

House Hunting in ... Germany



A 12th-century Bavarian castle surrounded by a dry moat is on the market in Kipfenberg, Germany, for \$7.4 million. Stephan Goerlich for The New York Times

By Alison Gregor

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A 12th-CENTURY BAVARIAN CASTLE SURROUNDED BY A MOAT AND 27 ACRES

Perched on a steep cliff overlooking the Altmühl river valley in Germany's Bavaria state, this 27-acre property includes an eight-bedroom limestone castle that dates to the middle of the 12th century, when it was constructed by knights. Known as Burg Kipfenberg, the medieval castle was later owned by a church bishop and expanded over the centuries. The 18-room castle was completely reconstructed from 1915 to 1925 by the German architect and castle expert Bodo Ebhardt, who is largely responsible for the castle's silhouette of towers with hipped and gabled roofs of tile. The castle later fell into disrepair.

"About 20 years ago, the current owners began a massive renovation of the previously neglected castle," said Matthias Helzel, an owner of Vermittlung historischer Immobilien, a real estate agency that specializes in historic buildings and has the listing for Burg Kipfenberg. "These days, the castle is well-maintained in excellent condition and has its own caretaker."

Most of the property's 27 acres are meadows, pasture and forest. The castle is encircled by a dry moat; a wooden bridge leads to the heavy wooden and iron doors of the castle gate. Limestone walls enclose the castle, a caretaker's house, stables, three guesthouses and a small museum, all on six acres. The buildings are included in the property's asking price except for the museum and one prefabricated house, which cost an additional 1 million and 500,000 euros, Mr. Helzel said, or about \$1.3 million and \$650,000. About three-quarters of the castle furnishings are also covered in the asking price, and the rest are negotiable, according to Bernd Neuhäuser, who also owns Vermittlung historischer Immobilien. The castle has nearly 9,500 square feet of living space and includes a gothic hall, a knights hall, library, private chapel, two kitchens, dining room and living room, Mr. Helzel said. The caretaker's house and three guesthouses encompass an additional 4,000 square feet.

The castle's main doors open to a long stone hall with rough-hewed limestone on either side - the result of a large limestone outcropping that rooms were built around, Mr. Neuhäuser said. A wooden stairway ascends to the living quarters, which include a lounge with stone fireplace, heavy wooden ceiling beams and a natural limestone wall. The lounge adjoins a dining area with a domed ceiling painted with frescos from the early 20th century. One of two kitchens has wooden cabinets, and the other has a large red island with a sink and oven that was custom-made in France, Mr. Helzel said. The castle has central oil heating, and the guesthouses have underfloor heating.

Burg Kipfenberg overlooks the town of Kipfenberg, with about 5,700 people, and is midway between the cities of Nuremberg to the north and Munich to the south. The area is surrounded by the Altrnühlal Nature Park, which is about 1,120 square miles and offers hiking, climbing, cycling and boating. An international train station is in the city of Ingolstadt, which is about a half-hour's drive. It takes about an hour to get to the international airports in Nuremberg and Munich, Mr. Helzel said.

MARKET OVERVIEW

The conservative lending practices of German banks have bolstered home prices, which have continued to climb despite the global economic downturn, brokers said. The market also has been reinforced by a strong economy that has drawn many immigrant workers, and the relatively low unemployment in Bavaria, according to brokers. In some parts of Munich, the capital of the Bavarian state, home prices have jumped 30 to 40 percent in the last three or four years, said Michael Lindmair, a Bavaria-based real estate agent with Engel & Völkers.

Germany's housing market, though, has little bearing on the niche market for castles, Mr. Neuhäuser said. He estimated that Germany has about 5,000 castles, which range in size from about 4,000 square feet to more than 21,500 square feet of living area, with the average being about 7,500 to 8,500 square feet. Prices range dramatically, but the larger privately owned renovated castles might start at 10 million euros, or \$12.9 million, and go as high as 19 million euros, or \$25 million.

Only about a third of Germany's castles are fully renovated, which is a major selling point for buyers, Mr. Neuhäuser said.

WHO BUYS IN GERMANY

Along with Berlin and Hamburg, Munich is among Germany's most attractive cities for foreigners, said Mr. Lindmair, whose clients include many Russians, Americans and Britons. The euro crisis and the relative strength of the British pound have led to the recent influx of British buyers, he said. In the market for castles, foreigners typically account for about half of the buyers, and they come from all over the world, Mr. Neuhäuser said. "We see Russians, Chinese, Turkish people, Dutch, Italians - it's a mixture," he said. There recently have been many Russians in the market for German castles, but typically they are looking for castles in the cities, which are hard to find, he said.

"The cities have big castles, which are typically in state ownership," he said. "Privately owned castles are in the countryside."

BUYING BASICS

There are no restrictions on foreign buyers in Germany, though a notary must be hired for sales transactions. The buyer can generally expect to pay an additional 10 percent of the home's sales price in notary fees, state tax and real estate broker's fees, Mr. Neuhäuser said. Broker fees are typically about 6 percent, and are divided between the buyer and seller in Bavaria.

WEB SITES

Bavarian government portal: Bayern.de

Kipfenberg site: Kipfenberg.de

Almühltal Nature Park site: Naturpark-Altmuehltal.de

German real estate association: ivd.net

LANGUAGES AND CURRENCY

German; euros (1 euro = \$1.30)

TAXES AND FEES

The total annual cost to run Burg Kipfenberg is 100,000 euros, or about \$130,000, which includes the property taxes, the caretaker's salary, insurance and heating,

Mr. Neuhäuser said.

CONTACT

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