

The Greek island of Patmos in the first position as an idyllic destination

The well-esteemed business and economic magazine *Forbes*, in a special report that was published recently, ranked the Greek island of Patmos in the first position as an idyllic destination and in real estate business. This report was composed in corporation with the experts of tourism and real estate, who were asked to vote for the top destinations in Europe, giving Greece the honorary first position. These destinations are characterised as magical places to live in and pretty

affordable, too. This position gives investors in Europe the chance to discover an authentic place, with a rich religious culture and pristine nature. According to real estate councillors who helped in writing the report, "Patmos has developed over the years but it hasn't lost its authentic beauty". It is also mentioned that because of the long distance from Athens, prices in Patmos real estate have been kept low and reasonable.

Last year, the rising dollar meant European property was becoming more affordable. But even now that the globe is fully in recession, Europe's most idyllic locations have yet to lose any of their charm.

Fortunately, that hasn't led to high prices absolutely everywhere. While many tranquil spots in Europe remain pricey (think Tuscany), others like the Greek island of Patmos have remained somewhat easier on the wallet. What Patmos—a tiny island in the Aegean Sea—doesn't have in terms of expense it makes up for in religious history. Also known as the Holy Greek Island of Patmos (it's where St. John is thought to have written the Book of Revelation), the island is home to more than 50 churches. But it has its origins in Greek mythology: The legend goes that Zeus allowed Patmos to rise up from the ocean, and humans are thought to have settled there as far back as 2000 B.C.

Patmos also offers peace and quiet, with a population of just under 3,000 and space of 13 square miles—and it isn't teeming with tourists. The only means of transport to and from there is a ferry boat from the neighboring islands of Samos or Kos, yet visitors who know of the place return time and time again.

"Patmos' saving grace is that it has no airport," says Patricia Schultz, author of *1,000 Places To See Before You Die*. "It is quiet, traditional and removed but not primitive. That and a beautiful interior and great beaches draws a very sophisticated crowd."

Yet living here won't dent the wallet too much. A three-bedroom house located about a five-minute walk from the beach will set you back 300,000 euros (\$428,700). A one-bedroom house, also near the beach—it's hard not to be on such a small island—costs around 160,000 euros (\$228,650).

"Prices in Patmos haven't really moved too much in the



It is worth to mention that many celebrities have already bought or are looking to buy a property in Greece and the Greek islands. Tom Hanks, for example, and his wife, Rita Wilson have a summer house in Antiparos. It is also said that Julia Roberts and Jack Nicholson are looking for a property in Santorini, Ritchard Gere in Patmos, Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in Simi and Michael Schumacher in Elafonissos.

last year," says Elena Panagopoulou, of GoldAcre Estates in Patras, Greece. She adds that while property prices have slid in Athens, they've been resilient on the country's 227 inhabited islands.

Behind the Numbers

To create our list of the most idyllic places to live in Europe, we asked a panel of experts in the fields of travel and relocation to choose their five favorite simple, unspoiled and near-heavenly locations to take up residence. Many of them will seem unfamiliar because they have yet to be

pounced on by hurried, mass-market tourism. Following Patmos at a close second on our list is Lucca, a medieval city within a city in the region of Tuscany, central Italy. It has "all the Tuscan charm of its neighbors Pisa and Tuscany but without the crowds," says Gillian Pearsall, marketing manager at Intrepid Travel. Tour busses are not the norm here: It's "blissfully cut off by its perfectly preserved Renaissance walls," says Schultz.

"This is a quiet, though classy town, with lawyers and housewives peddling the narrow cobblestone streets past thousand-

year-old churches and made-in-Italy fashion boutiques," she says, adding that you can visit the outdoor antiques market every month to furnish your Tuscan farmhouse. The larger city of Florence is just 45 miles to the east; both the beach and skiing in Abetone are about an hour away, in opposite directions. Foreigners who buy into the area tend to be professionals from Britain or other parts of Europe, and some of the most sought-after properties are within the walls of the medieval city.

An apartment in the epicenter can set you back between 300,000 and 500,000 euros (\$428,700 and \$714,320), de-

who are now seeking to cash in with high asking prices. A better bet would be a local who is selling an inherited house and isn't as desperate to create a nest egg for retirement.

Third place in our ranking is Saignon, a peaceful little village on a cliff in Provence, Southern France. A cluster of honey-colored houses interspersed with many flowers, it's one of the most attractive Provençal villages, according to Lucy White, editor of European titles for Rough Guides.

Life there is "tranquil and sleepy," she says, and because it's such a small village, the community is very tight-knit. It's "a lovely place to make

pending on how much restoration needs to be done. It's difficult to find a house there, so a good entry point is to find a property within the walled city for the winter, where you could be sheltered from the cold and not worry about electricity outages. Though if you can find it, a house in the hills just outside the city for the spring and summer would be appealing, but prices range from 500,000 to 800,000 euros (\$714,320 to \$1.1 million).

Vincent suggests avoiding properties that are being sold by a wave of Brits who invested in the area in the '70s and '80s, and

good friends, and not just French. There's quite a large expat community in this part of Provence." The population is just over 1,000.

Saignon, being so small, has few properties for sale, but look hard enough and you can find them. Currently a five-bedroom, 17th-century village house with a courtyard is going for 550,000 euros (\$785,870), while a nine-bedroom, seven-bathroom house with a large garden in the village will set you back 1.4 million euros (\$2 million).

No one ever said tranquility didn't come with a price.

