



# THE SUNSHINE



Coastal Estates, top panoramic; Secret Cove Resort, bottom panoramic; Sailboats at Gibsons, above inset. Photos by Heather Conn.



# COAST

| A LITTLE OUT OF THE WAY,  
| BUT THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT |

By Heather Conn



**Imagine** a panoramic view of Pacific blueness that melds into mountains and sweeps across sea and sky outside your front yard. You are relishing a breakfast of cereal with fresh blackberries from your garden while seated on your oceanfront deck. As the dotted colours of kayakers and sailboats drift by below, you hear the splash of waves and a screech of bald eagles. You wonder if it's too soon to slip off to your hammock or golf game or perhaps find time to catch an elusive salmon.



Left: Aerial view of Sechelt; Right: Daniel Point

and it's no surprise that about 800,000 people visit the area annually.

In the last several years, this allure has created a high real-estate demand, particularly for waterfront properties, cottages and lots on the Upper Coast, and for townhouses and condos on the Lower Coast. The average sale price of a single family home on the Sunshine Coast has increased from \$131,000 in the fall of 2000 to over \$250,000, according to the Sunshine Coast Organization Reporting on the Economy. The highest average sale price in 2003-2004 was \$277,505.

Upper Coast waterfront homes are the strongest resale market, particularly those with moorage, and the cottage market is also booming, says RE/MAX realtor Alan Stewart. "Our waterfront demand has skyrocketed mainly because of the serenity and abundance of protected moorage," he says. "With the scarce amount of available properties, prices have soared."

Stewart cites an example from last summer: he sold a lot in Pender Harbour (known locally as "the Venice of the North" with a population of about 2,500) for \$459,000. Two years ago, it would have cost \$115,000. Another two-acre parcel in the same development sold for \$1.75 million. He calls the Pender Harbour area the hottest on the whole Sunshine Coast. In his words: "Recent waterfront sales [are] staggering even the most seasoned veteran realtors."

Most buyers are baby boomers from Alberta and B.C.'s Lower Mainland area, which includes Vancouver. The U.S. buyer market has dropped off considerably, says Stewart, but he has noticed a trend of boomers with new inheritance money seeking second properties. He expects this to continue for the next decade. "We are not forecasting any dramatic slowdown in the market. As they say: 'They are not making any more waterfront.'"

Several new high-end developments are appearing in the Pender Harbour region. One is Daniel Point, located beside dedicated waterfront parkland. The first two of three phases are already sold out (for more information, see [www.danielpoint.com](http://www.danielpoint.com).) Lily Lake Village is a lakefront retirement community near Madeira Park, a Pender Harbour community, which offers shoreline access for boats. The project includes an activity centre with a 244-square-metre (800-square-foot) studio and workshop.

Another Pender Harbour project is Rock\*Water Coastal Estate, a 25-unit sub-



SIGH. SCENES LIKE THESE ARE NO FANTASY, but part of everyday life for many on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, touted as one of the hottest real estate markets in the country. Surprisingly, many Vancouverites have never even visited this idyllic mainland region, which stretches roughly 3,800 square kilometres (2,361 square miles) northwest of the city. With no road access from Vancouver, you can reach this popular retirement area only by boat, plane or public ferry; the latter takes just 40 minutes from Horseshoe Bay, which lies north of the city across Burrard Inlet.

With a total population of roughly 31,000, this haven of recreational properties is divided into Lower and Upper Sunshine Coast. The Lower region includes the main communities of Gibsons, Roberts Creek, Sechelt, Halfmoon Bay, Pender Harbour and Egmont. The Upper section is home to Powell River, Lund, Texada Island, Savary Island, and Desolation Sound.

The region lives up to its name: it boasts 14 more days of sunshine per year than Hawaii. Its moderate temperatures range from just below freezing in winter to highs of 30+C (less than 90 degrees F) in summer. Add its convenient distance to the city, spectacular scenery, excellent arts and cultural festivals, plus top-notch recreational activities from fishing to boating,

division that offers view strata lots on a 5.7-hectare (14-acre) oceanfront property. Prices range from \$249,000 to \$750,000. (See [www.rockwaterliving.com](http://www.rockwaterliving.com) for details.) South of Pender Harbour, the Rock\*Water Ocean Resort (formerly Lord Jim's) at Halfmoon Bay offers opportunities for resort vacation cottage ownership.

Farther up the coast at Dark Cove, north of Egmont, plans for the Jervis Inlet Resort and Spa are underway on a 55-hectare (136-acre) property. (Jervis Inlet is an 80-kilometre or 50-mile-long fjord.) Besides a five-star hotel, fitness centre and 120 berths of private moorage, this world-class destination will offer 125 suites and 30 detached log homes, owned on a time-share basis. Completion is targeted for 2007. (See [www.jervisinletresort.ca](http://www.jervisinletresort.ca).)

In Powell River (pop. 13,000), the main northernmost town of the Upper Sunshine Coast, real estate sales are strong across the board, from lots to recreational properties to luxury homes, says Ron Miller, a RE/MAX associate broker and office appraiser in Powell River. Prices have increased as much as 70 per cent in the last year and a half, he says.

Demand can barely keep up. Last year, Miller had 350 listings; as of

August, he had 62. Similarly, he had 100 houses under \$100,000; now, he's got two. Most of his buyers were from out of province: Alberta, Ontario, and the U.S. "There are no new apartments or condos," he adds. "There is certainly a need for them." Beach Gardens, a new condo and rental development, is slated for completion in Powell River next year.

On the Lower Coast, townhouses and condos listed in the \$179,000 to \$250,000 range in the greater Gibsons area are gone within one or two weeks, says RE/MAX realtor Mike Weiner. Two major new townhouse developments are underway in the Gibsons region (pop. 10,000). Within a 20-minute drive north in the West Sechelt area, Seaview Villa Estates offers 22 strata villas from \$369,000 to \$399,000. Nearby, at Porpoise Bay on Sechelt Inlet, the Silverback development is targeted to begin construction this year. It will include 1,480 residential units, an 18-hole golf course, low-income housing, a conference centre, and small commercial area.

In the Wilson Creek area, south of Sechelt, multi-use Eco Village ([www.ecovillagesechelt.com](http://www.ecovillagesechelt.com)) is a unique new construction under local developer

Doug Spani. This 12-hectare (30-acre) site will combine live/work spaces with retail, office space and light industrial. The design will incorporate LEED standards (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) to create water savings, energy efficiencies, and improve indoor air and lighting quality.

Such environmental factors reflect a growing concern among Sunshine Coast residents who seek to preserve the sustainability of their region as populations grow. The annual construction values for permits issued by the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) have more than doubled in recent years. Therefore, some observers predict a similar doubling of population in less than seven years. The SCRD's 2004 annual report projects an increase of roughly 10,000 to about 40,000 in 2012 and almost 50,000 by 2026. ■■

