



Second homes: History still walks Williamsburg's picturesque streets

By Larry Olmsted, Special for USA TODAY

Williamsburg is the best-known city in a region of Virginia known as the "Historic Triangle," aptly nicknamed "where America began." The claim is no exaggeration: In 1607, 13 years before the Pilgrims reached the shores of Massachusetts, three ships of pioneers landed in Jamestown, Va., the first permanent English settlement in the USA.

Today, Jamestown Settlement is just one of several historic sites packed into the area. The most popular is Colonial Williamsburg, which occupies the city of Williamsburg's Historic Area. It's a place where life today goes on just as it did more than 200 years ago, down to blacksmiths and farmers dressed for the part, all thanks to the non-profit Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

"The foundation is the hub of our wheel, the centerpiece of the entire community," says Kimber Smith, owner of Prudential McCardle Realty. "A lot of the people looking at second homes have visited it once or twice, or in some cases every year, and just fell in love with the place."

As Smith explains, "Everyone has a checklist of things they look for in a place, in 'quality of life.' We have a lot of things on those lists: small-town feel, a college town, four distinct seasons yet a mild climate. We are just an hour from the Atlantic and 2½ from the nation's capital."

The area is popular, too, with members of the military because of several large bases and stations nearby. Moreover, compared with other desirable second-home destinations, home prices in Williamsburg are reasonable: Seven-figure properties are almost unheard of.

The city of Williamsburg is small, just 9 square miles. Its population is 13,000 — nearly half of whom are students at the College of William & Mary. Much of the city is occupied by the Historic Area and the college, but most locals don't differentiate between "downtown" and the nearby suburbs, just few minutes away.

Until not so long ago, most second homes have been in large, gated golf communities such as Kingsmill and Ford's Colony. But a "new urbanism" has taken hold, an in-town mix of retail, commercial, residential, dining, services and entertainment.

A look at three Williamsburg neighborhoods:

- **Kingsmill.** Occupying nearly 3,000 acres, this resort development (kingsmill.com) is owned by brewery giant Anheuser Busch. In addition to condos, townhouses and single-family houses, Kingsmill includes a hotel, spa, marina, restaurants, golf and tennis. Most townhouses or single-family houses are in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range.

- **New Town.** This 365-acre mixed-use village (newtownwilliamsburg.com), just outside the city, is an ongoing partnership between a construction company and the College of William & Mary's endowment. It includes shopping and dining as well as condos and townhouses, with single-family houses planned. One-bedroom condos start at \$229,000.

- **Downtown.** Port Anne and High Street are the primary options here. Port Anne is a quiet, upscale neighborhood of single-family houses near the college. Expect to pay \$500,000 to \$800,000. High Street (highstreetwilliamsburg.com) is a new mixed-use development similar to New Town, except smaller at about 50 acres and without an office/business park component. Home prices also are similar to those in New Town.