

Bitten: My Unexpected Love Affair With Florida

When I first set foot in Florida, little did I know that it would be a love affair so fervent, it would leave an indelible mark on my soul. As an avid traveler, I had explored numerous destinations around the world, but none had captivated my heart quite like the Sunshine State. The warm sun, turquoise waters, and vibrant culture were just the beginning of a journey that would change my life forever.

It all started on a whim, an impulsive decision to escape the monotony of everyday life. I packed my bags, boarded a plane, and landed in Florida with no expectations. As I stepped outside the airport, the humidity embraced me like a long-lost friend, and I instantly felt at home. Little did I know that this love affair would challenge my perceptions in ways I could have never imagined.

The Allure of the Beaches

Florida is renowned for its stunning coastline, and it's not hard to see why. From the pristine white sands of Clearwater Beach to the captivating beauty of the Florida Keys, the beaches are a paradise like no other. The moment my toes sank into the soft sand and the salty breeze kissed my face, I knew I had found solace in this coastal haven.



Bitten: My Unexpected Love Affair with Florida

by Andrew Furman(Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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The rhythmic sound of crashing waves acted as a heartbeat, luring me into the tranquility of the ocean. Each day brought new adventures – swimming with majestic dolphins in Key Largo, snorkeling amidst vibrant coral reefs in Key West, and taking long walks along the deserted shores of Sanibel Island. Each beach had its charm, its own story, and I voraciously absorbed every moment.

But it wasn't just the natural beauty of the beaches that enamored me; it was the people who frequented them. Florida's eclectic mix of locals and tourists made for fascinating encounters. I found myself chatting with retirees who had made Florida their permanent residence and young travelers seeking adventure. With a diverse community like this, I felt a sense of belonging that can only be found in a place where everyone is a stranger longing for connection.

Exploring Nature's Masterpieces

Florida is not just defined by its beaches; its natural wonders extend far beyond the coastline. As I ventured further inland, I discovered a world teeming with unique ecosystems, captivating wildlife, and breathtaking landscapes.

The Everglades, with its vast expanse of wetlands, captivated my imagination. Gliding through the maze of mangroves on an airboat, I marveled at the sheer diversity of flora and fauna. From alligators lurking beneath the surface to vibrant bird species that painted the sky, the Everglades felt like a living, breathing organism that demanded respect.

Another natural masterpiece that left me awestruck was the Florida Keys. Crossing the Seven Mile Bridge was like entering another realm – one where time seemed to slow down. With each passing key, I witnessed a symphony of colors – the azure waters, coral reefs bursting with life, and eclectic beach bars that radiated laid-back charm. It was here, while exploring the underwater wonderland, that I felt truly connected to the beauty of nature.

The Cultural Melting Pot

As the days turned into weeks, my love affair with Florida deepened with every cultural encounter. The state's rich history and diverse population created a cultural melting pot that fueled my curiosity. From the historic district of St. Augustine, the nation's oldest city, to the vibrant streets of Little Havana in Miami, I immersed myself in the tapestry of traditions and stories that shaped Florida.

One of the most memorable experiences was attending a Native American Powwow in the Big Cypress Reservation. As the rhythmic beats of the drums reverberated through the air, I witnessed the vibrant traditions of the Seminole tribe come to life. It was a humbling reminder of the deep-rooted heritage that often goes unnoticed amidst the modernization of society.

Florida's love for the arts was also evident in its numerous museums and galleries. The Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg showcased the surrealist master's works in a mesmerizing setting, while the renowned Pérez Art Museum Miami embraced contemporary art in all its forms.

A Culinary Adventure

No love affair is complete without indulging in the culinary delights of a region, and Florida did not disappoint. The state's diverse culinary scene offered a gastronomic adventure that satisfied both my palate and my curiosity.

Sampling the iconic Cuban sandwich in Miami, savoring freshly caught seafood in Key West, and indulging in the mouthwatering Key lime pie were just a few of the culinary experiences that left me yearning for more. Each bite was a testament to the fusion of flavors that resulted from the blending of cultures in this vibrant state.

Even the simple act of devouring a juicy orange under the shade of a palm tree felt like a ritual, connecting me to the land and the rich agricultural heritage of Florida.

A Bittersweet Farewell

As my time in Florida drew to a close, I couldn't help but feel a sense of melancholy. The state had taken hold of my heart, and I knew this love affair would forever be etched in my memories.

Florida had shown me that love can be unexpected, transcending boundaries and defying preconceived notions. It had taught me to embrace the beauty of nature, revel in cultural diversity, and savor every moment. It had redefined my perspective on travel and left me longing for more adventures that awaken the soul.

So, if you ever find yourself in need of a love affair that will leave you breathless, head to Florida. Let the warm sun envelop you, the turquoise waters beckon you, and the vibrant culture embrace you. But be warned, for once Florida has bitten you, you will be forever captivated.

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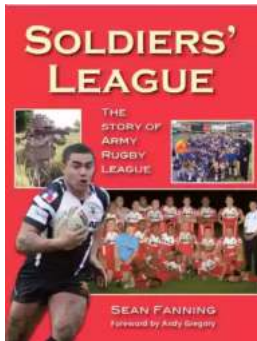


When Andrew Furman left the rolling hills of Pennsylvania behind for a new job in Florida, he feared the worst. While he'd heard much of the fabled “southern charm,” he wondered what could possibly be charming about fist-sized mosquitoes, oppressive humidity, and ever-lurking alligators.

It wasn't long before he began to notice that the real Florida right outside his office window was very different from the stereotypes portrayed in movies, television, and even state-promoted tourism advertisements. In *Bitten*, Furman shares his amazement at the beautiful and the bizarre of his adopted state. Over seventeen years, he and his family have shed their Yankee sensibilities and awakened to the terra incognita of their new home.

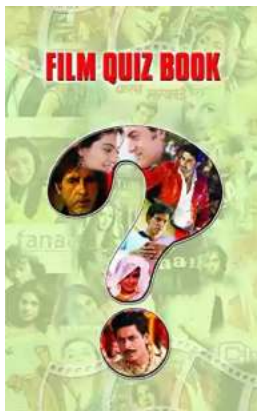
As he learns to fish for snook—a wily fish that inhabits, among other areas, the concrete-lined canals that crisscross the state—and seeks out the state's oldest live oak, a behemoth that pre-dates Columbus, Furman realizes that falling in love with Florida is a fun and sometimes humbling process of discovery. Each chapter highlights a fascinating aspect of his journey into the natural environment he once avoided, from snail kites to lizards and cassia to coontie.

Sharing his attempts at night fishing, growing native plants, birding, and hiking the Everglades, Furman will inspire you to explore the real Florida. And, if you aren't lucky enough to reside in the Sunshine State, he'll at least convince you to unplug for an hour or two and enjoy the natural beauty of wherever it is you call home.



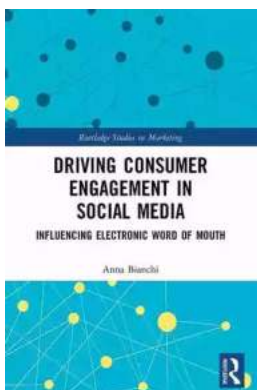
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