



Moving Home – Safety and Security Considerations

Portugal is a great place to live, with friendly people, good climate, good food, wine and superb countryside. It is also the 4th Most Peaceful Country in the World.

In deciding where to live and what type of property to purchase, we tend to take into account cost, whether to live in a town or in the countryside; whether to purchase a new property, live in a traditional Quinta or simply purchase land and build from scratch.

These are factors whether move here, or moving within Portugal, that estates agents can advise in selecting a property. Other factors, not so frequently asked, are those concerning safety and security – after all your investment is important as well as your well- being and quality of life.

Portugal is one of the safest places to live in Europe, but it is important to take safety and security into account when choosing a home. As we get older this is more important.

How many people do you know are downsizing, not necessarily because the place they live in is too large, but simply because the cost of upkeep is too high or they are longer to physically able to maintain it.

Safe communities Portugal has undertaken research into this and has produced a Checklist – “Moving to Portugal – Deciding where to live”. Before any suggestions that this may put people off coming here, I suggest just the reverse – by following this it will help people decide what the best property is for them taking into account the factors identified.

Location

The choice of location is really important. If choosing a rural property consider matters such as the distance from police, ambulance and fire services and how long they will take to reach you in an emergency. Do they know the location of the house? Seems obvious but many rural properties are not served by roads that have names or numbers.

Although English is widely spoken in the Algarve, it may be less so in some other places especially in remote locations. If you speak Portuguese or can learn it, fine, but if not this is an important factor to consider especially in emergency situations.

Although you may have a car, what happens if it breaks down and you need to get somewhere quickly? Are their public transportation services available?

Communication is vitally important – so check the availability of the internet with various service providers that they adequately the area with a reasonable download speed; particularly relevant if you need assistance.

Environment

Consider the property's likely resilience to the extreme weather that we can experience here in Portugal. Many people may view a lovely house whilst on a summer holiday, but when it comes to winter it maybe in an area liable to flooding. Research is important.

Although the crime level is one of the lowest in Europe, some areas may have some local crime problems. A good way to check is to ask people in the area, and the local bar can be a good way to find out this, but on the other hand do not give away too much about your personal circumstances to strangers.

Some areas near the coast maybe very crowded with properties fully occupied during the summer, but the majority of properties maybe unoccupied during the winter season. This is a factor as some thieves prefer to target such areas. Check if the area is served by the GNR Safe residents Program, which ensures a fast response to crime emergencies.

Getting to know neighbours is perhaps the most important way to ensure that you have trouble free relationships in the future. Of course neighbours can change, but in rural villages they and their families may have been there for generations. Do they appear friendly and accommodating to foreigners? Most problems we come across are due to the breakdown of relationships with neighbours. This can be barking dogs, noise pollution, failure to clean land to prevent the spread of fires etc. For those living in more urban areas it is wise to check if the neighbour rents the property to tourists, which could present problems with loud music parties etc.

Choosing a property.

When viewing a new property there are a few things to check as far as safety and security are concerned.

If it has a security alarm system check that it works and upon taking over the property change the password. If it does not have one consider the need.

Most importantly check if the property has previously been broken into, as this sort of information may not be volunteered by the agent concerned. Ask neighbours.

A matter often overlooked is the sustainability of water supply. Does it have a cisterna, borehole or town water? What happens if the borehole fails? Is there a local water supplier? Is there a sewage system?

Rural fires in rural areas is an ever increasing problem. Laws are in place to ensure that at least 50 metres around your home is properly managed to reduce the spread of fires to your home. Check that you are physically able to do this, or if not that you have the resources to pay others to help.

Lastly when you move in some simple measures to take include changing locks on external doors, especially if it has previously been rented. If I were to do a survey now I would guess that the percentage of people who do this is low. But if you are spending €300,000 on a property an extra €300 to change the locks is a good investment.

Taking time to research and consider these issues will help avoid problems later on and ensure that you chose a location and home which is right for you.

David Thomas

President Safe Communities Portugal

12th September 2018