

Q & A

WITH

TRAVEL CHANNEL'S
SAMANTHA BROWN



By Deborah Brauser
Photos by Matt Roseboom

Travel Channel hostess Samantha Brown made her 6th trip to Orlando this year, this time to speak at September's TRADE Show – the Travel Retailing and Destination Expo. During the two presentations, she entertained fans with stories of her adventures while filming the shows *Great Hotels with Samantha Brown*, *Samantha Brown's Disney Favorites*, *Passport to Europe*, and the new *Passport to Great Weekends*, which showcased the downtown Orlando and Winter Park areas in a recent episode.

Here are some of the highlights from her talks, audience Q&A session, and a quick “walk and talk” interview with Orlando Attractions Magazine.

Why do you think your shows have been so popular?

From the very beginning, I wanted to be seen less as an expert or a host and more as just a person. I wanted to pull viewers through the TV and have them have the experience with me. And I think that's really happened. Also, there's that 'girl next door' thing where people see me and think, 'If she can go and do this, then so can I.'

How much traveling do you do?

I travel about 230 days of the year. Fortunately, my husband travels with me whenever he can.

Do you ever travel on your own, without the cameras around?

Not really. I'm a little backwards. With

traveling so much of the year, I like to spend my vacations back home in Brooklyn, N.Y. And there's so much to do there.

What's one of the most important things you've learned on your journeys?

I've learned that yes, we all want to be mesmerized by the grand scope of an area, but we also crave that personal connection. That's what gives the true travel experience.

Is there anything that you've found during your trips that you don't like?

I really dislike being underwater. And believe it or not, I'm scared to be on horseback.

What is your favorite part of Orlando?

I fell in love with Johnson's Soul Food Diner (located downtown) during the filming of our Weekender series. Orlando's definitely got soul!

As part of that series, we like to go in and not just show an entire city or focus just on places that are off the beaten path. Instead, we concentrate on some parts you might not know about or have missed. And there are lots of great areas people might not know about around Orlando.

What's the biggest surprise you've found about Orlando?

It surprises me that so many adults come here – 50 percent without kids! So people are just having fun and feeling like kids themselves.

You've done several Disney specials. What is your all-time favorite Disney spot?

The Animal Kingdom park and Lodge are

so special with the animals and the culture and the cast members that are actually from Africa. I haven't had a chance to go to Africa yet, but I feel like I have after being there. And I think that would be great for kids to experience. Disney has really done an amazing job with that overall.

When it comes to the attractions, do you like roller coasters or the calmer rides?

Oh, definitely the roller coasters! And I really like Disney's Tower of Terror. I've stayed in so many hotels over the years that the idea of one running amuck is kind of funny to me.

What is your favorite resort in Orlando?

I'm staying at the Portofino Bay Hotel (at Universal) this trip, which is one of the first places we featured in our 'Great Hotels' series. I love everything about it and it's great to be back there.

What about your favorite Orlando restaurant?

You mean other than Johnson's? After a day of shooting, I usually like to relax in my hotel room and am just as happy eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Of course, I have also really enjoyed the bar at Emeril's.

So after today's event, will you go back to your hotel and rest up? Or will you go hit some of the attractions?

I haven't had a chance to catch the new Simpsons ride yet. What time does Universal Studios close? I think that might be the plan for tonight. What was I saying about Orlando making you feel like a kid again?