

BOB MORRIS: WHERE FORGOTTEN FRUIT STILL FLOURISHES

ORLANDO HOME & LEISURE

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A Backyard Bucket List

ORLANDO'S TOP 10
ADVENTURES FOR 2011

Rollins College at 125
QUIRKY TRADITIONS AND
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

PLUS

A PRO SKIER'S LAKESIDE
DREAM HOME

WEARING THE SEASON'S
HOTTEST TRENDS

The 2011 Orlando Bucket List

OUR TOP 10 WAYS TO GREET THE NEW YEAR AND SEIZE
THE DAY IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

by Kristen Maneiri & Michael McLeod

IT'S A NEW YEAR, WITH A FRESHLY MINTED supply of 365 days, some of which – let's face it – you'll be happy simply to survive. But some days you can seize, and we're here to help. *Orlando Home & Leisure* has come up with a bucket list of great adventures that are close at hand – and maybe just a step or two past your comfort zone.

The term “bucket list” came into fashion three years ago, with the release of the eponymous movie starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. It's

the ultimate to-do list: an array of experiences you hope to have by the time you kick the bucket.

No sense waiting until the last minute, as the characters in that movie did. And no reason you can't make a yearly bucket list a New Year tradition. Just remember: These are all rewards, not resolutions. Each of the ones we recommend is guaranteed to be a lot more fun than trying to lose 15 pounds – although, come to think of it, there are a couple of options among them that can help you to do just that.

GO AHEAD, RUN OFF TO THE CIRCUS. IT'S RIGHT ACROSS the street from the mall. The **Orlando Circus School** near the Florida Mall trains not only would-be professionals but also casual big-top wannabes.

There are classes for both adults and children in juggling, wire-walking, trampoline, acrobatics and trapeze. You can drop in for a single class or sign up for a series. There's also a package for parents looking for the next big thing in birthday party one-upsmanship. The owner and trainer of the school is a former trapeze artist, Andrei Roublev, who was a performer in Cirque du Soleil's *La Nouba* production at downtown Disney.

Classes are \$20 each and the series begins at \$85 per month for adults. Roublev's Russian accent adds to the circus vibe.

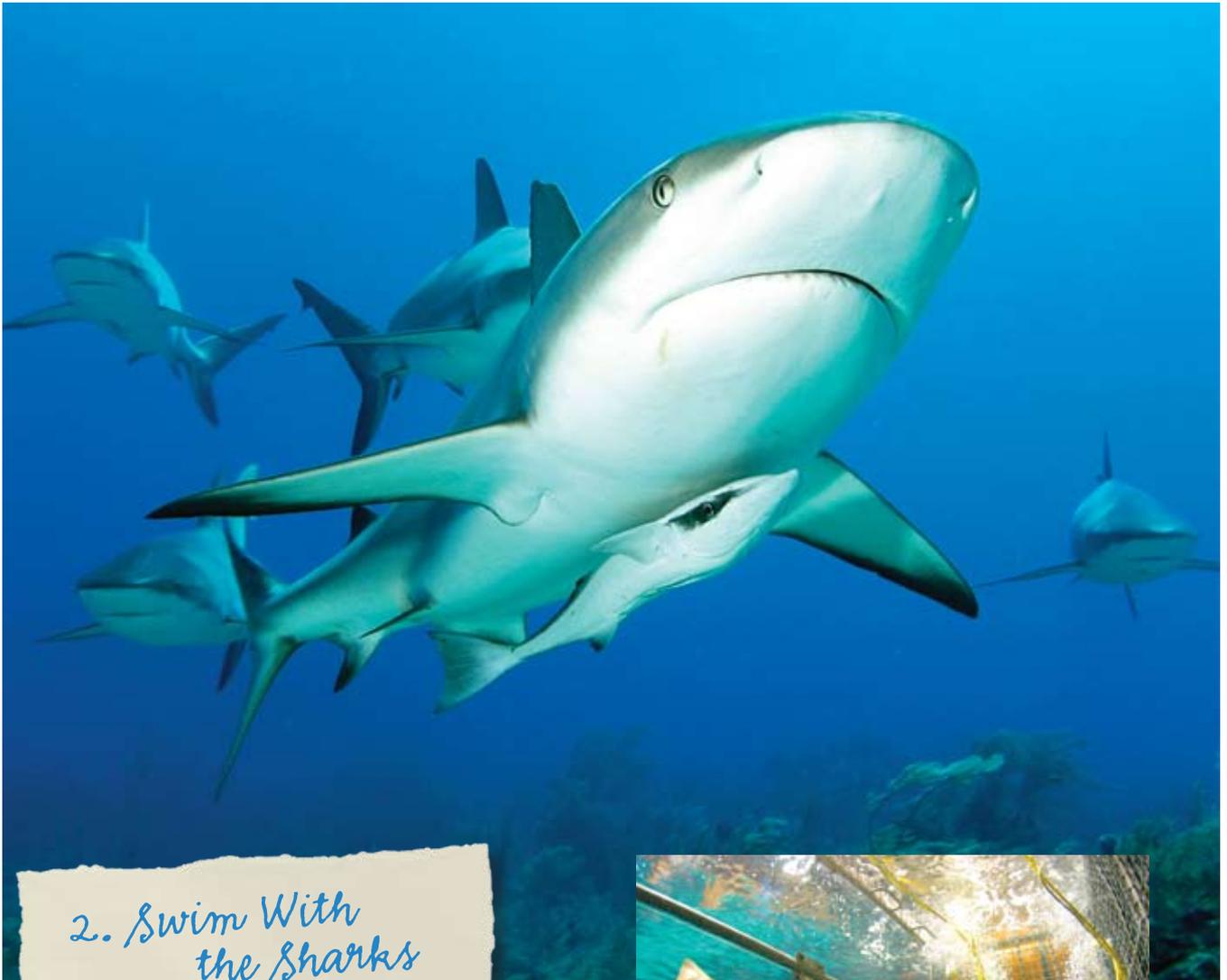
A second option: **Orlando Aerial Arts** in Kissimmee, which specializes in developing “aerial fitness” at its studio. Students learn to work through a series of graceful routines while dangling from silk ropes or hoops, with levels of difficulty adjusted to accommodate individual comfort levels.

Apart from being far more ethereal than earthbound exercises, it just might be the best core and flexibility workout you'll ever have. “I get a lot of people in here who tell me they're simply tired of clomping along on the treadmill,” says owner and artistic director Jennifer Drabik Pierce, who was a dancer before training in aerial arts at the Toronto Circus School.

Clomp no more. Classes are \$20 each or \$64 for a 4-class pass. orlandocircusschool.com and orlandoaerialarts.com

1. Run Away to
Join the Circus





2. Swim With the Sharks

YOUR FRIENDS AT WORK SURROUND YOU WHILE you stare off into the middle distance. “You know, Chief,” you mutter, in a fatalistic monotone, “the thing about a shark – he’s got lifeless eyes. Black eyes. Like a doll’s eyes.”

Never mind that the closest you’ve ever come to seagoing derring-do is snacking on fish sticks and heading off to sleep in your SpongeBob SquarePants jammies. You, Chief, can be a grizzled swashbuckler with a terrible tale to tell, thanks to **SeaWorld’s Shark Deep Dive**, which puts you face to snout with a variety-pack of roughly two dozen sharks – nurse, sand tiger and Atlantic black-tipped.

The sharks will be circling a 12-foot-long, 700,000-gallon saltwater aquarium. So will you. And who’s to know, when you talk about it later, if you leave out the minor detail that you were safe all along inside a submersible, motorized, metal and plexiglass cage? Or that



you were tucked into a comfy wetsuit and wearing a Sea Trek helmet that not only provided you with oxygen but allowed you to chat with other passengers and ask questions of a reassuring “shark guide” on the surface?

If you go, don’t forget to wave at the diners inside Sharks Underwater Grill, who can view the scene from their tables. You’re pretty good dinner entertainment for them – and in no danger of becoming a part of the food chain yourself. Cost: \$99, plus tax. No need to tip the sharks. seaworld.com

3. Curse the Red Baron



YOU'RE IN YOUR SCARF AND YOUR LEATHER HELMET. You're wearing your Amelia Earhart goggles and your Jimmy Doolittle bomber jacket. Now, go ahead. Raise a clenched fist and shake it at the crimson sky. Then holler, just once: "Curse you, Red Baron!"

At **Fantasy of Flight** near Polk City, a private aviation museum and restoration center with more than 40 vintage aircraft on display, you can take to the clouds in a WWII trainer biplane to do nimble lazy-eights, steep and shallow 360-degree turns, chandelles and stalls. You're aloft for 30 minutes, and if you have the nerve to do so, you can spend some of the time at the controls, flying 500 feet above the citrus groves at 100 miles per hour.

The engine noise isn't as loud as you might think, nor is the wind as rough. Instead of peeking out at the scenery from a cramped metal cocoon, you're peering over the side, looking up at the clouds and listening to the whistle of the wind through the support wires, realizing, after a while, that you can tell roughly how fast you're traveling from the sound it makes. It's like the difference between scuba diving and skinny-dipping.

Pilot and owner Waldo Lock says that the nostalgia and adventure of the experience will be enhanced beginning

this month, when friends will be able to go aloft in separate planes and engage in mock dogfights, complete with special effects in the form of streaming "smoke" that will appear when a "hit" is registered. Cost for a flight in one of the facility's two vintage Boeing Stearmans, which have room for just one passenger, is \$229. Groups of up to four can ride in a larger biplane, the Standard, for \$69.95 each.

Another sort of airborne adventure is available closer to town and back home in the 21st century: A balcony seat view of the nightly Disney World fireworks, from a perch 700 feet above the ground and straight across from the colorful display.

The up-close, mid-air perspective is offered by **International HeliTours** of the nightly *IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth* fireworks display. Apart from the fireworks, there's the spectacular view of the parks to enjoy. Feel free to crack open the bottle of champagne you're permitted to bring along for your ride aboard the Bell JetRanger.

"It's like seeing the fireworks in 3-D," says helicopter pilot Rick Violette. "I can't tell you how many people that I've taken up have said: 'This has been on my bucket list for a long time.'" Now it's on ours. Price: \$300.

fantasyofflight.com and *internationalhelitours.com*



4. Find Your Inner Va-Va Voom

WE'VE GOT CHER AND CHRISTINA AGUILERA – STARS of *Burlesque*, which hit movie theaters this year – to thank for the latest resurgence of the age-old art of the tease. Burlesque is less about what you show off and more about what you keep in coy abeyance, a lesson you can learn at **Blissful Lotus**, a lingerie and exotica boutique in Ivanhoe Village.

Blissful Lotus has been offering monthly Modern Burlesque Striptease workshops since it opened in 2009. “I think women really want to be sensual and seductive but in a classy way,” says Stacey Murphy, who co-owns Blissful Lotus with her husband, Sean.

Starting off in a large, long-sleeved, button-down dress shirt, dancers learn to remove and reveal, button by button and stitch by stitch. No experience is necessary and classes are kept small. Each month, participants learn a new dance routine and are given a music CD to use at home.

Every quarter, Blissful Lotus schedules a Burlesque Boot



5. Be a Flasher

FLASH MOBS ARE THE WOODSTOCK OF THE POST social-media world. Just not as muddy. A flash mob is a gathering of people who arrange, usually via the Internet, to meet in a public place and stage something fun, pointless and vaguely anti-establishment: have a pillow fight, walk around like zombies, form a conga line, sing a corny song, break into applause. One hidebound rule: on prearranged cue, the instant you're finished doing whatever the activity happens to be, you're supposed to walk away as though nothing happened.

It's a cross between karaoke and performance art. In a recent local example, a group arranged to meet at Universal Studios and freeze in place, like so many statues. It's silly. It's childish. You're way too grownup and sophisticated for that sort of thing. But just in case you decide to regress, visit the **FLASHMOB – Orlando** page on Facebook.

Camp where eight to 10 participants meet weekly over four weeks, culminating in a recital finale. This diva experience is made complete with total outfitting from Blissful Lotus, including boas, gloves and elegant corsets.

Similar classes are also offer at **Orlando Belly Dance Academy** in Winter Park, where the owner and artistic director, Suspira Tiouat, offers a three-hour, \$30 workshop, with additional classes available for women who want to fine-tune the art of looking charmingly *en deshabille*.

A Bourdoir photo shoot is yet another way women are now connecting with their inner foxes. At **Bon Bon Studios** in downtown historic Sanford, owner and photographer Sara Nixon meets with each client ahead of time to individually tailor each shoot.

The shoots can last as long as a few hours, including hair and makeup, several wardrobe swaps and backdrop changes. bonbonstudios.com, blissfullotus.com and orlandobellydance.com

IN MOST PARTS OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, ONLY ABOUT 70 stars are visible in the nighttime sky. You can do better than that.

According to Derek Demeter, director of the Seminole State College Planetarium, more than 3,000 stars are viewable if conditions are right and you know where to look.

One way to escape urban light pollution and see the constellations in all their splendor is to make an expedition to the **Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park** in South Florida. That's where Demeter and other local astronomy buffs stage periodic "star parties," particularly during the winter, when the atmosphere is dry and clear and the stars, consequently, are easier to discern.

Closer to home, the college's planetarium offers a roster of more than 30 events scheduled Friday and Saturday evenings throughout the year. Besides weekly interactive shows scheduled

at the planetarium, Demeter has designed a handful of events he's dubbed "Sidewalk Astronomy," which offers free telescope viewing from various sites throughout Central Florida.

Until February 19, the **Crosby Observatory at the Orlando Science Center**, which boasts the largest publicly accessible refractor telescope in the state, will continue to present SkyWatch every first and third Saturday. The center's rooftop telescope reveals a host of celestial wonders. And you can even arrange for a private star-gazing party. seminolestate.edu/plane, osc.org and floridastateparks.org/kissimmeeprairie



6. Cross Over to the Dark Side

YOU CAN BE GNARLY, YES YOU CAN, EVEN IF YOU don't know exactly what that word means, and even if you are likely to go into convulsions if you so much as dip your toes into the chilly mid-January Atlantic. You can become a surfer Joe, or a surfer Josephine, via the FlowRider at Kissimmee's new **Fantasy Surf**.

Try either bodyboarding or kneeboarding as 15,000 gallons of water rush at you from the "surf simulator" at about 30 miles per hour. You don't even have to worry about wipeouts: The trampoline-like surface under the water gently bounces fallen riders to the side, to hop out and try again.

Flowriding is not only a great preamble to hitting the real waves in the summer, but also an excellent way to master the same skills used in wakeboarding and snowboarding as you learn to gain balance and begin to cut and maneuver.

If you decide you're ready for the real thing, you can ride the waves at Cocoa Beach with an experienced surf guru at your side showing you the gnarly ropes. **Ron Jon Surf School** offers private, one-hour lessons for would-be surfers of any experience level.

ultimateindoorwave.com and ronjonsurfschool.com

7. Ride the Wild Surf



8. Head 'em Up and Move 'em Out



NO NEED TO GO TO SOME DISTANT DUDE RANCH WAY OUT WEST TO FIND YOUR INNER COWPOKE. You can ride the range to your heart's content and still be home by sunset. A working ranch is close at hand and at your command in the form of **Forever Florida**, a private nature preserve 20 miles east of St. Cloud. The preserve encompasses a 1,700-acre ranch called the Crescent J.

Forever Florida's Rawhide Round-Up takes urbanites on a three-hour horseback adventure throughout the Crescent J – and you'll have a bona fide cow-puncher, who may or may not resemble Jack Palance, as your guide.

The cows themselves are the most authentic element of all. They're "cracker" cows – a small, agile species whose bloodlines go back centuries, to the cattle the Spaniards brought over in the 1500s. The cows outlasted the Spaniards, roaming the untamed backwoods of Central Florida for centuries before nearly vanishing.

The breed was rescued, barely, and is now being carefully maintained in the Crescent J's rolling pastures. That means clip-clopping across the property offers both stunning scenery and a fascinating tutorial about conservation strategies and Florida's ranching heritage. The \$99 per person price tag includes lunch and all necessary gear; finding an appropriately rugged pair of Lee jeans is your problem.

A one- or two-day overnight horseback safari also is available, complete with camping and meals cooked via campfire. Advanced reservations are required for both experiences. foreverflorida.com

9. Make Like Jacques Cousteau

PADDLING OUT ON THE TRANQUIL WATERS OF THE Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge with just the moon and the stars to light the way is glorious enough. But when the bio is back, the experience is downright supernatural.

The “bio” is bioluminescence, a glow-at-night marine life phenomenon that causes both fish and the water itself to emanate a ghostly blue-green aura. The best place to view the spectacle is in the Indian River Lagoon near Titusville. The bio arrives in different forms, depending upon the season.

Between mid-December and March, tiny comb jellyfish arrive. They’re a credit to their species: They glow like fireflies in the water and don’t have stinging tentacles. The bigger, better bioluminescence comes in the warm-weather months with the presence of microscopic marine organisms called dinoflagellates.

“It’s nether-worldish,” says Elizabeth Mahan, co-owner of **A Day Away Kayak Tours**. “If you come up on a school of mullet, when they jump out of the water it’s like a thousand bursts of blue-green flames across your bow. If dolphin swim under your kayaks, you can look down and see their luminous outlines.”

Mahan and her husband, Mike, take parties out on nighttime expeditions when bioluminescence overtakes Indian



River Lagoon. The tour company provides the kayaks and related equipment; previous kayaking experience isn’t required. adayawaykayaktours.com

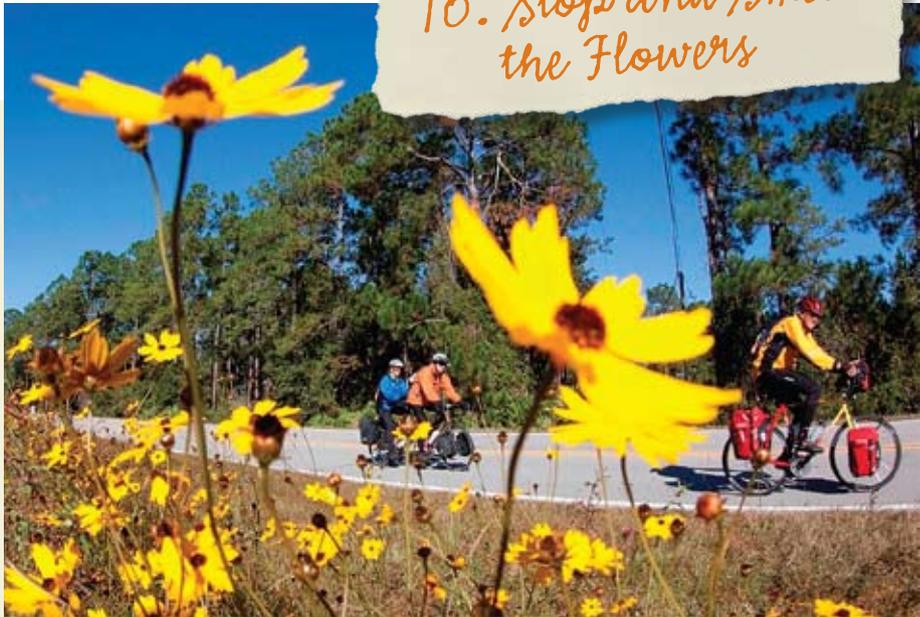
10. Stop and Smell the Flowers

“FLORIDA MAY LACK THE colorful fall leaves that some states have, but we have a terrific fall and spring wildflower display,” says Terry Zinn, board chair of the Florida Wildflower Foundation.

You can’t blame him for sounding defensive, what with all those showy leaves up north attracting all the attention while the wildflowers down here bust their blossoms. They’ve been at it for quite some time: After all, the state was named after them.

One of the best ways to enjoy the first flora of Florida is to traverse the state’s rural bike trails, such as the 260-mile **St. Johns River to the Sea Loop**, an increasingly popular, five-county pathway that offers views of Coreopsis (Florida’s state wildflower), Dune Sunflower, Gayfeather, Black-eyed Susan and Spanish Needles.

Numerous other trails offer the opportunity to stop



and smell the flowers, or at least tip your helmet at them. A good source for information about trails and tours is Bike Florida, a non-profit organization that arranges biking expeditions of various lengths throughout the state – and frequently hands out little packets of wildflower seeds for bikers to scatter along the way. bikeflorida.org