

COVER STORY

EXCLUSIVE REPORT

SPECIAL REPORT  
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# 2000

BEST PERFORMING  
SUBURBS UNDER

# \$350,000!

It's easy to buy a cheap property, but what about one that performs well as an investment with decent capital growth and rental returns? Now that's another thing altogether. Thanks to Residex, the hard work has been done for you in this special report prepared exclusively for API readers.

There are positive and very interesting aspects to property investment in low cost towns or suburbs, which I refer to as 'low cost locations', writes Residex chief executive officer John Edwards.

Low cost locations can be defined as any property that has a cost of less than \$350,000. An immediate reaction to this could be that this is still a large amount of money and more than some people may be able to afford; however it's significantly lower than the median value of Australian houses (\$425,000) and units (\$394,000).

In my research for this article, I've found 200 low cost locations with more than 2000 properties where the median value is less than \$350,000.

Looking at the housing market as a whole, there are around 1.469 million houses and 451,000 units with a value of less than \$350,000. This represents about 20 per cent of the house-and-land market and 17 per cent of the unit market, telling us that we're clearly dealing with the bottom end of the market.

The low cost locations have been extracted from the Residex databases and are listed in the table on pages 38 and 39. In fact, the number of locations with median values below \$350,000 may be greater than what's shown; however from an investment perspective, Residex doesn't recommend locations with fewer than 2000 dwellings for the following reasons:

- There will be limited purchase opportunities.
- Demand for property will be limited and re-sale could take a significant period of time.
- Small communities are usually reliant on a single economic driver and are hence vulnerable to downturns in that driver.
- Periods of vacancy can be prolonged.

Let's take a look at some other important points to consider when investing in property.

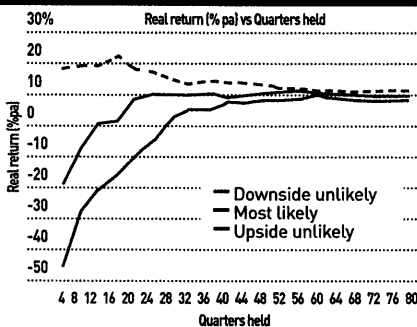
## INVESTMENT PERIODS

You should only select an investment property on the basis that you intend to hold the investment for a period of more than five years. Don't make an investment on the basis of a growth prediction for three years or less.

The graph in the next column represents the return associated with holding a property in Sydney for a minimum 10-year period, starting at any point in time over the past 20 years. The most likely outcome is the median of all possible outcomes after the specified number of quarters.

The data assumes that the value of the

## RETURN STRUCTURE



Percentage of furniture and fixtures as %  
Building depreciable 10% Depreciation rate 5%

property is \$350,000. The index used for the calculation is the Sydney median and the home loan variable borrowing rate is as it applied at the relevant date, specified by the Reserve Bank of Australia. The costs identified in the table 'Property Cost Assumptions' below have also been included and the property has been assumed to be leveraged to 80 per cent. Additionally, the returns are after inflation and after tax.

## PROPERTY COST ASSUMPTIONS

Expenses	%
<b>Purchase</b>	
Legal costs	0.20%
Stamp duty	3.75%
Mortgage insurance and loan setup	0.10%
<b>Annual outgoings</b>	
Council water rates (% of land value)	0.75%
Land tax (% of land value)	1.50%
Repairs and maintenance (% of total value)	1.00%
<b>Rent expenses (as % rental)</b>	
Vacancy rate	10.00%
Management fee	7.50%
<b>Sale costs</b>	
Legal costs	0.10%
Real estate agent costs	1.30%
<b>Taxes</b>	
Tax rate	30.00%
Capital gains tax	15.00%
% of furniture and fixtures (as % building depreciable)	10.00%
Depreciation rate	5.00%

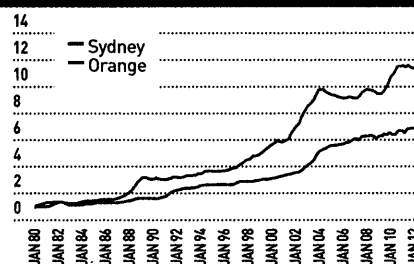
The most likely outcome clearly points to the fact that the establishment costs are, in most circumstances, not going to be covered by rental and capital growth for at least three years.

For this reason Residex looks beyond this period and only publishes predictive data for a minimum of five years.

## INVESTMENTS IN REGIONAL AREAS PRODUCE DIFFERENT CAPITAL RETURNS

Historically, regional cities don't cycle to the same extent as capital cities. In regional areas, there's a tendency to maintain a more constant growth rate. The below graph 'Regional vs Capital City' shows the differing trends and relationships between the two.

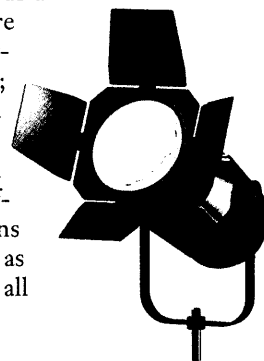
## REGIONAL VS CAPITAL CITY



Regional city house prices usually underperform capital city price growth and tend to grow at or a little above inflation. The larger the city and its economic diversity, the larger the margin above inflation growth tends to be. The comparison provided between Sydney and Orange housing over the past 30 years shows that Orange had an average annual rate of growth of 1.8 percentage points per annum above the Sydney inflation rate, while Sydney had an average of 3.5 percentage points per annum above the Sydney inflation rate.

Clearly, where a regional city experiences a change in its economic driver, that change will have an impact on demand to a greater degree than a change in a single economic driver in a capital city. This is simply because the capital city is driven by many economic drivers, not just one or two, hence new mining in a regional area will create a one-off spike in the value of properties. However, you should be wary of these spikes because once demand normalises, it's likely that property values in these locations will somewhat correct.

It's also important to note that locations which are driven by only one economic variable (such as a single mine) are high risk investment choices; the closure of a single economic driver can result in significant reductions in house prices as demand falls to all but nothing.



## COVER STORY

**REGIONAL AREAS ARE OFTEN MORE LIKELY TO BE CASH FLOW POSITIVE**

Again looking at Orange, when the rental return is considered you can see that the yield is higher, which is typical for most regional areas. In fact, what's basically happening is the rental yield is to some extent compensating owners for the lower capital return. The average yield for Orange houses over the past 20 years was 6.2 per cent, while it was 5.2 per cent in Sydney over the same period of time. If you were to look back even further, the more typical differential between the two markets is closer to 1.5 per cent.

**LOW COST HOUSING HAS A GREATER TENDENCY TO PROVIDE HIGHER RENTAL YIELDS**

Rent paid within a market segment is, in reality, based on the capacity of a group of people to pay. It isn't a function of the property values. Hence, if a population can afford to pay \$200 per week because wages in an area are such that this is possible, then landlords will drive rental prices up to that level. Once a level of unaffordability is reached, demand for rental properties will more likely than not diminish.

It's important to recognise that renters are more itinerant than homeowners. Therefore high housing costs will cause them to look for other living locations. Equally, corporations have to attract people to locations that fulfil the needs of employees and, as a consequence, set wages having regard to the cost of living in that region.

This all suggests that lower cost properties have the capacity to, and do produce higher rental yields than more expensive properties, providing a greater chance of achieving positively geared investments.

The truth of this is clearly evident when the median Australian-wide rental yield, currently in the order of 4.7 per cent, is considered and compared to the average rental yield of the locations in the '200 best performing suburbs under \$350,000' table on pages 38 and 39, which is 5.7 per cent.

**AFFORDABILITY AND COST PLAY A BIG PART IN CAPITAL GROWTH**

Consequently, the lower the cost, the potential for higher demand for the property.

This is simply a function of the number of people who have the capacity to buy the property. Generally, the result is that the higher the cost and the lower the affordability, the lower the rate of capital growth over the long term.

However, very high cost suburbs often

run contrary to this trend, as affordability is a less relevant factor for the very wealthy.

This view is supported by the data provided in the table 'Comparative Growth Rates' below, where various state capital cities have been compared with the locations set out in the table on pages 38 and 39.

Perth and Brisbane haven't been included as the mining boom will distort demand.

**COMPARATIVE GROWTH RATES**

Location	Median value, last 10 years	Capital growth, last 10 years
Low cost locations*	\$280,000	8.23%
Hobart units	\$226,000	9.20%
Adelaide houses	\$311,000	7.50%
Melbourne houses	\$401,000	7.10%
Canberra houses	\$409,000	8.00%
Sydney houses	\$562,000	4.50%

\* See table pages 38 and 39

Results from the above table would be more conclusive if affordability median figures for all areas were provided. However, this isn't possible, as Residex doesn't hold historical income figures for various suburbs included in the low cost locations. Notwithstanding this, it's very reasonable to suggest that this aspect, when coupled with price, is a very large contributor to capital growth outcomes.

Sydney has been the most unaffordable place in Australia for the better part of the past decade and it also has the highest cost. In turn, it has been the poorest performer.

## Consequently, the lower the cost, the potential for higher demand for the property.

**SOME PITFALLS**

Given the above points, it's reasonable to suggest that generally, lower priced properties offer the best potential returns. However, this can lead to unscrupulous investors making significant returns from very poor quality dwellings which are unhealthy and fire hazards.

I was recently drawn to a block of flats located in Port Augusta, South Australia, because of its high cash flow return. Upon inspecting the property, a review revealed that it was in poor structural condition and a fire risk, with no fire protection of any

type for its occupants. Additionally, the building construction didn't comply with fire safety regulations. Apart from the risks to occupants, investors need to recognise that while they may be able to insure the building, the chance of making a claim if it was burnt out would be limited. An insurer would seek to void the claim based on the failure to comply with building and fire codes.

I proceeded to make a bid on the property which was hundreds of thousands of dollars lower than the asking price considering the cost it would take to make corrections to the building. Naturally, I've heard nothing further from the agent or owner.

There are a few important points to draw from this.

- There has to be a balance between risk and return. Everyone should recognise the risks involved in owning very low quality properties that produce quality return but are occupied by the very poor.
- Be prepared to make any offer when purchasing a property, even if it's significantly lower than the asking price. When making a very low offer, be clear as to why your offer is so low. It's possible the vendor doesn't realise the issue you've recognised. In today's market, the vendor may be prepared to accept your offer simply because they're in need of clearing loans.
- Poor quality properties don't encourage tenants to treat the property with respect. Even the most basic maintenance of these properties can be significantly higher than it need be.

Poor quality properties often attract 'tenants from hell' who are very untidy and are prepared to live in squalour. Selling a property while it is, or after it has been tenanted by these types of people will make the property impossible to present at its best, possibly resulting in a sub-market sale price.

When looking at our list of low cost locations and working through them to identify how to find the best locations in which to purchase a property, there are again some points to remember when you make your selection.



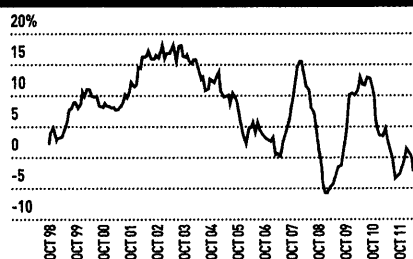
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1. You need to identify the most important attributes you want to achieve in terms of return. Is it capital growth or cash flow from rental? This will allow you to identify the group of locations for consideration (a list has been provided on page 36 that's a sensible balance between growth and rental return). However, you may be more interested in one rather than the other, and hence you may need to develop a different location group.

2. The locations that are currently presenting the highest returns aren't necessarily the places where you should make your next investment. In fact, it might be that these locations don't normally perform particularly well, but a one-off event is causing exceptional returns. Alternatively, the period of growth may be about to slow as demand has been satisfied or affordability at the location is approaching a level that causes people to rent or move further afield. The trend in the locations growth pattern can be identified by considering a capital growth index, which is available at this web link: <http://www.residex.com.au/index-report>.

In the 'Location Trend' graph on this page,

LOCATION TREND: SEYMOUR - ANNUAL RETURNS



you can clearly see that if you obtained an index for Seymour, Victoria, in the last half of 2010, you would have realised that this market was entering an adjustment phase and that it wasn't an appropriate investment area. Equally, the data is currently indicating that this market is in correction.

It's also important to understand the likely duration of this correction. If a market is approaching the end of its correction, you can look for opportunities as vendors in this location may be inclined to reduce prices to sell, not realising that the market is about to shortly provide growth, meaning

you should be able to find bargains. Note that the Seymour market is exhibiting a greater volatility than it has previously and the maximum rate of growth is also falling. This, coupled with the fact that there was a long period of significant growth above the long-term average, is potentially a telltale sign that there may be limited growth in this market in the short-term future. This leads me to my next point.

3. History suggests that a location normally reverts to its long-term average return. Hence it's important to consider what the long-term per annum rate of growth is and to understand how a market is performing relative to that indicator. Referring back to Seymour, the 20-year percentage per annum rate of growth is in the order of six per cent per annum, while the rate of growth over the past 14 years is in the order of eight per cent per annum. This suggests that there's potentially some significant correction to take place in this market, or the correction phase will be long in duration. Given the fact that Seymour is in correction and not presenting as if the correction is over, it

Home  
Sweet  
Loans



wouldn't be a location I would choose for my next investment property search.

4. To this point, only statistical data for the selected low cost locations has been considered. Statistical data on its own may still lead you to the wrong conclusions.

Although it's true that if a property is held long enough the longer term total rates of return are likely to be achieved, you're better off generating a situation where you don't suffer any reduction in equity in the short term and don't get involved in an investment location which carries excessive risk. This is more likely to be achieved if you do some location information research (I speak of this as subjective analysis). For any potential investment location, it's important to understand:

- The type of people who reside in the location so you can identify what type of property will rent best.
- The ease at which the property will rent.
- The likely short and long-term plans for the development of housing in the community.
- The economic drivers for the location.

You should also contact the local council and ask if they can identify the flood and fire areas for the location.

Most of this information can be obtained relatively simply by buying local newspapers and speaking to real estate agents in the area.

Spending a few days in a location you're interested in, speaking to the local newsagent, café proprietor and pharmacy will probably tell you almost all you need to know. Couple this with your own observations and you should understand where and where not to buy in a location and determine if there's a reason for the community in the selected location to continue to grow and provide you with some good returns.

In the table 'A List for Consideration', I've selected a few locations that I consider

to be worthy of some subjective analysis. I've selected these using the processes outlined earlier. Providing details on each of these and confirmation of why they'd make good investment locations would make this article lengthy and repetitive. For this reason, I've selected Sarina in Queensland to focus on.

Please note, in the table 'A List For Consideration' I've included an additional, important piece of information – the Residex-projected growth rate over the next five years. This important information helps to confirm your analysis and can be obtained in a *Residex Right Price Report* for a property in a selected location, from <http://www.apimagazine.com.au/residex>. You should do this in any case to ensure you make an offer at market value for any property you're thinking of buying.

#### SARINA, QUEENSLAND

The fact that Sarina is identified in this special report will potentially cause heightened buying activity. This doesn't mean you shouldn't seek out a property there, but it does mean you need to approach investing in this location with caution. Make sure you don't pay more than market value and don't get into a bidding war with other people. If you do there's a real chance you'll pay far too much for a property in this location.

Sarina is located about a 30-minute drive (35 kilometres) south of Mackay and a 25-minute drive (25 kilometres) north to Hay Point. This positioning makes it an ideal alternative location for workers on the Hay Point port development.

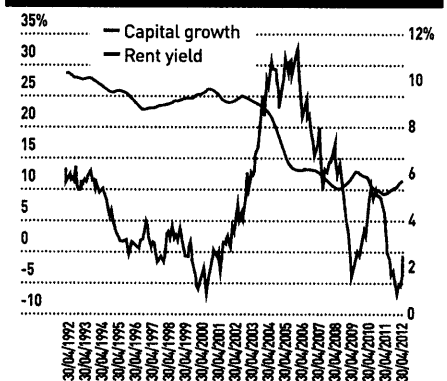
Sarina is an old sugar town with more than 100 years of history associated with the sugar industry. Today, it's a major supplier of sugar-derived ethanol. With its close proximity to the coast, residents and tourists alike can enjoy the beautiful beaches

that are popular for their prime fishing and prawning.

While Sarina isn't breaking its relationship with the sugar industry, the industry is losing its grip on being the largest employer. Over the past 20 years, the coal industry has become more important. The area is home to the largest coal ports in the Southern Hemisphere: Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay coal terminals. The Queensland Rail Maintenance Facility of Jillalan is only three kilometres south, providing residents with further employment opportunities. Sugar cane growing, the Plane Creek Sugar Mill and the Sucrogen BioEthanol (formerly CSR Ethanol) distillery are also major employers. Cattle grazing, agriculture, tropical fruit growing and aquaculture contribute to the wealth of employment opportunities in this fast growing area.

In this graph, the capital growth pattern in Sarina over the past 20-plus years is supplied. From this you can note the very exceptional growth that occurred as the

SARINA - 12 MONTH ROLLING



development of Hay Point took place. That growth would have to be considered exceptional and it's probably unlikely to be repeated in the future. However, the third stage of the development of the coal port facilities at Hay Point (currently under way), while modest in comparison to the proposed Dudgeon Point development, will have an immediate impact on the area as the third berth and ship loader are developed.

The most significant proposal, the development of new terminal coal stockyards and up to 10 new ship berths, a new rail connection from the Goonyella system to Dudgeon Point, as well as an expansion of the existing Tug Harbour at Half Tide, all with an expected capital cost of \$10 billion to \$12 billion, has an expected completion date of 2015 to 2016.

During its development it will deliver up to 5000 construction jobs and provide around 800 new long-term jobs. On June 14 this year, the Queensland Government

#### A LIST FOR CONSIDERATION

Suburb	State	Median value	Dwelling type	Avg. growth, 20 years	Rent rate, current	Avg. total return last 10 years	Predicted growth, next 5 years (% p.a.)
Seville Grove	WA	\$333,500	Houses	11.62%	5.67%	16.73%	10%+
Sarina	Qld	\$348,000	Houses	7.63%	5.84%	20.23%	7%+
Beenleigh	Qld	\$280,500	Houses	5.44%	5.60%	14.14%	7%+
Nambour	Qld	\$309,000	Houses	5.85%	5.69%	13.68%	6.5%+
Scone	NSW	\$327,000	Houses	7.02%	5.89%	13.71%	6.5%+
Cessnock	NSW	\$250,500	Houses	6.64%	6.86%	14.21%	6.5%+
Goulburn	NSW	\$265,500	Houses	7.17%	5.70%	12.89%	6%+
Mudgee	NSW	\$332,000	Houses	7.25%	5.85%	14.74%	6%+
Maryborough	Qld	\$217,000	Houses	5.30%	6.28%	14.88%	6%+
Muswellbrook	NSW	\$292,000	Houses	6.80%	6.47%	14.61%	6%+

invited the public to comment on the draft terms of reference for the proposed Dudgeon Point Coal Terminals Project. If the project is approved, port facilities in the Hay Point area will become some of the largest in the world.

Currently, export facilities for Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay have a throughput capacity of about 130 million tonnes of coal per annum. It's estimated that over the next decade this will need to be increased to about 250 million to 300 million tonnes per annum. The Dudgeon Point Coal Terminals Project will add some 180 million tonnes per annum.

Sarina isn't solely reliant on Hay Point facilities for its economic prosperity. It's also driven by the sugar industry, engineering and tourism.

Housing is still relatively affordable, particularly given the wage structures we're likely to see as construction workers are brought to the area.

In summary:

■ I've sought to identify a location where there's likely to be a balance between

rental yield and capital growth. Sarina doesn't totally fit that criteria currently, but given the pressures that are likely in the future, it would seem reasonable that rental yields will increase and provide a better balanced return.

■ The area isn't presenting with current high returns. It's still correcting and the population will, in all probability, still be acting realistically about purchase price offers. The correction phase looks as if it's all but at an end.

■ The long-term historical capital growth rate is acceptable at about 7.6 per cent per annum.

■ The subjective economic data on the area's growth potential is very positive.

Given the above analysis, Sarina presents as a place to invest and hold for at least the next decade. I don't believe that the total returns of 20 per cent per annum seen in the past 10 years are likely to be revisited, but I do anticipate that an investment in this area will see total returns of better than 13 per cent per annum, before costs. The graph 'Sarina' is indicating that the bottom

of the growth and rental cycles has passed.

Identifying a group of investment locations, whether low cost or otherwise, can be done. You simply need the appropriate data and some time to conduct analysis and research.

Data is available from Residex and the best starting place is the acquisition of a *Resi Spreads*, which lists all the suburbs in a state and its statistical performance in an Excel spreadsheet, allowing subscribers to sort and gather their group of locations for further analysis.

For more information you can go to [www.residex.com.au](http://www.residex.com.au). api

**200** TOP SUBURBS UNDER **\$350,000!**  
REPORT OVER PAGE



John Edwards is the chief executive officer and founder of Residex, a research provider on residential real estate:  
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Home Sweet Loans



