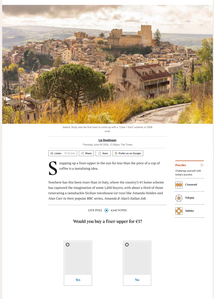

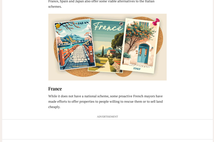

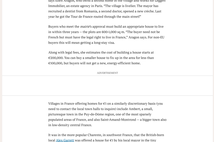

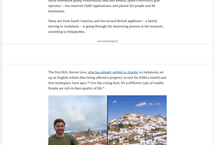

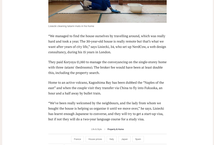

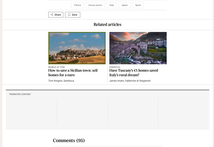

The Brits buying €1 homes around the world

It's not just Italy: schemes to buy houses for less than an espresso exist in regions of France, Spain and Japan too. We meet the expats who have taken the plunge

Salemi, Sicily, was the first town to come up with a "Case 1 Euro" scheme, in 2008

ALAMY

Liz Rowlinson

Thursday June 04 2026, 12.00pm, The Times

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Snapping up a fixer-upper in the sun for less than the price of a cup of coffee is a tantalising idea.

Nowhere has this been truer than in Italy, where the country's €1 home scheme has captured the imagination of some 1,200 buyers, with about a third of those renovating a ramshackle Sicilian townhouse (or two) like Amanda Holden and Alan Carr in their popular BBC series, *Amanda & Alan's Italian Job*.

LIVE POLL ◉ 4,543 VOTES

Would you buy a fixer-upper for €1?

Puzzles

Challenge yourself with today's puzzles.

Crossword

Polygon

Sudoku

○ Yes

○ No

The scheme's success at attracting investors to depopulated villages has spawned efforts in other countries to do the same, but do any of the alternatives measure up?

While Italy's scheme has primarily drawn foreign buyers, other initiatives incentivise local people to revive struggling areas or attract expats back to their homeland.

Amanda Holden and Alan Carr have helped to popularise renovations of crumbling doer-uppers overseas

BBC

In 2025, nearly 200,000 under-35s left the UK, including those priced out of the housing market, so some intrepid Brits have given it a go. But what is the reality behind the headlines?

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Italy's €1 schemes

- Starting in 2008, the country's now famous "Case 1 Euro" schemes were the brainchild of the mayor in the Sicilian town of Salemi, who was faced with a glut of empty houses. For the symbolic sum of €1 (or similar) the municipality sold off crumbling homes to buyers who were willing to renovate within three years. A security deposit of €3,000-€5,000 was usually payable, along with notary fees from €1,500, legal fees from €2,000 and renovation costs of least €30,000.
- Some of the costs could be offset by government tax deduction schemes of 36 per cent or 50 per cent for renovation works (some for second home

or primary residency, others for energy-efficiency improvements).

- More than 70 municipalities offer properties, and of the 1,200 or so sold, there's a 65 per cent completion rate, says Maurizio Berti, founder of the property finder 1eurohouses.com. Some Sicilian towns are selling more than 50 properties each. "North Americans remain by far the most numerous and motivated buyers," Berti says.

- **These Americans bought €1 houses in Italy. Was it worth it?**

While a 13-cent (pre-euro) scheme in Legrad, northern Croatia, was short-lived, the "I Choose Bulgaria" programme offers grants to returning expats, as does a Greek state programme (Metegkatastasi) in the northern border regions.

Remote islands have also offered grants — on Antikythera and on 23 uninhabited Irish islands — although foreigners face the extra obstacle of getting legal residency and a job.

France, Spain and Japan also offer some viable alternatives to the Italian schemes.

JAPAN
France
ITALY

France

While it does not have a national scheme, some proactive French mayors have made efforts to offer properties to people willing to rescue them or to sell land cheaply.

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One especially dynamic mayor presides over Lonlay l'Abbaye, a pretty, well-maintained Normandy village with a stream and ancient cider press that does not look to be dying. There's a bakery, delicatessen, vet, school and a Benedictine abbey that bakes butter biscuits.

Yet a year ago its mayor, Christian Derouet, started offering building plots for €1 a square metre, of which at least 12 have so far sold — mostly to young couples.

Lonlay l'Abbaye, a village in Normandy where building plots are for sale at €1 a sq m

"It's a very practical way to support homebuyers and also build the tax base," says Ellen Aragon, who owns a second home in the village and works for Leggett Immobilier, an estate agency in Paris. "The village is livelier. The mayor has recruited a dentist from Romania, a second doctor, opened a new crèche. Last year he got the Tour de France routed through the main street!"

Buyers who meet the *mairie*'s approval must build an appropriate house to live in within three years — the plots are 600-1,000 sq m. "The buyer need not be French but must have the legal right to live in France," Aragon says. For non-EU buyers this will mean getting a long-stay visa.

Along with legal fees, she estimates the cost of building a house starts at €200,000. You can buy a smaller house to fix up in the area for less than €100,000, but buyers will not get a new, energy-efficient home.

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Villages in France offering homes for €1 on a similarly discretionary basis (you need to contact the local town halls to inquire) include Ambert, a small, picturesque town in the Puy-de-Dôme region, one of the most sparsely populated areas of France, and also Saint-Amand-Montrond — a bigger town also in low-density central France.

It was in the more popular Charente, in southwest France, that the British-born local Alex Garrett was offered a house for €1 by his local mayor in the tiny medieval town of Lesterps (population: 439).

Alex Garrett, from Bath, bought a derelict house in the Charente, southwest France, for €1 after an offer from the local mayor

The four-storey townhouse had fallen into such disrepair that the owner of the adjoining property was anxious hers would suffer if nothing was done.

"The mayor offered it to me for €1 as I had renovated a property nearby for myself," says Garrett, 51, a self-taught carpenter from Bath. "A few weeks later the prefecture's fiscal rules changed, and I had to pay €999 in legal fees but even at €1,000 it's a great deal. I hope to run it as a B&B."

He reckons he'll spend about €20,000 renovating it himself, saving the €1,000 a week rate for professional labour that would mean it would cost €30,000 without materials. "If I was offered a property I'd steer clear of anything without a good roof, a modern mains electric supply and water." Each of these might add

€10,000 to the cost.

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- **[‘I bought a holiday home in Sicily for €32k’ — and there’s more bargains in Spain, France and Portugal]**

Spain

While some of Spain’s coastal resorts are packed with expats and homeowners, there are vast swathes of the country’s interior that have declining populations. Holapueblo is an initiative that helps people to start a new life and launch a business in rural towns.

It doesn’t offer homes for €1 or grants, but the scheme connects suitable applicants with villages or towns that provide subsidies — moving costs, temporary free accommodation — to help newcomers settle in.

Since it launched seven years ago, the scheme — a collaboration between the social enterprise group AlmaNatura, Ikea and Redeia, Spain’s electricity grid operator — has received 17,687 applications, and placed 215 people and 58 businesses.

Many are from South America, and the second British applicant — a family moving to Andalusia — is going through the mentoring process at the moment, according to Holapueblo.

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The first Brit, Steven Love, who has already settled in Aroche, in Andalusia, set up an English school after being offered a property to rent for €200 a month and free workspace. Love says: “I live like a king here. It’s a different type of wealth. People are rich in their quality of life.”

Steven Love set up an English school in Aroche, Andalusia, after being offered a property to rent there for €200 a month

To apply, candidates must supply information about their business proposal and their interest in moving to a rural area, says the project co-ordinator, Elena García, who discourages people from phoning the local town halls directly.

The deadline for applying for the current (sixth) phase is November 2026, but the next one will launch in January 2027 (holapueblo.com).

- **‘I bought a €1 home in Sicily’**

Japan

With about nine million empty homes, or *akiya*, Japan offers a scheme with the fewest caveats. Yet for non-Japanese speakers it is the least accessible — many of the portals are impenetrable, listing available homes for as little as ¥1 (about 0.5p).

Tapping into this yen for traditional Japanese houses, there are bilingual agents, such as Steven Huang of Kyoto-based Koryoya, who helps buyers from mainly Australia and Singapore find and purchase traditional farmhouses (*kominka*), *akiya* and townhouses (*machiya*).

Many buy as holiday homes or investments as there is no requirement to live in your property, he says. "*Akiyas* usually come with tons of problems and cost a lot to renovate so our buyers more often spend from £10,000 on a rural *kominka* that is not so run-down. It's hard to find a builder and interpreter in the countryside."

It took Tomasz Lisiecki and his civil partner, Joanna, an interior designer, just three weeks to fix up their wooden house in Kagoshima that they bought last year for £10,000. The couple from east London fell in love with Japan after extensive travels and plan to move out next year, when they've sold their Newham home.

Tomasz Lisiecki and his partner, Joanna, at their house in Kagoshima, Japan, which they bought for £10,000

Lisiecki cleaning tatami mats in his home

"We managed to find the house ourselves by travelling around, which was really hard and took a year. The 30-year-old house is really remote but that's what we want after years of city life," says Lisiecki, 34, who set up NerdCow, a web design consultancy, during his 15 years in London.

They paid Koryoya £1,160 to manage the conveyancing on the single-storey home with three *tatami* (bedrooms). The broker fee would have been at least double this, including the property search.

Home to an active volcano, Kagoshima Bay has been dubbed the "Naples of the east" and when the couple visit they transfer via China to fly into Fukuoka, an hour and a half away by bullet train.

"We've been really welcomed by the neighbours, and the lady from whom we bought the house is helping us organise it until we move over," he says. Lisiecki has learnt enough Japanese to converse, and they will try to get a start-up visa, but if not they will do a two-year language course for a study visa.

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Liz Rowlinson

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Per day that is

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I think Britain should not have flogged off its social housing stock to buy votes for the Tories.

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S Stockford
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Or moved immigrants into them until all British people were housed?

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S Martin

16 HOURS AGO

The EU punishes British citizens for Brexit with its ridiculous 3 months only in any 6 policy. None of the expats I know voted for Brexit in the first place. It's spiteful, political and completely unnecessary to punish ordinary hardworking people with this rule. Furthermore the EU loses out financ...

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It’s not just Brits, when we left, we simply joined the list as 3rd Countries.

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Lucy Atherton

18 HOURS AGO

No mention of the 90 day rule in Europe. Are these countries offering long stay visas or residency as part of the package?

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M Nagl

17 HOURS AGO

It's always amusing when people make one of these "no mention of" comments without actually reading the article to check whether it's the case.

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Mark Ripon

16 HOURS AGO

Hang on a sec.
Surely Brexit stopped all this living, working and travelling in Europe, or was that just a lie?

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john osborne

16 HOURS AGO

Have you seen the queues at the airports recently or tried to send a package to an EU country?

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Harry Hemmings-Batt

17 HOURS AGO

Sadly the moment you get within easy driving distance of a ski resort, everything gets really expensive.

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Daniel Carter

19 HOURS AGO

Small point re Japan but Y1 is about 0.5p, not 5p

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Carol Lewis STAFF

18 HOURS AGO

Thank you, we've corrected that now.

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Thomas Baker

14 HOURS AGO

> *They paid Koryoya £1,160 to manage the conveyancing on the single-storey home with three tatami (bedrooms).*

Tatami are not 'bedrooms' but rush mats used as flooring in Japanese houses. They are made in standard sizes, so room dimensions are often cited in terms of the number of ...

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Graham smith

17 HOURS AGO

Where we spend much of our of our time in Spain most of the newcomers are South American, however not necessarily
buying properties for €1
Mrs S

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M Nagl

17 HOURS AGO

The €1 properties tend to be in areas with no job opportunities, so unlikely that they would attract migrants from Latin America who arrive with the intention of working. Also, these properties all require substantial refurbishment so one would need a lot more than €1 of capital to take one on.
It's...

See more *(Edited)*

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Christopher Barclay
15 HOURS AGO

Sicily? Would you really want to be stuck there all year round? The parts where they're flogging of these slums are cheap for a reason. As for the cities, Palermo ok for a day or two, Catania not even that.

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M Nagl
13 HOURS AGO

Sicily could be lovely if they cleaned up all the open rubbish tips, and removed all the half-built structures littering the landscape. Though for part of the year it would still be too hot for human habitation.

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C White
14 HOURS AGO

What an interesting article. Thank you. edited due too autocorrect *(Edited)*

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B Benjafield
11 HOURS AGO

This is a great idea. Brings money into the local economy plus they finally get money once it's finished

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Jo Goodall
14 HOURS AGO

Er ... Brexit?

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M Nagl
13 HOURS AGO

Is there a point you wish to make?

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↳ 1 reply

Jumbi Tolleson
19 HOURS AGO

How will they get visas to live I Japan?

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M Wragg
19 HOURS AGO

Start up or study visa

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Arthur DWallac
12 HOURS AGO

Dreadful idea to buy a house in Japan without a visa. There has been a huge crackdown on the startup visa they mention and the study visa is harder than it used to be. More importantly this house will be a nightmare to live in in summer due to the lack of air conditioning and insulation.there is a ...**See more**

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