

second best?

# Longboat ranks No. 2

For the first time, Longboat Key made Condé Nast Traveler magazine's Readers' Choice Survey. But Kiawah Island, S.C., still holds the top island-destination spot.



Kurt Schultheis

By Robin Hartill | Community Editor

The golf courses are green, and its beaches are pristine. The tiny island stretches just 10 miles; its widest stretch is just more than one mile. It's home to multimillion-dollar properties, has a population with a median age above 60 and one of the largest turtle-watch groups in the United States. It's the No. 1 island-travel destination in North America, according to the 25,916 readers who voted in the Condé Nast Traveler 2010 Readers' Choice Survey.

Nope. We aren't talking about Longboat Key.

The top-ranked island destination is Kiawah Island, S.C., which also claimed the top honor last year. But, for the first year in the survey's 22-year history, Longboat Key made the list, beating out list regulars such as Vancouver Island, Canada, and Nantucket, Mass., to claim the No. 2 spot.

The ranking is a high honor, according to Tom Aposporos, president of the Longboat Key, Lido Key, St. Armands Key Chamber of Commerce,

because the magazine's readers are the demographic that Longboat Key wants to attract. Two separate sets of circulation data provided by Condé Nast list the median age of readers as 49 and 53 and their median household incomes as \$105,763 and \$167,425.

"That makes it a compliment by peers," Aposporos said. "I think we start by celebrating that."

It gives Longboat Key valu-

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## SIDE-BY-SIDE

Here's how the two islands rank, according to Condé Nast readers, on a scale of 1 to 100.

	Longboat Key	Kiawah Island
Beaches	88.4	81.9
Scenery	83.6	87.0
Ambience	83.3	85.8
Restaurants	80.6	78.0
Friendliness	78.0	82.2
Lodging	76.5	85.6
Activities	68.7	80.2



Kurt Schultheis

A view of the Harbourside golf course and Sarasota Bay from the west side of Longboat.

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able publicity, which could eventually be good for home values.

“What it will do is increase the visitors to the island, which is critical to increasing the demand for property,” said Coldwell Banker agent Roger Pettingell, who has been selling Longboat Key property since 1995.

But, still, the ranking begs the question: What does Kiawah Island have that Longboat Key doesn't have?

Kiawah Island is home to Beachwalker Park, ranked as the No. 8 beach in the country by drbeach.org, and the island's only public beach. But, according to the seven criteria that Condé Nast readers voted on in the year-long live survey, which ends in May each year, Longboat Key's beaches scored higher than Kiawah Island's beaches — and so did its restaurants. But the Key's three lowest rankings were in the activities, lodging and friendliness.

In the activities and friendliness categories, Kiawah Island's proximity to Charleston, S.C., gives it a boost. According to Mike Vegis, public relations director at the Kiawah Island Golf Resort, since Hurricane Katrina struck, the city has become the new “New Orleans” for foodies.

The city has an active nightlife, arts scene and was the site of major Revolutionary War and Civil War battles, which makes it a hot spot for history buffs. Travel + Leisure magazine announced Monday that Charleston had been named the friendliest city in the country. And, in this year's Condé Nast survey, readers ranked Charleston as the No. 2 U.S. city, just behind San Francisco.

“There's a nice little cluster of award-winning destinations,” Vegis said.

But Charleston doesn't get all the credit for making Kiawah Island a destination. The island is home to more than 200 types of birds and diverse wildlife, including deer, alligators, bobcats and river otters, in part because the island is home to a nature preserve of more than 300 acres. Guided nature walks, kayaking and riding the 30 miles of bicycle trail on the island are popular island activities.

And although the island has only a few businesses — including just one gas station and a tiny town market — it's also home to the resort, which has five golf courses and the five-star Sanctuary Hotel, which Condé Nast readers voted the No. 3 mainland U.S. large resort. In 2012, the resort will host the 38th Annual PGA Club Professional Championship.

Michael Welly, general manager of the Longboat Key Club and Resort, said that



Longboat Key



Kiawah Island, S.C.

Courtesy photos

**By the numbers**

Here's how the islands compare by the numbers.

	Longboat Key	Kiawah Island
Peak-season population	21,000 to 22,000	10,000
	(Easter weekend)	(July)
Year-round population	7,000	2,000
Area (in square miles)	17	13.5
High-temperature forecast (Nov. 11)	82	69
Low-temperature forecast (Nov. 11)	57	42
Median age	67.9	61.2
Median home value*	\$480,500	\$786,500

\*According to Zillow.com  
Sources: 2000 U.S. Census, town of Longboat Key, Kiawah Island Golf Resort and weather.com

Longboat Key's rankings highlight the need for improved tourist facilities — something that he has been prominently advocating since the Key Club announced its \$400 million Islandside expansion-and-renovation plan — but wondered where specifically survey-takers saw room for improvement.

“Is it in terms of the quality of lodging, the number of lodging units or the diversity of lodging?” he asked.

Welly said that Longboat Key could also improve its ratings by promoting activities primarily in Sarasota, but also in Tampa. Charleston, he said, has a different, more historic draw in comparison to Sarasota, which has an increasingly vibrant downtown and arts attractions.

“I think Longboat Key should be that little jewel in Sarasota,” he said.

*Editor's note: Condé Nast's website incorrectly listed Longboat Key in the No. 3 spot.*