

The Sydney Morning Herald

SE Domain
HD Coastal glamour
BY ANNA ANDERSON
WC 1,123 words
PD 3 May 2014
SN The Sydney Morning Herald
SC SMHH
ED First
PG 15
LA English
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NEW HOMES

Holiday homes in beachside towns close to the city are proving popular.

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The trick to making the most of a seaside getaway is to find one within an easy drive from home. Before spoiling yourself with a weekender, it's worth asking whether you'd be willing to make the journey after work on a Friday evening. Most buyers would agree anything over a three-hour drive is too far. In fact, Bryan Rose, managing director of Rose **Group**, developers of the Beaches project at Catherine Hill Bay on the central coast, says three hours is pushing it. "We've done some research and anything more than two hours is just too far for a weekend," Rose says.

Beaches is a new masterplanned village half an hour from Newcastle and in striking distance of Sydney. "If you leave the CBD on a Friday at 2pm, it takes exactly 1½ hours to reach Catherine Hill Bay," Rose says. The **site** has 550 land lots all within a five-to-10 minute walk from two beaches: the surf-patrolled Middle Camp Beach and Moonee Beach. "Surfers don't like me talking about this spot because it's absolutely natural with a fantastic surf break," Rose says.

Design guidelines for housing on the **site** reveal an Australian beach house style. "The houses will all have verandahs and the streetscapes will be very special," Rose says. "We're trying to hark back to earlier, simpler times."

To the south of Sydney, Kiama has long been a weekend getaway for Sydneysiders. It is a 90-minute drive along the Princes Highway or about two hours by train. The big attraction is its choice of beaches including surfers' favourites, Mystics, Boyds and Surf and the family-friendly Kendalls, Easts and Black Beach. Locals and weekenders love the 22-kilometre Kiama Coast Walk and the quick trip to Berry and Jamberoo.

A new **residential** project named Kiama Place is on schedule to begin construction by the middle of the year. It has proved popular with a range of buyers including families from Cheltenham and Bondi who will use them as holiday homes. "We've also had local downsizers, some empty nesters and even some investors from **China**," says the project sales manager at Vodaland, Sandra Chu. "There are so many attractions here; golf courses, fishing spots, 15 vineyards and so many beaches." Nine of the 12 duplexes offered in the first release have **sold**. The complex of 32 architect-designed Torrens title homes is 600 metres from the beach. All have four bedrooms, open-plan living areas, brick exteriors and double garages. Their lack of a coastal view keeps the prices down to between \$635,000 and \$650,000.

Port Stephens pushes the two-hour limit suggested by Rose but the extra half hour of driving is worth it. Locals say Shoal Bay is the jewel in Port Stephens' crown. Not only has it a pristine beach and laid-back ambience but also four big marinas and several boat ramps. One street back from the beachfront, a new **residential** development, the Shoal, is under construction. Marchese Partners have designed the six-storey complex of 43 two-bedroom apartments and four penthouses.

Buyers from Sydney, Newcastle and the Hunter Valley are showing interest but Paul Maund of Robinsons Real Estate, marketers of the Shoal, says there's also interest from Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Newcastle's airport at Williamstown, Australia's fastest growing regional airport, is 25 minutes' drive from Shoal Bay. "We get a lot of clients flying in for holidays. They come for the boating facilities and game fishing - this is a hugely popular boating and fishing area," Maund says.

Beaches, Catherine Hill Bay, central coast

The surf club was founded in 1928 by local coalminers. While mining ceased in 2002, Catherine Hill Bay remains a favourite spot for surfers. The Rose Group's development has 550 land lots all within five to 10 minutes' walk of two beaches, many with water views. Lots range in size from 550-1100 square metres and start at \$295,000. Site office open daily - corner of Clarke and Montefiore streets, Catherine Hill Bay.

Phone 1800 888 325. beachesCHB.com.au

Newcastle a painless commute from bay

With his work in Newcastle, Swansea-based Scott Woodbury can afford to make beachside Catherine Hill Bay his permanent home. He will take the 30-minute daily drive to his job in the health system in Newcastle and when he needs a break from the relaxed coastal lifestyle, he can drive down to Sydney in 90 minutes. "The double-lane road system to Newcastle and Sydney makes the journey either way very good," says Woodbury, 50.

Living close to Catherine Hill Bay, he has kept his eye on plans for the old colliery site for years. "When I knew the developers weren't going to disturb the natural bushland and that the project was going to be environmentally friendly, I decided to take a look at what was on offer," he says. In February, he bought a 570-square-metre block for \$265,000. The Rose Group have implemented design guidelines for their Beaches project so that while the houses will not be cookie-cutter in appearance, they will need to adhere to carefully vetted guidelines. Woodbury has confidence in the developers and likes the designs he's seen. "They're not over the top and they'll make this a quality estate," he says. "I think it's a good idea."

While no longer a surfer, he's looking forward to visiting Moonee and Fraser beaches and walking in the bushland of Munmorah state conservation area.

Anna Anderson

Quality: Scott Woodbury likes the design of the Beaches project. Photo: Max Mason-Hubers

OR TRY THESE ...

The Shoal, Shoal Bay, Port Stephens

Designed by Marchese Partners and developed by Veritas, The Shoal complex is about 100 paces from the sand of Shoal Bay. Still available are 28 two-bedroom apartments (70-90 sq m) from \$400,000 and two penthouses (155-162 sq m) from \$1,095,000. Strata levies from \$680 pq for two-beds, and from \$1880 pq for penthouses. Due for completion June 2015.

Phone 1300 133 311. theshoal.com.au

Kiama Place, 12 Elimatta Place, Kiama

All 32 duplexes, designed by PSEC Projects with interiors by Weir Phillips architects, have four bedrooms and double garages. Sizes range from 148 to 156 square metres inside and all have balconies, some have a study. Prices range from \$635,000 to \$650,000. Construction starts mid-year and completion is due by mid-2016. Phone Vodaland, 1800 887 880. Kiamaplace.com.au

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