

ORLANDO ON THE CHEAP

The GCSAA's Golf Industry Show is an important trip for every superintendent. It becomes even more important in tough economic times.

The 2011 show finds its way back to Orlando, a popular destination for the event. Orlando alone offers 176 public and semi-private golf courses in its metro region, equating to more than 548 miles of golf goodness. Add in several major theme parks, several water parks and the second largest convention center in the country, and it's easy to see why Orlando is such a popular destination.

Golfdom caught up with Seth Kubersky, the art and culture columnist for the Orlando Weekly and author of "Universal Orlando 2011"; Sara Moore, vice president of marketing for All Star Vacation Homes; and Chris Sorrell, superintendent at Eagles Ridge Golf Club in Curwensville, Pa., and a self-proclaimed "cheap travel expert" for some practical tips on traveling to Orlando next month (the show runs from February 7th through the 11th).

Split a room? Share a condo.

You want to be close to the Orange County Convention Center and you want to have a nice room. That means you're booking a room through GCSAA, and that's not cheap. The Rosen Centre, for example, is booking at north of \$200 a night. Even if you get a fellow superintendent to split a room with you, that still adds up quickly after a week.

"In the I-Drive area, around the convention center, honestly there's not much wheeling and dealing," Kubersky says. "If you're with the convention, they typically offer a rate and that's as good as you can get."

Is the company no longer paying for your annual trek to the GIS? Let these three experts help you out.

BY SETH JONES

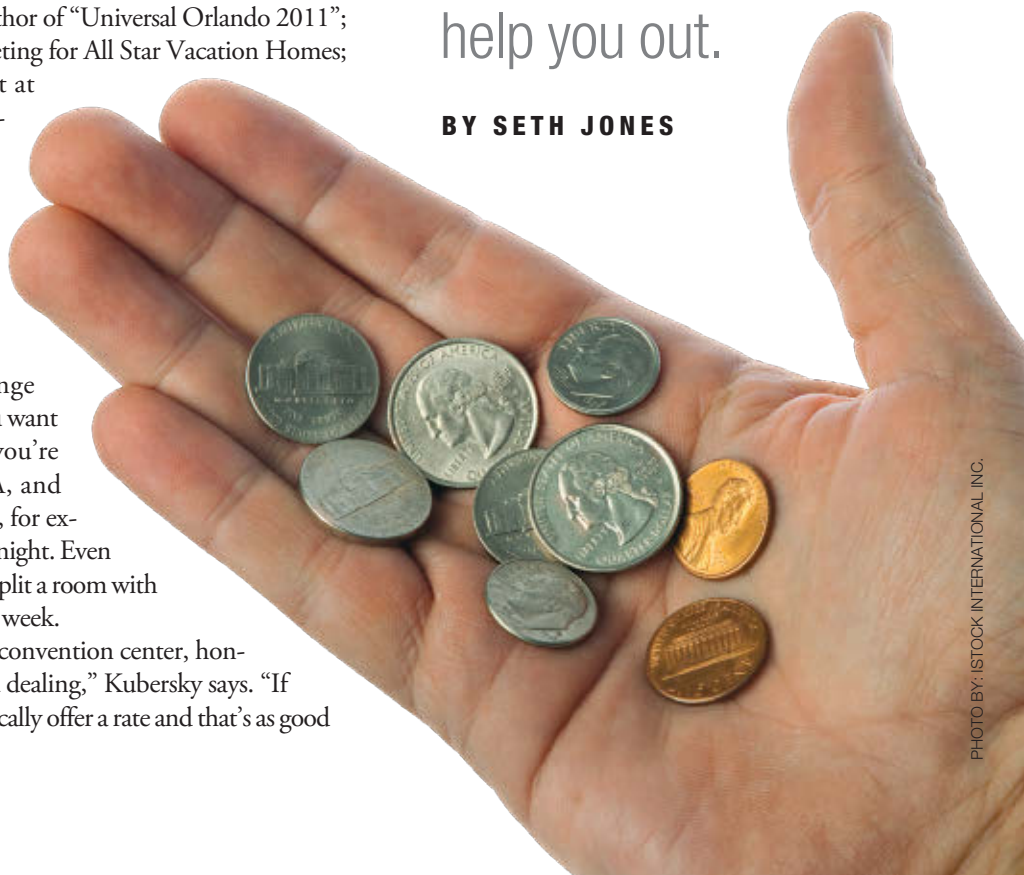


PHOTO BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.



Sure, you could share this pool with 500 other people. But why not consider booking a place with your own private pool — and for less money?

Continued from page 26

So superintendents are stuck paying for a pricey hotel room? Not so, according to Sara Moore, vice president of marketing for All Star Vacation Homes (www.allstarvacationhomes.com).

"We host many professionals coming down for conferences. There are a lot of benefits including and beyond cost-savings, when a group of colleagues come together to rent a condo," Moore says.

Besides just being cheaper than a hotel room, Moore says, there's the added benefit of your own kitchen to prepare meals, free parking in your own garage, added space to relax and in some rentals, your own private pool or access to the local golf course.

Moore says All Star Vacation Homes are all privately owned vacation homes, but they're treated like hotels with a full-time guest services team.

"We have two- and three-bedroom condos adjacent to the convention center for \$124 a night. We have larger three-bedroom condos in the same community, over 2,000 square feet, for only \$209 a night," Moore says.

Moore says that renting a home is something that is just now catching on with American travelers, but has been popular with international travelers for years.

"For people attending conventions, it's great, because it allows for extra space to store things and for a place to actually get away from the convention," she says.

Chris Sorrell, superintendent at Eagles Ridge Golf Club in Curwensville, Pa., will be taking advantage of a three-bedroom timeshare that he scored at a "friend price" of \$79 a night.

"My parents, wife and my girls are all going with me, and we're all staying there together," Sorrell says. "The place has a kitchen, so we'll be able to make our own meals. Staying at a timeshare makes for significant savings for those of us who have to travel on our own dime."

Convince a newbie to join you

Safety in numbers, right? It also helps bring the cost down. One extra body brings the cost of a room or rental car down for everyone.

So who can you convince to join you on your 2011 GIS-on-the-cheap trip? A rookie, a newbie, a turf student. Why? Because if they've never been to the GIS before, they get in for free. That's right, they just need to be a GCSAA member to take advantage of a one-time free GIS registration.

Now your intern thinks you're doing him a favor, when actually the intern is helping you out. (One note: this deal isn't available online. Your rookie will have to mail or fax their registration in. Sorry, rook.)

Plan carefully

The truth is, if you book your own travel, there's a good chance you can save a few dollars. Even if your travel

WE'RE GOING TO DISNEY WORLD!

If you're mixing business and pleasure this year for the GIS, you're in luck: the week of the Golf Industry Show is smack-dab in the middle of the slowest time of the year for the big parks like Disney World and Universal Orlando. In fact, possibly the slowest day of the year at Disney World is the Tuesday of the GIS.

"It always changes, but based on historical trends, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the busiest, Tuesday, Feb. 8th will be a 1," Kubersky says. "If you go to www.touringplans.com, they have all sorts of statistical data on this. The week-end of the 12th and 13th, the parks will only be at 30 and 40 percent capacity. It's really not a bad time of the year to be in Orlando."

Kubersky does expect it to be busy at the theme parks the weekend of Feb. 5th and 6th because of Super Bowl XLV (which will be played on Sunday, Feb. 6th at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington).

"The only other place that compares to Orlando in terms of 'wow' factor for a convention is Las Vegas, and that's a lot less family friendly if you're bringing the wife and kids along," Kubersky says.



agent finds you a great deal, there's always a price to pay that agent for getting you the deal. If you could get that same deal yourself...

"If you have a travel agent that you are comfortable with, and has served you well in the past... a good travel agent can be your best friend," Kubersky says. "If the most important thing is the price, you can probably do a little bit better researching it yourself. But if you're looking for peace of mind, a travel agent is still the safest way to go."

Kubersky does say that because Orlando is such a heavy tourist destination (48 million visitors a year!) that there generally is good competition for low airfare. If you're coming from the Los Angeles area, look into Virgin Airlines, which just started flying direct flights to Orlando for as cheap as \$99 each way.

But don't wait until the last minute. Even though February is a slow time for Orlando, most of the cheapest flights are booked at least two weeks in advance.

Sorrell says he scored a great deal to San Diego last year via careful planning on Expedia.com.

"My room, rental car and flight were all booked together for \$600," Sorrell boasts. "But I did plan ahead and booked it in advance, like in November."

Sorrell says he also budgeted for cheap meals all week, which brings us to our next tip...

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 28

Focus on dinner

It's OK to have a nice dinner. You're on a trip, you've got some good company — go grab a steak with some friends from your chapter.

But that dinner bill is a lot easier to swallow when you've gotten by on the cheap for breakfast and lunch.

"Hotel complimentary breakfasts are your best friend," laughs Kubersky. "I recommend you eat a good breakfast before you go."

Check to see what your hotel offers. And if you managed to get a good breakfast in — maybe even a breakfast buffet,

which aren't uncommon on I-Drive — consider hitting the convention center with a granola bar or energy bar stashed away. It's typically such a busy time at the convention center, all you'll have time for is something quick anyway.

Sorrell recommends eating poorly for lunch at fast food places like McDonald's. "One week of bad eating is not going to bite you in the ass," he laughs.

Once you're done for the day, reward yourself with something good. Orlando has a lot to offer.

"Around I-Drive, Pointe Orlando has a number of nice restaurants, great steakhouses, B.B. King's Blues Bar," Kubersky suggests. Another area he suggests is an area called "Restaurant Row" that is about a mile from the Orange County Convention Center on Sand Lake Road. It's here that GIS attendees can go and eat at restaurants that are prototypes of future chains. "Season 52 started there, and there are a number of high-end experimental restaurants that are interesting to people," Kubersky says. "A lot of new eating concepts come from here, restaurants you're not going to see for 5 or 10 years."

And, of course, if you can sneak in a meal at your chapter event or as a guest of a big exhibitor, that makes the next evening's dinner at the experimental restaurant even more affordable.

"I always catch a few free meals from sales reps and product manufacturers," Sorrell says. "And I hit the reception tents whenever I can. I remember last year, Quali-Pro, their reception was great — that was one of the best meals I had all week."

Avoid taxis

There is an affordable alternative to taxis in Orlando. The I-Ride Trolley (www.iritdetrolley.com) services the I-Drive Resort area,



The I-Ride Trolley will give you a lift for only \$1.25.



which is exactly the area superintendents will be in at the GIS. The trolley runs from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. daily, and costs only \$1.25 per trip.

"(The I-Ride Trolley) is actually pretty convenient — it runs frequently, it heavily services the convention center and the adjoining hotels, and it can take you all the way to Sea World and Universal Studios in either direction, if you're staying in the convention center area," Kubersky says. "But if you want to go from your hotel to Disney or to downtown Orlando, I'd highly recommend a rental car. Public transportation in Orlando is not great."

Kubersky also suggests you look to see if your hotel offers a free shuttle from the airport, another big taxi expense that could possibly be saved.

Check in with GCSAA

As show attendance has dipped in recent years, GCSAA has gotten proactive to get superintendents to show with some last-minute deals.

Visit www.gcsaa.org late in the game to see what deals the GCSAA is offering. As of press time, GCSAA had a "lodging and conference discount package" where superintendents can book a more flexible trip to Orlando, as well as a "cost-saving opportunities" page (<http://www.golfindustryshow.com/show-info/cost-savings.asp>) that went so far as to suggest hotel rooms outside the normal roster of GCSAA hotels, such as Econolodge Inn and Suites for as cheap as \$69 a night.

The site also has a list of restaurants that will provide GIS attendees a special menu for \$20 meals when attendees show their badge. That list includes B.B. King's Blues Bar, which has already been recommended by our local expert! ■