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Coveney Must grasp the Nettle of a Flawed Housing Report

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Beyond the beach

It used to be simple. A kidney-shaped private pool, a beach and a round of golf a stroll away, a tennis court and a Swedish massage at the local health club were considered the luxurious perks of owning a second home abroad. But then came all the other must-haves: concierge and butler services, infinity saltwater pools and fancy cosmetic treatments on tap (including the odd sneaky Botox tweak) at an on-site branded spa.

Today — led by ultra-wealthy buyers, of course — we are making our holiday homes work even harder. These sleek mansions of leisure are no longer places where we simply unwind and recharge. Yes, size still matters: the more square footage the better, and starchitect-designed trophy homes with features such as air-filtration systems and museum-standard art-hanging pulley assemblies are high on wanted lists.

Yet more important than tangible treats such as the helipad or stabling for the palominos are features that will add a frisson to your Instagram feed: it's all about adventure and experience rather than sheer excess, whatever your budget.

"We are increasingly finding that multiple buyers are looking for so much more than just a holiday home," says Sergio Greco, sales manager at Italy Sotheby's International Realty. "Any holiday destination can offer a beach or a luxury spa within its resort, but a property with a special something — whether it's an experience that is truly indulgent or particularly exciting — gives its owner extra kudos among their peers. Buyers want a home where they can create unforgettable experiences with their friends and family."

Canny developers and one-off housebuilders are now far more ambitious in their offerings — whether in terms of cutting-edge design or of assessing unique possibilities beyond just the beach, the golf course and fine dining — and are luring prospective purchasers to road-test them.

"We call these 'destination experiences', and they are becoming increasingly important," says Robert Green, the managing director of Sphere Estates.

"Expert guides help to prepare bespoke itineraries, make restaurant reservations or offer guided tours. The aim is to sell the destination first, so the buyer understands the benefits of owning a home there."

Buyers at a development of 15 villas in the IS Molas golf resort, on the southwest coast of Sardinia, can start the day



The beach, golf, a pool and a spa don't cut it any more. The latest ultra-luxe holiday homes are all about unique, unforgettable experiences, says Emma Wells

€420,000

MOROCCO When you tire of your three-bedroom villa with private pool terrace at L'Amandier, in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains, you can seek out the hotel's Berber guide for a hike or enjoy an al fresco yoga session. lamandierhotel.com

with a round of golf on one of the most technically challenging courses in the Mediterranean, before a spot of waterskiing or a scenic cycle through 300 acres of wild private parkland, simultaneously genning up on the native flora and fauna. They can follow all this with a visit to a Bronze Age burial site — which will tick the culture box. Organically shaped two-bedroom villas here start at €2.15m (00 39 028 707 8300, sothebysrealty.com).

Owners of the Residences at Four Seasons Chiang Mai, in Thailand, can take this a step further. When they need to escape their two- or four-bedroom homes, which have private pavilions and luxury amenities on tap, as well as use of a 65ft infinity-edge pool, they can head to the local market with the resort's master chefs to choose fresh ingredients, then return to the kitchen to learn to cook Thai

dishes that will dazzle their friends at home. (Artisan tableware can be shipped directly to their kitchen, naturally.)

Once they've perfected their *khao soi*, they can borrow a traditional *mor hom* costume and spend a morning with local farmers, learning how rice is cultivated and harvested. Residences start at about €3.5m (00 66 22 0779 1321, residences-chiangmai.com).

If sampling Michelin-starred snacks is more your idea of a holiday, there are plenty of options. Buyers of the vast range of homes at the pink-hued Ritz-Carlton Abama resort, in Guía de Isora, Tenerife, get good reductions if they want to use the five-star hotel's amenities, which include two Michelin-starred eateries: MB, the signature restaurant of the celebrated Basque chef Martin Berasategui; and Kabuki, which serves Japanese fusion cuisine. Swish one-bedroom "terrace

apartments" with views of the Atlantic start at €600,000 (00 44 20 3617 1360, sphereestates.com).

Other big overseas buying trends include conservation — especially for those with deep pockets. Having bought Blackadore Caye, off the coast of Belize, with plans to create an eco-resort, the Oscar-winning actor and heart-throb Leonardo Di Caprio is leading a new wave of environmentalists, preservationists — and plain old tree-huggers.

If you have a fantastic \$100m to spare, Islas Cayonetas, a trio of islands a 30-minute helicopter ride from Panama City, is for sale.

A haven for endangered sea turtles and a dozen species of birds and trees that are no longer found in mainland Panama, it has 19 miles of coastline and 50 unspoiled white-sand beaches (00 1 310 858 5476, christiesrealestate.com).



€6.9m

FRENCH POLYNESIA Make like Marlon Brando and buy a pristine Pacific atoll. Unesco-protected Taiaro, 5km in diameter, was visited by Charles Darwin, and has a two-room house.

00 494 033 8989, vladi-private-islands.de



From €2.15m

SARDINIA Dramatic scenery and the ancient Nuragic culture inspired the contemporary designs at the IS Molas golf resort, in the southwest of the island.

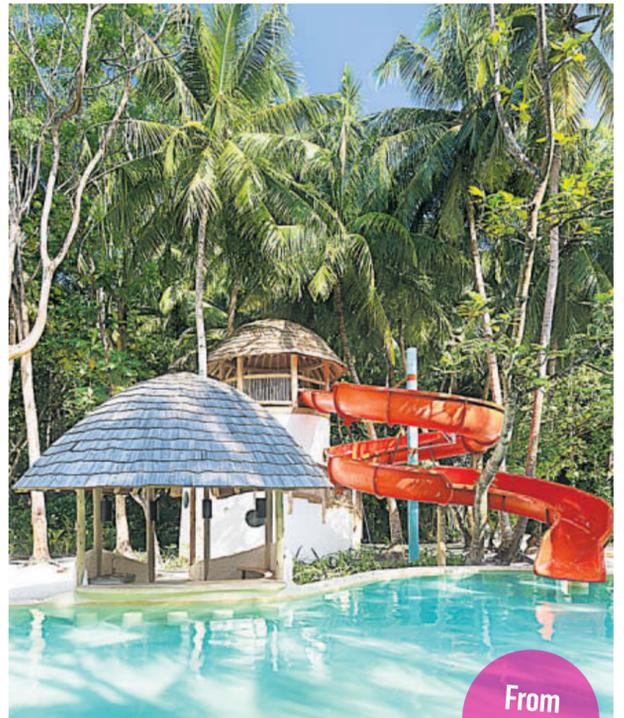
00 39 028 707 8300; sothebysrealty.com



From \$750,000

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC At this resort in Azua, owners get a vineyard thrown in, and can use the two helipads. Work is due to start on custom-built two- and three-bedroom villas.

7thheavenproperties.com



From \$3.5m

MALDIVES A new children's den area at the ultraluxe Soneva Fushi resort, on Kunfunadhoo island, is as plush as the one- to nine-bedroom villas for sale. There's a pirate ship, two swimming pools, a mocktail bar, cinema, library and music room, plus cookery classes for all the family. sphereestates.com



NZ\$1.49m

NEW ZEALAND With kayaking, whitewater rafting and fly-fishing on the doorstep, this four-bedroom retreat near Murchison, on South Island, is a launch pad to adventure.

00 64 21 152 8195, nzsothebysrealty.com



From €900,000

ALGARVE The Michelin-starred chef Albano Lourenco runs the Vistas restaurant at the Monte Rei resort. Homes go on sale in September and are due for completion in late 2018.

00 351 281 950950, monte-rei.com



\$5m

FLORIDA Pretensions to power? This is the off-grid Keewaydin Island retreat owned by members of the US vice-president Joe Biden's family. Set in five acres between Naples and Marco Island, the six-bedroom house has the ultimate in security systems. 00 49 40 338989, vladi-private-islands.de

VLADI PRIVATE ISLANDS; MARK LUSCOMBE-WHITE

Coveney must grasp the nettle of a flawed housing report

On June 17, the Oireachtas committee on housing and homelessness published its report after convening in April. It interviewed 38 witnesses and received about 82 submissions from the public and various bodies.

These reports do not write themselves, so the committee must be commended for its efforts. Indeed, as I suspect many of its members did not appreciate the infinite complexities of housing, apart from the normal personal experiences, what they have read and constituents' queries. They did well to get their heads around some of the main issues involved. The final report has some good recommendations but it misses some important issues.

It also comes across as a compromise between the different interests and points of view on the committee. Reports that are designed by committee tend to lack a unifying set of recommendations and, indeed, deputy Ruth Coppinger refused to sign off on the report, saying

that it did not go far enough. In fact, "not going far enough" would also be my assessment of the report.

Its good points include reducing the time it takes to get planning permission, from planning application to starting work on site, from the current average of 79 weeks. Various bodies blame this on third-party objections, but to remove the right to object would leave us

with a significant democratic deficit.

The report rightly suggests reviewing the tenant purchase scheme that has been operating since January. In general, it means selling local authority homes to tenants at significant discounts. It is not understood why Alan Kelly, the environment minister, introduced it in the face of a social housing shortage, and many committee witnesses

believe the scheme is a bad idea. There are supporters of tenant purchase, but it does not make sense to me to buy homes at market price and then sell them off at huge discounts. The British experience has shown that it has been used as a way for politicians to buy votes.

The report recommended the establishment of a housing procurement agency to help local authorities and approved housing bodies access funding and build social homes. You may wonder why local authorities should need help to build homes as they have been doing it well for decades, but last year they built only 75 houses, so evidently there's a skill or willingness issue that the committee felt should be addressed.

In the rental sector, the report suggests removing the sale of a property as a reason for evicting a tenant. This is a positive step towards creating a proper rental investment market. It also recommends bringing in rent certainty. It is common in many countries for rents to be linked to



The Oireachtas committee's latest report missed some important issues

an index, or for rents to be set by local authorities, so this would be a move towards normalising the dysfunctional private rental sector in Ireland.

Rent certainty is only one side of the coin, however. The other is security of tenure, and one is neutered without the other. The report failed to recommend

removing "use by the landlord or a family member" as a reason for eviction. To me, here the committee threw away a chance to create real security of tenure through suggesting, for example — as I did — that any landlord with more than two or three properties should lose these rights anyway, but gain business

status with full mortgage interest relief and so forth.

There is talk of ordering local authorities to deliver 50,000 social houses, but the fine print says this means acquire, build or refurbish. You can be sure the vast majority will be acquired or refurbished, thus adding little to the housing stock.

There is also no mention of housing quality or "remedy", a serious omission given our poor building quality history. Irish builders must have insurance to protect their workers and the public when building, but not for the house they are building. This is madness and should have been dealt with.

It's now up to Simon Coveney, the housing minister, to take what he will from the report and apply it to his own plan (hopefully he will have a vision for what housing should be like in 2030 or so). There are nettles there for grasping to increase both our housing and rental sectors, and these involve a little bit of pain — as nettles do — but it will be worth it in the end.

LORCAN SIRR
ON THE HOME FRONT

