

TRAVEL BRIEFS

Ballet in Mississippi

Jackson, Miss., is inviting the world to the dance. Jackson's USA International Ballet Competition is preparing for 121 young competitors from 27 countries to leap into battle. The 2006 competition is set for June 17 through July 2. The event, held every four years, has become one of the most respected in dance. According to an article published in the New York Times, "Jackson...is the most fiercely contested of them all."

GEOQUIZ ANSWER

Massachusetts

Held at the Thalia Mara Hall, named for the competition's founder, 44 dancers will compete as juniors (ages 15 to 18) and 77 will compete as seniors (ages 19 to 26) in the two-week, Olympic-style competition, vying for the gold, cash awards, scholarships, and most importantly, a job. One of the competitors is from Alabama. Casey Vaughn, competing in the senior division was born in Montgomery and trained at the Alabama Dance Theatre. Opening ceremonies are June 17, followed by the three contest rounds, the awards gala and the encore gala. Ticket packages range from \$202 to \$339 and individual tickets range from \$6 to \$70. For more information on tickets, related events and lodging, call (601) 355-9853 or e-mail usaibc@netdoor.com.

— Hervey Folsom

Best beaches

Fleming Beach Park, a mile-long crescent white sand beach on Maui's western shore featuring spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean and the rugged shores of Molokai Island, was named America's best beach in an annual list that also included two Florida beaches.

International beach expert Stephen Leatherman, also known as "Dr. Beach," lauded Fleming for its year-round sunny weather, scenic views, pristine waters, and amenities such as showers, grills for barbecuing, snack bar, picnic facilities and ample parking.

"The west side of Maui always has beach weather. It's one of the sunniest places in the world, so it's hard to beat that," Leatherman says in a telephone interview. "What you call winter there everybody else calls a nice day."

Leatherman says visitors to Fleming, however, must use caution during the winter months when the surf and currents pick up.

Fleming, in the posh resort town of Kapalua, was one of three Hawaii beaches to make the Top 10 list compiled by Leatherman, director of Florida International University's Laboratory for Coastal Research.

Caladesi Island State Park in Dunedin, Fla., was the runner-up to Fleming, followed by Ocracoke Island in North Carolina; Coopers Beach in the Hamptons on Long Island, in New York; Kauai's Hanalei Beach; Main Beach in the Hamptons; Coast Guard Beach on Cape Cod, Mass.; Coronado Beach in California; Maui's Hamoa Beach; and Barefoot Beach Park in Bonita Springs, Fla.

Road trip survey

What do most people argue about in the car during a road trip?

Where to sit and when to stop. That's according to a survey of 4,000 people in all 50 states conducted for Rand McNally, the map publishing company.

The survey, commissioned to mark Rand McNally's 150th anniversary, found that "personal space/seating arrangements" was the No. 1 reason for a disagreement on a road trip, cited by 54 percent of those polled, while 27 percent says "when to stop for breaks" was the biggest cause of discord.

Ninety-six percent of those surveyed say they'd taken at least one road trip in their lifetime, and 76 percent of respondents still take road trips for their vacations now.

Two-thirds of the respondents say their top activities while in the car were looking at passing sights and playing games.

But if you're looking to improve your diet, a road trip probably will not help. Top results for "best food for the road" were potato chips, candy and cookies.

The survey was conducted online on the Rand McNally Web site and through e-mail from March to early May.

Villa vacations

The fantasy: Renting a villa in the countryside, dining on food grown by local farmers, and relaxing with your family in a beautiful setting.

The reality: Getting lost on unfamiliar roads, worrying that the kids will be injured because the house is not childproof, and suffering through malfunctioning appliances, plumbing disasters and heating problems.

That's what Wendy Perrin, who writes for Conde Nast Traveler, discovered when she rented a villa for her family in Italy. Perrin describes her experience in the June issue and provides plenty of advice for others.

For one thing, are you prepared to do your dishes, take out your garbage, buy household supplies like toilet paper, and strip your beds and clean the place when you leave? If not, you might be better off in a hotel. Or if you're set on a villa, consider paying for a housekeeper and cook, which are offered with many villa rentals.

Perrin also notes that whether a villa is a good value depends on how many people stay there. A weekly rate of \$5,400, including part-time household staff, seems steep, but if the villa has four bedrooms, four couples can share the bill. Nightly rate: under \$100 per person.

Perrin adds that a good rental agent who knows the property is the key to finding the right villa for you. She recommends 35 rental agents in 16 countries, including www.justfrance.com and www.villaeurope.com. For the complete list, check out the June issue, or look for more villa guidance online at www.cntraveler.com/villarentals.

Aquarium reopens

At long last, Pungo and Neuse are holding their housewarming party.

The two playful river otters were among numerous residents on display as the aquarium on the Bogue Banks staged its long-delayed reopening on May 19 in Pine Knoll Shores, N.C.

It's one of three state aquariums — the others are at Fort Fisher near Wilmington and on Roanoke Island near Manteo. Each has a different focus; the theme at Pine Knoll Shores is, "From the mountains to the sea."

The facility was been closed for 21/2 years, awaiting an overhaul that ultimately cost \$28 million.

Attractions include a three-story mountain waterfall, and exhibits featuring water creatures of the Piedmont, coastal plain, tidal waters and ocean.

Outside the building, visitors can take a boardwalk to a marsh that links the aquarium to Bogue Sound, where they can see minnows swarming, crabs scavenging, egrets fishing and songbirds darting through the trees. The area is part of the 298-acre Theodore Roosevelt Natural Area.

JAUNT



Courtesy photo

Rosemary Beach was designed for walkability and its architectural style draws from Dutch and Caribbean influences.

Planned community in Florida offers fun, sun, sand and romance

BY J. ERIC ECKARD

Cox News Service

ROSEMARY BEACH, Fla. — The houses and cottages here at this New Urbanism community might seem jam-packed, but that's the point.

"It's intended to be congested," said Ken Gifford, vice president and managing director at Rosemary Beach. "The more congested it is, the more people will not want to drive."

"The town was designed for everything to be a five-minute walk from everything else."

Those walks down narrow streets and even more narrow boardwalks and footpaths typically lead visitors and full-time residents to the beach.

You can sea kayak, sail or just lounge on the sand as the waves from the Gulf of Mexico crash on the shore of this 107-acre planned town. Started 10 years ago and located in the Florida Panhandle, Rosemary Beach is almost halfway between Tallahassee and Pensacola and about 20 miles east of Seaside.

Seaside, known for its use as the location for *The Truman Show*, probably was the original New Urbanism planned community. But the roots for these projects come from downtown Charleston, S.C., Old Town in Alexandria, Va., and Georgetown in Washington, D.C.

"Having Seaside so close, some people have some connotations of that," Gifford said.

New Urbanism planners shoot for communities that discourage automobile traffic, encourage walking and biking and foster a mix of architectural styles.

At Rosemary Beach, you'll see Dutch and Caribbean influences and plenty of New Orleans-style courtyards.

You won't find grass except for in the planned park areas, and therefore, you won't hear lawn mowers on early Saturday mornings. And you won't see paint on any of the residences — only stain, which won't chip. And you won't find palm trees because they tend to block views.

"That's what it's all about at the beach

If you go...

- Lodging and cottage rentals — www.rosemarybeach.com
- Onano Neighborhood Café — located in the Pensione Bed and Breakfast at Rosemary Beach, featuring Northern Italian fare. www.thepensione.com
- Courtyard Wine and Cheese Bar — located in the merchant section of Rosemary Beach, featuring gourmet cheeses and at least 50 wines by the glass.
- Summer Kitchen Café/Blue by Night Bistro — located on the park side of Rosemary Beach, it's a casual eatery by day and a nice seafood place by night.
- Sugar Shak — also located on Rosemary Beach's park side, featuring snacks and ice cream.
- Café Thirty-A — Located on Scenic Highway 30-A about 12½ miles from Rosemary Beach, known for its extensive wine list and martinis. www.cafethirtya.com
- Shades at the Loop — located about a mile from Rosemary Beach, with a diverse menu that features Gulf seafood.
- For kayaking at Hobie Cat sailing in the Gulf, Sea Oats Beach Service is located at Rosemary Beach. Beach chairs and hammocks also available.

— the view," Gifford said. Rosemary Beach features about 200 rental units, with summer rates ranging from \$217 a night to more than \$13,000 a week, depending on the size of the condo, cottage or house. Rosemary Beach also includes a bed and breakfast, The Pensione. And in 2007, Hotel Saba, a 56-room inn with underground park-

ing, is expected to open. There's a day spa, fitness center and tennis courts. Rosemary Beach also has its own post office.

And even though Highway 30-A dissects Rosemary beach down the center, everything truly is within walking or biking distance. Bikes are available for rent on site.

Most of the rental properties are on the beach side of town, and most of the full-time residents live on the park side of the community, "away from the hustle and bustle of the beach side," Gifford said.

But the hustle and bustle is all relative. On either side of Rosemary Beach, you won't find the tacky souvenir stores, pancake places on every corner or surf shops typically found in more commercialized beach areas.

Rather than trying to find an upscale hotel among the frumpish spots at these destinations, Rosemary Beach's choices of accommodations, eateries, stores and shops all are impressive.

"All without getting into their vehicles," Gifford said, adding that Winn-Dixie and Publix grocery stores are down the road just in case.

Families and groups obviously would be comfortable at Rosemary Beach, considering that six-bedroom houses are available. But the town also has lofts, flats, studios and one-bedroom accommodations.

Rosemary Beach can cater to families, but there's something romantic about this place, as well. It's a haven for couples.

Weddings constantly are being held in the town hall or outside in one of the parks.

Down-lighting also plays a role in that romance, too, decreasing light pollution and providing wonderful views of the stars.

"If it wasn't for the unsightly glow of Panama City and Destin, this would have the most beautiful view of the heavens anywhere," Gifford said.

Even with that glow, it's pretty close.

J. Eric Eckard writes for the Rocky Mount Telegram. E-mail: eckardATcoxnc.com

Best airfares

Here are the lowest available prices for round-trip tickets on airlines serving Atlanta and Birmingham, as of June 2.



Fares are based on bookings two weeks out and include a weekend stay; all fares subject to change. AA-American, AT-AirTran, AW-America West, CO-Continental, DL-Delta, FR-Frontier, NJ-Vanguard, NW-Northwest, SA-Sun Country Air, SW-Southwest, TZ-American Trans Air, UA-United, US-US Airways, YX-Midwest Express

SOURCE: www.travelocity.com; www.southwest.com David Bone/The Anniston Star

Your dollar will buy...

Rates paid domestically for each dollar changed. These figures are intended only as a guide. Rates may be more favorable abroad.

Argentina (peso)	3.09	India (rupee)	46.2
Australia (dollar)	1.34	Indonesia (rupiah)	9,329
Brazil (real)	2.27	Israel (shekel)	4.52
Canada (dollar)	1.10	Japan (yen)	113
Chile (peso)	531	Mexico (peso)	11.3
Czech Rep. (koruna)	22.0	Morocco (dirham)	8.67
Egypt (pound)	5.77	New Zealand (dollar)	1.58
European (euro)	0.78	Norway (krone)	6.07
(Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain)		Philippines (peso)	52.9
Great Britain (pound)	0.54	Poland (zloty)	3.06
Hong Kong (dollar)	7.76	Russia (ruble)	27.1
Hungary (forint)	205	Singapore (dollar)	1.58
		South Africa (rand)	6.67
		South Korea (won)	947
		Sweden (krona)	7.22
		Switzerland (franc)	1.22
		Taiwan (dollar)	32.1
		Thailand (baht)	38.2
		Venezuela (bolivar)	2,146

— For June 1

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