

Early signals

A boom in Buenos Aires

Could Argentina be the next hot Latin property market? High-end apartments in Buenos Aires changed hands in January at a 24 percent faster clip than in December, often at prices up to 50 percent off their 1998 highs. Apartments in sought-after spots like Recoleta have risen 20 percent since July.

The pace has slowed recently as the country builds up to elections in April. But local experts said this week that there was room for prices to rise further, especially if a new president can come through with financial reforms.

Foreign buyers who can stomach the ride are warming to Argentina because of uncertainty about their own bourses and the country's geopolitical distance from global strife. Maria Reynolds of JR Reynolds Real Estate in Buenos Aires said her agency was on track to sell twice as many downtown properties by the end of March as it sold all last year, all to North Americans (the unavailability of credit means that most locals cannot buy). Agents are also noting a spike in queries from Europe.

Farms, which carry lower peso expenses, are especially popular. Marc Faber, a Hong Kong-based contrarian investor, calls Argentine rural land "attractive" as a pure play on commodities.

— Carolyn Whelan