

T R A V E L

Sunny Central Florida

Water, Wings and Wild Things!

By Mira Temkin

Like most Florida-bound vacationers, when you think Orlando, you think mega-theme parks and attractions. But you'll discover, as I did, there's a lot more to do in Central Florida with its sparkling lakes, historic trails and miles of nature reserves. They tell me Polk County is home to 554 lakes...and from what I saw, it seems like there's a lake on every corner. The best part is, you're still just a short distance to Orlando's magic.

Thrill to a great coaster? Fear not, Cypress Gardens, the original amusement park, has five...

plus you'll fall in love with the beautiful gardens, animal topiaries, Water Show and lovely Southern Belles. Their newest addition, Splash Island Water Park offers a refreshing oasis of adventure, included with general admission.

Westgate River Ranch Resort, Dude

Here's a chance to experience Florida when it was home to cowboys and cattle ranchers. Stay in western-style lodging or just come for the day. Watch the cowboys rustle up the steer. Relax on the hayride accompanied by a singing cowboy, enjoy delicious bar-be-cue and stamp your feet at the wild rodeo. When it gets dark, do line dancing in the River Ranch Saloon or roast s'mores. This is one great time, folks!



Cow Hunter's Camp, Lake Kissimmee State Park – A Living History

Both historical (and hysterical), Cow Camp is a blast from the past. Once you enter Cow Camp, you'll travel back to 1876, where you'll meet a cow hunter in frontier camp. He talks about his life, dislike of President Grant and challenges. When I asked him where his clothes came from, Sears Catalog, he stared at me blankly. Oops, the catalog didn't exist until 1894...but he never got out of character!

Zoom Across the Water with Captain Fred!

Captain Fred Neidlinger's Airboat Nature Tour is a fun, fascinating ride on Lake Kissimmee. We literally floated over the lily pads as the captain pointed out bald eagles perched in trees, purple gallinule and other wildlife. I even got to drive the boat, after a few driving lessons, giving new meaning to a "magic carpet ride!"

The Terrace Hotel– Lakeland's Stunning Gem

Overlooking Lake Mirror and a bevy of glorious swans, this classic 1920s hotel has been graciously restored with modern amenities, creating exquisite accommodations. A member of the historic Hotels of America, the Terrace Hotel faithfully maintains its historic architecture and ambience, inside and out. We enjoyed lunch in the Terrace Grille, elegant and classy as the hotel itself. I'd love to return!



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Chalet Suzanne – "Moon Soup" and Gourmet Dining

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Chalet Suzanne Restaurant and Inn, which opened in 1931, continues to impress with sophisticated cuisine and eclectic atmosphere. Their original recipe for Romaine soup was brought on Apollo 15–16 space missions and became known as "Moon Soup." Served with every meal, "Moon Soup" was the perfect start to my seafood and artichoke crusted salmon with potato herbed cake.

A Natural Escape

The best thing about the area is that it gives families a chance to experience the real Florida. While eating "al fresco" at Rosie's on the grounds of Camp Mack (fish camp), I saw a rustic bait shop. It wasn't a theme-park's version of a bait shop. It was a real bait shop...now how 'bout that!

For more information, call (800) 828-7655 or visit the website www.visitcentralflorida.org. And be sure to ask about your Passport to Adventure and Savings Card!

Mira Temkin is a freelance writer specializing in advertising, promotional marketing and public relations. Her work has appeared in the Chicago Tribune and six00threefive magazine. Contact mtemkin967@aol.com.

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