

Golf tourism

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Simon and Louise Hudson

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Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Wood Eaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

4 Planning for Golf Tourism

Spotlight: Development of golf resorts in Australia

ANZ Ladies Masters Tournament, Royal Pines Resort, Queensland – the Richest Women’s Golf Tournament in Australia, courtesy of Queensland Tourism



A golf course is second only to a major body of water in terms of creating added value to residential development, according to Australian property analyst, Michael Matusik. ‘In a correctly conceived and researched development, the premium price obtained for fairway frontage and the marketing advantage of a golf course community can greatly exceed the course construction and operating costs,’ he says.

The Queensland-based researcher has been studying the golf property development business in northeast Australia since 2000. Matusik has determined that, despite the economic downturn and property market slump in Australia, golf course communities are still being built and golf estate homes still being sold at a premium. He attributes this ability to buck the trend to something more than just the golf. With only 20–25 per cent of golf estate residents actually playing golf, he says ‘most buy into a golf estate because the course is often 60 to 70 hectares of permanent and maintained open space, which adds prestige and lifestyle appeal to a residential development.’

His company, Matusik Property Insights, produces a regular newsletter with updated statistics and research results about the Queensland property market in general with a specific focus on golfing developments. Matusik maintains that once the initial lure of the golf has worn off, it is secondary facilities – such as non-golfing, inter-generational activities, lap pools, lounging areas, themed architecture etc. – that sustains demand. With prospective residents comprising up to 75 per

cent non-golfers (compared to around 50 per cent in the USA), Matusik says it is critical to plan for non-golfing activities in Australian developments.

The target market for golf course developments is predominantly baby boomers in Australia: 'The traditional golf course buyer household is either an older family with teenage children living at home, with household heads between 45 and 55 years of age, or an empty nester couple aged between 55 and 65 years,' says Matusik. Younger families are also buying into the lifestyle (particularly as telecommunications enable working from home away from urban centres) but often further away from the actual course where property prices are lower.

Profit margins can be high for golf real estate but it is paramount to plan developments carefully, focusing on social and economic conditions, competitive analysis and demand analysis. Some items that planners should consider are whether there are few golf courses in the area or if the existing courses are overcrowded; are land costs relatively low; will the estate contain mid and upper income housing; is the existing market sufficient to absorb premiums required; can capital costs of the course be amortized over several years and over at least hundreds of dwellings; and could the course be sold without detracting from the ongoing marketing of the residential product?

Environmental planning is, of course, key for the sustainability of golf course developments. Australia's Gold Coast saw large overseas investment during the 1980s in reaction to changes in government legislation. Too many golf course developments were subsequently planned, approved and built during this period, some circumventing normal business and environmental planning processes. The result was an over-concentration of golf facilities in environmentally-sensitive areas and an over-supply in relation to demand. By contrast, other areas are learning from this example, addressing these issues in advance of projects. Alexandrina in South Australia, for example, has written into its local council development plan specific controls on water use, vegetation and heritage preservation for golf developments. This has now been recognized as a best-practice model.

Planning for views is also crucial for the marketability of golf course housing. Many courses line allotments down both sides of a fairway with residences placed at a 90-degree angle to the course. 'Providing less angled allotments, changing building setbacks and envelopes, sacrificing some allotments, realigning streets, walking trails and cart paths can direct views toward focal points on the course and elsewhere within the estate. By opening up views to the widest possible audience a developer can maximize the overall base price, premiums and rate of sale,' says Matusik.

He's also convinced that a championship course is not always preferable – the potential clientele must be taken into consideration and most golfers don't boast the necessary handicaps. He recommends numerous tee placements at each hole. Provisions for the non-golfer are vital: 'A golf course provides a great way to integrate pedestrian access throughout the estate. Also, do not rely on the golf course alone, offer other open space and facilities such as pocket parks, BBQs, teenage sports' equipment and play gyms outside the golf course itself,' he advises.

Chapter extract

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