Where do buyers want to retreat to this year?

For luxury real estate buyers, the search has begun for homes where the nearest neighbors are large trees and calm water, and the only noise is the breeze. This year has seen the emergence of two related trends — concern about urban density, and the ease of working remote — and buyers are reassessing how often they need to be in the city center.

If your clients have started to look further afield for ideal — and idyllic — properties, read these insights from luxury agents in trending markets on the East Coast and Down Under. These areas provide plenty of retreats for those looking to purchase high-end real estate, and transferrable wisdom for agents operating in secondary markets.

Talbot County, Maryland

TTR Sotheby’s International Realty

Trey Rider

“Second-home buyers are flocking to the Eastern Shore of Maryland — Talbot County in particular — from Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore in search of privacy, distance from populated city centers, and tranquility,” says Trey Rider, Vice President at TTR Sotheby’s International Realty. “Talbot County is home to charming waterfront villages like St. Michaels and Oxford, and it continues to pique the interest of luxury real estate buyers who now more than ever are primed to invest in second-home havens.”

Peaceful, quiet, and picturesque, this area is the perfect counterpoint to the big cities surrounding it. “Talbot County has long been a destination for luxury buyers,” notes Rider. “The county seat, Easton, is ranked as the sixth wealthiest small town in America and named one of the best places to retire.”

The most significant difference agents see today is that affluent professionals are realizing that they can live in this highly desirable county while they continue to work. “Buyers are seeing these second homes as an investment in their present and in their future,” Rider says.

The Whitsundays, Queensland

Queensland Sotheby’s International Realty

Wayne Singleton

At a time when buyers are moving to more laid-back locales, Queensland is often cited as a top choice. “The Whitsundays have always been in the top 10 destinations in Australia,” says Wayne Singleton, Director of the Whitsundays team at Queensland Sotheby’s International Realty.

“This is mainly a vacation home market that provides a place in the sun,” he says. “Lifestyle is the number one reason why clients relocate, and the sense of freedom and space is important.”

But as Singleton notes, the Whitsundays real estate market is accommodating a rising number of year-round residents. “We are finding that our southern buyers from the colder climates of Sydney and Melbourne are looking at relocating to the Whitsundays,” he says. “Perfect weather, with the average temperature of 81 degrees, and one of the best boating destinations in the world are just some of what the Whitsundays offer.”

3 priorities for buyers who want to “get away from it all”

No matter where in the world they’re retreating, luxury buyers want the amenities and access that will make their work and leisure easier. Keep note of the following three preferences.

1. Access by land or air

While luxury buyers may have options to spend more time in their second homes, mobility remains a major consideration for many of them. Rider notes that Talbot County is desirable for his clients

because it’s within driving distance of their homes in more metropolitan areas. “Easton also hosts the second most active airport in Maryland, is a Wheels Up and NetJets destination, and can accommodate large private jets.”

Singleton says that the Whitsundays are no different. “A main criterion is accessibility to access the major cities if clients need to travel for business. The Whitsundays, and especially Hamilton Island, allow this with daily flights to Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne,” he says.

2. Privacy and amenities
One of the top selling points of escaping the city is enhanced privacy. “The sense of seclusion with the feel of a tropical retreat is important,” says Singleton.

When asked whether remote work and the shift from urban centers have increased activity in his market, Rider replies, “One hundred percent, yes. Actually, make that 500 percent, yes: since May we have seen a 500 percent increase in pending contracts over $1 million compared to the same timeframe in 2019. Buyers are drawn to Talbot County’s extensive waterfront — more than 600 miles of shoreline — property acreage, and luxury amenities like pools, docks, home gyms, offices, and stunning views.”

3. Waterfront properties
As Rider implies, proximity to the water has proven hugely attractive to buyers. His clients want to telecommute from home offices, work out in personal gyms, and swim in private pools — but first and foremost, they want to do all this while they “enjoy the sights and sounds of waterfront living.”

“Buyers even relocate their large boats to the Whitsundays to have the best of everything as they complete their move,” explains Singleton. As you recommend second home markets to your clients, remember that riverside and seaside retreats are today’s must-haves.

In some cases, these retreats won’t remain secondary residences for long. “Buyers are now comfortable running their operations from anywhere,” says Singleton. “They only need a laptop and internet, which is why they choose this lifestyle.” Rider adds that “Time will tell if the homeowners eventually return to their metropolitan area homes full-time or if they’ll continue to use their second homes as their primary residence.”

One thing is for sure: interest in private waterfront properties, with car and plane access and plenty of in-home amenities, is at an all-time high with luxury buyers. Introduce your clients to trending locations like Talbot County, the Whitsundays, or your own secondary market so they too can discover — and own — their dream retreat years before they retire.

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