

# Fantasyland

## From Mickey Mouse to blastoff, Florida's sights are like a dream

By Iris Sanderson Jones  
special writer

Sometimes you can't tell where fantasy ends and reality begins in Florida. I went from Space Mountain at Disney World to the space shuttle at Kennedy Space Center, with stops among flying dolphins and wax models of Hollywood figures along the way.

While riding from Mickey Mouse to Shamu on a tourist bus, I read an article in the Orlando Sentinel Star entitled "I Rode the Tourist Wave and Lived," which is exactly how I felt after seeing the height-of-season lineups at many local entertainment spots. It was great fun however, here is my first-timer's diary.

You can tell you are in Orlando as soon as the plane lands. You step into the same long marble halls, but here you see grown women carrying huge stuffed animals and a party of six in Mickey Mouse hats, singing their way down the halls.

Expressways run everywhere through the natural landscape of scrub pine. I was naive enough to think that people came to Florida to relax, but here

are the billboards in what was a wilderness 10 years ago: Stars Hall of Fame, Sea World, Disney World, Circus World, Camping World.

A sign reads "For Walt Disney information dial 1030," and then we drive through a 14-lane toll plaza to the Disney World parking lots. Signs lead straight ahead to the hotels, left to the kennel club where you must leave your pet, past bushes carved like animals to the spot where a monorail and a ferry will take you to the Magic Kingdom.

The ferry is chilly on this windy spring day, but there are long lines on the monorail. The ferry is a five-eighths scale model of the 1938 Staten Island ferry, built at their own dry dock facilities here in Disney World.

DISNEY WORLD IS the busiest attraction in the world, with 14 million customers a year visiting the Magic Kingdom theme park, as well as the hotels, shopping areas, campgrounds and other things available on the rest of the 21,000-acre property.

The twice-a-day parade is already on its way down Main Street, and soon we are hopping along, singing that song, and being kissed by everybody from Pluto to Mickey Mouse.

The Kids of the Kingdom, an inside singing group, are beginning to gather on the forecourt of Cinderella's Castle. All the roads in the Magic Kingdom lead here to the golden turrets of the castle, which gleam against the blue southern sky.

Disney World was designed for families but there are many gray-haired kids here too in their Mickey Mouse shirts. They converge on the castle by train, on foot and by double-decker bus, from Frontier Land, Tomorrow Land, Liberty Square and the terrifying precipices of Space Mountain.

They sit on the ground in front of the castle, or on stone benches around the town square, carrying red Mickey Mouse shopping bags and speaking French, German, Spanish and English.

We rode the train, sailed through the Pirates of the Caribbean, screamed on the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, squealed through the Haunted Mansion, rode the WeeWee People Mover over Tomorrowland, and watched the most thrilling travel film I've ever seen at Circle-Vision 360.

"We didn't have time to go on Space Mountain. Too bad," I said, smiling to myself. I'm no dummy. You won't catch me scaring myself to death in the dark unless I have to.

THE MOST INTERESTING and unexpected part of Disney World was in what they call "the rest of the property." The Magic Kingdom is only spot on the corner of the Disney World Map. Beyond is Lake Buena Vista, hotels, Disney World Village with its shops and restaurants, the water thrills of River Country, and especially the camping facilities at Fort Wilderness.

At Fort Wilderness you can bring your own tent or trailer, or you can rent a trailer, within sight of the theme park. You can then take a regular tram through the camping area, and bus or ferry to the Magic Kingdom.

At Fort Wilderness, you can enjoy a wild west rave with a barbecue dinner for \$15 in Pioneer Hall, ride one of the 41 saddle horses along the trails or watch the ponies being trained to pull the train through the Magic Kingdom, pet the animals in the children's zoo, ride the water slides in adjacent River Country, or take advantage of the top name performers available in the nearby hotels.

This is a diary about fantasy land, so you will not be surprised if I take you now on a quick trip across 60 miles of central Florida to the Kennedy Space Center, where the space shuttle is being readied for its first flight.

We approach the J.F. Kennedy Space Center over a long causeway. The Atlantic gleams on either side under a blue Florida sky.

"See that huge building ahead? That's where they keep the rockets," Scotty said. Scotty is our driver guide. "Seven Empire State Buildings would go in there. It's so big they have weather; it rains inside that building!"

Somebody in the back seat of the van mutters: "Fantasyland! We're still in Fantasyland."



Children delight in the larger-than-life animals at Walt Disney World near Orlando.

SEVERAL THOUSAND people a year get lost going to the center because they can't tell the difference between Cape Canaveral, Cape Kennedy and the Kennedy Space Center.

The expressway going east out of Orlando splits as you approach the coast. Signs lead left to the Kennedy Space Center right to Cape Canaveral. About 5,000 people a month get lost because they turn right. Just to confuse things further, there is a Port Canaveral and a Cape Canaveral City.

Keep your mind on the space shuttle, and turn left to Kennedy Space Center. The shuttle has been the main topic of conversation at the center for a long time, and will be a main attraction for tourists for a long time to come. It is out there beyond the building where it rains inside.

Dozens of buses are parked near the check-in and exhibit area, where several rockets are on display behind the exhibit building and the museum. The center is a four-hour tourist experience — two hours in the exhibit area and another two hours on the tour. All the tours are free.

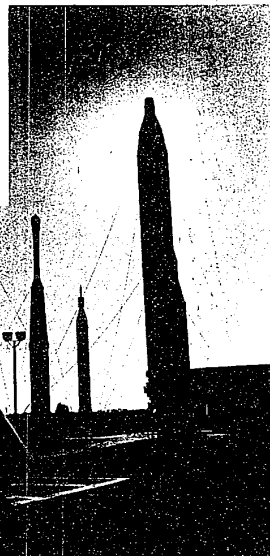
This is not another attraction like Disney World and Sea World. It is a working space center. A tour bus takes you past the huge building where it rains and along a parallel pair of gravel roads where the huge transports carry 18 million pounds of rocket to the launching pads.

On one side of the road is a distant view of the shuttle. On the other side is a motorboat with its motor tipped up, beside a sparkling waterway, as if waiting for a fisherman. Nearby are three small silver tanks designed for rescue, and distant views of pads A and B, where the moon flights were launched.

A tour also includes the flight crew training area and the industrial area of the center.

WE DRIVE UP one side and down the other side

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IRIS SANDERSON JONES

of the shuttle, hidden in its casing, ready for flight. The center is closed to tourists during a manned launch, but they can usually watch an unmanned launch.

The last tour of the center will be at 2:00 p.m. on the day before the space shuttle goes up. After the first two or three launches, however, you will be able to watch the space shuttle take off and land.

It is a 4½-hour drive to the center from Miami, 90 minutes from Orlando. Shuttles aren't the only things that move here. There are deer, alligator, armadillo and more than 200 species of birds, counted every year on Christmas week by the Audubon Society.

Rockets (above) stand on display at the Kennedy Space Center near Cape Canaveral.



travel log  
Iris  
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## Florida tourist decline causes rates to follow

ORLANDO, FLA. — I may be the only travel writer in the world who has never been to Florida before.

I have lived in Australia and camped in the Himalayas, but I have never been to Disney World, which amuses my friends greatly.

The Florida tourist industry is worried about all those other Northerners who haven't been to Florida this year either, victims of rising fuel costs, recession and bad weather reports from the sun belt.

Business first started getting soft last spring, said Tom Reid, the sales director of the Orlando Marriott. Reid is from Rochester — there are a lot of us snow-country folks living down here in the sun belt.

Joe Ryan, executive director of the Florida Attractions Association, puts it this way:

"Everything that could happen to us happened during the last year.

"Inflation raised prices, gas prices went up, it got cold, a bridge got knocked down in Tampa and people stopped going to Key West because they read in the press that refugees were running riot down there, they weren't."

FLORIDA HAD a good Christmas season, but a week after New Year's Day 1981 the cold spell hit.

Ryan's weekly surveys showed that for six consecutive weeks the tourist numbers were all down, except at the Kennedy Space Center, where everybody is interested in the space shuttle.

The state of Florida, which treasures its \$13 billion tourist business and the resultant \$700 million in taxes, allotted \$600,000 in an advertising campaign aimed at six northern markets. Eventually, the weather warmed up, but the damage was done.

The only thing that saved the tourist industry here, as it did throughout the United States this last year, was the dramatic increase in the number of foreign visitors, who have been getting a lot of value for their money on the dollar market lately.

Meantime, Eastern Air Lines, which has a lot of money invested in the Florida travel market, launched a low-priced package campaign to fill their empty seats.

Delta Airlines quickly followed suit. These packages are the best travel buy on the market right now and will probably continue to be so through mid-June.

It is a good example of how consumers can benefit when the tourist industry gets in trouble.

It's an old idea: Offer air fare, hotels, rental car and some attraction tickets at a single low price that people will immediately recognize as a bargain.

THE RATES ARE roughly 50 percent of the regular air fare combined with a discounted land tour package. Prices vary depending on the hotel chosen. Eastern and Delta offer five and seven-day packages. Republic offers inexpensive land options combined with discounted air fares.

For example, Eastern Airlines' seven-day package from Detroit to Orlando starts at \$329 per person double occupancy at John Newcomb's Inn and ranges to a high of \$412 at the Orlando Marriott. Children cost \$200 up to age 17. You must fly to Florida Monday through Thursday and return any day except Sunday.

Delta's rates are \$325 at John Newcomb's Inn to \$434 at the Orlando Hyatt, with children also at \$200 each. Package rates cover air fare, hotel, rental car with unlimited mileage and tickets to Disney World.

They can be bought to any Florida city through mid-June, and may be extended beyond that time.

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