

# SECOND HOMES

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RECREATION AND INVESTMENT PROPERTIES

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## Make vacation home a paradise

Realty couple maintains condo in absence of Canadian owners

JANE MARSHALL  
Special to The Journal  
PUNTA CANA, D.R.

The *Lonely Planet* guide sums it up nicely when it informs readers about the Dominican Republic's climate. "Except in the central mountains, temperatures don't vary much in the Dominican Republic, averaging a summery 28 to 31 degrees C in most places for much of the year."

And this, of course, is what draws cold Canadians to vacation there — and to purchase second homes.

Add to that sand that's as fine as icing sugar, quivering palm fronds and translucent blue waters and it would seem a no-brainer to escape our winter cold for this milder, more inspiring setting.

But just what is involved in the upkeep of a second home? How quickly does the honeymoon end and the reality of housework and responsibility set in?

For Perry and Cheryl Merlot, it hasn't yet. They purchased their condominium in December 2008 and have no regrets. In fact, they're about to make their second trip there this year. (They average about four annually.)

"We are so lucky to have met Maria and Todd Williams of Reliable Realty," says Cheryl. "They came in once a month and check on our property."

Their approximately 1,100-sq.-ft., one-bedroom suite is at the Palm Suites, a gated community in Punta Cana — the tourist hot spot of the Dominican.

One of the couple's concerns when purchasing their condo — which they ultimately hope to retire to — was how to take care of it in their absence. Luckily, they found Reliable Realty.

"Maria and Todd have a cleaner who comes in, runs the taps, checks the air conditioning and humidity; she makes sure everything is in good working order," Cheryl says. "Because of the tropical climate, the humidity alone can really do damage."

This comforts the Merlots. When they get off the seven-hour flight from Edmonton, they know there will be no unwelcome surprises.

These are important concerns. We dry-skinned Edmontonians sometimes don't realize the challenges of a tropical climate — mould, mildew, bugs — and so it's critical to either become informed or take lessons or help from people in the know. The couple jokingly calls Punta Cana "Punta Canada," as there are so many Canadians there.

"Nearby our building are people from Regina, Vancouver, Okotoks, Ontario, and even Fort Saskatchewan," she notes.

Cheryl and Perry had travelled many times to the Dominican Republic before considering investing.

"Perry went online and did some research and he found Sabine Gruss of Trust Realty. She was invaluable — she speaks Spanish and English. She helped us set up and purchase our power meter and even helped us with furniture buying. She was



Perry and Cheryl Merlot of Edmonton enjoy this view when they travel to their Dominican condominium.

### HOUSE HUNTERS

Perry and Cheryl Merlot were featured on House Hunters International. To watch them as they look for the perfect second home, go to: <http://www.punta-cana.us/HouseHuntersInternational/> page\_2322210.html

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The Merlots enjoy spending their time at the Pulpo Cojo beach club near their condominium at the Palm Suites.

invaluable." The condo is 500 metres from the ocean, and the Merlots enjoy spending the day at the Pulpo Cojo beach club.

"There is a restaurant, access to the beach — it opens at 8:30 a.m. and we are usually there by 8:34 a.m. or so," she jokes.

"There is so much vegetation and it is very green. Truly tropical. The sand is bright white and like icing sugar. Because it's on the Atlantic side, there aren't a lot of shells or coral washed up on the beach. And the water is turquoise."

"We feel very confident in Maria and Todd's abilities. If people were interested in purchasing or renting from Reliable Realty, we would send them their way."

"They are from the United States and understand that Canadians often have very different expectations.

Our expectations are quite high, yet the Dominican is on island time, which is good. The people there aren't ignoring, they just have different timelines and priorities. Maria and Todd help with this."

Cheryl notes that purchasing in a foreign country was really quite easy, though different than in Canada. "It's important to have a licensed realtor who knows what your needs are."

"The most important thing to do when considering purchasing abroad is to do research and find someone you can work with. Maria and Todd are our eyes and ears when we aren't there. Anything needing attention, they take care of."

Reliable Realty has many properties for sale, as well as rentals, and the best part is that they can manage the properties they sell.

"We are told constantly by our vacation rental clients that their trip to

Punta Cana was the best trip they've ever had," says Maria Williams.

"A few rental clients have actually cried and hugged us when we dropped them off at the airport. They are now repeat vacation clients."

More recently, a couple of them have actually purchased their own condos. This is the ultimate compliment and we are thrilled to have more new friends and neighbours here. So inadvertently, our satisfied rental clients are now becoming our upcoming buying clients."

"It's just such a different way of life there," says Cheryl. "Perry and I are more relaxed and there isn't the same hustle and bustle."

And when they arrive at their second home, they won't be broadsided by anything unexpected. Perhaps this is the whole, complete picture of second-home paradise.

## Resort condos high on Albertans wish lists

Payoff is improved quality of life

MARIO TONEGUZZI  
Calgary Herald

Potential real estate buyers in Alberta are keen on purchasing a recreational property in the next 24 months — a greater portion than any other region in the country, says a new report by Re/Max Real Estate Services.

The survey, conducted by Angus Reid, indicated 29 per cent of respondents in Alberta listed a condominium at a resort as their top choice they were to purchase a recreational property.

That preference was followed by mobile home/RV, at 18 per cent, and a cottage on a lake, at 14 per cent each.

Nationally, a cottage on a lake topped the preferred choice at 31 per cent, followed by a condominium at 24 per cent.

More than any other region, potential buyers in Alberta also consider a recreational property's long-term investment potential as a primary reason to buy (49 per cent), compared with the national average of 43 per cent. And Albertans are as likely, at 49 per cent, to cite lifestyle as a reason to buy.

The three most important features for potential buyers in Alberta are four-season use, at 51 per cent, and waterfront/beach access, at 48 per cent. This was followed by peace and quiet, at 41 per cent.

"Canadians are generally confident about buying recreational property because they see a payoff in terms of improved quality of life," said Soper, president and chief executive of Royal LePage. "The survey results show that tightening of lending requirements for second homes, coupled with an increase in taxes, may have a dampening effect on the recreational property market."

Recently, a recreational property report by Re/Max showed that 18 per cent of recreational properties are about 50 markets surveyed coast-to-coast experienced a swing in the number of properties sold during the first three months of the year compared with the period in 2009.

The report also showed that prices for recreational properties are also on the move, with 43 per cent of those markets posting a net increase.

The Royal LePage report, released Monday, said the typical price for a standard waterfront, laneway access property of 1,000 square feet, three bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms in Alberta is between \$300,000 and \$555,000.

From May 20 to 26, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted a survey among 1,003 random selected Canadian adults who are considering purchasing a recreational property in the next 24 months.

The margin of error is plus or minus 3.1 per cent.