

# FLORIDA

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## HOMES AND TRAVEL

July/August 2006

## Tropical Storm Alberto

Hurricane Season 2006 began officially on June 1<sup>st</sup>, and to confirm this, Tropical Storm Alberto brewed up in the Gulf and arrived on Monday June 12<sup>th</sup>. Alberto was very disorganised, and had an unusual pattern on the satellite, which showed all cloud activity to the east of the centre so the 'eye' appeared to be on the outer edge. He provided substantial, much needed, rainfall over most of Florida and finally came ashore in Taylor County on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>. What was much more interesting about Alberto was the way it was presented in the media. There were lots of reporters standing half way down beaches so that they could show themselves with wet feet, and lots of talk of the winds. As this was only a Tropical Storm the winds wouldn't even warrant a mention on British weather forecasts! But, still, relatives of Floridians from elsewhere in the U.S. were contacting loved ones to ask if they were being evacuated. The storm was covered internationally – all of which helps to continue the negative association of Florida with hurricanes. As it is widely predicted that the next few years will be more active than usual for hurricanes it will be worth our while as owners developing ways of allaying guests' fears whilst taking sensible precautions to protect and preserve life and limb.

Over recent years, building codes for new houses have been amended (from those introduced following Hurricane Andrew in 1992) to make houses safer and more resistant to high winds and extreme weather. But, what if your house is older, what can you do to protect your home? Most roofs are covered with asphalt shingles, and although these are usually guaranteed for 20 years, in Florida they often need replacing sooner. When this is being done, the roof can be 'retrofitted' by a licensed professional to strengthen it. Hurricane straps can be installed at every wall –to-rafter connection, paying particular attention to gable end connections as gable ends are more likely to fail in high wind. Install a roof deck of solid plywood making sure the nails penetrate the roof rafters and then seal the joints using self-adhering flashing tape commonly called 'peel and seal'. Ensure the roof covering itself has been tested to ASTM D 3161 (modified to 110 mph) for wind resistance and UL 2218 for impact resistance. Be sure to specify these standards, as ordinary roofing materials may look the same as the wind resistant versions. Windows and exterior doors can be brought up to standard and shutters can be installed. For details of the product standards you require, and further strengthening ideas, please see [www.flash.org](http://www.flash.org) and [www.blueprintforsafety.org](http://www.blueprintforsafety.org).

### Insurance Rises Continue

Increasing property insurance premiums are reaching most homeowners now and the rate hikes are not set to stop. There is still a surcharge to pay towards Citizens' \$1.7 billion deficit despite the award of \$750 million from this years legislature, there is now a 2% surcharge for the failure of Poe Insurance Group (see page 4) and private insurance companies will be able to increase rates by between 5% statewide and 10% in certain areas without approval from next July.

The insurance industry paid out \$39 billion in 2004 and 2005. In that same period, the

industry received only \$18 billion in premiums – the rises are going to continue. In fact, State Farm Florida has just applied for average statewide increases of 70%.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

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### Dining & Birthdays

We had a fantastic meal at an Olive Garden (served with a smile by a lovely girl from Cheshire who has married an American). I tried the new 'Asiago and Roasted Garlic Tortellini with Shrimp', which was beautiful. As shrimps have a delicate flavour, the mildness of roasted garlic compliments them beautifully. Our server recommended this over the sausage and tomato version, as "the sauce is nicer".

We went to a Bahama Breeze for the first time and had a wonderful time. It was a little brighter overall in the restaurant than many, but our particular booth was quite dimly lit. However, we had a very helpful server in Julian who recommended I try the Grouper (as they don't always have it in – apparently) with Almond crust. I chose to have this with 'island rice' and vegetables and the whole thing was just fabulous. The 'island rice' and veg complimented each other perfectly with some wonderful fresh fruity flavours and the Grouper had firm, meaty flesh, but was a little filling by the end. If I went again I would prefer to try the cream based sauce. We had a lovely evening, and the children were very interested in the hand cream, hairspray and deodorant provided in the restrooms. We will definitely be back!

A holiday highlight was our son's seventh birthday. Tim had spent a while organising this, and we had a real Disney day. We arrived in the Magic Kingdom at 8.10am and started by collecting a Birthday Badge from the Guest Services building (just go in and ask). Then we headed for a character meal in the Crystal Palace (needs to be prebooked). When we checked in Tim told them it was Tom's birthday and by the time we were called to the table it had been covered in Mickey Mouse confetti and streamers. We had our meal and visits and were then surprised to receive a small-decorated cupcake with candle and a birthday card signed by all the crew from the Hundred Acre Wood. Then followed a very long hot, humid morning at the park where Tom was greeted everywhere by cast members wishing him "A Happy Birthday" (this was down to the large birthday badge).

After a return home for a cool down and rest, we headed back on the monorail to "Chef Mickey's" at the Contemporary resort for dinner (must be prebooked about 3 months in advance). We met Donald Duck on the way in, had Mickey, Minnie, Chip and Dale and Goofy come by the table and finished up with an enormous Birthday cake (also prebooked at \$16). Chef Mickey's special celebration is to whirl napkins around heads to the birthday music. Tom took home his signed placemat, and I had to carry the Birthday cake into the Magic Kingdom when we went to watch the parade. Tim had told Tom that the fireworks that night would be especially for him – he had arranged it – and as we went into the park our youngest (Sam, 5 yrs) asked why all these people had come to see Tom's fireworks and how did they know?

### Website Access

Apologies to anyone who is having or has had, difficulties accessing the member section of our website [www.floridahomesandtravel.com](http://www.floridahomesandtravel.com). When you create an account on line, the expiry date of your access is set to the current expiry date of your subscription. Due to an error in the website code, when we have attempted to extend the expiry date after subscription renewal, the account password has been corrupted, and access denied. Our web guru has now fixed the problem, but if you are experiencing problems, he has offered to fix your account for you, or it could be quicker to just create a new account.

### Help-Me-Park.com

Our visit to Florida gave us the perfect opportunity to try out this parking facility at Gatwick Airport. Help-Me-Park.com offers a meet and greet valet parking service. After making the reservation I received a confirmation email with all the details. The website also has a wealth of information about the service. About 2 weeks prior to departure we received a pack through the post with handy cards to take with us with phone numbers and instructions, a tag to hang from the mirror to help identify the vehicle at Gatwick together with instructions. Basically, they send you a text about half an hour before your arranged meeting time at Gatwick saying they are all ready. You can then respond and let them know how time is running with relation to the traffic. We were a little early due to a good run and this was not a problem, the uniformed driver was waiting when we arrived at the arrivals kerb. He checked the vehicle over; we signed our form and were on our way. 15 days later we received another text as we switched the phone on in the passport area. We collected our baggage and made our way out to find our car parked exactly where we left it with the uniformed staff. The cost is £118 for 15 days, which we think, is very reasonable with taxis from our area costing £60 plus each way. We had no worries about delays or any thing else and were totally self-sufficient. To obtain a quote please go to [www.help-me-park.com](http://www.help-me-park.com) and use FHANDT1 as your promotional code.

### Naples Climate Data – July - 1948- 2003 (All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The average high temp is	91.2°
The average low temp is	73.0°
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

With zero points	Apr 27	May 26	June 27
Fixed 30 yrs	6.35%	6.64%	6.71%
Adjustable 1 yr	5.87%	6.37%	5.75%

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

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### State Digest

**Walmart** is following an initiative started by Publix last year with the opening of its new Sabor supermarkets targeting Hispanic shoppers. Walmart is to tailor stores to the local market – in five styles: suburban-affluent, urban multicultural, Hispanic, baby boomer and rural.

**A fuel truck driver** at Sanford International Airport prevented a huge catastrophe as he coolly extinguished a fire that broke out in the engine of his truck. His truck was loaded with 10,000 gallons of aviation fuel and had just pulled under the wing of a Boeing 767 operated by FlyGlobespan, which was unoccupied at the time. The engines of the trucks are located at the rear of the vehicle. Two nearby jetliners owned by First Choice and My Travel were loaded with passengers ready to depart.

**The U.S. Census Bureau** has announced that the population of the United States will top 300 million probably in October. According to the bureau's population clock there is one birth every 8 seconds and 1 death every 13 seconds. It is also predicted that the 300 millionth person born or arriving will be Hispanic although there will never be any way of confirming this.

**Governor Bush** has signed the Babcock Preservation Act, providing \$310 million to acquire nearly 74,000 acres of the Babcock Ranch property, which spans both Lee and Charlotte counties in Southwest Florida. Placing Babcock Ranch into public ownership preserves in perpetuity a vast expanse of wildlife habitat, a valuable water-recharge area and an historic working ranch.

### Regional Roundup

**A storm on June 21<sup>st</sup>** caused power cuts to around 3,000 homes in the Bradenton/Sarasota areas and sparked a tornado near Port Charlotte together with power cuts for around 8,000 in north Port Charlotte.

**Constructions begin** next month on a flyover near Orlando International Airport to improve access from westbound traffic from the Beachline Expressway. The work should be completed by January 2008. The airport is also developing a courtesy car park where 100 private cars can wait to be called on their mobiles when passengers have collected their baggage. As kerbside waiting is not allowed, it is hoped that this park will relieve traffic on the terminal road systems waiting for passengers. The car park should be completed by Thanksgiving.

**P F Chang's China Bistro** continues its South Florida expansion. The chain is to open a new restaurant in the Galleria Mall in Fort Lauderdale by October.

**Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede Dinner & Show** is introducing a new Carriage Room show that features entertainer and comedian David Lucas.

**A 4 year-old has died** in Central Florida after a 40" television fell on him at his home. Please make sure your televisions are not in a position to be rocked by young children.

**Centra Care centers in Kissimmee**, Formosa and Longwood saw a 400% increase in stomach flu in three separate outbursts during June. The main symptom of the highly contagious bug was diarrhoea.

**Visitors to the Naples** area can enjoy a water park without travelling to Adventure Island at Tampa. The Sun-N-Fun Lagoon opened on June 24<sup>th</sup> at 15000 Livingston Road, Naples, just inside the North Collier Regional Park.

### Theme Park Roundup

**Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster** at Universal Studios was closed for a day after a 4-year-old girl trapped her foot between the car and the platform. She suffered only cuts to her foot.

**Pirates of the Caribbean: 'Dead Mans Chest'** will open after refurbishment on July 7<sup>th</sup> at Disney's Magic Kingdom to coincide with the nationwide release of the new Johnny Depp film of the same name.

**Disney's new promotion 'Year of a Million Dreams'** begins on October 1<sup>st</sup> (see page 6). Central to the promotion is the chance to win a stay overnight in Cinderella's Castle. However, before anyone can stay the room must be developed into a boudoir fit for a princess. The single floor apartment is 10 stories up where the main castle ends and the towers and turrets begin. It is believed to have been ordered by Walt Disney as a family suite but was not completed. In the interim the space has been used as a radio room, a telephone switchboard room, and a greenroom for entertainers to relax. Certain details must also be decided, like what guests do when the park has closed!

### Average Daily Hotel Room Rate

Area	May	June
International Drive	\$111.60	\$101.05
Lake Buena Vista	\$122.61	\$118.82
Kissimmee East	\$81.52	\$81.84
Kissimmee West	\$54.11	\$53.19

### Florida Lottery Winning Numbers

Date	Numbers
06/24/2006	07 - 15 - 38 - 46 - 47 - 50
06/21/2006	06 - 14 - 31 - 32 - 48 - 51
06/17/2006	10 - 12 - 28 - 38 - 39 - 49
06/14/2006	05 - 15 - 16 - 18 - 21 - 36
06/10/2006	07 - 15 - 30 - 31 - 34 - 35
06/07/2006	15 - 24 - 29 - 32 - 51 - 53
06/03/2006	01 - 12 - 23 - 26 - 37 - 46
05/31/2006	14 - 24 - 30 - 34 - 43 - 44

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.



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### Homes

**A new coastal disclosure law** becomes active on July 1<sup>st</sup>. It requires sellers of property on land seaward of the coastal construction control line (CCCL) to make a broadly worded disclosure before the contract for sale and purchase is executed. The CCCL is a boundary established by the state and roughly includes beaches and dunes.

**If you paid the Osceola County School** impact fee between May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 and January 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 (or it was paid on your behalf), you may be entitled to a reimbursement of \$1,815 for a single-family home. An application form and instructions can be obtained from Nancy Parker, 1 Courthouse Square, Suite 1400, Kissimmee, FL 34741 for unincorporated Osceola County. For property within the city of St Cloud or city of Kissimmee the application can be obtained from Richard Collins, 817 Bill Beck Boulevard, Kissimmee, FL 34741. The application deadline is December 1<sup>st</sup> 2006.

**Lloyds TSB** has introduced its “multi currency mortgage” to the Orlando market particularly targeting British homebuyers. The mortgage allows holders to switch between currencies up to four times per year. The mortgage has existed for years in Asian countries but has recently arrived in the States. The main idea is that a homeowner resident in Britain could have the mortgage in sterling or Euros or Dollars and switch between them, as rates were more favourable. You find out more about the mortgage from British Homes Group, which has the exclusive rights to sell the mortgage within the Orlando area. [www.britishhomesgroup.com](http://www.britishhomesgroup.com).

**Park Square Homes** has started pre-sales of 75 town homes and 75 single-family homes at Summerbrooke, located off U.S. 441 in Mount Dora.

**Following the collapse** of the Poe Financial Group, parent company of three Florida insurance companies, the state has approved a 2% surcharge on all property insurance policies to help cover outstanding claim. The

surcharge should raise \$225 million.

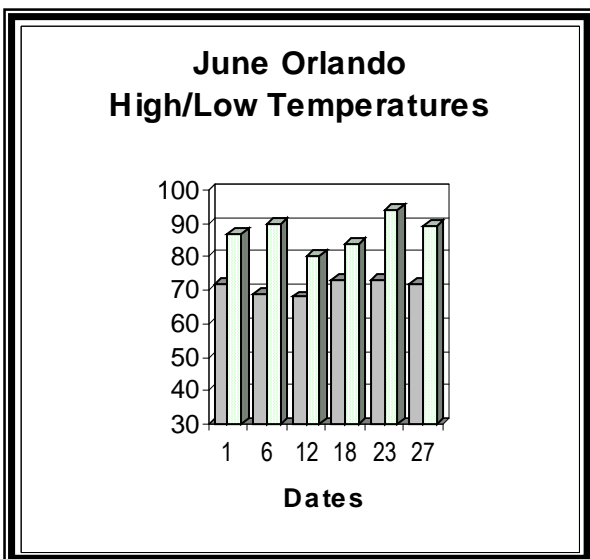
**The school impact fee in Polk County** – currently set at \$8,596 for a new single family home – could be reduced to \$6,006 in a vote scheduled for July 12<sup>th</sup>. The fee is the subject of a lawsuit filed by the Polk County Builders Association that claims the fee is unconstitutional as it includes funding for the states class size amendment. The fee should be used for capital projects only. Polk County has received a cheque for \$81 million from the legislature to help fund the class size amendment requirements.

**A recently released study by the Urban Land Institute** in Washington D.C. has claimed that regional cooperation in Florida is “neither widespread nor widely encouraged”. Central Florida could be a prime example of this. In the seven county central area there are 183 government agencies ranging from county and city commissions and school boards to water management, conservation and special taxing districts. In the ‘Four Corners’ area alone there are more than 80 subdivisions but no regional parks, traditional public schools or decent roads.

**Collier County commissioners** have turned down a request to change zoning to allow private ownership of condos at the Abaco Bay condominiums. The zoning will remain as rentals only. Private owners who have already bought condos have been forced to create companies and rent the units back to themselves to get around the zoning as Abaco had pledged to change the language of the zoning ordinance. This will not now happen. A recent study found that close to one third of the over 100 condos sold during 2005 had been flipped – or sold twice within the same year as investors sought to make a profit.

**Citizens Property Insurance Corp** is to end coverage for screened swimming pool enclosures and limit coverage for sinkhole damage. Citizens says the swimming pool screens are not hurricane proof and are therefore uninsurable. Sink hole damage will be reduced to nothing and then coverage can be purchased as an extra up to \$50,000. Complete home loss would still be covered for what is known as a ‘cover-collapse sinkhole’ regardless of whether further cover had been purchased.

**Lightening sparked** a fire near the subdivisions of Sunset Lakes, Lindfields Emerald Island, Oak Island and the new Encantada development on 4th June. This reignited to spectacular effect on Friday 9th in the afternoon and led to sections of U.S. 192 being closed due to smoke. Plumes of smoke rose hundreds of feet into the air for days. Fire-fighters contained the fire edges, which at one point was burning right opposite the entrance to Sunset Lakes, and monitored the fire as they left it to burn itself out. Alberto failed to make any better progress as fire officials revealed that the scrub was burning 3 feet under the ground.





# Florida Homes and Travel

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### Property Trends 2006 by Andrew Bartlett

If you own a property in Florida are storm clouds overhead? Is it still a good investment? The answer to these conundrums may well depend upon where, when and for what reason you bought, a second/holiday home, seasonal retirement, relocation or investment.

Property price increases in Florida in certain cases exceeded 40% in 2005. This led to a significant further influx of investor funds into property. However some investors were unwisely advised to buy into certain developments where the sales spiel was worthy of an Oscar nomination and impressive glossy brochures and DVD presentations were motivators rather than hard facts.

A combination of huge inventory levels and overtly optimistic sales claims serve to emphasise the need for guidance based on fact, not motivated by the size of the sales agent's commission cheque!

Within this background picture there are specific locations where I would flag up areas of concern, depending upon your investment perspective or lifestyle requirements.

Higher end off plan condo developments in some areas such as Miami and Naples, with fairly long build times and a high proportion of investors intent on selling (flipping) as soon as their homes become available should set alarms ringing. With market demand lower consider who will buy? In a situation where investor properties are released simultaneously there is sometimes buyer resistance to paying the investors profits.

Another area of concern is Orlando / Kissimmee, on developments where there are a high proportion of overseas investors. Some of these owners who bought during the recent boom, spurred on by limited availability at the time, on the basis of expectations of increasing visitor numbers and guaranteed rentals are often dependant upon rental payments to cover their mortgages and therefore may be vulnerable.

Areas of this market now have an over-supply of new properties with attractive commission and bonus rates being offered to real estate agents and investment advisers to get property sold, as high as 11% on certain developments. These developments featured heavily in some glossy adverts and slick salesmanship raise several questions on the impartiality of the advice given.

I was particularly concerned when listening to some of the advice being given to would be buyers of Florida properties, particularly by a couple of companies promoting apparently independent property investment advice at the largest property exhibition in London; it sounded so convincing but was completely inaccurate, and that's a polite way of putting it!

When property is bought on the basis of frothy sales messages with the buyers unaware of the implications of the huge commission payments or the limitations of

guaranteed rental payments, at the very least you are leaving yourself vulnerable to changes in the market.

Some experts expect property prices in certain areas of Florida to fall to correct the imbalance between supply and demand in the market; this process could accelerate as builders give significant discounts to shift their inventory.

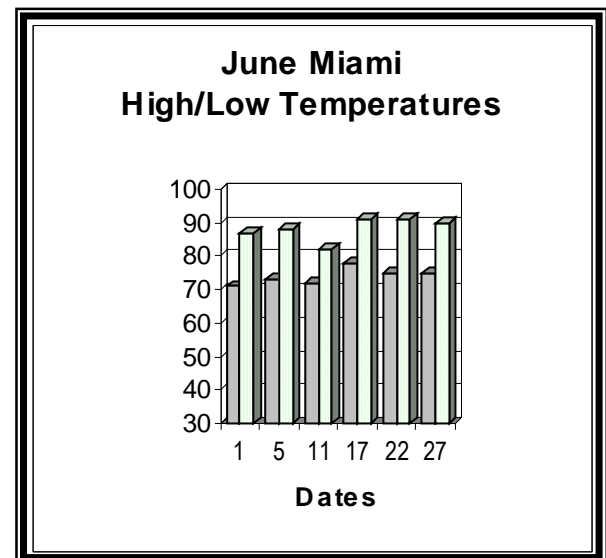
In other areas given the property shortage and the continued demand from North American baby boomers and the limited land availability, ongoing gains nearer to the historic norm of 5% to 10% are likely. Due to zoning restrictions rental properties remain hard to find in these desirable locations, and thus limit the competition from other villa owners.

Thus 2006 is a buyers market; due to record inventory levels, particularly in the Central Florida area. Renting or selling property in the face of so much competition will become an increasing challenge –further no nonsense impartial information on renting or selling property in Florida can be found on [www.gbus.co.uk](http://www.gbus.co.uk).

Andrew Bartlett is a certified independent Florida Property Specialist, he writes articles on Florida property trends, has constructed a Florida property consumer web guide and provides independent advice to British clients on lifestyles, locations, properties, Agents and investment trends in Florida.

### US Dollar Update by Moneycorp

The idea of a 5 per cent peak in the fed funds rate has disappeared and folks are now talking of 6 per cent. It may be wild talk but it was kicked off by Ben Bernanke a month ago and the Dollar is having a renaissance. Higher mortgages, higher gas prices and a slower housing market are not enough to put off the investors who have been buying back into the Dollar. Can it continue? The whole thing will depend on where the analysts see the fed funds rate going in the future and, just as importantly, whether they see UK base rates moving higher or not. Allegedly the Dollar has had its day but, for the time being, it refuses to lie down and die. Watch this space.





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## Postbag

You may like to warn readers that if they make purchases from Appliance Direct to ensure they get delivery well before they leave the property. We placed an order for a new range and fridge/freezer whilst visiting our property in February. We were let down on the first promised delivery date, and basically ended up having to pay our management company \$105 for attending the property for deliveries which failed to arrive, arrived with only one item and then again to receive the second item. I have attempted to contact Appliance Direct by letter and email, but no response.

Regards

Sue Dorricott-Leslie

Thank you to Keith Butler who wrote to point out that contrary to some Florida car hire providers websites, adverts and desk staff claims, Alamo and National **do not** have a car hire location **on site** at Tampa International Airport. You are required to go along to the end of the terminal and use a bus to get to the Spruce Road facility.

**We have had several questions** from subscribers regarding car insurance in Florida, and if it is worth buying a car there. If you are car owners, we would be grateful to hear from you regarding the insurance company you use – the sort of premium you pay, and if you believe that car ownership is still a financially viable alternative to hiring a car.

## Year of a Million Dreams

From an overnight stay inside Cinderella Castle to a Golden FASTPASS, dreams big and small will come true at Disneyland and Walt Disney World resorts during Disney's "Year of a Million Dreams," a first-of-its-kind celebration of the individual dreams of Disney Parks guests.

The year-long celebration, beginning Oct. 1, 2006, at Disneyland Resort in California and Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, will feature the debut of an incredible line-up of new attractions and entertainment at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World resorts, plus new technologies that allow guests to customize their Disney park experience.

And, for the first time, during the "Year of a Million Dreams" celebration, Disney cast members will award a million dreams -- both large and small, including many "money-can't-buy" experiences -- to guests selected through a random process as part of a unique "Disney Dreams Giveaway" promotion.

The "money-can't-buy" includes the creation of over-the-top, overnight experiences for winning guests at both East and West Coast resorts: a royal bedchamber inside Cinderella Castle at Walt Disney World Resort and a Mickey Mouse Penthouse at Disneyland Resort, both expected to be complete by January 2007.

A day of royal treatment will end with a night of enchantment inside Cinderella Castle for a different lucky guest each night. Cinderella's royal bedchamber, now under construction at Magic Kingdom, will allow Disney guests to stay overnight inside the park and enjoy a view shared only by Tinker Bell. The lavishly decorated bedroom will be located in a space originally planned as an in-park apartment for the use of the Disney family.

And for a lucky Disneyland guest, each night, the all-new Mickey Mouse Penthouse at Disneyland Hotel will pour on the Mickey charm and include magical views overlooking both Disneyland and Disney's California Adventure parks. The extraordinary penthouse will be decorated in all things Mickey, with finishing touches by none other than Minnie Mouse herself.

In addition, during the yearlong celebration, other Disney dreams both large and small will be awarded in the "Disney Dreams Giveaway" promotion, such as:

- ◆ Travelling to each Disney resort around the world to serve as grand marshal in a Disney parade.
- ◆ A variety of unique Disney vacation experiences.
- ◆ Admission to special parties and other extraordinary experiences in the Disneyland and Walt Disney World parks.
- ◆ Private meetings with favourite Disney characters.
- ◆ Or, a Golden FASTPASS ticket with unique access entitlements to some of Disney's most popular attractions.

Throughout the "Year of a Million Dreams" celebration, Walt Disney World and Disneyland resorts will debut major new attractions:

### Walt Disney World Resort in Florida

"The Seas with Nemo & Friends" -- Epcot's newest attraction picks up where Disney-Pixar's "Finding Nemo" left off. Amazing technology gives the stars of the film the appearance of swimming amid the live marine life of the 5.7-million-gallon saltwater aquarium in The Living Seas pavilion. Guests aboard "clam-mobiles" float amid a coral reef where they meet Mr. Ray and his class on a field trip. (Late 2006)

"Finding Nemo-The Musical" -- At Disney's Animal Kingdom, the undersea world that charmed audiences worldwide in the Disney-Pixar motion picture "Finding Nemo" will come to life in an all-new musical stage show. (Late 2006)

The Laugh Floor Comedy Club -- Magic Kingdom guests will laugh, joke, sing songs and match wits with the beloved animated characters from the Disney presentation of Pixar's "Monsters, Inc." in an engaging and interactive attraction being created by the Disney Imagineers. The fun reigns at a 400-seat theater in Tomorrowland. (Early 2007)



# Florida Homes and Travel

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## St Pete's Beach

As a family we were inspired by the responses to the survey question regarding your favourite day trips to visit somewhere different on our Florida vacation this year. Originally we had intended to select a State Park, but Tropical Storm Alberto interrupted our plans, so we chose to head for the beach instead.

So on a very wet, windy Tuesday, as Alberto deposited all his rain, we left Kissimmee and headed west. This was the first time we had travelled Interstate 4 since all the road works had been completed (including the US 27 interchange) and we made it down to Tampa inside an hour despite not being able to see more than 2 meters in front of the car at one point due to the rain. We were very grateful to a large truck in front for showing where the road might be at that point. But the further west we travelled, more blue sky was illuminated, the rain became drizzle or the occasional shower and spirits lifted.

As we exchanged smoothly from Interstate 4 to Interstate 275 we headed over the long bridge across Old Tampa Bay, which was looking very angry, towards St Petersburg. We were still not entirely sure where we were going to stay at this point, but we were using one of those travel guides that you pick up free at restaurants for inspiration (we had picked ours up that morning at Denny's on US 192).

We drove through St Petersburg with interest, and noted the exit for the Clearwater/St Petersburg airport which will soon be welcoming Flywho flights from Birmingham, and saw how easy it will be for travellers to just drive out of the airport and straight down I 275 over the Sunshine Skyway Bridge and on down the coast.

As we headed off I 275 onto the beach islands, the sun was shining strongly, and the winds whilst strong were certainly not cold. We went as far as St Petersburg Beach, and decided there was no point going further up the islands, as we would only be staying overnight. Our first attempt at a hotel was overpriced for the facilities, so we moved on to a Best Western, which for \$88 per night was not bad. The Best Western has a bar on the beach, and there appeared to be a number of 'students' staying, but we were given a family room nearer the lobby than the bar and were not disturbed. The room was clean and basic with a small kitchen attached. It made us realise just what a wonderful deal guests get when they stay in a villa!

We spent a lovely afternoon by the pool where it was still sunny, and very windy – it was strange thinking that just up the coast Alberto was dumping some inches of rain and tossing a few boats about.

On the recommendation of the lobby staff we walked a block down to Skidders to eat. Skidders has won the

top award in the category of 'Greek Restaurant' for many years running in the local Paradise News and Beach Life 'Best of Beaches' awards.

Having had a gamut of chain restaurants in Kissimmee over the previous week, it was nice to be somewhere different, and the relaxed atmosphere of the coast permeated right through the building. It was decorated with red, white and blue tinsel, decorations, flags etc. A real collection of patriotic memorabilia. We believe this was in preparation for 'Flag Day' on 15<sup>th</sup> June, which kicks off a period of celebration of the Armed Forces until July 4<sup>th</sup>.

We sat in a booth that was dedicated to a previous Mayor and a Mabel Gribble (or similar) and this conjured up interesting images of regular visitors with their own space. In fact while we were there, many of the customers appeared to be well known and familiar to the staff. The menu was 'eclectic', with only 10 Greek items on the list (4 of which were Souvlaki) the 'Greek Restaurant' award was looking like there was light competition, with Pasta, Seafood, Steaks, Veal and Chicken to name a few. But the food was good, freshly prepared and home cooked.

Feeling very full we returned to the Best Western and hit the beach for an early evening stroll. The strong waves had washed up a fish and a jellyfish looking thing, and the winds were still what one would call 'bracing' on a British beach, but were softened by their warmth at St Pete's. I found a small shark's tooth, and the children fell through the surf having a great time. After a long walk up and down the beach, we just sat for a while whilst sandcastles were built and destroyed and soaked in the atmosphere. This was definitely the most relaxing day of our vacation, and Albert had not interrupted our time at all. So thank you all for your recommendation!

The next morning we were heading up to Busch Gardens, so after an early, tasty, cooked breakfast at Skidders again, we headed back over the bridges. Busch Gardens has always been a favourite theme park, but we haven't visited since our eldest – 7<sup>th</sup> birthday on holiday – was 4 months, so anticipation was high. We were truly disappointed. There have been upgrades and renovations in those 7 years, but also a lot of space has been 'in filled' with more rides (we counted 8 roller coasters) losing the spacious relaxing feeling we have always treasured. But that was only a side issue – the main disappointment was the atmosphere. Not one attendant smiled, engaged or made eye contact. We got the impression that they all wished we would go home and leave them alone! When we rode on the little train around the park, any staff within sight of the train clearly have to wave to the passengers and oh boy, was that forced!

Take me back to Disney – the smile may hide all sorts of feelings, but it goes a long way to making my day.



# Florida Homes and Travel

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## How Well Do You Know Florida?

Here are the answers to last months fun quiz. No one got it all correct but Michelle Feltham & Maxine Groves both scored 31 – well done to both of you!

1. What is the number of the exit on I-4 for SeaWorld? **27A/71**
2. I-75 stretches from Hialeah in Miami-Dade County to Michigan at the Canada Border – how long is it in miles? **1786(.47) miles**
3. The Magic Kingdom opened on October 1<sup>st</sup> in which year? **1971**
4. In which year did SeaWorld open? **1973**
5. When was Gatorland founded? **1949**
6. Before 1974 what was Orlando International airport known as? **McCoy Air Force Base or Orlando Jet Port at McCoy**
7. Hurricane Charley struck Charlotte Harbor on what date? **Friday August 13<sup>th</sup> 2004**
8. In which county is Fort Myers? **Lee County**
9. What minimum sustained wind speeds must a Category 5 Hurricane possess? **Winds must be greater than 155mph ie 156mph**
10. Who was Charlotte Harbor named after in 1775? **Queen Charlotte Sophia, wife of King George III**
11. Which is the second largest city in Florida? **Miami**
12. The Everglades cover many Southern Florida counties – how many can you name? **Monroe, Collier, Palm Beach, Miami Dade, & Broward.**
13. What is the average depth of Lake Okeechobee? **9 feet**
14. How long is the Kissimmee River? **100 miles**
15. Who named Florida in 1513? **Juan Ponce de Leon.**
16. Can you name the highest point in Florida? **Britton Hill**
17. How high is it? **345 feet/105 m**
18. The highest point in Peninsular Florida is in Lake County can you name it? **Sugarloaf Mountain**
19. Bumper 8 was the name of the first rocket launched from Cape Canaveral – what was the year? **1950**
20. From 1963 to 1973 Cape Canaveral was re-named something else – what was it? **Cape Kennedy**
21. Which Florida city is the longest continually occupied city in the U.S.? **St Augustine**
22. What is the capital of Florida? **Tallahassee**
23. What does ESPN stand for? **Entertainment and Sports Programming Network**
24. What does HBO stand for? **Home Box Office**
25. Which baseball team does spring training at Walt Disney World? **Atlanta Braves**
26. What is the State Bird? **Mocking Bird**
27. Tampa is in which county? **Hillsborough**
28. Where in Sarasota County is the “Shark Tooth Capital of the World?” **Venice, Florida**
29. What is the airport code for Sarasota/Bradenton? **SRQ**
30. What does ABC stand for? **American Broadcasting Company, also accepted Alcoholic Beverage Control**
31. Where was President Bush on the morning of September 11, 2001? **Emma E Booker Elementary School, Sarasota**
32. What was the population of the City of Lake Buena Vista in the 2004 Census? **15**
33. Which town in Scotland is Sarasota twinned with? **Dunfermline**

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