THE SUNDAY TIMES

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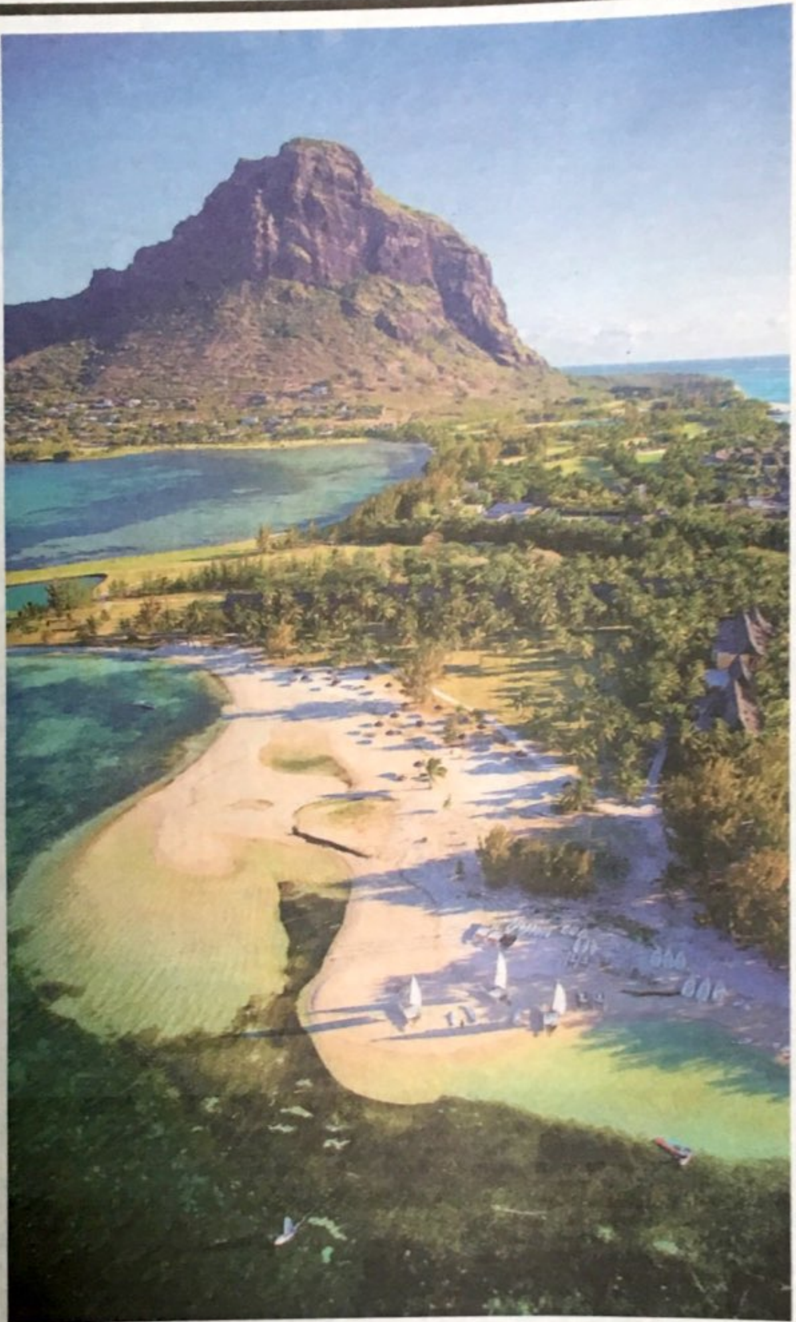
ESCAPE PLAN

If the endless wrangling over Brexit leaves you longing to get away to a real sunlit upland, *Zoe Dare Hall* suggests the top spots to invest in



Money talks English-speaking Mauritius is increasingly popular with British buyers

Soft, hard, clean, red, white and blue – whichever way you want your Brexit, you'd be forgiven for wishing to get away from it all.

Do you feel the call of far-flung shores where the talk is of sundowners and island tours, not tariffs and transition deals? Or perhaps you're among those looking beyond Europe because of what high-end London estate agents report as the biggest fear among the rich: the double whammy of leaving the EU and having Jeremy Corbyn as PM.

A combination of climate, lifestyle, potential tax breaks and, yes, a healthy distance from Brexit is encouraging some British buyers to look further afield. Here are the places that are grabbing their attention.

BARBADOS

Stunning beaches, the sunny climate and the friendliness of the Bajans are among the many reasons to consider the Caribbean island that has attracted British buyers for 50 years. And with sterling at its strongest against the US dollar since Brexit struck, investing in dollar-denominated locations seems more appealing. "Many buyers are concerned with the direction Europe is heading in and want to spread their risk by investing in dollar-priced assets," says Robert Green, managing director of Sphere Estates.

You can spend millions on a villa where you can step out straight onto the sand on the island's fancy west coast, but there are new homes at far lower prices just 200yd back. A short stroll from the beach bars and dining destinations such as the Lone Star restaurant is Garden Grove, where the eight three-bedroom townhouses start at $419,000 (£296,000) through Chesterton Barbados (chestertonbarbados.com). Or follow other Brits to the five-star Crane resort, on the wilder east coast. The latest phase of private residences starts at $676,000 (thecraneprivate residences.com).

MAURITIUS

Since its property ownership laws changed in 2002, allowing non-nationals to invest, this Indian Ocean island has been a niche investment spot for a wealthy few. They have become more numerous since the Brexit vote, according to Thierry Macquet, spokesman for the Maradiva resort (maradiva.com), where properties start at $800,000: "Inquiries to invest in Mauritius are increasing from the British market." English is the official language in the former crown colony, 1,200 miles east of Mozambique; it celebrates 50 years of independence this year and "has an interesting tax system, with residency attached to the purchase of a property", Macquet says.

Political concerns in the Maldives are also prompting buyers to look at alternative Indian Ocean islands, whether Mauritius or the Seychelles, according to Robert Green, who is marketing flats at La Balise Marina, the only residential marina on Mauritius, from $692,000 (sphereestates.com).

Foreigners can still only buy in designated resorts, "which keeps the island unspoilt", says Lloyd Hughes, of Athena Advisers, who is selling apartments in the Anahita resort from €2.1m (£1.8m; athenaadvisers.com). "Those who spend at least six months a year in Mauritius benefit from low income tax and no capital gains or inheritance levy, so it's easy to see why it's becoming increasingly popular with British expats."

FLORIDA

What's good enough for the Donald... The Belgravia-based estate agency Henry & James reports that a number of clients are relocating to the Sunshine State. "These are high-net-worth individuals who would have moved to France or Spain in the past because of taxes," says its chief executive, James Bailey. "Now they are drawn to the US because of its economic growth and the implication of Trump's reduced taxes in comparison with the UK."

Florida's lack of personal income tax is a bonus, but the main draws are its sun-baked lifestyle, great schools and easy accessibility. Orlando is "Brit land", according to Hugo Thistlethwayte, head of international sales at Savills estate agency, but Miami is of interest to a smaller number. "The market in the city has reached an equilibrium that is seeing it trundle along quite nicely," he says. "There are lower levels of South American investment than at its peak, but there are also fewer sites available – the best of the waterfront plots have now gone.

"Further stability comes from the fact that they don't start new developments there until they are 60% sold, and buyers have to put down a 50% deposit, which means they are unlikely to walk away. By the time the diggers start, you know the building will be completed."

Jason Mansfield, of Knight Frank estate agency's US team, is seeing British interest in the city split between two camps: those looking to expand business there, from hedge funds to talent booking agencies (they're typically drawn to prime Miami, including South Beach and the Venetian Islands); and those looking to cash in on buying a property to renovate and sell.

The place that's "ripe for investment", Mansfield says, is Delray Beach, an hour's drive north of Miami. "It's a desirable area where the housing stock isn't up to scratch. You can spend $1m on a large lakefront property with a 1960s house that can be torn down and rebuilt. Delray is all about quality of life. They've completely changed the city centre, so it's walkable. You don't need a car."

For buyers who want a postcard Miami address – and no renovation hassle – the Fasano Shore Club is right on South Beach, with one-bedroom condos starting at $1.75m through Sphere Estates (sphereestates.com).

SWITZERLAND

Tax shouldn't be your only basis for an investment choice (particularly as the EU has recently rejigged its blacklist of non-cooperative global tax jurisdictions, removing St Lucia from the ranks, but adding St Kitts and Nevis and the Bahamas), but it's unlikely anyone is going to be raising eyebrows over trusty, safe old Switzerland. "It's about convenience, rather than about being hugely tax beneficial," Thistlethwayte says. "It suits people who want to set themselves up with good governance, rather than try to shelter anything."

The "incredible quality of life, with a strong currency, beautiful scenery and lake and mountain activities", also inspires Brits to go Swiss, according to Green. "It's a popular and safe destination to invest in," he says, citing a couple of rare new developments that are open to foreign buyers and where entry prices are less eye-watering than you might expect. The Florens Resort & Suites, near Interlaken, is a lakeside plot due for completion in 2020, with flats starting at SFr325,000 (£248,000) and projected rental yields of 4%-6%. Bicha Residences has 18 turnkey apartments near popular Gstaad, with one-bedders from SFr438,000. Both are available through Sphere Estates.

"Bicha Residences is probably the last development in the Gstaad region that is permitted to sell new-build apartments as second homes to foreigners, so this has solid long-term investment value," Green says.

MAURITIUS

The large villas at the Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa, on the west coast, have private pools and sea views. The properties are available on a leaseback basis: owners get a guaranteed rental income of 5% for the first three years. One-bedders start at $800,000. **00 230 403 1500, maradiva.com**

BARBADOS

The newest phase of residences at the Crane Resort has two-bedroom apartments with an ocean view from $676,000. The five-star resort, set on a clifftop on the east coast, has numerous pools, bars and restaurants. **001246 416 6560, thecraneprivateresidences.com**

MARRAKESH

After a spell in the spotlight before the global crash, fuelled mainly by foreigners snapping up dilapidated riads to turn into boutique B&Bs, the Moroccan city went quiet. Now it's "back by popular demand", Green reports, with a raft of glitzy names attracting international buyers to homes with five-star services, including M Avenue (an apartment-only extension of the Four Seasons), a polo-focused Ritz-Carlton resort and the Fairmont Residences Royal Palm Marrakech, where Sphere Estates is marketing two-bedroom residences from €300,000.

"Most buyers we see compare the benefits on offer in Marrakesh and the Algarve," Green says. "Marrakesh's top end offers value for money – about half the price of the top Portuguese resorts, a completely different culture and lifestyle, a less seasonal climate and incredible destination experiences, including tours of the Atlas Mountains and camping in the desert."

CAPE TOWN

The buzzing and cosmopolitan South African city features prominently in Knight Frank's latest Wealth Report, thanks to its growing ranks of super-rich, and prime property prices that are up 20% year on year. It's also becoming a magnet for art lovers thanks to the largest contemporary art gallery in Africa, the Thomas Heatherwick-designed Zeitz MOCAA, on the V&A Waterfront.

"Cape Town is almost detached from the rest of South Africa in that it is a really European-feeling First World hub, and it's seen as safe compared with other areas of the country," Thistlethwayte says. "When the new president came in in February, there was an immediate bounce of 20% on the rand, but you still get incredible value for money."

> **Many high-net-worth individuals are now drawn to the US because of its economic growth and Trump's reduced taxes**

International interest stretches into nearby wine regions such as Franschhoek, and along the coast, but Thistlethwayte warns against buying in more rural locations: "Crime is the story there. You have to be careful in smaller places where you get that juxtaposition of extreme poverty and wealth. Cape Town is big and confident enough, and its population that bit more prosperous, for there to be more of a balance. It's more of a real place all round."

For true city-centre living in the business district, the five-star Taj Hotel – with views over Table Mountain – has large one-bedders from £299,000, and owners can use the hotel's facilities and services (knightfrank.co.uk). Or get sea views from the two-bedroom duplex in prime Bantry Bay, which is on the market for £990,840 (savills.com).

TURKEY

While many are wary of Turkey because of its warring neighbours, others maintain unwavering devotion to pockets of its Mediterranean coastline, including Kalkan, Bodrum and Fethiye – which between them accounted for most of the 794 property sales to Brits in Turkey last year.

"The number of inquiries from British buyers remains steady," says Julian Walker, managing director of the Turkish property specialist Spot Blue, who adds that sales to foreign nationals rose by 22.2% last year, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. "The key appeals remain affordability and ease of access," he says. "You can buy a villa with a pool in popular Antalya, for example, for £65,000. This year also sees 31 new flight routes from the UK."

… AND NORTHERN CYPRUS

Recognised as a republic only by Turkey (though you can still fly there direct from the UK), northern Cyprus was attracting gung-ho bargain-hunters before the crash a decade ago, but its long-running standoff with the Cypriot government means that investing here is always a risk.

Thalassa Beach Resort is a new seafront development near Famagusta, with flats from £44,950 and a guaranteed 6% net yield, available through 360 Estates (thalassa.360estates.com). Oliver Pugh, property consultant for the agency, knows of one British couple who live in the southern part of the island and use this as their weekend getaway.