

→ English voices ring out among its holidaying families, but Pine Cliffs is also attracting two new types of buyer: the Non-Habitual Tax Regime purchaser, for whom the resort has just launched suites from €780,000, and the Golden Visa contingent – non-EU residents who can obtain renewable one-year residency permits in return for a minimum €500,000 investment in property.

Although Lisbon attracts the most Golden Visa hunters, Pine Cliffs has snared its fair share, with about 10% of the visas granted in Portugal so far, and buyers from diverse countries, including South Africa, Turkey and China. "We were one of the first resorts in Portugal to sell property under the scheme," says Karin van den Hemel, general manager of Pine Cliffs Real Estate. "The rental guarantees make it a secure and hassle-free investment."

Among the pristine fairways and Beverly Hills-style mansions of Quinta do Lago, the 40-year-old resort in the Algarve's affluent golden triangle (which includes Vale do Lobo and Vilamoura), Monte da Quinta is also tempting those in search of a Golden Visa. "They typically look to spend up to €1m and their priorities are turnkey properties in established locations, with easy access to the airport, shopping and golf," says Christian de Meillac, head of Portugal sales at Knight Frank. One-bedroom apartments at Monte da Quinta start at €500,000.

Quinta do Lago's San Lorenzo North is one high-end option that might appeal to those seeking the tax-friendly route. Its 26 plots, the last available on the resort, face the golf course and sea, and start at €2.3m (quintadolago.com, 00 351 289 392754). As a taster of the lifestyle you can lead here, the 850 sq metre show home, on sale for €5.9m, includes five ensuite bedrooms, a spa, a gym and a Portuguese-marble swimming pool.

The other draw for those thinking of buying a holiday home abroad is the confidence that they'll be able to rent it out. The past year has seen a 102% increase in owners putting their homes on Holidaylettings.co.uk, but inquiries per home available have remained high, with a 62% increase since 2013. Albufeira is the most requested location, followed by Lagos, Burgau and Faro.

There's still a long way to go before Portugal – still one of the economically depressed PIGS – is out of the mud, but its most popular holiday coast is starting to get back on track. Time for a sleeper on the Algarve, perhaps?



Parasola/Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy



FUNCHAL

No 9 Quinta do Monte is in the exclusive Herdade do Funchal area, outside Lagos in the western Algarve. The 1½-acre elevated lot has ocean views, pool, steam room and gym. **020 7861 1097, knightfrank.com; 00 351 282 789336, sadlersproperty.com**



ESTOMBAR

Next to the Fontes Estombar nature reserve, an Algarvean beauty spot with springs and an amphitheatre, this seven-bedroom quinta (a four-bedroom family home plus three-bedroom lodge) has its own pool and gardens. **00 351 282 357109, meravista.com**

Portugal's most in-demand places for holiday home rentals include Lagos, top, in the western Algarve, and Albufeira, below

Eastern Europe's hidden gems

Forget the usual suspects – we find the best places to snap up a bargain in eastern Europe's most alluring and underrated hotspots

Never mind Spain's costas and the south of France – Britain's top three hotspots for holiday homes abroad are all in eastern Europe.

Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia have seen the fastest growth in British-owned bolt holes advertised on HomeAway, the world's largest holiday rental website, with more than 1m listings (homeaway.co.uk).

Over the past three years, the number of listed properties in Croatia and Hungary has more than doubled, with growth of 110% and 105% respectively. Slovenia (50%) is third, ahead of Mauritius (48%) and Greece (27%).

Cheap flights and affordable property have been the big draw, says Gregory Sion, UK director of HomeAway. "Croatia and Hungary represent excellent value for British investors, being outside of the pricey eurozone."

For Claire Csoka, 39, a financial adviser from Portsmouth who lets her three-bedroom flat in Budapest for up to £480 a week, the popularity of Hungary, and its capital in particular comes as no surprise. "Budapest is an absolutely gorgeous city. It has year-round rental potential, much better than a beach or ski resort, and yields are high."

Straddling the Danube, Budapest combines the leafy Buda hills west of the river with the elegant Austro-Hungarian architecture of Pest to the east. Csoka bought her 19th-century flat, in Pest's most upmarket fifth district, for about £120,000 in 2006 and estimates her gross yields at 9% (homeaway.co.uk/p404155).

"Budapest offers the best value for money in the whole of central and eastern Europe," says Ken White, sales manager of the Hungarian buying agency Gateway

Properties. A 700 sq ft one-bedder in Pest's fifth district costs about £66,500, compared with £430,000 in Vienna, £195,000 in Prague and £115,000 in Bratislava, according to research by Gateway. With the pound 15% stronger against the Hungarian forint than a year ago, White has seen inquiries from British buyers' treble in the past three months.

Neighbouring Slovenia, too, has seen interest soar. Dubbed the "Surrey of the Balkans" by its fans, this former part of Yugoslavia is smaller than Wales, yet diverse, with spectacular mountains, a wine region and the charming capital of Ljubljana.

Colin Hayes and Diane Hughes, from Long Eaton, Derbyshire, were so enamoured of Slovenia that they bought a three-bedroom village house with an acre of forest and meadow in the Upper Savinja Valley, an hour's drive northeast of Ljubljana, for £93,000 in 2012. "It was the smallest house we could find," recalls Hayes, 60, a retired nurse.

They spent £8,000 doing up the upper floor as a two-bed holiday let, available from £370 a week (bela-breza.si). "We like to hike in forests and mountains, and Britain's Lake District doesn't have much of either," says Hayes. "Here we can walk, cycle and raft from our door, and there's skiing in winter."

"This could be the best possible time to buy in Slovenia," says Justin Young of Elite Property, Savills' partner agency in Slovenia. "The market has reached the bottom and we are starting to

see tiny improvements locally to prices and demand."

But don't expect to get rich quickly, warns Frances Sargent, director of the buying agency Slovenian Properties. "Expect to pay similar prices for the popular areas as in Austria or Italy, with no more than 15 to 20 weeks a year of letting." And beware: Slovenia is littered with half-built houses because of speculative building after it joined the EU in 2004, Sargent adds.

Across the southern border, Savills has reported the first signs of house-price recovery in Croatia after the eurozone debt crisis: apartments on the coast have risen 1% in the year to January. Croatia joined the EU last year, which means that Britons can now buy and let homes under the same rules as the locals.

With almost 3,900 miles of coastline – the 20th longest in the world – and only 4.3m people, Croatia has a wealth of seaside property potential. The northern peninsula of Istria, often compared to Tuscany, is a big tourist draw, as are the Dalmatian islands off the port of Split.

Dubrovnik, with its walled Old Town on the sparkling Adriatic, remains the most bulletproof market, with year-round flights and high rental demand. Jelena Cvjetkovic, associate director at Savills International, grew up in Dubrovnik, but advises buyers to look a little further afield: "The Old Town can get quite congested. Try Konavle, just to the south, or the Peljesac peninsula for secret beaches and sea views."

Martina Lees

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