

## Winter Travel in Search of Warmth

Twice this winter I have traveled south in hopes to escape our frigid Michigan winter. The first time was my trip to Florida to visit my oldest daughter and her four children from January 28<sup>th</sup> to February 6<sup>th</sup>. Arriving in Jacksonville airport at 7:30 p.m. the weather was balmy and a gentle 65 degree rain was falling – lovely! Although my Florida kids thought it was freezing!

Awakening the following morning with eager thoughts of a beach walk, I was soon disappointed to see it was raining quite hard. No matter! There is always this afternoon for a beach walk. It never rains all day in Florida! Wrong missy!!! It rained all day and into the evening precluding any beach walk – but sadly not ruling out a mall excursion for the day (which I reluctantly gave into in a team effort spirit).

The next day the rain was gone and the beach and ocean were calm and clean. Hooray for me!!! Sunrise on the ocean was magnificent as I clipped along in the sand shared only by the gulls and shore birds breakfasting in the receding tidal waves. I was in heaven.

The following day more of the same although I did notice my arrival temperature of 65 degrees had gone down to 50 something. No matter! For this warmth-seeking, beach-walking deprived Michigander it was still a warm version of heaven.

The fourth day into my visit the weather turned sour and my spirits dampened by a roaring north-easterly storm blasting the beaches and dunes precluding any outdoor activities at all. Ugh! More mall crawls with the troops. This crazy storm continued into the next day as well but fortunately, the troops were tired of “mall” so we turned to creativity and a craft-artsy-at-home day with a collaborative home cooked meal. Giant hooray!

Group weekend activities had us in and out of doors; soccer games, football practices, etc., etc. – no time for beach walks. Okay, there is always tomorrow! Surprisingly, the weather had other ideas. While I slept dreaming of sunrise on the beach, the weather feel out entirely and the temperature dropped drastically. When I awoke it was 20 degrees and there were ice cycles on all the dune grasses. Yes, it was a spectacular sunrise but not strolling on the beach! Rather, spent taking photos of the gorgeous, icy dune grasses glistening in the sunrise. Short-lived as it was, it was BEAUTIFUL!!! The sun warmed the dunes and ice cycles melted quickly. The beach was calm once more. No white caps on the ocean and the temperature climbed to over 50 but sadly, no more beach walks.





The second attempt to escape winter was our long weekend Mardi Gras party in Huntersville, North Carolina where John's son and daughter-in-law live. We left Midland on Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup>. It was something like 10 degrees and snow covered the ground. We drove to Charleston, West Virginia and stayed overnight at the Red Roof Inn. Driving was good, no rain, no snow, just road after road in and out of heavy truck traffic. I-75 to M-23 to the Ohio turnpike then to I-77 south to West Virginia. Once we were off the eternally flat Ohio turnpike, we started getting into rolling hills and then into the Blue Ridge Parkway of the Appalachian Mountains.

The farther south we went the more signs of spring we encountered. Buds were plumping on the tree tops, brown and snowy landscape gave way to rolling green hills with cattle picturesquely dotting the hillsides. Dilapidated, long-abandoned farms mingled with trim, functioning farms with livestock and full silos. Nowhere did we see opulent, brand new \$200,000 homes. Just well-maintained or newly painted homesteads circa vintage 1950's to 1970's along with profusions of house trailers of every shape and description. Clothes drying on lines and chickens roaming over the yards took us back in time. We took a picture of a two story "shack" we'd seen a few times before nestled in a valley off the mountain road. Little villages popped out of nowhere in the mountain valleys. The picture was invariably the same. About 50 to 100 house trailers and one story houses with an occasional two story home stuck in between, all huddled together in clumps. A school house or two appeared in the center of a block and at least one white-spired church house in the center of the villages. There were lots of cars and outbuildings, and all sorts of trucks in and out of repair.

Aside from the picturesque out-of-time villages, the mountains were simply magnificent! Majestic peaks and valleys spread on endlessly, green and tree topped. We drove through two mountains in mile long man-made tunnels. Amazing! What a huge job it must have been to tunnel right-smack-dab through a big old mountain just so cars and trucks could pass through. What a struggle pioneers had to face to travel over these fabulous mountains. There is a whole other story there.

We arrived in Huntersville on Friday around 2 p.m. It was raining softly when we pulled into the kid's driveway. The temperature was 65 degrees and daffodils, magnolias and tulips were in bloom with green, green grass everywhere.

The next day the soft rain had turned into a deluge. It was raining so hard the driveways had rivers of run off water flowing down hill. The neighborhood was quite hilly and all driveways sloped down to the streets. From my window I could see the heads of my long awaited for daffodils drowning in puddles of rainwater and mud. I couldn't stand it. So, waiting for a single break in the downpour, I made a mad dash across the driveway river and cut every one of those poor bedraggled daffodils and brought them inside. I had to wash off their muddy faces before I

could make bouquets for our party. How lovely they lit up the house with their fresh aromas! So much for my daring daffodil rescue!

The deluge of rain continued all through the day and into the night. The temperature went down too with our hopes of going for a wonderful North Carolina spring walk. The next morning, the day of the party it was still raining a heavy continual rain which lasted all day long. Guests arrived with dripping umbrellas and soggy shoes and no one had a “good hair day”.

The party was lovely and full of Southern style hospitality and charm complete with Abby’s grandmother’s Waterford crystal and Limoges china. A good time was had by all and no one looked outside once!

Sunday’s forecast called for falling temperatures once again and a predicted eight inches of snow. We made it through the day with only rain and thought we were in luck. When we left for dinner that evening it started to snow a little - light, hardly-visible snowfall. From our seats in the restaurant we could see the tiny flakes of snow turn into giant flakes of very visible snow falling rapidly. By the time we left the restaurant there was three inches of wet, heavy snow on our car. When we woke up the next morning, the day of our departure, there truly was 8 inches of snow on top of our frozen car. I just HATE it when the weather man is right! We chipped more ice off of our car before we could leave North Carolina than we had all our long Michigan winter!

Driving home on icy, snowy, not so snow-plowed roads was dicey but not too terribly dangerous for us seasoned Michiganders. This winter gave us lots of practice in honing our treacherous conditions driving skills. This was not the case for our poor southern neighbors who were oh-so-accident prone. We saw many, many accidents and more cars off the sides of the roads than on the roads.

Driving through the mountains again was lovely, but was an entirely different picture than our drive a few days earlier. The green, tree-topped mountains were now covered with drifts of snow and all the plumping buds were capped or coated with snow. It was hard to believe that this was the same drive we had made only four days before.

So, after two attempts to escape Michigan’s long, cold winter in search of warmth, we decided to not tempt fate and just stay home next winter by our cozy fireside.



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