



Andrew Kellock rekindles childhood memories and discovers there's so much more to Austria than mountains and snow

ALPS FOR ALL SEASONS

It was January, 1976, and in a tiny Aberdeenshire school there was a growing sense of excitement and anticipation.

Santa had been and gone, the new year had been seen in, but hundreds of miles away in the heart of Europe an event was about to be staged which would blow away the Rathen Primary youngsters' post-festive season blues.

The Austrian city of Innsbruck was poised to stage the Olympics – the ones with the skis, skates and bobsleighs – and, via the medium of TV (some of them were even colour) bring to life a place the children had heard so much about over the years.

It was a favourite Christmas destination of their head teacher, Dorothy

Kühtai is Austria's highest ski resort



Dick, and for that reason alone had become a source of fascination for her young charges.

Sadly, Mrs Dick is no longer with us, but I thought of her as I boarded the plane at Gatwick, bound for Inns-

bruck's compact international airport.

Those winter games of 1976 were notable for local hero Franz Klammer's triumph in the blue ribband downhill ski-ing event.

He looked the picture of calm as he

waited at the top of the run ready to power his way to the gold medal – but later admitted he had been terrified in the moments before what was literally the ski of his life.

Approaching Innsbruck through the Alps, the structure that really catches my eye from my window seat is the spectacular Bergisel ski jumping venue, a towering testament to this Tyrolean city's winter sports credentials.

There is, however, more to Austria than just mountains and snow, which became clear over the next couple of days.

After landing safely in Innsbruck, I headed east to the small town of Oetz, about 30-odd miles and a half-hour drive from the airport.

It's not as famous as Ischgl, Kitzbühel or Sölden, but a ski resort in its own right – and also the perfect base for exploring the Tyrol in the warmer months.

My digs – the picture postcard Waldhof Hotel – sat in the shadow of the 9,869ft Acherkogel mountain, a quite breathtaking setting.

A few minutes down the road is the Acherkogelbahn gondola, a cable car system which will transport you serenely almost 4,000ft to what is green pasture – complete with bell-wearing cows – in summer and the pistes in winter.

As a dual-season resort, Oetz offers world-class infrastructure and a variety

of activities in the summer, including rafting, canyoning, glacier safaris, climbing, mountain biking, tennis, golf and fishing.

It is also home to Europe's largest outdoor extreme water sports park – Area47 – where the latest innovations include ski ramps into water to practice somersaults and even a high altitude wakeboarding lake.

With so much on offer – the town itself has a population of not much more than 2,000 but the Ötztal area manages to secure over 2million visitor nights a year – it's no surprise that British brothers Simon and Branson Atterbury are keen to tap into its potential.

With an impressive portfolio of Alpine developments under its belt, their Kristall Spaces operation develops and sells more ski apartments in Austria than any other company.

The firm, which is the sales and marketing arm of VenturePlus AG, aims to "help owners acquire their dream lifestyle investment".

Two years from now, the Mountain Lake Resort at Ötztal will feature 63 high-end one, two and three-bedroom freehold apartments.

Residents will benefit from an onsite a la carte restaurant and bar, a spa and pool with a natural bathing lake as well as underground parking.

The Mountain Spa Resort at Paznaun, in world-renowned Ischgl, will offer a similar specification and is also



FROM / Page 24

due for completion in 2018. As with all Kristall Spaces developments, both will be fully furnished and feature underfloor heating.

Standard features include triple-glazed floor to ceiling windows, Italian ceramics and Hans Grohe bathroom fittings.

Miele kitchens with integrated appliances, cutlery and crockery as well as flat screen smart TVs are also included.

Rather more luxurious, in other words, than Heidi would have been used to.

And with far more investment potential than some of the more humble but nonetheless charming mountain chalets.

To that end, Kristall Spaces has now introduced an innovative apartment design, giving owners the chance to maximise their rental returns.

The properties at both the Ötztal and Paznaun complexes will each feature two entrances, allowing owners to let out both sides of their apartment individually as double en-suites – similar to a hotel – or remove the configurable dividing walls to let the property as a larger getaway to families and groups.

Both projects also boast a fully managed rental service.

Branson Atterbury is Kristall Spaces' marketing director, and although based in London he spends as much time in Austria as his schedule allows.

I chased him up one of the winding mountain roads near Ischgl on a hired e-bike – without any real prospect of catching him, I should add.

He said: "I spend as much time here as I can because it's such a beautiful place.

"Obviously, Austria is famous for its skiing and winter sports, but there's so much to see

and do, it really is an all-season destination."

Brother Simon, who is married to a local Austrian, adds: "It has a unique feel and atmosphere.

"The Alps are spectacular, full stop, whether they're capped with snow or speckled with wild flowers, they have a magic about them."

At the end of the day, of course, the pair are businessmen, albeit ones who happen to be operating in stunning surroundings.

Branson said: "Austria's tourism market continues to grow year-on-year, and there is increased demand for the type of accommodation we are creating from renting tourists.

"The Tyrol region registered a 9.5% year-on-year increase in visitor numbers in the first half of 2016, and thanks to guaranteed skiing from November to May, the Ötztal and Ischgl continue to grow in popularity."

Now, I've always fancied a little place in the mountains, but while the cold, hard facts backing-up the case for investing in a Kristall Spaces apartment make perfect sense, the cold, hard facts on my bank statement suggest I'm going to have to wait a little longer.

But sitting having a beer – what else? – in the warmth of the Gasthof zum Stern in the heart of Oetz, as historic a watering hole as I've ever been in, I already have a hankering to come back to this place.

I'll never be a Klammer on the slopes (I regard staying upright on skis for more than a few seconds an achievement), but I'd probably be quite happy to maim myself trying.

And whether the sun is shining or the snow is falling, I now appreciate why Mrs Dick always talked so warmly about her beloved Austria.



The luxurious interiors at the new Mountain Lake Resort, Ötztal





AREA 47

Area 47's slogan is "an action packed holiday in Ötztal" – and it more than lives up to expectations.

There is an old saying that you never forget how to ride a bike, but I managed to forget how to ride a motorbike.

And after a couple of hefty crashes on the indoor motocross track, I decided discretion was the better part of valour and withdrew as gracefully as I could to let the youngsters get on with it.

I'm glad I didn't try the frankly terrifying looking aerial zipline, or, for that matter, the equally panic-inducing megaswing. Those who did looked like they were having a good time. I think.

Europe's largest outdoor extreme water sports park also offers rafting, canyoning and caving. Visit www.area47.at/en



LUXURY APARTMENTS

Kristall Spaces Mountain Lake Resort in the Ötztal will feature 63 luxury one, two and three-bedroom apartments. It is on course to be completed in the final months of 2018 and prices will range from 213,570 euros (just under £200,000) to 435,000 euros (about £406,000).

It will feature a spa and infinity pool with a natural bathing lake as well as underground parking. And the development site is just 100 yards from the Acherkogelbahn gondola ski lift. It gives access to 80 miles of skiing, and Sölden, with its two glaciers and another 90 miles of skiing, is only a 25-minute drive away. The Mountain Spa Resort Paznaun in Ischgl will offer a similar specification and prices, and is also due for completion in the latter part of 2018.

Visit propertysaleaustria.co.uk or phone 020 3735 8790.

The exterior of the new Mountain Lake Resort