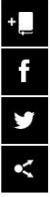


Buying Luxury Property in European Ski Resorts

BY NICOLA VENNING

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High-end European ski resorts mean more than just mountains and Michelin stars as they are increasingly on the radar for long-term luxury property investments.



A snow home in a chic Alpine village with great skiing, log-fire charm and celebrity-chef restaurants has always been the lifestyle purchase for the global super rich.

However, these days, high-end European ski resorts mean more than mountains and Michelin stars — they are also being sold as attractive long-term investments and never more so than in uber-fashionable, Russian favourite, Courchevel.

The top-class French resort, like other oligarch-friendly holiday spots, has been badly hit by economic sanctions since the Ukraine crisis and Russian buyers have all but disappeared. "The Putin government is not taking lightly to overzealous spending in Europe, it's just not in vogue", says Roddy Aris, senior negotiator with estate agency Knight Frank.

The mega-mansions and chic chalets near Courchevel 1850's exclusive Bellecôte slope have had a quiet year. Prices for prime homes in the resort, which range from €30,000 to €40,000 per square metre, have fallen by 6.5 per cent in the year-end to June 2014, according to recent research from Knight Frank.

Over the same period, the average price of a prime ski home across 20 of the world's top resorts has increased by 5.9 per cent, according to the agency.

In response, Courchevel town hall is courting a broader range of buyer, as well as upgrading amenities and infrastructure. €120 million is being spent improving the lift system, speeding transfer between Courchevel 1550, the lowest of the three villages, and the highest, Courchevel 1850. (Courchevel 1650 is the middle resort.)

A new aquatic centre, to encourage year-round tourism, is also being built. In addition, many of the older, smaller flats in Courchevel 1550 are being replaced with larger, better-appointed apartments.

Carré Blanc is a new development of 38, one- to four-bedroom apartments in Courchevel 1550, which is due to be completed in December 2016. Around 130m from the lifts, the apartments start from €335,000, rising to €2.5 million. A full-time management company and concierge will be on the site. The development will also have a rental pool as, post-downturn "everybody wants to justify their purchase through rentals", according to Mark Harvey, a partner with Knight Frank, which is selling the development. The agency estimates that an apartment bought off-plan and let for 14 weeks in Courchevel 1550 would produce a yield of 6.7 per cent. New, state-of-the-art, six-bedroom chalets in Courchevel 1850 rent from €50,000 per week, according to Savills estate agency.

Other French resorts that combine lifestyle with investment potential include newcomer Morzine in the Portes du Soleil. This small vibrant town, which, according to the Ski Club of Great Britain, has some of the finest skiing in Europe, has invested heavily in new infrastructure and is also seen as a year-round resort. Luxury property has, on average, had a remarkable 6.7 per cent rise in price in the past year. Home Hunts buying agency, based in France, is selling a four-bedroom chalet with two adjacent flats on the pistes in Les Gets for €3.8 million.

Meanwhile Val d'Isère, in the Savoie region and known for its high snowfall, has seen 3.2 per cent growth in luxury property prices in the past year. An established and smart resort, Val d'Isère has prices that reflect this. Chestertons International is selling a splendid seven-bedroom chalet in the resort for €12 million. The roomy home, which has its own spa, spacious terrace and an impressive indoor atrium, as well as a large swimming pool, is approximately 400m from the lifts.

However, of all the alpine boltholes, it is the Swiss ski towns that have been the most stable. Viewed as a safe haven in the global economic crisis, while being chic enough to entice the Prada and Gucci crowd, the value of prime property in Zermatt and Verbier, in the Valais canton, grew by 5.5 per cent and 5 per cent respectively in the year-end to June 2014. Switzerland's restrictive residency laws, attractive tax regime and a low supply of homes on the market also bolstered prices.

Laetitia Hodson, senior international sales consultant from Chestertons International, says: "The top end of the market is still very strong and the Valais in general is considered to be a secure and safe place to invest in the long term."



SLIDESHOW: In the year-end to June 2014, the average price of a prime ski home across 20 of the world's top resorts has increased by 5.9 per cent, according to recent research from Knight Frank.

View
Slideshow

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