

RV Business

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RV Business[®]

BREAKING NEWS

Luxury RV Resorts Spring up on Ala. Coastline

Several developments along Alabama's Gulf Coast shoreline are catering to an emerging, and affluent, market – high-end motor coach owners.

According to the *Press-Register*, three separate projects in the Gulf Shores area are in the works with amenities and accommodations centered around an upscale RV lifestyle.

- A 40-acre tract called Bella Terra will feature an H-shaped fishing lake as the centerpiece of a 176-lot, full-service motor coach resort. Around 4,000 square feet in a "four-star" setting will cost between \$88,000 and \$200,000.
- A proposal has been submitted to planning officials to subdivide an irregular shaped 240 acres into 772 land-yacht lots and five lakes called RV Resorts of America.
- The proposed Buena Vista on the Beach, a 111-lot RV resort, is currently under scrutiny by local officials. The gated community's lots – essentially 4,700-square-foot parking spaces with utilities and landscaping – would be offered for around \$350,000 and governed by strict covenants that allow only well-maintained, top-of-the-line motor coaches.

The developers of these resort projects tend to use the terms motor coach and recreational vehicle interchangeably. Generally, what they are referring to are Type A motorhomes, bus-shaped vehicles in which the living quarters are accessible from the driver's area and which can cost anywhere from about \$60,000 up.

The allure is a rising number of Baby Boomers seeking a life on the road paired with rising recreational vehicle purchases. The Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) reported RV ownership will extend to 8.5 million households by 2010.

"We really perceive that we're insulated from the real estate industry's recession," said Trip Keber, Bella Terra's executive vice president for business development.

So far Bella Terra has sold about 45 lots and many of the buyers – well-heeled Baby Boomers shedding their homes and hitting the road – paid cash, which has helped developers dodge the mortgage industry meltdown, Keber said. He envisions a circuit of Bella Terras along which unencumbered and moneyed retirees can "chase the seasons" from Portland, Ore., to Santa Fe, N.M., Scottsdale, Ariz., Gulf Shores and south Florida to Portland, Maine.

The popularity of recreational vehicles resorts has been noticed in local city halls, and planners said with home and condo sales badly slumping, it's not surprising to see developers trying something new.

Some recreational vehicle resorts – which are built faster and torn down easier than homes, shopping centers or condos, may even be an intermediate use until land values rise again.

"I kind of question whether we have too many on the market," said Orange Beach Community Development Director Jim Lawson.

He noted the lifestyle is one of leisurely pursuit, and the lots – not to mention the vehicles – are expensive. "You just wonder how many people like that there are," Lawson said.

The recreational vehicle parks in Gulf Shores are numerous but generally the traditional type in which travelers rent space, be it a for a summer weekend or a full season. They also tend to accept a wider range of vehicles, from folding camping trailers to fifth-wheels to motorhomes.

At Gulf State Park, for example, there are more than 500 recently renovated campsites with power, water and sewer hookups. In the coming weeks those spots will fill with flocks of seasonal residents from the North.