

A century ago, only millionaires would have been able to enjoy living around majestic Lake Worth in Austria's southernmost region of Carinthia. But credit-crunched **Tricia Wormald** discovered that today it is possible for less well-off mortals to live the high life without breaking the bank.

GENTLY cruising along the still waters of Lake Worth on a tourist boat and gazing at the magnificent turn-of-the-last-century villas that grace the water's edge along its 10-mile length, you can't help but be nostalgic for an era that has long since passed.

While admiring their ornate, pastel-coloured facades and dramatic turrets rising into a perfect blue sky, it was easy to imagine the privileged life enjoyed by their 19th-century inhabitants – the very rich from Vienna.

Composers Gustav Mahler and Johannes Brahms were just two of the celebrities drawn to the tranquillity of the lake during those times and today the villas are owned by industrialists, tycoons, including the owner of the Porsche car company, stars of stage and screen and the richest woman in Austria, billionaire Heidi Horten, widow of German retail magnate Helmut Horten.

Sadly, many of the villas have been demolished to make way for new buildings, not all of them in keeping with their surroundings, and there's a movement led by architect Heimo Kramer to make local people more aware of their heritage and to encourage them to help protect it.

The best way to see these impressive villas is from the beautiful lake. A map detailing both historic and modern Lake Worth architecture, produced by Heimo, provides information about all



ON REFLECTION:
Lake Worth at night.

Worth every penny: A place where still waters run cheap

TRAVEL FACTS

GETTING THERE: Getting there: Ryanair operates flights from London Stansted to Klagenfurt: www.ryanair.com

WHERE TO STAY: Villa Miralago, Portschach – from 65 euros per night: www.miralago.at.

LAKE WORTH VILLAS: www.woerthersee-architektur.at.

TOURIST INFORMATION: www.austria.info (0845 101 1818) or www.kaernten.at.

the buildings that are worth seeing, the name of the architect, the date of construction and, in many cases, who the owners are today.

You can stay in some of these villas. Many have been converted into hotels and apartments and you can stay in one from as little as 25 euros a night, including breakfast.

I stayed at the Villa Miralago, in Portschach, one of the best preserved villas in Carinthia. Built in 1893, it has just nine bedrooms, all different in style and size. But don't expect a television, internet facilities or a telephone in any of them. You can, however, expect friendly and personal service at this family-run establishment. Because it's a listed building,

renovations three years ago were kept to a minimum so that guests can experience what it must have felt like to live in a villa on the lake in about 1900.

My room was decorated in the Art Nouveau style, with large, elegantly-draped shuttered windows offering a view over the lake across to the Maria Worth peninsula and the only sounds to be heard were bird song and the gentle lapping of water against the boathouse deck. Breakfast was excellent, with hot crusty bread and local meat and cheese and other fine produce.

Within easy walking distance of the boat stop and a 10-minute drive to Carinthia's capital city of Klagenfurt, it's a perfect base for

a holiday to enjoy the city, the countryside and the lake.

Bathing in the ultra-clean lake is one of the most popular activities, along with cycling or walking around the lake on paths and hiking in the hills.

Picturesque Klagenfurt has museums, a theatre, a market and top designer shops and plenty of places to relax and sip the local apple liqueur spritzer.

Take a motorboat ride to the five-star Schloss Velden hotel and savour lunch in the Schlosstern restaurant prepared by Michelin two-star chef Silvio Nickol. For 65 euros (about £60) for a three-course lunch, plus taster plates in between, you too can live the millionaire lifestyle.