

MAKE HASTE, MAKE WASTE

Wanting purchasing power drives many of us to put in long working weeks. But Susanna Stuart warns wasteful spending habits can negate our hard work

A few weeks ago, the opportunity to make a financial 'house call' took me a little further afield than usual. My client is a New Zealander living in the south of Spain.

For a couple of years, she's been urging me to come over and see the sights. So when my partner announced he had to go to London on business we agreed an extra leg to Spain could constitute our 25th wedding anniversary celebration.

There can be no more romantic city in the world than Seville and we were fortunate that our visit coincided with Easter celebrations, the *Semana Santa*. Fifty-seven city guilds, or brotherhoods, put on commemorative processions.

These are very much family traditions, and we were struck by the importance Spanish people place on family. My client friend also remarked on this aspect of Spanish life. She said locals tend to keep their working hours under control (the siesta helps) and that, generally speaking, the Spanish have chosen to earn less in exchange for having more time to spend with friends and family. "Their homes or apartments are quite simple and they don't fill them up with all the latest things," she said.

In essence, the lifestyle we saw belongs to the Slow Cities movement that has quietly been gaining momentum since it was founded in Italy in 1999. People from all corners of the globe (but especially in Spain and Italy) are questioning their rat race lives,



wondering if life would be better if they earned less, purchased less and enjoyed their time more.

Two recent newspaper articles suggest New Zealanders have the potential to follow suit. One story, quoting TV ratings for March, revealed that Kiwis have been watching 10 per cent less television. Presumably we were outdoors

and enjoying the summer. That's good news. The less good news comes in a report prepared by the Australian Institute about wasteful consumption. Some 1644 Australians – and they aren't too different from us – were surveyed about what they spend versus what they eventually throw out. On average, a household wastes \$A1226 per annum on food that is thrown away, clothes, CDs, gym memberships and electricity that don't get used. Half the wasted dollars are spent on food.

Is \$1200 a lot? Well, the total of \$A10.5 billion is more than federal and state governments spend on universities or roading.

The survey also found that the more a household earns, the more it tends to waste. Also, young people waste far more money than older people.

My question is: If you and your partner could eliminate waste spending in return for an extra one or two week's vacation together, wouldn't it be worth it?

That's how the numbers add up. And across Spain, many people have chosen the less haste, less waste option. ■



what kind of a money waster are you?

The Australian Institute survey on household spending waste has come up with four main groups of consumer:

- * Guilty wasters. You buy things you don't use and feel guilty about it.
- * 'Who cares?' wasters. You're relaxed about sometimes buying things you don't use.
- * In-denial wasters. You waste a lot but refuse to recognise the fact.
- * Saints. Forty per cent waste little and think carefully before spending.