

# The New York Times

Real Estate

AWAY

## Away, but Not Too Far



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Michael Isaacson, left, and Luis Nobrega at their Rockaway Park condo.

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IT'S a summer Friday at 6 p.m., and all across the country, city residents lucky enough to have a weekend home are stuck in traffic trying to reach their longed-for destination. New Yorkers inch along the Long Island Expressway, the promise of beach breezes dampening their despair over the bumper-to-bumper vista. In Minneapolis, eager weekend fishermen crawl upcountry to their lake homes. And Houstonians scan the horizon for the Texas Hill Country in search of barbecue solace.

But a few savvy weekenders, from Manhattan to Vermont to Miami to Los Angeles, have figured out how to have their weekends and enjoy their Friday evenings too. They have bought weekend homes just a few miles from where they live.

It seems logical, right? After all, many American towns and cities have magnificent waterfronts that tourists fly hours to visit. Los Angeles has the Pacific. Miami has South Beach. And New York City has many beaches, with the same sand as the Hamptons, but only a subway ride away. Yet while there are no statistics on the phenomenon, calls to real estate brokers around the country suggest that it's the rare city dweller who chooses a second home close to a primary residence. Among those unusual weekenders are Michael

Isaacson, 40, and Luis Nobrega, 38, who on most Fridays trade their two-bedroom rental in Manhattan for a two-bedroom oceanfront condo with a roof deck that has ocean-to-city views — in the Shore Front development in Queens.

Their condo, which they bought two years ago at Shore Front Parkway and Beach 101st Street in the Rockaway Park section, is on Rockaway Beach, once known as “the poor man’s Riviera” because the subway made it accessible to working-class city dwellers.

“I found out about it from my assistant, who saw the condominiums under construction,” said Mr. Isaacson, a senior vice president of finance for an entertainment company. “We weren’t familiar with the area and were pleasantly surprised when we went out there. It seemed so much easier to get to than the places we’d rented or stayed in at Fire Island and the Hamptons.”

Whether they arrive by car or take the A train, they say, they can leave Manhattan and be swimming in the Atlantic in little more than an hour. And the possibility of a subway commute makes it possible for one of them to use the car and for the other to easily follow the next day, if necessary.

Their friends come out to their beach condo frequently on weekends. “Our friends have been really surprised by this place — no one expects it to be so beautiful,” Mr. Isaacson said. “We had a retirement party for my mother a couple of weeks ago. Her generation used to spend a lot of time out here as kids, before it fell into rough times. Many of her friends hadn’t been back since, and they were thrilled to see how it was coming back again.”

Parts of the Rockaways began a slow descent into decrepitude after World War II, when the small-scale bungalows and houses that had attracted city residents for decades were joined by large public housing projects. But starting with some residential developments in the Arverne section, in 2002, the area has begun to experience a revival.

Since the Rockaways lack the nightlife of the Hamptons or Fire Island, the couple and their friends have dinners on the roof and pass peaceful afternoons on the broad beach out front.

Dana Griffin, the sales director for the 21-unit Shore Front, as well as the 78-unit Belle Shores development in Rockaway Park, which is still under construction, said that most of her buyers were full-time residents. But Ms. Griffin said she sensed an increased interest among city dwellers in buying second homes on the city beach.

The two- to three-bedroom, 980- to 1,750-square-foot apartments in Belle Shores are priced from \$440,000 to \$990,000. Prices at Shore Front started at \$300,000 two years ago; the last unit was recently sold for about \$550,000, she said.

“People find it hard to believe,” she said, “that you can have this kind of lifestyle in the middle of New York City.”