

WANTED: MORE NEW HOMES

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OVERSEAS

If you want perfect skiing conditions for months on end — or if, like the Beatles, you just want to go mad in the snow — head for Obertauern. Anna Tyzack visits the village's latest development

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The return of television's Ski Sunday

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Paradise found in t

Property

BUYING OVERSEAS

If you want guaranteed snow, Obertauern in Austria is a good bet. It was snowing there in July — and was clumping when I arrived in the resort in early December. Snow — and metres of it — is exactly why the village was extended in the 1950s to become Austria's first purpose-built ski resort.

It lies at 1,600 metres, making it one of Austria's highest resorts, and prides itself on snow-sure conditions for 160 days a year. True, there are higher resorts in France but they are (dare I say it) rather bleak and windswept compared to Obertauern, a village of chalets and hotels, in a tree-lined snow bowl. You might have seen it in the Inghams brochure or the Beatles' film *Help!* — the band filmed the *Ticket to Ride* sequence there in 1965. They considered Obertauern the perfect setting for a "mad, zany, comedy thriller" but the resort has only recently become a hotspot for British property investors.

"Obertauern does not need the English market," says Guy Taylor, who founded property development company Austrian Chalets Ltd (www.austrianchalets.com). "It already has 100 per cent occupancy. But now everyone's wanting altitude, prices in Obertauern will rise dramatically."

Within a month of launching a development of 11 apartments in Obertauern, demand was so high that Guy decided to keep the lot and embark on a much larger project. Zehnerkar Mountain Resort on the edge of the village will feature two-bedroom apartments with balconies for £140,000 and vast penthouses for £267,000 (see box, right).

When it comes to skiing, I'm very biased towards Austria. The chairlifts are fast (many have magic carpets to help you on and lifts to keep you dry), the chalets are immaculate, often with wellness facilities (saunas, steam rooms) and there's nothing like a good *unionschmizel* with *preiselbermbalwepot* (cranberry sauce) in a mountain restaurant.

Obertauern is not as pretty as places such as Lech and Kitzbühel but it ticks all the right boxes as far as skiing is concerned — so much so that the Austrian Olympic ski team made it their training base. There are 26 speedy ski lifts in the resort alone, and the 120km ski area reaches up to 2,313 metres high. Motivated skiers can embark on the Tauernrunde, a 20km ski circuit that takes the whole day to complete (if you factor in a schneizel-stop). When the ski lifts shut, snow-beaten skiers return to the village to dry their ski gloves on *Äschelofen* (filled stoves) while indulging in some traditional Austrian *après-schi*. We hiked up in the Lärzer Alm, a wood-clad bar which is to Obertauern what the Moosewirt is to St Anton, or Dick's T Bar to Val d'Isère. Several *glühwein* later, the dance floor was filled with ski-boot-wearing Tee-Danzers — the Austrians are unstoppable when it comes to *après-schi*.

Guy Taylor refrained from joining in (I suspect he might have done if I wasn't there) but he has jumped on the Austrian bandwagon of sustainable development and eco-friendly heating and water systems. "The Austrians are extremely environmentally conscious so we've taken on board all their sustainability measures," he says. The 41



Why Austria is still the ticket



apartments in Zehnerkar will have underfloor heating and hot water heated by the town's communal system (local waste is incinerated and this heats the water). Underfloor heating and hot water form part of the intelligent house management system that allows you to control the heating through your mobile phone or internet," says Guy. "So you can warm up your apartment as you're driving from the airport."

Each room has individual thermostat controls which allow owners to heat only the rooms they are using. "This saves on energy bills. Running costs are just £200 a year including heating, service and insurance."

Meanwhile, Zehnerkar will also cater to the specific demands of British skiers, who yearn for comfort and convenience as well as plenty of snow. With Salzburg airport just 90km away, property owners can be on Obertauern's slopes by lunchtime, having taken an early morning flight from one of 14 British airports. They will park the hire car in an underground garage, and find their skis and boots in the private storage space included with each apartment. The properties are ski-in and ski-out from a number of different directions, with the main gondola and quad chairlift just a few metres away.

Admittedly, the development isn't bang in the town centre, but this does mean there are pretty views of Obertauern from the balconies. "You can do your research but you'll not find anything comparable," says Guy Taylor. "An apartment in an Austrian ski resort costs half as much as one in France. And Obertauern is probably the best investment there is at the moment."

The Zehnerkar properties will have fully equipped kitchens, open-plan living rooms, and generous balconies with views across the ski area and church. Most exciting perhaps is the wellness area, which apartment owners can use. It will include a steam room, sauna and super-sized hot tub — perfect after a hard day's skiing (or *après-ski*). "In Austria and Germany, there is a philosophy that happiness comes from being well on the inside and the outside — but British people think that's just their excuse to get their kit

off in the spa," says Guy Taylor. In deference to British modesty, clothing will be allowed in the Zehnerkar wellness area before 7:30pm. "After that, everyone has to get naked — although there will always be those who break the rules," he says.

Why buy in Austria? Property prices: Up to 50 per cent less than in French and Swiss resorts. Inheritance tax: 0 per cent from April 2008. Capital gains tax: A sliding scale from 40 per cent for one year to 0 per cent over 10 years. Banking: Some private banking; security benefits as exist in Switzerland. Purchase costs: About 6 per cent of purchase price. Finance: Austrian banks will give mortgages of up to 70 per cent, usually at around 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent (interest rates are about 5 per cent).

Where else in Austria? **Rauris, Salzburgerland** A quintessential alpine village with views of the Grossglockner, Austria's highest mountain, Rauris used to be a gold-mining town, and the Gelbfelder's house stands ready for conversion in the village centre. The cobbled main street has a Konditorei selling delicious cakes and a good ski shop, and there are over 295km of walking trails to enjoy in summer. A chairlift runs from the village centre up to the ski area at 2,170m, which includes wide slopes for all abilities, two glaciers and plenty of off-plate to explore. Property prices in the village rise by 21 per cent last year. South Alpine Homes is selling luxury apartments in the Schönbach Mountain Resort from £133,000 for a large two-bedroom flat (guaranteed 5 per cent rental income), with access to a wellness centre with indoor and outdoor pools (029 7016 3740; www.alpinehomesintl.com).

Kitzbühel, Tyrol Known as one of the most charming towns in the Alps, with a walled, pedestrianised centre and pretty church, Kitzbühel is a good base from which to enjoy the mountains all year round. It is just over an hour's drive from Salzburg airport, and features a respected golf course and the Schwarze See, the warmest pool lake in the Tyrol. The ski area is diverse and spans 150km (with Kirchberg and other small villages) and there is a lively *après-ski* scene comprising more than 125 bars and pubs and three floors. Investors in Property is selling a four-bedroom chalet five minutes from the town centre with open-plan living area including *barabühel* (fired stove), a "country-house" kitchen, an attractive garden with barbecue area and south-facing terrace. In the basement, there is a sauna, spa, and solarium. Price £1,190,000 (E1,050,945) — see picture, above.

HIGH LIFE

Chalets on the market in Austria



On the edge of the mountain resort of Zehnerkar, there are two-bedroom apartments for sale for £120,000 and penthouses for £267,000. See www.austrianchalets.com



In the pretty town of Kitzbühel, there are two-bedroom apartments for sale for £192,945. See www.investorsinproperty.com



Two-bedroom flats in the Schönbach Mountain Resort in the alpine village of Rauris, Tyrol, Austria. See www.alpinehomesintl.com