

In the shade of the live oaks



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While many Johns Island homes will fetch a hefty price, there are a few that still maintain the “under \$500,000” status.

Johns Island remains a nature-populated paradise

BY LISA IANNUCCI

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If you desire to buy a home where you can relax around an incredible amount of beautiful nature, you might think living on a private island would be a dream come true. Fortunately, you don't even need to leave South Carolina to find your oasis. Johns Island could be the perfect place to call home.

Johns Island is the largest island in

South Carolina at 84 square miles and the fourth largest island in the eastern United States (in case you're wondering, the only islands bigger than it are Long Island, Mount Desert Island and Martha's Vineyard). Johns Island is located less than a half-hour from downtown Charleston.



Brown

“There's a lot to offer for those who want to live on Johns Island because it's close to downtown Charleston, but it still has its own feel and, of course, its own separate beach,” says Nishikwa Brown, a Realtor with Excel Real Estate. Beachwalker County Park is Johns Island's public beach. “One of its main features are the trees that have been there for thousands of years and are actually a tourist attraction.”

One such tree-themed attraction is Angel Oak Park, home to the Angel

Oak, considered the largest live oak tree on this side of the Mississippi River. It's approximately 300 to 400 years old.

In addition to the island's beauty, it is also home to many wildlife species, including deer, alligators, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, otters and wild hogs. For bird-watching enthusiasts, bald eagles, osprey, wild turkeys, owls, hawks, herons, egrets, and ducks are just a few of the local fowl you can spot if you're patient enough.

But there's more to living on Johns Island than being an animal lover and a tree admirer.

Perfect for a short stay or a lifetime

"If you are looking to retire or want a vacation home on Johns Island, there are a lot of golf courses, resorts, and restaurants," said Brown. "It produces a relaxing outdoor adventure. Everything on the island is there for you to relax."

Indeed, there are many activities to enjoy without even having to leave the island. Trophy Lakes offers slalom water skiing, a kid's water park, and an 18-hole disc golf course, while avid golfers can enjoy all that the Kiawah Island Golf Resort has to offer with their stunning courses that provide a breath-taking setting to enjoy a relaxing game.



Harrington Pam Harrington, owner of Pam Harrington Exclusives, says that if you are searching for a home surrounded by quiet, Johns Island might be for you. "If you don't want to be next door to your neighbor or if you say, 'I don't want to see anybody, I don't want to hear anybody, I just want to my little life and have a horse, some chickens and access to water,' Johns Island is still a viable area."

What about inventory?

For buyers who are looking for a quiet life surrounded by the wilds of Johns Island, Realtors encourage a quick decision. "The market is still very hot, and there's very little inventory," says Harrington.

"Younger buyers and newcomers are also being priced out of the market at the moment," Brown adds.

While there may be some affordable homes in the \$300,000 range, they are few and far between.

"Then you can go into more of a specialty market and find homes on the island that are in deep water so that you can have a big boat," says Harrington. "These homes cost anywhere from \$3 million up to \$10 million."

The current Charleston market is undoubtedly competitive, according to Brown.

"Newcomers are being pushed to the



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Johns Island offers gorgeous marsh views.

outskirts of Charleston to Summer-ville," she says. "We have an influx of new people relocating here in the city trying to purchase homes, but there are people who were born and raised here that are being pushed out of the major areas like downtown Charleston."

Finding a dream home on Johns Island is not for the faint of heart and requires buyers to move quickly when something becomes available. Seth Stisher, broker associate with Carolina One Real Estate, says there are only 123 listings available on John's Island, with a few located in Kiawah Island, a luxury beach resort located on one of the barrier islands at the end of Johns Island. "In comparison, we were probably at least one-and-a-half times that pre-pandemic. We are starving for inventory."

Thankfully, there appears to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

Brown says the lack of inventory was exacerbated by the higher interest rates affecting the market last year.

"Sellers do not really have anywhere to go because they probably have a lower 2% — 3% interest rate, so buying another home would be more expensive," she notes. "As a result, homeowners were staying put, but now that interest rates have dropped a little bit, we're seeing a little more inventory on the market."

Stisher expects things to improve in the next couple of months.

"Things slowdown from Thanksgiving through New Year's and then pick up again about the first week in March," he says. "It's still a seller's market, but not to the point where they can list the property at any price."

The bidding wars are also over.

"If a house comes on the market, to be quite frank, you don't have ten buyers," says Harrington. "You have maybe one buyer or two buyers, but it's not that frantic, where you got ten offers all at the same time. So, a little bit of that fast, hot market has slowed a bit mainly

because of interest rates, particularly in the under a million bucks market."

Traffic remains a roadblock

What Johns Island isn't starving for is people interested in moving to the area. According to the Charleston County Economic Development, more than 30 people are moving to the Charleston region *every day*. With limited listings, new construction has become a necessity.

"The residents do not like hearing that the island is going to be saturated with new residential construction, but with the demand we have of new residents, the only way to keep up is to build more," says Stisher.

For example, Pulte Homes is currently building Sea Island Preserve, a gated community with approximately 400 oversized homesites. "They range anywhere from, say, \$500,000 up to around \$800,000," explains Harrington.

Also, Lennar Homes paid \$18 million last year for about 300 acres near Charleston Executive Airport with the



Stisher

mainstory

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original proposal for 430 homes, with slightly more than half of the tract left as open space.

Another thing to note about Johns Island is the scarcity of roads leading in and out of the island, which can result in some nasty traffic, explains Stisher.

“People were saying ‘don’t cut down those trees to create roads,’ but now we’ve outgrown the roads,” he says. “Johns Island has a main four-lane highway that goes down to three lanes because of the trees and then back up to four lanes. I leave my house and drive a two-lane road, and it takes 20 minutes to travel one mile.”

Stisher also explains that 526 is a semi-circle loop around downtown Charleston.

“There is a plan to extend the end of that to loop onto Johns Island and then back into town. “It would create a better ability to get out to the Island that’s been in the works for 20 years, but it comes with a huge price tag, and they still aren’t ready to start working on it.”

According to reports, Charleston County received an estimate of the project in 2022 of \$1.78 billion.

However, if you can stomach the daily traffic, the roads through Johns Island are reminiscent of a sprawling southern avenue shaded with ancient live oaks.

There certainly isn’t a more beautiful commute, even if you find yourself sitting still sometimes.

A diamond in the rough

Stisher believes there will be some improvement as the market heads toward spring but calls new construction “the weak link.”

“If more people are putting their properties on the market because we have such an influx of people, mathematically those people are also buying in the same market,” he said. “So, every seller creates additional demand because that seller is buying a home as well.”

But if you can find a home, living on Johns Island is a pleasure. Harrington says she’s fortunate to live by Kiawah Island.

“Which, of course, gives you the ocean and private clubs,” she explains. “It’s just a special place with special people, many of whom weren’t born and raised here, but we ended up with a diverse group of intellect and art, and it’s a fun place to be.”



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For water-sport enthusiasts, there are tons of opportunities for boating, fishing and other aqua-based activities in Johns Island.



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