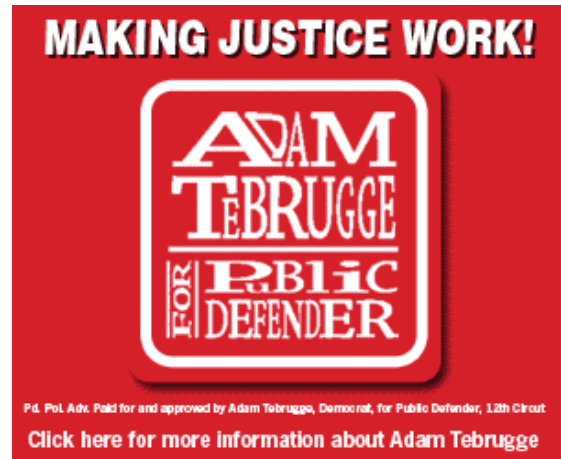


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## Englewood ranks No. 2 in U.S. destinations



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### The Story

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ENGLEWOOD -- Englewood beat out two Hawaii destinations and was bested only by St. George, Utah, as a top U.S. destination for 2009, according to a TripAdvisor TravelCast list released this month.

The list was part of an annual travel trends survey of more than 3,000 U.S. travelers conducted by TripAdvisor, an Expedia Inc. company.

St. George was identified as the top emerging U.S. hot spot. Englewood was number two and Ruskin, Fla., was number 10.

TripAdvisor employees, or engineers, as the Web site TripAdvisor.com describes them, have developed a "proprietary algorithm" that examines different criteria such as changes in search activity and postings on the site.

This information is used to predict rising stars in travel.

Travelers are getting greener and going after more active, outdoors activities, the survey found. They also want to save money on fuel but say they will take more car trips this year because of declining gas prices.

"That means 'staycations,'" said Jon Bednerik, executive director of the Englewood-Cape Haze Area Chamber of Commerce. "One tank of gas, in your back yard. It's exploring within easy driving distances."

Beautiful areas such as national parks scored high in the survey, according to Michele Perry, vice president of global communications for TripAdvisor, who commented in a press release.

Bednerik was ecstatic with the news of Englewood's high ranking as a top U.S. destination. It couldn't come at a better time. The chamber is preparing to launch a new project, a tourist development conference in Placida on Nov. 13. The conference is geared at forecasting the upcoming tourist season and training local tourism-related businesses to take advantage of new trends.

TripAdvisor claims to have 6 million registered members and 32 million monthly visitors to its Web site.

The greatest number of travel inquiry hits come from the Tampa Bay area on the Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau Web site, sarasotafl.org, according to Erin Duggan, bureau public relations director.

"When a destination pops up on TripAdvisor, it's amazing the impact it has on the community," Duggan said. "I

think it's going to be very positive."

Bednerik was surprised when he first heard how much interest was coming from nearby.

"Then I realized Englewood is something people haven't experienced," he said. "Englewood doesn't compete with attractions in Orlando and Kissimmee. We're not Busch Gardens. We're not Disney World. But what we have to offer is unique. It's pretty. It's restful. You can almost experience a pleasant time warp when you come here."

Bednerik, who lived in Sarasota for 10 years before moving to Punta Gorda, said he was never quite sure where Englewood was before moving south.

"It wasn't a place I set out to go to, and I think if we live up to our potential, Englewood and Cape Haze will become a destination," he said. "Until we have a resort-type facility, we're not going to have that type of tourism, but we're such a wonderful visit for people who are in Florida for other reasons."

Besides natural amenities, Englewood's appeal includes affordable accommodation and an emerging arts and shopping district on Dearborn Street, said Becky Bovell, director of tourism for Charlotte Harbor Visitor's Bureau.

All of Charlotte County's 28 miles of beach are in Englewood, and they are the county's top tourism draw. Accommodations include beach villas, motels, inns, cottages, vacation rental condos, homes and the Palm Island Resort.

The news of the high ranking as a top U.S. destination is welcome and useful for tourism marketing efforts, Bovell said.

"This recognition of an area long popular with Florida visitors will now be promoted nationally and will introduce new vacation opportunities to newcomers," Bovell said. "The Charlotte Harbor Visitor's Bureau will partner with the Englewood Chamber of Commerce in integrating this new designation into our marketing efforts."

#### TripAdvisor TravelCast Top Ten U.S. Destinations for 2009

1. St. George, Utah
2. Englewood, Fla.
3. Keauhou, Hawaii
4. Mount Pocono, Pa.
5. Haines, Alaska
6. Bainbridge Island, Wash.
7. New Buffalo, Mich.
8. Pahoia, Hawaii
9. Gurnee, Ill.
10. Ruskin, Fla.

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