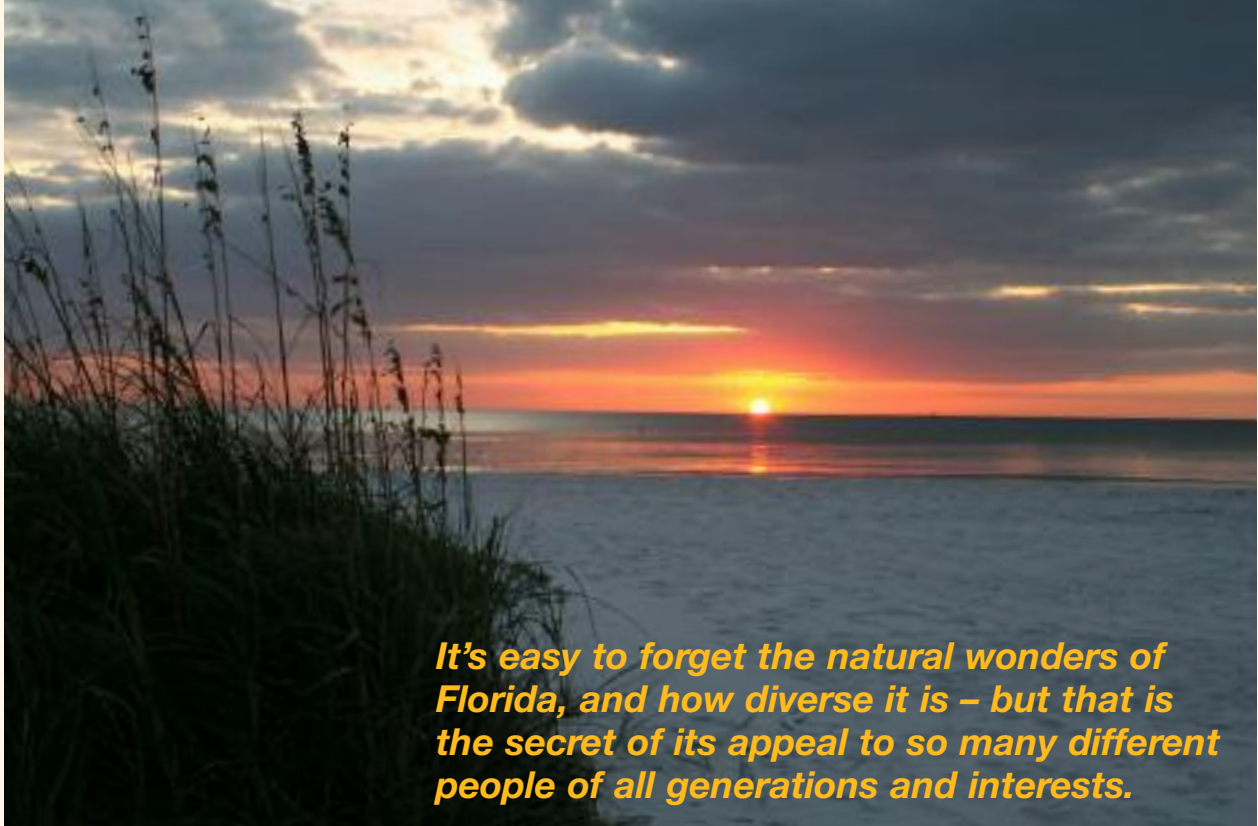


# Family Florida

By Chris Robinson



***It's easy to forget the natural wonders of Florida, and how diverse it is – but that is the secret of its appeal to so many different people of all generations and interests.***

*Chris Robinson, host of The Chris Robinson Travel Shows on CFRB and provides some thoughts as to why more Canadians choose Florida for their vacation than any other single destination outside Canada.*

**T**hough Florida is the vacation choice for all ages, many people associate it with children. We have taken our two young sons to Florida several times. I remember one occasion when – despite its reputation for great weather – we were caught in a brief tropical down pour. We took shelter from plump raindrops under a Chinese pagoda in the Botanical Gardens

in Sarasota, on the Gulf Coast of Florida. “So much for the Sunshine State.” grumped Pip, the eldest of our two boys.

We had spent the previous few days being bewitched and bedazzled by the delights of Walt Disney World and Universal Studios in Orlando. But now we were insisting on some grown-up delights in a “two-centre’ vacation.

The drops turned to a down-pour and then a crescendo of thunder and lightning. “Wow!” breathed a, by now, very impressed Pip. “This is even more cool than Epcot”. Florida has a habit of doing that – surprising and delighting vacationers who are

often focused on the wonders of the Orlando attraction parks. It’s easy to forget the natural wonders of Florida, and how diverse it is – but that is the secret of its appeal to so many different people of all generations and interests.

Don’t get me wrong – Orlando has more than enough attractions to keep visitors buzzing for a week or more. This year, especially, will be an exciting one to be in Orlando as Walt Disney World will be celebrating The Year of a Million Dreams. It’s a first-of-its-kind event, celebrating your dreams and the dream-making magic that Disney Cast Members create for guests everyday! Enjoy



incredible new experiences, shows and attractions that put you right in the middle of the magic!

Canadian vacation companies feature all the park tickets you will need, pre-purchased in Canadian Dollars. If you stay at one of over twenty Disney hotels showcased in many tour operators' Florida brochures, you benefit from an included ticket to all the Disney Theme Parks, and you can choose one of several other vacation options. The new Disney's Magic Your Way Package Plus Dining is a convenient and affordable way to experience many of the unique Disney dining locations found across the Walt Disney World Resort. Guests have included dining options at more than 100 participating Walt Disney World Resort restaurants.

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My suggestion, if you have young children, is to opt for the "Disney Character Breakfast". I remember a younger Pip, wide eyed with amazement, when Mickey and Goofy sat down beside him to share his Cornflakes.

Here's another couple of insights into the Central Florida Parks. You can pre-purchase tickets for the Busch Gardens, SeaWorld and Universal Studios attractions parks using Canadian Dollars – a much better deal than paying at the gate. And, if you have ever dreamed of swimming with dolphins in a tropical paradise, here's your chance to make that dream come true at Discovery Cove in Orlando. Though the experience is not cheap, what



price staring into the eyes of these intelligent mammals in their own environment. It's a moment you

will never forget!

One Florida experience that is cheap is to go treasure-hunting on the beach at Venice, a small city an hour's drive south of St Petersburg. The treasures in question are fossil sharks teeth. These 20 million year old, perfectly preserved, dental specimens are washed up by the thousand on the beaches around Venice every day. Sifting through the sand for these impressive relics was fun for both parents and our sons. Our youngest, Timmy, has since presented those teeth at many a "show and tell". Every August there is even an annual Seafood and Sharks Teeth Festival at Venice. And speaking of seafood .....the lobster there is divine.

My sons and I loved the Kennedy Space Centre at Cape Canaveral, which is a must for all boys – big and small. My wife, Dara, can't say enough about the shopping in Florida, and she also enjoyed shell collecting at Sanibel Island, which is world famous for the beauty and size of its sea shells. Timmy's favourite memory is riding in the world's largest airboat over the crystal clear, alligator infested waters of Myakka State Park (you can canoe too, if you are brave enough!). Pip remembers watching a beautiful and dignified Silver Back Gorilla at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Dara and I treasure sandcastles by day, and long sand-between-the-toes walks at sunset, along the white sand of Sand Key, Clearwater.

Our fond family memories demonstrate the diversity that means Florida truly has something to offer every one.

