

Bring Your Clubs. And the Kids.

Golf communities often tend to cater to adults. Here are some tips for finding ones that embrace families.



Jared Andrew Schorr

While retirees are traditionally the primary buyers of properties in residential golf communities, after Covid-19 and even in the few years leading up to the pandemic, a growing number of families with school-age children may also have been moving in.

Scott Kauffman, an analyst specializing in global golf developments, said that while it was too soon to have hard data, his frequent conversations with golf community owners worldwide indicated that property sales to families had been brisk during the pandemic.

“Golf communities are low density with lots of open space and offer security with their gated settings,” he said. “The trust in them as safe environments has never been more valuable.”

David Brown, a golf real estate broker with Downing-Frye Realty in Naples, Fla., said he had sold 15 golf community houses in his area since April to families; by this time last year, that number was under 10.

“Residential living has completely changed because of Covid,” he said. “More people are working remotely, schools are virtual and there’s more freedom of where you need to be located. In addition to the security aspect, golf communities are attractive places to live because they have amenities similar to what you’d find at a resort hotel.”

The golf communities of Silo Ridge Field Club in New York, Timbers Kauai Ocean Club & Residences in Hawaii, and Rosewood Bermuda have all had a spurt of property sales to families in the last few months, press representatives for the properties said.

Here is advice on buying property in a golf community that welcomes families.

Are the amenities and activities kid-friendly?

While many golf communities have appealing amenities such as a pool, gym, spa and tennis center, not all welcome children. Ideally, Mr. Brown said, the community you buy in should have separate areas for children, such as a playroom, video game arcade, library and family pool. Many newer communities stand out for their lavish amenities for children, such as a pool with waterslides, a lazy river and a rock-climbing wall. Silo Ridge has a new 11,000-square-foot barn with child-size furniture, arcade games, a bowling alley, a movie theater, and an arts and crafts room.



Silo Ridge Field Club in New York has an 11,000-square-foot barn with child-size furniture. Silo Ridge Field Club

If a community does not have designated areas for children, find out if there are any restrictions as to when children and teenagers have access to amenities such as locker rooms, tennis courts and pools. “Some clubs, particularly ones where the demographic skews older, have kids’ off-limits hours, which could be during a time when you and your kids want to use them,” Mr. Brown said.

In addition to amenities, having a lineup of family- or children-specific activities is a factor to consider. Newer golf communities offer options such as nature camps, tennis and golf academies, and family cooking classes. Lyford Cay in Nassau, the Bahamas, has water sports for children, including sailing, and at Rosewood Mayakoba, in Riviera Maya, Mexico, which has a residential component, children 15-and-under can sign up for free golf lessons.

Another point to note: Does the club have rooms or other spaces that you can rent out for family events? Some clubs are OK with loud noise and children’s celebrations; others aren’t.

Consider the dining options.

Some communities are limited in their dining options and may have only a high-end farm-to-table restaurant or one that requires jackets. These may be suitable choices for you, but less than ideal for your children. “In my experience as a mother and from talking to our clients, I find that kids prefer laid-back settings when it comes to meals,” said Caroline MacDonald, the vice president of sales and marketing for Rosewood Hotel Group, which has four global golf residential resorts.

While many golf communities have a signature restaurant that tends to be upscale, Ms. McDonald encouraged buyers to find ones with a choice of dining, such as a grab-and-go and casual dining that serves familiar fare such as burgers, pastas and tacos. Children’s menus are a good sign of a family-oriented environment.



The Timbers Kauai Ocean Club & Residences in Hawaii. Timbers Kauai

Does the community have parks and walking and biking paths?

A family-friendly community should have at least one green space and playground with swing sets, basketball courts and open spaces where children can run around, said George Damianos, the president and managing broker of the Bahamas-based Damianos Sotheby's International Realty and a golf development specialist. Walking and biking paths are another plus and a common feature in communities that were built within the last five years.

“One of the biggest reasons families like golf communities is the acres and acres of vast outdoor space they can enjoy,” Mr. Damianos said. “A setting with too many buildings and not enough of a natural landscape is not what I would recommend for a family.”

Know the rules and restrictions of the homeowners' association.

Any community home buyer — whether the purchase is in a golf development or not — is beholden to the rules and restrictions of its homeowners' association, some of which may not be ideal for families. The association could prohibit basketball hoops on driveways, for instance, or not allow volleyball and badminton nets or swing sets on lawns. Bake sales and lemonade stands may also be off limits, in addition to solicitation. That means that children cannot knock on doors to sell products for their after-school clubs or charities.

Find out about the security and safety.

Ms. MacDonald said that safety was paramount in any family-friendly development. In addition to a security gate where visitors have their identity verified and receive a pass to enter, the community should have security guards who regularly patrol the public spaces. You can find out about security protocols at the sales office or the homeowners' association.

Lifeguards at the pool and beach are another essential part of safety. Some high-end communities, Mr. Damianos said, have minders at playgrounds who watch young children for short periods of time, such as while their parents are finishing a meal.

Who lives in the community, and what are the employees like?

Buyers should take into account a community's demographics. "You want to know who lives there and what kind of attitude they have toward kids and families," Mr. Brown said. Ask a local real estate broker who is familiar with your community as well as board members of the homeowners' association, the membership director for golf and other activity programs, and the social coordinator.

Ms. MacDonald said a development's staff was also important to making a buying decision. Research how long they've been there. In communities with a close-knit culture, the employees are often longtime staff members and have friendly relationships with residents.

She suggested staying for a night or a weekend in your prospective community (many offer short-term paid stays for interested buyers) to get a feel for who the employees and residents are.

"These people will be your neighbors or teaching your kids lessons and bringing them their meals," she said. "They're regulars in your life, and you want them to embrace your family."