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Alpine beauty

LOWDOWN: Austria

By Cathy Hawker

Location

Austria lies at the heart of Europe, bordering nine countries including Italy, Germany and Switzerland. With more than half the country dominated by the Alps, the main climate is an alpine one with cold but sunny winters and mild, temperate summers.

Tourism in Austria

Thirty million tourists visit Austria every year. Traditionally, most visitors have been skiers — 19 per cent of British skiers choose Austria, making it our second-favourite winter sports destination after France. British skiers to Zell Am See doubled in the eight years to 2007. Increasingly, Austria is seen as a summer destination with golf courses and impressive and affordable spas.

Geography

Forty per cent of Austria's 32,383 square miles is forest or woodland. The main tourist cities are the capital Vienna and Mozart's birthplace, Salzburg. New low-cost flights there are introducing more visitors to the country.

Skiers can choose between resorts such as Innsbruck in the Tyrol, the only major city in the Alps, or the Arlberg in western Austria, where five interlinked towns, including St Anton, provide a perfect picturesque backdrop to the mountains.

Few destinations are more glamorous than Kitzbühel, one of the Alps' most famous resorts. It doesn't have a perfect snow record but for sheer European style and old-school glamour, this Tyrolean resort is hard to fault.

Property

Austria has not been a traditional hunting ground for British house-buyers thanks to historic restrictions on foreign property ownership and a lack of suitable developments.

The past two years has seen several new-build projects with agents keen to stress Austria's affordability.

"The Austrian market offers alpine property that is truly within everybody's reach," claims Jeremy Rollason of Savills Alpine Homes.

Austria has been less affected by the global credit troubles than its neighbours Germany and Italy. "In Salzburg, property prices remain stable. Historically, it has been very hard to lose money in Austria," says Michael Ellmer of Ellmer & Partner Immobilier.

In south-east Austria, AlpenParks, Austria's

largest ski resort developer, is selling chalets at Hagan Lodge on Loser Mountain with a guaranteed rental return of six per cent and two weeks' personal use.

The three-bedroom chalets sleep up to nine, with indoor saunas and optional hot tubs, at prices from £324,500 including all legal fees. Salzburg airport is 90 minutes away.

Or in the Belle Epoque resort of Bad Gastein, Investors in Property is selling one- and two-bedroom apartments at the top of the waterfall that dominates this spa town. Wasserfall Apartments start at £171,500.

Contacts

- Hagan Lodge: www.hagan-lodge.co.uk; www.alpenparks.co.uk
- Investors in Property: 020 8905 5511; www.investorsinproperty.com
- Ellmer & Partner Immobilier: www.ellmer.at/e_home



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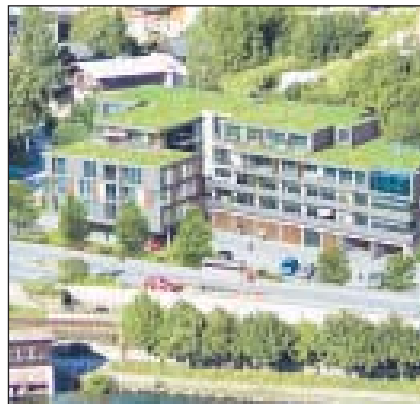
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Eva Maria Grese

Austria is second only to France in popularity with British skiers

What's on offer



From £165,360: two-bedroom flats at Zell Am See. Savills Alpine Homes (020 7016 3740)



From £324,500: three-bedroom lodges at Hagan Lodge (www.hagan-lodge.co.uk)

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The Belle Epoque town of Bad Gastein, in the Hohe Tauern National Park, is dominated by a large waterfall