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SITE UNSEEN: “Buy from the UK”

If you are thinking of buying a property in Florida, but you're not sure when you will get the chance to go out there, you could buy a property "site unseen" from your home in the UK. While the thought of this may seem risky for some people, thousands have already bought this way very successfully.

The most important consideration for anyone attempting to buy a property without first going to see it is to work with a trustworthy agent, who has experience and knowledge of the area and the specific market. Such an agent (preferably a realtor, who has access through the MLS database to a much wider selection of properties than non-realtors), should be happy to work with you to achieve your goals. By first building up a rapport with you (via email and phone), your agent should get to know exactly what you are looking for, what your maximum budget is and your intended use of the property.

A competent agent will take several good photos of various angles of all rooms, plus exterior shots of the property and the views. They can email them to you, properly labelled and with a good description of the location of the property, including any visible defects or issues, how the property "feels" inside and out and exactly how it is situated on the lot. If possible, a selection of comparable available properties should be emailed, to help you to decide a property's suitability.

Once you have determined that this is the property for you, your agent will prepare an offer, which can be

either emailed or faxed to you for your signature and then sent to the listing agent for the seller to look over and accept or counteroffer. Once both parties have agreed to the terms, you have a contract and your agent will take care of the rest up to closing, including arranging a home inspection as an additional safeguard for you as to the condition of the property. A good agent will also help to arrange your finances.

If you don't have access to the internet, then buying unseen is not for you because it would be extremely difficult for your agent to be able to send you timely information and photos. Generally, this method is usually more suitable for someone looking to buy an investment property to rent out, rather than for someone looking to spend a lot of personal time there. However, if you have built up a very good rapport with your agent, even this method may still be for you.

Some companies who offer inspection trips, especially those who pay for you to do so, often want you to buy certain properties in certain developments. In these cases, you will most likely not be offered the widest selection of available properties, so your choices are limited. If your inspection trip is subsidised, the costs may be built into the price of the property, so one way or another, you'll be paying.

An agent who is willing to take the time to hand pick a property to suit your personal criteria, which usually requires a lot of their time back and forth, is probably an agent you can rely on to be on your side! ☀



LESLEY DOLBY
Dolby Properties
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the great debate

To see or not to see?

Buying a home in Florida can be a problem for those who haven't the time or money to fly to the US; but are inspection visits crucial or unnecessary? **Matthew Evans** argues that seeing your property is critical before buying, while **Lesley Dolby** believes that trusting your agent is more important

INSPECTION TRIPS:

Matthew Evans, a real estate agent based in the UK, explains why he believes it is essential for prospective purchasers to visit Florida before buying a property.



MATTHEW EVANS
Simply Florida
www.simplyflorida.net

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Guests can
experience the
advantages
of villa
living rather
than the
single room
of a hotel
”

I am a firm believer in prospective purchasers of Florida real estate taking advantage of an inspection visit rather than buying site unseen. Our inspection visits are very much geared to our clients; we are dedicated to making the inspection trip as personal as possible, and clients can get a feel of the properties too. Before leaving the UK, clients are contacted by one of our licensed realtors based in the UK and discuss what type of home they are looking for. These requirements will reduce any wasted time looking at the wrong sort of property when in Florida.

Budget and location are two other important areas that are addressed during this discussion. Our clients are also advised at this point that they will be required to open a US bank account and are given a list of what they need to take out with them to help facilitate this.

If our client has not made arrangements for a mortgage, should one be needed, we arrange for a mortgage broker to contact them and have them pre-qualified before arriving in Florida; then they will be aware of their budget.

The next step is to arrange dates for travel: flights and car rental can be booked by us on behalf of the client, or they can make their own arrangements. We arrange accommodation for their visit, usually in one of our own rental villas where the guests can experience the advantages of villa living rather than the single room of a hotel. The next day a realtor will meet them at the villa and discuss the programme for their stay.

The first stop will be to one of the local banks where our client will be introduced to a personal banker who will assist them in opening their US bank account. Typically this will take no longer than 30 minutes; then we tour the area so that our clients can have an objective view of what facilities and amenities are close to the various sub-divisions we will be visiting; the clients then select their favourite areas.

In Central Florida we will only show homes that are within a 10-minute drive of Disney as experience has taught us that these are a better investment. If we have done our homework correctly, it is usual for our clients to make a decision on the first day; then we continue the process of writing the contract and submitting the offer to the selling agent. Once accepted we arrange for them to meet up with the mortgage company and complete the required paperwork. During the inspection visit they will also be introduced to property management companies who are known to us and who will do an efficient job.

Our inspection trips are paid for by the client before they come over to Florida. In the event of them making a purchase, refunds are made that are dependant on the type of property that is purchased. If it is a new home then the accommodation, two economy-class flights and up to one week's car rental is refunded. In the case of a resale home the accommodation costs of the villa will be refunded. Inspection visits will normally be arranged outside high season.