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If you're fond of Venice, Prosecco and golf, PETER SWAIN has found just the place for you

ITALY is full of surprises. For many of us a holiday home in the land of Michelangelo, mozzarella and Armani conjures up images of exquisite (and exquisitely expensive) farmhouses in Tuscany.

As for golf in Italy, well, few British players could name a single club there. Yet there are several niche developments on excellent courses near Venice, coming to the market this spring, priced from just €135,000 (£116,000).

"While most parts of Europe have seen house prices tumble during the past 18 months, Italy has been pretty stable," said Linda Travella, who has been selling property there for 23 years.

Now is a good time to be looking, she believes. "The market is stable but I think we will see a steady advance in prices over the summer."

Immortalised by the English poet Robert Browning, the charming medieval town of Asolo sits on a hilltop surrounded by Prosecco vineyards and olive groves. An hour north of Venice and just a short drive from skiing in Cortina, "the city of a hundred horizons" has Palladian villas, Renaissance frescoes and divine restaurants.

A few miles away, near Treviso, Benetton has its HQ. In the Nineties the Benetton family created a clothing empire, a successful Formula One team and at Asolo, a golf club with 27 scenic holes.

Around the course, 187 properties have been built over the past 10 years. Prices start at €135,000 for a studio, €220,000 for two-bedroom apartments and €400,000 for larger townhouses.

Their style owes something to the ski lodge, with plenty of wood and stone, stylish shutters and underground parking. Owners get substantial golf discounts and pay an annual service charge of about £1,500. As this is a mature scheme, there are always resale properties available, often at a sizeable discount from new-builds.

The heart and, this being Italy, the stomach of the whole set-up is the stylish clubhouse. The fresh



DOWN TO A TEE:
Golfer Archie Cochrane (below) swapped Scotland for Italy

La dolce vita

pasta available in the bar, such as pumpkin ravioli, is the perfect end to any round. For dinner, the formal restaurant is spectacular.

Golf widows can use the wellness centre, heated outdoor swimming pool and tennis courts and there are always apartments for rent as well as a small guesthouse that is ideal for short breaks.

Most buyers are Italian, with a few Austrians and Swiss as well. Britons in this part of the Veneto region are relatively thin on the ground, which is either good or bad depending on your perspective.

One who has made the move, to another golf development a few miles south at Castelfranco, is 39-year-old Scot Archie Cochrane, originally from North Berwick.

"I first came here 14 years ago to work as a golf pro," he said. "It's a brilliant area: skiing at

Asiago, the beach at Jesolo plus golf, all within an hour's drive. The locals are family-orientated, friendly and metropolitan. They work hard and play hard, with plenty of long dinners."

ARCHIE, his Italian wife Tiziana and their two children aged six and nine are moving into a new three-bedroom apartment overlooking a course built around the Cà Amata mansion. The region specialises in these Palladian houses, built by rich Venetians as summer homes. This gem is the domain of Contessa Valentina, who regularly hosts chamber concerts and exhibitions at the mansion.

The 18-hole course is undergoing major refurbishment, to be completed this month. Rather like Asolo, the standard of golf is good, if not yet on a par with the Algarve. The big plus points, though, are the

nearby cultural, culinary and sporting attractions.

"All my friends want to see Venice when they come over, as it's only half-an-hour away," said Archie.

There's even a course, one of Italy's top 10, on the Lido, although bizarrely it's the one place in Venice with no water hazards.

Just 20 apartments and 10 houses are being built in the first phase of the Residence Cà Amata development. The styling is modern, with oak floors throughout and a home automation system controlling the air conditioning, heating and blinds, plus broadband, satellite TV and a video intercom.

The two- and three-bedroom apartments range from €300,000 to €400,000, while the houses start at €690,000. These are "shell" prices, so do not include the cost of fitted kitchens. Access is easy, with Ryanair flying into Treviso, a 20-minute drive away from both Asolo and Castelfranco.

Further west, in the foothills of the Alps, the Italian Lakes area has even better courses than Veneto. George Clooney, Sting and Richard Branson have homes on the shores of stylish Lake Como.

Boutique

With golf courses at Menaggio and Villa d'Este nearby, it's also the site of a new boutique development: Residenza del Lago Azure.

With magnificent views over the lake, the gated resort has 28 villas and apartments with a choice of one, two and three bedrooms.

"Occasionally we come across a development that ticks every box," said Robert Green of Cluttons Resorts. "This will appeal to the British second-home market both as an investment and as a lifestyle purchase."

The chic interiors of the properties, built in local stone, feature large picture windows to maximise the views. The development has a private leisure club with a sauna, gym and Jacuzzi plus an on-site concierge service and private underground parking. A glass-walled lift takes residents up the hillside to their homes. Prices start at €398,500.

Near three golf courses on Lake Maggiore, Linda Travella is also selling one-bedroom apartments for €180,000.

"If you're looking for a bargain, private sellers are likely to be your best option," she suggested.

A golfing holiday in Italy is one way to see all these properties. Momentum Golf Italia organises bespoke trips to the best courses in the country, from Puglia in the south to the Lakes in the north.

INFORMATION:

● www.asologolf.it
● [www.caamata.it/0039 33 0423 9657](http://www.caamata.it/0039_33_0423_9657)
● [www.cluttonsresorts.com/020 7584 3050](http://www.cluttonsresorts.com/020_7584_3050)
● [www.casatravella.com/01322 660988](http://www.casatravella.com/01322_660988)
● [www.golfitalia.co.uk/020 7371 9111](http://www.golfitalia.co.uk/020_7371_9111)

PICTURESQUE:
Flats at Lake Maggiore



STYLISH: Cluttons' scheme at Lake Como



FAIRWAY TO HEAVEN:
Course-side homes at Asolo

