

# TOURISM

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love Europeans and attend trade shows internationally — ITB Berlin is the largest — and domestically to court them. In general, European visitors stay longer than guests arriving from within the United States, an average of six days versus three days. Direct business with no middle party receiving compensation — say, returning guests who first came at the recommendation of a travel agent or other referral — is most desirable.

“International business is up for us, and in many cases it’s now coming direct,” said Cathy Christopher, director of sales and marketing for The Inn on Fifth in downtown Naples. “Some of the business from international operators is double what it was last year.”

Ms. Christopher said Europeans are attracted to the boutique leisure hotel because of its location in the heart of Old Naples with dining and shopping within walking distance. “They love to dine out, drink, shop and go on golf outings,” she said. “They enjoy our main street location and often return with friends.”

Sun Stream Hotels & Resorts caters to visitors at different price points with Park Shore Resort, BellaSera Hotel and Port of the Islands Resort in Collier County and three properties — DiamondHead Beach Resort, GullWing Beach Resort and Pointe Estero Beach Resort — on Fort Myers Beach.

On the water in the Everglades, Port of the Islands fills a desire for eco-tourism.

“We’ve seen a dramatic increase in interest from the German market in Port of the Islands,” said Jennifer Seaborn, director of sales and marketing. “Many have been to Naples before, but then they want to come back to really experience the Ten Thousand

Islands, the fishing, an airboat ride or boating. Eco-tourism is a big draw.”

West Wind Inn on Sanibel receives a good number of European visitors looking for a tropical island vacation. Charlene Staton, director of sales, reports that Germany and Great Britain are the top two sources of European visitors for the inn, followed by France and Switzerland. In May, West Wind’s sales professionals attended Pow Wow, an international trade show held domestically, this year in Miami.

## Exchange rates a plus

In addition to lying by the pool, walking the beach and in general soaking up the sun’s rays, European guests are thrilled to cash in on favorable exchange rates. They come to shop.

Miromar Outlets reports a steady flow of international traffic throughout the year, but more so from July through October. The upscale shopping outlet actively courts European shoppers, most recently running ads in Selling Long Haul, a travel publication in the U.K., and Florida Sun, a German lifestyle magazine. With the current campaign, they also offer travelers the opportunity to receive a Miromar Outlets gift card when they show their passports at the Visitor Information Kiosk.

Jeff Staner, general manager at the outlets, said the center works closely with the Lee County VCB and its representatives in Europe. He said recent shoppers from abroad included a couple from England who have the outlets on their itinerary when they vacation in Southwest Florida every year. “They said their shopping list for family and friends gets longer every year,” he said, adding this year’s purchases included shirts, shorts, shoes and jeans.

The Trianon hotel in Bonita Springs has established relationships with European tour operators. Darren Robertshaw, vice president of hospitality, has traveled to the trade

shows for years and said that he doesn’t need to any more.

“I used to go to the World Travel Market in London, ITB Berlin and Pow Wow, but right now we’ve signed up the major tour operators and are maintaining the relationships that we have,” he said. “The dollar being as weak as it’s been, Europeans are really coming over in droves.”

Mr. Robertshaw said many guests say for a month and start looking for land or a home to buy while they’re here.

## International marketing tips

Persons wanting to sell real estate to Europeans had better fine-tune their Internet search protocol, according to Jo Ellen Nash of Nash & Company Luxury Estates, a Downing-Frye Realtor.

“Resources are critical to getting foreign real estate buyers in the door,” she said. “To use the Internet to draw people, you’d better use the right key words. A lot of investors over there might not know Naples. They know Miami, L.A. and Manhattan. They know Florida. When you’re marketing internationally and you want to draw the traffic, that’s the kind of information you need to refine.”

Ms. Nash, who has owned a real estate agency in Vail for more than 25 years, is familiar with the task of drawing interest from faraway lands. She’s hired a search engine optimization specialist to focus on Europe, and her Web sites are translatable in 10 languages. She’s sending representatives to a Russian trade show for the luxury market in the fall, and she printed brochures in German when a colleague went to Europe to meet with trade ambassadors recently.

Business professionals are also nurturing international commerce.

Four years ago, Dr. Juergen H. Hortwich helped form the European Business Council within the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce. A longtime member of the chamber,

he received the inspiration following a successful trade junket to Europe with 35 professionals from Southwest Florida.

“Nobody in the surrounding chambers spoke German, and we just decided to go the extra step,” he said.

The venture has been so well received — the group has 156 members — that the council separated last year to focus solely on international business. Its Web site, www.ccebc.org, receives more than 9,000 hits a month and is also listed on the German consulate’s Web site in Miami.

In October, a group of council members including a Realtor, mortgage broker, an immigration attorney and an accountant will visit six cities over seven days in Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

The Cape Coral European Business Council works closely with area chambers of commerce and has one major fundraiser each year, the International Holiday Market in downtown Cape Coral (Dec. 3-5 this year). Air Berlin is the top sponsor.

“What we bring to the European market is different than what they see on CNN,” Dr. Hortwich said. “What they hear in the news about Southwest Florida is not always in the best interest of Southwest Florida... We’re bringing them helpful information.”

Della Booth, a council board member and Realtor with Time Realty in Cape Coral, has participated in trips with the council and plans to go in October. She went to ITB Berlin last year and said that efforts with five German real estate agents she’s been corresponding with ever since have been positive. She e-mails a weekly report on opportunities in Southwest Florida, has had subsequent visits from people coming from Switzerland and Germany, and has sold real estate too.

“It’s been a great venture that keeps getting better,” she said of the European Business Council. “We have such a large European base here already that the people we contact automatically feel a sense of ease.” ■

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