

# FLORIDA

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## HOMES AND TRAVEL

June 2006

## Survey 2006

**The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Property Management Survey – 2006 – enclosed with this months issue has shown that despite another difficult hurricane season 2005 was actually a good year for rental home owners. In fact owners were entirely split as to whether the hurricanes had had any bearing on rentals at all. Early estimates on tourist numbers released by Visit Florida – the official tourism body of Florida have shown that 2005 was a record year for travel to Florida with visitor numbers estimated in excess of 85.8 million. Experts believe that a weak fourth quarter was offset by the performance of the preceding 3 quarters. Hurricane Wilma caused some havoc in the fourth quarter. According to the results of our survey, owners received over 20 weeks of rentals from Management companies, this was the best result for some years – owners generated nearly 30 weeks on their own, continued on page 2**

### Yvonne's - Lawsuit

We have obtained further explanation of an ongoing civil action against Yvonne's Property Management Company as mentioned in the May issue. Yvonne's Property Management Company of 2629 Waverly Barn Road, Davenport, writes to many owners within their area with the offer of "a 'Guaranteed Rental Program' which is unique in this industry and provides a MINIMUM (with no maximum) income guarantee for your home (\$32,000 for a three bedroom, \$40,000 for a four bedroom, \$50,000 for a five bedroom and \$52,000 for a six bedroom home) over a two year period."

A claim against this company has been filed in the Circuit Civil Court of Polk County citing violation of Florida Statute Chapter 501, Part II, Deceptive and Unfair Practices. One of the Statutes' purposes is stated as "To protect the consuming public and legitimate business enterprises from those who engage in unfair methods of competition, or unconscionable, deceptive, or unfair acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce."

We spoke with Mr Rodger Moss, Attorney of Diaz and Moss, who has been working on behalf of 10 clients in a 'group action' for over a year. He told us "this is probably the strongest fraud case I have ever worked on". He believes he can show that whilst the guaranteed rental program is marketed – there is no intention to follow it through and pay out, on the company's part. The letter from Yvonne's states "we give you a legally binding contract that

places the responsibility solely on our shoulders to perform." Mr Moss cites testimony from employees claiming they had to create false work invoices to reduce client accounts, and delete bookings from the system so clients were unaware of their existence. Mr Moss is about 90% ready for trial and will notify the court when he is ready and at that stage a date for the trial will be set. This particular case will impact only the 10 plaintiffs and is not a 'class action' whereby other owners could benefit from a ruling without being involved in the case. However, during the course of his preparations Mr Moss has spoken with "over one hundred" other owners regarding Yvonne's, as well as other attorneys. He is happy to speak to anyone who has concerns about Yvonne's who may be considering/debating taking legal action.

A separate case in the Circuit Court in Polk County has resulted in a final judgement on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 in favour of plaintiffs Walker & Walker-Brown against Yvonne Bernstein and Yvonne's Property Management Inc. The court found that 'Yvonne's' was indebted to the two plaintiffs for the total sums of \$38,311.49 each.

Other Stories in This Issue	Page
Survey Continued	2
State News & Regional Roundup	3
Homes	4
Reaching New Markets	6
The Mighty Oriskany	7
How Well Do You Know Florida?	8



# Florida Homes and Travel

June 2006

## Survey Continued

and achieved 24 weeks when working with their MC – so it certainly appeared to be a good year. When we examine the graphs, we can see that owners spending £250 or less on their advertising actually received 24 weeks on average. This is about 9 weeks more than in 2004, and whilst those who spent more, received more rentals, we can assume that in a good year, everyone will pick up rentals no matter how their advertising budget works. It will be interesting to see what happens this year – which is widely acknowledged by owners and the travel industry to be tough! (See page 4) We were pleased to see that the number of guests travelling from elsewhere in the US or Canada had increased by 12%. The US travel market is an important one for UK owners to cultivate because it continues to grow as more Americans discover villas, and because they are less affected by high transatlantic flight costs. The US also appears to be coming out of a recent economic downturn – so now is a good time to be utilizing that market.

We can see that two thirds of your advertising budget is spent on a villa listing website and your own website. This investment provides about one third of rentals, another third of rentals are generated by management companies at no outlay but reduced rental rates.

We also asked if owning a property in Florida had lived up to the dream? How satisfied are you as an owner. Over 73% of owners said yes, you were satisfied as an owner, 15% said no, you were not satisfied, and 12% were undecided. Many reasons were given for all positions, those who said yes overall cited the weather, the beautiful homes, the lifestyle etc, those who said no cited bad management companies, lack of rentals and therefore finances and in some cases the changing reception of overseas owners in Florida.

We were also staggered by the variety of your favourite day trips. Although Disney won overall when all your best parks were combined – there were many different state parks mentioned, and many favourite beaches. St Pete's beach on the gulf coast was the most popular. Those of you who said Walmart – you are not alone, our 5 and 7 year olds are currently planning their shopping trip with military precision!!

## Our Competition Winner...

"On my return from Florida, suffering from a severe case of holiday blues, I eagerly picked up my copy of Florida Homes and Travel. I was delighted to read of my good luck in your recent competition. In fact, I had to read the article two or three times before it sunk in. I am sure you can guess where I will be flying to with the help of my BA vouchers. Thank you to you all at Florida Homes and Travel and keep up the good work!"

From Mr Richard Coffey who won £500 of BA flight vouchers in our recent Moneycorp competition.

## Setting The Record Straight

You may remember that last month we published a letter of complaint from Mr Bradley concerning Moneycorp. We believed (erroneously) that the complaint procedure was complete. Moneycorp and Mr Bradley have provided us with an update, and we are more than happy to share this with you and restore the excellent reputation of Moneycorp.

"We were very disappointed to hear about Mr Bradley's initial experience of our services.

Upon receipt of Mr Bradley's letter, Moneycorp contacted Mr Bradley in order to discuss in more detail the issues that he had raised. We have subsequently responded to the issues raised by Mr Bradley to his satisfaction and he has agreed that he will use Moneycorp again for his future currency transactions.

Trading in foreign currencies since 1979, the Company has built a solid reputation in the industry and serves over 2.4 million customers a year. TTT Moneycorp Ltd has maintained an internationally recognised ISO Quality Accreditation since 1996. In the rare event of a customer complaint, any complaint is dealt with as an absolute priority in accordance with our complaints procedure.

We would like to reassure Mr Bradley and all Florida Homes and Travel clients that Moneycorp has dedicated teams in the UK and in Florida to proactively manage all of your foreign exchange requirements.

For further information about Moneycorp and our foreign exchange services please call our Florida office on: +1 321 559 1050 or the UK office on: +44 (0)20 7589 3000. Our Florida office opening hours are 8:30am – 5:30pm Monday – Friday and our UK office opening hours are 7:30am to 10:30pm Monday – Friday and 10am – 4pm Saturday."

## Hurricane Watch

We post regular updates on hurricanes during the season, as they are issued, together with a useful checklist of things to do if you are affected by a hurricane, useful websites and phone numbers, all on our hurricane watch page on the website: [www.floridahomesandtravel/hurricane\\_watch](http://www.floridahomesandtravel/hurricane_watch).

## Miami Beach Climate Data – June - 1948- 2000

(All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The average high temp is	85.7°
The average low temp is	76.6°
The highest temp (on June 10 <sup>th</sup> 1957)	97°
The coldest night temp (on June 5 <sup>th</sup> 1967)	65°

## Mortgage Rates

	March 29	Apr 27	May 26
With zero points			
Fixed 30 yrs	6.65%	6.35%	6.64%
Adjustable 1 yr	6.12%	5.87%	6.37%

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



# Florida Homes and Travel

## June 2006

### State Digest

**This year's legislative session** finished on time with a flurry of activity in the final days. Just 48 hours before the end of the session, it looked as if the budget would be the only thing to be passed (legally the budget is the only thing that must be passed each session). But after a small amount of prevarication, which included a couple of bills being read in their entirety to make a point, the collective finger was pulled out and action took off. The unpopular telephone law passed in 2003 was amended to remove a possible 20% per year unapproved rate increase to an annual increase equal to the rate of inflation plus 1%. Subscribers will be relieved to discover that Key Lime Pie was officially adopted as the State Pie! Diners may or may not be pleased that cities can now decide whether or not man's best friend can sit by his owners outdoor table, but they will probably be happy that an unpopular alcohol tax has been removed. The date for return to school has also been moved closer to Labor Day in a move that will be very popular with theme parks!

**Roads in Central Florida** were closed by brush fires sparked by the tinder dry conditions together with a lack of real rainfall. A 30 acre fire just west of SeaWorld Orlando shut down Interstate 4 and the Central Florida Parkway, when it ran alongside I4 and jumped across the Parkway in early May. About 72 firefighters fought the fire and extinguished it after 3 1/2 hours. The problem was so widespread that Governor Bush had to declare a State of Emergency and order the National Guard to help fight the fires. Later in the month storms in Southern Florida caused power outages for thousands of homes.

**Dr Beach** has named 2 Florida beaches in his annual top ten. Dr Beach (Stephen Leatherman) is director of Florida International University's coastal research lab and has studied beaches for years. Caladesi Island State Park, Dunedin came second, and Barefoot Beach Park, Bonita Springs came 10<sup>th</sup>. Fleming Beach Park, Maui, Hawaii came 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Delta Airlines** may be in Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Protection, but that is clearly no excuse to let standards slip. Designer Richard Tyler unveiled new uniforms in May featuring splashes of gold and platinum along with the companies traditional navy blue and red. New uniforms typically cost around \$1,000 per employee. Delta Airlines Chief Executive Officer Gerald Grinstein has said that he expects Delta to be out of bankruptcy protection no later than summer of 2007.

**Passengers passing** through Hartsfield-Jackson airport in Atlanta on a Delta Airlines flight will benefit most from a new runway opened in May. Atlanta handles more than 86 million passengers every year – more than Heathrow. More than 40% of Delta's flights pass through the flagship hub at Atlanta.

**A disruptive passenger** who caused a flight from Orlando to be diverted to Charlotte last November has been sentenced to 7 months in prison for intimidating a flight attendant. Mark McGovern was accused of urinating in an aisle and lighting a cigarette on board.

### Regional Roundup

**Barnie's Coffee & Tea Co.**, which began life in Winter Park over 25 years ago, has sold 56 mall-based locations to main rival Starbucks. Barnie's wants to focus on selling beverages, and expand food offerings into a breakfast and lunch menu. It also has one eye on growing the overseas market.

**The original terminal** for Orlando International – a simple metal-framed hangar used by the Air Force for storage – will be demolished to make way for further development along the Beachline Expressway.

**The site formally known** as Splendid China has changed hands again. No selling price has been disclosed and the purchaser is Wooden Bridge Partners GP LLC, a major South Florida development company. No development plans have been released for the property, which was sold last year to Rolling Oaks Investment Properties LLCX for \$40.5 million.

**Osceola Property Appraiser** Bob Day was suspended in May after being arrested on charges of using employees to help him move into a new house and to aid two of his re-election campaigns. An interim property appraiser will be appointed to serve the remainder of the term unless Day is acquitted or the charges dropped. Meantime the Orange County Property Appraiser Bill Donegan has stepped in to help the Osceola County office meet its May 31<sup>st</sup> deadline for mailing estimates of taxable property values to local taxing authorities.

### Average Daily Hotel Room Rate

Area	April	May
International Drive	\$109.61	\$111.60
Lake Buena Vista	\$136.86	\$122.61
Kissimmee East	\$86.87	\$81.52
Kissimmee West	\$62.81	\$54.11

### Florida Lottery Winning Numbers

Date	Numbers
05/27/2006	02 - 03 - 08 - 33 - 40 - 51
05/24/2006	03 - 12 - 19 - 23 - 28 - 35
05/20/2006	15 - 20 - 23 - 30 - 34 - 41
05/17/2006	02 - 04 - 08 - 16 - 24 - 46
05/13/2006	01 - 05 - 12 - 27 - 33 - 52
05/10/2006	12 - 14 - 20 - 39 - 42 - 49
05/06/2006	07 - 24 - 28 - 38 - 50 - 53
05/03/2006	04 - 07 - 09 - 12 - 18 - 22
04/29/2006	15 - 17 - 21 - 27 - 29 - 43

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



# Florida Homes and Travel

## June 2006

### Homes

**Another month** – another scam. The latest scam in Florida plays on fears over water quality. Florida Water Works, a private, profit-making company has been sending out letters to homeowners stating, “The Environmental Protection Agency wants everyone to test their water and Florida Water Works can do it”. Water borne nasties such as ecoli are mentioned and some Florida Counties have given out warnings against the scam. According to a hidden camera report by Action 9 television station, the salespeople conduct 2 tests, one places a couple of drops of liquid in to a cup of water which then goes cloudy (a precipitation test which simply isolates calcium which makes water ‘hard’ – not harmful) and the other test involves putting two metal rods into a glass of water and sending an electrical current through it – the water turns mud brown. The water turns brown because metal is shed from the rods not because it is contaminated. People who fall for this scam land up installing water treatment systems costing \$2000 or more. The EPA does not require anyone to conduct water tests, and all utilities can provide test results if requested. The Better Business Bureau has revoked the membership of Florida Water Works because of the sales tactics.

**Regions Financial Group** and AmSouth Bancorporation have agreed to a \$9.8 billion merger to create a top 10 U.S. Bank. Regions will acquire AmSouth and retain the Regions name so becoming the fourth largest financial institution in Florida with \$18.3 billion in deposits. Earlier in May, Wachovia agreed to buy the parent company of World Savings Bank for \$25 billion a move that should make Wachovia the largest bank in Florida.

**Collier County Commissioners** voted 4-1 in favour of increasing school impact fees by 200% at a meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May. The last increase in school impact fees came in 1992.

**A June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting** will discuss the results of a survey of more than 240 Manasota Key residents that asked if homeowners are interested in a beach restoration/replenishment project. The area most in need is just south of Manasota beach and north of Middle Beach – where some homes are less than 30 feet from the beach’s bluff. To protect against rapid erosion the replenished beach should measure at least a mile long. As yet there are no costs or designs available.

**At a recent award** ceremony at the Naples Grande Resort & Club honouring tourism professionals it was pointed out that there are almost 30,000 tourism related jobs in Collier County generating over \$850 million in wages last year.

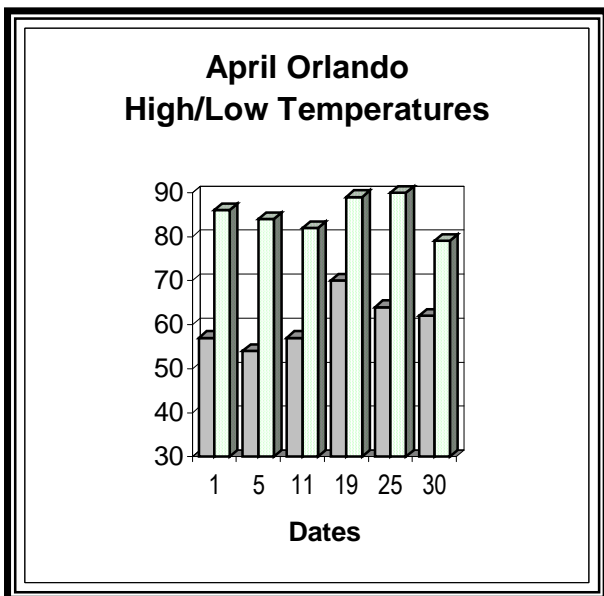
**IKEA has announced** plans to open a store in Orlando at the southeastern end of The Mall at Millenia. With construction of the 310,000 square-foot store commencing later this summer the anticipated opening will be the fall of 2007. IKEA Orlando will feature three model homes and 50 room settings together with the ubiquitous supervised children’s play area and restaurant serving Swedish meatballs.

**The continued** dry spell is forcing many counties to re-evaluate their irrigation policies. Sarasota County is considering changing Sunday as the watering day for odd numbered houses to irrigate to a weekday to even out demand at a time when most residents are home. St Lucie County has asked owners to water in the evening instead of during the daytime although this is purely voluntarily at this time. Residents of Cape Coral may be limited to only one day of watering per week to protect underground water levels. Violators of the current two-day restriction could find themselves fined.

**The 3% Federal excise tax** on long distance calls is being dispensed with, and in 2007 taxpayers will get a refund backdated to Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 2003. Taxpayers will be able to claim a refund on their 2006 tax returns when they are filed in 2007. Non-taxpayers will only benefit from readjusted call and billing plans that take account of the new law. State and regional fees as well as federal excise tax on local telephone service remain in effect.

**The Tourist Development Council** of Pinellas County has voted to spend \$30,000 on a new advertising campaign with a difference. Called “Love a Tourist” the adverts to be run on public access television and in brochures will highlight the benefits that tourism brings to local residents, such as support for festivals, museums and high-end restaurants.

**A public hearing** for the Karlton Development of Regional Impact was rescheduled for May 30<sup>th</sup>. The mixed-use project is proposed on a 2,098-acre site to the east of U.S. Highway 27, near the border of Lake and Orange counties. The estimated population will be 12,000 at build out if approved.





# Florida Homes and Travel

June 2006

## Insurance

The vexed questions of what to do about soaring home insurance premiums and escalating debt at Citizen's Property Insurance Corp (the state insurer of last resort) took up most of the final days of this year's legislative session. The final outcome was that the state would send a cheque for \$715 million to help bail out the \$1.7 billion debt at Citizens. Further debts will be recouped by assessing Citizens insured vacation home owners for 10%, followed by a second assessment if necessary of all Citizen's customers and if still required, all homeowners in the state will be assessed.

**American Mercury** (a home insurer) and Mercury Insurance Co of Florida (an auto insurer) have been ordered to refund \$2 million to Florida customers after a state probe found the companies had charged unapproved rates and failed to pay claims properly following the hurricanes in 2004.

**Allstate Floridian** is to transfer 120,000 insurance renewals to Royal Palm Insurance Co beginning in November. Policyholders will begin to receive notice in August.

**State Farm Insurance Co** is to cancel all 1,500 of its condo association policies Statewide.

Many insurance companies continue to file for rate increases, citing the high cost of reinsurance as one reason. Record catastrophe losses in 2005 were 'market changing events' which have forced reinsurers to readjust historical catastrophe reinsurance ratings which had underestimated the frequency and severity of hurricanes. It is widely expected from within the insurance industry that the end of soaring rates is not yet in sight – as the market readjusts to sustainable levels following years of artificially low rates caused both by state restrictions and 'quiet' hurricane seasons.

All three of Tampa based Poe Financial Group's insurance companies have been forced into liquidation by the state after confirming they could not pay its liabilities and did not have enough capital to continue. The Poe group was formed in 1996 when it took on high-risk policies from Citizens. All Poe's policyholders unable to find cover elsewhere will automatically transition into Citizens on July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

To compound insurance problems, the cost of repairs has largely doubled since Hurricane Charley first swept through two years ago. Particularly hit are roofing repairs. Most roofing material is made from asphalt, and asphalt is made from oil and there can be no one left who is not aware of the rise of oil prices. Then there is the cost of transportation to be factored in. Florida is considered a 'dead run' for hauliers who can seldom find anything to haul back out of the state. This increases costs to suppliers who have to pay for two legs of transport – again affected by fuel prices.

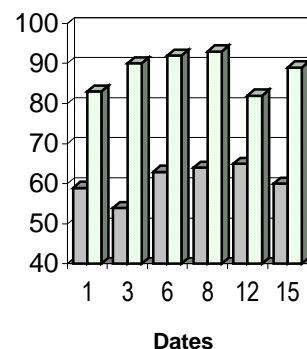
## 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2006 Home Prices

The figures below, released by the *Florida Association of Realtors*, are reflective of the larger picture in the U.S. A continued upward trend in mortgage rates coupled with a higher number of houses available for sale are leading to some market adjustment. We can see that with 5 exceptions, the percentage increase in median home sale prices (half above and half below) has remained at less than 20% over the first quarter of 2005. We have also highlighted in bold print the MSA's where the median price has decreased since the fourth quarter of 2005 and we can easily see that with 5 exceptions prices are 're-adjusting'. The figures released by FAR also show that realtor sales Statewide have decreased by 20% in the first quarter 2006 over 2005.

Naples has a median price of over \$500,000, and Lakeland/Winter Haven has seen the strongest growth in this period.

District (MSA)	Median Price	%Change 2006-2005
Daytona Beach	\$226,600	+28%
<b>Fort Lauderdale</b>	<b>\$366,600</b>	<b>+14%</b>
<b>Fort Myers/Cape Coral</b>	<b>\$282,600</b>	<b>+19%</b>
<b>Fort Pierce/Port St Lucie</b>	<b>\$260,200</b>	<b>+13%</b>
<b>Fort Walton Beach</b>	<b>\$234,600</b>	<b>+7%</b>
Lakeland/Winter Haven	\$172,400	+43%
<b>Melbourne/Titusville</b>	<b>\$222,400</b>	<b>+13%</b>
Miami	\$376,900	+21%
Naples	\$505,600	+8%
<b>Orlando</b>	<b>\$257,300</b>	<b>+34%</b>
<b>Panama City</b>	<b>\$221,000</b>	<b>+13%</b>
<b>Pensacola</b>	<b>\$161,400</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<b>Punta Gorda</b>	<b>\$225,900</b>	<b>+14%</b>
<b>Sarasota/Bradenton</b>	<b>\$331,100</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<b>Tampa/St Pete/Clearwater</b>	<b>\$221,700</b>	<b>+26%</b>
<b>West Palm Bch/Boca Raton</b>	<b>\$392,900</b>	<b>+8%</b>
Statewide	\$248,000	+20%

Orlando Early May High/Low Temperatures





# Florida Homes and Travel

June 2006

## Reaching New Markets

As we reach the middle of the year, estimates and analysis of visitor numbers during the first quarter of 2006 are released. The numbers really reinforce what most subscribers we have spoken to have been experiencing. Brits are not travelling.

If your market is mainly American or International you will probably not have noticed any difference because domestic U.S. visitors are continuing to travel. Visitor numbers from Canada have increased by 2% this year. But, if your market is mainly British you will be very lucky if you have not noticed a dearth of enquiries and consequentially bookings.

Many subscribers have been quite relieved when we have spoken with them, to discover that their experience is not unique.

Tourism numbers to Florida are only down by about 100,000 over the first quarter in 2005. Visitors from the UK however are significantly down – although this is disguised in the numbers game by the increase in the Canadian market already mentioned. Increases in county resort tax incomes are because of higher hotel room rates, not because of increased numbers.

UK deplanements (passengers who disembark a plane) at Orlando and Sanford were down by 12% in total in January and February. Research by Redmarke has given a clear indication that the March and April figures will be the same.

Only 8% of UK passengers travelled to Orlando and Sanford from Gatwick in the first two months compared with 73% of passengers in the same period 2005. Manchester, meanwhile, has shown an increase in Passenger traffic of 82% during the first 2 months of the year over last year. Does this point to a particular tightening of belts in London and the Southeast?

Our survey shows that British travellers accounted for 56% of guests in 2005. This was down 12% on the previous year, but still shows a dependence on the British market. There are many owners 100% reliant on the British market. So how can we diversify? How can we reach other markets?

Projections by Visit Florida (the official tourism body of Florida) of visitor profiles indicate a 10% increase in the number of Germans heading to Florida in 2006. So we have taken a quick look at this market. The profile shows that 93.8% of Germans travel without children. Of those 74.9% travel completely alone and 20.9% as a couple. This probably explains their preference for condo's or villas on the Gulf Coast. They like to stay for 13 nights, and spend around \$2,468 per trip. Particular preferences are: - Shopping (84.7%), Dining in restaurants (82.8%) and Heritage based (74.3%) – visiting historical places and cultural heritage sights. Golf interests 12.5% of German visitors.

To find out how to reach this market, we logged into Google as Germans – [www.google.de](http://www.google.de) - and searched for a Florida villa on the German Web, just as one would in the UK. The first reasonable looking villa listing site that came up (not the actual first on our search because that appeared to need installations and we don't like those) looked very similar to what we are used to and was called [www.ferienhausmiete.de](http://www.ferienhausmiete.de). From what we could see, you can register your home for free (if you link to their site from your home page) and by selecting the Union flag, the site appears in English. At the time of searching, of the 163 properties listed for Florida, only 18 were in the Disney World area.

A similar experiment for France using [www.google.fr](http://www.google.fr) turned up [www.homelidays.com](http://www.homelidays.com). Once again, this site uses the Union Flag for those of us non bi-lingual! One can advertise up to three properties free for one month after which one can opt to renew for a maximum cost of 115 Euros for 12 months (there are shorter and cheaper tariffs). They also have a guarantee that if one does not receive at least one week of rentals they will extend the advert for 6 months free of charge. When we looked there were 40 properties in the Orlando area and 102 in Florida.

French visitors accounted for 122,000 visitors to Florida in 2004 (the last year that finalised figures are available for), Germans accounted for 265,000 and British visitors – 1,480,000.

So we can see that there are steps we can take to widen our villa's appeal. Other steps could include displaying prices in sterling, dollars and Euros, ensuring your terminology is not too narrowly British and have a look at the way other nationalities display their homes – what is important to them? What are they looking for to be prominently displayed?

## US Dollar Update by Moneycorp

Three weeks. That's all it took for the Dollar to weaken by nine per cent against Sterling. The following fortnight brought similar levels of activity but little net movement. Although the bears had temporarily run out of ammunition, volatility in the equity and commodity markets fed through to currencies. The Dollar went up and down like a yoyo; time and again it fell short of making any meaningful recovery. The Fed has finished its planned cycle of monetary tightening. It will base any future interest rate hikes on the economic data. Those data are annoyingly inconclusive. Investors are unsure what to do next and the Dollar's (few) supporters are still nervous. The longer the Dollar fails to rally, the less its chance of reversing the losses and the greater becomes the risk of further decline when this waiting period is over.

We also provide a weekly Moneycorp US Dollar update on our website page: -

[www.floridahomesandtravel.com/moneycorp\\_update](http://www.floridahomesandtravel.com/moneycorp_update).



# Florida Homes and Travel

June 2006

## The Mighty Oriskany

Visitors to Pensacola gained a unique diving and fishing location this May when the retired aircraft carrier Oriskany was reefed at an existing artificial reef site in the Gulf of Mexico. At 888 feet in length, the "Mighty Oriskany" is the largest vessel purposely sunk as a reef and has the potential to become the largest artificial reef in the world. This exceptional site gives divers the chance to swim with Goliath grouper, ocean sunfish and eagle rays. In addition, anglers will have the opportunity to catch popular game fish such as Warsaw grouper, snapper and amberjack.

The reefing commenced with controlled charges in 212 feet of water, 22.5 miles southeast of Pensacola in late May 2006. A memorial service was held prior to the event at the National Museum of Naval Aviation, to recognize the vessel that served as a combat aircraft carrier in the Korean and Vietnam wars. The service honoured the crew and ship that have provided exemplary service to our Navy and country.

USS Oriskany, a 27,100-ton *Ticonderoga* class aircraft carrier, was built at the New York Navy Yard. Though she was launched in October 1945, construction was suspended in August 1947 and she was completed to a revised design that was also used in modernizing several other ships of the *Essex* and *Ticonderoga* classes. Commissioned in September 1950, Oriskany deployed to the Mediterranean Sea between May and October 1951 and steamed around Cape Horn to join the Pacific Fleet in May 1952. She made one Korean War combat cruise, from September 1952 to May 1953.

Following the end of the Korean conflict, Oriskany continued her Pacific Fleet service for more than two more decades, deploying regularly to the Western Pacific for tours of duty with the Seventh Fleet. She was out of commission from January 1957 until March 1959, during which time she was modernized with a new angled flight deck, steam catapults, an enclosed "hurricane" bow and many other improvements that permitted safer operation of high-performance aircraft. In 1961, she became the first aircraft carrier to be fitted with the revolutionary Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS).

Oriskany's second war began with her 1965 WestPac cruise, during which her planes hit targets in North and South Vietnam. Several more combat tours followed as the Southeast Asian

conflict waxed and waned. Tragedy struck the carrier on 26 October 1966, during her second Vietnam War deployment, when fire ravaged her forward compartments, killing 44 members of her crew and air group. Oriskany was repaired in the U.S., returned to the war zone in mid-1967 and rendered assistance to USS *Forrestal* when that carrier also suffered a major fire. Following twenty-six years of service, USS *Oriskany* was decommissioned in September 1976.

In April 2004, the U.S. Navy chose Escambia County as the resting place for USS Oriskany. The Oriskany's former crewmembers include Sen. John McCain, who was taken prisoner in North Vietnam after leaving the ship in 1967.

Shipwreck diving is a unique recreation that is gaining in popularity and attention. Northwest Florida offers exciting diving opportunities with many historical wreck sites and artificial reefs. Serving as a premier diving site, north Florida holds a variety of marine life, as well as dozens of natural reefs. With a large area of open water and relatively little commercial fishing, this area is a great location for big game fish, as well as manta rays and the Florida spiny lobster. The slightly cooler water provides greater visibility and a less crowded diving haven.



For beginning divers, scuba diving lessons are offered from scuba instructors at the various Pensacola dive shops or scuba schools. Divers who have open water scuba certification can dive without an instructor present. Arrangements can also be made through dive shops and charters to swim with a certified instructor. Some of Pensacola's dive instruction locations include Watersport Specialties, MBT Divers, which offers SCUBA training and certification, and Reel Eazy charters, which offers diving and deep-sea fishing charters.

In addition to the USS Oriskany, Pensacola is home to numerous historic ships, including the 500-foot World War I battleship, USS Massachusetts, the Russian freighter San Pablo, a Navy barge and a part of the carrier USS Lexington. Divers can also find Vietnam-era tanks and various other naval ships to explore. Already called the best place to explore historic wrecks, Northwest Florida's newest addition, the USS Oriskany, will bring a premier diving and fishing attraction that shouldn't be missed. Visitors can come and see the largest vessel to be purposely-sunk turn into the largest artificial reef and wreck diving site. This new attraction will provide a memorable experience for veteran and new divers alike. [www.visitpensacola.com](http://www.visitpensacola.com)



# Florida Homes and Travel

June 2006

## How Well Do You Know Florida?

Pit your wits against Tim in this month's fun quiz. Answers next month.

1. What is the number of the exit on I-4 for SeaWorld?
2. I-75 stretches from Hialeah in Miami-Dade County to Michigan at the Canada Border – how long is it in miles?
3. The Magic Kingdom opened on October 1<sup>st</sup> in which year?
4. In which year did SeaWorld open?
5. When was Gatorland founded?
6. Before 1974 what was Orlando International airport known as?
7. Hurricane Charley struck Charlotte Harbor on what date?
8. In which county is Fort Myers?
9. What minimum sustained wind speeds must a Category 5 Hurricane possess?
10. Who was Charlotte Harbor named after in 1775?
11. Which is the second largest city in Florida?
12. The Everglades cover many Southern Florida counties – how many can you name?
13. What is the average depth of Lake Okeechobee?
14. How long is the Kissimmee River?
15. Who named Florida in 1513?
16. Can you name the highest point in Florida?
17. How high is it?
18. The highest point in Peninsular Florida is in Lake County can you name it?
19. Bumper 8 was the name of the first rocket launched from Cape Canaveral – what was the year?
20. From 1963 to 1973 Cape Canaveral was re-named something else – what was it?
21. Which Florida city is the longest continually occupied city in the U.S.?
22. What is the capital of Florida?
23. What does ESPN stand for?
24. What does HBO stand for?
25. Which baseball team does spring training at Walt Disney World?
26. What is the State Bird?
27. Tampa is in which county?
28. Where in Sarasota County is the "Shark Tooth Capital of the World?"
29. What is the airport code for Sarasota/Bradenton?
30. What does ABC stand for?
31. Where was President Bush on the morning of September 11, 2001?
32. What was the population of the City of Lake Buena Vista in the 2004 Census?
33. Which town in Scotland is Sarasota twinned with?

If anyone would like to send in their answers, there will be a free year's subscription for the first correct answer sheet drawn out of the hat on June 28<sup>th</sup>!

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