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It's Hard to Adjust to a Florida Christmas When You're Sweating

By Richard Crepeau
UCF Forum columnist

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I have tried. I really have. But to no avail.

I just can't adjust to Christmas in Florida – not the religious holiday, but the secular one featuring Santa, his reindeer, fake snowmen, gingerbread men, Charlie Brown and his friends, and any number of inflatable or Styrofoam characters populating front yards around the community. They seem to have taken over Central Florida like some sort of alien occupying force.

Then of course there are the lights.

The lights! The lights!

They're scattered everywhere across the fronts of houses, adorning bushes, swirling around palm tree trunks and flashing from the fronds.

What is it about Floridians and Christmas lights? Do transplanted Yankees have some sort of strange need to bury themselves in lights? Are they overcompensating for the lack of snow and cold weather so familiar in their childhood?

How else to explain the cascading avalanche of green, red and white light that gives a strange twilight glow to neighborhoods well after sunset? How can you possibly get excited about a Santa sleigh of lights, pulled by blinking reindeer, piercing the night through the fog born of 100 percent humidity? Not exactly a veritable winter wonderland.

Then there are bushes covered with white lights blinking on and off in a kind of studied random pattern, which, if you watch long enough, can leave you nauseous. Small hedges are covered with red or green lights. Even worse are multi-colored arrangements that

appear to have been created by monkeys throwing light bulbs at hedges, offering no recognizable pattern, only scattered bulbs in riotous forms.

One is reminded of those strange modern art “events” of the ’60s at which people threw various colors of paint at a canvas, which generally resulted in something that wasn’t quite art.

On top of a subdivision wall I saw a strange blue line the other night. It resembled a series of dots running for about 50 yards along the side of the road. I had never seen it before, and so I assume it had some mystical Christmas meaning that only certain “special” people could discern. Clearly I wasn’t one of them.

Just the other day I had an encounter with a new variation on Christmas decorations. I saw several cars adorned with antlers. Not those that come as trophies of the hunt, but synthetic ones sticking up from the roofs.

One car even had a red ball attached to the middle front grill, like it was Rudolph the Red-nosed Range Rover.

Yeah, that really put me in the Christmas spirit.

This was not a transcendent moment taking me back to my childhood, but a torrent of tackiness reminding me just how far gone some Floridians are as they struggle in vain to convince themselves that it really is Christmas, even if Santa is wearing a swimsuit and catching a wave.

Such an image has been immortalized with a new holiday recording carrying the off-putting title, “Christmas in the Sand.” Somehow I don’t think it will become a classic, but then who other than Gene Autry thought Rudolph” would become better known than the three kings?

The single most amazing piece of schlock I’ve seen over the years is a neon sign spelling out “Happy Birthday Jesus,” in the distinctive neon script used to spell out “Miller High Life” in the windows of neighborhood taverns. Such tackiness has no peer.

Perhaps it’s time to send the worst offenders off to Maine or Minnesota for a two-week stint of deprogramming amidst the delights of a December blizzard. They obviously need help, having failed to make the adjustment to Christmas in Florida as they

continue to insist that artificial Christmas trees, blinking lights, and Styrofoam snowmen are essential to the season.

I do like Christmas but just not in these conditions, where Santa is more likely to sweat bullets than sort out who has been naughty or nice.

Merry Christmas, everyone!

Aren't you glad it only comes once a year?