

Your Golden Ticket



Europe's Golden Visa Options Which Is Right For You?

By Lief Simon

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Golden Visas

A Path To European Residency By Investing

Some countries have had options for obtaining residency by making a property investment in the country as part of their overall residency permit portfolios for a long time. Panama is one example where you could invest US\$300,000 in property and you could obtain residency.

However, Panama has many other residency options on its books of which currently the pensionado residency for retirees and the Friendly Nations Visa for people from 50 specific countries are less capital-intensive options.

Golden Visa Programs as they have become to be called, are generally offered by countries that don't have other good options, if any, for obtaining legal residency. Most are in developed countries that are in need of foreign investment. European programs are the most interesting because of the access they provide to the EU and The Schengen Zone.

The Schengen Zone refers to countries that have agreed to eliminate border controls between them. Most EU countries are part of the Schengen Zone or are expected to join. Ireland and the U.K. opted out of Schengen agreement. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland are part of Schengen, but not EU countries.

If you're not a citizen or resident of a Schengen or EU country, then you're limited to how much time you can spend in the Schengen Zone to 90 days in a rolling 180-day period. They are effectively one country for tourist visa purposes.



Having residency in a Schengen country allows you to spend as much time in any of the other Schengen countries as you like up to 90 consecutive days at a time. In other words, as a legal resident of Portugal, you could spend 90 days in Italy and then 90 days in France.

Each Golden Visa program in Europe has different minimum investment requirements. However, they also have different benefits and time in country requirements, so don't just go shopping for the country with the lowest capital requirements.

The first Golden Visa program started in Latvia in 2010. It was so popular that Portugal launched their program in 2012, followed by Spain and Greece in 2013. Malta created their program in 2015.

Latvia's program initially had a very affordable 165,000-euros level for real estate purchase, but after Portugal, Spain, and Greece started their programs which all had higher investment levels, Latvia increased theirs as well.

Greece

Greece has the lowest total cost of any of the current Golden Visa programs. The investment level is 250,000 euros (in most locations, except Athens and popular tourist islands) and real estate transaction costs in Greece are about 7% on the buy side.

Greece also allows you to buy several properties to reach that 250,000 euros threshold. With investment properties available well below 250,000 euros in some areas, this allows you to seek out the best opportunities rather than being stuck with buying a property just because it costs enough for the program.

You don't have to actually spend any time in Greece once you have the residency, but you will have to go to complete the residency application and every five years to renew your residency status. The down side is that you have to maintain your investment for as long as you want residency unless you go for naturalization which is possible after seven years.

However, while seven years of legal residency qualifies you for naturalization, Greece, like all countries, wants to see a connection to the country before they'll give you citizenship... including being able to speak the language. Therefore, you'll need to spend time in the country and make a life there if your plan is to apply for citizenship after seven years. Also, keep in mind that Greece has a military requirement for male citizens between the ages of 19 and 45.

The government fees for applying for the Golden Visa program is 2,000 euros per person. If you use a facilitator or attorney to help with the application, expect to pay at least 1,000 euros per person.

The Golden Visa program is really the only way to get residency in Greece. That is, unless you want to work remotely from the country and apply for their digital nomad visa, in which case you must show income from work of at least 3,500 euros per month..

Latvia

The investment requirement for Latvia's Golden Visa program is also 250,000 euros and closing costs on property total about 2.5% of the purchase price. That makes Latvia cheaper than Greece on the real estate transaction side. However, Latvia imposes a 5% processing fee for their Golden Visa program. The fee is based on the value of the property so it will be at least 12,500 euros.

That makes the total cost of obtaining residency in Latvia about the same as in Greece.

One downside in Latvia is you can only buy one property to qualify for the program with a few exceptions in some smaller towns where you can buy multiple properties to reach the minimum requirement.

Latvia will give you permanent residency after five years if you have actually been living in the country for at least four of them. Otherwise, there's no requirement to spend time in the country once you have the Golden Visa residency.

You can apply for naturalization in Latvia after 10 years of residency—five under the Golden Visa and five as a permanent resident. They have a language and basic history test for the permanent residency permit. For naturalization, basic knowledge of the constitution is required.

Latvia has other investment options for gaining residency. You can invest in an interest-free government bond at 250,000 euros or a bank bond at 280,000 euros which will pay interest. The government fee for these options is 25,000 euros. These options make the real estate path more attractive.

Portugal

Because of a shortage of affordable housing for Portuguese nationals, Portugal's government announced major changes to its ever-popular Golden Visa program on Feb. 16 of 2023.

The government deliberated on those changes until July 19, when the final version of the program's new legislation was approved by parliament.

These are the changes you need to know about:



The Golden Visa program continues. Contrary to some reports, Portugal's Golden Visa has not been terminated. It continues with changes to its investment options...

Real estate investment is no longer an option. This is the big news... Property has been eliminated as an investment option. Prior to the changes, you could have qualified for residency by buying property worth at least 280,000 euros (albeit an older renovation property in a low-density area).

Attractive investment options remain. Your main options for qualifying for a Portugal Golden Visa today include: Cultural heritage and artistic contribution (250,000 euros); scientific contribution (500,000 euros); VC and investment fund (500,000 euros).

The investment fund option has risen in popularity since 2019, when it accounted for only 0.56% of all Golden Visa applications. This year, it accounts for almost 29% of them.

This correlates to a rise in the Golden Visa's popularity among Americans. In 2019, only 5.3% of all Portugal Golden Visa applications were made by Americans, but this year, the number is at 20.4%.

This could be explained by American openness to investment funds, especially compared to people from Asia. Chinese people have historically claimed the biggest share of Portugal Golden Visa applications. There's no direct evidence to support this, however.

Although minimal, Portugal does have requirements that you spend time in the country under the Golden Visa program. You have to spend one week in the country the first year and two weeks in the country in each of the following two-year periods.

Considering that you have to renew your residency after the first year, then two years after that, and then one final time two years after that, you'll be going to Portugal anyway making the time requirement easy to fulfill.

After five years of residency, you can apply for permanent residency or naturalization. To be considered for naturalization, you'll need to show a connection to the country, i.e. have spent more than the oneweek-a-year there. The naturalization process includes a Portuguese language test and some basic country history and civics topics.

Should you decide to live in Portugal under the Golden Visa program long enough each year to become a tax resident, the country offers tax breaks for new residents under its Non-Habitual Resident (NHR) tax program. NHR eliminates income taxes on many forms of income and reduces it for others.

Portugal has another residency option that doesn't require an investment. If you can prove you have passive income from pensions, real estate, dividends, and/or interest income of a least 1,200 euros a month, you can get residency status in Portugal.



The catch with this residency option is you must spend at least 183 days a year in Portugal. That would make you a tax resident in Portugal which would mean you'd want to apply for the NHR program.

Spain

Spain has the highest investment requirement at 500,000 euros with no options for lower amounts like Portugal has. Transfer taxes on property in Spain are applied at the regional level and range between 4% to 10%. In addition, notary and registration fees will add another 1.5% on average to the total cost of buying.

Spain doesn't have any in-country time requirement, but like Portugal, you'll have to renew your residency after the first year and then every two years until you apply for permanent residency.

Also, like Portugal, once you have permanent residency, you can sell your property if you wish to do so.

Naturalization in Spain requires 10 years of legal residency and comes with similar requirements as other countries for showing you've made a life in Spain. In fact, as the naturalization process

isn't a purely administrative process in Spain, the government has discretion as to whether or not to approve a naturalization application.

Once you are naturalized, Spain requires you to give up previous citizenships unless you are a citizen of a former colony.

Spain offers a similar residency option as Portugal for people who want to live in the country, i.e. spend more than 183 days in Spain. You simply have to show a minimum of 25,000 euros in a bank account to prove you can support yourself while living in Spain. You can't work in Spain under this type of residency.

Malta

Malta offers several residency programs including citizenship-by-investment program. However, the real estate options for residency in Malta make it quite attractive as you don't have to buy property if you don't want to. You can simply rent.

With a lease on a property paying at least 9,600 euros a year (8,750 euros on Gozo), you can qualify for Malta's Global Residence program. Or you can buy a property for 275,000 euros (220,000 euros on Gozo). You'll also have to prove you have sufficient income to support yourself.

Under this program you don't have to spend any specific amount of time in Malta, but you can't spend 183 or more in any other single jurisdiction as that would mean you're a tax resident in that jurisdiction and Malta is going to tax you under this program.

The tax in Malta is 15% of funds remitted to Malta with a minimum tax payment of 15,000 euros whether you bring any money into Malta or not. Obviously, this program is meant for individuals who are looking to reduce their taxes more so than obtain a backup residency option... or someone who actually wants to move to Malta.



You can't rent your property out under this program and you have to renew annually.

Malta has a similar residency program for retirees with a lower minimum annual tax of 7,500 euros. Under the retirement program, you have to spend at least 90 days a year in Malta on average over five years to maintain the tax benefits. Like the Global Residency program you can't spend 183 days or more in another jurisdiction.

The actual program that Malta calls its Golden Visa program has higher investment requirements for buying or renting property along with a 30,000 euros government fee. The threshold for buying property under this program is 350,000 euros (300,000 euros on Gozo) and for renting it's 12,000 euros a year (10,000 euros on Gozo). When renting the lease must be for five years. A 250,000 euros investment in Maltese government bonds is also required for five years.

The benefit of this program is it doesn't have the minimum tax requirement and it is a permanent residency program that doesn't require renewals. It also doesn't accrue towards citizenship in Malta unlike the other Golden Visa programs.

EU Golden Visa Comparison Chart

	Greece	Latvia	Portugal	Spain	Malta
Minimum Property Value (€)	250,000	250,000	Must invest in a fund/culture/business	500,000	300,000 (5-year lease + bond investments)
Minimum Transaction Costs (€)	17,600	5,000	N/A	31,000	400
Visa Costs And Fees (€)	500	12,700	5,700	100	30,000
Property Type	Any	Any, except for undeveloped land	N/A	Any	Residential only
Opportunity To Buy Several Properties	Yes	Certain locations only	No	Yes	No
Need To Apply Personally	Yes (one visit to the country is enough)				
Residential Requirements	None		Must spend 1 week in the country during the first year, and 2 weeks during each of the next two years	None	
Tax Residence	When living over 183 days per year in the country				
Visa Validity	5 years, renewable every 5 years	5 years, renewable every 5 years	1 year, renewable twice for 2 years	1 year, renewable every 2 years	Indefinite
Asset Holding Period	As long as the holder needs residence		5 years	As long as the holder needs residence	5 years
Family Members' Eligibility For Residence	Spouses, children under 21 years of age, parents	Spouses, children under 18 years of age, dependants	Spouses, partners, children under 18 years of age, dependants	Spouses, partners, children under 18 years of age	Spouses, children, parents, grandparents
Right To Work	No (investment activity only)	Yes			
Permanent Residence	After 5 years if the investor spends at least 183 days per year in the country		After 5 years	After 5 years if the investor spends at least 183 days per year in the country	The Golden Visa is already a permanent residence permit
Citizenship	After 7 years of residency	After 5 years of permanent residence	After 5 years	After 10 years of residency	Cannot be granted

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