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ABROAD OUTLOOK



'There is nothing here except beach — but just look at the potential'

# GOD'S GOLDEN CRUMBS

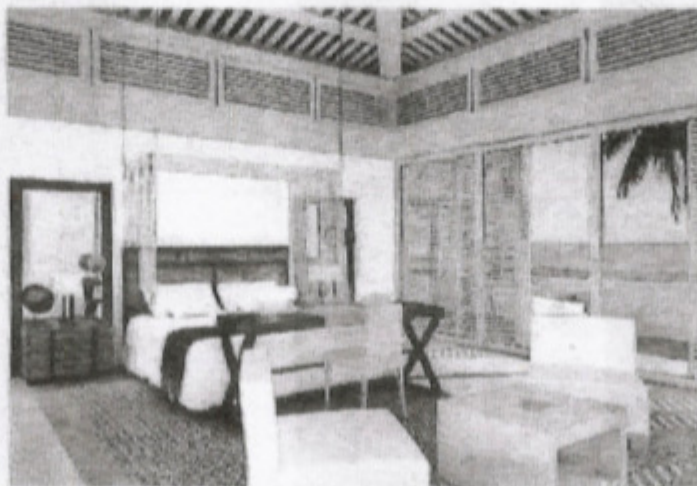
Property buyers are following tourists to the Cape Verde islands, says Kieran Falconer



THE hardest thing about Cape Verde is finding it on the map. The people who live there describe their islands as "the crumbs left over when God rubbed his hands". Ten islands and eight islets speckle the Atlantic hundreds of miles off West Africa, between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer. They were once a Portuguese colony and received their independence in the 1970s, but retain many cultural links. More importantly, they have empty sandy beaches, an average annual temperature of 27C, only 20 days of rain a year and no hurricanes.

Direct flights from the UK (5½ hours) have just started to the island of Sal and four operators have been battling to connect tourists with the beaches. Yet there is a powerful stirring among property developers and investors as well: they see in Cape Verde a politically stable, sunny haven with property prices a good deal less intimidating than the Caribbean or Spain.

At the moment most development is on the islands of Sal and São Tiago (direct flights to the capital, Praia, are mooted to start this year). Sal is basically a desert surrounded by beach. Its sights (this takes about an hour) are the two characterful towns, the salt pans and the Lion's



Life's a beach: people who buy Cape Verde flats or villas will never be far from the sea.

Back mountain. There's a clinic, however, and a hospital, and a second clinic will follow next year. There are two good five-star hotels and a cluster of boutique ones that so far have catered for Germans, Italians and French. The main property market is for the British and Irish.

Paul Aspin, managing director of Independent Property Consultants, has recently moved into Cape Verde. He says: "The place is in its infancy. There is nothing here but beach. Arriving here is like landing on the moon, but

you only need to look around at the potential." Like most people Aspin is selling properties that haven't been built yet. Via Verde will have 1,200 villas, apartments and townhouses (prices from £70,000 to £300,000). Aspin is also involved in the Sal Vista development, which will border a large water sports complex near Santa Maria. Prices are from £71,000 and the first phase (of 100 units) has already been sold.

São Tiago is home to Ponta Bicuda, a 60-acre complex with two miles of coastline, pri-

## CAPECRUSADE

- The weather in Cape Verde is hotter and more consistent than it is in the Canaries — which means year-round letting potential.
- Buyers initially were Italian, French and Dutch but now they are largely from Britain and Ireland. Golf is a big draw for winter visitors.

vate beach, cricket pitch, tennis courts and an art school. There are several hotels, restaurants, shops and bars — and 1,300 private units comprising villas (three-bedrooms from £80,968) and apartments (two-bedrooms from £85,900).

Matt and Julia Hobson, from Pooleton, recently paid £50,000 for a four-bed penthouse apartment on the Agria development ([www.avater-capeverde.com](http://www.avater-capeverde.com)) in Praia, near the beach. Julia says: "Once our two boys have left school, we'll probably move here. But we also wanted a good investment, so this is a buy-to-let property first and we expect it to pay for itself by the time we relocate. We still haven't visited, though."

Fights to Sal are full, so it may be that these golden crumbs will have more castaways. Cape Verde Islands, by Alistair Ingh and Colin Wilson (Bradt, £12.95); IPC, 0800-169 2224, [www.ipc.co.uk](http://www.ipc.co.uk); Via Verde, [www.viaverde-resort.com](http://www.viaverde-resort.com); Ponta Bicuda, 020 7409 8844, [www.salvita.com](http://www.salvita.com)

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