

FLORIDA

HOMES AND TRAVEL

February 2005

Formosa Wakes Up To The Western Beltway

It has been in the planning for 10 years, but finally the full impact of the extension of the Western Beltway 429 has become clear to owners at Indian Ridge, Windsor Palms, The Palms, Oak Island Cove and Emerald Island. The northern section of toll road currently begins on the Orange Blossom Trail US 441 north of Apopka. The road then descends to Seidel Road, which is just to the north west of Walt Disney World Property. The extension section has now been cleared from Seidel Road to the end at Interstate 4 near C.R. 545 – Old Lake Wilson Road. The toll road will pass Indian Ridge subdivision on its western side, relocating Sand Hill Road in the process. At this stage the road will have 4 lanes and a large grassy median in the centre. There will be tollbooths at a junction with Sinclair road, below Indian Ridge with a 25 cent toll to reach I 4. The road continues up past The Palms, between Windsor Palms and Indian Creek, through the gap between Oak Island Cove and Emerald Island phase 2 townhomes, onwards to U.S. 192, and on near Orange Lake Country Club. It continues onwards to the left of Walt Disney World Property to join the northern section at Seidel Road. Because much of the land in this section is wetlands much of the road will be elevated by 25 ft. Owners along the edge of the Beltway at Oak Island Cove and phase 2 townhomes at Emerald Island will be in the shadow of an elevated section just 35 feet from property lines. The road will dip as it passes right through Indian Creek after the developer there negotiated special permission to lower the road and landscape to prevent noise, but will rise again as it passes Windsor Palms. The road developers estimate that approximately 400 properties will be in full view of elevated highway along the whole section. However, legally, the issue of noise cannot be addressed until it arises! There will be no landscaping, walls or earth banks installed with the road, which is forecast to carry 30,000 cars per day within 2 years of opening. Work is permitted from 6.30 am, although fuel supply trucks have no restrictions and can deliver at any time of day or night. The work is already impacting many residents with noise and dust. It is expected that house prices for effected properties in Oak Island Cove and Indian Creek will be ‘soft’, but in other subdivisions, the sudden appearance of many ‘For Sale’ signs is more indicative of the inventory of resales returning to normal levels after a very tight summer.

Developers had been informed of the proposed Western Beltway as far back as 1994, but it was left to them to inform their buyers of the plans. It would appear that most of the time they did, but some current owners have purchased resales privately and not been informed of the plans. Many time purchasers fall into the trap of going to the seller’s agent to purchase a house, rather than finding their own buyers agent. Of course a selling agent is not going to be upfront and forthcoming about detrimental aspects to the property. The plans can be viewed at www.floridasturnpike.com, then click ‘system roads’. Sections 1 and 2 are the most relevant –but very slow to load.

Atlantic Warning System

The world watched in horror on December 26th as an earthquake and subsequent Tsunami wreaked havoc throughout the Indian Ocean. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the families caught up in this catastrophe, at a time when many should have been celebrating. In the days that followed, as numbers of dead and lost steadily rose, thoughts turned closer to home with a “could it happen to us” fear. The bad news is yes, it could happen to us. The most famous threat to the Atlantic comes from a mountain on Tenerife that is slowly slipping in to the ocean. When, not if, it finally falls, the resulting tsunami is predicted to wipe out a lot of southern England. Across the pond in Florida though, waves 100ft high will skate straight across the peninsula taking everything with it. At present there is no warning system anywhere other than the Pacific Ocean, which is widely seen as presenting the greatest threat. (Cont p2)

Deductible Reimbursement

In the December Special Session of the Legislature, it was agreed that victims of more than one storm who faced paying multiple insurance deductibles according to their insurance policies would receive reimbursement. It was conceded that the when the law on deductibles was crafted following the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, it was never envisioned that more than one hurricane could hit in such a way in one season. (Cont p5)

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Building Codes Need Work

That was the conclusion of an investigation by the Florida Home Builders Association into the intrusion of water through the walls into thousands of homes in the Central Florida area during last year's hurricane crisis. The majority of the homes were less than 3 years old. The Florida Building Commission initially talked about requiring eighteen months to effect any changes. But in the face of pressure, both political and from private homeowners, the commission has announced that it will make every effort to bring about change as quickly as possible. There must be public hearings about any code changes, so the earliest that any new codes could be implemented is October 2005.

Car Rentals

Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport has unveiled its new car rental centre. Previously the 'onsite' car rental companies were located at various points around the perimeter road, accessed by company shuttles. 10 companies now have their desks within the new centre, across the road from Terminal 1. Shuttles operate to bring passengers from the other terminals. The centre has received a mixed welcome from passengers. Whilst Terminal 1 arrivals can just cross the road to begin the process, other passengers complain that the shuttles are full, there are then long queues for the desks and luggage must then be hauled up or downstairs to access the cars. Longer-term plans for the airport include a separate concourse and check-in facility for cruise passengers, who during the winter months can number 5,000 in just a 3-4 hour stretch.

An investigation into the car rental industry at Orlando International Airport has confirmed something that most travellers were well aware of; customers are subjected to high-pressure sales tactics! Whilst officially not condoned by any of the rental companies, there was plenty of anecdotal evidence showing that on arrival, most Americans landed up paying about 25% more than the quoted price. Unlike our UK inclusive packages, Americans must pay separately for taxes, Customer Facility Charges and insurances. Most travellers in the states don't need additional insurance to drive a rental car, but are shown photos of damaged cars, told they will be liable for costs whilst a damaged car was out of action, told their insurance is not enough etc! Agents are on commission of course for any extras, or upgrades they can sell. The Association of Car and Truck Rental Independents and Franchisees said the situation was 'problematic' and people were easily coaxed.

Really Important News !!!

Melbourne City Council has banned the wearing of thongs or other super skimpy swimwear on its beaches, streets or in local parks. You have been warned!

Atlantic Warning System (Continued from p1)

However, on Friday 14th January President Bush unveiled a \$37.5 million plan to install a tsunami warning system covering all the U.S. coastal areas. The system will be designed so that other countries can add to it if they choose. The plan quadruples the current system in the Pacific and extends cover to the Atlantic, Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. But with Tsunami's moving at hundreds of miles per hour, the warning would only be hours ahead, and with Florida being a peninsular, the resulting evacuation would be a logistical nightmare.

Web Site – An Update

You may remember that we announced in December our new archived website would be active by now. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, this launch has been delayed. We are now hopeful that we will relaunch the web site by April.

TSA

The Transportation Security Administration has received such a huge volume of complaints – mainly from women passengers – about the invasiveness of its pat down procedures that it has had to announce modifications. Two planes were destroyed in Russia last year when women terrorist smuggled explosives on to the flights hidden in their bust area. The event made the TSA tighten up procedures for when a passenger fails the walk through detector test. But the complaints of humiliation and invasion of privacy have resulted in a slight change, passengers may now drop their arms after the torso has been examined, and the back of the hand investigation of the bust area will only be carried out if the wand does not alert to an area of chest that doesn't match the contours of the body. The pat down can be conducted in privacy if requested.

Fort Lauderdale Climate Data – February 1948-2000

(All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The average high temp is	77.2
The average low temp is	58.6
The highest temp (on February 15, 1964)	94
The coldest night temp (on February 05, 1958)	31

Exchange Rates \$ to £

Jan 30 (high)	1.9194	Jan 17 (low)	1.8590
Dec 20 (high)	1.9457	Dec 22(low)	1.9135
2004 High Dec 20	1.9457	2004 Low May 11	1.7552

Mortgage Rates

With zero points	Nov 17	Dec 27	Jan 26
Fixed 30 yrs	5.87%	5.75%	5.62%
Adjustable 1 yr	4.00%	4.15%	4.25%

Note: Mortgage rates are published as a service to readers to indicate trends and must not be relied on in entering into any agreement.

News Roundup

Would-be robbers shot a Scottish tourist in the leg, when he and his wife were attacked outside their Travelodge on America Way, off International Drive.

Walt Disney World has finally announced that River Country, their old style water park will not re-open. They have not announced what will happen to that area of property. A Federal judge has thrown out a lawsuit by Hawaiian artist Mark Waters against Walt Disney World. Waters claimed that he showed Disney a plan for 'Miniature Worlds' several years before Epcot was conceived. Watch out for a new 'Irish' Pub located on the former Pleasure Island Jazz Company site at Pleasure Island. As yet unnamed, the pub will feature Irish music, traditional Irish food and of course – plenty of Guinness. There will be no charge to enter the pub.

Theme Parks have increased gate rates by \$5 in the Orlando area, with Disney, Universal and SeaWorld now charging \$59.75. Busch Gardens in Tampa has only raised entrance fees by \$2 to \$55.95. Further savings can be made for Florida Residents by purchasing a daily ticket for Busch Gardens online for \$49-95. Disney has confused all by offering more than 30 different pricing options. Multi day passes will now be cheaper the more days are purchased. There will be a discount for Florida residents on a one-day pass for the first time. How do you get a residents pass? Well, the proper way is to get an official Florida ID card from the local vehicle-licensing centre. However, the word is that if you take a utility bill and passport to Downtown Disney to purchase your tickets you may well get the discount. This is not guaranteed but may be worth a try before you head down to the licensing centre. The procedure for an official ID card can be found at <http://www.hsmv.state.fl.us/ddl/geninfo.html#4#4>.

Jacksonville hopes to benefit from a \$175 million cash injection when it hosts the Super Bowl on February 6th.

ATA Airlines will stop operating flights to and from St Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport on April 10th as part of a major retrenchment.

Michael Chertoff, a Federal appellate court judge, has been selected by President Bush to replace outgoing secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Tom Ridge. The position is high profile, Ridge's name became well known around the world as he put a friendly face on the changes to America's immigration policies.

Seasons 52 have opened a restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, the second of this seasonal food and health conscious concept from the Darden group. A third restaurant will open in Altamonte Springs during February and two more sites are planned in Palm Beach Gardens and Boca Raton later this year.

Manatee deaths around Florida during 2004 have exceeded 250 for the sixth year in a row, although at 264, the total was substantially down from a total of over 300 which has been the case since 2001.

Verizon Communications has been blocking emails from Britain, France, Germany and Russia since December 22nd in a rather overzealous case of Spam blocking.

Look out in Golf communities for the 'custom' luxury golf cart. In many gated, recreational golf communities the golf cart is the only mode of transport to be seen in and owners are starting to make statements with carts styled after Humvees, Lincoln Navigators and Lamborghinis.

The Pro Player Stadium in Miami Gardens, home of the Dolphins and the Florida Marlins has been renamed the 'Dolphins Stadium' with immediate effect. The stadium was originally called the Dolphin Stadium when it was built, and has since been through a couple of name changes as its fortunes changed. This current change comes as a major refurbishment is announced.

A low carb potato, Sunlite, is now on sale in grocery stores and restaurants. Sunlite has one third as many 'carbs' as an average spud.

Average Daily Hotel Room Rate

Area	Nov	Dec
International Drive	\$94.57	\$90.98
Lake Buena Vista	\$112.52	\$109.30
Kissimmee East	\$68.78	\$65.47
Kissimmee West	\$47.90	\$52.41

Florida Lottery Winning Numbers

Date	Numbers	Winners/Jackpot\$
01/15/05	21-31-46-47-50-52	Roll \$11 m
01/12/05	01-02-06-13-15-42	Roll \$6 m
01/08/05	04-25-28-30-39-43	Roll \$3 m
01/05/05	02-09-21-22-33-49	1 \$3 m
01/01/05	11-21-32-35-42-46	2 \$20 m
12/29/04	19-20-21-28-38-50	Roll \$15 m
12/25/04	11-12-18-42-44-53	Roll \$10 m
12/22/04	01-02-16-29-35-36	Roll \$6 m
12/18/04	01-26-35-38-46-52	Roll \$3 m
12/15/04	17-21-29-35-51-52	2 \$25 m
12/11/04	10-33-38-39-41-44	Roll \$20 m
12/08/04	13-26-34-38-46-48	Roll \$15 m
12/04/04	06-07-13-41-46-50	Roll \$11 m
12/01/04	02-20-39-44-49-52	Roll \$6 m
11/27/04	04-12-14-30-42-46	Roll \$3 m
11/24/04	07-08-28-29-31-33	1 \$60 m
11/20/04	10-15-22-39-46-52	Roll \$50 m
11/17/04	06-10-20-33-35-51	Roll \$40 m

Numbers are obtained from the Florida Lottery (www.flalottery.com) as a service to readers. We cannot accept liability for any errors.

Homeowner News

Progress Energy and Florida Power and Light have both increased rates this month by \$3.81 and \$2.09 per month respectively in an attempt to recoup their hurricane funds. There will be inquiries later in the year to decide if the increases are warranted and if not, the money must be refunded. Progress Energy has worked to recover over \$2.8 million from customers who ‘stole’ electricity during 2004.

Short Term Rental properties and hotel/motels provided Osceola County with \$1.77 million from its 6% room tax during November. This was over 18% higher than November 03.

Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) was honoured by the Florida Municipal Electric Association with a ‘Community Restoration Award’ for its outstanding efforts in restoring electric service. KUA lost power to 100% of customers after Hurricane Charley.

Around 400 new vacation homes are planned on the former All Seasons RV Resort site. The site on the U.S. 27 1 mile north of Hwy 192 was sold in December to Platinum Properties who have already commenced clearance work. The new community will be called Millbrook Manor and will have 3-5 bed pool homes with a starting price of \$280,000.

Park Square Homes sold 1,034 houses during the first 11 months of 2004 for an average price of \$311,100.

E. Everett Huskey, the developer of Sweetwater Oaks and Sweetwater Club celebrates 59 years in business this year. Huskey is still hard at work at Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate in Longwood.

First Federal Savings Bank of Lake County has entered into a definitive agreement with Colonial BancGroup to be acquired by the latter.

There is a whisper of Ikea opening a store on a 30-acre plot near the Mall of Millenia.

Businesses, officials and planners met recently to discuss the future of the Four Corners area. Not a recognised geographical district, Four Corners is the name frequently given to the loose area where Polk, Orange, Osceola and Lake counties meet, around the junction of U.S. 27 and Hwy 192. Regarded by many residents as a no-go tourism district, officials and businesses are waking up to the enormous dollar reservoir there. There are legitimate concerns that development of infrastructure is piecemeal because of the proximity of the 4 borders. Businesses hope that some official designation would help identify the area.

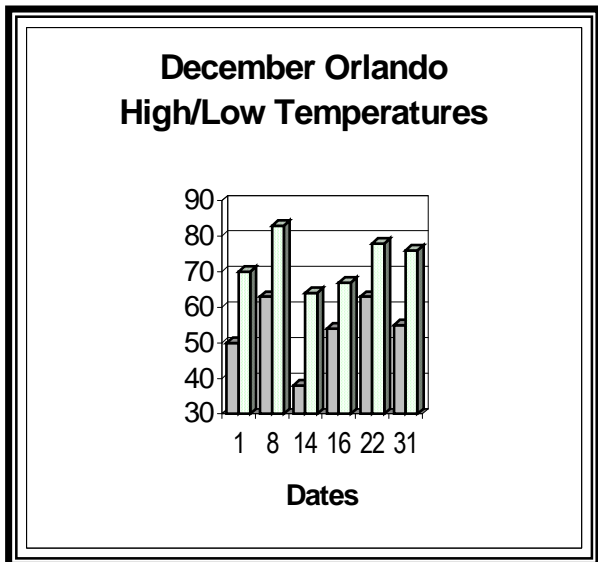
As of January 7, Osceola County had spent approximately \$30.8 million on hurricane recovery. Of that amount, about \$26 million is due from FEMA, \$1.44 million is due from the state of Florida; and nearly \$2 million is due from insurance.

Construction has commenced on alterations to the intersection of Hwy 192 and I 4. The task is expected to take about 2 years to complete with various detours as the work progresses. The first detour takes drivers heading west on Hwy. 192 past I 4, south on to World Drive, then uses the west bound entrance ramp directly on to I 4.

Emergency money totalling \$5.11 million has been earmarked for restoring some of the beaches that were badly eroded during the hurricanes. Renourishment involves dredging sand from further out on the seabed and spraying it back on to the beach. This expensive work can be essential when the beaches front residential or commercial properties that would be at risk with narrower beaches.

As many subscribers are experiencing, supplies of pool screen mesh are at an all time low. Demand in the aftermath of the hurricanes has outstripped supply, which is driving up the price. Suppliers are having to limit distribution in many locations to two rolls per contractor, and manufacturers predict that this could last for the rest of the year and possibly into next year. They haven’t boosted screen production because that might impact some of their other business such as outdoor furniture covers and boat covers. But **Ashe Industries**, a Tampa wholesaler, has a contract with a Chinese manufacturer and appears to have screens available. New construction will begin to be affected now as existing contractor stockpiles are used. By contrast, roofing contractors are hopeful that supplies of shingles may pick up as the cold winter weather slows construction in the north of the country. However, any requirements other than the standard three-tab style will result in a huge delay.

Despite a slight drop in deposits, SunTrust Bank held on to its market leader position in Polk County accounting for 21.4% of the market share and \$958.6 million in deposits. Wachovia was close behind with \$807.4 million in deposits and 18% of the market share.



Insurance Roundup (Continued from p1)

Homeowners who will benefit from this reimbursement should have received their claim pack from their insurance company by now and must make sure to return them quickly so that they are in Tallahassee by 1st March. An application can be found online at www.flds.com or by calling 1-800-22-STORM. The reimbursements will cover the amount paid by the homeowner in excess of the first deductible – capped at \$10,000 for damage from two storms and \$20,000 for damage by three or more storms. In future, only one deductible will apply per season.

The number of insurance companies requesting rate increases in the wake of a horrific hurricane season continues to rise. Statewide, over 20 companies have now requested an increase with American Strategic Insurance Corp being the first to file a request. Other big names are State Farm Florida and Nationwide. Law prevents companies from increasing rates to cover their losses, but they can apply to increase rates where they perceive exposure to a greater risk.

A side effect of these increases, if approved, is that Citizens Property Insurance must increase its premiums. Citizens is the state owned ‘Insurer of last resort’ for homeowners that the mainstream insurance market have deemed too great a risk. This particularly applies to coastal and exposed properties. To maintain the market Citizens must charge premiums that are higher than any of the top 20 companies writing policies in that geographic area.

All of these increases, if approved, will not take effect until policy renewal dates, so may not even impact until next year for some, but many homeowners will soon experience premium increases that were approved last year before the hurricane season.

Citizens is facing a crisis, it was never intended to become a fully-fledged insurance company and has relied on outside help to process claims. At the turn of the year there were still 2,000 homeowners awaiting their first visit from an adjuster. This is likely to change as Citizens squares up to the challenge and develops its own ‘in house’ teams to handle claims and adjustments. It is also likely that homeowners will be asked to take greater responsibility for the durability of their homes – such as installing storm shutters.

These issues and many more which arose from the hurricane season will be discussed at Florida legislature committees as preparation is made for the 2005 meeting of the Florida Legislature.

When checking policy renewals or looking for a new policy, ensure you use a fine toothcomb, and double check for pool enclosure cover. Many subscribers had been assured by their insurance agent that their policies included this cover and found out to their cost that it was not the case.

Year End Home Prices

A tight inventory during the summer of 2004 kept prices riding high despite the hurricanes. According to the year-end figures released by the Florida Association of Realtors the statewide average price for an existing home has increased by 17% over 2003.

A second year of historically low interest rates, 5.84% over the year, continued to drive the market. A record 242,234 houses changed hands in Florida during 2004 – remember this is existing houses only. This reflects an 11% increase over the previous record of 218,739 houses exchanged during 2003.

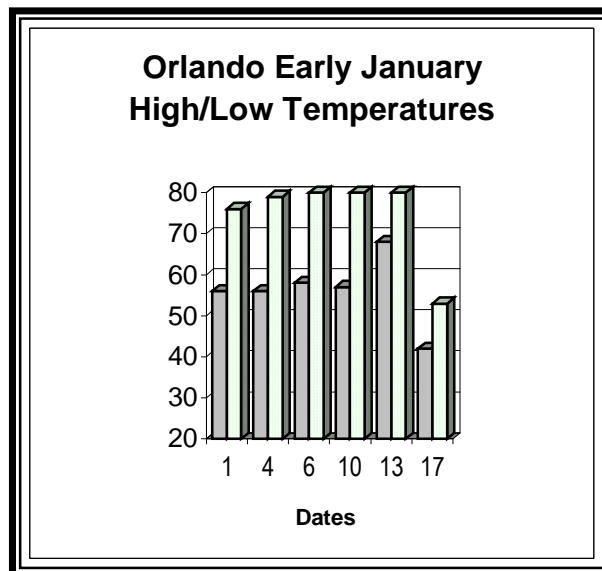
The five-year gain for the average house price is 70.6%, which is fairly consistent with previous years.

Metropolitan Statistical Areas	2003	2004	% change
Daytona Beach	\$130,500	\$157,800	+21%
Fort Lauderdale	\$228,600	\$279,500	+22%
Fort Myers/Cape Coral	\$156,600	\$192,100	+23%
Fort Pierce/Port St Lucie	\$153,900	\$193,900	+26%
Jacksonville	\$138,200	\$159,000	+15%
Lakeland/Winter Haven	\$96,800	\$111,100	+15%
Miami	\$223,100	\$273,900	+23%
Naples	\$291,400	\$374,300	+28%
Orlando	\$143,500	\$164,500	+15%
Punta Gorda*	\$134,300	\$167,100	+24%
Sarasota/Bradenton	\$189,700	\$244,100	+29%
Tampa/St Pete/Clearwater	\$139,300	\$159,900	+15%
W Palm Bch/Boca Raton	\$241,300	\$300,900	+25%
Statewide	\$155,800	\$182,400	+17%

Useful Numbers and Addresses in this issue.

www.flds.com - application form for reimbursement of multiple deductibles or:
1-800-22-STORM

Ashe Industries – Pool Screen wholesaler – 813-247-2743. 4505 Transport Drive, Tampa, FL 33605



Looking Back – Looking Forward 2004

January

U.S. VISIT program launched, visa holders required to be digitally fingerprinted and photographed upon entry to the United States.

Ken Buescher officially saves Cypress Gardens with help from the Florida Forever program.

February

The UK pound is worth \$1.90 – despite forecasts of a \$2 pound by the summer, this is the highest value until December.

March

The Central Florida housing market explodes, some builders resort to lottery system to select buyers.

Over 90 bottlenose dolphins, die suddenly along the Panhandle coast, the deaths are blamed on ‘Red Tide’.

April

CVS Corp pharmacy chain buys Eckerd, spelling the end for the family built Florida chain.

May

Pulte Homes ordered to stop building at Windsor Hills when it is discovered that behind the double garage frontage, an extra bedroom and storage area was being constructed.

Builder’s consumables such as concrete and wood continue to rise in price prompting the inclusion of ‘escalation clauses’ in some new contracts.

Hurricane Forecaster warns “We’re going to see hurricane damage like you’ve never seen it”.

June

Governor Bush signed legislation aimed at protecting the rental rights of existing owners, when associations vote to disallow short-term rentals. The law is also aimed at preventing Homeowner Associations from foreclosing on properties for non-payment of fines.

Massive construction in China impacts availability and price of cement in Florida causing delays in building.

The State Department ends domestic revalidation for non-immigrant visas.

July

The Department of Homeland Security issue a directive for immigration staff to be nicer and more approachable. Travellers who have overstayed on previous visits, will no longer be searched and handcuffed, but will be admitted for a limited period of 30 days and advised that they must apply for a visa in future.

August

Friday 13th is the day the Hurricane Charley rips through Florida, landing at Port Charlotte and cutting a 12 mile swathe through Central Florida.

September

Hurricane Frances landed at Stuart on the Atlantic coast and crossed Florida travelling right through the Short Term Rental area.

Hurricane Ivan battered the Panhandle area. Hurricane Jeanne also landed near Stuart and followed a similar course to Frances, finishing off her work.

We publish the results of our Annual Property Management Survey, which showed a surprising downturn in rentals when all pundits declared 2003 an excellent year for tourism.

October

An \$11.6 billion aid package is agreed to help the states ravaged by four hurricanes in six weeks.

Florida continues to clean up and insurance companies are given a deadline by which to have finished adjustments for claims that have been filed.

November

Events in the world outside of his control have defined his presidency. His solid response to 9/11 and subsequently the war in Iraq have just about carried him through to 2004. By the summer of 2004 John Kerry was riding high – but then once again events intervened. Natures unleashing of four terrible storms onto Florida allowed President Bush to be seen shoulder-to-shoulder with Governor Bush assisting victims of the storm. Kerry was nowhere to be seen, and apart from a brief blip in Ohio – Bush was back.

December

A national tomato shortage is blamed on the hurricanes. Prices in supermarkets rise and restaurants cease to serve tomatoes in salad or charge separately.

2005

Construction and rebuilding from the hurricanes will continue to drive the state’s economy over the next 12-18 months as the state repairs itself. High prices and scarcity of construction materials will negatively impact the speed of building, which in turn will ensure a demand for the completed houses and keep house values elevated. It is predicted that interest rates will rise over the next year, but that is unlikely to impact the ever-increasing influx of non-residential owners.

Predictions for tourism continue to be strong, not withstanding the hurricanes, although coastal areas directly affected have experienced a dramatic drop in reservations. A strong tourism market will help to the ever increasing numbers of vacation homes in Central Florida.

The area around the intersection of I4 and U.S. 27 will continue to see growth of the restaurants and shops that have long been lacking for homeowners forcing long journeys up to Hwy 192 or Clermont.

Utility and insurance costs will continue to rise, in some cases quite dramatically as the ramifications of 2004 continue to unfold.

Travel Back To The West

There was a time that the phrase "Old West" brought up images of endless blue skies, sagebrush and pines. Cowboys tipping their hats to the ladies as they made the journey home from church services on Sunday afternoons, or colourful dancehall girls and the local rowdy bunch living it up, with lively piano music to serenade their escapades.

The Old West was more than a place in history, its uniqueness of lifestyle and notorious characters, gave it its own little place in history and legend, but for the most part, the Wild West has slipped into the pages of history and lore.

Today if one were to venture into the Old West, they would likely find busy freeways, high-rise buildings, and the city lights drowning out the starry night skies. Could one find the essence of the Old West if they were to hit the trail in search? Fortunately, hidden in the National Forests and deserts, reached by the backloads of the Western United States, are a few places that still radiate the spirit of the Old West.

In the heart of Wyoming, one would find such a place, a region that will capture the imagination and transport you back to the wild days of the Old West. In the foothills of the Wind River Mountain range, located 25 miles southeast of Lander, Wyoming, is the South Pass City area. On a series of well maintained gravel roads you will find at least three ghost towns; a Calvary Fort and many abandoned gold mines, as well as the Carissa mine. The South Pass City district is rich in folklore and abounds with tales of outlaws and Indians.

In 1842, gold was discovered in the Sweetwater Creek, and before long, South Pass City was born. The town is one of the most complete and authentic ghost towns in the west. Of the original 300 buildings, 30 still remain intact. In its heyday, South Pass City's population reached nearly 4,000 citizens, but all was not well on the home front. Frequent raids by the Sioux and Cheyenne brought in the U. S Calvary and Fort Stambaugh came into existence. The remains of this fort can still be seen and is only a short drive over dirt roads from South Pass City.

A visit to this gold rush town is like stepping back through the gates of time. Take a moment and shop at the Smith - Sherlock General Store, here you will find old fashion candy and possibly even a book containing recipes of the pioneers.

The famous Oregon Trail came right through the South Pass area; making its final crossing of the Sweetwater River near a telegraph and stage station known as Burt Ranch. Following the old Oregon Trail you can still see the wagon ruts of the many pioneers who blew caution to the wind and set out for the Old Wild West and adventure.

If an explorer craves even more of that Old West flavour, just a short drive away is the ghost town of Atlantic City, where many of the original buildings are still intact and some are even being used. Atlantic City's old saloon is still in operation and is now a restaurant, which serves up some delicious steak dinners.

The restored Miner's Delight is the local Bed & Breakfast and if you would like something a little more rustic the owners rent out cabins as well. A short walk from the Miner's Delight Bed & Breakfast is the Two-Bit Gulch; an art gallery displaying works from many Wyoming artists.

If this isn't enough adventure you will find the area full of opportunities for fishing, hiking and rock climbing, just to name a few activities available in the region.

A trip the South Pass area is a good bet for some authentic Old West.

By Viogo Mando

<http://www.premtravel.com>

Florida Strawberry Festival

The Florida Strawberry Festival heritage dates back to 1930 when members of the newly organized Plant City Lions Club conceived the idea of an event to celebrate the bountiful harvest of the strawberries. The Lions Club and other civic organizations have participated in the Florida Strawberry Festival throughout its history.

The Festival runs from March 3rd to March 13th and has many, many things to do. Competitions and contests for young and old combined with exhibits of agriculture, commerce, horticulture, fine arts, livestock, homemade goods, crafts, and parades. The Florida Strawberry Festival's own Post Office is of extra special interest. The old mailboxes, a desk, and other furniture were actually used in early Post Offices in the area. The U.S. Postal Service operates the Post Office on each day of the Festival. The hand stamp on letters and cards mailed from the Post Office show "Florida Strawberry Festival Station, Plant City, Florida 33567." An authentic log cabin that dates back to the mid-1800's is located next to the Post Office. The cabin was moved log by log from its original site on Knights Griffin Road, seven miles northeast of Plant City, to the Festival grounds. Turn-of-the-century antiques are displayed in the cabin. Country music entertainers perform each day at 4:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. There are about 4,000 free seats included as a part of the gate admission available on a first-come, first-served basis, or you may purchase reserved seats for \$15 and \$10.

LOCATION - 2202 West Reynolds Street, Plant City, 813-752-9194

Gate Admission \$9 (ages 13 and up)

Youth gate admission \$5 (ages 6-12)

Children 5 and under admitted free with paying adult.

10 Most Hated New House Jobs

1. Unpacking/getting rid of boxes
2. Weather stripping, and caulking doors and windows.
3. Fixing dripping taps
4. Hanging pictures or shelves
5. Cleaning gutters
6. Repairing plaster and drywall
7. Making sure house is properly insulated
8. Touching up paint
9. Checking the roof doesn't leak
10. Assembling and moving furniture

10 Facts From the DHS 2004

1. 428 million travellers were processed at entry ports.
2. Of this number 262 million were aliens -
3. 643,000 aliens were deemed inadmissible -
4. Border Patrol agents arrested 1,158,800 illegal aliens.
5. Over 650 million passengers travelled by air
6. Averaging at 1.8 million per day & they had:
7. 6, 501,193 prohibited items confiscated,
8. Including: 1,895,915 knives & 598 guns.
9. 255,233 pounds of cocaine were seized.
10. FEMA provided \$2.25 billion in aid for victims of disasters

Florida Homes And Travel Car Hire

Rates through February

*** Special Offer – Minivan 7 Seater from £185 per week***

	Fully Inclusive Weekly	Fully Inclusive Daily	Platinum Cover Weekly	Platinum Cover Daily
Economy 4 Door	£125	£22	£135	£25
Compact 4 Door	£140	£24	£150	£26
Intermediate 4 Door	£149	£26	£159	£28
Full Size 4 Door	£169	£29	£179	£31
Premium 4 Door	£186	£35	£196	£37
Luxury 4 Door	£205	£36	£215	£39
Convertible 2 Door	£205	£36	£215	£39
4 Wheel Drive	£200	£45	£210	£47
<i>Luxury 7 Seater</i>	<i>£185</i>	<i>£36</i>	<i>£195</i>	<i>£39</i>
Minivan 8 Seater	£247	£48	£257	£50

These rates are subject to change 2 door models are available – please see our website or call for prices

Please call 0500 50 50 87 for more details or email elle@floridahomesandtravel.com

We accept Visa, MasterCard, Switch/Maestro and Solo

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