

SUMMER VACATION

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WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS, SPRING HILL

An original roadside attraction from the 1940s, the mermaids of Weeki Wachee remain a rich part of Florida's heritage, and a fun day trip to boot. Watch the mermaids perform the aquatic version of "The Little Mermaid" from the 400-seat underwater-viewing theater. Cruise down the river on a narrated tour or take in an animal encounter show featuring snakes and alligators. Bring your swimsuit for Buccaneer Bay, which includes flume rides, tubing down a lazy river and a water-play area for the little ones. **Admission including Buccaneer Bay, for adults: \$26. Kids 6-12: \$12. Five and under: free.**

TRADEWINDS ISLAND GRAND RESORT, ST. PETE

Located on the pure white sand of St. Pete Beach, Tradewinds Resort offers a fine mix of relaxing luxury for the grown-ups and endless water activities for the kids. Explore the meandering waterway by paddle boat, spin some tall tales with Redbeard the Pirate, sample some salty fare at the unique Flying Bridge—actually a floating Florida cracker cottage—or get back out to the beach and whoosh down the three-story inflatable slide. In April 2011, the resort debuted Splash Island, a 15,750 square-foot floating inflatable water park boasting such features as a giant trampoline, 10-person rocking seesaw, slides, climbers, and of course, plenty of lounging rafts.

www.tradewindsresort.com. Summer rates from \$149.



TANKFUL OF GAS?...YOU BET!

One of the perks of living in Tampa is the close proximity to world-class theme parks and natural attractions that other folks have to travel thousands of miles (and drop some heavy cash) in order to enjoy. We have several vacation destinations in our own backyard—some well known, some a little more off the beaten track. Airline prices going up? No sweat. Gas prices sky rocketing? Not a problem. We can help you plan a summer packed with great memories at places close enough to visit and get back to your own sweet abode on a tank of gas or less.



GAYLORD PALMS HOTEL, ORLANDO

Reminiscent of a stately mansion, the Gaylord Palms Hotel combines old Florida charm with topnotch service and amenities while still maintaining a kid-friendly environment. Take a leisurely stroll through the four acres of lush, tropical gardens enclosed in three distinct, Florida-inspired atriums: the steamy Everglades, fun and funky Key West and Spanish-infused St. Augustine. At Clearwater Cove, the zero-entry pool is perfect for the tiniest guests, while toddlers on up will love the Octopus water slide, marine life climbing structures, pop-up fountains, sand play area and waterfall. Or try your hand at bocce ball, croquet, a nine-hole golf putting course or sand volleyball. <http://www.gaylordhotels.com/gaylord-palms>. *Summer rates from \$149 plus 4th night free.*



DINOSAUR WORLD, PLANT CITY

Let aspiring paleontologists roam among the 150 life-size dinosaurs crouched among the trees and native vegetation at Dinosaur World in Plant City. The dinosaurs, carefully crafted from fiberglass, steel and concrete, reach up to 80 feet in length. After dinosaur hunting, kids can explore the Prehistoric Museum, brush up on their dino-knowledge in the Movie Cave or sift through sand in search of real fossils at the Fossil Dig. Kids can keep up to three fossils, which may be shark's teeth, dinosaur bone fragments or petrified sea urchins. A new playground, museum and several brand new dinosaurs will be unveiled in the fall of 2011. www.dinosaurworld.com. **Adults: \$12.75, Children 3-12: \$9.75.**

NICKELODEON SUITES RESORT, ORLANDO

This hotel is a theme park unto itself, boasting a zero-depth entry pool and a four-story tower that includes water flumes, slides, jets, climbing nets and of course the 400-gallon bucket that drops massive amounts of green slime all over you. High energy staff provides kid-friendly, Nickelodeon-themed entertainment both poolside and with nightly game shows in the state-of-the-art theater. Kids love being surrounded by favorite Nickelodeon celebrities, whether they're nodding off in the themed Kidsuites or noshing on waffles and pausing for hugs and photos with Dora and Diego at a character breakfast. www.nickhotel.com. **Florida residents receive 20% off family suites. Rates from \$119 plus \$25 resort fee per night.**



SEA WORLD, ORLANDO

Explore an undersea universe at Sea World, a 200-acre park dedicated to the creatures of the deep. Feel like a giant ray as you skim, glide and soar head-first and face-down on Manta, Seaworld's newest coaster. Get soaked in the splash zone during the "Blue Horizons" or brand new "One Ocean" shows, where dolphins and orcas leap, dive, spin and splash. Feed and pet the dolphins at Dolphin Cove. Visit with penguins, seals and sea lions, otters, manatees, sea turtles and stingrays, walruses, and of course, Shamu the killer whale. When hunger strikes, dine with the sharks at Shark's Underwater Grill, where you can enjoy filet mignon while a nurse shark drifts by in the massive aquarium next to you. www.seaworldorlando.com. **Adults and kids' tickets \$71.99 when purchased online.**



BUSCH GARDENS, TAMPA BAY

Can't decide whether you feel like visiting the zoo or an amusement park? Knock both items off your list at Busch Gardens, which not only boasts eight roller coasters but houses lush, sprawling habitats for tigers, lions, zebras, elephants, rhinos and more. Busch's newest coaster, Cheetah Hunt, mimics the feel of a cheetah sprinting over the Serengeti plains as it launches guests down into subterranean trenches, around a canyon gushing with whitewater rapids and through a heart-pounding roll inversion at speeds up to 60 miles per hour. Also part of the new mega-attraction is Cheetah Run, an 11,000 square foot habitat for 14 cheetahs. Daily sprinting exercises allow guests to witness the fastest land animals on earth do what they are so famous for—run.

www.buschgardens.com/BGT. Adults \$77.99. Kids 3-9 \$69.99.



ADVENTURE ISLAND, TAMPA BAY

When the pavement is burning, it's time to get drenched. The 30-acre park's newest ride, Riptide, is a four-lane matt slide that lets you race against your friends as you twist through a hairpin turn and then drop into a splash pool. Or try Key West Rapids, which plunges riders down six stories of twisting slide. Spend some time frolicking amongst the five-foot waves in the wave pool, chill out on the mile Rambling Bayou lazy river or spike it out on the sand volleyball courts. The little ones can climb and splash to their heart's content on the water jungle gym at Fabian's Fun Port. Don't miss Island Nights every Thursday through Saturday night June 9th through August 15th. From 5-9 p.m., the park transforms into a Caribbean island, complete with live bands, tropical treats, and Polynesian dancers.

Adults \$41.95, kids 3-9 \$37.95.



UNIVERSAL STUDIOS AND ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE, ORLANDO

Spend a day or two exploring the sister parks. Both parks combine movies, TV shows, and pop culture with thrilling rides and coasters. You can soar above skyscrapers with Spiderman, battle aliens with the Men in Black or whirl through the pages of The Cat in the Hat. Islands of Adventure's newest attraction, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, creates a fully immersive experience in the wonder and magic of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade. Make it a mini-vacation with a night or two at the Royal Pacific Resort, which transports guests to the South Seas with lush, tropical surroundings and a luau featuring hula and fire dancers. **www.universalorlando.com. One park: Adults: \$82.00 Kids 3-9: \$74.00.**

