

# Wilderness property market booms despite the gloom

Wilderness, a picturesque Garden Route enclave in the Western Cape, continues to buck the broader property market trend in the country as it delivers significant growth for sellers, with demand from buyers outstripping supply.



Source: The Wilderness Hotel.

“We are experiencing unprecedented levels of activity in the area, despite higher interest rates and economic conditions,” explains Madelyn Kohler, principal property practitioner for Jawitz Properties in the Wilderness and Sedgefield areas.

According to Kohler, the region remains a seller’s market, whereas property markets in other provinces typically favour buyers in the current environment.

“Many properties in Wilderness are selling within two weeks of listing, with a mix of buyers driving the activity.”

Data from Lightstone indicates that 59% of housing sales in the Western Cape are buyers from Gauteng, with the semi-gratification trend also playing out in Wilderness.

“We are witnessing an interesting demographic shift in the region, with buyers in the 36-49 years-old middle-aged group making up a higher proportion (26%) of buyers than before.”

However, the mature 50-64 age category still makes up the largest proportion of recent buyers in the region (41%),

according to Lightstone data.

The bulk of sellers (39%) in the region are the older 65+ pensioner demographic, who are using the favourable market to achieve record prices on their properties and retire to nearby George, Hartenbos and Mossel Bay.

“The semi-gration trend has also driven a significant shift from seasonal to permanent residents in the town, with the proportion of full-time residents increasing from 33% to 80%,” elaborates Kohler.

“While the number of 'swallows' who purchase summer holiday homes in the town is on the decline, we have had numerous international buyers snap up prime properties in recent months due to the weakened rand, with many buying properties unsighted.”

## Property transaction surge

Overall, 42 property transactions took place in Wilderness in the three months between February and April 2023, with a total of 152 over the 12 months between May 2022 and April 2023.

This trend speaks to the confidence that buyers have in the broader region and the town itself, suggests Kohler.



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“The town is situated in a well-run municipality compared to other areas in the region, with adequate levels of service delivery. The provincial government is also committed to incorporating renewable energy sources into the grid to ease the impact of load shedding on residents and businesses in the region, which is attractive to buyers,” explains Kohler.

The other factors drawing buyers to Wilderness include the tranquil atmosphere in the charming coastal town, which many refer to as a village, coupled with its idyllic setting. Nestled between the Outeniqua Mountains and the Indian Ocean, Wilderness is located along the major route that connects George with Knysna. Its proximity to George means schools, hospitals, and other amenities are also easily accessible.

## Tranquil oasis amidst city life

The town itself has a relaxed and laid-back ambience, offering a peaceful retreat for residents and visitors looking for a break from the hustle and bustle of city life.

“The main street is lined with quaint local restaurants and cafes that offer a variety of delicious cuisine, which has helped to add an important social element to new residents and attracts many visitors from George and Knysna over weekends,” adds Kohler.

“Importantly, we have active and engaged citizens who take pride in their town. Wilderness is safe, and it is clean. There are no beggars or vagrants, and there is zero tolerance for crime with a single provider of security services in the area.”

The natural beauty of the area is another major drawcard. Wilderness boasts a stunning coastline that stretches approximately 18km, offering pristine beaches to residents and visitors.

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Surrounded by lush forests, lakes, and rivers within the Wilderness National Park, a protected nature reserve that includes diverse ecosystems, including indigenous forests, wetlands, and estuaries, the area is popular with those looking for an active or adventurous outdoor lifestyle.

“The surrounding forests offer hiking, trail running and mountain biking trails, with numerous opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. The nearby Wilderness Lagoon is also a haven for birdwatchers and nature photographers,” continues Kohler.

## **Sustainable demand and appreciating values**

These lifestyle factors, coupled with limited stock as there are no new developments planned for the area, will likely sustain demand and continue to drive house-price growth in the town, believes Kohler.

“Some sellers have doubled their investment over as little as three years with purchases in Wilderness,” affirms Kohler.

“There is a big demand for larger properties such as smallholdings where we have seen as much as a 30% increase in sales. Prime positions, ocean views, and good security are also key selling points, but we are also seeing that properties with off-grid electricity generation are selling for up to 7% more,” she continues.

While many property sales are cash transactions, bond approvals are usually easy to obtain, even for properties in higher price brackets.

“We are delighted to have a dominant presence in this vibrant sector of the robust Western Cape property market, with a team of experienced, dedicated and passionate property experts who are helping sellers achieve their price expectations while making real-estate dreams come true for buyers,” says Russell Berkman, franchise director at Jawitz Properties.

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