thoroughly. For instance, do estate agents charge their commission to the vendor or to you, the buyer? And do they charge for showing you around their properties?

You'll want to know what fees are associated with the transfer taxes, the stamp duty, legal fees and notary fees if any. Some islands such as the British Virgin Islands and Anguilla require that non-residents apply for a Non-Belongers License before they can own property – what is the cost involved here?

As an example, when buying property in the Dominican Republic there are two property taxes. There is the transfer tax which is calculated at 3 percent of the sales price or the price that the Inland Revenue valued the property at – whichever is the higher. Then there is the annual property tax which is 1% of the value of the property.

Of course there are then the other usual charges such as lawyer and surveyor plus perhaps 1 percent of the value of the property in addition to these fees to cover stamps and other costs such as translations if those prove necessary. It is always advisable to have a survey done too...

Here are the relevant fees that would apply to a property purchase in the Dominican Republic. They are a percentage of the value of the property from the surveyor's valuation report *or* the agreed purchase price, whichever value is higher.

- **Government fees:** These are 7.5 per cent and are made up of 1 per cent Assurance Fee, 4 per cent Stamp Duty and 2.5 per cent Judicial Fee
- **Legal fees:** 3 per cent (plus 15 per cent VAT)
- **Survey fees:** as required
- **Alien Tax:** All non-nationals must pay an additional 10 per cent Alien Tax irrespective of size of property purchased

## **What is the biggest financial mistake that overseas property buyers make?**

The biggest mistake made is when a buyer agrees to buy an overseas property yet fails to realise the impact of exchange rates on the final purchase price. In the UK you would never agree to purchase a property without knowing the total purchase price – would you? Well, when buying a property overseas in a foreign currency, that's precisely what you're doing.

The currency exchange rate you achieve when you transfer your currency overseas will have a direct impact on the end cost of your property – you can either save or lose a lot of money throughout this often-overlooked process. When buying in The Caribbean, you'll have to pay a deposit, followed by the balance of the purchase price later or in a series of stages. During this process you'll be required to convert your British pounds to East Caribbean dollar (or other currency).

The price of currency fluctuates second by second as it gets traded on the currency market. Because of this 'live' market, the exchange rate you can achieve in the morning will be different by the afternoon. And over the course of days and months the exchange rates can change drastically. What many overseas property buyers don't realise is that they can 'fix' an exchange rate today for a purchase later. That means that they can 'fix' the purchase price of their The Caribbean property. Furthermore, there are ways and means to save thousands by getting good exchange rates by buying currency from a specialist rather than a bank.

Generally, buyers find a property, get the currency exchange rate on that day and base their decision to buy on that day's currency exchange rate. However, as previously mentioned, the rates change by the second. This means that unless you have fixed your rate (which is possible if you consider this early enough during the purchasing process), the cost of your property will change by the second as well. If you're very lucky, on the day you actually send your money overseas you may achieve your budgeted rate or the rate you had in mind. But, by leaving the currency purchase to the last minute, this leaves buyers at the mercy of what ever the rate is on the day they decide to pay.

As soon as you know that you're going to purchase an overseas property check out an international payment specialist like Smart Currency Exchange. They can save you up to £4,000 for every £100,000 on better exchange rates over using the bank. They can also help you to fix the price of your property. Smart is the UK's only international payment specialist that focuses on helping overseas property buyers save money and avoid currency fluctuations and risks. As it specifically focuses on money transfers for property, the entire process is efficient, easy and very cost effective. (At the end of this section I've included information on how you can get a free report from Smart Currency - it is well worth a read).

### **How can you finance a property overseas?**

There are a variety of ways that you can pay for a property in the Caribbean. Aside from paying cash, you can fund a property through a variety of loan options. Similar to the UK you will find a range of mortgage offers in the Caribbean. Offers change on a daily basis so it's best to contact an overseas mortgage broker to determine what the current offers are. You'll want to get an idea as to how much cash is needed in relation to the mortgaged amount. For example, you may need to pay 40% of the purchase price in cash and 60% can be mortgaged. You'll also want to understand interest rates, loan terms and the criteria used to determine how much will be available. Of course, the monthly mortgage repayment cost is another important figure to look at when looking at the cost to maintain your property.

### **How much does it cost to maintain a property and lifestyle overseas and how do I maintain that lifestyle?**

There are a variety of costs associated with maintaining a property and it's imperative that you get a good understanding as to what these costs are. Many disgruntled overseas buyers make the mistake of thinking that taxes, cost of goods and rates would be cheaper than the UK when many costs, in fact, can be higher. When calculating the monthly/yearly cost of owning a property in Caribbean, consider taxes, property service charges, electricity, phone, water, gas, insurance, TV/cable/satellite, Internet connection, repairs/maintenance, car/transport costs, health/medical fees and the cost of food.



### Income from pension/investments

Furthermore, if you will be relying on UK-based pension and/or income from investments, it's very important to understand that currency exchange can cause issues. Over the last few years expats living in the euro zone have seen their income drop by 30% due to the value of the euro weakening against sterling. As mentioned above, there are ways to 'fix' the exchange rate for up to a year on regular payments from the UK to your overseas destination by using a specialist.

Also, there are ways to move your pension overseas so that you get your income in the local currency and gain from a whole host of other benefits. Fortunately, if you're going to emigrate or no longer live in the UK, there are excellent alternatives available. In 2006 new EU legislation opened up opportunities for UK pension holders to move their pensions overseas, thus giving greater control to the pension holder. However, the UK authorities will only allow you to transfer a pension abroad if the scheme meets certain criteria. First, you need to be living, or going to live, abroad and secondly you must remain living abroad. The benefits of a Qualifying Recognised Overseas Pension Scheme (QROPS) can be extremely advantageous. It may be possible for you to:

1. Eventually take out the majority of your fund by the time you reach retirement over and above the UK's 25% threshold
2. Set it up so that any unused pension monies can be left to your heirs – not your annuity provider or your previous employer's fund
3. Avoid UK income and inheritance taxes
4. Receive income in a more tax-efficient manner than offered in the UK and/or have more freedom with your investments rather than having to follow set UK procedure
5. Take income from the currency of your choice avoiding adverse exchange rate conversions
6. Avoid having to buy an annuity (when you die your annuity goes with you, meaning that the hard work that helped you create your pension does not get passed to your beneficiaries)

The good news is that getting a QROPS can greatly benefit anyone planning to move overseas or those who have already moved. The not-so-good news is that it takes five years of being a non-resident and moving the pension for a QROPS to show real benefits. That's why it's important to consider your options now rather than later.

## Income from employment or setting up your own business

Regarding employment always keep in mind that it might be difficult to compete with the local market. It's also imperative that you research the demand for employees in the area of your interest.

However, due to the Internet, I think that now more than ever it's entirely possible to take employment into your own hands. As long as you have a good Internet connection and a skill that will allow you to work from home, you can earn a living. Having access to the Internet could be synonymous with having access to a money generator. There are all sorts of project-based work opportunities for writers, editors, programmers, graphic designers, project management, accountants, telesales; the list goes on and on. The great thing about Internet project work is you can pick what you want to do and how much you're happy to handle. By surfing the Internet for project-based work, you can find sites to outline what your expertise is along with a short CV and while waiting for someone to call upon your services, you can apply to work on projects that suit your fancy. Check out Elance.com to start.

Another option is to create a business that suits the Internet – you could find a product to sell online, write an ebook (check out Clickbank.com) or advertise your services as a proof reader. The options are limitless. There's a huge amount of information on how to generate money by building an Internet business. If you're in need of something to stimulate your mind, I guarantee that this mode of income generation will surely get your juices flowing. You will, however, want to make sure that you don't spend all your time on the computer!

Finally, there's nothing to stop you from setting up your own company as long as you abide by the laws and regulations. You can buy a franchise, buy out an existing company or start something from scratch. By no means is this an easy and risk-free option, but if you have existing success with running a company it might be a good option that will allow you to maintain your lifestyle in the Caribbean. Do keep in mind though that it's hard enough to start up and manage a business in the UK – in an the Caribbean there are many more forces that can work against you. Locals often support locals – not foreigners, so keep that in mind!

## Must have resources for financing your overseas property & lifestyle

- ❑ **Free report.** Smart Currency Exchange offers a FREE full report on '**Why overseas property buyers lose money... and how you can avoid it!**' The report outlines how the international payment process works, all the fees associated with the process and what you can do to ensure you save money and avoid the risk of your property from increasing. Call Smart on 0808 163 0102 or get the report below:



[www.SmartCurrencyExchange.com/report.htm](http://www.SmartCurrencyExchange.com/report.htm)

- ❑ **Financial advice.** If you need help with any of the elements listed below, visit The Overseas Guides Company financial advice resource area. You can request help with the following:
  - Financial planning (including pension, investment and tax planning for overseas property buyers)
  - QROPS
  - Mortgage offers for the Caribbean
  - Wills (from a financial aspect you need to finalise your wills as different countries have different rules for inheritance and so forth)

[www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/finance/resource.htm](http://www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/finance/resource.htm)

# Successfully finding and purchasing your overseas property

## Success step 1: Create a property brief

After spending time outlining your intentions and understanding the finance involved in buying an overseas property you'll have a much stronger idea of what's out there and how much it costs. The next step is to create a brief that will help you (and estate agents) find you what you want, where you want it and at the price you want it for. In addition to helping estate agents, the brief will keep you focused. When going through such a lengthy journey it's easy to get pushed off course and end up ultimately getting something not quite what you wanted, in an area not quite where you wanted and for a price much more than you expected!

To create a brief go back to the 'Getting started' section and taking account of everything you now know, update your answers to the perfect property questions. You'll also need to outline a budget in addition to indicating how you're going to pay for the property – cash, or a combination of cash and mortgage, and when you'd like to buy.

## Success step 2: Select a good agent that has properties that fit your brief

As the title highlights there are two key ingredients involved in having a successful viewing trip. You need to find a good agent – one that is legal, reliable, helpful and eager to service your needs. The second ingredient is that the agent you select must have properties that fit your brief. Rather than waste time looking for an agent once in the Caribbean or deciding to view properties with an agent who doesn't offer what you want, it's often best to determine who you want to view properties with before you go. And just to accentuate this point, it's very important for you to find good agents. What IS a good agent? A good agent is one that...

- **Is operating legally.** If you will be using the services of an estate agent (or a realtor in American!) you need to make sure that they are with a registered Estate Agency (or Real Estate Agency). They should also be a member of a regulatory association such as the Association of Real Estate Agents (AREA) in Trinidad and Tobago. Always ask the basic questions: how long they have been in business? Can they provide satisfied customers for you to chat to? Are they part of any estate agency industry regulation? Remember, you are NOT making a new best friend – leave that British reserve at the door and ensure that you satisfy yourself as to the integrity and the track record of the agents you choose.

- **Offers a good service.** If you want an answer to a question, it would be nice to have someone call you back – yes? If you have a problem, you want someone to take action to get it resolved – yes? Determining up front if an agent is helpful will give you a better chance of getting things done properly. Make sure to test agents prior to going to the Caribbean – when you send your brief or an email asking a question, see how long they take to get back to you and whether or not they seem enthusiastic about helping you.
- **Has a wide range of property styles and locations.** Whether you want a resale property or a new build, a farmhouse or a condo, a property on the water or in the hills, good agents will have thousands on their books.
- **Has been around for a while.** You want an agent that knows the area, understands the market and knows the politics involved to make things happen.
- **Stays with you until the end.** A good agent does not up and leave the minute the final contract is signed. They offer to help you further in terms of opening a bank account, finding a builder, a doctor, schools, etc. You can find out if your prospective agent does this by asking for past-buyer feedback. Or search the estate agency name on the Internet to see if anyone has something bad to say about the agent.

### **Success step 3: The viewing trip – some tips**

Ideally you will want to plan a leisurely visit to get to know the area you are interested in. By doing so, you will not be under pressure to buy this time so the visit is all about getting a true feeling for the area. Make sure to request time so that you can ask around, talk to the locals, check out the shops, and go to the markets. Buying a property in the Caribbean deserves more than one visit so start off slowly, allow yourself time to absorb what you see on your first visit, preparing you for a second visit to check out more properties.

When planning the trip, leave some free time in case something crops up while you are visiting. Between four and seven days is an ideal and practical length of time to view properties. You need to keep focused on what you want and avoid being bombarded with too much information all in one go.

Remember to check bank holiday dates and arrange accommodation well in advance – you don't want to get to the Caribbean only to find that nothing is open! It's also been recommended to book a trip during the worst time of the year. For example, winter is often a good time to view properties in sunny/warmer climate areas as you'll get an idea as to how cold/dark it gets and since it's a slow time for estate agents, you'll get loads of attention. I've also heard that sellers are more willing to negotiate a lower price as demand is at its lowest.

Getting an idea of what living in a property is like is also advisable. Many of my readers rent a property in the area they're most interested in rather than booking a hotel. This will help you to get a more realistic feel for living in the overseas destination. Having to go out and get groceries will allow you to navigate the area, get an idea of the cost of groceries and it can even help you to determine what kind of noise there is. I've lost count of the amount of stories I've heard where overseas property buyers select a property in a quiet area of town only to find out that a nightclub opens at 11pm blasting dance music or that the flight path is overhead. Be prepared to ask questions. When your agent is taking you around, use the time in the car to go through all your queries and concerns.

Make notes and take photographs as you go along. Remember to take photos of the view. Many buyers spend time getting images of the property, but forget which property had which view. Once you have seen several properties, your memory may need a little jog. At the end of this guide I've included a property analysis worksheet. The worksheet will allow you to take notes and rate various factors so that you can compare one property to another. Ratings include things like appearance, condition, parking, views, noise levels and so forth for the property. The areas section includes things like getting to grips with the crime rate, transportation, climate, things to do, etc. And the amenities analysis gets you to determine your rating on grocery stores, shopping, medical, and dental, pharmacy, hair dresser, trades people, pubs and so forth.

Give yourself plenty of time to consider all aspects and make more than one trip to your chosen area. And remember – there are no rules. One of my readers commented that he and his wife took a very leisurely trip meandering around without viewing one single property. He and his wife came away with notes on each little village and what the area was like. This exercise allowed them to go home, reflect on what they had seen and fine-tune their criteria for their trip dedicated to viewing properties. On their second trip they found exactly what they were looking for – their dream location and ideal property!

#### **Success step 4 – Making offers**

Once you've had a viewing trip or two and have narrowed your property search down to a handful of options, and know that you can get financing for the property, it's time to start making offers. The agent you're working with will tell you what an acceptable offer is, but keep in mind that agents are often motivated to get the highest price to get the highest commission. Don't be afraid to make slightly cheeky offers!

#### **Must have resource for successfully finding and purchasing your overseas property**

- ❑ **Find your perfect property.** If you need help finding the perfect property or want to try before you buy, visit The Overseas Guides Company property resource area. You'll be able to view properties (to rent and/or buy) from a variety of estate agents or request The Overseas Guides Company Resource Team to help you out. You can find the resources at:

[www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/property/resources.htm](http://www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/property/resources.htm)

## Legalities – dot your i’s and cross your t’s

### **Getting a solicitor is a must – no matter what anyone else says!**

Getting a lawyer involved in your property purchase in the Caribbean is a must, and anyone who says differently does not have your best interests at heart.

I think it’s safe to say that buyers abroad now realise that it’s not only imperative to get a lawyer, but it’s essential to get a really *good* lawyer. News stories about property buyers having their overseas property demolished or finding out that they don’t own the land or can’t get a title deed to their property appear daily in newspapers around the world, and it would be a foolish buyer who didn’t take note of this.

Furthermore, I would suggest that you contact a lawyer *before* setting off to view properties in the Caribbean. Otherwise, if you do decide to buy, you may be rushed for time and persuaded to use a lawyer who may not act in your best interests. You can find a list of lawyers on the ‘UK in XXX (name of where you are buying) website – I looked under the ‘UK in Jamaica’ website for instance, and found the information rather alarmingly filed under ‘When things go wrong’! Or perhaps you could go to an ex-pat website and ask a few people. People like to help and are usually delighted to share the news of someone who has assisted them. Failing that, you could chat to people locally once you arrive and find someone that they recommend. Having your own trusted lawyer will mean that the chances of having problems later on will be vastly reduced.

Another important factor is that you need to find a lawyer who is independent of the estate agent, developer or company showing you properties. That way you know that the lawyer is working for you and *not* for the property professional. Some lawyers may draw up a contract of sale that is in favour of the estate agent (or end seller), and the reason behind this is quite easy to understand: by safeguarding the agent the lawyers will be assured of retaining their valuable business. Compare your one transaction to the many the lawyer stands to gain from the agent or developer and you will understand the clear conflict of interest here.

You may want to ask for personal referrals from your lawyer – and it goes without saying that these should not include your developer or agent! Remember, you are not making a new best friend but conducting a costly business deal and you need all the legal protection you can get. If they are not fully conversant in English for instance, or if you have any reservations at all, move on and find someone else.

Your lawyer will review the sale agreement, verify titles and carry out other checks to ensure that you're protected. For instance, they should investigate that your prospective property purchase is free and clear of any charge, lien or mortgage and also free of estate taxes (viz. land property and inheritance), municipal taxes, claims (no injunctions and enforcement measures or actions pending) or damages to neighbouring owner's property and so forth.

Never sign anything that you do not fully understand or are not entirely happy with. Lawyers can use quite a lot of jargon; this can be intimidating, but never be afraid to ask what something means. After all, you are not a qualified lawyer – that's why they are there! And remember too that you are paying for their time.

You may wish to do give Power of Attorney to a local lawyer. This is routine for people purchasing property in the Caribbean and the powers given can be as extensive or as limited you wish. It gives the lawyer permission to act on your behalf in certain matters, communicate with third parties and/or authorise the transfer of funds for you. If you do sign a Power of Attorney for your lawyer in Greece, make sure you know exactly what you're signing and that that you remember to withdraw it once all business is complete.

You need to bear in mind that the legal system in the Caribbean may not work in your favour if trouble strikes, so it's of paramount importance that you hire qualified people who can ensure that you do not have to take legal action. You may have the law on your side but cases can sometimes take a long time to get to court and cost a fortune. Make sure that you – and your lawyer – get it right from the start.

### **Must have resource for the legal aspects of buying an overseas property**

- ❑ **Finding a solicitor.** If you need help finding a solicitor, visit The Overseas Guides Company 'Legalities' resource area.

[www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/legalities/resources.htm](http://www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/legalities/resources.htm)

## Moving in

### Buying furniture or moving your possessions overseas?

If you're buying a second home to be used throughout the year for holidays you will most likely want to either purchase a 'furniture pack' or enjoy the process of shopping locally to get your property furnished. Furniture packs allow you to order all the standard furniture needed to kit out a new home. People that buy these are often investors and simply need to get the house furnished. This is something your estate agent will surely be able to help you with.

However, if you plan on moving to the Caribbean chances are that you'll want to move many of your possessions. A good removals company is high in the order of importance and it's vital to go with an insured company. It needs to be a member of *The British Association of Removers Overseas* or *The Association of International Removers*. If you use a company that comes personally recommended then this is best.

It's important to check your prospective removals company's insurance status. Does its policy cover possessions while in storage, awaiting removal? Does it cover possessions while in transit by sea (marine insurance)? Are your possessions still insured once they arrive in your new country and are delivered to you?

The best time to contact a removals company is three to six months before the removal date. They will need to come in to quote and then fit you into their schedule. The better the company, the busier it will be. Check that the company does all packing of goods - it is better to pay a few extra pounds and get your things professionally packed. Some removal companies will not guarantee goods unless packed by themselves, so check this in advance.

Ask your removal company to write clearly on each box which room the contents were from and what is in the box; and make sure you have a complete inventory of all possessions packed.

Try to be ruthless with your possessions from the outset. Remember to keep essential items to hand. Allowing for at least six weeks in transit, you will need to pack carefully to make sure you have everything you need, as once it's loaded you can't access it. Sort out keys for your present accommodation, car, office, etc. And make sure they are kept separate, labelled and ready to hand over to the right people before you leave.

Protect yourself from identity theft by shredding all those bits of paper, old bank statements and bills that you don't want to keep. You could use the shredded paper as packing material.

It is important to comply with regulations when your possessions enter a new country – your removals company will be able to give you a specific list of what can and cannot enter the Caribbean. Additionally, you'll need to:

- Drain all petrol and oil out of lawnmowers and similar equipment before transportation so that they comply with fire regulations
- Remove all batteries from possessions e.g. torches and radios, as they can leak in transit and damage your equipment
- Clean and paint any garden tools and furniture – items with soil on them may be denied entry at customs

You should also check your electrical equipment. Will it work in your new home? A good removals firm will advise you on this. Sell what you don't want and take all the small items that you can't sell to the local charity shop. Most councils will take good furniture and white goods to pass on to deserving folk.

If you have children, set their minds at rest by arranging a quiet time with them before packing, picking out what they want to take with them and what they can manage without. If you are not moving straight into your new home you will need to discuss storage, as it may be cheaper to store your containers in the Caribbean rather than in the UK.

### **Must have resource for moving in to your overseas property**

- ☐ **Find a removals company.** If you need help finding a removals company, visit The Overseas Guides Company Removals resource area.

[www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/removals/resources.htm](http://www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/removals/resources.htm)

# Settling in

## Adjusting to your new home

It is only natural to feel strange and a little alienated initially. Joining a club – tennis, golf, bird-watching or whatever takes your fancy – is a wonderful option and you're likely to meet like-minded people if you follow your hobbies and interests.

If you have children you will have a distinct advantage: you can volunteer to help at school, offer lifts to your child's classmates, take children to activities and get into conversation with other parents at the school gates. If you are able to find work, even if it's just part time, you'll find adjusting to your new environment and making friends far easier.

## Sources of information and support

Check out the embassy, consulate or official website for the Caribbean before leaving the UK. Make contact with the UK embassy when you arrive in your new country. They sometimes plan get-togethers for expats at various times, such as to celebrate the Queen's birthday. Try to meet other expats from the UK who will be able to give you the low-down on the local area and help you avoid the pitfalls they ran into when they first moved.

## A few more ideas to help you settle in

Access to a telephone is a must. Just to hear a friend or family member's voice from back in the UK makes such a difference. Mobiles are all very well for local calls, but become expensive when making calls abroad, so do check when you rent or buy that there is an existing landline. This is also essential for Internet access. You should try to create a comfortable home as soon as possible, with all your familiar bits and pieces around you, plus familiar possessions for your children, if you have them.

Familiarising yourself with the culture in Caribbean can go a long way to making you feel at home. It's best to make a conscious effort to be laid back and tolerant of people's differences. You may find when you move that things are done differently, so remember that you are the visitor.

It's worth paying a courtesy call to your new neighbours – they will appreciate it and it is essential to be on friendly terms with them if you want to be part of the community. You also never know when you may need their help. Don't hesitate to ask them for guidance. People are usually only too pleased to help and thrilled to be asked. But remember small rural communities can be slow to welcome 'outsiders'.

Try to have fun and keep busy. Find activities such as sports clubs, dance classes, Rotary, volunteering, music clubs or bands. Alternatively, take an online degree, write a novel, take up photography, paint, find an amateur dramatics society or join a gym.

And finally, if you can, take some time off when you first arrive in Caribbean before getting stuck into a new hobby or starting a new job. Spending a few days unpacking and discovering your local shops and amenities will help you to relax and enjoy and settle in.

### **Must have resource for settling into your overseas property**

- ❑ **Financial advice.** If you are in the midst of moving or have already moved, it's extremely important to make sure all your finances are in order. If you need help with any of the elements listed below, visit The Overseas Guides Company financial advice resource area. You can request help with the following:
  - Financial planning (including pension, investment and tax planning for overseas property buyers)
  - QROPS
  - Setting up regular payments from the UK to the overseas destination
  - Wills (from a financial aspect you need to finalise your wills as different countries have different rules for inheritance and so forth)

[www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/finance/resource.htm](http://www.OverseasGuidesCompany.com/finance/resource.htm)

# Buying overseas - property details sheet (generic example)

## Purchase Details

Price of Property: \_\_\_\_\_

Deposit: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Stage 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Est. Yearly Mortgage Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Mortgage Option: \_\_\_\_\_

Mortgage Fixed/Variable: \_\_\_\_\_

## Investment Potential

Avg. Capital Growth in last 5 years: \_\_\_\_\_

Forecasted future growth (per/year): \_\_\_\_\_

Rental Demand  
(Is there a high or low demand for this type of property?) \_\_\_\_\_

Avg. Rent for this type of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Rent per year \_\_\_\_\_  
(Take the amount of weeks/months you can expect to rent your property and multiply by the average rent)

Estimated Rent per year Less Mortgage per yr. \_\_\_\_\_

(This will tell you how much profit you'll make from rent)

Net Gross Yield  
(Take your annual rental amount and then divide by the purchase price) \_\_\_\_\_

## Costs to Purchase Property

Cost to Buy Habitable Property (in addition to price of property):

Solicitors: \_\_\_\_\_

Accountant: \_\_\_\_\_

Surveys & searches: \_\_\_\_\_

Stamp duty and other taxes: \_\_\_\_\_

Building/contents insurance: \_\_\_\_\_

Life assurance: \_\_\_\_\_

Finance/mortgage fees: \_\_\_\_\_

Estate agents/developer fees: \_\_\_\_\_

Refurbishment/Build costs: \_\_\_\_\_

Furniture cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL (inc. price of property): \_\_\_\_\_

## Costs to Maintain Property

Cost to Maintain the Property (base all figures on a per annum basis):

Electric/water/gas rates: \_\_\_\_\_

Taxes: \_\_\_\_\_

Pool cleaner: \_\_\_\_\_

House cleaner: \_\_\_\_\_

TV/Cable/Satellite: \_\_\_\_\_

Internet Access: \_\_\_\_\_

Gardner: \_\_\_\_\_

Repairs & Maintenance: \_\_\_\_\_

Letting Agent: \_\_\_\_\_

Marketing costs: \_\_\_\_\_

Servicing costs: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL (running costs): \_\_\_\_\_


## Currency Options

Current Exchange Rate for £1: \_\_\_\_\_ GBP Needed to Purchase Currency: \_\_\_\_\_

Past Market Trends: \_\_\_\_\_

Currency Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

**Call Smart Currency Exchange on 0808 163 0102 Free phone to discuss your money-saving strategy. You will get better-than-bank rates today OR have the option to secure a fixed rate of exchange for money needed in the future - This will ensure that your budget will not fluctuate with currency movements.**



## Thank you and best wishes!

Thank you for reading the Caribbean Property Buying Guide. I truly hope that some of the tips, concepts and general information offered will help you on your journey to buy or invest in a property in Caribbean. Please remember that on the website, we have new articles, web journals, videos and much more published weekly.

Due to the fact that my colleagues and I write about the overseas property industry and chat with loads of people buying overseas *and* also discuss various issues with property agents and developers, we have continuous access to all sorts of resources. Whether it is property deals, access to a wide range of overseas mortgages, currency exchange specialists, removal companies, solicitors or even connections for car rental and hotels, please consider us as a point of contact.

If there is anything that I or my associates can help you with, first check out our website. Failing that, if you can't find what you're looking for, pick up the phone and ring us - we'll try our best to point you in the right direction. The key thing for you to do is to seriously research your options, ask loads of questions and try your best to find others that have gone before you, so that you can learn from their successes.

Also – if there is anything that you've learned during your property buying journey that you would like to share with others, please send your story, tips or feedback to the below email and we might publish your information in one of our regular newsletters:

[Kim@OverseasGuidesCompany.com](mailto:Kim@OverseasGuidesCompany.com)

Best of luck with all your plans!

*Kim Brown*  
Director  
The Overseas Guides Company