

The Observer SUNDAY 15 JUNE 2008

# PROPERTY

The Observer | Property  
15.06.08

INTERNATIONAL | 7

## Newfoundland log cabin?

Beautiful, remote and offering a quirky line in hospitality, the island of Newfoundland has the British firmly in its sights. **Jon Robins** tours the hot tubs and the breathtaking views

**F**lying into Deer Lake airport in Newfoundland, you are struck by the remoteness of this Canadian island, which is as big as Japan, covering 400,000 square miles but with a population of only 500,000. First impressions from the plane, descending in the early evening, are of a bleak fir-clad landscape with isolated clusters of houses on the banks of frozen rivers and lakes. It seems an unlikely candidate for the next property hotspot.

But Brits abroad are nothing if not pioneering. Daniel and Kate Gray recall their first journey to Newfoundland. 'The flight from Gatwick should be about five hours, but because of a huge snow storm we couldn't land at Deer Lake. So we circled,' Daniel says. 'Their plane ran out of fuel and was diverted to Stephenville. We landed and there were no lights on. We watched a guy leave his house, jump in his car, drive down the street, arrive at the terminal building, flick on all the lights, run out to the plane with a ladder and gas it up,' Daniel recalls. 'Pilot paid with Amex and off we went again.'

The couple landed in Deer Lake 11 hours after leaving the UK. During their flight, a metre of snow had fallen. The coach that picked them up came equipped with a snow plough to clear a path down the usually two-lane Trans-Canadian Highway.

'All the staff at the resort had been unable to get home, so stayed overnight,' says Daniel. 'There was an amazing buzz and atmosphere when we arrived. We woke up the next morning to so much snow we had to dig it away from the front door to get out, and instantly fell in love with the place.'

Daniel and Kate are in the first wave of Brits to buy in Newfoundland. They bought at the Humber Valley Resort at the northern end of Deer Lake, which is about a mile wide and 25 miles long, half an hour's drive from the Gros Morne National Park, a Unesco World Heritage site, and 10 minutes from the Marble



Deer Lake (top), 25 miles long, is gateway to world heritage site Gros Morne national park. At the lake's northern end the Humber Valley resort offers gorgeous timber-framed homes such as this one at Birch Creek (left), while further down the coast is the Bay of Islands development (above).

Mountain ski resort. Humber Valley was the first development to target the international property market and opened in 2002. There are 200 lakeside units on a site which has an 18-hole award-winning golf course threading through it. A total of 1,000 are planned. Half the properties have been snapped up by UK buyers.

You are in easy reach of outdoor pursuits including kayaking, climbing, sailing and fishing. In the summer, temperatures reach 25C and in the winters there is snowmobiling, skiing and dog sledding.

The Grays spent \$800,000 (\$350,000 for land and \$450,000 for construction)

on their five-bed resort chalet complete with sauna, two decks and hot tub. It stands on 1.5 acres, although, as they point out, Newfies don't go in for fences. If you do not want to buy on such a big development, there is the Marble View Estates which has 20 waterfront chalets in 2.5 acre plots. The price for plot and build range from \$492,000 to \$793,000.

Another plus is that buyers have the choice of selecting from one of six chalet designs by Canadian company Riverbend Log Homes. The company specialises in traditional Canadian log cabins of the type recently featured on the BBC prop-

erty programme *Under the Hammer*.

You don't have to realise your inner Grizzly Adams to enjoy these unique homes, nor are you likely to develop cabin fever – these rot-resistant white cedar-framed structures are big. One of two chalets already built on the site is 5,400 sq ft and features a 16-ft fireplace, whirlpool bath, geothermal heat pumps and a sound system with six listening zones.

Further down the coast (but still within 40 minutes of Deer Lake airport) is the Bay of Islands development, which will feature 60 chalets on 0.3-acre plots, six 22-unit condos and 20 estate homes

on one-acre plots. The condos start at \$245,000 and the chalets at \$231,000. The coastal walk along the craggy cliff has amazing views over islands that dot the bay, and behind are the Blomido mountains where the more adventurous go 'cat skiing' (hailed up virgin mountains by a converted Caterpillar tractor). The long-term plans are for a 24-room hotel and a 25-slip marina.

Are the Newfies looking forward to this Brit invasion? 'I would not want to see the area overdeveloped, because then we are creating what the British or European people are trying to get away from: overcrowding and congestion – which is something that we as a people are not used to,' says Arch Mitchell, mayor of Frenchman's Cove (population 250), close to the Bay of Islands development.

'We like to enjoy the scenery and the fact that we can still walk the beaches on a sunny day, have a beach fire on a fine evening and watch the sun go down and generally feel that you are not infringing on someone else's property.'

He describes developments like Bay of Islands as 'generally good for the local economies', but adds: 'The downside is that these developments drive property values much higher, with documented

**'We woke up to so much snow we had to dig our way out, and instantly fell in love with the place'**

cases in Nova Scotia where local people could no longer afford the taxes and were literally driven off their land that had been in the families for generations.'

The quirky hospitality of the Newfies is a quality that is much noted by Brits. The local accent is a transatlantic hybrid somewhere between Ireland and Bristol (lots of 'oot' and 'aboot'). And Newfoundland has its own time zone (it's 1.5 hours ahead of Eastern time). Then there is a strange rite of passage for tourists who are 'screeched in' or made honorary Newfies, which, from hazy recollection, seemed to comprise donning a load of Jamaican rum (or 'screech') and then kissing a cold fish on the lips.

Daniel and Kate Gray certainly believe that they have found somewhere unique. 'How many places do you know where many leave their car keys in the ignition?' Daniel muses. 'Where you come home and the UPS delivery guy has left your parcel on the table in your kitchen?'