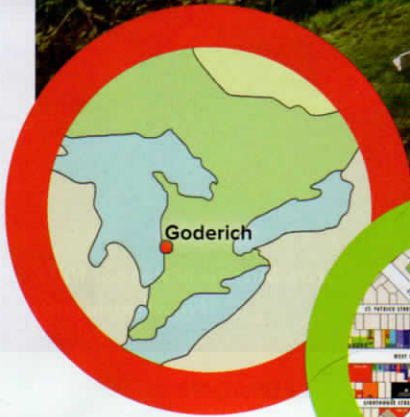


retirement destinations

Finding a Home in

By Wendy Haaf

Goderich, ON



Street plan.

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hen Linda and Bruce Crawford began to think about retiring and leaving their farm north of Hamilton, ON, they had a list: they wanted to be near water and close to a hospital and other amenities, and yet to hold on to the relaxed pace of country living. They found what they were looking for in Huron County (also known as Ontario's West Coast), on the southeastern shore of Lake Huron: Goderich, a beautifully preserved historic town at the mouth of the Maitland River that radiates out from the octagonal park that forms its heart.

The Crawfords were no strangers to the area, having camped farther north along the shore, at MacGregor Point Provincial Park, for more than 20 years. But, Linda Crawford says, "I'd never really known Goderich; we'd always driven through. Now we've gotten to know it, and we've learned that everything we need is here."

For starters, the town (population: 7,600) boasts an excellent hospital, which has a CT machine purchased in part with the proceeds of a community fundraising drive. There's also a medical clinic and a complement of doctors, nurse-practitioners, dentists, and other health professionals. For more complex care, London and Kitchener are each just 1½ hours away by car (or a short flight away) and a number of London specialists hold weekly clinics in Goderich. "I'm very happy with my doctor and everything else," says Gary McGrath, who had a heart attack shortly after moving here. "I'm back to exercising and fly-fishing and doing all sorts of stuff," he says.

Not only is Goderich on the water, but it has a boardwalk and three beaches—two sandy, one pebbly—in the town itself. "I can sit in my garage and stare at the lake," says McGrath, who, like the Crawfords, lives just north of town in an active-adult community called The Bluffs. "You can watch the Great Lakes ships sail in and out of the harbour," says Kathryn McMeekin, who, with her husband, Dennis, moved to the Goderich area from North Bay 36 years ago.



Lighthouse and bike path, with salt mine in the distance.



Rotary Cove Beach.



Boardwalk.

Photos: Town of Goderich.

Aerial from Courtyard Square Park, facing West Street. Right: Yoga at Courtyard Square, in front of Huron County Courthouse.

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The library.



Another big plus: “Home prices here are very, very reasonable,” Dennis says. In August 2016, the median house price was roughly \$254,000. “A \$350,000 home here is very upscale,” he says.

Whatever your preferred outdoor pursuit, you can likely do it here, from kayaking, paddle-boarding, sailing, and fishing to cross-country skiing and bicycling; for those up to the challenge, there’s a triathlon every August. The Maitland Trail Association maintains 120 kilometres

(74.5 miles) of hiking trails, including a section with a former railway bridge from 1907 that offers spectacular views of Goderich Harbour. More than two dozen provincial parks and conservation areas lie within the county, including Point Farms, a park on a bluff just outside of Goderich; the park was once the site of a Victorian resort.

Golfers have an embarrassment of riches from which to choose, starting with the three courses within a 10-minute drive. What’s more, Gary McGrath says, “golf is cheap up here.”

If you’re in the mood for a leisurely drive, you can visit any number of lovely area communities, hamlets, and resort towns, such as Bayfield, Kincardine, Clinton (the home of Alice Munro), and Grand Bend. For indoor exercise enthusiasts, Goderich also has a YMCA and two arenas, as well as the MacKay Centre for Seniors, which offers various fitness classes and a roster of other activities, including an inexpensive weekly meal and social gathering.

The variety of cultural activities available here is similarly rich.

“We have a wonderful library,” says Gayle Law, another resident at The Bluffs; she and her husband, David, relocated to Goderich from Toronto in 1990. “We also have the Blyth Festival nearby, which offers professional theatre every summer.” Two galleries, including a co-op run by more than 20 artists, attest to a flourishing arts community. From free weekly outdoor concerts (by Goderich’s Laketown Band, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017) to festivals celebrating Celtic roots and blues music, “every week there’s something happening in the area,” Gayle Law says.

For history buffs, Goderich is a candy store, with its artisanal blacksmiths, century homes, historic walking tours, and four museums, including Huron Historic Gaol and Sky Harbour Gallery, a museum at the airport; during the Second World War, Goderich Airport, known unofficially as Sky Harbour Airport, was home to No. 12 Elementary Flying Training School, where many Commonwealth pilots earned their wings. The town is also the site of a salt mine reputed to be the world’s largest.

Goderich’s downtown heritage district is home to 200 unique shops, such as Culbert’s Bakery, which has operated for more than 130 years, and Shanahan’s Quality Meats, as well as weekend flea and farmers’ markets. (If you can’t find what you’re looking for there or in one of the local chain outlets, several mid-sized cities and the Sarnia-Port Huron border crossing into the United States are within a 1½-hour drive.)

As the most productive agricultural county in Ontario, Huron County has become a culinary destination, too, with numerous fine restaurants, such as Benmiller Inn & Spa’s Ivey Dining Room—the inn is located in a 19th-century mill—and Beach Street Station restaurant, which is in a restored CP Railway station. A member-based “Taste of Huron” program highlights local food, farms, craft breweries, and wineries.

“There’s always something for us to do here; we love it,” Kathryn McMeekin says. Linda Crawford is equally enthusiastic: “I’m really happy. I can’t say that enough.”

Photos: Town of Goderich.