

Chalets in Switzerland

Climb every mountain, buy a bit of the Alps

The hills are alive with the sound of building – and you can have your share of fun in an Alpine Swiss resort where you can buy a fraction of a €1.5m luxury chalet. **Fiona Tyrrell reports**

Serviced Swiss chalets beside a swish five-star hotel offer buyers Alpine hospitality and great skiing. Prada Biala is a new development of eight luxury apartments in the heart of Flims, an Alpine village in the canton of Grisons in eastern Switzerland.

The canton, tucked up against the Italian and Austrian borders and a neighbour of the principality of Liechtenstein, is the homeland of Heidi and a major winter sports destination.

Prada Biala means beautiful meadow, but the big draw of the scheme is the adjacent 220kms of alpine slopes. Another major selling point is the scheme's location beside the 22-acre Park Hotel Waldhaus and Spa.

The hotel, which was built 130 years ago, oozes understated elegance and good taste. Last September the entire Swiss parliament decamped to the hotel while its Bern debating chamber was restored.

The basement of the hotel is home to an engaging hotel museum full of 19th-century valises, piano music rolls and cooking pots.

Owners and occupants at Prada Biala will have access to all the facilities at the hotel, including the very impressive spa with an array of pampering suites and a selection of heated outdoor pools.

The scheme itself comprises eight four-bedroom 200sq m (2,153sq ft) duplexes overlooking the Flims valley.

Prices are between €1.5 million and €1.6 million.

Design will be in a style traditional to the area with a mix of stone and wood. Included in the price is an interior fit-out designed by former Russian stage designer Alex Kravetz.

A dedicated company, Alpine Residences Club, will provide a complete concierge and daily maid services for the chalets. This service is included in the price for the first five years.

The developer is also offering a fractional ownership plan on a few of the properties.

Buyers can opt to purchase 20 per cent of the property which will entitle them to two two-week periods in the winter and up to six weeks in the summer.

You have the option to hand over your property to the Alpine Residences Club to rent out the unit for 30 weeks in the low season. The rental income will be pooled between the owners.

Buyers can, however, choose to opt out of the rental pool and use their properties for up to three extra weeks. A 20 per cent fractional ownership of a duplex will cost between €443,000 and €487,000, depending on the weeks you want in high season.

Unlike timeshare, the purchaser will own the property and have a deed. The fraction of



A chalet of the style being built in Prada Biala in Flims, a ski resort in eastern Switzerland, near the Italian border. The chalets cost from €1.5m to €1.6m. Above and far right: lots of snow for skiing in winter, and hiking trails for walking in the summer



Swiss ready to sell to foreigners

Until recently Switzerland has not been an option for foreigners looking to buy property. Aside from prohibitive prices, the many legal barriers to purchasing were a major turn-off.

However, recent relaxations on restrictions governing non-Swiss buying residential property have made it more attractive to overseas purchasers.

Each of the country's 26 cantons has a yearly quota of how many homes can be sold to foreigners. Restrictions vary considerably and, even within a canton, rules can differ from village to village. Some areas still don't sell to foreigners, others restrict foreign ownership of a new scheme to 20 per cent.

As it stands, non-Swiss buyers may only buy one property per family and the net floor space of the property must not exceed 200sq m (2,152sq ft).

Property prices have been very stable in Switzerland (about 3–4 per cent growth in the last 30 years).

Growth, however, in big resorts has been strong (10–15 per cent).

Costs associated with buying vary from area to area. Normal notary fees will cost around 3 per cent and you will have to pay a community property tax.

In the canton of Grisons, for example, it's 2 per cent.

A big draw for some foreign owners is the fact that inheritance tax and gift tax in Switzerland is very low.

Starting in 2008, there is no inheritance tax in the canton of Grisons for direct relatives. A buyer may also transfer property to one or more direct relatives without any gift tax.

the property can be rented, sold and passed on. The scheme, which is expected to be completed in summer 2008, will be located on the Waldhaus home trail, which means you can ski all the way to your front door.

The first ski lift to be installed in Switzerland was in Flims in 1945. Today the village has a well-developed ski infrastructure.

Flims, with neighbouring villages Laax and Falera, is now part of the largest linked ski area in eastern Switzerland, called the Weisse Arena resort, which boasts 220kms of slopes and 27 lift facilities. The resort is a regular host to international competitions.

At a time when "snow reliability" is a growing issue for Alpine resorts, the area is better placed than most to deal with climate change given that 70 per cent of the skiing area is above 2,000m. In addition, the Vorab Glacier assures a longer season.

There are 20 mountainside restaurants offering a great range of eating options.

There is a good mix of runs to suit skiers of all abilities. The ski school is located at a high altitude, ensuring that beginner skiers don't feel too isolated. Snowboarders have their own facilities at the resort including the largest halfpipe in Europe.

The Flims-Laax-Falera area is a 90-minute

drive south-east of Zurich Airport. The area stretches from the Rhine Valley to the Vorab Glacier. In summer it is an Alpine pastoral idyll. Heidi's homeland of Maienfeld is only 20 minutes down the road and boasts beautiful hiking trails and pristine lakes.

In the warmer months the area is popular with hikers, rafters and paragliders. There are, however, 10 golf courses to choose from in the area, if Alpine pursuits are not your cup of tea.

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