

## Passport to Switzerland

### Why Switzerland?

The land of sun, snow and mountains has a lot going for it — affluence, neutrality, economic stability, lower taxes and one of the healthiest climates. Buying a home is becoming easier and EU citizens can live and work there year-round. Resale restrictions have been scrapped in Canton Vaud and foreigners who buy foreign-owned homes in Valais can now skip the three-year wait for a permit. Permanent residents can buy anywhere and sell immediately to any nationality.

### Where does the smart set live?

There is plenty of old money in Gstaad but you will need at least £3 million to buy a chalet near the Palace Hotel. Ski buffs prefer Verbier, which gives access to nearly 400 miles of pistes. A new two-bedroom flat on the pistes costs from £260,000 to £400,000 and a chalet from £500,000 to £1 million. The seriously rich are buying homes at Villars, a year-round resort with glacier skiing, 90 minutes from Geneva. Two-bedroom flats cost from £200,000; a chalet with skiing to the back door £450,000.

### Best buys?

Second-hand homes are cheaper. A small studio flat on the outskirts of Verbier can be had for £36,000; one and two-bedroom flats in the centre from £90,000 to £200,000. In Gryon and Barboise, two pretty alpine villages near Villars, half-timbered chalets can be had for under £250,000.

### Getting there

easyJet flies to Geneva from Liverpool, Luton, Gatwick, Stansted and East Midlands from under £100 return. You can fly to several Swiss cities from many UK airports with British Airways, Crossair and Swiss International Airlines.

### Who else goes?

Recent arrivals in Verbier are younger, mostly investment bankers and young media types in their 30s who want to play in the snow year-round. Old billionaires and the glitterati still prefer Gstaad. Villars attracts industrialists and plastic surgeons in their 60s looking for a family home on the pistes.

### Out to lunch?

Lac des Chavannes, a mountain restaurant overlooking a lake above Villars, is perfect for skiers and summer hikers. Eat raclette (melted Swiss cheese) with potatoes, fondue and wild mushrooms on toast, washed down with the local vin d'Oillon (not beer — it sets the cheese). In Verbier, Le Hameau, in a traditional village, serves delicious air-dried ham and sausage.

### Where's the catch?

It is still difficult to buy homes outside tourist resorts and in some German-speaking areas. In Valais you can buy immediately from a foreigner but must wait three years to buy a Swiss-owned home. You can resell to a Swiss national but must wait five years to sell to any nationality. Foreigners may buy homes in German-speaking Zweisimmen and Gstaad but must not resell to another foreigner for ten years. Foreigners may own only one property in Switzerland. Owners must use holiday homes from three weeks to six months a year. A longer stay requires a residence permit, which is becoming easier for EU citizens.

### Hidden extras

Before buying you must obtain permission from the local canton and the Government. The process takes about eight weeks for foreign-owned homes and up to three years for a Swiss-owned home in Verbier. When the permit is received the purchaser signs the final transfer. Buying costs vary according to canton. In Vaud they amount to 5 per cent of the purchase price but are only 2.5 per cent in Valais. Annual property taxes amount to 1 per cent of property value. Apartment service charges are often as much again and running costs are high but income tax and capital gains tax are lower. You are not taxed on rental income but if you are resident in the UK the Inland Revenue will want its share. Capital gains tax is levied at 18 per cent of the gain; inheritance tax is 4.8 per cent for property valued up to Swf1500,000, rising to 6.068 per cent on property worth more than Swf1 million.

**Estate agents**  
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**Lawyer:** Keith Baker, Croft Baker & Co, 020-7242 3370.

# Clear run to to a home on Alpine ski slopes

**Cheryl Taylor finds that the Swiss are easing restrictions on foreigners who want to step straight from their own back door on to the piste**

BUYING a home in Switzerland is becoming easier, and since recent changes in Swiss legislation, European Union citizens can live and work or retire there all year round. Resale restrictions have been scrapped in Canton Vaud and foreigners who buy foreign-owned homes in Canton Valais, which includes the ski resort of Verbier, can now skip the previously mandatory three-year wait for a permit.

Although property values have risen by only 5 per cent to 10 per cent over the past three years, demand is growing for flats and chalets with access to the ski slopes. As Switzerland prepares for closer economic integration with the European Union and residence permits become easier to obtain, demand could outstrip supply, leading to higher prices.

Now that foreign-owned homes are easier to buy in Valais, values of such properties are likely to rise faster than those owned by Swiss nationals. But foreign owners in Valais still have to wait five years to sell to any nationality, which has led to cash-strapped British owners selling up at a loss to the Swiss.

Homes are built to last so there is no great advantage in buying new. Resale property offers better value. Ideally, the property should be no more than ten years old and well-located for both summer and winter activities.

Villars, a year-round resort in Canton Vaud with glacier skiing, is a 90-minute drive

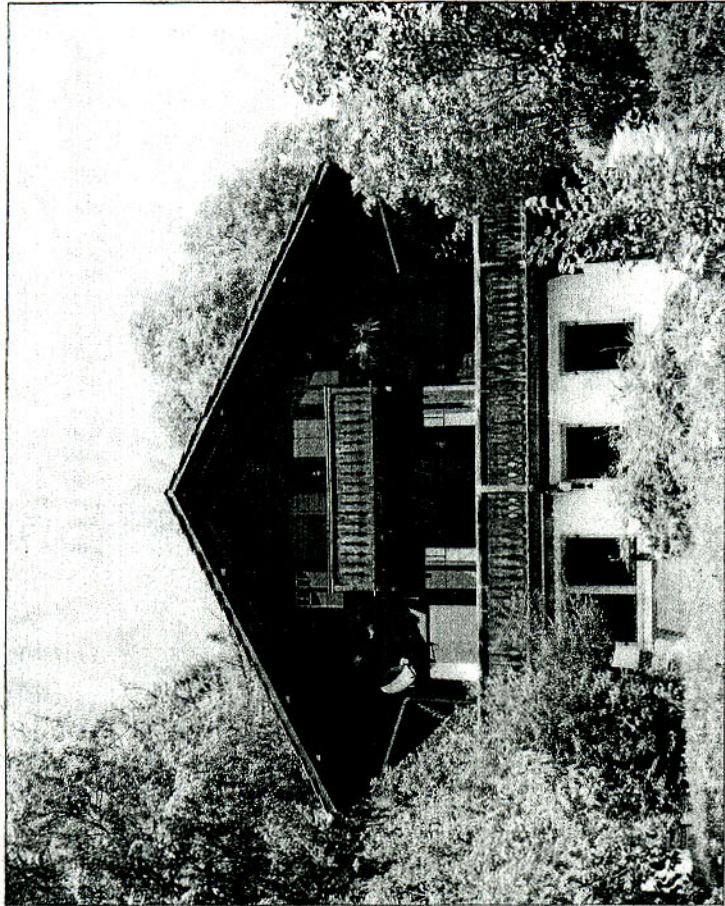
from Geneva airport. One and two-bedroom resale flats at Domaine de La Residence on the edge of Villars can be had from £150,000 to £200,000; chalets are from £450,000 for five bedrooms, with views of Mont Blanc and skiing to the back door.

Property prices are lower at Barboise, a traditional alpine village about four kilometres from Villars, which is linked directly into the ski systems of both Villars and the glacier at Les Diablerets. New one, two and three-bedroom chalet-style apartments next to the ski lift with mountain views cost £17,000-£210,000.

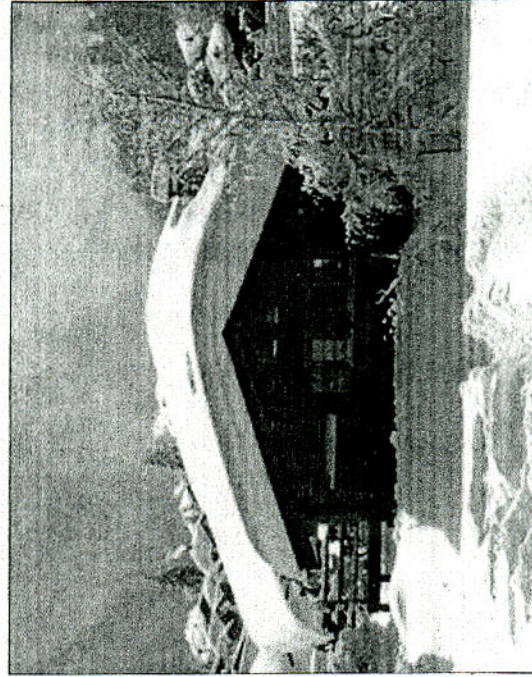
Good skiing and attractive buys can be found in Verbier, in Canton Valais, a 90-minute drive from Geneva, which forms part of the four valleys ski terrain with nearly 400-miles of pistes. Although you can pick up an off-centre resale studio for £32,000, a well-located one-bedroom flat will set you back £90,000-£150,000 and two-bedrooms about £200,000.

New homes on the piste in Verbier are more expensive. You can buy new two and three-bedroom flats in Residence Alroux, a chalet-style building near the ski lift with panoramic views over snow-capped mountains, from £255,000 to £430,000 through Investors in Property.

Prices are lower in Crans-Montana, a chic resort on a south-facing plateau overlooking the Alps, with summer and winter skiing. One, two and three-bedroom resale flats



A renovated four-bedroom chalet on the market with Investors in Property for £250,000 in Villars, a year-round resort in Canton Vaud, Switzerland. Below, a three-bedroom property in Verbier that sold recently for £400,000



fetch from £50,000 to £136,000 and chalets from about £290,000, through Villas Abroad.

Just inside French-speaking Vaud, at Rougemont, a village within the Gstaad super-ski area, a modern three-bedroom apartment can still be found for less than £400,000. A four-bedroom 17th-century chalet for modernisation, with views over Rougemont, is for sale at £270,000. A similar chalet in nearby Gstaad would fetch up to £2 million, according to Simon Maister, of Investors in Property.

Foreigners can now buy in the old part of German-speaking Interlaken and in some villages round the lake, about 90 minutes by train from Zurich. Large stone houses with a boat-house on the lake shore can be had for about £650,000. Above the lake, in the small ski resort of Beatenberg, you can buy apartments from £100,000 and chalets from £250,000.