

# great adventure

## ON THE BLACK SEA COAST

**After falling in love with the rugged coastline around Balchik, Craig Thomas saw his dream of a Black Sea villa realised in just six months ...**

It was during a long summer holiday that I first toured Bulgaria, during which time I made many contacts and bought myself a property which I have subsequently knocked down and rebuilt.

During that trip, I initially looked at a number of options for investment including Turkey and Croatia. I had a tight budget of £25,000 UK sterling to buy a wreck of a house with, and I knew that I wanted one within walking distance of the sea.

I had been priced out of Croatia and did not really fancy the idea of Turkey but Bulgaria took my eye. It appeared that I could get the kind of property I wanted for the money, so I booked my flights and went. As I had not visited the country before I toured many parts and fell in love with the diverse beauty and friendliness of the locals. Researching on the internet back in England had attracted me to the Northern Coast of the Black Sea between Balchik and Shabla. It seemed wild, unspoilt and rugged - a kind of 'Bulgarian Cornwall' I suppose.



**I viewed many properties and lots just didn't feel right. Then on one hot day we rolled into Kamen Bryag, a small village on the sea, between Kavarna and Shabla. And there it was!**

The house that I had spied had gaping holes and clearly needed to be demolished but I had found the perfect location to build my dream villa.

The village is lovely and traditional with two restaurants, a small hotel and breathtaking views of the Black Sea coastline. Close by is Yayliata, a protected nature and archaeological reserve with many Thracian and Roman Sites and about 5km away is the beautiful Russalka resort which is located in Birds Bay.

As the land already had a property on it which had received planning, no planning permission was necessary as we intended to re-build on the same footprint. My advice to people now is: buy an old house on the best piece of land in your favourite location. You can always build your dream house but you can never change the location. With regard to any planning, life is made much easier with an existing footprint - plus water and electricity supplies are already going into the property which makes things simpler again.



The house was up for sale for £21,000. I offered £17,000 and was rewarded when I finally did the deal for £19,000. I believe I paid a great price for a house within 400 metres of the sea and with 2,500 sq.m. of land.

But what was I to do with it? Leave it and wait for prices to rise? Renovate? Rebuild? I got a few quotations and finally went with a firm (who we now work with up and down the coast). The total price including demolition, kitchen, bathroom, satellite, gates, walls and air conditioning was £23,000 for a 90 sq.m. house.

Building work started in November and I was sent photos of the villas progress over the next six months. I felt totally confident as penalties for late completion were in place and photographs were sent to me every two weeks. We loved receiving the pictures - they were a real highlight of the week for us!

Although I never bought the property to make a quick return I think in monetary terms we have done really well. Prices have rocketed on the northern Black Sea coast over the past 12 months and land in Kamen Bryag has risen from around £8 a sq.m. to £14 - 20 a sq.m. fuelled by the three golf courses which are now being built by professionals Ian Woosnam and Gary Player within 30 minutes of the village. More and more people also now seem keen not to have apartments on the coast and are looking to have properties with land in traditional Bulgarian villages.

My total outlay including all fees and furniture must be close to £45,000 which was more than I originally wanted to spend but my villa has recently been valued at around £75,000. Not a bad return in 12 months! I think prices will continue to rise in the coming few years as we get closer to EU accession in 2007

After talking to a large number of British people over the following months there seemed to be a real need for a service that could help British clients gain quotations for building and renovation projects in Bulgaria. We'd already experienced knocking down and rebuilding ourselves and as I had toured the country and made many contacts it dawned on my wife and I that we could help British clients who wished to build or renovate their properties. So we established the business and do projects with many British clients along the Black Sea coast with all the work being carried out by local reliable building firms including the firm who built my own house.

Craig Thomas

[www.bulgarian-villa.com](http://www.bulgarian-villa.com)

For the next few issues of Quest Bulgaria we are going to be following a project we are undertaking for a couple from Preston who are selling up and moving out to Bulgaria next year. We are building a villa for them and will be sharing our experiences of the building process with you.

The villa is located in Vranino near Kavarna and we hope you will find the journal interesting and informative, particularly for all you readers out there who may be thinking of doing the same in the future!

