

Foreign buyers

From Russia with Love

In recent months, real estate agencies in Slovenia have noticed a curious trend: a dramatic increase in interest from Russia. Attracted by beautiful landscapes and the many cultural similarities, more and more Russians are considering opting for life in the country. In so doing, they are giving the Slovenian property market a significant boost.

By Claire Read

It used to be that Justin Young received only occasional enquiries from Russians interested in buying property in Slovenia. Over the last twelve months, however, that has changed. Now Young and his colleagues at Slovenia Estates are receiving numerous and regular approaches from those whose phone numbers begin with international dialing code 7.

"I now get around five to eight enquiries a week from Russia,"

says Young. "Three of the last four properties we have sold have been to Russians."

On the ball

According to real estate agencies, the interest has been sudden and recent. So why have Russians decided to look towards this small country in the heart of Europe? Young says that those who approach him cite disillusionment with life in their home land as an important reason for considering



Slovenia. The prevalence of open green spaces, friendly people and reliable services doesn't hurt either.

Eva Jakopin, whose Elite Property Slovenia agency specialises

in luxury apartments and houses, agrees that the beautiful surroundings and quality of life are a big draw. She says the good food, economic stability and European Union membership are also ap-



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Slovenian coast is still very popular with Russian buyers looking for a holiday home

preciated. And she argues the importance of cultural connections between the two nations shouldn't be discounted.

"Russians feel a connection to home here," Jakopin points out. "Slovenians have the same roots as Russians – we are both Slavic nations, so the cultural and linguistic differences are not that great."

As for the timing of the interest, Jakopin suspects a certain footballing competition may have played a part. "When Slovenia knocked Russia out of the World Cup qualifiers, there was a lot of press coverage about it in Russia," she says. "This may have highlighted Slovenia and its location."

Branching out

The coverage may also have highlighted the massive variety of landscapes in the country. Once

upon a time Russian interest centred on the coast of Slovenia. But no more.

"We do still get enquiries for the coastal region, but it is not solely the coast that draws interest anymore," says Jakopin. "Our enquiries are now also for properties in mountainous regions as well as in flatter regions. For example, we recently sold one property near Celje and one in Prekmurje."

Young tells a similar story: "In the past Russians favoured the coast but now it can be mountains, the rolling hills of Goricko in Prekmurje, or the beautiful Soca area. We are getting demand for areas from Prekmurje to Bovec and from Maribor to Ljubljana."

Capitalising on the interest

Understandably, real estate agencies are keen to capitalise on this new source of interest. Elite Property Slovenia has recently translated its entire site into Russian.

"That has made it easy for Russians to look at real estate in Slovenia," says Jakopin. "It has allowed those who could not obtain property information before to now get all the facts they are looking for."

Of course one important fact when looking at property is price. According to Jakopin, it is not necessarily the case that those from Russia are looking for properties with high price tags.

"They like properties of a newer construction or ones that may be older but renovated to a high standard with modern amenities. Properties that offer a lot of privacy in nice surroundings but are close to a city. Normally they are looking for bigger houses with land."

Young agrees: "There is a common misconception that Russian buyers spend huge amounts of money on their purchase. This is not so true, they want value for money and are careful purchasers – they know what they want."

And right now it seems that what they want is Slovenia. ■



Properties in the countryside are also sought after



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By Helena Kupljen Profil d.o.o.

Home Ownership out of Fashion?

Job mobility in its primitive, rudimentary sense is the ability or willingness of a worker to move his or her home for work. Such a definition, although rough and insufficient in terms of expert literature, implies the eagerness of a person to follow the trends set by his or her interests and potential within economic possibilities and given opportunities that are sometimes beyond the boundaries of his or her primal geographic area. The Slovenian mentality regarding home ownership strongly opposes this logic. Let's take a look at why.

Slovenia has one of the highest homeownership rates in Europe. Owning one's house or apartment is a status symbol, it means more financial security, and it is one's contribution to his or her legacy for future family generations. But it also means lower geographic mobility for obvious reasons – it is more difficult to move from an area when selling a house or apartment is involved.

Why is geographic job mobility sometimes necessary? In recent times more and more companies have faced the need to change their strategies in order to catch up with rising demands in the market and this inevitably calls for higher labour market flexibility. Job profiles are changing, competency requirements are ever growing and life-long job tenure is part of an era that has long since passed. Workers move between different jobs out of their own interest or their company's request and that mobility frequently brings up the subject of relocation. And if you own your house or apartment and have established a home, is this acceptable?

From this point of view headhunters are facing a difficult task and pinpointing the best candidates for jobs is only the first step. Challenging the geographic rigidity of not only job candidates, but also clients is the next and even more demanding step. Let's take for example a high profile job opening in a remote region of Slovenia. Is there a high profile candidate already living there? Not necessarily. Our job as headhunters is also to shift the mindset of our clients and allow them to consider their options: choosing the best candidate for a position even though that candidate may not live in the area or allowing a candidate's address (and with that lower travel expenses) to outweigh other, and in our opinion more important, factors such as competency.

In times of rising professional mobility demands, is home ownership an asset or a liability hindrance?

There is no absolute answer to this question. The problem is much more complex since home ownership is not the only factor influencing job mobility – age, marital or relationship status, children, interest priorities, social standards, wage appetite, etc., also play a part. We must ask ourselves as individuals if home ownership in a specific area determines our way of life, or as potential employers if choosing a local candidate for a job opening is an absolute must. After all, Slovenia is by geographic standards a small country and what we call "long-distance travel" may in other European or worldwide countries seem laughable.

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