

Forbes

Private Club Communities Enjoy Covid-Era Comeback

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The Cliffs, a private club community in the Carolinas, has witnessed an 80% surge in home sales since the dawn of the pandemic.

If someone had set out to invent a period, an age, a time ideally suited to a resurgence of private club communities, they couldn't have done better than creating the Covid-19 era.

The strictures the pandemic imposed on Americans quickly spurred renewed interest in private club communities, which offer secure, fully-serviced environments.

They are often close enough to population centers to enable safe travel there by car, but sufficiently removed from urban density to allow for social distancing.

Result: A surge in purchases of second homes no longer seen as discretionary, due to travel restrictions. Buyers of homes in these communities are able to benefit from spending more time in them, thanks to Covid-era work-from-home and home-schooling options. What's more, at a time when the great outdoors is deemed far less risky than being inside, club offerings of golf, tennis, pickleball and water sports deliver even more appeal than they customarily do.

Privacy surges

Private club communities like Sonoma, Calif.'s Mayacama and North and South Carolina's The Cliffs have witnessed increased buying interest during the pandemic. In fact, Mayacama reported 2020 home sales soared more than 300% over 2019. The Cliffs, a collection of seven private golf clubs in the Western Carolina mountains, has seen an 80% increase in home sales during the scourge of Covid-19.

Another private club community, Kiawah Island Real Estate [KIRE] in South Carolina, tallied the most successful year in its 44-year history last year. Its \$568 million in closed sales volume represented a 185% increase from 2019 to 2020. From January 2020 to January of this year, the company witnessed a 186% increase in transactions. February 2021 brought a 155% increase over February 2020 figures.

Observes Rob Duckett, president of The Cliffs, "Last year, the private club industry experienced historic growth, mostly due to buyers suddenly being able to live and work from anywhere. The Cliffs is seeing this momentum continue into 2021. Buyers are still looking for high-end real estate listings in remote settings that offer an abundance of club amenities and outdoor activities, as well as proximity to mid-sized markets."

The Cliffs is proximate to the mid-sized markets Asheville, N.C. and Greenville, S.C.

Great outdoors

Not surprisingly, the surge has applied to use of recreational amenities as well.

Overall golf play at The Cliffs increased by 21%, with weekend play higher by 42%.

In addition, private communities launched Covid-era extras, such as “The Cliffs School of Golf,” offering socially-distanced classroom and on-course education, with intentional focus on removing the sport’s intimidation factor. The Cliffs also upped its game this spring by expanding its water sports offerings, adding new activities and high-end boats.

At Mayacama, rounds of golf increased by 27% in 2020, and substantial surges were seen in participation by newcomers to golf, especially those from the junior ranks. Even with the golf shop closed for better than two months due to the pandemic, the sale of golf clubs increased by 53% vis-à-vis 2019 numbers.

How has Mayacama kept golfers engaged during Covid? Ted Antonopoulos, the club’s head golf professional, says the club increased the number of junior programs and golf camps to tempt younger golfers, and utilized its Op-36 program for juniors and new adult golfers. “This is a detailed program that provides beginners with a roadmap to learn to play the game by developing skills through instruction and a creative on-course model,” he says.

“Players begin playing nine holes from 25 yards from each green, with a goal of 36 strokes for nine holes. Players then graduate to the next level and so on. With attainable goals, the players learn the game from the green backwards.”

The increased embrace of clubs at private club communities could ensure another kind of club – the one made up of buyers at such communities – continues to grow.



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I launched my freelance writing career in 1989 and have since produced more than 4,000 bylined articles for a wide array of traditional and web-based publications. I began covering real estate in 1991 when the Chicago Tribune assigned me to pen an article on the renovation of Chicago's illustrious Union State. That first foray into real estate led to my producing hundreds of articles for all of the Tribune's traditional real estate sections, Friday Your Place, Saturday New Homes and Sunday Real Estate, where I covered many facets of residential real estate. Additional real estate writing has included pieces for both consumer and trade publications, including Bankrate.com, Multi-Housing News, Commercial Property Executive, Units and Modern Luxury, among many others.