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Basic Stuff

Deciding where you're going to stay during your Disney World vacation is probably the single toughest decision you'll make. I've seen perfectly calm, sane friends go absolutely mad after hours—no, days—spent looking over literature, talking to the Disney folks, listening to friends, and searching the Web, all to one purpose: where to stay? The range of options is truly dizzying. Orlando boasts more than 114,000 hotel/motel rooms, and by the time you finish reading this paragraph, there'll be more. Disney alone offers 24 full-scale themed hotel properties, with a total of more than 30,000 guest rooms. Universal Orlando has its own on-site destination resorts: **Portofino Bay Hotel**, **Hard Rock Hotel**, and **Royal Pacific Resort**. No doubt about it, folks, deciding where to bed down can suck the F-word (F stands for fun, okay?) right out of your vacation planning.

In Orlando you don't merely look for a room. No, no, no.... (Of course, if you're so inclined, that would make life easier. You'll find plenty of reasonable, ordinary options around town; think Red Roof Inn, Comfort Inn, Holiday Inn, Howard Johnson, Hilton, Doubletree, Days Inn, Marriott, Embassy Suites, Ramada, Radisson, Best Western.... Pick any of them—you know what to expect; they're all the same.) To do the Orlando experience right, you must first decide what theme you can live with, if only for a few days, and how much it's worth to you. Never mind that there are no mountains in Florida; you can still have a Rocky Mountain-high room at the Wilderness Lodge, a retreat overlooking bubbling hot springs and an erupting geyser. Choose between the Southern-style hospitality at Port Orleans Resort—Riverside, a spread of elegant manor homes complete with a Mississippi-style river, banjos strumming, and magnolias blossoming, or the New Orleans-themed Port Orleans—French Quarter complete with a waterslide that drops you out of the mouth of a sea serpent. At Marriott's Orlando World Center or the 1,500-acre Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress resort, you can swim in grottoes and under waterfalls. Sleep in a purple jester's bed studded with jewels at The Doubletree Castle, or with a three-story-tall Big Wheel parked outside your room at the Pop Century resort.

If you want to spend a fortune, the penthouse suite of Disney's Grand Floridian delivers two very nice bedrooms, a baby grand piano, surround-sound stereo, a full bar, a Jacuzzi tub, turndown service, high tea, hors d'oeuvres, and dessert—and there's a view of Cinderella Castle, too. (Oooh...restless heart,

be still.) How about sleeping underneath the watchful eyes of five-story-tall stone fish and swans? You'll find it all at the side-by-side Walt Disney World Dolphin and Swan resorts, designed by world-famous architect Michael Graves. If you're looking for quiet elegance instead of hit-you-over-the-head decor, check in to the Peabody Hotel, where the atrium lobby soothes the soul with exotic plants, gentle waterfalls, and an eye-catching art collection. Alas, even the Peabody has a gimmick: the ducks (they're real). Each morning and evening, a 75-foot red carpet is rolled out, and the fabled Peabody Ducks—descendants of ducks that once graced the fountain of Memphis's original Peabody in the 1930s—waddle to the Orlando lobby's marble fountain, where they spend the day before heading back to the Royal Duck Palace for bed. (Turn-down service at the Peabody also includes filling your bathtub and floating a yellow rubber ducky in it.) Here's where to start: Request the free **Planning Kit** (visitors guide, accommodations guide, coupon pack, and Orlando Magicard) from the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau by calling Tel 800/551-0181 or heading online to www.orlando.info.com.

Let's Make a Deal

Orlando is a capital example of the laws of supply and demand. The \$60 you paid for a room during "value season" will surely double—or more—in price when the kids are out of school. Location may be everything in the rest of the universe, but here, it's timing, timing, timing. Go off-season and you can almost name your price; come when everyone else does and you'd better make reservations at least 6 months ahead of time. Some of the more popular resorts book rooms up to a year in advance, especially during holidays. That said, you can nearly always negotiate a price, whatever the time of year, if you're flexible and persistent. Ask for a better deal, and chances are you'll get it. Disney properties, alas, are usually sticklers when it comes to room rates, but there are usually enough Disney discount codes floating out there to slash room rates by up to 33% or even more depending on the season. If you're really feeling adventurous, roll into town without a room reservation and head to Orlando's **Official Visitor Center** at 8723 International Dr. (at the corner of Austrian Row). Then ask if there are any rooms currently available. Orlando hotels phone the center each day, looking for folks to fill their properties. The visitor center's "**little black**

book” lists available hotel rooms, with prices often slashed 50% or more. On a recent visit during peak spring-break time, it was possible to snatch a two-bedroom, full-kitchen condo (nice digs), just minutes from Disney World, for \$79 a night. The regular rate would have been double that.

Web-savvy surfers can get the latest prices and book airfare, lodging, even theme-park tickets online. Start with a visit to **Disney’s official website**, www.waltdisneyworld.com. From there, **Mousesavers** (www.mousesavers.com) should be your next stop. If there are Disney resort discount codes available, they’ll have them listed. Walt Disney World annual passholders and Florida residents usually get deeper discounted code rates, so if you don’t live in Florida, it might be worth your time and money to get at least one annual pass for your group.

You might check out hotel brokers, too, who snatch unsold rooms and offer them at deeply discounted rates. A couple to try: **Hotels.com** (Tel 800/246-8357; www.hotels.com) and **Places To Stay.com** (Tel 800/390-4687; www.placestostay.com). If you don’t mind doing a bit of calculation, check into the various Disney World/Universal Studios/Orlando package deals. Several airlines offer Orlando/Disney World packages complete with airfare and lodging, including **Southwest Airlines Vacations** (Tel 800/243-8372; www.swavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (Tel 800/301-3800; www.covacations.com), and **Delta Vacations** (Tel 800/221-6666; www.deltaairlines.com).

For people who just can’t get enough of the Mouse, the Disney experience extends beyond the Orlando area with the **Disney Cruise Line**. Two ships, *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder*, both docked at Port Canaveral, Florida, offer 3-, 4-, 7-, and 10-day cruises to the Bahamas, Mexico, and the Caribbean, as well as 7-day land-and-sea vacations. All cruises include a stop at Castaway Cay, Disney’s private Bahamian island. This cruise is a magnet for families, so you might want to look elsewhere if you don’t want to be trapped at sea with a swarm of kids. For information, call Tel 800/951-3532 or visit www.disneycruise.com.

Is There a Right Address?

There are four major lodging areas in Orlando to choose from: the **U.S. 192 strip**, situated southeast of Disney World along the road to **Kissimmee**; the **International Drive area**, which lies east of the World and includes the resorts of **Universal**

Orlando; the **Lake Buena Vista area**, which is just off WDW property and is also home to on-site hotels not actually owned by Disney; and **Walt Disney World** itself, which encompasses 21 on-site hotels.

The **U.S. 192 strip** offers the most economical choices—including not only all the major chain hotels, but also a selection of local mom-and-pop motels. You can find many rooms on the strip for \$50 or less per night, and “high-end” here usually means under \$150. Accommodations in this area, often referred to as “Main Gate” residences, are touted as being the closest to Disney attractions, with I-4 being the dividing line between East and West Main Gate. Technically speaking, the hotels at the Disney end of U.S. 192 are generally a lot closer than the lodgings on International Drive, and staying here may even get you closer to the Disney parks than the guests at some of the more remote Disney resorts. But don’t read this as necessarily convenient—you still have to fight the inevitable traffic in this neighborhood. And even though you might save 10 minutes or so in the car getting to the Magic Kingdom, you’ll make up for it trying to find a decent restaurant at the end of the day. If there is a fast-food chain in existence, you’ll find it somewhere along this road. Living smack dab in the midst of tourist-gouging shops and cheap amusements (how ’bout a spin around the go-cart track after that All-U-Can-Eat buffet at Ponderosa?), you have to have a high tolerance for tacky to spend much time on U.S. 192. Still, if you’re traveling *en famille*, who can argue with the convenience of an IHOP next door to your hotel and a Pizza Hut down the street? Besides, after a long day of fighting crowds and blowing your budget on admission tickets and a high-priced lunch at Disney, maybe all you need is a clean, cheap room and a clean, cool pool.

The on-site but non-Disney hotels command higher prices for their convenient location (right off Downtown Disney, but actually in Lake Buena Vista—see below). There are six independently owned hotels: the **Buena Vista Palace**, **Doubletree Guest Suites**, **Grosvenor Resort**, **Hilton WDW**, **Hotel Royal Plaza**, and **Best Western Lake Buena Vista**. (A seventh hotel in this group, the Holiday Inn at Walt Disney World, suffered extensive hurricane damage and had no planned reopening date at press time.) WDW parks and the restaurants and attractions on International Drive are relatively close and accessible. Free shuttle service is provided to WDW areas, and other Disney privileges like Extra Magic Hours are also available. Beware of

what you book in this area, however; it's a mixed bag when it comes to value. You can pay up to \$200 a night at cookie-cutter high-rise hotels, just for the Disney proximity. But make a reservation at the **Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn** just down the road, and you'll get a two-bedroom suite, free breakfast, free meals for kids all day long, a fab pool, free shuttles to the Disney parks, and more—all for about the same price or less than what you'll get at the on-site non-Disneys, depending on the season.

The area just east of Downtown Disney is known as **Lake Buena Vista** and features a mixture of themed hotels and mid-priced all-suite properties. This is a good area for families on a budget who want to be as close as possible to Disney World but can't afford the Disney price tag (though note that some hotels on the far side from Disney aren't really that close to the park entrances).

International Drive (I-Drive to locals) offers some of the best lodging values in town, with rooms ranging from \$50 to \$200 a night. In case you're wondering, by the way, there's nothing international about International Drive: It's pure commercial Americana, with hundreds of restaurants, shops, amusements, and hotels. But you'll find some great places to stay—and generally they'll have a much smaller price tag than their Disney resort counterparts. Two additional advantages of staying on International Drive (or close to it): You'll have access to a few high-quality, reasonably priced restaurants, and you'll be closer to other top non-Disney attractions, such as SeaWorld and Universal Orlando. Most hotels on International Drive provide free shuttle service to these attractions, though you may have to pay to get to Mickey. If you stay on I-Drive, expect to spend some grueling time in the car trying to get anywhere besides the World. During afternoon rush hour and when the parks let out, it's not uncommon to spend about 45 minutes going less than 10 miles (are we having fun yet?).

When it comes to staying at **Disney World resorts**, you have to decide not only how much you're willing to pay, but also what theme you can tolerate best. Get ready for virtual vacationing. Why travel to the New England coast when you can book a room at the Yacht Club? Yearning for that easy island feeling? Pack your sarong and head to the Caribbean Beach resort. Longing for the adventure of the African savanna? Disney's answer is the Animal Kingdom Lodge, complete with real giraffes lurching on trees outside your window. Disney does a

magnificent job of capturing everything in cliché, and nowhere is their mastery of illusion and attention to detail more pronounced than at their resorts. Walk up to the Wilderness Lodge and you'll see towering pine trees and western wildflowers. (You won't, however, find dreadlocked locals selling ganja and good times on Disney's Caribbean Beach.) You may feel compelled to explain to your children that, no, Jamaica, Aruba, and Trinidad (fill in the blank) aren't exactly like this. But if you want to be totally immersed in Disney fantasy day and night, then go for it (and get your wallet out).

Universal Orlando plays the theme game, too, with three on-site resorts. Choose from an Italian seaside village, a rock-music bonanza, or a Polynesian island paradise—all run by the upscale Loews chain. If you plan to spend a good deal of time at the Universal theme parks (a good idea if you're a thrill junkie or are traveling with teens in tow), then consider staying on-site and saving yourself a bunch of time on the road, waiting in traffic. Guests staying at Universal Orlando resorts receive some nice privileges, too, such as Universal Express front-of-the-line access to selected attractions with their room keys. There's also complimentary transportation to and from all parks and on-site hotels via water shuttles.

To Sleep with the Mouse...or Not

Disney offers room rates ranging all the way from \$79 to over \$2,440 a night. In general, you'll pay more for Disney resort accommodations than for comparable rooms off-site (although they *do* offer the very real added advantage of "Extra Magic Hours" in one of their parks each day you're with them—see below). For example, a standard room (two queen-size beds and a daybed) at **Disney's Grand Floridian** runs \$359 a night, while a similar-size room at **Disney's Yacht Club** and **Beach Club** resorts runs about \$305. Ouch. Compare that to a standard room at International Drive's **Doubletree Castle**, replete with jeweled chairs, pointy headboards, and its own cast of castle characters, for about \$120 to \$215. Small studio villas at **Disney's BoardWalk Inn** feature a scant 359 square feet (not a lot of room), a microwave oven, mini-refrigerator, coffeemaker, and wet bar, and will cost you about \$305 to \$475 a night; compare that to the **Staybridge Suites** in Lake Buena Vista and International Drive, each offering a large, two-bedroom suite with full kitchen and living area, for about \$239 a night. A better deal are Disney's "moderate" or "value-priced" options, such

as the **All-Star resorts, Pop Century, Port Orleans, Coronado Springs, and Caribbean Beach**, all of which range from \$79 to \$215 per night. About \$250 a night will get a standard room at the **Animal Kingdom Lodge**, complete with exotic animals on view, or at the **Wilderness Lodge**, where you get to gaze at a geyser. An economical option for campers is Disney's **Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground**. It's a help to know that Disney's resorts are clustered around each of its theme parks. If you plan on spending most of your time at one particular park, you'll save commuting time if you stay at a resort nearby. Here's how they're bunched: **Magic Kingdom**—area resorts are the **Contemporary, Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, Polynesian, Wilderness Lodge, Fort Wilderness, and Shades of Green** (open to military members and their families only). **Epcot**—area resorts are **Caribbean Beach, BoardWalk Inn, BoardWalk Villas, Yacht Club, Beach Club, Beach Club Villas, and Swan and Dolphin**. Area resorts for the **Animal Kingdom** are **Coronado Springs, All-Star Sports, All-Star Music, All-Star Movies**, and the **Animal Kingdom Lodge**. **Pop Century** is closest to **Disney's Wide World of Sports**. **Downtown Disney** resorts include the **Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa, Port Orleans Resort, and Old Key West**.

Let's take a look at the Disney resorts' list of privileges/enticements. Service? Yes, you can count on that. Convenience? Usually, but not always. Getting around Disney quickly and efficiently requires the savvy maneuvering of a New York cabbie in rush hour. Depending on where you stay in the World, your return trip could take up to a half-hour—even longer—on crowded buses, boats, and monorails. After standing in line all day at the park, plan on standing in line again to catch your ride home. You'll hear of a number of other "advantages" for staying at a Disney resort. Let's take a look at them:

- **The Disney resort ID card**, allowing you to charge meals and purchases to your room. But surprise! Your regular credit card works just as well. Another upside: If you spring for souvenirs in the park, you can get them delivered right to your hotel room (delivery can take a day or two though). But for those prices, delivery should be included anyway.
- **Use of all Disney recreational facilities**, including golf, rental bikes, boat rentals, and watersports. Of course, they all cost extra, even for resort guests, and

are often available to non-Disney day guests as well, sometimes for the same price. Disney guests do, however, get preferred tee times.

- **Advance dining reservations**, up to 180 days in advance. Surprise again. Anyone can call Tel 407/WDW-DINE to secure Advance Reservation arrangements (see the Dining chapter). Besides, do you know anyone who plans meals that far in advance? (“Yes, honey, I think that 3 months from now, on April 20, I’ll be in the mood for sushi.”) If your Disney vacation just wouldn’t be complete without catching the Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue dinner show, a character breakfast at Cinderella’s Royal Table, or your heart is absolutely set on dinner at Victoria & Albert’s (three of Disney’s most popular dinner spots), call ahead; see chapter 2, Dining, for a little advice in the reservation wars. Otherwise, just plan on making reservations at the restaurant of your choice when you get to town; it shouldn’t be a problem. With any luck, the starry-eyed couple who made reservations 2 months ago are now history, and you’ll get their corner table at Victoria & Albert’s. I have noticed, however, that Disney resort guests almost always get into even solidly booked restaurants—more so than when not a guest.
- **Enter parks early, leave late.** This is a real benefit. Disney’s “Extra Magic Hours” allow resort guests into a different park an hour earlier than the general mobs each morning, or alternatively, allow resort guests to stay an hour later than the hoi polloi. If you’re organized about it, this can help you avoid some of the bigger lines. Call Disney (Tel 407/824-4321) as soon as you arrive (or ask at the guest-services desk at your resort) to find out which park has early entry for the days you’ll be in town.
- **Guaranteed park entry.** When the parking lots are full, Disney resort guests can still get in using park transportation. Think twice about whether this is a good thing or not—do you really want to enter the Magic Kingdom when the sign says FULL? Sounds like a good day to stay at the pool.
- **“Free” transportation.** Disney resort guests get access to the **Walt Disney World Transportation System**,

RUMOR MILL: MAGIC A LITTLE BIT MORE YOUR WAY

For years, most guides advised you to avoid Disney's "Dream Vacation" packages like the plague—the packages were inflexibly built to include (and charge for) all kinds of amenities your average person would never use. You either got too few park admissions or too many, or you were allowed to enter as many parks as you wanted for an insanely brief window of time. And to add financial insult to injury, the packages often cost more than if you'd booked each component individually. However, with the 2005 debut of "Magic Your Way" packages, Disney at last offers a range of options you might actually get to use, at a sliding scale of discounts in the "more you buy, the more you save" vein. Now you can book the number of hotel nights you want, and then, a la carte, buy the number and kind of park admission tickets you want as well. There's also a dining plan that grants you a certain number of meals per day. Of course, if you insist on blowing a wad of cash, feel free to indulge in the Magic Your Way Premium or Platinum plans, which resurrect the old-fashioned ginormous per diems in exchange for granting you every Disney privilege you could ever want, and then some. Check out www.waltdisneyworld.com for current Magic Your Way details and prices.

which includes monorail trains, ferryboats, launches, and motorcoach shuttles to all areas in the World. This can be a benefit if you plan to hop from one area to another during the day: Say you want to spend a few hours in the morning at the Magic Kingdom, have lunch at Disney-MGM, and then hop over to Epcot for the afternoon. (Are you nuts?!? This is supposed to be a vacation.) Free transit is also an advantage if you plan to exit and return to the park during the day (a good idea, as it lets you take a nap, swim in the pool, and return refreshed). There's only one problem: Let's say you're staying at a primo Disney resort but decide to take in another Orlando attraction (as you should).... Just try to get a Disney World bus driver to drop you off at Universal Studios. No way, José. Most non-Disney hotels in the area do offer free shuttle service to the major attractions, including Disney World and Universal Studios, while others charge a nominal fee. Should you prefer using your own wheels, Disney resort guests get free parking at the theme parks (which leaves you with an extra \$9 to put toward those new Mickey ears!).

- **Discount Passes.** Disney is very good at never giving away something for nothing, so don't expect red-carpet

admission into the theme parks just because you're forking over for a Disney room. However, they've gotten a little more relaxed about how their upgrades and add-ons can be sold, allowing you to pick and choose what you buy to go with your hotel reservation. How much you save depends entirely on what you're willing to pony up initially—are you ready to make it worth Mickey's while to treat you nice, big spender?

The Lowdown

Only in Orlando... Welcome to total-immersion vacationing. Here, you'll not only spend your days in fantasyland but your nights, too. Take your pick: Are you in the mood for a timber-framed Western lodge, Southwestern hacienda, seaside inn, beach cottage, Caribbean island abode, classic Victorian resort, Southern manor on the bayou—or how about a room that overlooks an African savanna? They don't call it the World for nothing. And Disney doesn't have the lock on themed lodging, either. Orlando-area resorts outside Disney World compete with their own faux settings and over-the-top designs. You can't spend the night at Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom, but if you really want to play in a palace, book a room at **The Doubletree Castle**, a frivolous, all glitter-and-gold fortress on International Drive. In the spacious rooms, you'll find upholstered chairs painted purple, with pointy backs, all studded with multicolored stones, plus thrones, headboards, jeweled mirrors, hand-set mosaics of kings, queens, and jesters, and stuffed mystical castle creatures peering around the corners. Even the swimming pool has a fountain and a regal hot tub. Kitschy? Sure; but it is so gloriously over the top, you won't care. Besides, rooms are bright and spacious, the location is great (although the traffic is horrendous), and the price is right. You'll pay twice as much at a comparably themed Disney resort. For a cinematic experience, guests at the **Sheraton Studio City** get to travel back in time as they are transported to the "homes" of Hollywood stars, complete with period furnishings, costumed hosts, vintage movies, free popcorn, and more. (The Marilyn Monroe rooms sport zebra-striped shower curtains and oversize, colorful makeup mirrors.)

Tropical delights... It's hot and sultry; so what if there's not a sea in sight? Tropical-themed resorts are big in Orlando. At the **Caribe Royale All-Suites Resort**, you'll find a variety of suites and villas, all sitting on a 30-acre parcel of giant palm trees and colorful foliage. Actually, there's not much more to it than the giant pink facade that says "Caribbean," but you could do a lot worse for the money, and the "all-adult" third tower is a definite plus for those without kids. **Disney's Polynesian Resort** has always been one of their most popular, and it's definitely got some things going for it. The lobby hits the mark with trickling waters, South Pacific foliage, island music, and thatched things all about. Be prepared to drop a load here (\$315–\$600 per night). I like the **Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort** better, for less than half the price. This lively and colorful resort sits on a 42-acre lake, surrounded by 200 acres; it also features one of Disney's best pools. You'll find lots of water activities on site, too. On the downside, it sprawls, and getting from one end of the resort to the other can take a while. Over at Universal Orlando, the **Royal Pacific Resort** is Asian/South Pacific in design (its orchid garden is sublime), though less overtly themed than Disney's Polynesian. Part palm trees, part bamboo, the resort is elegant, yet moderately priced—and it gets my top vote in this category.

Out of Africa... Here's your chance to stay in a South African game reserve without a passport and hours spent on a plane (not to mention those nasty vaccinations for who knows what). All you have to do is book a room at Disney's **Animal Kingdom Lodge**. The impressive lobby features hand-carved furnishings, a mud fireplace, and stunning views of a 33-acre savanna. You'll find lots of other carvings as well, along with rich jewel-tones, low lighting, and thatched huts, all done very tastefully. (Peter Dominick, of Disney's Wilderness Lodge fame, had his hand in this property, too.) Catch sightings of animals and exotic birds from the lodge's large picture windows or the rooms' balconies (some 100 grazers and 130 birds live on the property's private reserve), and forget for a moment that you really are in Orlando. Of course, this mind-over-body transportation will cost you; rooms here are at Disney's deluxe side of the scale, costing \$250 and up a night.

In the meantime, another option is to follow the leopard carpeting to the front lobby of the **Sheraton Safari Resort**. This out-of-Africa-themed hotel includes fine furnishings, a lush courtyard, and a kid-approved pool. (And nothing spells video relaxation like in-room PlayStations.) There are no exotic animals roaming outside, but the prices are tamer (\$150–\$219 per night for rooms and small suites).

La Dolce Vita... The luscious **Portofino Bay Hotel** at Universal Orlando conjures up images of an idyllic Italian fishing village. Never mind that you're mere seconds away from cavorting with Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk; once here, you'll be enchanted. This Loews Hotel property—which comes complete with imported Italian cypress and olive trees, elaborate *trompe l'oeil* paintings created by artists from Portofino, Italy (the real one), a harbor dotted with fishing boats, and extra-comfy beds in the guest rooms—was Universal's first on-site hotel, and it's still a beauty. Families will like the main pool area, complete with water slide; adults will enjoy the quiet second pool hidden back by the bocce court. I like its elegant style and proximity to Universal's parks and CityWalk. Mandara, a deluxe, full-service European-style spa, is located on the premises. Book a massage and life will suddenly start looking sweeter.

Disney's forest fantasies... Nestled on the shores of Bay Lake, **Disney's Wilderness Lodge** is a tribute to early-20th-century national-park lodges, and it's one of Disney's best-executed themes. Okay, maybe it's not the sweeping view you'd get if you were looking out the window of the Old Faithful Lodge in Yellowstone, but the hotel lobby elicits more than a few oohs and ahhs: It features a seven-story pine-beamed great hall with an 80-foot quarry-stone fireplace, a giant, carved totem pole, magnificent tepeelike chandeliers, and carved wooden bears, goats, and eagles peering at you from all directions. Bubbling hot springs start in the lobby and cascade outdoors into the pool. In true Disney let's-take-it-over-the-top fashion, an erupting geyser completes the scene. The rooms are spacious, in Disney terms, done up in Western-style furnishings with plaid bedspreads and buffalo-print sheets, and the surroundings

of woods and water give the resort a quiet, secluded feeling. Is that sagebrush we smell?

You won't even know you're in Orlando... Check in to the **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress** and you may not even make it to the amusement parks. This 1,500-acre megaresort is a sports-minded hedonist's wet dream: a grand pool with grottoes and waterfalls, plus a 21-acre lake, 45 holes of championship golf, lush grounds, an equestrian center, tennis courts, racquetball.... Need we say more? This place is deluxe, inside and out. Rooms are decorated in soft, tropical hues, and the public areas—the lobby, hallways, restaurants, and outside gardens and walkways—are filled with sunlight and top-notch art and sculpture. The hotel has five restaurants, including Hemingway's, an upscale Key West-style eatery overlooking a free-form swimming pool, waterfalls, and gardens. Also in the get-all-your-needs-met-under-one-roof category is the gigantic **Orlando World Center Marriott**, a 200-acre resortopolis surrounded by tropical foliage, golf fairways, and cascading waterfalls. It boasts one of the largest meeting facilities in the country, so you'll be surrounded by suits and badges. Never mind; they'll all be in meetings while you splash in the gigantic freshwater pool, complete with waterfalls and a water slide (of course), or soak in one of the secluded spas. The building itself—a towering cement structure with a 12-story atrium lobby and glass elevator—is not terribly unique, but the oversize rooms have classy pastel-and-floral-draped furnishings, and the grounds are luscious. Finally, you *definitely* won't feel like you're in Orlando at the **Celebration Hotel** in the Disney-created town of Celebration. In fact, walking the streets in this made-to-be-perfect real town (you can actually buy a house here, if you promise to keep your lawn mowed, the kids' toys inside, laundry off the line, and your sidewalks rolled up after dark, among other things that I can only imagine) is like being stuck in *Pleasantville*. The town, of course, is perfect: perfect little upscale shops, perfect little restaurants, perfect little park on the water, perfect little coffee shop, and so on, and so on. The town center is not actually owned by Disney anymore, but the Celebration Hotel, located there, is quite nice and provides a fabulous escape from the theme park frenzy. The place is a flashback

to old Florida, when the pace was slower and the scale much smaller. The four-star boutique hotel borders the lake (what else?) and features an understated clapboard and stucco design, a brick courtyard entrance, and a quiet, elegantly casual atmosphere. (Think Ernest Hemingway, not Jimmy Buffett.)

Two recent additions to the resort skyline of Orlando can be found at the luxury development of **Grande Lakes**, just east of SeaWorld. The **JW Marriott**, the taller of the two resorts, reflects a Spanish style and is the pinnacle of Marriott luxury. The neighboring **Ritz-Carlton** lives up to the luxury resort chain's reputation—reminiscent of an Italian palazzo, it's posh with a capital "P." Both properties sit side by side, sharing a Greg Norman–designed championship golf course, a 24,000-square-foot, winding, lazy-river pool, and a 40,000-square-foot spa. You'll choke on the prices (\$299–\$890) but not on smoke (both hotels are smoke-free).

Hiding from Mickey... You'll find no cutesy mouse-ear topiaries, gushing geysers, or water-sprouting dragons at the **Saratoga Resort Villas**. This oasis, located just 4 miles from the entrance to Disney World off the busy U.S. 192 strip, doesn't look like much from the road, but it's perfect for folks who can't stand another moment of Disney-ness. The beautifully furnished one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas come with a full kitchen, two full bathrooms, and bi-level floor plan and run \$125 to \$199 a night. The 15-acre resort includes a boardwalk that winds through the property.

The **Gaylord Palms** is themed, true, but not in any Disney fashion. Located across I-4 from the Downtown Disney area, the resort occupies just over 4 acres, including an attached conference center. An atrium offers an overview of the state of Florida that spans the width of the resort and includes replicas of famous Florida landmarks, including Castillo de San Marcos, Key West's Mallory Square, the bell tower from Flagler College, and the Everglades. The rooms, however, which start at \$199 a night, are pure elegance, decorated in rich colors themed to different Florida locations. Add to this luxury touches such as an on-site full-service branch of the legendary Canyon Ranch spa, and free bottles of juice and water daily, and the resort is a great way to be close to the theme parks but not immersed in them.

Grand gambles... Reeking of class and elegance, Disney's **Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** makes a great first impression: A stately white Victorian-style hotel with a red-shingled roof and a zillion balconies, it sits facing the Seven Seas Lagoon. The lobby is all chandeliers, arched windows, and gold birdcages. High tea is served at 3pm (raise that pinkie, now). But the prize here is getting one of the coveted lagoon-view rooms that face the Magic Kingdom. These rooms are few and never guaranteed (and the others are nice, but not worth the hefty price), so you're taking a gamble on the \$359-to-\$940 price tag.

Disney's **BoardWalk Inn** and **BoardWalk Villas** take the 1930s Atlantic-seaboard scene to the max. The bustling seaside illusion takes place outdoors: Disney's G-rated, golly-gee clubs, street performers, shops, and restaurants are clustered along a lakefront boardwalk. In other words, let the good times roll, and roll, and roll...after a day's worth of fun, fun, fun at the parks, you may not get the quiet you need to recharge. The smallish, inn-style rooms will set you back a whopping \$305 to \$825 a night, and the larger BoardWalk villas break the bank—we're talking \$305 to \$2,020 (for the two-bedroom Presidential Suite). You're better off renting a room elsewhere and visiting the BoardWalk for an evening.

Disney's Contemporary Resort was one of the first two resorts to open when the park did in 1971. Based on Walt's idea of a futuristic hotel, the resort's A-frame allows the monorail to run right through it (which makes the resort noisier than most). The two Garden wings (constructed years later) are not convenient to anything, and rooms in the Tower will set you back \$355 and up per night. If you can luck into one of the rooms with a balcony overlooking Seven Seas Lagoon, you'll have memory-making views of both Magic Kingdom's nightly fireworks and the nightly Electrical Water Pageant. And I do mean luck, because while you can request such a room, Disney will not guarantee you'll get it, even if you pay the premium price. Still, if you can take the financial pounding, it's worth a try. After a massive update and renovation, rooms at the Contemporary are now among the nicest at Disney World.

When you want to see and be seen... Disney's **Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** attracts those who request the

best and most expensive place to stay at the World (Oprah's stayed here!). When money is no object, or, perhaps, more accurately, when money *is* the object, the Grand Floridian is the hotel of choice. It tries to be gracious and elegant—in that Disney faux-style way—with lots of chandeliers, arched windows, and lavish decor. Cutesy shops have been replaced with high-end boutiques, and a Mickey mannequin sports top-of-the-line resort wear in the obligatory Disney store on premises. Disney's **Yacht Club** and **Beach Club** are also celebrity favorites. If it's rock stars you're looking for, head over to the **Hard Rock Hotel**. Want some names? How about Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, *NSYNC, and Cheap Trick? Most bands playing the Hard Rock Live venue stay here, drawn to this perfect blend of funk and function. Jam-packed with rock-'n'-roll memorabilia, it's a hit with adults and kids, alike. You'll relish the swimming pool (one of Orlando's largest), with its piped-in underwater music. Five on-site restaurants and lounges, and its close location to the parks—only a short walk from your front door—make it even better. Celebs looking for a more low-key experience, such as Steven Spielberg, often book one of the suites at Universal's **Portofino Bay**.

When you come to your senses... Families or groups on a budget should consider the **Suites at Old Town** on U.S. 192 in Kissimmee. Though this property does have regular rooms, the suites are the main reason to stay here. Get twice the space of a normal hotel room for the same price and a kitchen area to boot. Located next to Old Town, there's plenty to do without driving anywhere, but the property also offers free shuttles to the Disney parks.

Deals at Disney... The lively **Caribbean Beach**, one of the Epcot resort-area hotels, was first to enter Disney's moderate category, and it's still a bargain with rooms starting at \$139 a night. The price point draws a lot of families, so expect it to be a bit on the noisy and active side. Rent a paddleboat and join the fun. Also considered a "moderate," Disney's version of New Orleans, the **Port Orleans Resort's French Quarter** section (\$139–\$215 a night) lacks the Big Easy's 24-hour jazz-club-hopping, while the legendary New Orleans ladies of the evening have been replaced by squeaky-clean bell captains, and you'll never

have to flash any body part to get beads. Still, it has lots of wrought-iron railings, picturesque courtyards, and a kid-popular pool—climb up a sea serpent's back and drop out of its mouth into the water. The rooms are lighter than they used to be but still seem small; romance is best found strolling along the cobblestone streets and the meandering river walk. The adjoining **Riverside** section, with its old-Southern Mississippi theme, is priced similarly. However some of its rooms offer an additional child-size trundle bed, making it a great value for a family of five.

Feel like sacrificing yourself on a 46-foot mock Mayan pyramid complete with a water slide rushing down its “ceremonial” stone steps? It's possible at Disney's “moderate” **Coronado Springs Resort**. Of course, Disney's depiction of the Southwest can be a bit clichéd and sterile, but the resort's price tag (rooms start at \$139 a night) and obsessive attention to detail make this a good deal. Disney Imagineers set out to transport guests to a combination of the American Southwest and the Mexican Riviera with Mickey Mouse-shaped cactus landscaping, a 15-acre man-made lagoon, and the aforementioned Mayan Temple pool area. You can choose between the lively, brightly colored casitas (my favorite), the quirky beach cabanas, and the earthy, Western-styled ranchos. The lobby and the resort's large food market are built around “La Fuente de las Palomas,” a “spring-fed” fountain bubbling up from a Spanish urn. The ranchos and cabanas are closest to the Mayan pool and the casitas are closest to the food market/main building. And yes, Mickey wears a sombrero here. Pick up yours in the gift shop.

But to truly grab the lowest prices for Disney accommodations, one must be willing to find their inner child and let it come out to play. Otherwise you may find the decor of the **All-Star Sports**, **All-Star Music**, **All-Star Movies**, and **Pop Century Resort** resorts too hard on the senses and even too much to take. There's nothing subtle about Disney's entries into the lower-price lodging market (also known as “value resorts”). Suffice it to say, kids will love the larger-than-life themes. The All-Star Sports resort has giant surfboards, taller-than-the-building football helmets, and stairwells in the shape of soda cans. Things are just as wacky at the All-Star Music resort: Get ready for three-story-tall cowboy boots, a guitar-shaped pool, and a

walk-through, neon-lit jukebox. The All-Star Movies resort will appeal to die-hard fans of Disney's animated movies as it features, among other things, a 35-foot-tall Buzz Lightyear from *Toy Story*, the towering bodies of Pongo and Perdita from *101 Dalmatians*, and Mickey the Sorcerer from *Fantasia*.

The Pop Century resort is probably the value resort with the broadest appeal, as the different sections are themed according to the pop culture of each decade from the 1950s to the 1990s. The '50s buildings offer a three-story-tall jukebox, bowling alley pool, and dancers at the hop. The '60s buildings, with their yo-yo stairwells, are all about Flower Power (and are closest to the main building/food court). The '70s buildings have disco music piped in the courtyard that features a huge foosball court and a three-story-tall Big Wheel. The '80s are hard to miss with the Rubik's Cube stairwells, and the '90s has only one building featuring cellphone stairwells and a three-story laptop computer. Note that the icons decorating their facades and the outdoor layout may differ slightly, but the four value resorts are basically clones: Each has a fast-food-style court, small and sparse rooms (think 1950s budget motel dressed up in Mickey garb), and even tinier bathrooms. Clearly, Disney wants to inspire an overdeveloped sense of togetherness in its guests. The resorts are also set off in their own little section of the World (probably so they won't frighten off guests with fatter wallets), and transportation to the parks via Disney's crowded buses is often time consuming. But hey, what do you want for \$79 to \$137 a night?

If you picked up arms for Uncle Sam, even Disney will give you a discount, specifically at its **Shades of Green Resort**, a spot reserved for active and retired military personnel and their families. It's the best bargain on Disney soil, though room rates are based on military rank (the scale begins at \$76 per night). All the large rooms offer TVs with wireless keyboards (access to the Internet is offered for a fee), balconies or patios, and pool or golf-course (there are three of them) views.

Where to go to get away from kids... The best answer is someplace else, preferably out of state. This is Disney World, folks, where kids rule and parents pool all their

resources to 1) pay for the adventure and 2) keep their cool while doing so. If the tiny bundles of noise and energy really do drive you up the wall, book a room at the quiet and elegant **Peabody Orlando Hotel**. Parents with young ones feel instantly out of place when they walk into what is in fact a very gracious lobby, full of beautiful art, subtle tones, and hushed voices. Spend an afternoon at the Peabody Athletic Club (classes, machines, personal fitness trainers, tennis courts, and a lap pool are all available), and then treat yourself to an intimate dinner at the sophisticated Dux restaurant, on the premises (see the Dining chapter). If you must, there's also daily bus transportation to all the theme parks. The **Caribe Royale All-Suites Resort** sections off one of its three accommodation towers for "adults only." This means that while you may still have to deal with kids at the pool, they won't be running up and down your hallway all day. If you want to stay on WDW property, the **Coronado Springs Resort's** moderate pricing may appeal to families, but the convention center on its premises means a bunch of business travelers make it their home base and give it a slightly quieter edge.

The much pricier **Walt Disney World Dolphin** and **Walt Disney World Swan** hotels aren't actually owned by Disney (they're owned by Starwood Hotels), so the Mickey theme is toned down a notch or two, and there are fewer kids in the house. Noted architect Michael Graves—yes, he of the silver-and-blue toasters at Target—designed these striking, over-the-top buildings with rooftops graced respectively by a five-story-high giant swan and a dolphin fish. The Dolphin is the more whimsical of the two (witness the circuslike tent and dolphin fountains in the lobby), though both hotels have had their themes scaled down thanks to a redesign (with Graves at the helm yet again). "Unique" is an understatement. Guest rooms at both properties have a palette of silver-blue and white, and they include Starwood signature items, such as the Westin Heavenly Bed and Heavenly Bath treatments. The two resorts face Crescent Lake and share a slice of sandy beach—one of the best places in the World to watch Epcot's nightly fireworks. *Tip for canoodlers:* The outside beach and pool area can be quite romantic at night.

For honeymooners and romantics... First, don't even think about **Disney's Polynesian Resort**. This is the top

choice for honeymooners visiting Disney World, for no apparent reason. Only thing I can figure is that this resort sounds so romantic—a touch of the French Polynesian islands, warm breezes, thatched roofs. What you'll actually get is a nice enough room, but the resort itself is packed with diaper-clad crawlers and hot, harried parents. Watch out for the stroller traffic jams at the door. If you're willing to pay for the romantic atmosphere, you'll enjoy your stay more next door at the **Grand Floridian**—and since you're there, splurge (and I mean splurge) on a meal at the resort's small award-winning fine-dining restaurant, Victoria and Albert's.

The romance and lure of a national park lives on at **Disney's Wilderness Lodge**. So what if it's full of pretend hot springs and manufactured geysers—it's still one of Disney's best. The surrounding woods and somewhat secluded setting on Bay Lake Beach give a sense of privacy. Rent a bike and take a ride in the pines. The Wilderness is a great place to come home to—the towering wood-and-stone lobby is stunning. Wait until the sun starts to head for the other side of the world, then find a table for two at the small, upscale Hemingway's restaurant in the **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress** resort. After a fine dinner, stroll the lush grounds and then pick a private spot at the giant grotto pool. Listen to the waterfalls, and sneak into one of the tucked-away spas. Nothing says romance more than an Italian villa on the water, so it should come as no surprise that Universal's **Portofino Bay Hotel** is a top romantic getaway. Request a room with a private balcony overlooking the harbor and share a bottle of wine while you watch the sun set over the water. The oversize bathtubs and showers also lend to the intimate mood.

Aquatic wonderlands... The Orlando area has to have the largest concentration of swimming pools per square mile in the world. Every hotel, motel, campground, and resort has at least one, and often five or six. Lots of these may be your basic, dip-your-feet-in models, but there are also plenty of the spare-no-expense, over-the-top examples sure to fulfill your wettest and wildest dreams. Among my favorites is Stormalong Bay, the free-flowing fantasy pool shared by the **Disney Yacht** and **Beach Club resorts**. In the middle of the 3-acre pool is a giant pirate ship; kids climb in and zip down the water slide. Meanwhile, adults can relax in

the spas tucked away in rockscapes or enjoy the zero-entry sandy-bottom pool areas. For a tropical experience, Universal's **Royal Pacific Resort** offers up a zero-entry, 12,000-square-foot lagoon pool with its own beach and deck. Adults can seek serenity in the private cabanas and whirlpools. The pool at the **Hard Rock Hotel** gets my vote for best L.A.-hipster vibe, with a 240-foot slide, 12 underwater speakers, interactive fountains, private cabanas, and a sandy beach.

If you prefer languorous soaks in the sun and sensuous cool floats on the sparkling water, check out **Orlando World Center Marriott**, where guests have a choice of four pools: indoor, children's, sport, and the sprawling freshwater pool with its rock-framed waterfalls, four secluded spas, and fast-moving water slide. At the **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress**, there's a stunning free-form pool with grottoes, cascading waterfalls, and a water slide, all surrounded by a maze of tropical foliage and meandering walkways. You'll find spas tucked away in corners and hidden under waterfalls. If you like the feel of sand between your toes, stroll over to the beach, where you can build your own castle, go sailing, or take a dip in the lake.

Pamper palaces... Another day of jostling among the sweating masses, waiting in line for Splash Mountain and the Incredible Hulk coaster?!! Don't stress out. Instead, take a break and book a few hours at the spa. Stay at **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa**, **Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa**, Universal's **Portofino Bay Hotel** and its Mandara Spa, or the **Gaylord Palms Resort**, with its prestigious Canyon Ranch SpaClub, and you'll have the luxury of a full-service spa on-site. If those aren't enough to ease your tension, try the huge tri-level spa complex shared by the new **JW Marriott** and **Ritz-Carlton** at **Grande Lakes**. The services and amenities at the **Buena Vista Palace** are also top-notch. All the spas discussed above offer the standard treatments, as well as signature services and special packages. Of course, you don't have to be a guest to partake of the resort spas—but oh, how much easier it is to pop in for a wonderful massage and foot rub when it's only two floors away. Even better—have them come to you in your room.

Simple and cheap... Grottoes, waterfalls, fake environments, dotting bellcaps? Hell, you just want a clean room with two beds, a pool, and an ice machine nearby. And you want to pay a reasonable price (reasonable by tourist-town standards, anyway). No problem. For starters, you can't beat the **Microtel Inn and Suites**, a pleasant motel-style accommodation that always gets top marks with returning travelers on a budget. Who can argue with clean, bright rooms, a heated pool, snack bar, free continental breakfast, and free local calls (surprisingly a rarity in Orlando)—all for around \$62 to \$90 a night? Its convenient location, just off I-Drive, behind Wet 'n' Wild, is another plus. The rooms at the **Radisson Barcelo Hotel** on International Drive won't charm your pants off, but they're okay. Management has tried to spruce up the outdoor pool area with some trees and flowers, and you do get a refrigerator in the room and a restaurant on the premises. One great perk: Guests get free passes to the well-equipped YMCA Aquatic Center, located right behind the Radisson. Just down the street, the **Quality Inn Plaza**, located across from the Pointe Orlando shopping/entertainment complex, has some extra niceties. All rooms include a refrigerator, microwave, and coffeemaker, and outside there's a good-size pool. Throw in free breakfast and shuttles to the theme parks, and you've got a great deal for under \$80 a night. The **Tropical Palms Fun Resort** in Kissimmee offers spacious, separate home-style accommodations that management's dubbed "FunSuites." These include two bedrooms, sleeping loft, a pullout sofa in the living area, and a full kitchen (enough room for you and seven pals) for \$149 per night. In the chain department, clean hotel rooms, good pools, a free breakfast, free local calls, shuttles to main attractions, and a 100%-satisfaction guarantee mean you really can't go wrong with a **Hampton Inn**. You'll find many of them in the theme-park areas, but the best in terms of location is the Hampton Inn at Universal Studios on Windhover Drive.

And cheaper still... If you're really looking to spend micro-bucks, your best bets are the small, locally owned U.S. 192/Kissimmee motels. All of the following establishments charge less than \$60 a night. **Magic Castle Inn & Suites**, near Disney World on U.S. 192, is a family-owned property

offering a clean room at a budget price. They also offer a free continental breakfast and weekly rates that average out to around \$35 a night. As one guest explained, “We get up early; we’re gone all day. When we return, we take a dip in the pool and fall asleep. Why pay for a fancy place to stay?” Over by Universal, the **Days Inn Lakeside** is showing its age on the outside, but offers clean rooms, lakefront views, and a free shuttle to Universal Orlando. Rates are usually under \$60 a night. For the ultracheap, only one hostel remains in the Orlando-theme-park areas: The **Palm Lakefront Resort & Hostel** in Kissimmee. Formerly a Hostelling International property, amenities include a lakefront, a beach, a pool, paddleboats, and private family rooms, as well as dorm rooms. Be aware that you may end up sharing a room with up to five strangers in exchange for the average rates of around \$19. I’d personally rather coerce five friends to split a hotel room.

I want to be alone.... If privacy is what you seek in Orlando, you’ll have to stay in your room and lock the door. Otherwise, no matter when or where, you’ll be in a crowd. That said, there are a few spots that are more secluded than others. The **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress** is big enough to let you remain incognito—it’s quite possible to check in next to people you’ll never see again until checkout time. While you’re golfing, they’re horseback riding. While you’re playing tennis, they’re at the driving range. While you’re in one restaurant, they’re in another. In fact, you could both be at the pool at the same time and not bump into one another—the resort is that big. The **JW Marriott** and **Ritz-Carlton** share a 500-acre complex over in the Grande Lakes development. Lose yourself in the 40,000-square-foot spa or play golf until you can’t stand green anymore. The **Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center** takes privacy a step further, designing each room with individual doorbells and electronic DO NOT DISTURB signs.

Suite deals... Suite accommodations are a big deal in the Orlando area. No wonder: After battling the masses all day, the idea of waiting in line for dinner and then bunking down with your buddies in a tiny hotel room may not sound like your idea of a vacation. You want a place to sprawl out and relax, with a separate room for sleeping and

a cold beer in the fridge. Even if you pay a little more for the room itself, just think of what you could save by purchasing snacks and meals from the grocery store instead of some overpriced restaurant (Orlando has plenty of those, too). The six-story, 350-room **Residence Inn SeaWorld International Center** is one of the newest all-suite properties on the block. Families, business travelers, and groups flock here, piling into the one- and two-bedroom suites (studios are also available). The under-\$300-a-night price point for a two-bedroom suite is a bargain when you consider the extras: free shuttle to SeaWorld, Universal's theme parks, and Wet 'n' Wild; fully equipped kitchens; free hot breakfast buffet; pool (overrun by young tykes); sports courts; and more. If you're traveling with kids, they even have their own poolside bar that serves pizza and ice cream. At **Staybridge Suites**, you get a spacious living area, full kitchen, two bedrooms, and two bathrooms for less than you'd pay for a tiny room at the deluxe Disney properties and plush Orlando resorts. There's also a small pool and an on-premises restaurant and lounge, and you're within walking distance to about a hundred restaurants and shops. Free continental breakfast and free shuttles to Disney World and Orlando International Airport make this an even bigger deal.

You'll pay more at the **Buena Vista Suites** on World Center Drive, just a mile or so from Disney World, where rooms are smaller, the suites have only one bathroom, and there's a mini-kitchen setup (small fridge, microwave oven, and coffeemaker). On the other hand, the rooms were recently upgraded and the public areas are more deluxe; they include a large swimming pool, exercise room, and tennis courts. For a more tropical-flavored escape, try the neighboring **Caribe Royale All-Suites Resort**. It's all pink and green with lots of foliage, giant palm trees, and pretty flowers spread out on a 30-acre parcel just outside Disney World. Unfortunately, the high-rise buildings give it away—no, Dorothy, you're not in the Caribbean, either. Still, the suites offer a bit more space than a standard hotel room, plus kitchen facilities. They come in lots of variations; the standard package is living room plus bedroom, while the deluxe suite gives you a pullout couch in the living area. What the designers saved on the suites (they kept them pretty basic, with just enough room), they put into

the public areas. The free-form swimming pool has a 75-foot water slide, whirlpools, and a poolside bar and grill, plus an adults-only sun deck.

Home away from home... What? No cartoon characters, no overdone themes, no giant water slides? The **Disney Vacation Club** (DVC for those in the know) is Disney's answer to timesharing. They've taken the already tricky concept and complicated it even further, so the ownership system is about as easy to understand as a computer manual. Disney rents out individual villas and suites when they aren't in use, so you don't have to pay the exorbitant buy-in costs. (Though you'll still pay a pretty penny—\$299–\$1,099 depending on the size of your unit.) Forget trying to get a place here during peak season; they're booked up for years to come. But if you go off-season, you might get lucky, so ask about it when you call Disney reservations. The DVC resorts offer the best of two worlds: a Disney property with a giant pool and lots of activities and amenities, and comfortable home-style accommodations, complete with kitchens. The suites are roomy, bright, and airy, with a choice of studios, one-bedrooms, two-bedrooms, and grand villas. Properties included in the Disney timeshares are the **Old Key West Resort**, the **Beach Club Villas**, the **BoardWalk Villas**, the **Wilderness Lodge Villas**, and the new **Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa**.

Fairways in the foreground... If your idea of the perfect vacation spot includes an 18-hole golf course outside your door and a pro on staff, start packing your clubs. The Orlando area has a number of top-ranked golf resorts. Only minutes from Disney is **Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club and Lodge**, consistently ranked one of the top courses in the country. If you have that obsessive, gotta-golf-every-day passion, you'll fit right in at Bay Hill. The lodge-style rooms at the resort are modest, but nobody notices. They come for Palmer's renowned golf academy, in hopes of shaving off a few strokes from their score, and for the demanding play on 27 championship holes. Nongolfing partners will not have to pray for rain when they decide to stay at the **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress**—there's plenty to keep everyone busy at this opulent, anything-your-little-heart-desires resort. First, the golf course: a

Nicklaus-designed championship layout, inspired by Scotland's classic St. Andrews links, with lots of vistas and heathered fairways. Second, the golf school: one of the best, with state-of-the-art teaching techniques. Finally, the resort: one of the finest around, with sprawling grounds, a giant pool, fine restaurants, tasteful accommodations, and more activities than you'll be able to handle in one vacation. The sprawling **Grande Lakes** complex features a Greg Norman-designed par-72 course adjacent to the **Ritz-Carlton Orlando**. Extending the resort's unparalleled tradition of service onto the green, the innovative Caddie-Concierge Program—the first of its kind at any golf resort in Central Florida—assigns each group a knowledgeable, professional attendant to enhance the golf experience and take care of the guest's needs while on the course. In the same class is the **Orlando World Center Marriott**, a spectacular high-rise hotel with six restaurants, eight tennis courts, and expansive, free-flowing pools with slides and spas. Did we mention golf? Marriott's Golf Club is situated on 130 acres, just off Disney's doorstep. Improve your game at John Jacob's School of Golf, which was once named the "Golf School of Choice" by *Golf Magazine*. The club also offers practice and driving ranges, private or group clinics, and one of the best pro shops in the country. Of course, **Disney World's** no Mickey Mouse operation (well, you know what I mean) when it comes to golf. There are five championship courses on WDW property—Eagle Pines, Palm, Magnolia, Osprey Ridge, and Lake Buena Vista—offering a total of 99 holes, as well as three pro shops and 15 pros on hand. (See the Getting Outside chapter for more info.) Stay at any Disney resort and you'll receive preferred tee times. **Tee tip:** If you plan to go golfing more than park-hopping, look into one of Disney's Magic Your Way packages. These come in a variety of price ranges and configurations, and they can include a choice of Disney accommodations, park admissions, dining, golf, transportation—you name it.

Condo-mania... Condos and rental homes are often the cheapest way to go for large groups in Orlando. It's possible to rent a two- or three-bedroom condo or house with a community pool for \$100 to \$150 a night, though you can certainly spend more if you want even more space and

amenities (even within a given property, there's usually a wide range of price options). The word about these bargains has been slow to get out, but this type of lodging is definitely catching on. The disadvantage is that it feels like, well, a home, instead of a resort—the maid service is usually minimal—and if you crave action, you'll hate it, as it's pretty dead on the premises. Spending all your waking hours at the attractions (that's why you came here, isn't it?) might help. **All Star Vacation Homes** (Tel 407/997-0733 or 888/249-1779; www.allstarvacationhomes.com) offers a large selection of villas, town houses, and elegant single-family homes in Kissimmee, all within a few minutes of Disney World. Spacious living quarters, fully equipped kitchens, washers and dryers, air-conditioning, a community pool, a clubhouse, and rec areas are often part of the package. For more condominium info, ask for the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau's free Planning Kit. It lists several other condo and vacation-home rental agencies in the area.

Taking care of business... In addition to the hotels inside Walt Disney World proper, six off-Disney properties feature on-site meeting and convention facilities. **The Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center** is going after the upscale convention crowd in a big way. The massive convention center and exhibition and meeting spaces lure the big crowds, while on-site amenities and services try to keep everyone happy. Lush atriums filled with tropical plants, bogs, swamps, caves—even a replica of the *Castillo de San Marcos*, the oldest Spanish fort in America, and a “fountain of youth” complete the Florida theme. Resort restaurants are top-notch and you'll love the on-site Canyon Ranch SpaClub. The **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress** is also a favorite among the working crowd—well, among those who are supposed to be working, anyway. It's tough to put the nose to the grindstone when you're surrounded by 1,500 acres of lush grounds, waterfalls, a massive swimming pool, world-class golf, an equestrian center, and more. But, hey, if the company's paying, why not? Meeting planners have 65,000 square feet of space to play with, including 7,000 square feet of prefunction space, 16,768 square feet of exhibition space, and 29 meeting rooms, all within walking distance of the golf club and

villas. If your VIPs need to helicopter in, you can arrange landing clearance at the resort's helipad. Only a bit less sybaritic, with more than 200,000 square feet of meeting space, **Orlando World Center Marriott** ranks as one of the largest meeting resorts in Florida; it's a magnet for really big groups. The individual business traveler is provided for, too, with a complete business center—equipped with fax, copy machine, and IBM and Macintosh computers—and a full-service audiovisual production unit. Off-hours, the resort offers more recreational opportunities than you'll have time for: swimming, golf, a driving range, tennis courts, a health club, and, of course, all those Orlando/Disney attractions nearby. Bet you end up playing hooky. Not quite in the same class is the **Buena Vista Palace**, a 27-acre property near Downtown Disney, which features translation and secretarial services, fax, computers, and photocopying at its business center. The resort has 44 meeting rooms, a ballroom, and a conference/exhibit hall. This place looks all business—low ceilings, dark halls—until you get to the spa. Be sure to schedule a visit to this full-service nirvana for a massage, body wrap, facial, or a hydrotherapy treatment—way more fun than catching the bus to Disney World on your afternoon off. The prices are kinda high for the ho-hum rooms, but the outside swimming area and walkways are pleasant, and you'll get a good view of sunsets against the skyline (and, later, the nightly fireworks) from the lounge on the 27th floor. High-powered executives favor the posh, subdued **Peabody Orlando Hotel**, right across from the convention center. Its pale and plush surroundings are very soothing to come home to after a day on the convention floor, and buttoned-down types may well prefer such traditional decor to the tropical riot of most other Orlando lodgings. The high-rise **Renaissance Orlando Resort** is a major convention facility, catering more to business than pleasure, but it's near SeaWorld. It also features the world's largest atrium lobby, with a \$600,000 tropical aviary and a pool of more than 200 rare Japanese koi.

Happy campers... Let's suppose your blood is already thin and you can handle the sweatbox conditions of Central Florida (and let's suppose the bugs don't bother you)—well, then, camping just may be the way to go. Or perhaps

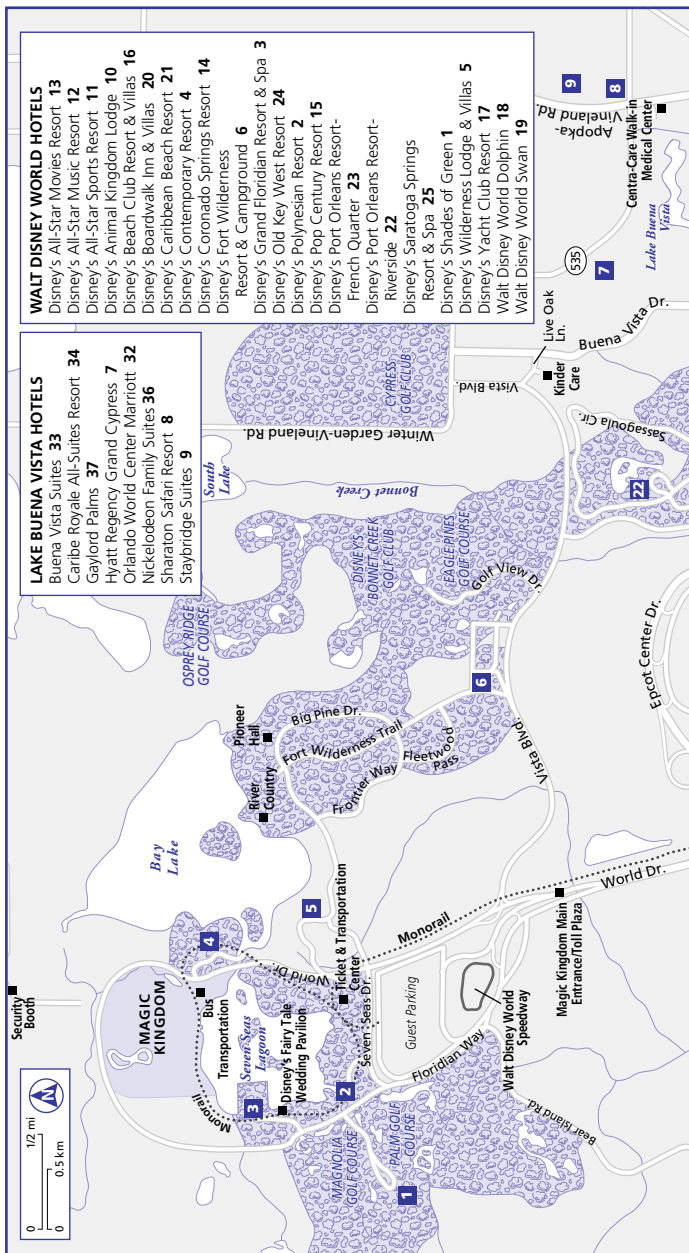
you have one of those traveling homes on wheels and just need a place to plug in. If so, you're in luck. Disney's **Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground** is downright plush by camping standards. More than 700 acres of woods surround the campground, where you'll find sites for tents and RVs. There are also a number of "wilderness cabins" for rent that accommodate up to six people, with separate living space, fully equipped kitchens, telephone, and daily housekeeping. Of course, prices have gone up, but call way ahead, because these spots fill up months in advance; campsites and hookups run about \$39 to \$92 a night, while wilderness cabins rent for \$239 to \$349. At this huge campground, you'll find snack bars, restaurants, bike and boat rentals, game rooms, horseback riding, nightly campfires, movies and entertainment, tennis, two swimming pools, and a small beach. Not exactly roughing it! You'll also have access to theme parks by boat or bus. The **Kissimmee KOA Kampground** features spaces for tents and RVs, including slide-outs. A pool, bicycle rentals, fishing, and high-speed Wi-Fi Internet access are available to guests. Value Kard holders get extra discounts, so it might be worth the \$14 or so to join up. Then you can head for the theme parks with the money you saved on lodging. (A shuttle runs to Disney World, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld.) However, be advised: Wilderness camping this ain't. It's more akin to pitching a tent in the parking lot at Wal-Mart.

Doggie digs... Can't bear to leave your four-legged treasure at home? No prob. You'll find lots of places where Fido is welcome in Orlando, including the **Seralago Hotel & Suites Main Gate East** and **Residence Inn SeaWorld International Center**. Disney resorts, except for the **Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground**, do not allow pets. On-site kennels are available, however, at Epcot, Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, and MGM Studios. And overnight boarding is available at the Ticket and Transportation Center for Disney resort guests. Kennels for day use are also available at SeaWorld and Universal Orlando. The three on-site Universal hotels—**Portofino Bay Hotel**, **Hard Rock Hotel**, and the **Royal Pacific Resort**—are run by Loews, which means pets are not only welcome as guests but are pampered alongside their owners.

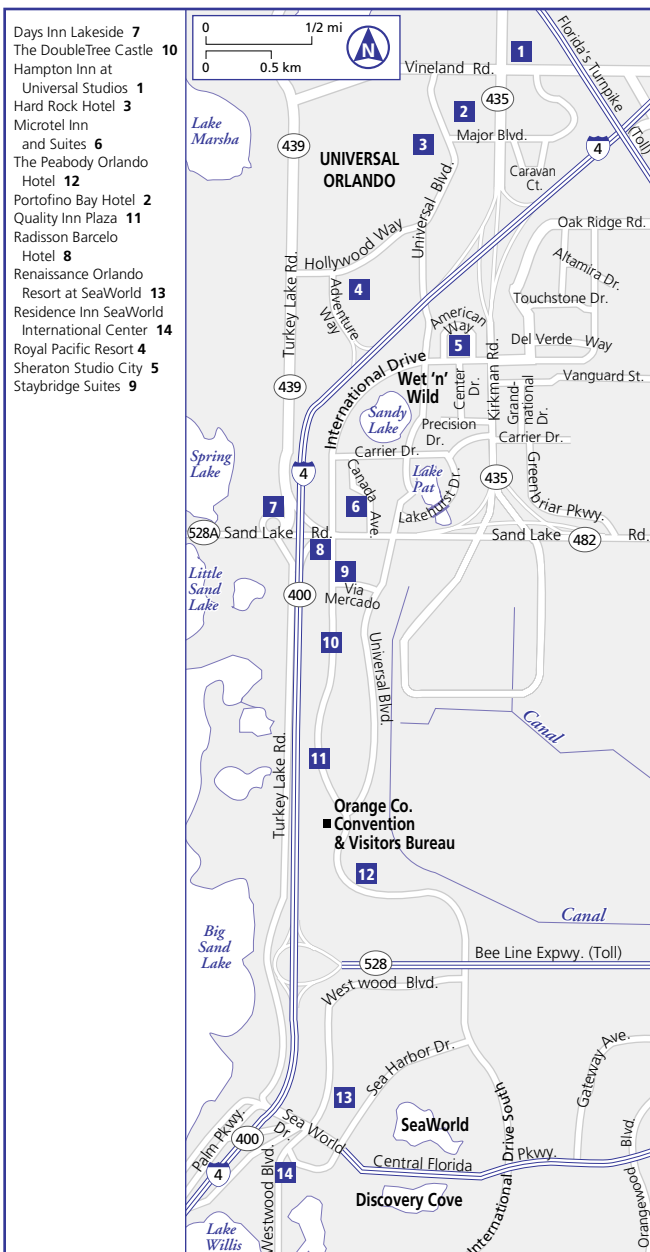
Map 2: Orlando Accommodations



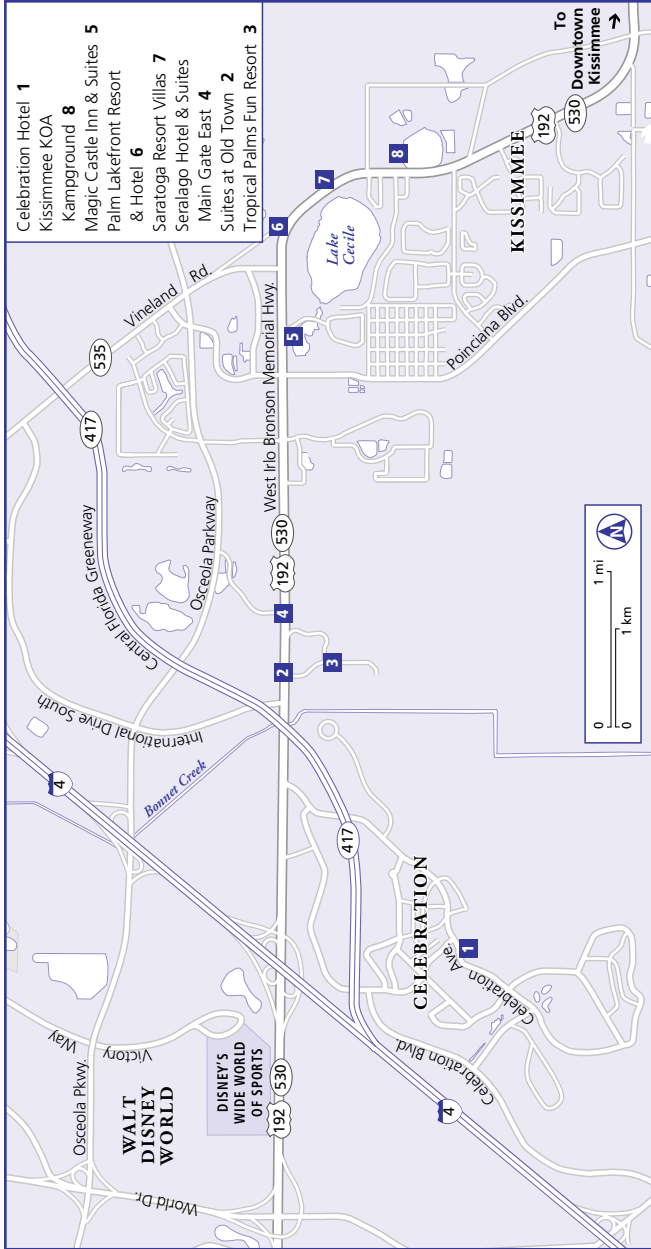
Map 3: WDW & Lake Buena Vista Accommodations



Map 4: Universal Orlando & International Drive–Area Accommodations



Map 5: U.S. 192/Kissimmee Accommodations





The Index

\$\$\$\$\$	over \$200
\$\$\$\$	\$150–\$200
\$\$\$	\$90–\$149
\$\$	\$50–\$89
\$	under \$50

Price ratings are based on the lowest price quoted for a standard double room in high season, including taxes and charges. Unless otherwise noted, rooms have air-conditioning, phones, private bathrooms, and TVs.

Note: All hotels with names preceded by the word “Disney” are on Walt Disney World property, as are the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin.

The following abbreviations are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express
DC	Diners Club
DISC	Discover
MC	MasterCard
V	Visa

Arnold Palmer’s Bay Hill Club and Lodge (p. 42) ORLANDO This country club/mini-resort is a favorite among golfers, who come to test their skill on the top-rated golf courses and to attend Palmer’s Academy. Lots of packages available.... *Tel* 407/876-2429 (*toll-free* 888/422-9445). *Fax* 407/876-1035. *www.bayhill.com*. 9000 Bay Hill Blvd. 70 rooms. AE, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on p. 47.

Best Western Lake Buena Vista (p. 21) LAKE BUENA VISTA Located near Downtown Disney, this 18-story high-rise sits on a pretty lake, and many rooms offer great views of water and the World. But that’s the only reason to consider staying here, as the staff is often rude and rooms are showing their age.... *Tel* 407/828-2424 (*toll-free* 800/348-3765). *Fax* 407/828-8933. *www.orlandoresorthotel.com*. 2000 Hotel Plaza Blvd. 325 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Buena Vista Palace (p. 38) LAKE BUENA VISTA This 27-acre hotel is pleasant, offering a fabulous location and nice service but

average rooms. The on-site full-service spa will cure any aches after a long day at the parks.... *Tel 407/827-3228 (toll-free 866/397-6516). Fax 407/827-6034. www.buenavistapalace.com. 1900 Buena Vista Dr. 1,012 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Buena Vista Suites (p. 41) LAKE BUENA VISTA This basic all-suite property offers accommodations with mini-kitchens at a decent price. A free breakfast buffet and shuttle to the Disney parks add to the value, but if you want something a little more upscale, try the Caribe Royale Resort next door.... *Tel 407/239-8588 (toll-free 800/537-7737). Fax 407/239-1401. www.bvsuites.com. 8203 World Center Dr. 279 suites. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Caribe Royale All-Suites Resort (p. 28) LAKE BUENA VISTA Lushly planted grounds give this high-rise suite property a slight Caribbean feel. Recent renovations include improvements to the lobby and a new fitness center. The 250,000-gallon free-form pool will inspire you to take a dip, and Tower III's "adults only" accommodations offer asylum from the kid parade.... *Tel 407/238-8000 (toll-free 800/823-8300). Fax 407/238-8050. www.cariberoyale.com. 8101 World Center Dr. 1,218 suites, 120 villas. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Celebration Hotel (p. 30) CELEBRATION Elegant and lovely old Florida-style hotel, perfect for adults who want to get away from tourist central. Too bad it's in Disney's manufactured town of Celebration, which tries too hard to be the perfect Stepford version of small-town America.... *Tel 407/566-6000. Fax 407/566-1844. www.celebrationhotel.com. 700 Bloom St. 115 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Days Inn Lakeside (p. 40) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE Families flock to this hotel on the lake but the buildings are showing signs of wear and tear. The lakefront views and free shuttle to Universal make this budget property a little more attractive.... *Tel 407/351-1900 (toll-free 800/777-3297). Fax 407/352-2690. 7335 Sand Lake Rd. 695 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Disney's All-Star Movies Resort (p. 34) WDW Giant-size characters from Disney movies adorn this budget-priced property. Loud and busy, but fun if you're a Disney movie fan and don't mind midget-size rooms.... *Tel 407/939-7000. Fax 407/939-7111. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1991 W. Buena Vista Dr. 1,920 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's All-Star Music Resort (p. 34) WDW Themed to different musical styles, this kitschy value resort is a favorite with

cheerleading groups. Avoid it like the plague if there's a competition going on.... *Tel 407/939-6000. Fax 407/939-7222. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1801 W. Buena Vista Dr. 1,920 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's All-Star Sports Resort (p. 34) WDW Disney's salute to big-league sports can be crowded and noisy, especially when school sports competitions are being held at Disney's Wide World of Sports.... *Tel 407/939-5000. Fax 407/939-7333. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1701 W. Buena Vista Dr. 1,920 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge (p. 28) WDW Nestled behind Animal Kingdom, this African-themed resort offers panoramic views of a 33-acre savanna brimming with birds and exotic animals. Close to the Disney hubbub, but removed enough to appeal to those not totally Disney-enamored.... *Tel 407/938-3000. Fax 407/938-4799. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 2901 Osceola Pkwy. 1,293 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Beach Club Resort (p. 33) WDW This is Disney's attempt to mimic Cape Cod's grand summer hotels circa 1870, and they do it well. The casual ambience is courtesy of wicker furniture, pastel colors, and seashell decor. Reasons to book here: Storm-along Bay, a great mini-water park, will cool you off, as will Beaches & Cream's ice cream concoctions. The short walk to Epcot is another plus.... *Tel 407/934-8000. Fax 407/934-3850. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1800 Epcot Resorts Blvd. 583 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Beach Club Villas (p. 42) WDW The timeshare arm of the Beach Club, the Villas range from studios to two-bedroom arrangements. Often available for rentals, the villas are more expensive than regular rooms (but are sometimes available when the regular Beach Club is sold out, especially for longer stays).... *Tel 407/934-2175. Fax 407/934-3850. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1800 Epcot Resorts Blvd. 280 rooms and suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's BoardWalk Inn (p. 32) WDW Themed after the Eastern seaboard of the 1930s, it comes complete with an actual boardwalk filled with shops and clubs (Atlantic City back when it was still a beauty). Inn rooms seem a bit smaller than comparable resorts; water-view rooms can be noisy in the evenings. A short walk around the promenade brings you to Epcot.... *Tel 407/939-5100. Fax 407/939-5150. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd. 378 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's BoardWalk Villas (p. 32) WDW Part of the same complex as the BoardWalk Inn, these sometimes pricey accommodations (sold as timeshares, but also rented to visitors) range from small studios to three-bedroom villas.... *Tel 407/939-5100. Fax 407/939-5150. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd. 532 villas. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort (p. 28) WDW Close to Epcot, this island-themed property is popular with families; activity and noise levels can be high. Six pools, a small beach, boat rentals, and a food court are spread out over more than 200 acres. Some rooms are a half-mile hike from the main building, so request accordingly.... *Tel 407/934-3400. Fax 407/934-3288. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 900 Cayman Way. 2,112 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Contemporary Resort (p. 32) WDW The tower rooms of this A-frame building have views of the Magic Kingdom, Bay Lake, and/or Seven Seas Lagoon, but you won't know which you get until check-in. Avoid the garden-wing rooms, which are far from the monorail station and restaurants. Recent upgrades put it among Disney's top rooms.... *Tel 407/824-1000. Fax 407/824-3539. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 4600 N. World Dr. 1,053 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Coronado Springs Resort (p. 34) WDW Southwestern in theme, this resort is one of the best on WDW property, although the on-grounds convention center can make rooms hard to come by. The grounds include waterfalls, a swimming pool with giant pyramidal water slide, and a 15-acre lagoon. Request a casita room to get away from the noise by the pool.... *Tel 407/939-1000. Fax 407/939-1001. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1000 W. Buena Vista Dr. 1,967 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground (p. 46) WDW Accommodations at this 700-plus-acre Disney campground run the gamut from campsites and RV hookups to "Wilderness Cabins." Back-to-nature amenities include walking and biking trails, boating, fishing, horseback riding, swimming, campfires, and more. The Trails End restaurant offers one of Disney's best all-you-can-eat dining deals, but the wait for a bus can be infernal.... *Tel 407/824-2900. Fax 407/824-3508. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 4510 N. Fort Wilderness Trail. 788 campsites, 407 cabins. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa (p. 32) WDW Extravagant, with a lavish turn-of-the-20th-century Victorian design, the

resort's lobby alone may make your jaw drop. Several award-winning restaurants, a full-service spa, monorail access, and extraordinary detailing...but to truly justify the hefty price tag, a lagoon view is the only way to go.... *Tel 407/824-3000. Fax 407/824-3186. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 4401 Grand Floridian Way. 900 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Old Key West Resort (p. 42) WDW Sunny, large studios and villas, furnished in light woods and subtle island prints, are the hallmark of this Disney Vacation Club property. Accommodations come with fully equipped kitchens. Hop the water shuttle to Downtown Disney.... *Tel 407/827-7700. Fax 407/827-7710. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1510 N. Cove Rd. 497 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Polynesian Resort (p. 28) WDW South Pacific in theme, this resort is popular with honeymooners...who should get as far away from it as they can. Too many kids means the nightly luau dinner is the only reason to come.... *Tel 407/824-2000. Fax 407/824-3174. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1600 Seven Seas Dr. 853 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Pop Century Resort (p. 34) WDW Disney's newest inexpensive option showcases pop culture with staircases fashioned out of yo-yos and Rubik's Cubes, and a three-story-tall laptop computer—all masking the same basic rooms as the All-Stars.... *Tel 407/938-4000. Fax 407/938-4040. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1050 Century Dr. 2,880 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Port Orleans Resort—French Quarter (p. 33) WDW The Big Easy's French Quarter a la Disney. Wrought-iron railings, courtyards, and old-fashioned street lamps help make up for the modest rooms. You don't have to show any body parts here to get beads.... *Tel 407/934-5000. Fax 407/934-5353. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 2201 Orleans Dr. 1,008 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Port Orleans Resort—Riverside (p. 34) WDW The Mississippi Delta and the Old South, ranging from plantation mansions to bayou cabins with simple but tasteful decor. One of Disney's better values, you get six swimming pools, boat and bike rentals, and a water shuttle to Downtown Disney.... *Tel 407/934-6000. Fax 407/934-5777. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1251 Dixie Dr. 2,048 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa (p. 38) WDW Inspired by 19th-century Saratoga Springs, a popular New York summer retreat, the resort's got Victorian-themed studios and villas with kitchens, a "natural springs" pool, and water shuttle access to Downtown Disney. But its main asset is the renowned full-service spa.... *Tel 407/934-7639. Fax 407/827-1151. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1901 Buena Vista Dr. 552 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Shades of Green (p. 35) WDW Just west of the Polynesian, this resort is reserved for active and retired military personnel and their families; rates are determined by rank. Renovated and expanded in 2004, it's the best bargain at Disney, bar none.... *Tel 407/824-3600. Fax 407/824-3640. www.shadesofgreen.org. 1950 W. Magnolia Palm Dr. 599 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Wilderness Lodge (p. 29) WDW You'll think you're in a ski lodge in the Rockies at this spectacular resort on Bay Lake. A favorite with families due to its proximity to the Magic Kingdom and availability of bunk beds in some rooms.... *Tel 407/824-3200. Fax 407/824-3232. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 901 Timberline Dr. 728 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Disney's Yacht Club Resort (p. 33) WDW Like its Siamese twin, the Beach Club (the resorts share all facilities), this resort's a Disney replica of turn-of-the-20th-century New England's sea coast. Posher than its sister, with nautical touches: brass fixtures, boats, dark woods. It's pricey, but not a bad place to drop anchor.... *Tel 407/934-7000. Fax 407/934-3450. www.waltdisneyworld.com. 1700 Epcot Resorts Blvd. 630 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

The Doubletree Castle (p. 27) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This towering purple and pink hotel makes for a fun place to stay, if you like this sort of thing. Inside, you'll find a whimsical decor (think jester colors and jewel-bedecked headboards), a backdrop of Renaissance music, and the chirping of crickets and birds. International Drive location, and a bargain in the theme category.... *Tel 407/345-1511 (toll-free 800/952-2785). Fax 407/248-8181. www.doubletreecastle.com. 8629 International Dr. 216 rooms. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Doubletree Guest Suites in the Walt Disney Resort (p. 21) LAKE BUENA VISTA Located at the tail end of Hotel Plaza Boulevard from Downtown Disney, this hotel is the best value for families who still want to be on Disney property but not at a Disney resort. Two-room suites sleep up to six. Other amenities include

a pool, tennis courts, a refrigerator/wet bar/microwave area in each room, complimentary shuttles to the Disney parks and Downtown Disney, and yummy chocolate-chip cookies upon check-in.... *Tel 407/934-1000 (toll-free 800/222-8733). Fax 407/934-1015. www.doubletree.com. 2305 Hotel Plaza Blvd. 229 suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center (p. 31) LAKE BUENA VISTA This grand resort-style property a mile from Disney is a magnet for convention-going suits and their spouses. Its indoor atrium is themed to reflect the geography of the state from St. Augustine to Key West and the Everglades, complete with a fort, ship, and fountain of youth. A bit over the top but, hey—this is Orlando. The resort's four signature restaurants and the premium on-site Canyon Ranch SpaClub are a big plus.... *Tel 407/586-0315. Fax 407/586-0397. www.gaylordpalms.com. 6000 W. Osceola Pkwy. 1,406 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Grosvenor Resort (p. 21) LAKE BUENA VISTA Subtly British-themed complete with a Sherlock Holmes-inspired mystery dinner theater. A scaled-down Disney Character breakfast is available 3 days a week. Conveniently located next to the Downtown Disney entertainment complex.... *Tel 407/828-4444 (toll-free 800/624-4109). Fax 407/828-8192. www.grosvenorresort.com. 1850 Hotel Plaza Blvd. 626 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Hampton Inn at Universal Studios (p. 39) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE Basic hotel rooms but with pools, free breakfast, local calls, shuttles to main attractions, and a 100% satisfaction guarantee, you really can't go wrong. In addition to this location, the chain has more than 10 properties in the Orlando area.... *Tel 407/351-6716 (toll-free 800/763-1100). Fax 407/363-1711. www.hamptoninn.com. 5621 Windhover Dr. 120 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Hard Rock Hotel (p. 33) UNIVERSAL ORLANDO This is a happening, AAA four-diamond hot spot in the Universal Studios Orlando resort area. Impressive rock-'n'-roll memorabilia throughout; outside is a giant pool with a sand beach, water slide, and piped-in underwater music. Walk to Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios parks or take the complimentary water shuttle. A Loews hotel, so it also has that chain's benefits.... *Tel 407/503-7625 (toll-free 800/235-6937). Fax 407/503-7625. www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando_hard_rock. 5800 Universal Blvd. 650 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort (p. 21) LAKE BUENA VISTA It's a Hilton; what more can we say? Expect to pay more for its location near the Downtown Disney entertainment area.... Tel 407/827-4000 (toll-free 800/782-4414). Fax 407/827-3805. www.hilton.com. 1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd. 814 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Hotel Royal Plaza (p. 21) LAKE BUENA VISTA Some of the best deals amongst the Downtown Disney hotels can be found at this property. Every room has a sleeper sofa and coffeemaker... Tel 407/828-2828 (toll-free 800/248-7890). Fax 407/827-6338. www.royalplaza.com. 1905 Hotel Plaza Blvd. 394 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress (p. 30) LAKE BUENA VISTA This self-contained 1,500-acre megaresort definitely ups the wow factor. A half-acre swimming pool, a private lake, an equestrian center, 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus–designed golf, a 21-acre lake, and a kids' program are among the many amenities. Minutes from Disney.... Tel 407/239-1234 (toll-free 800/239-3800). Fax 407/239-3800. www.grandcypress.hyatt.com. 1 Grand Cypress Blvd. 750 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on p. 48.

JW Marriott Orlando, Grande Lakes (p. 31) ORLANDO Luxury resort situated on 500 acres with lush, tropical landscaping at the Grande Lakes development minutes east of SeaWorld. Shares amenities with the neighboring Ritz-Carlton, including a Greg Norman–designed golf course and a 40,000-square-foot spa.... Tel 407/206-2300 (toll-free 800/228-9290). Fax 407/206-2301. www.grandelakes.com. 4040 Central Florida Pkwy. 1,064 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on p. 47.

Kissimmee KOA Kampground (p. 46) KISSIMMEE This recently renovated campground features spaces for tents and RVs, including slide-outs. Pool, bicycle rentals, fishing, and Wi-Fi Internet access are also available. Value Kard holders get extra discounts. More primitive than rustic.... Tel 407/396-2400 (toll-free 800/562-7791). www.koa.com/where/fl/09329. 2644 Happy Camper Place. 200 sites. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$-\$\$

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Magic Castle Inn & Suites (p. 39) KISSIMMEE A clean budget-priced family-run motel with a pool minutes from Disney in Kissimmee. Free continental breakfast and local calls. Weekly rates available; ask about the Internet special.... Tel 407/396-2212 (toll-free 800/446-5669). www.magicorlando.com. 5055 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192). 107 rooms. AE, MC, V. \$

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Microtel Inn and Suites (p. 39) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This property is centrally located just off International Drive behind Wet 'n' Wild and offers clean, basic rooms and suites at a budget price and even throws in free breakfast and local calls.... *Tel 407/226-9887 (toll-free 800/457-0077). Fax 407/226-9877. www.microtelsuitesorlando.com. 7531 Canada Ave. 128 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn (p. 22) LAKE BUENA VISTA This top-notch place for families sports the only Nickelodeon character appearances outside of Universal Studios. Conveniently located on the doorstep to Disney World.... *Tel 407/387-5437 (toll-free 866/462-6425). www.nickhotel.com. 14500 Continental Gateway. 800 suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Orlando World Center Marriott (p. 30) LAKE BUENA VISTA One of the top places to stay in Orlando. You'll love the grotto swimming pool with waterfalls and hidden spas, plus the 200-acre golf course. Upper floors facing towards Disney have great views of nightly fireworks.... *Tel 407/239-4200 (toll-free 800/621-0638). Fax 407/238-8777. www.marriottworldcenter.com. 8701 World Center Dr. 2,000 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Palm Lakefront Resort & Hostel (p. 40) KISSIMMEE This lakefront property on Lake Cecile offers dorm-style rooms (separate women's and men's quarters), up to six to a room; private family rooms are also available. Bare-bones basic accommodations with a price to match. Minutes from Disney World.... *Tel 407/396-1759. Fax 407/396-1598. www.orlandohostels.com. 4840 W. Irla Bronson Hwy. (U.S. 192). 9 dorm rooms and 34 private rooms. MC, V. \$-\$\$*

See Map 5 on p. 51.

The Peabody Orlando Hotel (p. 36) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This gracious and elegant hotel across from the Convention Center is made for those wanting to get away from Disney madness and other people's kids. Its I-Drive location is close to the action without being smothered by it. Home to the famous Peabody Ducks and the award-winning Dux restaurant.... *Tel 407/352-4000 (toll-free 800/732-2639). Fax 407/351-0073. www.peabodyorlando.com. 9801 International Dr. 891 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Portofino Bay Hotel (p. 29) UNIVERSAL ORLANDO Universal Orlando's first on-site resort hotel and its most deluxe. This lush and lovely Italian-themed hotel features imported paintings and

plantings, butlers, water-shuttle, and a full-service spa. The only Universal property with two pool areas and a bocce court. Ask for a room with a balcony overlooking the water.... *Tel 407/503-1000 (toll-free 888/273-1311). www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando_portofino_bay.* 5601 Universal Blvd. 750 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Quality Inn Plaza (p. 39) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE Simple rooms, pool, restaurant, and lounge on premises, shuttle service to attractions. All rooms include refrigerator, microwave, and coffee-maker. Across from Pointe Orlando.... *Tel 407/996-8585 (toll-free 800/999-8585). Fax 407/996-6839. www.qualityinn-orlando.com.* 9000 International Dr. 1,020 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$ \$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Radisson Barcelo Hotel (p. 39) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This hotel on International Drive has a good location and free admission to the YMCA Aquatic Center next door. Tower rooms also have microwaves.... *Tel 407/345-0505 (toll-free 800/333-3333). Fax 407/352-5894. www.orlando-hotelbarcelo.com.* 8444 International Dr. 300 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$ \$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld (p. 45) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This high-rise upscale Marriott hotel, located directly across from SeaWorld, has large rooms, four on-site restaurants, an adjacent golf course, swimming pool, and fitness center.... *Tel 407/351-5555 (toll-free 800/327-6677). Fax 407/351-9991. www.marriott.com.* 6677 Sea Harbor Dr. 842 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Residence Inn SeaWorld International Center (p. 41) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE What's to say? You'll get the usual room decor in this all-suite property near SeaWorld. Complimentary breakfast buffet is included.... *Tel 407/313-3600 (toll-free 800/331-3131). Fax 407/313-3611. www.residenceinnseaworld.com.* 11000 Westwood Blvd. 350 suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes (p. 31) ORLANDO Über-luxury resort situated on 500 acres with lush, tropical landscaping just east of SeaWorld. Shares amenities with the neighboring JW Marriott, including a Greg Norman-designed golf course and a 40,000-square-foot spa. Minutes from SeaWorld.... *Tel 407/206-2400 (toll-free 800/241-3333). Fax 407/206-2401. www.grandelakes.com.* 4012 Central Florida Pkwy. 584 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on p. 47.

Royal Pacific Resort (p. 28) UNIVERSAL ORLANDO This South Pacific/Asian-themed resort is a favorite of families with its zero-entry pool, weekly luau, and kids' activities. Emeril's Polynesian restaurant, Tchoup Chop, is also on the property.... *Tel 407/503-3000 (toll-free 800/235-6937). www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando_royal_pacific.* 6300 Hollywood Way. 1,050 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Saratoga Resort Villas (p. 31) KISSIMMEE Located just east of the intersection of 192 and 535 in Kissimmee, this resort may not look like much from the road. But tucked inside are two- and three-bedroom bi-level villas with full kitchens and two full bathrooms—all at reasonable prices. Complimentary shuttle to Disney.... *Tel 407/397-0555 (toll-free 800/222-8733). Fax 407/397-1968. www.saratogaresortvillas.com.* 4787 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy. (U.S. 192). 150 villas. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Seralago Hotel & Suites Main Gate East (p. 46) KISSIMMEE Comfortable rooms, kitchenettes, a kids' program, including Kid-Suites, a pool, and a shuttle to Disney. Families will also appreciate the kids-eat-free program.... *Tel 407/396-4488 (toll-free 800/366-5437). Fax 407/396-8915. www.seralagohotel.com.* 5678 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy. (U.S. 192). 614 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Sheraton Safari Resort (p. 29) LAKE BUENA VISTA Can't afford Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge? This fanciful hotel gives the African-safari motif full play as well, with leopard-spotted carpeting, woodcarvings, African prints, a python water slide, and Olympic-size pool. You can't beat the location either (there are lots of restaurants and shops nearby).... *Tel 407/239-0444 (toll-free 800/645-7666). Fax 407/239-1778. www.sheratonsafari.com.* 12205 Apopka-Vineland Rd. 489 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Sheraton Studio City (p. 27) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE Can't miss this 21-story towering tower of steel topped by a rooftop globe. The property offers Art Deco decor and a movie-star theme. Good location if you're doing the Universal parks.... *Tel 407/351-2100 (toll-free 800/327-1366). Fax 407/352-8028. www.sheratonstudiocity.com.* 5905 International Dr. 301 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 4 on p. 50.

Staybridge Suites (p. 41) INTERNATIONAL DRIVE/LAKE BUENA VISTA This all-suite hotel chain hosts lots of value-minded vacationers at its International Drive location. Modest furnishings, full-size kitchens, and more-than-adequate facilities make it a bargain. Near the Disney parks.... *International Drive: Tel 407/352/2400 (toll-free 877/238-8889); fax 407/352-4631; 8480 International Dr.; 146 suites. Lake Buena Vista: Tel 407/238-0777 (toll-free 877/238-8889); fax 407/238-2640; 8751 Suiteside Dr.; 150 suites. www.staybridge.com. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 4 on p. 50.

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Suites at Old Town (p. 33) KISSIMMEE Ignore the regular rooms—the suites are the main reason to stay here. Get twice the space of a normal hotel room for the same price, and a kitchen area to boot. Free shuttles to the Disney parks add to the appeal.... *Tel 407/396-7900 (toll-free 800/327-9126). Fax 407/396-1789. www.suitesatoldtown.com. 5820 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy. (U.S. 192). 603 rooms. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Tropical Palms Fun Resort (p. 39) KISSIMMEE If you're traveling in a motor home, trailer, or pop-up, you'll find lots of inexpensive hookups here. Or, if the camping life isn't your thing, stay in one of their spacious two-bedroom cottages. It's in the middle of the U.S. 192 strip.... *Tel 407/396-4595 (toll-free 800/647-2567). Fax 407/396-8938. www.tropicalpalms.com. 2650 Holiday Trail. 144 rooms. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$*

See Map 5 on p. 51.

Walt Disney World Dolphin (p. 36) WDW If you don't want to put up the bucks to stay here, at least come by for a peek at the Michael Graves design. Spacious rooms sport whimsical touches, and the outdoor pool area is great. Water shuttle to Epcot and Disney-MGM.... *Tel 407/934-4000 (toll-free 800/227-1500). www.swandolphin.com. Fax 407/934-4710. 1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd. 1,510 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.

Walt Disney World Swan (p. 36) WDW This high-priced Disney property screams to be noticed. The Swan shares the sandy beachside plaza with the Dolphin (see above). Water shuttle to Epcot and Disney-MGM.... *Tel 407/934-3000 (toll-free 800/227-1500). Fax 407/934-4710. www.swandolphin.com. 1200 Epcot Resorts Blvd. 758 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on p. 48.