



HOTELS



JOHN VANBEEKUM/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

WELCOME SIGN: Guide Konrad Pramsholer, right, saw European bookings for his tour company increase 10 percent in Miami — a respectable gain in a rough year for travel.

Hotels' bookings on rise

COMPETITION

Konrad Pramsholer, who runs a Miami Lakes tour company that caters to Europeans, said South Florida was hurt in the foreign market this year by even deeper discounts in the Caribbean. "Miami is a beach destination," he said. "You can get much better deals in the islands than you can in Miami."

Still, Pramsholer saw his European bookings increase 10 percent in Miami — far less than in other U.S. markets but still a gain in a rough year for travel.

This summer, he bought a small bus modeled to look like a trolley car, where he leads tours of Miami and Miami Beach with taped commentary in German, English and Spanish.

"In January, I'm adding French and Italian," he said. "I'm trying to do Russian."

Foreign tourists provide South Florida hotels the biggest boost in the summer, when steamy weather turns off U.S. vacationers from the Midwest and Northeast.

Travalco, a North Miami company that sells U.S. vacation packages to Europeans, saw bookings drop between 10 and 15 percent in 2009 as a U.S. recession spread around the world.

But President Peter van Berkel said the summer of 2010 should see gains. Many Europeans book summer trips in the fall, and the recent rise of the euro to \$1.50 is helping boost sales. "It's a psychological level," van Berkel said. "You get three dollars, and you only have

Rise in bookings may signal hotels' rebound



JOHN VANBEEKUM/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

ON TOUR BUS: Guide Konrad Pramsholer talks with Walter and Emma Jones of Dexter, Mich.

■ Demand is picking up for South Florida hotel rooms as the winter tourism season kicks into gear. Profits may be another story.

BY DOUGLAS HANKS

dhanks@MiamiHerald.com

The winter shouldn't be quite as harsh for tourism this time around.

As Art Basel Miami Beach heralds the unofficial launch of the "high" tourism season this week, demand has finally begun to rise for trips to South Florida. That could signal a turning point for a hotel market besieged by discounted rates and weak demand, trends that have pushed some of the region's flashiest hotels to the brink of foreclosure.

Severe cutbacks in travel spending haven't stopped art buyers from driving up rates in Miami Beach this week — the cheapest rooms at the \$25 a night this weekend, compared