

Close your eyes and imagine a tropical trip

By Craig Walker
The Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — You can go to the island of St. Somewhere. St. Anywhere. Just boot up your PC, make a drink, put on your headphones and close your eyes.

"There are no restrictions," says singer Jimmy Buffett. "No FCC. It's like the old pirate radio stations that sat offshore and played what they want."

Yes, Radio Margaritaville (www.radiomargaritaville.com) is owned by Jimmy Buffett. But no, it's not just a jukebox that spits out its namesake tune and other Parrot-head favorites.

"We hope we can take folks away," says program director Steve Huntington. "It's really a theater of the mind. You supply your own pictures."

In some ways, it's a throwback to the bygone days when AM ruled the airwaves and the clearer night air allowed signals to be heard halfway across the country. It's also like the early days of FM rock, when each on-air personality was free to mix an individual picture through music. Throw in the exotica of listening to short-wave broadcasts from abroad, and the picture is complete.

"Your imagination doesn't work the same way watching TV," Huntington says.

A music set on Radio Margaritaville might begin with Buffett's

"Cuban Crime of Passion," then go to a selection from Ry Cooder's "Buena Vista Social Club" CD, which features an award-winning collection of Cuban musicians. The lazy tropical theme might continue with James Taylor's "Mexico," then something from island music master (and Buffett sideman) Ralph MacDonald, and from Putumayo's "Caribe! Caribe!" collection of artists from Martinique and other islands.

Mix in some appropriate American pop/rock and some classics ("Respect" by Aretha Franklin, or an old Beach Boys number).

The idea for Radio Margaritaville began with a Jimmy Buffett trip to Australia about 20 years ago. The country had only about 13 FM stations scattered around the rim, and they had to program a wide variety of music for a diverse audience.

"You never had to change the station," Buffett says. "It was so well programmed for what the listeners were doing. I wound up taping a bunch of those shows and bringing them back."

Fast-forward to about five years ago, when Buffett began thinking about radio again while listening to a Key West station and to WOYS in Apalachicola, in the Florida Panhandle. Their programming was similar to what he had heard in Australia.

"About that time, my computer guy comes to me and starts talking

about this Internet thing."

Buffett looked up his old radio friend Huntington. In 1998, Huntington agreed to leave his long career in "regular" radio, saying he was tired of consultant-driven, homogenized programming.

"When we first started talking about this, we didn't know the Internet would be the route," Huntington says. "We figured it would be done in syndication or something. But we started doing some shows on the main Margaritaville site in 1998 and the response was very good."

Radio Margaritaville is linked to Buffett's regular Margaritaville site (www.margaritaville.com), which promotes his mini-empire of restaurants and retail outlets. A rollicking escapist figure in flipflops and shorts (and occasional best-selling author of stories), Buffett hasn't had a Top 40 radio hit in more than two decades. But fans continue to lap up his leave-it-all-behind music and his concerts are sold out.

"Radio says it's not popular," Huntington says. "James Taylor is another guy who sells out every concert. But radio is underserving adults."

Radio Margaritaville is one of the few places to hear the solo efforts of Buffett's Coral Reefer Bandmates such as Roger Guth and brothers Jim and Peter Mayer. It's also an outlet

for the growing world music scene, featuring the Afro-Caribbean music distributed by Putumayo and other labels.

"I think the Web in general has done wonders for world music," says Jennifer Daunt, Putumayo's national promotions director. "Corporate radio shuns eclecticism."

Cuban singer Ibrahim Ferrer,

who won a Grammy for his solo album after "Buena Vista Social Club," is a regular on Radio Margaritaville. Songwriters such as Steve Goodman and Alabama's Mac McAnally also get their due as performers.

"We're quietly out there making noise," says Buffett, borrowing a line from one of his songs.

Canada

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with an unforgettable light show.

You also won't want to miss the Royal British Columbia Museum which houses a huge collection of coastal Canadian art and historical material. There's also an IMAX theater at the museum. What more could you ask for?

Oh yeah, here's something cool about Victoria: The U.S. dollar is worth more than the Canadian dollar. This means that stuff in Victoria is cheap, cheap, cheap! Eat like a king for \$6. Drink yourself under the table with cocktails for less than \$20. Go to Victoria's wax museum (yes, that's right, Victoria has a wax

museum) for chump change.

OK, OK, you're bored with all of the tourist-y stuff — you want to hear about the nightlife. Fine.

Victoria has a very active downtown area, with a lot of discos, sports bars and jazz clubs. One of the best things about Victoria is the fact that the entire downtown area is easily traversed by foot. In fact, most of the places you'll want to go in Victoria are within walking distance from the Inner Harbour where the ferries arrive and most of the hotels are located. So, when you're on your twelfth Canadian Sunrise or your tenth pint of local ale, you won't have to worry about driving your inebriated behind back home.

Getting to Victoria is really quite easy. You just need to drive up to Port Angeles, Wash., which takes about four hours from Eugene. Get on the M.V. Coho Ferry for \$15 round-trip and have yourself a pleasant 90-minute marine voyage.

Victoria might not have the big-city flashiness of its close neighbors Vancouver and Seattle, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a destination with more culture, charm and personality than Victoria. It's an incredibly romantic place that simply radiates its rich history. The next time you're planning a getaway for you and your sweetheart (or a binge with your underage drinking buddies), cross the border and go Canadian.

Coast

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If you're into the all-terrain vehicle scene, there's a lot for you to love in Florence. The town contains a bunch of giant sand dune parks that are dedicated to dune-buggy madness. For about \$45 an hour, you can cruise the sands at high speeds.

You don't need a dune buggy to enjoy the sand dunes, though. There's tons of amazing swimming lakes around the dunes that are perfect for diving into when the weather gets too hot.

Also, check out Florence's Old Town area. It's probably the most tourist-friendly area in town, and it has some 60 shops and restaurants that you'll want to check out.

The highlight of Florence very well may be Honeyman State Park. An awesome territory that features freshwater lakes, plenty of sand dunes and lush forest, Honeyman is an outdoor lover's dream. It has hundreds of great campsites, many with electricity. If you can only visit one place on the Oregon coast this summer, Honeyman State Park should be at the top of your list.

Many visitors to the Oregon Coast opt to travel north of Florence, and for good reason. Newport is a wonderful town which features the excellent Oregon Coast Aquarium, which is a must-see for anyone with even a passing interest

in marine life. Towns such as Astoria, Yachats and Depoe Bay are charming little stops on the beautiful drive that Highway 101 provides. Seaside is the Oregon coast's oldest resort town, and it features an action-packed downtown with bumper cars, ice cream parlors and fancy dining.

While the northern part of the Oregon coast is undeniably nice, the southern part offers a wealth of hidden treasures that you might not read about in a brochure.

About an hour's drive south from Florence is Coos Bay, the largest city in the area. Formerly a central hub of Oregon's timber industry, it's been hit with hard economic times in recent years because of a sagging wood-products market. This shouldn't stop you from enjoying the area, though. Coos Bay has some great natural attractions, the most impressive of which is Shore Acres State Park.

Shore Acres features excellent beaches with fascinating tide pools, and large botanical gardens are tucked away in the park. There are some great hikes to be had, too. Many of these hikes take visitors through a seeming tropical forest, with ferns, salamanders and steep climbs, only to end up at the top of a cliff with a spectacular view of the ocean.

The wildlife is also plentiful, with tons of sea lions and coastal birds around for your viewing pleasure.

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