



TAMPA TIME!



It's that time of year again, when company executives, store owners and their employees converge at the annual APRO Convention and Buying Show to find out the latest and greatest in the world of RTO. Now that the 2004 show is ready to go and choc full of insightful guest speakers and endless exhibits, *Progressive Rentals* set out to discover more about our host city, Tampa Bay, and all it has to offer. ☀ What we found were rich histories, vibrant cities, eclectic communities, lazy beaches, kid-friendly parks, colorful museums, happening night spots, good eats and much more. ☀ Terry Beville, vice president and CFO of Buddy's Home Furnishings, as well as the current president of the Florida Rental Dealers Association, has lived in Tampa for 55 years. "Tampa is a great place because there's so much to do in and around the city," he says. "You have Busch Gardens, the Florida Aquarium and the beaches are a short drive from the hotel. Then you have places like Disney World just a couple hours away." (See sidebar at on the following page.) ☀ So, whether you're planning a vacation around the convention or are here only for business, take some time to learn about Tampa and the hot spots you shouldn't miss!

APRO's 2004 Convention and Buying Show is set in one of the country's most exciting cities. Stephen Schenck talks to Tampa locals who offer a wealth of possibilities for Floridian fun.

TAMPA BAY HISTORY

Although our hotel, the Tampa Marriott Waterside, is technically located in the heart of Tampa (population 300,000), the city of Tampa actually lies within a much larger metropolitan area, known as Tampa Bay. No longer just a body of water on Florida's west coast, Tampa Bay is home to more than two million people and encompasses Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Tarpon Springs and all the stops in between. It is the most populous metropolitan area in Florida and also the state's largest television market.

The history of Tampa Bay can be traced back to Native Americans who settled in the area hundreds of years ago, naming their village "Tanpa," meaning "sticks of fire." The spelling became "Tampa" on the maps of early explorers, two of which were Ponce de Leon, who began his search for the fountain of youth south of Tampa in 1521 and Hernando de Soto, who sailed into the bay to search for gold in 1539.

Despite these early visits, the western coast of Florida wasn't the focus for settlers until the United States purchased Florida from Spain in 1821 and promptly set up Fort Brooke in what is now downtown Tampa. Over the next century, Tampa Bay would see an influx of industry and new settlements, eventually creating the metropolitan area we know today.



LOCAL CULTURE

Ybor City (pronounced EE-bore) played a significant role in the development of Tampa Bay. The city takes its name from Don Vicenté Martinez Ybor, a cigar manufacturer and Cuban exile who brought his cigar business to the area from Key West in 1885. After the first

cigar factory opened a year later, more Spanish cigar manufacturers followed, transplanting their factories and workers to Tampa.

At its peak, the cigar industry employed nearly 12,000 Spanish, Italian, German and Cuban workers and produced 700 million cigars a year. After being revitalized in the early 1990s, Ybor City is now des-

ignated as one of three National Historic Landmark districts in Florida and is a center for nightlife in Tampa. Ybor's cobblestone streets also feature upscale



dining, shopping, Cuban sandwiches, traditional hand-rolled cigars and museums.

"A perfect day for someone new to Tampa would probably include a visit to Busch Gardens in the morning, then in the afternoon I'd take the trolley to the historic district of Ybor City," says Melissa Sulsberger, director of marketing at Buddy's Home Furnishings. "Ybor City has a bunch of Spanish restaurants. My favorite is Columbia. It's 80 years old and has flamenco dancers and really captures the flavor of old Tampa."

Founded in 1905, Columbia Restaurant (812/248-4961) is Ybor City's most famous attraction and is impossible to miss. The restaurant has a Mediterranean style and is enormous—stretching a full city block and holding up to 1,600 people. Columbia offers authentic Spanish-Cuban cuisine, such as paella and empanadas, as well as a wide selection of seafood and meat entrées, tapas and sandwiches. The restaurant is also well known for its lively atmosphere, complete with flamenco dancers. In fact, the *Tampa Tribune* listed Columbia as one of the 10 best Tampa Bay attractions.

FAMILY FUN

Busch Gardens (813/987-5000), Tampa's No. 1 attraction, is one of the many reasons why Tampa is a favorite destination for families and children. The park



contains adventure rides, shows, shops and restaurants, spread out over 300 acres of various "African lands," such as Egypt, Timbuktu and Morocco and is guaranteed to wow kids and adults alike. More than 2,700 exotic animals from around the world wander

freely as rides allow you to pass over and around them. The park also features roller coasters and a raging river ride. Adult admission is \$49.95; for children ages 3 to 9, admission is \$40.95.

Adventure Island (813/987-5600), located next door to Busch Gardens, is also owned by Busch and is considered one of Florida's best water parks. Attractions include the Tampa Typhoon, the

More Tampa Bay sites and stops

Bern's Steakhouse
1208 S. Howard Ave., Tampa
813/251-2421

For anyone seeking the ultimate fine dining experience, Bern's Steakhouse is renowned. Though steaks are the restaurant's specialty, the diverse menu offers a variety of other meat and seafood choices to satisfy any craving. Additionally, Bern's features its own live fish tank, bakery, coffee roaster, upstairs dessert parlor and organic garden. It also boasts "the largest wine cellar of any restaurant in the world," which includes more than 6,900 unique wine labels. "Bern's is just a fantastic place," says Beville. "I think it's the best steakhouse in the world." Reservations are required.



Salvador Dali Museum
1000 Third St. South, St. Petersburg
800/442-3254

The world's largest collection of the surrealist's artwork is housed here.



Tampa Bay Holocaust Museum
55 Fifth St. South, St. Petersburg
800/960-7448

World's fourth largest of its kind, displays Holocaust art and other rotating and permanent exhibits.

Ybor City State Museum
1818 E. Ninth Ave., Tampa
813/247-6323

Exhibits examine growth of Ybor City, cigar making and bread making.

Lowry Park Zoo
7530 North Blvd., Tampa
813/935-8552

Twenty-six acres of exotic animals from around the world.

Tampa Bay Devil Rays
Major league baseball
Tropicana Field, St. Petersburg

The Devil Rays host the Boston Red Sox and the Seattle Mariners August 3-7.





“One of the best parts of living here is definitely the weather because the sun is always shining.”

Endless Surf Pool, the Splash Attack Maze and the Caribbean Corkscrew. Admission is \$27.95 for adults and \$25.95 for children 3 to 9 (plus tax). Both Busch Gardens and Adventure Island are located in northeast Tampa,

Miles and miles of Florida fun

From Tampa, you're not too far from other Florida hot spots:

- Orlando: 85 miles
- Clearwater: 20 miles
- Ft. Lauderdale: 234 miles
- Miami: 245 miles
- St. Petersburg: 19 miles
- Daytona Beach: 139 miles

about 30 minutes from the hotel.

For family entertainment within walking distance or a short trolley ride from the convention center, the Channel District, along Channelside Drive, has much to offer. While walking along the waterfront, you can watch cruise ships dock in the Port of Tampa, stop in for a movie at the IMAX theater or relax at the many restaurants, dance clubs, piano bars and unique shops along the way.

The Florida Aquarium (813/273-4000) is the focal point of the district and is part of the Garrison Seaport Center. With more than 152,000 square feet tucked beneath a seashell-shaped

dome, exhibits recreate various water environments inhabited by sharks, angelfish, jellyfish and octopi. Popular features are a tank that holds sharks and rays that are safe to pet and the daily shark feeding shows. Admission for adults is \$15, while seniors pay \$12 and children \$10.

Stump's Supper Club (813/226-2261) is also located in the new Channelside complex downtown and features "Southern cooking and deep-fried dancing." The menu offers traditional Southern fare, from cornbread and black-eyed peas to barbecue ribs and meatloaf, as well as a variety of steaks and seafood. After

dinner, you can cut loose on the dance club floor or check out one of the bands playing onstage.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

As awesome as its commercial attractions may be, for many it is Tampa's natural beauty that will always be its top selling point. From its tropical weather and near constant sunshine to its white sand beaches and deep-sea fishing, Tampa Bay was made for people who love to get outside and leave the city behind.

"One of the best parts of living here is definitely the weather because the sun is always shining and the winters are really mild," says Joe

which are great." Ben T. Davis Municipal Beach (813/274-7719) is Tampa's lone saltwater beach, which lies on the Courtney Campbell Causeway, in northwest Tampa, but for the serious beach bum, St. Pete Beach and Clearwater are the places to be.

St. Pete Beach is located on Long Key, a 7.5-mile island just west of St. Petersburg, and is famous for its interesting history, as well as its beaches. The pink, 70-year-old Don CeSar Resort was once a stomping ground for 1920s celebrities such as Al Capone and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Clearwater Beach, though not as well known as St. Petersburg or St. Pete Beach, has beaches that rival any beach along Florida's western coast. About a 30-

minute drive from Tampa, Clearwater also is abundant with other recreational activities. Boat tours, like the ones offered at Sea Screamer (727/447-7200) take families on hour-long trips visiting dolphins, beaches and the Gulf.

In addition to tours, scuba diving, snorkeling, parasailing and fishing charters are available along Clearwater Marina. "I like fishing, so if it was up to me I'd charter a boat in Clearwater and do some deep sea fishing," says Gazzo. Gypsy (727/461-4882), also located along Clearwater Marina, offers fishing charters for six people or less at a rate of \$75 per hour. ■

Stephen Schenck is a free-lance writer based in Austin, TX.



COMMUNICATIONS IN THE RTO WORKPLACE



COMMUNICATIONS IN THE RTO WORKPLACE IS APRO'S LATEST RENTAL TRAINING ONLINE COURSE

ALSO AVAILABLE:

INTRODUCTION TO RENT-TO-OWN

RENTAL DELIVERY AND SAFETY

ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT IN RENT-TO-OWN

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN RENT-TO-OWN

WWW.APROVISION.ORG