

Journal Entry – May 24, 2009

## **Tampa Bay, Naples, Everglades Nat'l Park and Miami Beach**

Wow, we can now say we have been to Honeymoon Island and the greatest beach in the USA by ferry boat, Caladesi Island St Park. We also got to experience Florida's wet season, which means it rains at least once a day maybe for 20 minutes or 6 hours, ya never know. The one day that it rained all day we decided was best spent doing laundry and that was also a good use of the time. The rain doesn't stop anyone from getting out here (although it rains so hard the whole sky opens up) since it is warm and just part of life down here. The good news is that it keeps the bugs and mosquitoes down.

We left the Tampa Bay area after enjoying the beautiful beach to traipse down to the Naples area where we spent a day finding out about the everglades. Never seen them before so I guess I was expecting a jungle but found some beautiful trees, plants and grass, mile after mile of red mangrove trees with their roots exposed to air and arched into the waters below. We took an airboat ride to see alligators and another boat tour to see birds and the mangrove islands of the Gulf of Mexico.

We then traveled to the southern portion of the everglades and spend a day checking out the grasslands and another boat ride to see the crocodiles, not to be confused with the alligators - we now know the difference.

Yesterday we put the everglades behind us and ventured into the city of Miami (45 miles from camp across town to the island referred to as Miami Beach.) It took our many maps and TomTom gps. We surely saw all the Haitians, Cubans and other diverse cultural groups. Mexican tortillas are not in the stores and have been replaced by the Cuban version which is more like Arabic oven fired flat bread. People in the stores speak to us in Spanish and assume that we speak Spanish or we wouldn't be there. My preschool Spanish isn't quite cutting it down here...

The beaches are beautiful... warm, clean, white sand and that beautiful Caribbean green water. We checked out south beach which was painfully crowded (after all it was Saturday of Memorial Day weekend) and then chugged along in our trusty stick shift Toyota truck (we are really thankful for the A/C) to where we could find parking and enough space to set out our chairs which we carried from the truck on back straps with our beach bags, umbrellas and ice chest. We settled on north beach a family beach predominantly Cuban but friendly. We had a great couple days there, even though we were run off the beach by a huge thunderstorm the first day. Today we spent all afternoon at the same beach - no rain but it did rain at camp while we were gone. We will attempt one more day there tomorrow, weather permitting, before we head off for the keys with the truck hooked up to the motor home, full gas tanks and the A/C blasting.

We will stay for about a week at 2 different islands, then head for the mainland and the Fort Lauderdale area. We will not have Wifi during that time but hope to be connected again upon our return to the mainland ...Janice