

Who would say no to a Scottish castle?

If we all fall out, could it be goodbye from Londoners owning a historic Highland pile?

By **Cathy Hawker**

AN ENGLISHMAN'S home is his castle, as the saying goes, but Scotland can lay claim to the highest concentration of these historic beauties – more than 2,000 of them – and if you want to buy one, you may have to act fast. With Scots voting on independence tomorrow, the procedure for an English, Welsh or Northern Irish buyer hoping to bag a property north of the border could be about to change forever.

SCOTTISH PROPERTY PRICES

Property prices in Scotland have grown 49 per cent in the last decade according to estate agents Strutt & Parker, yet the average house price remains one of the lowest in the UK at £141,872, against £533,489 in Greater London and £256,883 in England and Wales.

Even when you consider Edinburgh's fine Georgian terraces, and rambling estates in rural areas, Scottish property represents striking value. "In total our London property is now worth £1.5 trillion," says Andrew Bridges of London agents Stirling Ackroyd. "That is almost four times as much as all the residential property in Scotland combined."

You could pick up a castle with a 50-acre estate and fishing rights from £500,000. English and foreign buyers usually spend between £1 million and £2.5 million says Robert McCulloch of Strutt & Parker. He sells up to six castles a year, with Scotland and southern England each accounting for 40 per cent of buyers and the rest from overseas.

"Buyers want peace and pretty rural locations with the hotspots nearby – the popular and attractive Highlands of Perthshire, Inverness-shire and Royal Deeside," adds McCulloch. However, renovation of a castle comes on a grand scale, while repair and running costs



Offers over £1.1 million: partly refurbished Castle Grant, near Granttown on Spey in the Highlands, through Strutt & Parker



Offers over £2.9 million: Castle Gogar, left, Edinburgh (savills.com)

Weddings and sporting breaks: Forter Castle, right, Katharine Pooley's home in Perthshire



Castle in Perthshire, 90 minutes' drive north of Edinburgh. Built in 1560, it lay in ruins for 300 years until Pooley's father, Robert, bought it in 1990. He restored the exterior, and in 2003 Pooley started on the interior décor. She

can be staggering. Biomass boilers and good insulation are just the start. And buyers should beware of taking on a lot of land with their castle. SNP leader Alex Salmond has pledged new land taxes, and to grant communities the

right to buy parts of large estates. "The dream can turn sour," says McCulloch. However, the dream has not soured for London banker-turned-interior designer to the rich and famous, Katharine Pooley. Her home is Forter

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says: "It needed to be luxurious and 'more Scottish'." Forter has five double bedrooms and an awkward staircase. "One of many problems was getting four-poster beds upstairs," adds Pooley. She called in Georgian Antiques in Leith who sent an expert to saw the beds in half, then reassemble them.

TOURIST FAVOURITE

Today Forter has a vaulted kitchen, a wedding chapel and a Great Hall with a huge stone fireplace and a grand table seating 16. Pooley has used iron chandeliers, her family tartan, French tapestries, 18th-century mirrors and the occasional Ralph Lauren fabric. Forter is now blissfully warm and to pay the bills she rents it out for £4,250 for a long weekend. It is popular for Christmas and new year, and fishermen have been joined by golfers thanks to world-class courses including Gleneagles, hosting the Ryder Cup from September 26-28.

Will Pooley fall out of love with Scotland if Scotland falls out of love with us? "Not a bit of it. I would never sell the castle in the event of a yes vote. The vote is a monumental political decision for Scots, but this country is a beautiful, unique gem with the most welcoming people. Visitors will always be drawn to Scotland and Forter Castle."

■ **Strutt & Parker:** struttandparker.com
■ **Forter Castle:** fortercastle.com



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