

COTTAGE FROM C8

states of disrepair. "Seventy-five percent of them are old, from the '50s and '60s," Hanečák says. "If the equipment is older than 1990, it will need fixing. And it's much easier to get things done in the city than in the country."

You should make sure the cottage is in good shape, or that you're willing to do what it takes to fix it. If possible, bring along a handyman friend when you're inspecting the property to check the roof, wiring, heating and plumbing. And imagine the cottage in all four seasons — is it winterized, so that the pipes won't freeze and break?

When looking at the property, Hanečák suggests meeting the neighbors. "Are they rowdy? Do their dogs bark all night? You'll have more

dealings with them than with your neighbors in the city," he says.

Affordable alternatives

Because cottages require a serious commitment of money, time and effort, many expats choose renting over buying. "It's more practical," Hanečák says. "You don't have to fix anything, and you can change locations every year if you want."

Rentals are typically in better condition than sale properties, and offer locations specific to seasonal activities such as skiing in the mountains. Rental properties are best found by word of mouth — agents don't make enough commission on rental transactions to make them worthwhile.

Hanečák estimates that rental prices range

from about 10,000 Kč a month up to as much as 50 euros (\$60/1,600 Kč) a day for a Krkonoše property during the winter. One way to make the cost of renting or buying more affordable is to do it as part of a group.

"It's a good idea if you've got some good chums to chip in and buy one together and then sort out who wants to use it which weekend," suggests Mort of Capital Properties. "The problem is that most people feel obliged to go every weekend to cut the grass. That's why a cottage is a commitment and an obligation.

"But," he adds, "it's a great tradition."

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