

Thinking of golf in retirement?

Expand your horizons. Go to Vietnam, Portugal or South Africa.

BY SHIVANI VORA

Golf-driven real estate communities have consistently been top living choices for retirees, according to Scott Kauffman, an analyst specializing in global golf developments.

"Whether they play golf or not, people who are about to retire or already retired love the idea of moving to a golf community because of the ample green spaces, which are like having your own private park," he said.

Retirees, Mr. Kauffman added, also enjoy the security and cachet of living in a well-maintained community with amenities such as a clubhouse, tennis courts, restaurants and a pool.

Statistics support his statement: *Ideal-Living Magazine*, a real estate publication aimed at retirees, conducted a survey recently of more than 10,000 retirees and found that around 50 percent said they were seeking to move to a golf community or would like to live in a home with golfing nearby.

The popularity of golf-driven real estate communities started in the United States and then spread internationally in the 1980s, said Josh Sens, a writer for *Golf* magazine. "Golf courses used to be built for golf," he said. "You found good land and built the best course you could, but in the '80s, golf became a vehicle for selling homes, and real estate became the priority."

Below are eight destinations — some well established, others emerging — that are attracting retirees today.

CAPE WINELANDS, SOUTH AFRICA
The Cape Winelands, in South Africa's Western Cape, situated 20 to 40 minutes from Cape Town, are replete with luxury golf communities. Most have been around for at least five years, said Maria De Villiers, the region's manager for the South Africa real estate company Chas Everitt International.

They're appealing to buyers from Europe, she said, who usually spend December through February in these vacation homes, when it's summer in the country.

"We call these owners swallows, because they're only in South Africa temporarily," Ms. De Villiers said.

The affordability of living in a secure luxury development with premium golf courses and amenities is a plus: Ms. De Villiers said that two-bedroom apartments in upscale golf communities start at \$200,000, while a five-bedroom home with attached bathrooms, expansive gardens and a pool runs around \$750,000. "Buyers love that they can get so much for a relative bargain," Ms. De Villiers said.

Val de Vie is one of the most prestigious Cape Winelands golf estates and has a Jack Nicklaus-designed course, mountain biking and running trails, a polo club, an equestrian center, a wine cellar and three farm-to-table restaurants.

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

With upward of 20 golf communities spanning several thousand acres each and many additional public and private courses not affiliated with residences, golf is Scottsdale's main attraction, according to Charlie O'Malley, principal realtor of The O'Malley Group, a Scottsdale real estate company specializing in golf properties.

"Golf is the primary reason why people buy vacation and retirement homes in Scottsdale and has been for several decades now," Mr. O'Malley said. "These communities have been around awhile, and sales of golf homes are consistently steady." (Several professional golfers including Tom Lehman, own homes in the area.)

Benefits include the low property taxes, compared with other states; a favorable climate of low humidity and sunny days; flight accessibility from major and secondary cities in the United States; and the ease of getting around with minimal traffic.

But most of all, there's the luxury-for-less value proposition. Mr. O'Malley said it's possible to buy a 3,000-square-foot, three-bedroom, three-bath home with a pool in a high-end golf development that's situated on the course for less than \$1 million.

Desert Highlands is an example of a prestigious residential community in Scottsdale and has a farm-to-table restaurant, a large fitness center with a pool, a racket club with 13 tennis courts, a dog park, an 18-hole putting course and an 18-hole course designed by Mr. Nicklaus.

The 8,000-acre Desert Mountain, with its six Nicklaus courses, is another top golf community and offers hiking and biking paths, tennis, horseback riding, a 42,000-square-foot fitness center and spa, and more than a half dozen restaurants.

ALGARVE, PORTUGAL

According to Philip A. White Jr., the president and chief executive of Sotheby's International Realty and an avid golfer, the Algarve region in southern Portugal offers buyers an affordable cost of living, a temperate climate most of the year, and strong infrastructure. "It has consistently been a go-to destination to buy a golf home," he said.

Most of Sotheby's International Real-



ty clients who buy in Portugal are from France, Brazil, England and Russia, although demand from the United States is growing.

Patrick Bonnet, the marketing director for Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Portugal Property, said that Algarve has nearly 40 courses, mostly in golf communities.

"The high density of courses makes it a massively popular golf destination, along with the value for money," he said. "You're going to get a lot more per square meter for a residence than you would in other parts of Europe."

Quinta do Lago is regarded as one of the region's most high-end communities. Situated in a protected coastal lagoon in Ria Formosa nature reserve, home to an abundance of wildlife, flora and fauna and walking trails, it has three golf courses, a golf academy and driving range, more than a half dozen restaurants, a beach, a fitness center and a spa.

Properties come in a range of sizes and prices including two-bedroom apartments for 400,000 euros, about \$440,000, and five-bedroom villas that cost upward of 10 million euros.

COSTA DEL SOL, SPAIN

Spanning the coastline of Southern Spain between Malaga and Sotogrande, Costa del Sol — Spanish for "coast of the sun" — is one of Europe's most well-established golf destinations.

The region has about 50 golf courses, said Javier Rivadulla, the marketing and sales director for Finca Cortesin, a resort near the mountain village of Casares that includes a hotel and residences. "If you drive along the coastline, there is literally one golf course after another, and most have a real estate component," Mr. Rivadulla said.

But home prices in Costa del Sol are high, and buyers, who are mostly from Europe, include royalty and celebrities. "This is a very expensive place to buy a home," he said.

At Finca Cortesin, for example, the 57 villas set around its 18-hole golf course that have either four or five bedrooms and 70-foot-long pools have a starting price of \$4 million. For golfers, Costa del Sol's big advantage is the weather. "Winters are sunny and mild so you can pretty much play golf year-round," Mr. Sens, of *Golf* magazine, said.

DUBAI

With its strategic location between Asia and Europe and in the heart of the Middle East, Dubai has become a coveted spot for golf homes in the last five years, said Mr. Kauffman, the golf analyst.

"Dubai is the financial and cultural capital of the region and a Las Vegas equivalent in terms of restaurants and luxury shopping," he said. "More recently, it has become a golfers haven and has some of the largest master-planned luxury golf communities in the world with courses built by top architects."

The roughly 2,800-acre Jumeirah Golf Estates is an example and includes 16 different living districts and two courses designed by the Australian golfer Greg Norman. Parks, walking trails and green spaces abound throughout the development, and each district has its own style and amenities.

Flame Tree Ridge, for one, is meant to evoke the feeling of being in the Tuscan countryside and has four- and five-bedroom villas with stone facades and terra-cotta roofs. The properties have views of the golf courses, large landscaped gardens and pools.

But Dubai is expensive. Mr. Kauffman said that pricing is akin to New York real estate.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic is a prime destination in the Caribbean for golf-driven real estate, Mr. Sens said, and has at least a half dozen sizable golf developments.

The island's northeast coast is home to Discovery Land Company's Playa Grande Golf & Ocean Club, a more than 2,400-acre development with seven miles of coastline and surrounded by tropical rainforest. The notable golf architect Robert Trent Jones Sr. designed the golf course, and residences, which start at \$2.45 million, include beach cottages, homes near the course and mountain tree houses.

Golf home buyers in the Dominican Republic tend to be from the East Coast, both in Canada and the United States, said Mr. White, of Sotheby's International Realty, because of the flight accessibility and proximity to the island. "New York is less than four hours away and you have multiple flight options a day," he said.

VIETNAM

While Thailand has been the leader in Asia for vacation and retirement golf homes for the last decade, Mr. Norman, the course architect and golfer, said that Vietnam is quickly catching up. "The country is the new frontier for premier golf resort-style living in Asia," he said.

Both Mr. Norman and Mr. Kauffman said that upward of 40 golf courses are open all over Vietnam. Some are part of golf communities with residences while others are attached to hotels or clubs and close to neighborhoods where prospective buyers can find homes. Most of these courses were built between 2010 and 2020, and many more are set to debut in the coming years.

"Golf has become a way to unlock the country's hospitality, and homeowners appreciate the great weather and food, the beautiful beaches and the country's safety factor," Mr. Norman said. He has designed three courses in Vietnam including KN Golf Links, in Cam Ranh, on the South Central Coast. The course is part of the first phase of KN Paradise, a large-scale oceanfront resort, currently in development, that is slated to have residences, a golf club, a shopping promenade, a water park, a theme park and a water sports club.

LOS CABOS, MEXICO

Situated on the southern tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula, Los Cabos is a perennially popular vacation spot for tourists from the United States and Canada. Mr. White estimated that the area has upward of 16 top-quality courses, many with a residential component.

The 1,800-acre Cabo del Sol, which opened in 1994, has two golf courses, two miles of coastline and a spa.

Mike Meldman, whose Discovery Land Company, a Scottsdale-based real estate business, has communities in Cabo, El Dorado Golf & Beach Club and Chileno Bay Golf & Beach Club, said that the people who buy golf homes there are usually from the United States, namely Southern California, the state of Washington, Texas and the East Coast. "Cabo is appealing because you have the perfect climate of sunny days from November through June, fantastic restaurants, great activities and flight accessibility from many major cities on the West Coast," he said.

Mr. White agreed and described the region as "beautiful and welcoming to international home buyers." He said that homes are available in a variety of price points from \$500,000 modest condos to lavish multimillion-dollar residences such as the 400 in Chileno Bay, where properties start at \$3.9 million.

Golf havens

From top: Desert Mountain, outside of Scottsdale, Ariz.; Quinta do Lago Resort in Algarve, Portugal; Playa Grande Golf & Ocean Club in the Dominican Republic; and Finca Cortesin in Spain.

EVAN SCHILLER PHOTOGRAPHY