

Florianópolis — 'Best Of The Best'



By DIANE SMITH

"It's the best of the best," said Hans Keeling, a local boy who is carving out a new life in Florianópolis, Brazil, switching from his past as a corporate lawyer to his present endeavor as an entrepreneur.

The former Tiburon resident now is the founder and managing director of *Nexus Surf*, a new surf/adventure

Former Tiburon resident Hans Keeling, the founder and director of a surf/adventure sport resort on an island in southern Brazil.

sport resort on an island in southern Brazil, a 45-minute flight from São Paulo.

This 32-mile-long and 12-mile-wide island is made

up of 17th Century fishing villages, jungle-covered hills, sparkling lagoons and 42 unspoiled, sandy beaches, 18 of which are known as "quality surf beaches."

In fact, a recent *Newsweek* article names "Floripa" (its nickname) number 10 on a list of the most dynamic cities in the world.

But surfing is not the only pastime on this idyllic vacation isle. Just as available are wind surfing, kite surfing, eco-hiking and tours, sand dune boarding, river rafting, horseback riding, snorkeling and deep sea diving, all within minutes of each other.

Keeling's headquarters face the Atlantic Ocean so the surf constantly is up, but behind it on the opposite side of the island is a quiet lagoon where one can relax on a sandy beach in a peaceful setting.

Immediately next to Keeling's property is a large nature preserve, so when you're tired of marine activities, there are numerous hiking paths to explore. Other options are to visit the historic sites — a fort constructed in 1740 by the Portuguese to defend themselves from the French — walk through small fishing villages with their stone bungalows and cobbled streets that have changed little in the last 100 years, or drive around the mansions owned by ultra-rich Brazilians who have discovered Floripa — those who know, compare this area with New York's Hamptons.

Brazil's seasons are, of course, opposite to ours so, from June through August (their winter), temperatures hover around 70 degrees F. January through March has an average of 85 degrees. "The weather's temperate year round," said Keeling, "on average, about five to ten degrees warmer than San Diego in any particular season."

Keeling's enterprise is an all-inclusive business that can arrange a rental townhouse or home (for four people, it costs an average of \$1,499 per person for seven nights) with air conditioning, wireless high-speed Internet connection, U.S. phone line, private pool, big screen television, and surf lessons and excursions led

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by all English-speaking certified instructors and staff.

This price also includes all transportation and a personal rental-car, as well as reservations at your choice of restaurants and nightlife venues. "We have arrangements with the owners so our clients don't have to wait in line or pay the cover charge," said Keeling, "and we have private table areas reserved for them, a nice personal touch that's usually difficult to come by in a foreign city."

There's also breakfast delivered to your residence each morning, a refrigerator stocked with snacks, local cell phone use and personalized pickup from the airport upon arrival. In fact, the only items not covered in the package price are lunch, dinner and airfare.

The nine-hour direct flight from Los Angeles to São Paulo has an average price of \$1,000 roundtrip on major airlines.

In late afternoon, when the day's activities wind down, the vacationers and locals frequent the wide variety of nightspots. Restaurant choices range from Thai to Greek to French or Italian to German to traditional Brazilian barbecue.

"A comparable dinner in Marin that costs \$75," said Keeling, "would be \$23 in Floripa, including some very nice Brazilian wine." After dinner, you can go to the high-end nightclubs with dancing or to the small bars with Brazilian music, plus everything in between. "Each night, we take people to the 'hot spot' of the evening," said Keeling.

For lunch, there are numerous spots to choose from, many with fresh seafood. In fact, Floripa is one of Brazil's largest exporters of shellfish.

"We try to give our visitors an insider's view of the culture," said Keeling. "Brazilians are friendly, fun-loving, relaxed and warm, and Floripa is 100 percent safe, contrary to what one often hears on the news about Brazil. The mega-cities of São Paulo and Rio get a bad rap for crime, and deservedly so, but not here. Another thing, Brazilians are known for their hospitality and really like Americans, and there's a growing trend for Americans to buy property here, especially Californians."

Asked when the best month is to visit Florianópolis, Keeling said, "March and April are great months in Floripa. It's warm but not too warm, and the weeklong Carnival is at the end of February, marking the end of the Brazilian vacation season, so the atmosphere is a little more relaxed. It really all depends on what you're after though, as there is no definite 'best' time to visit."

While growing up in Tiburon, Keeling attended Reed, Bel Aire and Del Mar schools before going on to Redwood for two years and graduating from Branson in 1994.

Starting out at Princeton playing basketball, he missed the California weather and returned a year later to graduate from Stanford in 1998, then went on to UCLA for law school, graduating in 2001 in the top one percent of his class.

After five years practicing corporate law in Los Angeles, often working 20-hour days, he was offered a job with a large international law firm in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. "I found out I didn't like law any better in Rio, but really enjoyed living in Brazil," he said, "and decided to follow my passion for adventure sports, foreign cultures and travel." Having discovered

Florianópolis on vacations, he launched Nexus Surf in August 2005.

His parents, Edward and Christa Keeling, still live in Tiburon but have been won over by the magic of Florianópolis and are in the process of buying a vacation home there where they plan to live at least part of each year.

"I've traveled a lot and seen many great places," said Keeling, "but to me, no place stands out culturally, historically, and with the natural beauty and leisure options that Florianópolis offers. It really is a special place, and in many ways reminds me of a Brazilian version of Marin, just with better beaches!"

For more information on Nexus Surf and Florianópolis, go to www.nexussurf.com.