

Golden Visa for Europe Comparison



In recent years there has been growing demand from non-EU nationals for residency in European countries. A number of European countries have introduced a “Golden Visa” program, offering residency in exchange for real estate investments. The Golden Visas are designed to attract foreign investments and stimulate the property market and economy.

The programs primarily target Russian, Middle Eastern and Chinese investors, and also investors from the US, India and Latin America. Applicants in the countries offering these programmes can bring their spouses and any dependent children with them (and in some countries, parents and grandchildren also qualify for residency).

Benefits

The amount applicants are required to invest varies, as does the length of the visa. The temporary resident visa may lead to eventual citizenship. A residency visa enables free travel throughout all 26 countries in the Schengen Area (Austria, Belgium, The Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Leetonia, Republic of Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland).

Other advantages are the opportunity to invest in countries with stable political and economic situations, benefitting from good infrastructure as well as doing business in the Euro currency (stable prices, large consumer market, integrated financial markets, etc.)

Guide to Europe’s most important Golden Visa programmes:

Spain:

When? Spain’s “Golden Visa” programme was launched in September 2013, and had updates in 2015.

How Much? The Spanish Golden Visa requires a minimum investment of € 500 000 in property (one or several), directly or indirectly through a registered company, as long as the applicants continue to hold the majority of shares of this company.

Benefits? Applicants initially can receive a residency visa for 2 years, which can be renewed indefinitely for 5 years residence permits.

After 5 years, recipients may apply for permanent residency.

Applicants may apply for citizenship after 10 years of residence in Spain.

Requirements? Investing a minimum of € 500 000 without encumbrances, in one or more properties. There is no requirement for minimum stays to renew the visa. This means that it is optional to stay in Spain.

Who? Recent amendments to the program allow the holder to request family regrouping including their spouse, dependent children and parents.

Alternatives for qualification? Applicants may also invest € 2 million in Spanish government bonds or € 1 million in a Spanish company.

Portugal:

Portugal's program is the most similar to Spain's:

When? Golden Visa program established in 2012, and was the first of its kind in Europe.

How Much? The Portuguese Golden Visa has a minimum qualifying investment of € 500 000 or more in property.

Benefits? The initial temporary residency visa is valid for 1 year and can be renewed twice for 2 year periods at a time. At the end of the sixth year, the holder may apply for full Portuguese Nationality.

Requirements? Residency visa holders are required to spend 7 days in Portugal the first 12 months, and 14 days per year the following 4 years. The real estate investment must be kept for a minimum period of 5 years.

Who? The holder may request the family regrouping including their spouse, children aged under 18 and adult dependent relatives carrying out their studies.

Alternatives for qualification? People who invest € 1 000 000 in Portuguese companies or set up a business which creates 10 jobs may also apply to the program.

United Kingdom:

When? The United Kingdom have offered their current program of residency in exchange for investments in the British economy since November 2014.

How Much? The UK's "Golden Visa" has a minimum qualifying investment of £ 2 million.

Benefits? The initial £ 2 million investment allows the applicant to reside temporarily in the UK. Following 2 years, applicants may invest a further £ 10 million in order to settle permanently. Applicants may apply for British citizenship after either 5-6 years of residing in the country. After the Brexit however, the visa will NOT allow holders to travel in the European Schengen zone.

Requirements? Investment in property is not allowed, and there are strict guidelines as to which types of investment programs qualify towards a residency visa application. These include UK government bonds, share capital or loan capital in active and trading UK registered companies.

Who? The investor's spouse as well as any children under 18.

Alternatives for qualification? None.

Cyprus:

When? Cyprus' Golden Program was opened in 2012.

How much? In order to qualify for a citizenship, investors must purchase a luxurious property worth € 2 million or invest at least € 2.5 million into the Cypriot economy (see below for full requirements).

Benefits? Following this substantial investment, a full Cypriot (EU) citizenship and passport can be processed within just 3-4 months.

Requirements? There are no requirements to reside in or visit Cyprus after being awarded a passport. Investors may sell their Cypriot real estate after three years but must acquire, or hold, a permanent residence equivalent of € 500 000 to maintain the Cypriot passport.

Who? Also, passports can be issued to the applicant, the spouse, all underage children and adult dependents in full time education and whom are under 28 years old.

Alternatives for qualification? Accelerated citizenship may also be available to those who invest at least € 2.5 million in the Cypriot economy, including a €2 million investment in shares or bonds issued by the government, and a € 500 000 donation to the country's Research and Technology Fund.*

Malta:

When? The Malta Residence and Visa Programme was launched in 2015.

How Much? Applicants must invest a minimum of € 320 000 in Maltese real estate unless the property is situated in Gozo or in the South of Malta where the minimum value is lowered to € 270 000. Alternatively, a residency applicant may rent property in Malta for a minimum of € 12 000 per year (should the property be situated in Gozo or in the South of Malta, this is lowered to € 10 000 per year).

Benefits? The applicant (and their dependants) will receive a certificate allowing them to reside indefinitely in Malta. This will be reviewed each year for the first five years, then will be reissued every five years following this initial period.

Requirements? The applicants must be able to provide evidence of an annual income of at least € 100 000 from outside Malta or else that they are in possession of a minimum capital of € 500 000. Both the applicant and any dependants are responsible for health insurance within the EU territory. The individual must also undergo a health test.

Who? Dependants may also join the applicant (this includes the applicant's spouse, children under 18, children aged between 18 and 26 who are financially dependant on the applicant, a dependant parent, a child aged over 18 who is declared legally disabled).

Alternatives for qualification? Further measures for applicants have yet to be announced, though it is anticipated that these will take the form of significant investment in government bonds.

Greece:

The least costly option, but more risky considering the recent political instability within Greece and its problematic relationships with other EU nations.

When? The Greek version of the Golden Visa program opened in July 2013.

How Much? A minimum investment of € 250 000 in Greek real estate.

Benefits? Successful applicants will qualify for a 5 year temporary resident visa, which may be extended for a further 5 years at the end of this period. Foreign residents may not be granted citizenship, thus the visa will continue to be renewed every five years for the duration of this period.

Requirements? There is no minimum stay requirement.

Who? The wider family of the applicant are included in the visa, including children up to 21 years of age.

Alternatives for qualification? Greece also issues visas to those who make ‘strategic investments’ (the minimum requirement is unspecified, and residency is awarded on a pro rata bases) and/or create or buy a business that employs a minimum of ten people.

Belgium:

Belgium has a Golden Visa program for entrepreneurs setting up a new business. Real estate investments are not considered. The visa applications are reviewed on a case by case basis. The rules of the evaluation are not clearly defined.

How Much? To set up a business and for all kinds off costs the first few years, an investment of € 350.000 is expected.

Benefits? Successful applicants will qualify for a 1 year temporary resident visa, which may be extended if the business is successful and contributing to the Belgian economy, meaning: “making profit, creating employment and paying taxes”. Foreign residents may be granted citizenship, after 5 years residence.

Requirements? There is no minimum stay requirement.

Who? The family of the applicant are included in the visa, including children up to 18 years of age.

Switzerland:

Switzerland has an attractive Golden Visa program for Ultra High Net Worth Individuals.

The program does not involve investing in real estate, but paying a fixed yearly expenditure tax per family member of about CHF 100 000 (depending of the canton of residence).. In return you get a residency visa for one of the richest and safest countries in the world.

Benefits? 5 years, renewable residency visa. As a resident of Switzerland you pay no income tax of wealth tax on your global income or global properties.

Requirements? **It is not allowed to work or do business in Switzerland.**

Who? The family of the applicant are included in the visa.

The best options

SPAIN: Visa in return for real estate investment

- Spain offers superior lifestyle benefits in comparison to many neighbouring EU nations
- The property market is currently looking extremely buoyant. After some years of decline, recent figures show that prices are at last stabilising and indeed tentatively beginning to rise across Spain
- The Residency permit now also includes right to work in Spain.
- Under the previous Law, property investments were legally required to be made on an individual basis. Investors will now be able to purchase their properties in Spain either directly or indirectly through a registered company, so long as they continue to hold the majority of shares and the company’s address is not located in a tax haven.
- Unmarried couples who wish to acquire a property together are no longer required to comply with the € 500 000 minimum investment individually. Before the changes, the minimum investment requirement applied on an individual basis, creating a disadvantage for co-owning couples. The changes benefit unmarried couples immensely.

- Another addition to the program will ensure that unmarried, co-habiting couples will now also benefit from the Law when they register under the Spanish “domestic partnership” Civil Registry, a rule which also applies to same sex couples.
- Spain has excellent communications links (including several international airports, the fast-speed ‘AVE’ trains as well as extremely well maintained road and rail links) – enabling efficient travel throughout the Schengen zone, and many far flung destinations.
- Spain is renowned for some of the best international schools in all of Europe. A recently published “prosperity index” rated Spain highly on an international scale due to its high standard of education (in fact, higher than any other nation currently offering a golden visa residency program).
- Spain simply offers huge lifestyle benefits – the WHO listed Spain second in the world for longevity after Japan. A recent study by Eurostat has revealed that Spanish people live the longest in Europe, with life expectancy at birth an extremely positive 83.2.
- The Spanish health service is excellent. It is widely recognised that residents of Spain have access to world class medical care.
- The general infrastructure is considered to be well managed with a fair system of accountable government spending.
- Spain is world famous for its incredible gastronomy – home to the most highly rated restaurants in the world including El Celler de Can Roca, and the former El Bulli, Spain has a great deal to answer for on the international culinary stage. The exceedingly high life expectancy in Spain has also been attributed to the Mediterranean diet, which the Spanish do particularly well.
- The economy is on the up, and has been declared one of best currently improving economies in the Eurozone. According to the IMF, Spain’s GDP is currently predicted to grow 2.5% next year.
- **CONCLUSION:** Spain is the best and easiest choice to gain a European visa through buying real estate and enjoy a high quality life style in an excellent climate.

BELGIUM: Visa in return for business investment

- Belgium is a multilingual country, with commonly spoken languages French, Dutch and English.
- Belgium offers a high quality of life and is a great place to live.
- Belgium is the political and logistic center of Europe.
- Brussels is the cosmopolitan capital of Europe.
- It is easy to set up a business.
- **CONCLUSION:** Belgium is ideal if you want to set up an active business in Europe.

SWITZERLAND: Visa in return for taxes

- Switzerland offers a high quality of life.
- It is a global financial and diplomatic center.
- Natural settings are stunning, with mountains for skiing and hiking, and lakes for water sports.
- **CONCLUSION:** Switzerland is a great choice for UHNWI’s looking for a tax shelter and desire to enjoy a high quality life style in a rich and safe country.