

Getaways to Orlando

by Melissa Wolcott and Al Martino

We do love living in the Tampa Bay area with our beaches, parks, sports and entertainment, but we also like to hop over to Orlando to visit their wonderful theme parks once in a while. What you may not be aware of (we weren't) is all the other interesting things there are to do in the Orlando area. The Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau recently opened our eyes to some different things to do there.

They have created the **Orlando Magical Getaway Travel Club** website strictly for Florida residents. Sign up is FREE with no obligation to purchase anything. Based on your interests they will keep you informed regularly so you can plan and book an Orlando getaway. Select any or all from choices of attractions, festivals, dining, shopping, nightlife, arts and culture, sports and recreation, or golf.

Tooling around in this site is very easy, comprehensive and concise. It truly is a "one stop shopping" site for Florida travelers. Once you have registered and entered the site, you can click on anything that interests you on the left side menu bar. The Hot Offers button has current getaway packages from different hotels, some of which include accommodations and theme park admissions, or just "romantic getaways." There is even a Coupon button which will allow you to print your own coupons for certain restaurants and attractions, giving you anything from a free drink to a buy one-get one free dinner at the various restaurants. There really isn't anything they haven't thought of covering in the Orlando area including an easily navigable calendar of events. Make sure you add this site to your "favorites" — www.orlandoinfo.com/floridaresidents.

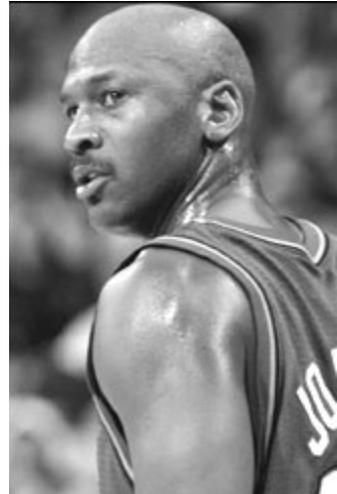
We had our own "Orlando Getaway" recently, and stayed at the **Radisson Barcelo Hotel and Resort**. This hotel is a full service resort located "In The Center Of It All," right on International Drive, which gave us a wide choice of shopping and dining right outside our door. They are located only 2 miles from Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure, 8 miles from Walt Disney World, Pleasure Island and Downtown Disney, and are close to Sea



World and Discovery Cove. Our room had a king bed, refrigerator, in-room safe, coffeemaker, iron, hairdryer, on-demand movie and Nintendo system, telephones with voice messaging system, and computer dataport capabilities — which is handy when you travel (as we do) with an ever-present laptop. The hotel has a little gem of a restaurant called the Cargo Bay Grill. It has a creative atmos-

phere, and melds Florida and Caribbean cuisine, offering a wide variety of choices. An open wood fire-pit grilled our steaks to perfection.

During our getaway weekend, the **Orlando Magic** were playing the Washington Wizards, and we were fortunate to see Michael



Jordan play in his last Orlando game before retiring (unless he's gonna be like Cher with her 400th "Farewell Tour!") The crowd was pretty pumped and the Magic won 112-97. There are still plenty of home games as the Magic season continues through April 16th (last home game April 12th) so you might want to add that to your "Orlando Getaway."

Since we hadn't been to **Universal Studios** in a while, we decided to spend the day there. It was one of those "blustery" days we've been having lately, but was very pleasant, as there weren't any long lines to wait in for rides (good for us, bad for Universal!) We revisited "The Terminator", which is still a great ride combining 3D with live action, and an old fave, the "Back to the Future" motion ride. We hadn't seen "Animal Planet Live" before, and enjoyed the mix of video, live animal performances and audience interaction with the animals.



Coming up at Universal is the longest-running Mardi Gras celebration outside of New Orleans, beginning February 21 and run-



ning Friday and Saturday nights through April 11th, then nightly through April 26th. During this event, the streets of Universal are transformed into a 10-city-block-long parade featuring 14 elaborately-decorated floats direct from the Big Easy. Numerous street performers and costumed characters, as well as stilt walkers, entertain partygoers. There will also be a variety of concerts featuring rock and country bands.

We were up for Chinese food one evening during our getaway, so we headed on over to **Ming Court**, located (conveniently for us) on International Drive. A mock Wall of



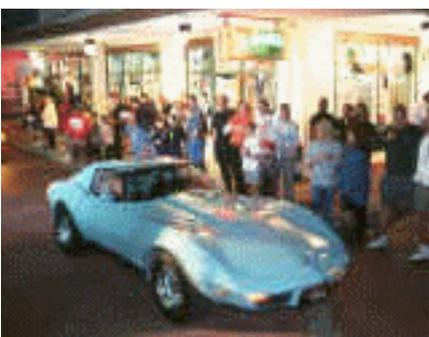
China surrounds this upscale restaurant, and a little bridge walkway leads you over a koi pond into the foyer. The dining room overlooks a peaceful courtyard and pond. Some nights, Chinese musicians play traditional melodies on antique instruments. An expansive menu features gourmet traditional Oriental cuisine. Ming Court is one of our favorite Chinese restaurants, and we are never disappointed with our order.



On our next Orlando Getaway we plan on checking out some "different" places to visit, as found on the Orlando Magical Getaway Travel Club website.

One that sounds like fun is **Old Town's** Friday Nite Cruise, (on Hwy 192 in Kissimmee) which has show cars (Mustangs, Corvettes, Monte Carlos, etc.) on display, a car parade starting at 9:00 pm each week, and live music. The Saturday Nite Cruise has an average of 325 classic cars, hot rods, street rods, and antiques. The cars roll in to Old Town beginning at 1:00 pm, and the Saturday Nite Cruise starts at 8:30 pm. Live rock-n-roll (50's & 60's style) is performed in the evening.

Not so much our bag, but FYI, **Orlando Bike Week 2003** — the "Party of The Century" — is being held March 3-9, hosted by Orlando Harley-Davidson. Last year, Orlando Bike Week had over 60,000 people attending the 8 day event. Headliner music this year will be 38 Special, The Marshall Tucker Band, and Confederate Railroad. Other highlights include an All-State



Police Rideo, the World's Largest Wedding Vow Renewal, Stunt Show Extravaganza, Fashion Shows, Custom Motorcycle Show, Lunch and Happy Hour Biker band weekday concerts, and a Florida-style 100th Harley Birthday Party with the Largest Birthday Cake and birthday card to Harley for all to sign.



Working in a little culture, we might check out the **68th Annual Winter**

Park Bach Festival, which returns to Winter Park February 28th - March 14th. The Bach Festival Choir is 150 members strong,

and performances are held in the Knowles Memorial Chapel on the campus of Rollins College.



Also coming up soon is the **2003**

Florida Film

Festival, March 7 - 16, an internationally recognized event, which brings some of the finest independent films, filmmakers, celebrity speakers, and industry professionals together at the Enzian Theater. The Festival includes narrative and documentary features and shorts, animation, as well as a full array of forums, parties, and other special events.



There are just tons of ideas for

things to do in the Orlando area, and you can see them all at the Orlando Magical Getaway Travel Club website. Check it out, you'll be glad you did.

For More Information:

Orlando Magical Getaway Travel Club
www.orlandoinfo.com/floridaresidents

Radisson Barcelo Hotel and Resort
 8444 International Drive
 Orlando, FL 32819
 (407) 345-0505
Reservations:
 (800) 333-3333
www.radisson.com

Orlando Magic
www.nba.com/magic

Ming Court
 9188 International Drive
 407-351-9988
www.ming-court.com

Old Town
 Hwy 192, Kissimmee
www.old-town.com

Orlando Bike Week 2003
www.orlandoharley.com

68th Annual Winter Park Bach Festival
www.bachfestivalflorida.org

2003 Florida Film Festival
www.floridafilmfestival.com