

Artificial Lagoons Offer a Different Kind of Waterfront Living

Similar to giant swimming pools, these bodies of water are attractive to prospective home buyers who may prefer them to oceanfront.



SoLe Mia, a 184-acre mixed-use \$4 billion project in Miami with a seven-acre lagoon, was developed by Turnberry and LeFrak. Crystal Lagoons

By **Shivani Vora**

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Waterfront residential real estate is typically built on or near oceans, lakefronts and rivers. Now, artificial lagoons are another body of water to add to the list.

Shaped like large lakes with beaches, lagoons are generally shallow, compared with a lake or the ocean, and are somewhat similar to giant swimming pools. In the United Arab Emirates, Hawaii, Texas and Florida they are a factor for prospective home buyers who are seeking a waterfront property.

Chris Lim, the president of Christie's International Real Estate, said that lagoons had become an attractive amenity for buyers, particularly for those who were interested in a property that was not within proximity of a natural body of water.

“Man-made lagoons are more common and coveted today than they have ever been, with a growing demand for homes and communities where the lagoon is a key feature,” he said. “Some of these lagoons are located in inland destinations and have redefined what it means to own a waterfront property.” Lagoons offer aesthetic beauty and many recreational opportunities, Mr. Lim said, such as boating, swimming and paddle boarding.

Chris Graham, the founder of the London-based luxury real estate branding consultancy Graham Associates, agreed that lagoons are picturesque and also said that they're desirable because the waters are always clear and calm. “High waves or murky conditions that would typically prevent you from enjoying water sports on or in an ocean or lake aren't a concern with a man-made lagoon,” he said.

The Miami-based company Crystal Lagoons is a leader in building massive artificial lagoons in real estate settings. It bills itself as sustainable and currently has more than 80 projects built globally with another 120 in the works, according to the founder and chief executive Fernando Fischmann, who is also a biochemist and entrepreneur.



Citystars Sharm El Sheikh is a 33-acre artificial crystalline lagoon in Egypt facilitating swimming, kayaking, and sailing. Crystal Lagoons

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Developments that are already open include SoLe Mia in Miami, District One in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and San Alfonso del Mar, in Algarrobo, Chile, on the Pacific Coast.

Mr. Fischmann said that he founded Crystal Lagoons in 2007 with the aim of creating environmentally friendly crystalline bodies of water that were inexpensive to maintain, compared with swimming pools, and anchor a community with their broad range of diversions.

“Many people have the chance to enjoy a beautiful waterfront and idyllic beach life with crystal clear waters and white sand,” he said. “Crystal Lagoons’ patented technology uses 100 times less chemicals and 50 times less energy than your typical swimming pool, so the upkeep isn’t expensive, and the lagoons are constructed with plastic liners, a durable material that lasts for 30 years.”

The company’s lagoons are filled with either freshwater or saltwater and range in depth from eight to 12 feet. They rely on ultrasonic filtration, or sound waves, to move particles and any pollution to the floor, Mr. Fischmann said. An electronic system that uses telemetry reads the temperature and condition of the water to determine what chemicals or other additives it needs to keep it as clear and clean as possible.

Depending on how they’re built, these lagoons can have a positive environmental footprint, according to Wesley Espinosa, the executive director for the Center for Responsible Travel, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that studies the environmental impacts of destinations.

“Artificial or man-made lagoons can threaten native species and habitats and can require significant, unsustainable sourcing of water so their design must be considered to reduce harm to the environment,” he said. “When a careful design is considered, artificial lagoons can promote the development of new natural habitats, support water storage and even potentially mitigate challenges in urban heat islands.”

SoLe Mia, located in North Miami near Oleta River State Park, is a 184-acre mixed-use \$4 billion project developed by Turnberry and LeFrak with a seven-acre freshwater Crystal Lagoon. Called Laguna SoLe, it's the size of 21 Olympic-size pools and has sandy beaches, a shallow area next to a palm-fringed island that's ideal for small children and options for activities such as paddleboarding, kayaking and floating on loungers; a path surrounds the lagoon where residents can walk or go on runs.

The property offers close to 4,400 residential units, a mix of rentals and condominiums. To date, 800 rentals are complete while the condominium project, ONE Park Tower, developed by Turnberry, is slated for a 2026 opening, according to Richard LeFrak, the president and chief executive of LeFrak. Prices for rentals begin at \$2,800 a month, and condominium sales start at \$800,000.

Ramu Gutierrez is a project manager who rents a one-bedroom apartment at SoLe Mia that overlooks the lagoon. She loves the lagoon, she said, because she has access to the water where she lives as opposed to getting her fix by driving to the beach, about 15 minutes away.

"I work from home, and during the week, I take a break at midday by walking around the lagoon. On the weekends, I like paddleboarding, swimming or reading a book on one of the beaches," she said. "I feel like I'm on vacation all the time."

DAMAC Lagoons, in Dubai, is another master-planned development with a Crystal Lagoon — in this case, two — a footprint that's bigger than 141 Olympic-size swimming pools. Spread over more than 45 million square feet, the project is divided into 17 clusters, each of which is inspired by a different Mediterranean locale such as Costa Brava, Nice and Morocco.

The real estate component has more than 9,000 townhouses and villas, according to Mohammad Tahaine, the general manager of projects at DAMAC, with the initial phase scheduled to open in the third quarter of 2024. Townhouses have a modern design, he said, and start in price from approximately \$798,000. Villas have an aesthetic that borrows from their locale and start at around \$4.4 million.

While Crystal Lagoons is a recent example of an artificial body of water, other water features such as lagoons or ponds that have existed for a few decades or longer also have become the showpiece of newer developments.



Timbers Kaua'i Ocean Club & Residences in Hawaii features 38-acres of lagoons for fishing, kayaking and paddle boarding. Timbers Kauai

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, in Naples, Fla., for instance, is being built adjacent to Vanderbilt Lagoon, which was created in the 1950s. The lagoon will serve as a marina for the property and have slips where residents can park their boats, according to Claudine Léger-Wetzel, the vice president of sales and marketing for Stock Development, the company behind the residences.

Nick Rigoni, a Naples resident and real estate broker who is not affiliated with the property, bought a home along Vanderbilt Lagoon and described the setting as “magical.” “I grew up on the beach but like the idea of living on this lagoon because I’m a boater and will have instant access to my boat,” he said. “Plus, the waters are calm, and I get to savor the sunset every day.”

Then there’s Timbers Kauai, open since 2018 and offering 30 acres of lagoons built to offer a natural aesthetic to the resort.

Constructed in the early ’80s, they teem with wildlife such as Hawaiian geese, ducks and guppies, said Greg Spencer, the chief executive of Timbers Resorts. With a starting price of \$3.2 million, 27 of the property’s 47 residences face the lagoon, he said, a vantage point that also gives homeowners vistas of the Ha’upu mountain range in the background.

Dick and Dodi Cole, retirees from Seattle, bought a three-bedroom property at Timbers Kauai that overlooks the lagoons and said that they were a selling point. “We walk around them every day whenever we’re here and see the gorgeous wildlife,” Ms. Cole said.

“Then there’s the views of the mountains and the sunsets we get,” Mr. Cole said. “It’s where we want to live.”

Shivani Vora is a New York City-based travel writer who considers herself a very savvy packer. [More about Shivani Vora](#)