

Clarens experiences upturn in property demand

Clarens in the Free State is seeing an upturn in enquiries for residential property, while most weekends the town is abuzz with domestic visitors from Gauteng, says Anne Maree, Pam Goldi Properties' area principal.

"The restaurants are busy every weekend and the Protea Hotel, which conducts extensive marketing, is full on weekends and achieves reasonably high occupancy during weekdays. Many of the more established and popular guesthouses have forward bookings and annual bookings for holiday seasons such as Christmas and Easter."

Due to its proximity to the major cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Durban, the town appeals to those wanting to escape from city life for weekends or longer leisure breaks.

"We are also finding that more and more corporates are booking accommodation in Clarens while attending team building adventures available in the vicinity. Among others, these activities include water rafting, horse riding, abseiling, hiking, zip line and tours into Lesotho, with Afri Ski resort a major draw card.

With a population today of about 900, Clarens was founded in 1912, growing from two farms, which were subdivided to create the town site, which for many years was the service centre for the surrounding farms. It subsequently developed as a small retirement town for farmers in the area, with tourism and second home purchases commencing in about 1985. This was followed by an influx of Pretoria and Johannesburg investors who, as business people saw the potential of the area for future tourism development.

"In the early 1990s, residential investments began when Clarens became the base for local and international construction workers and engineers for the Lesotho Highlands water scheme, with a tunnel built from the Katse Dam in Lesotho to the Ass River just outside Clarens. This resulted in 63 new housing units being built, boosting population growth, infrastructure and improvements in the area. Following completion of the Lesotho Highlands project, many international workers left the area and so the town began to evolve as a unique leisure area - ideal for artistic and recreational pursuits as well as retirement. This soon led to a subsequent wave of second home development."

Today vacant residential stands sell between R165 000 and R1.2 million, depending on size and location, while two bedroom houses fetch from R750 000 and range up to R4.8 million for a five bedroom house with pool set on approximately 6 000 square metres. Guesthouses range in price from R4.4 - R5.9 million, commercial property is priced from R3.2 million to R4.95 million and industrial property from R821 000 to R1.25 million.

"Business owners and residents who have invested in the area sometimes own several properties as they believe the area offers sound development and income potential as well as a highly desirable lifestyle. Another owner sees Clarens in about 20 years possibly resembling a local equivalent of Franschhoek today. The scenic mountains are a huge attraction for visitors, residents, home and business owners," concludes Maree.

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