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Purchasers of an executive suite at Aura, by conderel Stoneridge, receive a furniture package worth \$10,000 - and the view from this rooftop patio.

FRILL SEEKERS

When it comes to real estate, the pickings are plenty so are the purchasing incentives, from glitzy trips to vouchers for fabulous furnishings. Who says you can't have it all? *By Lis Van de Ven*

Want to go on a trip? Better yet, how about 10 trips?

If someone were to give you one vacation per year for up to 10 years, visiting destinations around the globe and staying in five-star Ritz-Carlton accommodations, all of it covered, would it be hard to say no?

If you say yes to all that, all you have to do is buy a new suite at the Residences at the Ritz-Carlton. Better do it soon, though, because it's a limited-time deal.

The trip promotion - worth up to \$250,000 - is currently on offer to new suite purchasers at Toronto's Ritz-Carlton, and expires at the end of the year - or once 10 units sell, whichever comes first. Its point is to bring new interest to the building already under construction - and to sweeten the pot for purchasers uncertain about buying in the current economic climate.

After all, for buyers in today's market who have their pick of properties, a little extra can go a long way.

"We decided to do an incentive program [giving buyers the ability to] experience the Ritz-Carlton [lifestyle]," says Tina Amato, vice-president with Baker Real Estate, sales agents for the site, which is

being developed by Cadillac Fairview, Ritz-Carlton and Graywood Developments. The thought was "not just to have a one-year or two-year length of time to go on this Ritz-Carlton vacation, but ... a 10-year period. Imagine living at the Ritz-Carlton, and [vacation at] any Ritz-Carlton anywhere

around the world for 10 years."

While the Ritz's offer may be one of the more valuable incentives available in and around the greater Toronto area, it's certainly not the only one. Many condo and low-rise developers are introducing incentives to their sales programs, looking to find ways to entice new buyers in a slower market. Whether it's cash back, furniture packages, discounts with local vendors or free maintenance fees for a period of time - purchasers have an array of incentives to choose from.

"I think buyers, right now, are just waiting," Ms. Amato says. "But I believe that if a developer introduces a special incentive or a special program,

it will make the purchaser come to the various projects and actually buy."

Today's buyers' market, adds Brian Ellis, sales manager for Medallion Developments, means developers need to work a little harder to get purchasers to their sites. Medallion has chosen a cash

offering as its incentive: up to \$50,000 cash back on the purchase of a home at the developer's Castlefields site in Ajax, Castlestone in Brampton or Thornberry Woods in Maple. The money can be used for home upgrades or can simply be collected by buyers to help with the expenses of moving into a new home. The reaction since the mid-February introduction, says Mr. Ellis, has been "phenomenal." Traffic flow at the sites' sales offices increased from about 10 people a week to about 350 per weekend, he says.

"We are in a recession, Ontario is in a recession. Therefore, things have contracted a bit," Mr. Ellis says. "Builders are realizing that if they want

to move their inventory, and move it quickly, they've got to do a package."

And because of those incentives, he adds, it's a good time for prospective purchasers to buy. Especially since many developers are offering practical deals. Unlike the Ritz - which is selling in the luxury bracket, where the focus tends to be on lifestyle offerings - many of the incentives focus more on decreasing the cost of home ownership.

This, at least, was Andres Paara's reasoning when consulted on Harbour Vista's project, Eleven Bay Street, located in Thornbury north of Collingwood. At the townhouse site, mostly geared toward empty nesters looking for a second home or a place to retire, elevators were always offered as an upgrade. Now, though, as an incentive to buy, the developer has made them a standard in each home without increasing prices - a value of about \$45,000. "Our feeling was that this provides a direct addition to the lifestyle of living in the home, rather than a hook of offering a car or other incentives," says Mr. Paara, broker from Lush Realty. "This was something substantial and

INCENTIVES continued on PH3

CONDOS: PERKS ARE INCLUDED

INCENTIVES *CONTINUED FROM PH1*



A suite at the Residences of the Ritz-Carlton, right, comes with a limited-time (and very opulent) vacation offer, while those interested in a townhouse suite at Eleven Bay Street in Thornbury don't have to pay extra for a private elevator.

something of real merit, and added to the long-term resale value to the home as well."

Michael Firestone, vice-president of sales and marketing at Camrost-Felcorp, kept to the same theory of practicality. At the developer's R Condos and California Condos projects, \$5,000 and \$10,000 cash-backs are on offer, depending on the size of the unit. At iLoft in Etobicoke, meanwhile, the developer is highlighting one suite - a new 560-square-foot unit that's geared for first-time and investor buyers - with a \$25,000 cash-back offer. "It's value added, really," Mr. Firestone says. "Rather than doing all these other things - gimmicks and upgrades - we want to say, 'OK, we'll give you our best shot, we'll take the price down

by \$25,000.'"

Other developers have taken another approach to the "value added" idea. While mortgages and maintenance fees might be part of the expense of buying a new home or condominium, so is the reality of moving and of buying new furniture. To make that part of the process easier, some developers are gearing their incentives toward furniture packages meant to give buyers the chance to put their own stamp on their new digs.

Canderel Stoneridge, for one, is doing exactly that in some of its suites at Aura. Recognizing that many of their purchasers are investors who rent out furnished

spaces - or end users looking for a pied-à-terre close to a job at the local hospital, for instance - the developer has introduced a \$10,000 furniture package incentive at its one-bedroom-plus-den and two-bedroom executive suites on the 56th to 70th floors of the building. So far, the reaction has been positive, says Riz Dhanji, vice-president of sales and marketing. "[Potential buyers] are looking for a little bit of a push to be able to take advantage of the current market," he says.

In Uxbridge, developer Alliance Homes had much the same idea, offering a set furniture package from Sears, on display in some of the units - or a \$5,000

Sears gift certificate - in the inventory homes at its Butternut Village site. "Basically, it's a stimulus package," says Kathryn MacFarlane, Alliance's director of marketing and sales.

But stimulus in today's economy doesn't need to stop with homebuyers themselves - some developers have gone one step further, looking not only to boost sales at their sites, but to help stimulate the community around them as well. That was Heathwood Homes's reasoning at its Traditions project in Milton, where the developer is offering buyers its residents card program, which provides them with discounts with some of the

merchants nearby. While not as valuable to buyers - based on numbers alone - as some of the other incentives on offer, the idea was to help some of the local independent retailers who are not only being affected by the economy, but have also been hit by a rush of big-box stores in the area.

"The whole thing's designed to start the community off," says Bob Finnigan, Heathwood's chief operating officer. The company's idea was to get new homeowners to establish "a shopping pattern that can help their community."

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