



CANADA'S WINTER DESTINATION

Lakeside living in the midst of wine country is clipping the wings of snowbirds

BY JULIE GEDEON

SOME SNOWBIRDS are heading for the driest part of Canada instead of points south and many are happily arriving forever at Osoyoos Cottages. The 285 homes built or still planned for the 70 acres bordering pristine Osoyoos Lake in the Okanagan Valley were originally intended for summer vacationers, but retirees have been snapping them up.

Eric Van Maren, the managing general partner of Osoyoos Cottages Limited Partnership, doesn't usually "fall in love" with land he buys to develop, but the lakeside region nestled an equal distance from Osoyoos and Oliver stole his heart.

"It's a spectacular location with 1,800 feet of waterfront—a third of it sandy beach—surrounded by open meadow and hillside vineyards," he says. "I've been in real estate development for almost 43 years and this project will be the capstone of my career."

The initial model homes weren't open for long when prospective buyers made it clear they wanted more space for visiting family and friends, a garage and other contemporary upgrades for year-round living. 🏡





“About 75-80 per cent of our residents are retirees,” Van Maren says. “They love the lifestyle we offer with the lake, boat slips in a quiet cove, wine country, two swimming pools, hot tubs and a clubhouse with tai chi lessons, wine and cheese parties and other activities organized by the residents.”

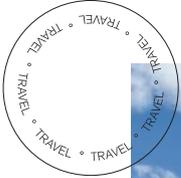
The weak Canadian dollar and steep insurance premiums for health care outside the country have prompted many retirees to opt for Canada’s only official desert region as a winter haven. “With minus five or minus 10 degrees Celsius being about the coldest it gets with just a dusting of snow, it’s certainly warmer than Winnipeg,” Van Maren says. “And less than 12 inches of rain annually makes for a lot of sunny days.”

Local hotel/motel accommodations that sat empty as of October a few years ago are now already booked for next January. “And the community has responded wonderfully by keeping restaurants and entertainment venues open to cater to snowbirds year-round,” Van Maren adds.

Everyone at Osoyoos Cottages has time to enjoy activities or to just relax with all the landscaping maintained by the developers.

The company offers more than a dozen contemporary floor plans to get buyers started, but goes out of its way to customize each property. “Kitchens and bathrooms are most often upgraded,” Van Maren says. “Vaulted ceilings, hot tub installations and a double garage are important additions for many.”

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All the house sidings and trims by Hardie were chosen for their appealing durability, and the Magnum Glass and Door windows for their high level of energy efficiency. The landscaping is handled by the Strata Homeowners' Corporation to resemble a well-maintained park setting.

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The houses are strategically placed on the hillside to give every owner the best possible views of Lake Osoyoos. Glass railings ensure that the view is as clear as possible from each balcony.

With most residents being 55 years and older, the developers have kept the needs of this aging demographic in mind. All the master bedroom suites, for example, are located on the main floor of each house regardless of its style. Decks and patios are readily accessible.

The overall project has been designed to facilitate easy walking throughout the property. “There are small groups of residents who gather throughout the day to go for a hike on the trails down to the beach or up the hills for a bit,” Van Maren says. “There’s also a fitness area with commercial equipment to stay fit, as well as 160 boat slips.”

Many buyers initially express interest in a home without any stairs whatsoever, but most opt for a two-storey house to better accommodate visiting family and friends. “The gorgeous lake in the middle of wine country makes it appealing for relatives to spend their vacation time here,” Van Maren says. “Grandchildren love it.”

The two-level hillside homes are ideal for people who want a beautiful view of the lake but aren’t as interested in water-related activities.

While the local towns fill with visitors come summertime, the Osoyoos Cottages on the north end of the lake remain tranquil. “Boats from Osoyoos rarely come all the way to this side,” Van Maren notes. “We’re also far enough from the highway so we don’t really hear it and yet it’s only about a 12-minute drive to Osoyoos or Oliver.” ☛

The Cottages on Osoyoos Lake
855-742-5555
www.OsoyoosCottages.com

