

Mansion Life: Affordable vacations in high class accommodations



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OSCEOLA COUNTY, Fla. — There's a hot new trend unique to Central Florida's tourism industry: Mansions being built for the sole purpose of renting them online to tourists at a nightly rate. It appears the business model is a big success, both for the investors and the vacationers renting the homes.

A hot trend in Central Florida is vacation rentals that are super-sized. From rooftop pools, to lazy rivers, and enough bedrooms to sleep over 20 people, these McMansions are not being built for celebrities, but rather, investors who rent them out on websites like Home Away and VRBO.

"My slogan is five-star accommodation at a three-star price," said Shawn Huang, of Vacation Home Link.

Huang of Windermere was formerly an executive with Dell. Ten years ago he and his wife bought a five bedroom vacation home in Orlando. They had no idea what it would lead to.

"We stumbled into this," Huang said.

Huang said he saw a growing demand for rental homes with 10 bedrooms or more, so he upgraded, and now owns eight, including one in the Encore Resort at Reunion. His primary client? Families.

"It provides a space for people to get together, not live separately, hotels don't do that," Huang said.

Huang said he's had so much success renting the big homes, that he was able to quit his job and now manages them full time.

One reason the large vacation homes are becoming such popular rentals is it's usually a lot more affordable than a hotel. If you rented a house for a thousand dollars a night and had 20 people stay there, that's just \$50 per person.

Most of the super-sized homes are in Osceola County, specifically Reunion, where the zoning is friendly to short-term rentals.

Ed Guerette has built several of the big homes and said the demand is growing.

"We built two of these 13 bedroom homes just down the street for a couple. We started out with one, they did so well in the first six months, they asked us to build another," Guerette said.

The rental rate for the huge homes varies. A 10 bedroom home can go for \$500 a night. A 14 bedroom home with lots of extra amenities can cost several thousand dollars per night.

For both investors and vacationers, the business of super-sized vacation homes seems to be working. According to the website MansionQuest.com, of the 10 most valuable homes in Osceola County, seven of them are vacation rentals.