

Part Five

Orlando: Walt Disney World, Universal, and Beyond

Introduction

When Walt Disney flew over the Orlando area and selected 28,000 acres on which to build his theme park, he jump-started a multibillion-dollar tourism industry and forever changed the face of sleepy Central Florida. Truth is, the attractions got their start way before Walt, back in the 1930s when Richard Pope bought 200 acres along the shores of Lake Eloise near Winter Haven and created a water-themed park called Cypress Gardens, with daily ski shows (the park closed in 2003). Today, Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando, SeaWorld Orlando, and other attractions vie for the time (and dollars) of millions of vacationers.

There are now more than 110,000 hotel rooms and dozens of man-made attractions that lure vacationers from around the world.

Beyond the glitz of the themed attractions, there are little towns such as Winter Park, where you can wander amid the world's most extensive collection of Tiffany glass in the Morse Museum of American Art; and Kissimmee, where camping, horseback riding, bass fishing, and the rodeo take precedence. The ocean may be miles away, but the lakes in Central Florida offer adventures from canoe rides to airboat treks through alligator country. Or you can traverse the St. John's River, the state's longest navigable waterway, by pontoon or on guided boat tours.

Covering 378,178 acres, Ocala National Forest is divided into three recreation areas linked by a 65-mile-long trail. You can hike, fish, camp, snorkel, swim, and canoe.

A Brief History

Long before Walt Disney World forever changed the sleepy Central Florida landscape from cattle and citrus, Orlando was an army post, Fort Gatlin. The name Orlando most likely came from a soldier, Orlando Reeves, who was injured by Seminole Indians on the shores of Lake Eola in 1835.

Cuba's demand for beef cattle created a major industry in Orlando in the mid-1800s, and people began to plant orange seeds in the 1870s. At the

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industry's peak in the 1950s, more than 80,000 acres of citrus trees thrived in Central Florida.

That same decade, nearby Cape Canaveral brought a technology boom, overshadowed in the 1960s when Walt Disney started buying up land to build his theme park. Since the opening of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in 1971, nearly 100 theme parks and attractions have opened, and most of those orange groves have been replaced by new developments. Today, there are more than 110,000 hotel rooms and 4,500 restaurants catering to more than 43 million visitors annually.

Visiting the Orlando Area

Gathering Information

Kissimmee–St. Cloud Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1925 East Irlo Bronson Highway, Kissimmee 34744; (800) 327-9159 (U.S. and Canada); (800) 333-5477 (worldwide); www.floridakiss.com.

Lake County Convention and Visitors Bureau, 20763 US 27, Groveland 34736; (352) 429-3673 or (800) 798-1071 (U.S. only); www.lakecountyfl.com.

Orlando-Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau, 8123 International Drive, open daily 8 a.m.–7 p.m.); (800) 551-0181 (U.S. and Canada) or (407) 363-5871; www.orlandoinfo.com.

The Walt Disney Travel Company, Walt Disney World Vacations Brochure, Walt Disney World, P.O. Box 10,000, Lake Buena Vista 32830-1000; (407) 934-7639 or (800) 327-2996; www.disneyworld.com.

Seminole County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tourist Development Council, 105 International Parkway, Heathrow 32746; (407) 665-2900 or (800) 800-7832 (U.S. and Canada); www.visitseminole.com.

Getting There

By Plane Two airports service Central Florida. Orlando International Airport is seven miles south of Orlando; (407) 825-2001. Orlando-Sanford Airport is two miles east of Sanford; (407) 322-7771. More than 49 scheduled airlines and 41 charters provide nonstop service from 69 U.S. destinations and 17 international cities.

By Train Amtrak (phone (800) USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) serves Orlando with four daily trains originating from New York and Miami with stops in downtown Orlando, Winter Park, Sanford, and Kissimmee, as well as with a tri-weekly train originating from Los Angeles. Amtrak also offers the Auto Train, which transports passengers and their vehicles, running daily between Lorton, Virginia, and Sanford, leaving each town at 4 p.m. and arriving at the destination at 9 a.m. the next morning.

By Car Orlando is approximately in the center of the state, midway between Jacksonville and Miami. Major interstates include I-4, which runs from Daytona Beach in the east to St. Petersburg on the west coast,

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through downtown Orlando and past the attractions; I-10, which enters the state at the southwest tip in Pensacola and extends to Jacksonville in the northeast; I-75, which enters Florida just south of Valdosta, Georgia, and runs south to Naples and then east to Fort Lauderdale; I-95, which enters the state just north of Jacksonville and extends south to Miami; and Florida's Turnpike, which connects with I-75 south of Ocala, extending southeast through Orlando and continuing to Miami.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort
- Islands of Adventure at Universal Orlando
- Discovery Cove at SeaWorld Orlando
- A canoe trip down Wekiva Springs
- Snorkeling, swimming, or canoeing in Ocala National Forest

Getting Around

Should You Rent a Car?

If you're here to see the big three—Disney, Universal, SeaWorld—many hotels offer a bus to the major attractions, so you can save on car rental. Transportation across Disney property is free if you're a Disney resort guest. International Drive offers an efficient trolley system, I-Ride, to carry you from one end of that street to the other (phone (407) 248-9590). **Mears Motor Transportation Service** (phone (407) 423-5566 or 422-4561; www.mearstransportation.com) operates handicapped-accessible, air-conditioned shuttles that run from the baggage-claim level at Orlando International Airport to area hotels, and they operate around the clock. Round-trip cost is about \$28 per adult to hotels near the theme parks, \$24 to downtown. Children ages 5–11 ride for \$20, \$14 to downtown; children age 4 and under ride free. If you have small children, however, it's often convenient to have a car so you can return to your hotel on your own schedule. More than a dozen rental-car companies have fleets in Orlando, so shop around for the best rates if you decide to rent.

Interstate 4 is the main thoroughfare, linking the Atlantic Coast to the Gulf of Mexico—but it runs north-south through Orlando, so don't get confused. I-4 East (to Daytona) is generally northbound, and I-4 West (to Tampa) is generally southbound. Highway 528 (also known as the Beeline Expressway) links Orlando to the Space Coast and Interstate 95.

International Drive, or I-Drive, is another busy tourist area, with exits clearly marked off I-4. South of Disney World, US 192 is home to another concentration of hotels and restaurants that runs from Kissimmee and crosses Disney property, with exits to the Disney parks.

The Florida Turnpike runs south to Miami and northeast to join Interstate 75.

Outdoor Adventures and Sports

Recommended Excursions

Boggy Creek Airboat Rides These half-hour rides cover ten miles of wetlands and creeks with plenty of wildlife. The U.S. Coast Guard–approved outfit is open daily, 9 a.m.–dusk. Rides are \$18, \$13 for children ages 12 and under. Nightly gator tours, held 9–10 p.m., cost \$30, \$25 for children ages 12 and under. Located at 3702 Big Bass Road, Kissimmee; (407) 344-9550.

Forever Florida Just minutes from Disney World, experience a wilderness adventure that combines a two-hour tour of the 1,500-acre working Crescent J. Ranch and a 3,200-acre nature preserve with nine Florida ecosystems. It's Florida *au naturel*, with deer, alligators, herds of cattle, and flocks of sandhill cranes, and the best way to take it all in is the guided Cracker Coach Tour in an elevated swamp buggy. The first tour of the morning leaves at 9 a.m., and we recommend this one to both avoid the heat and to improve your odds for sighting wildlife. After the tour, kids can feed calves and goats at the petting zoo or take a pony ride. The attraction is open daily and costs \$28, \$18 for ages 5–12. Trips for groups of 12 or more can be arranged anytime during the week with reservations. Located at 4755 North Kenansville Road, St. Cloud. (866) 854-3837; www.foreverflorida.com.

Florida Audubon Society's Center for Birds of Prey Located just north of Orlando, the Center for Birds of Prey is noted as the leading raptor rehabilitation center on the Eastern Seaboard. Thousands of birds—bald eagles and other raptors—have been released since 1979 after rehabilitation at the center. Birds that can't be released are housed at a lakeside aviary. Requested entry donations are \$5 for adults, \$4 for children ages 6–15. Located at 1101 Maitland Way, Maitland; (407) 644-0190.

Florida Pack and Paddle Outdoor Adventure Tours This full-service outdoor tour company offers canoeing, camping, and hiking to some of the best natural attractions in the area, including Wekiva River, Ichetucknee Springs, Suwannee River, and Peace River. They provide everything, including food, camping equipment, and guides. Trips can be as short as half a day or as long as six days; one-day trips start with a continental breakfast and include lunch as well as “farewell toast” at 4 p.m. The best time to go is spring or fall when there's a nice breeze. Located at 11025 Southeast US 192, Summerfield. Call (800) 297-8811 for rental rates and reservations.

Harry P. Leu Gardens Camellias, palms, roses, and orchids are showcased in these magnificent gardens surrounding the Leu House Museum, a turn-of-the-century Florida farmhouse that's open for tours daily, 9 a.m.–6 p.m. (closed Christmas). Admission is \$4, \$1 for students. Located at 1920 North Forest Avenue, Orlando; (407) 246-2620; www.leugardens.org.

Historic Bok Sanctuary This is an incredibly beautiful setting, with a 57-bell carillon tower as its centerpiece, surrounded by 157 acres of gardens

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and nature trails. Bok Tower is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, dedicated to the American people by Edward Bok, a Dutch immigrant. There are daily bell serenades from the 205-foot “singing tower,” which has been called one of the world’s great carillons. The gardens are located on Iron Mountain, the Florida peninsula’s highest point at 295 feet. Open daily, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Admission is \$8, \$3 for ages 5–12, and free for those younger. Located north of Lake Wales three miles, off CR 17A (Burns Avenue) and Tower Boulevard; (863) 676-1408; www.boksanctuary.org.

Houseboat on the St. John’s Adventurous families can cruise the scenic St. John’s River on a houseboat, for rent from the **Hontoon Landing Marina**. The boats sleep six to ten and are furnished with gas grills, cooking and eating utensils, linens, and a microwave. Rentals start at \$360 a day or \$975 for a weekend (Friday–Sunday), and you’re free to cruise as far south as Lake Monroe or as far north as Palatka. If you’re planning a day or two on the boat, we recommend heading to Silver Glen Spring, about a five-and-a-half-hour ride, where you can anchor overnight and swim in the crystal-clear water. There’s plenty of great fishing along the way. It takes no special training to operate a houseboat; most renters have never driven a houseboat, say the folks at Hontoon Landing. Just be sure to bring along mosquito repellent, especially in the summertime. Hontoon Landing Resort and Marina is located at 2317 River Ridge Road, DeLand 32720; (904) 734-2474 or (800) 248-2474; www.hontoon.com.

Kelly Park–Rock Springs Run This old park just north of Orlando has been a favorite of Central Floridians for generations. Bring an inner tube or snorkel and while away the day in the icy (72° year-round) water. Tubers, by the way, have right of way, but it’s great fun and easy to snorkel along the one-and-a-half-mile-long spring run with a sandy bottom and plenty of fish and turtles for viewing (no fishing allowed). Snorkeling is best in early morning, late afternoon, and on weekdays, when the crowds haven’t scared away the fish. Camping is available, with a two-night minimum (sites are \$15, \$18 with electricity; Orange County residents get a \$5 discount). Admission is \$1 per person. Take I-4 to Exit 51, then west on Highway 46 and follow the signs to Kelly Park—Rock Springs Run; (407) 889-4179.

Ocala National Forest This 400,000-acre refuge for wildlife has a quartet of untamed springs, winding streams, and natural lakes that brighten one of the oldest national forests east of the Mississippi. There are also numerous hiking and horseback trails; perfect for families is the Juniper Nature Trail, complete with signs describing the fauna and ecology. Some other highlights:

1. **Alexander Springs** is the place for excellent swimming and snorkeling—the springs pumps out 76 million gallons of 72° water each day. There are also picnicking, canoe rentals, and camping (\$17 per site). Take US 441 to the intersection of SR 19 at Eustis; turn right at the overpass and follow SR 19 to SR 445. Turn right and follow the signs to the recreation area; (352) 669-3522.

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2. **Silver Glen Springs** is known for its thick grass beds, white-sand bottom, and plenty of fish, like largemouth bass and striped bass in the spring. Beware, boat traffic on the half-mile spring run is especially heavy on the weekends. No fishing rentals. Located on SR 19 about six miles north of the SR 19–SR 40 intersection; (352) 685-2799.
3. **Salt Springs** has three spring boils to snorkel around and a five-mile run that leads to Lake George. There are gators along the way, so be especially careful during springtime mating season—and always leave the water if you spot one. Located on SR 19 in the town of Salt Springs; (352) 685-2048.
4. **Juniper Springs** has a popular campground (\$17 for tent and RV camping, no electricity) where you can't make reservations—it's first-come, first-served. The springs pump out 20 million gallons every day, ideal for swimming. There's also excellent canoeing on the seven-mile spring run. Located on SR 40 just west of SR 19; (352) 625-3147.

Wekiva Springs State Park The Wekiva River meanders 25 miles north of Orlando, a gin-clear ribbon of water fed by springs. Flat and gentle currents make it perfect for novice canoers. There are eight miles of trail intended for horseback riding and mountain biking, and the rolling terrain is prime habitat for black bears. This lush park contains almost 6,900 acres of wild scenery, with a main spring that pumps out 42 million gallons of water each day into a near-perfect “swimmin’ hole.” Canoe rentals, walking trails, and camping are available. Admission is \$4 per car. Located 15 miles northwest of Orlando (take I-4 to Exit 49 and follow the signs); (407) 884-2009; www.floridastateparks.org.

ORLANDO'S LAKE EOLA PARK

Right in the middle of downtown, Lake Eola Park (195 North Rosalind Avenue; (407) 246-2827) is the largest and most-visited park in Orlando. A majority of the 43 acres are covered by the lake, with its distinctive “spaceship fountain” and a 0.9-mile sidewalk around the waterfront. There are swan-shaped paddle boats, a well-equipped playground, a small café, rest rooms, and plenty of benches. Year-round festivals are scheduled, and the Walt Disney amphitheater hosts outdoor theatrical and musical performances.

Snorkeling

Unlike the rest of the Florida regions, Orlando and Central Florida lack coastline. Scuba diving opportunities are consequently lacking. Snorkeling however, requires only a short trip to one of the area's natural springs. **Kelly Park, Alexander Springs, and Wekiva Springs** (all noted above) each offer the chance to snorkel in crystal-clear freshwater springs and creeks. Seasoned snorkelers and divers can explore an underwater world altogether different from their saltwater haunts, and many novice snorkelers find the shallow rivers less intimidating than the ocean.

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Fishing

Deep-sea fishing is a non-option in Central Florida, but the lakes make it a bass-fishing haven. Some of Central Florida's easiest bass fishing is in the stocked lakes at **Walt Disney World**, where trophy-sized largemouth bass in the 14-pound range sometimes lurk in lakes and canals. During construction of the Magic Kingdom in the late 1960s, more than 70,000 bass fingerlings were released into Bay Lake and Seven Seas Lagoon, and organized fishing tours didn't start until 1977, leaving the bass to grow and breed undisturbed for years. Two-hour tours for up to five are \$180–\$210; call (407) W-DISNEY.

Other top bass guides offering full- and half-day trips on Central Florida lakes include **A#1 Bass Guide Service** (15712 Bay Lake Trail, Clermont; (352) 394-3660; www.a1bassguideservice.com); **Bass Anglers Guide Service** (6526 SR 535, Windermere; (407) 257-2241; www.tyree.net/bass-anglers.com); and **A Pro Bass Guide Service Inc.** (398 Grove Court, Winter Garden; (407) 877-9676; www.probassguideservice.com).

ORLANDO MAGICARD

A free Orlando Magicard, good for up to six people, can mean savings on attractions, rooms, dining, and more. More than 100 area businesses will give you a break on everything from theme park tickets to dinner theaters. You can get it ahead of your trip by calling (800) 551-0181 or at www.orlandoinfo.com. Or if you don't get one ahead of time, they're at the Official Visitor Center, 8723 International Drive, Orlando, open 8 a.m.–7 p.m. every day except Christmas.

Bicycling Central Florida

Rail Trails

General James A. Van Fleet Trail in the Green Swamp, Clermont Travel 29 miles from Mabel to Polk City on this rail-trail through the Green Swamp, which is home to many varieties of wildlife and plant life. Trailheads are located at Green Pond and Mabel; (352) 394-2280.

West Orange Trail, Orlando This paved trail traverses 19 miles from the Lake County line into Apopka. You can rent bikes and Rollerblades from West Orange Trail Bikes & Blades Co. at 17914 SR 438 in Winter Garden, at the very western end of the West Orange Trail; (407) 877-0600.

Withlacoochee State Trail, Clermont With trailheads at Citrus Springs and SR 50, this 46-mile paved trail from Dunellon to Trilby passes through the Withlacoochee State Forest, Fort Cooper State Park, and neighboring rural areas. Forest, sandhill, and wetland climates play host to gopher tortoises, bobcats, deer, and turkeys; (352) 394-2280.

Mountain Biking

Orlando Wilderness Park This park offers 15–20 miles of easy, scenic riding, with spectacular bird life (especially in winter). The park is open from February 1 to September 30, dawn to dusk; (407) 568-1706.

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Santos Trailhead The Santos Trailhead system, built by the Ocala Mountain Bike Association, is one of the Southeast's premier mountain bike destinations. The system, located on 80th Street in south Ocala just west of the intersection of US 441, offers over 50 miles of prime single-track with trails color-coded according to level of difficulty. Most of the riding is fast and mellow through some of central Florida's most scenic pine and live oak forests. Two large rock quarries, however, are integrated into the system, and though avoidable, serve up healthy doses of advanced and expert riding accompanied by not a little blood letting. For more information, visit www.omba.org.

Tosohatchee State Reserve Near Christmas, Florida, in East Orange County, this preserve welcomes bikers on all roads in the park and on the orange-blazed trail (the white-blazed trails are for hikers only). There's plenty of wildlife, but hunting is allowed in the fall, so call first; (407) 568-5893.

Spectator Sports

Baseball

You can watch four teams get ready for the season in Orlando-area spring-training camps: **The Atlanta Braves** play at Disney's Wide World of Sports (710 South Victory Way, Kissimmee; (407) 939-1500); the **Cleveland Indians** train at Chain of Lakes Park in Winter Haven (Cypress Gardens Boulevard; (941) 293-3900); the **Detroit Tigers** practice in Lakeland (2125 North Lake Avenue; (863) 686-8075); and the **Kansas City Royals** train in Davenport (300 Stadium Way; (941) 424-2500). The **Orlando Rays**, the AA Minor League affiliate of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, also plays each spring at Disney's Wide World of Sports (phone (407) 939-4263).

Basketball and Football

The NBA's **Orlando Magic** (www.nba.com/magic) play at the T. D. Waterhouse Centre (600 West Amelia Street, Orlando; (407) 849-2020) in downtown Orlando, along with the **Orlando Predators** (www.orlandopredators.net) arena football team.

Walt Disney World

Walt Disney World encompasses 43 square miles, an area twice as large as Manhattan Island or roughly the size of Boston. There are four theme parks, three water theme parks, a shopping, dining, and entertainment district, a competitive sports complex, several golf courses, hotels and campgrounds, more than 400 places to eat, four large interconnected lakes, and a complete transportation system consisting of four-lane highways, elevated monorails, and a network of canals.

If you are selecting among the tourist attractions in Central Florida, the question is not whether to visit Walt Disney World but how you can see the best of the various Disney offerings with some economy of time, effort, and money.

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Make no mistake, there is nothing on earth quite like Walt Disney World. Incredible in its scope, genius, beauty, and imagination, it is a joy and wonder for people of all ages. Infused with the wonder of childhood, the best Disney attractions transcend simple entertainment, freeing us for an hour or a day to live the dreams of our past, present, and future.

DISNEY ON THE INTERNET

Disney's official Internet address is www.disney.com; the company also maintains www.disneyworld.com. The official website offers much of the same information as the Walt Disney Travel Company's vacation guidebook, but the guidebook has better pictures. However, you can now purchase theme-park admissions and make resort and dining reservations on the Internet. The website also offers online shopping, weather forecasts, and information on renovations and special events. There is a vast array of websites devoted to Disney World that are not affiliated with Disney. Among the best are www.wdig.com, www.mousesavers.com, and www.wdwmagic.com. Universal Studios Florida also offers a home page at www.universalorlando.com.

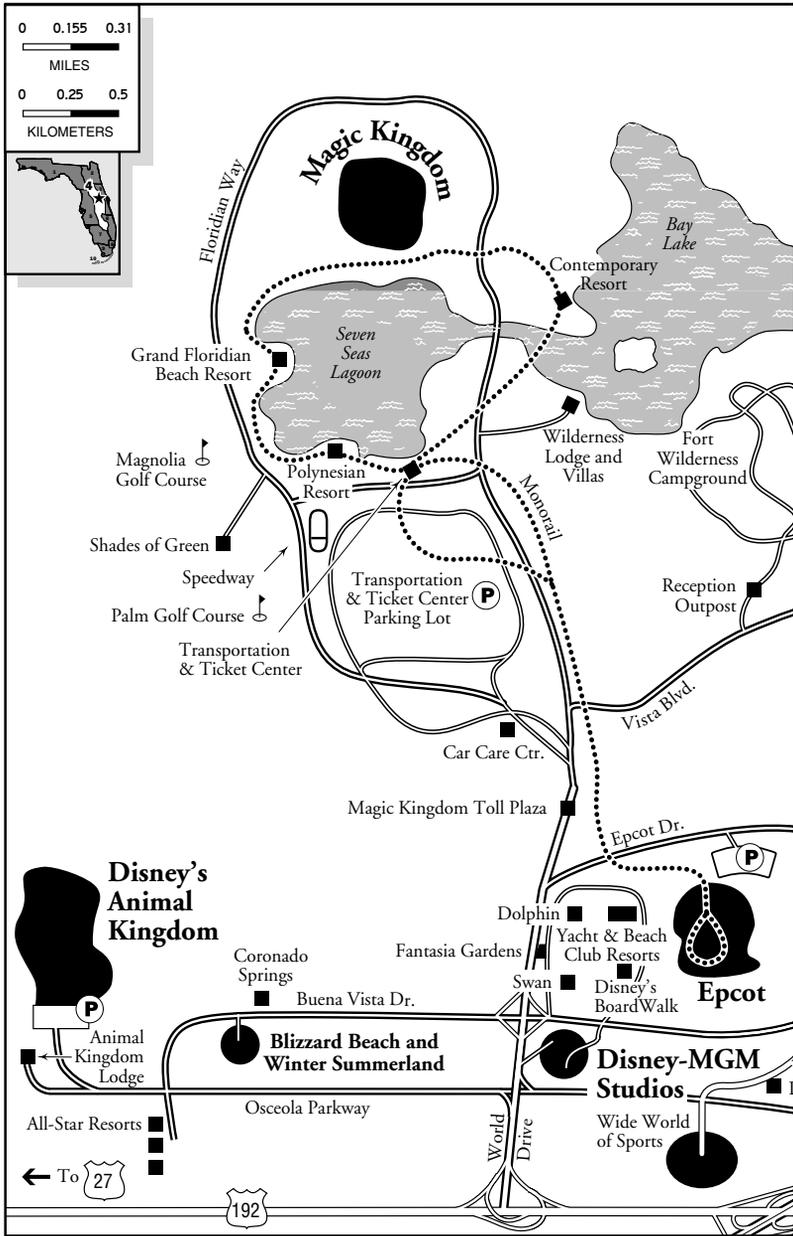
Selecting the Time of Year for Your Visit

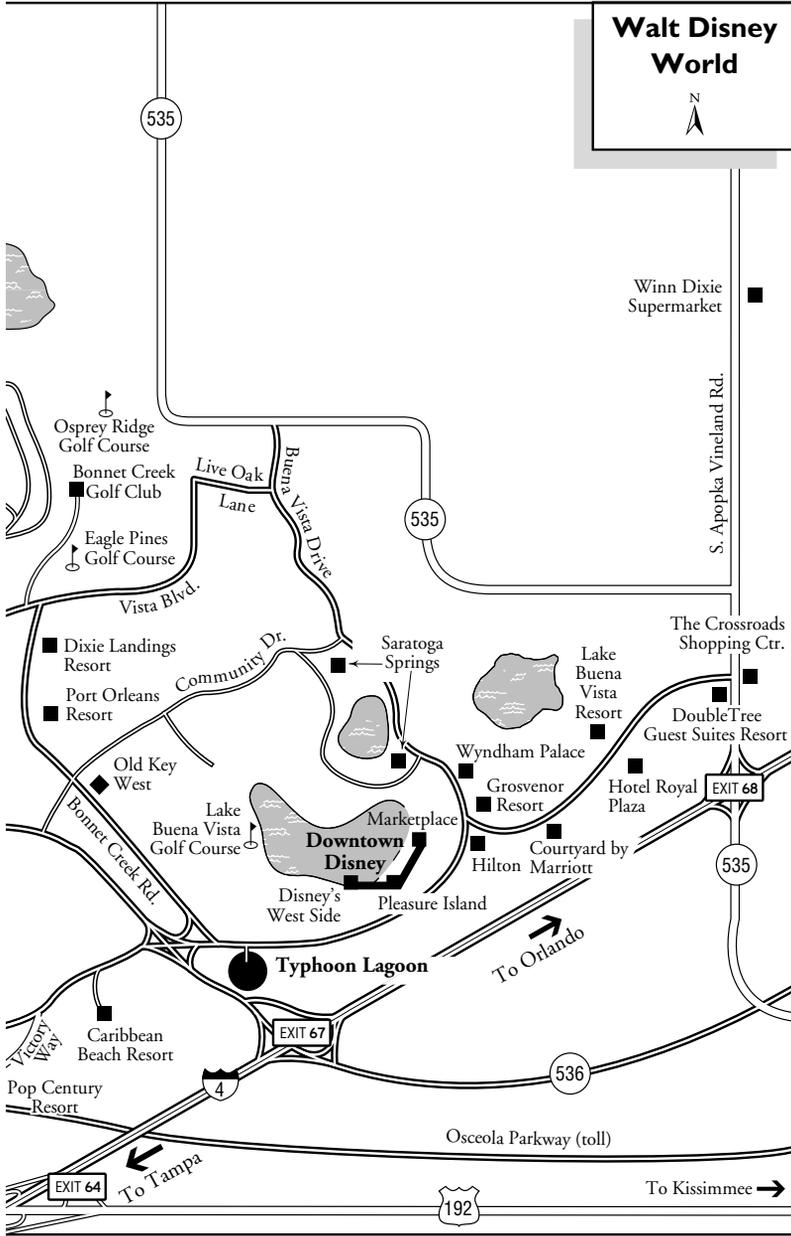
Peak times at Walt Disney World are the Fourth of July, Christmas Day through New Year's Day, Thanksgiving weekend, the week of Washington's birthday, Martin Luther King holiday weekend, spring break for colleges, and the two weeks around Easter. Only those who absolutely cannot go at any other time should challenge the Disney parks at their peak periods.

The least busy time is from mid-January through the first week of February, the week after labor Day until Thanksgiving, and the week after Thanksgiving through the week before Christmas. Crowds ebb and flow according to spring-break schedules and the timing of Presidents' Day weekend. Though crowds have grown markedly in September and October as a result of special promotions aimed at locals and the international market, these months continue to be good for weekday touring at the Magic Kingdom, Disney-MGM Studios, and the Animal Kingdom, and for weekend visits to Epcot.

10 Tips for an Optimum Disney Visit

1. Do your homework before you go. Our annually revised *Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* offers much more in-depth information and flexible touring plans.
2. Let the whole family help with the planning—everyone can choose favorites that can be worked into the itinerary.
3. In spite of all your planning, be flexible once you arrive.
4. If intend to spend more than a couple of days at Disney, spring for a multiday pass. You'll save a few bucks and have the flexibility to move between the theme parks. Some passes even include admission to the water parks.





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5. Start your day early—arrive at the parks at least 30 minutes before the scheduled opening and plan a break in the middle of the day, returning to your hotel for a swim or a nap, then back to the theme parks for the evening. Also, mix and match parks if you have a multiday pass; if you spent the morning in the Magic Kingdom, head to Epcot for dinner and fireworks.
6. Families with kids of various ages should plan to split up—let dad do the thrill rides with an older child while mom spends time in Fantasyland with younger siblings. If you have at least two teenagers, they can take off on their own, as the parks are very safe. Just be sure to pick a meeting place, and advise them not to lose track of time.
7. If your budget is tight but you don't want to miss out on the themed restaurants, book lunch instead of dinner. Portions are generally huge, so you also can share meals. The top choices in each park: Crystal Palace in the Magic Kingdom, Hollywood Brown Derby or 50's Prime Time Café at the Disney-MGM Studios, Coral Reef at Epcot, and Tusker House in Disney's Animal Kingdom.
8. Don't try to see it all. Enjoy what you can, and save some attractions for another visit.
9. Take a break from the theme parks. Even if you don't leave Disney property, you can play at one of the water parks or take an afternoon to visit Downtown Disney.
10. Wait until it's time to go home to buy souvenirs. You'll see plenty of things you want to buy, but you won't waste money if you wait and anticipate buying one really special keepsake.

Admission Options

Prices quoted below are those prevailing at press time. Please note that the prices below include sales tax, and are gate prices—you can save around ten percent if you purchase in advance.

| Type of Pass | Adult Price w/ Tax | Child Price w/ Tax |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1-Day/One-Park-Only Pass | \$55 | \$45 |
| 4-Day Park-Hopper Pass | \$222 | \$178 |
| 5-Day Park-Hopper Pass | \$255 | \$204 |
| 5-Day Park-Hopper Plus Pass | \$287 | \$230 |
| 6-Day Park-Hopper Plus Pass | \$318 | \$256 |
| 7-Day Park-Hopper Plus Pass | \$350 | \$281 |
| Annual Passports | \$393 | \$314 |
| Annual Premium Passports | \$521 | \$443 |

The 1-Day/One-Park-Only Pass is good for admission and unlimited access to “attractions and experiences” at the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney's Animal Kingdom, or Disney-MGM Studios.

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The 5-, 6-, and 7-Day Park-Hopper Plus Passes provide admission to all four theme parks plus two visits to a choice of Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon, Pleasure Island, or Disney's Wide World of Sports.

The Annual Premium Passport provides unlimited theme-park admission plus Pleasure Island, water parks, Disney's Wide World of Sports, and DisneyQuest.

Also available are Ultimate Park Hopper tickets, based on the length of stay in a Disney resort (from two to ten days). These are available through the Walt Disney Travel Company exclusively to guests at Disney-owned properties.

Unused days on any multiday ticket except the Ultimate Park Hopper never expire and can be used for a future visit.

EXTRA HELP NAVIGATING THE THEME PARKS

Disney launched a free service to provide synchronized narration in five languages for popular theme-park attractions. The personal translation devices, available at Guest Relations in each of the theme parks, are in French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish, and feature lightweight headphones that automatically receive digital-quality audio, triggered by infrared signals throughout the attractions.

Another new "park guide" is Pal Mickey, a ten-inch plush Mickey Mouse programmed with hundreds of messages, from show details to Disney trivia to height requirements for all four Walt Disney World theme parks. He even tells jokes and plays games. You can rent the high-tech toy for \$8 a day or keep him and take him home for \$50.

Should You Book a Room at Disney?

Luxury accommodations can be found both in and out of Walt Disney World. Budget lodging, however, is another story. Room rates start at about \$90 in Walt Disney World and range to more than \$500. Outside Walt Disney World, rooms go for as low as \$45.

There are specific privileges and amenities available to guests staying at a Walt Disney World resort:

Convenience Decreased commuting time made possible by proximity to the theme parks and easy access to the Walt Disney World bus, boat, and monorail transportation system is especially advantageous if you stay in one of the hotels connected by the monorail or by boat service.

Baby-sitting and Childcare Alternatives Several of the resort hotels offer themed child-care centers where potty-trained children ages 3–12 can be dropped off during the evening while adults go out. In-room baby-sitting is offered by Kinder-Care, (407) 827-5444.

Guaranteed and Early Admission Regardless of crowds, guests staying at Disney properties are guaranteed admission and are eligible for "Extra Magic Hour," which allows admission to one of the four theme parks an hour before opening to the general public. On days of unusually heavy attendance, "E-Ride Night" allows resort guests with multiday passes (for

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an extra \$12, \$10 ages 3–9) to remain in the Magic Kingdom after official closing time and ride all the biggies with little or no waiting.

Children Sharing a Room with Their Parents There is no extra charge per night for children under age 18 sharing a room with their parents (but that's also the case in many non-Disney hotels).

Free Parking Walt Disney World resort guests with cars do not have to pay for parking in the theme park lots (\$8 a day).

DISNEY'S FASTPASS

At Walt Disney World's most popular attractions, guests can choose the regular wait line or opt to use FASTPASS. After inserting a valid theme park ticket into the special FASTPASS machines at these attractions, guests receive a ticket denoting a one-hour window of time when they can return and enter the attraction with little or no wait. There is no extra charge to use FASTPASS.

Always check the sign near the FASTPASS machines that indicates the return time; if it is hours away, you might want to forgo the option. Try to obtain a FASTPASS before 11 a.m. for blockbuster attractions.

You are able to get as many FASTPASS tickets in a day as you want, but you have to use a current FASTPASS ticket or wait two hours before getting another.

Magic Kingdom

The Magic Kingdom/Transportation and Ticket Center parking lot opens about two hours before the park's official opening time for the general public. After paying the parking fee, you board a tram for the Transportation and Ticket Center, where you can take either a monorail or a ferry to the entrance of the Magic Kingdom.

Entering **Main Street, U.S.A.**, be sure to pick up a guide map at City Hall; it lists all attractions, shops, and eating places, as well as information about first aid, baby care, and entertainment for the day.

Main Street, U.S.A., ends at a central hub, from which branch the entrances to five other sections of the Magic Kingdom: **Adventureland**, **Frontierland**, **Liberty Square**, **Fantasyland**, and **Tomorrowland**, in clockwise order. **Mickey's Toontown Fair** is wedged between Fantasyland and Tomorrowland and does not connect to the central hub.

Cinderella Castle is the entrance to Fantasyland and the focal landmark and visual center of the Magic Kingdom. It's a great place to meet if your family decides to split up or if you are accidentally separated.

Only five rides in the Magic Kingdom have age or height requirements: Splash Mountain, Space Mountain, Alien Encounter, Tomorrowland Speedway, and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad.

Avoid lines by taking advantage of FASTPASS at Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin, The Haunted Mansion, Jungle Cruise, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Peter Pan's Flight, Space Mountain, Splash Mountain. To get a FASTPASS, insert your park ticket in the turnstile for a free FASTPASS ticket with your designated ride time.

Top 10 Attractions

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (Frontierland) On this roller coaster through and around a Disney “mountain,” the idea is that you’re on a run-away mine train during the Gold Rush. A superb Disney experience, but not a wild roller coaster. Emphasis is much more on the sights than on the thrill of the ride. You must be at least 40 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Alien Encounter (Tomorrowland) The scariest attraction in any of the Disney parks features an angry alien and an experiment that goes awry. Mayhem ensues. A departure from typical Disney theme-park entertainment, so be forewarned. You must be at least 44 inches tall to ride.

Haunted Mansion (Liberty Square) More fun than scary, with some of the Magic Kingdom’s best special effects, the Haunted Mansion is a masterpiece of detail. “Doom Buggies” on a conveyor belt transport you throughout the house from parlor to attic, and then through a graveyard. FASTPASS available.

Jungle Cruise (Adventureland) A cruise through jungle waterways with animatronic elephants, lions, hostile natives, and a menacing hippo. Since the advent of the Animal Kingdom, the attraction’s appeal has diminished, but you can always depend on the Jungle Cruise’s robotic critters being present as you motor past. FASTPASS available.

The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (Fantasyland) Hop in a “hunny pot” for a four-minute tour of Pooh’s Hundred Acre Wood. For little ones, this is Nirvana with a happily-ever-after storybook ending that features a hero’s party, a colorful rainbow, and all the gang safe in the Hundred Acre Wood ready for another escapade. FASTPASS available.

Mickey’s Philharmagic (Fantasyland) This new, ten-minute special-effects laden film stars classic Disney characters—Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, with computer-generated 3-D graphics on a 150-foot-wide screen and in-theater sounds, smells, and other effects that put you in the middle of the action. FASTPASS available.

Parades and Fireworks Magic Kingdom parades are full-fledged spectacles with every Disney character imaginable and amazing special effects.

SpectroMagic is the nighttime parade, an extravaganza of more than 600,000 lights that are synchronized to sound effects and a musical score—Goofy’s xylophone keys dance with light at his touch and Mickey’s cape transforms in a 24-step cascade of color sweeping from the base of his float upward to 17 feet above his head.

Wishes is the stellar new fireworks display, unleashed after dark on nights the park is open late. For an uncluttered view and lighter crowds, watch from the terrace of The Plaza Pavilion restaurant in Tomorrowland.

Pirates of the Caribbean (Adventureland) Disney Audio-Animatronics at its best, this indoor cruise depicts a pirate raid on an island settlement. Undoubtedly one of the park’s most elaborate, imaginative, and longest-running attractions.

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Space Mountain (Tomorrowland) Space Mountain has long been the Magic Kingdom's most popular attraction, a space flight through dark recesses of the galaxy. The effects are superb, and the ride is the fastest and wildest in the park. Children must be 44 inches tall to ride; those younger than age 7 must be accompanied by an adult. FASTPASS available.

Splash Mountain (Frontierland) This water-flume ride combines steep chutes with excellent special effects. The ride covers more than half a mile, splashing through swamps, caves, and backwood bayous before climaxing in a five-story plunge. More than 100 audio-animatronic characters, including Brer Rabbit, Brer Bear, and Brer Fox, regale riders with songs, including "Zip-a-Dee-Dee-Dah." Children must be 40 inches tall to ride; those younger than age 7 must ride with an adult. FASTPASS available.

FANTASY IN THE SKY CRUISE

For a different view, you can watch the fireworks from the Seven Seas Lagoon aboard a chartered pontoon boat. The charter costs \$120 and accommodates up to 12 persons. Your Disney cast member captain will take you for a little cruise and then position the boat in a perfect place to watch the fireworks.

For an additional \$80 per four persons, the captain will provide deli sandwiches, snacks, and beverages. A major indirect benefit of the charter is that you can enjoy the fireworks without fighting the mob afterwards.

To reserve, call (407) WDW-PLAY at exactly 7 a.m. 90 days before the day you want the charter. Similar charters are available to watch *IllumiNations* at Epcot.

Epcot

With Epcot, the second theme park to open at Walt Disney World, Disney combined two different areas—Future World and World Showcase—into a one-of-a-kind theme park, with all the attractions oriented toward education. Epcot is more than twice the physical size of the Magic Kingdom or Disney-MGM Studios, and it requires a considerable amount of walking from attraction to attraction. One can't really see the whole place in a day without skipping an attraction or two and giving other areas a cursory glance.

As in the other theme parks, we have identified several attractions in Epcot as "not to be missed." However, part of the enjoyment of a place like Epcot is that there is something for everyone; let your interests shape your touring.

There are height restrictions for Mission: Space and Test Track. Disney FASTPASSES are available to cut time waiting in line at Mission: Space, Honey I Shrunk the Audience, Living with the Land, Maelstrom, and Test Track.

Note that Future World and World Showcase have separate operating hours. Though schedules change throughout the year, Future World always opens before World Showcase in the morning and usually closes before World Showcase in the evening. Most of the year, World Showcase opens two hours later than Future World. For exact hours during your visit, call (407) 824-4321.

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Plan to arrive at the turnstiles 30–40 minutes prior to official opening time. Give yourself an extra ten minutes or so to park and make your way to the entrance. If you are a guest at one of the nearby Disney resorts, it will take you about 20–30 minutes to walk from your hotel to the Future World section of Epcot.

DINING AT EPCOT

Some of the best Walt Disney World restaurants are in the World Showcase countries, where you can sample *queso fundido* in Mexico, slow-roasted lamb in Morocco, and bouillabaisse in France. Each pavilion has a restaurant, and priority seating can be made through (407) WDW-DINE. If you haven't made reservations, sidewalk cafés offer delicious (and less expensive) fare. Another favorite is the Matsunoma Lounge, where you can have sushi and drinks with no reservations.

Future World

This is the first area you encounter, and everything, including the bountiful landscaping, is clean and sparkling to the point of asepsis and seemingly bigger than life. Seven pavilions dedicated to man's past, present, and future technological accomplishments form the perimeter of the Future World area, with Spaceship Earth and its flanking Innoventions East and West standing prominently front and center.

World Showcase

This is the second theme area of Epcot, situated around picturesque World Showcase Lagoon. It is an ongoing World's Fair, with the cuisine, culture, history, and architecture of almost a dozen countries permanently on display in individual national pavilions. The pavilions are spaced along a promenade a little more than a mile long, which circles the impressive 40-acre lagoon. Countries include **Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, American Adventure, Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom, and Canada.**

Though many guests fail to notice, World Showcase features some of the loveliest gardens in Florida. Located in Germany, France, England, Canada, and to a lesser extent, China, they are sometimes tucked away and out of sight of pedestrian traffic on the World Showcase promenade.

While most adults enjoy World Showcase, some children find it boring. Disney has added a craft booth at each country, called Kidcot, with hands-on activities, such as painting with watercolors in Paris or learning Arabic lettering in Morocco. And there's also live entertainment to keep kids amused, from colorful dancing dragons in China to participatory street theater in Italy.

Passport Kits are available for about \$10 in most Epcot retail shops. Each kit contains a blank passport and stamps for all the World Showcase countries. As kids accompany their folks to each country, they tear out the appropriate stamp and stick it on the passport. The kit also contains some information on the respective countries, as well as a Mickey Mouse button.

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American Adventure (World Showcase) This theater is a composite of everything Disney does best. Located in an imposing brick structure reminiscent of colonial Philadelphia, the production is a stirring, 29-minute sanitized rendition of American history narrated by an audio-animatronic Mark Twain and Ben Franklin. Behind a stage almost half the size of a football field is a 28 x 55-foot rear-projection screen on which motion picture images are interwoven with action on stage.

Body Wars (Future World) On this thrill ride through the human body in a flight simulator, the story is that you're a passenger in a miniature capsule injected into a human body, on a mission to rescue a scientist who's been sucked into the circulatory system. The simulator creates a visually graphic experience, seeming to hurtle at fantastic speeds through human organs. You must be 40 inches tall to ride.

France (World Showcase) *Impressions de France* is an exceedingly beautiful, 18-minute movie projected over 200° onto five screens. The film takes the audience to the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, the French Alps, Cannes, and other beautiful locations. The soundtrack is the music of French classical composers.

Honey I Shrank the Audience (Future World) This 3-D offshoot of Disney's feature film, *Honey, I Shrank the Kids* features an array of special effects, including simulated explosions, smoke, fiber optics, lights, water spray, and moving seats. This attraction is played strictly for laughs, a commodity in short supply in Epcot entertainment. The sound level is earsplitting, frightening some young children. FASTPASS available.

IllumiNations (World Showcase) This 13-minute, after-dark show consists of lasers, water, fire, and fireworks (2,800 shells are exploded during the nightly display), all set to a symphonic score. In the center of the lagoon is an "Earth Globe," a 28-foot diameter sphere that becomes a three-story video screen to tell the story of planet Earth. In the show finale, the Earth Globe opens with a fire torch rising 40 feet into the air. Viewing is excellent all around World Showcase Lagoon.

The Living Seas (Future World) Among Future World's most ambitious offerings, scientists and divers conduct actual marine experiments in this 200-foot-diameter, 27-foot-deep tank containing fish, mammals, and crustaceans. Visitors can watch the activity through eight-inch-thick windows below the surface (including some in the Coral Reef restaurant) and aboard a three-part adventure ride consisting of a movie dramatizing the link between the ocean and man's survival, a simulated elevator descent to the bottom of the tank, and a three-minute gondola voyage through an underwater viewing tunnel.

Living with the Land (Future World) This boat ride takes visitors through swamps, past inhospitable farm environments, and through a futuristic, innovative greenhouse where real crops are grown using the latest

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agricultural technologies. Inspiring and educational, with excellent effects and a good narrative. FASTPASS available.

Mission: Space (Future World) This simulated space adventure combines Disney storytelling with NASA technology. A powerful launch literally pushes you back into your seat. After you “slingshot” around the moon, you continue on to Mars where you land at a very high rate of speed. The attraction left one rider feeling “like socks in a dryer.” Skip it if you are prone to motion sickness or are claustrophobic, and head for the post show video game Space Race, where up to 60 visitors can compete against each other in a race to send their rocket from Mars back to Earth. Guests must be 44 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Test Track (Future World) Visitors test a futuristic car at high speeds through hairpin turns, up and down steep hills, and over rough terrain. The six-guest vehicle is a motion simulator that rocks and pitches. Unlike simulators at Star Tours, Body Wars, and Back to the Future (at Universal Studios), however, the Test Track model is affixed to a track and actually travels. Guests must be 40 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Reflections of China (World Showcase) The new Circle-Vision 360° film in the China pavilion reflects the dramatic changes in that nation during the past 20 years. A crew of American and Chinese filmmakers worked together to capture fresh views of Hong Kong, Macau, and Shanghai.

DIVE QUEST

The soggiest behind-the-scenes experience available anywhere is Epcot's Dive Quest, where open-water scuba-certified divers can swim around with the fish at The Living Seas. Offered twice daily, each tour lasts three-and-a-half hours, including a 30–40-minute dive. The cost is about \$140 per diver and includes all gear, a souvenir T-shirt, a dive log stamp, and refreshments. A video of your dive is \$30. Reservations are required and can be made with a credit card by calling (407) WDW-TOUR. For recorded information, call (407) 560-5590. The experience is for adults only: no junior certifications are accepted and divers must be 15 or older.

Disney's Animal Kingdom

With its lush flora, winding streams, meandering paths, and re-created exotic villages, the Animal Kingdom is a stunningly beautiful theme park. The landscaping alone conjures images of rain forest, veldt, and even formal gardens. Add to this loveliness a population of more than 1,000 animals, replicas of Africa's and Asia's most intriguing architecture, and a diverse array of singularly original attractions, and you have the most unique of all Disney theme parks. And though you will encounter the typical long lines, pricey food, and shops full of Disney merchandise, you will also (with a little effort) experience a day of stimulating private discoveries.

At 500 acres, Disney's Animal Kingdom is five times the size of the Magic Kingdom and more than twice the size of Epcot. But like Disney-MGM Studios, most of the Animal Kingdom's vast geography is only

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accessible on guided tours or as part of attractions. The Animal Kingdom features six sections, or “lands”: The Oasis, Discovery Island, DinoLand U.S.A., Camp Minnie-Mickey, Africa, and Asia.

Its size notwithstanding, the Animal Kingdom features a limited number of attractions. However, two of the attractions—Dinosaur and Kilimanjaro Safaris—are among the best in the Disney repertoire.

You must park your car and board a tram to reach the entrance. Be sure to pick up a guide map and entertainment schedule upon entering; this is also the place for package pick-up, Guest Services, lockers, rest rooms, and kennels. There is an ATM, and wheelchairs and strollers can be rented in Garden Gate Gifts shop.

Immediately past The Oasis is Safari Village, the park’s “hub” to the other lands. The buildings are covered in brilliantly colored animal designs. But most visitors are more amazed by the giant Tree of Life, more than 14 stories high, with nearly 350 animal forms hand-carved into its massive trunk. Live animals, too, live at the base, like otters, ring-tailed lemurs, and red kangaroos.

From Safari Village, you can choose from six “lands”: Africa; Chester and Hester’s Dino-Rama, a new mini-land; DinoLand, USA; Asia; Conservation Station; or Camp Minnie-Mickey if your kids need a dose of Disney characters. You may use FASTPASS on Dinosaur, *It’s Tough to Be a Bug!*, Kali River Rapids, Kilimanjaro Safaris, and Primeval Whirl. Height restrictions apply to Kali River Rapids, Primeval Whirl, and Dinosaur.

Top 10 Attractions

Dinosaur (Dinoland, U.S.A.) Dinosaur serves up nonstop action from beginning to end with brilliant visual effects, a combination track ride and motion simulator. The plot has you traveling back in time on a mission of rescue and conservation. Your objective is to haul back a living dinosaur before the species becomes extinct. However, you arrive on the prehistoric scene just as a giant asteroid is hurling toward Earth. Mayhem ensues. May be too intense for young children. FASTPASS available.

Festival of the Lion King (Camp Minnie-Mickey) This energetic production, inspired by Disney’s *Lion King* film, is part stage show, part parade, and part circus. Guests are seated in four sets of bleachers surrounding the stage and organized into separate cheering sections, which are called on to make elephant, warthog, giraffe, and lion noises. There is a great deal of parading around, some acrobatics, and a lot of singing and dancing. By our count, every tune from *The Lion King* (plus a couple of others) is belted out and reprised several times.

Flights of Wonder (Asia) Both interesting and fun, Flights of Wonder is well paced and showcases a surprising number of different bird species. The focus is on the natural talents and characteristics of the various species, so don’t expect any bicycle-riding parrots.

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It's Tough to Be a Bug! and the Tree of Life The Tree of Life, apart from its size, is quite a work of art. Although from afar it is certainly magnificent and imposing, it is not until you examine the tree at close range that you see that what appears to be ancient gnarled bark is in fact hundreds of carvings depicting all manner of wildlife, each integrated seamlessly into the trunk, roots, and limbs of the tree.

In sharp contrast to the grandeur of the tree is the subject of the attraction housed within its trunk. Called *It's Tough to Be a Bug!*, this humorous 3-D film is about the difficulties of being very small. Combining a 3-D film with an arsenal of tactile and visual special effects, the production is very intense and will do a number on young children and those who squeamish about insects. FASTPASS available.

Kali River Rapids (Asia) The ride consists of an unguided trip down a man-made river in a circular rubber raft with 12 persons. Because the river is fairly wide, with numerous currents, eddies, and obstacles, there is no telling exactly where the raft will go. Kali River Rapids flows through a dense rain forest, past waterfalls, temple ruins, and bamboo thickets, emerging into a cleared area where greedy loggers have ravaged the forest, and finally drifting back under the tropical canopy. Along the way, your raft runs a gauntlet of raging cataracts, log jams, and other dangers. Guests must be 38 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Kilimanjaro Safaris (Africa) Kilimanjaro Safaris offers an exceptionally realistic, albeit brief, imitation of an actual African photo safari in a simulated veldt habitat. Animals such as zebra, wildebeest, impala, Thomson's gazelle, giraffe, and even rhinoceros roam apparently free, while lions and potentially dangerous large animals like hippos, are separated from both prey and guests by all-but-invisible, natural-appearing barriers. Although the animals have more than 100 acres of savanna, woodland, streams, and rocky hills to call home, careful placement of water holes, forage, and salt licks ensure that the critters are hanging out by the road when safari vehicles roll by. FASTPASS available.

Maharajah Jungle Trek (Asia) This walk-through exhibit features an Asian setting and Asian animals, including Komodo dragons, Malayan tapirs, fruit bats, Bengal tigers, and an aviary. From the top of a parapet in the palace, you can view a herd of blackbuck antelope and Asian deer.

Pangani Forest Exploration Trail (Africa) Winding between the domain of two troops of lowland gorillas on this route, it's hard to see what, if anything, separates you from the primates. Also on the lush trail are a hippo pool with an underwater viewing area, hyenas, a beautiful bird aviary, and a naked mole rat exhibit.

Primeval Whirl (Dinoland, U.S.A.) A small coaster with short drops, curves, and spins—and you can't control the spinning, so don't try. It may look like a kiddie coaster, but it delivers quite a jolt when the spin is braked

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to a jarring halt after half a revolution, or you're twirled two complete spins. It's silly fun. Guests must be 48 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Tarzan Rocks! (Dinoland, U.S.A.) In the 1,500-seat Theater in the Wild, this 30-minute show features aerial acts as well as acrobatic stunts, including extreme skating. The musical score is by Phil Collins and drawn from the soundtrack of the eponymous film.

Disney-MGM Studios

Disney-MGM Studios is about the same size as the Magic Kingdom. Unlike the other parks, however, Disney-MGM Studios is a working motion picture and television production facility. This means that some of the studio area is controlled access, with guests permitted only on tours accompanied by guides. It's easy to see the park in a single day.

Guest Relations, on your left as you enter, serves as the park headquarters and information center, similar to City Hall in the Magic Kingdom. Go there for a schedule of live performances, maps, lost persons, package pick-up, lost and found (on the right side of the entrance), general information, or in an emergency. To the right of the entrance are locker, stroller, and wheelchair rentals.

There are height restrictions for Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith, Star Tours, and The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror.

The FASTPASS system is available for *Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular*, *Jim Henson's Muppet Vision 3-D*, Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith, Star Tours, Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It!, and *Voyage of the Little Mermaid*.

Top 10 Attractions

Beauty and the Beast—Live on Stage This 25-minute musical in the park's Theater of the Stars uses elaborate props, extravagant costumes, colorful production numbers, and special effects to tell the love story of Belle and the Beast in the Theater of the Stars. Credit for the collection of toe-tapping tunes belongs to Academy Award-winning composers Howard Ashman and Alan Menken.

Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular Coherent and educational, though somewhat unevenly paced, this popular production showcases professional stunt men and women, who demonstrate dangerous stunts with a behind-the-scenes look at how it's done. Sets, props, and special effects are very elaborate. FASTPASS available.

Disney-MGM Studios Backlot Tour This 35-minute tour begins in a special-effects water tank where you see how rain effects and a storm at sea are staged. From there, board trams with stops in wardrobe and craft shops and through the backlot to Catastrophe Canyon, an elaborate special-effects movie set where a thunderstorm, earthquake, oil-field fire, and flash flood are simulated. It's education and fun.

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Jim Henson's Muppet Vision 3-D This movie provides a total sensory experience, with wild 3-D action augmented by auditory, visual, and tactile special effects. If you're tired and hot, this zany presentation will make you feel brand new. It's a little loud at end for toddlers. FASTPASS available.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith Although the rock icons and synchronized music add measurably to the experience, the ride itself, as opposed to sights and sounds along the way, is the focus here. The Rock 'n' Roller Coaster offers loops, corkscrews, and drops. What really makes this metal coaster unusual, however, is that it's in the dark (like Space Mountain) and launches you up the first hill like a jet off a carrier deck. By the time you crest the hill, you'll have gone from 0 to 57 mph in less than three seconds. When you enter the first loop, you'll be pulling five Gs. By comparison, that's two more Gs than astronauts experience at lift-off on a space shuttle. Guests must be at least 48 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Star Tours Based on the *Star Wars* movie series, this ride uses flight simulators modeled after those used to train pilots and astronauts. You're supposedly on an outing in space, piloted by a robot on his first flight with real passengers. This attraction is not for anyone prone to motion sickness; guests must be 40 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror The new version of this attraction multiplies the thrills inside the 13-story haunted hotel with a faster ride and more drops. In addition, visual, audio, and olfactory special effects were added. Though the final plunges are calculated to thrill, the meat of the attraction is its extraordinary visual and audio effects. There's richness and subtlety here, enough to keep the ride fresh and stimulating after many repetitions. Guests must be 40 inches tall to ride. FASTPASS available.

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It! This version of the TV game show is played on a replica of the real set; contestants are selected from among the audience and play for points and prizes (but not a million bucks). FASTPASS available.

Fantasmic! Far and away the most extraordinary and ambitious outdoor spectacle ever attempted in a theme park, *Fantasmic!* stars Mickey Mouse in his role as the Sorcerer's Apprentice from *Fantasia*. The production uses lasers, images projected on a shroud of mist, fireworks, lighting effects, and music in combinations so stunning you can scarcely believe what you have seen. It could be argued, with some validity, that *Fantasmic!* alone is worth the price of the Disney-MGM Studios admission. The program is staged in a 6,900-seat amphitheater, which can accommodate an additional 3,000 standing guests.

Voyage of the Little Mermaid Romantic, lovable and humorous, this stage show is a winner, appealing to every age. The story is simple and engaging, the special effects impressive, and the Disney characters memorable. FASTPASS available.

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EASY WAY TO CHECK WAITING TIMES

At the corner of Hollywood and Sunset boulevards is a large display listing current waiting times for all Disney-MGM Studios attractions. It's updated continuously throughout the day. We've found the waiting times listed to be slightly overstated. If the display says the wait for Star Tours is 45 minutes, for example, you probably will have to wait about 35–40 minutes.

The Disney Water Theme Parks

There are two water theme parks to choose from at Walt Disney World. Before you go, call (407) 824-4321 the night before you go for opening times. For a day at the water parks consider the following:

- Visit on weekdays, when the parks are less crowded. We recommend Monday or Tuesday, when most tourists are visiting the theme parks; Fridays are also a good bet, because people traveling by car often use this day to start home.
- Go early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Don't wait for the Disney bus if you have your own car, and arrive 30 minutes before park opening. The parks often close by 11 a.m. when they are filled to capacity, and they don't open again until guests pack up in the afternoon. There can be long waits—up to 30 minutes—for some slides.
- The perfect time to go is after an afternoon storm, when the park has been closed due to bad weather. When the parks reopen after the inclement weather has passed, you can almost have a whole park to yourself. Evenings are great, too, when special lighting after dusk makes Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach enchanting places, and crowds are definitely lighter.
- Wear your bathing suit under your clothes, and wear shoes. Take your own towel and sunscreen.
- Since wallets and purses just get in the way, lock them in the trunk or leave them in the hotel. Carry enough cash for the day and a Disney resort ID (if you have one) in a plastic bag. It's relatively safe to leave stuff at your chair instead of renting a locker—just be sure it's well concealed.
- Don't bring personal gear (fins, masks, rafts, etc.)—it's not allowed. You can rent towels, or buy bathing suits or sunscreen. Tubes and personal flotation devices are free (you need a credit card or driver's license as a deposit, held until the equipment is returned).
- Head straight for the most popular slides and ride them first thing in the morning, before the crowd has time to build up.
- You can take a picnic, but no glass containers or alcoholic beverages.
- If your children are young, choose a base spot near the children's swimming area in all three parks. There are shelters for those who prefer shade and even a few hammocks. There are also picnic tables.

Blizzard Beach

This is Disney's newest and most exotic water adventure park, and like Typhoon Lagoon, it arrived with its own legend. This time, as the story

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goes, an optimistic entrepreneur tried to open a ski resort in Florida during a particularly savage winter. But alas, the snow melted, the palm trees grew back, and all that remained of the ski resort was its Alpine lodge, the ski lift, and of course, the mountain. Plunging off the mountain are ski slopes and bobsled runs transformed into water slides. Visitors to Blizzard Beach catch the thaw in midcycle—with dripping icicles and patches of snow here and there. The melting snow has formed a large lagoon (the wave pool), fed by gushing mountain streams.

Blizzard Beach is distinguished by its landscaping and detailed theme. There are 17 slides in all, among them Summit Plummet, the world's longest, fastest-speed slide, which begins with a 120-foot free fall, and the Teamboat Springs bobsled run, 1,200 feet long. If you are going primarily for the slides, you will have about two hours in the early morning to enjoy them before the waiting becomes intolerable during busy times of the year.

A ski lift carries guests to the top of the mountain where they choose from three rides—Summit Plummet, the Slush Gusher, and Teamboat Springs. If you are among the first in the park, the ski lift is fun and provides a bird's-eye view of the park. After riding it once, however, you are better off taking the stairs to the top of the mountain.

A wave pool and a float creek circle the park. The children's areas, Tike's Peak and Ski Patrol Training Camp, are creatively designed, nicely isolated from the rest of the park, and visually interesting, with attractions like Frozen Pipe Springs, where your kids can take a trip through a frozen pipe and drop down into eight feet of water.

Quick-service restaurants, rest rooms, shops, as well as tube, towel, and locker rentals are located in the ski resort's now-converted base area.

Admission is about \$31 a day for adults, \$25 for children ages 3–9, and free for children under age 3.

Typhoon Lagoon

Typhoon Lagoon is comparable in size to Blizzard Beach. Nine water slides and streams, some as long as 400 feet, drop from the top of a 100-foot-high man-made mountain. An “aftermath of a typhoon” theme imparts an added adventure touch to the wet rides.

Beautifully landscaped, Typhoon Lagoon is entered through a misty rain forest that emerges in a ramshackle tropical town, where concessions and services are located. Disney special effects make every ride an odyssey, as swimmers encounter bat caves, spinning rocks, dinosaur bone formations, and other imponderables.

Like Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon is costly: \$31 a day for adults and \$25 for children ages 3–9; free for children under age 3. If you are going primarily for the slides, you will have only two early morning hours to enjoy the slides before the wait becomes prohibitive during busy seasons.

Ketchakiddee Creek, for those under four feet tall, features geysers, tame slides, bubble jets, and fountains. For the older and more adventurous there

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are two speed slides, three corkscrew body slides, and three tube rapids rides (plus one children's rapids ride) plopping off Mount Mayday.

Two attractions, the surf pool and Shark Reef, are unique. The wave pool is the world's largest inland surf facility, with waves up to six feet. Shark Reef is a saltwater snorkeling pool, where guests can swim around with a multitude of real fish.

Shark Reef is a great opportunity for youngsters to try snorkeling in a controlled environment. Guests are grouped into impromptu classes for a briefing, then launched together. You're not allowed to paddle about aimlessly, but must swim more or less directly across the reef.

If you don't want to swim with fish, you can avail yourself of an underwater viewing chamber, accessible any time.

Elsewhere in the World

Downtown Disney

Encompassing three areas—the Marketplace, Pleasure Island, and West Side—Downtown Disney is the place to shop, dine, and play away from the theme parks—nearly a dozen restaurants, 24 movie-theater screens, and more than 50 shops and stores. The world's largest Disney character shop, World of Disney, is one-stop shopping for souvenirs. There are plenty of restaurants to choose from—Rainforest Cafe, Planet Hollywood, House of Blues, Wolfgang Puck, to name a few. During the winter holidays, from late November to early January, Disney builds an outdoor ice-skating rink, a real novelty in 80° weather.

DisneyQuest

DisneyQuest is a five-story, indoor interactive theme park at Downtown Disney's West Side that combines Disney creativity with technology, including virtual reality and real-time 3-D. There are activities for every age group in four zones: Explore Zone with virtual reality attractions; Score Zone that tests game-playing skills; Create Zone, a studio for artistic self-expression and invention; and Replay Zone, a favorite for youngsters with retro midway games and high-tech bumper cars.

DisneyQuest is open daily from 10:30 a.m. until midnight. Admission is \$31, \$25 for children ages 3–9, and free for children under age 3. All children ages 9 and under must be accompanied by an adult.

Cirque du Soleil

Recognized throughout the world for its astounding shows, Cirque du Soleil has a permanent home at Downtown Disney's West Side for the theatrical, spellbinding *La Nouba*, presented twice nightly Wednesday through Sunday. This extraordinary show wows audiences with surreal sets, theatrical lighting, and high-energy choreography. More than 60 artists from around the world, including gymnasts, acrobats, dancers, and clowns, weave a story of life and high drama during each 90-minute performance. It's definitely worth the ticket (\$72–\$82; \$44–\$49 ages 3–9).

Walt Disney Speedway

Adjacent to the Transportation and Ticket Center parking lot, this one-mile tri-oval course is host to several races each year. Between competitions, it's home to the **Richard Petty Driving Experience**, where you can ride in a two-seater stock car for \$89 or learn to drive one. Courses are by reservation only and rides start at \$89. You must be age 18 or older (16 for the Ride-Along Program), have a valid driver's license, and know how to drive a stick shift to take a course. For information, call (800) 237-3889.

Miniature Golf

First, **Fantasia Gardens**: We actually found it a little frustrating and too difficult for amateur golfers. But then we discovered there are two courses, and we were on the tougher approach-and-putt course with serious sand traps and water hazards. The other course is easier, themed after Disney's animated film *Fantasia*, and kids (and nongolfing parents) actually have a chance to reach the hole without picking up the ball. So pick the one that suits your game. The two, 18-hole courses are on Epcot Resorts Boulevard, directly across from the Walt Disney World Dolphin hotel.

Disney's **Winter Summerland** offers two 18-hole courses near Blizzard Beach water park. Both courses are loaded with interactive gadgets, like the snowman who squirts you with water when a golf ball passes beneath him. Fun for families ready for a break from the theme parks. A round at either course runs \$9.25 for adults and \$7.50 for children; phone (407) WDW-GOLF for more information.

Disney Cruise Line

You can combine a Disney World vacation with a cruise, or just sail on one of two ships, the *Disney Magic* and the *Disney Wonder*.

The ships are designed to offer activities and areas for all ages, including an adults-only spa, a sports club, four restaurants, a movie theater and a theater for Broadway-style shows, a nightclub for families, and a nighttime entertainment district for adults.

If your cruise starts at Disney World, one key will open both your hotel room and your onboard stateroom. Three- and four-day cruises sail to Nassau in the Bahamas; seven-day cruises offer ports in the Caribbean. Both ships stop at Castaway Cay, Disney's private Bahamian Island. For information, call (407) 566-7000.

Disney's Wide World of Sports

This 200-acre, multimillion-dollar sports complex hosts more than 30 types of sporting events, from baseball and basketball to tennis and aerobics. It's the home of the Amateur Athletic Union, the spring training home of the **Atlanta Braves**, and the training site of the **Tampa Bay Buccaneers** football team, and hosts the **Harlem Globetrotters** basketball showteam.

When at Disney, check to see if there's an event you might like to watch; tickets to premium events like an Atlanta Braves game can be purchased through TicketMaster at (407) 839-3900. If you want to take a chance and

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see what's going on or take a self-guided tour through the complex, tickets are \$10 for adults and \$9 for children ages 3–9.

Disney Dining

Reservations in World Disney World are known as “Priority Seating,” a term that suggests you may still encounter a brief wait. When you call to make a priority seating, a Disney representative takes your name and essential information, then explains that you will be seated ahead of walk-ins, i.e., those without priority seating. Whether you reserve early or make arrangements once you're there, the number to call is (407) WDW-DINE.

For most full-service restaurants, buffets, and character meals, you can make priority seatings 120 days in advance. Exceptions include the character breakfast at Cinderella's Royal Table, where priority seating arrangement can be made 60 days in advance, and Disney dinner shows such as the Polynesian Luau and the Hoop-Dee-Do Revue, where priority seatings can be scheduled two years in advance.

FAVORITE DISNEY EATS

- Best seafood** Flying Fish Café at Disney's BoardWalk, Coral Reef at Epcot
- Best steak** Yachtsman's Steakhouse, Disney's Yacht Club Resort
- Best sushi** Disney's California Grill
- Best upscale theme-park dining** Hollywood Brown Derby at Disney-MGM Studios
- Best pasta** Alfredo's at Italy in World Showcase, Epcot
- Best quick service in the Magic Kingdom** Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café in New Tomorrowland
- Best all-you-can-eat** Boma at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, Whispering Canyon Café at Disney's Wilderness Lodge, or 'Ohana at Polynesian Resort
- Most entertaining** A seat next to the aquarium at Coral Reef in the Living Seas pavilion in Future World, Epcot; or a Disney character meal
- Best family fun** Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue at Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground
- World's best milk shakes** The peanut-butter-and-jelly shake at 50's Prime Time at the Disney-MGM Studios
- Most fun for kids** Chef Mickey's at Disney's Contemporary Resort
- Best splurge for grown-ups** Victoria & Albert's or Citricos at Disney's Grand Floridian

If you fail to make priority seating before you leave home, or if you want to make your dining decisions spontaneously while at Walt Disney World, your chances of getting a table at the restaurant of your choice are pretty good, but not a slam dunk. The Hoop-Dee-Do Revue and Cinderella's Royal Table breakfast will most certainly be sold out, as will several of the other more popular character meals and Boma, a buffet at the Animal Kingdom Lodge. Other restaurants will still have priority seatings available if you call at least a day in advance.

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Once in the theme parks, you can make priority seatings in person at the door of the restaurant, at Guest Services at Epcot, or at the kiosk at the intersection of Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards at the Disney-MGM Studios. With a few exceptions, you'll have no problem getting your priority seating at the park. If you fail to make priority seatings, most full-service theme park restaurants will take you as a walk-in between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m.

Walt Disney World Shopping

Downtown Disney

Downtown Disney has three shopping areas: the Marketplace, Pleasure Island, and the West Side. If you have time constraints and need to limit your Disney shopping spree to a single stop, this is it.

Downtown Disney stretches along the shore of Buena Vista Lagoon at the intersection of Buena Vista Drive and Hotel Plaza Boulevard. It's a pleasant walk from the Marketplace on the east end to the West Side, with Pleasure Island situated between the two areas. The West Side has smaller shops with trendy merchandise; the Marketplace is loaded with Disney merchandise and a smattering of non-Disney products; Pleasure Island is really a nighttime entertainment district, but there are a few shops worth considering. So, what you're shopping for determines the best place to park—free parking on a surface lot spreads from one end to the other.

DISNEY SHOPPING TIPS

If you are staying in a Disney hotel, you can have all of your packages delivered to the front entrance of any of the four Disney parks to avoid carrying them around. For a nominal charge, you can ship them by FedEx to your home.

If you remember on your flight home that you forgot to buy mouse ears for your nephew, call the Walt Disney Attractions Mail Order Department on weekdays at (407) 363-6200 or the catalog department at (800) 237-5751. Most trademark merchandise sold at Walt Disney World is available.

The Marketplace

The Marketplace is open Sunday–Thursday, 9:30 a.m.–11 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–11:30 p.m. There are more than 20 shops and seven eateries, including Rainforest Cafe. Top shops include: **Art of Disney** with limited-edition animation cels and pricey Disney creations; **World of Disney**, the Disney superstore with 12 rooms—50,000 square feet—stacked with Disney merchandise, from underwear to clocks to Cinderella dresses; Disney's **Days of Christmas** with hundreds of holiday decorations and a two-story tree decorated with Disney characters; **Disney at Home** with something Disneyesque for every room in the house; **LEGO Imagination Center** with all the latest LEGO paraphernalia, and **Once Upon a Toy** with five rooms of toys, from choose-your-own Mr. Potato Head parts and Lincoln Logs to popular board games.

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Pleasure Island

It's best known for its nightclubs, but Pleasure Island's shops are open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 2 a.m. The newest Pleasure Island addition is **Zen Zone**, where shoppers can purchase sessions in massage chairs or aqua massage beds—long tubes that massage with 36 powerful jets of water (you stay dry). Anti-stress and massage products are for sale.

West Side

The West Side is open every day, 11 a.m.–11 p.m. This is the hip new extension of the Marketplace and Pleasure Island, with shops that are full of fun tchotchkes for compulsive buyers. Top shops include **Virgin Mega-store** with more than 150,000 music titles on CD and cassette and 300 listening stations for previewing CDs; **Guitar Gallery**, offering more than 150 custom, collector, and rare guitars and accessories; and **Hoypoloi**, with one-of-a-kind pieces of art from various regions of the United States—Zen water fountains, contemporary art glass, and wooden boxes.

Epcot

It's one of the treats of Epcot to wander in and out of the shops in the 11 World Showcase pavilions, looking for unusual finds and bargains. Often you will see sale items, especially in the shops in France and Italy, but most of the imported merchandise is relatively expensive. However, the Epcot shops may be the only place in the United States that carries some lines of merchandise.

Walking clockwise around the World Showcase, here's what you'll find:

Mexico Carts are piled with blankets, sombreros, paper flowers, tambourines, and straw bags. Sure, the merchandise may be cheaper south of the border, but these prices aren't bad, with piñatas at \$5–\$11, kids' straw hats at \$4.50, and straw bags for \$12.

Norway The Puffin's Roost is a series of small shopping galleries with popular imports such as an entire room of trolls and wooden Christmas ornaments. Other hard-to-find imports include Laila perfume and body lotion and Helly Hansen outerwear.

China Yong Feng Shangdian department store features real silk kimonos, cloisonné, and thick silk rugs. Kids love rummaging through the toy bins in the covered outdoor area.

Germany Eight small shops interconnect on both sides of the cobblestone central plaza and provide an impressive collection of imports: cuckoo clocks, dolls, crystal, wine, and sweets are among the treasures.

Italy Il Bel Cristallo showcases Venetian glass, porcelain figurines and Giuseppe Armani figurines from Florence, along with handbags, ties, and scarves.

Japan A U.S. branch of Japan's 300-year-old Mitsukoshi Department Store stretches along one entire side of the pavilion. A recent renovation expands the culinary display and adds a sake-tasting bar.

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Morocco Three shops offer everything from leather sandals, purses, and fezzes to brass and inexpensive kitchenware.

France Plume et Palette, a perfume shop, carries more than 100 imports, among them Chanel, Christian Dior, Jean Patou, and Cabotine de Grès. Other merchandise includes French wines, dishes, cookbooks, and finds from Provence.

United Kingdom/Canada The popular Roots boutique has a wide selection of merchandise, including caps, jackets, T-shirts, boots, clogs, and backpacks.

The Other Parks

Beyond Epcot, shopping is hit-or-miss in the other three theme parks. You'll find the same basic Disney merchandise everywhere, with specialty items for each park tossed in. However, there are still some unusual shops amid all the Disney goods. At **Disney-MGM Studios**, Sid Cahuenga's One-of-a-Kind, loosely inspired by junk shops in southern California, carries autographed photos of film and TV stars, and old movie posters. The park's Animation Gallery in the Animation Building has an impressive collection of cels and other collectibles.

Mombasa Marketplace at **Disney's Animal Kingdom** showcases reasonably priced African-themed pottery, musical instruments, and masks. Often you'll find an artisan from Kenya carving walking sticks on the front porch.

In the **Magic Kingdom**, if you want a monogrammed mouse-ears hat, The Chapeau on Main Street is the only place at Walt Disney World to purchase it (there is a hat shop at the Studios, but there you pay extra for the monogramming).

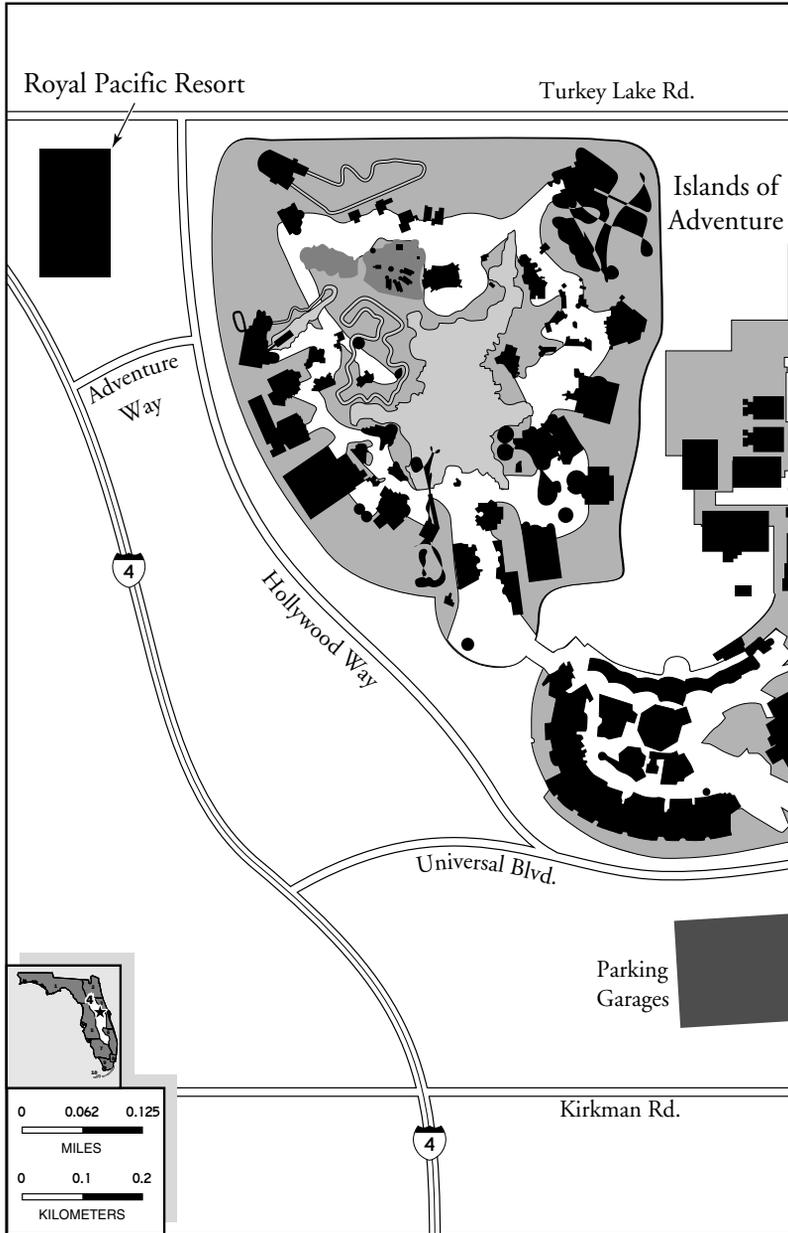
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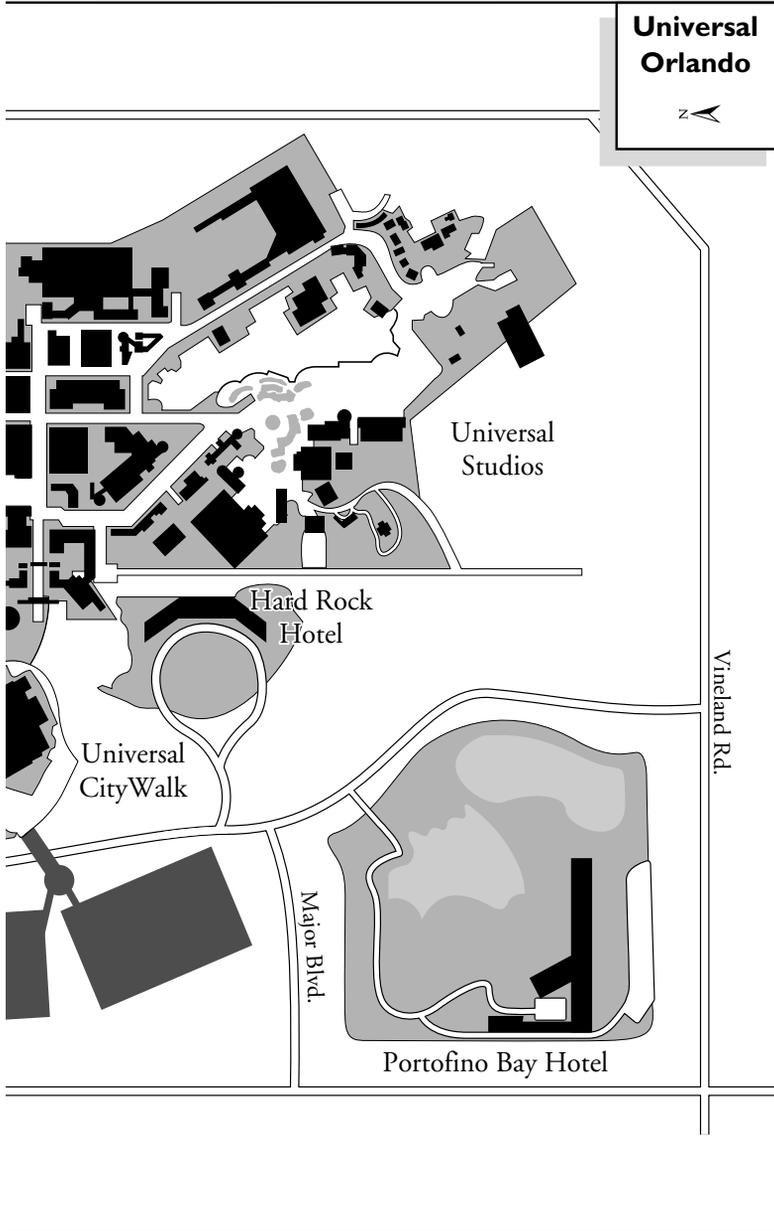
Universal Orlando (1000 Universal Studios Plaza, Orlando; (407) 363-8000 or (800) U-ESCAPE; www.universalorlando.com) is spacious, beautifully landscaped, meticulously clean, and delightfully varied in its entertainment offerings.

UNIVERSAL EXPRESS PASS

A great advantage for resort guests is the new Universal Express Pass. If you're staying in a Universal hotel, you simply show your room keycard to be directed to an "express line" for almost every ride and attraction in the two parks. The system is also available to nonresort guests who buy theme park tickets—but they must receive an Express Pass for a single ride or attraction, and can only get another Express Pass after visiting the attraction or after two hours have passed.

The two Universal parks—Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure—have lots of exciting, innovative rides, and individual shows on movie making. Both open daily at 9 a.m., with closing times that vary seasonally. Stretching between the two theme parks is Universal CityWalk, a 30-acre entertainment district.





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Universal Orlando features three hotels: Portofino Bay Hotel, with a Mediterranean theme; Hard Rock Hotel, with a cache of cool rock 'n' roll memorabilia; and the Royal Pacific Resort. All are just a short (and free) boat taxi ride from CityWalk and the theme parks.

Admission Options

A one-day, one-park pass is \$55, \$46 for children ages 3–9; those under age 3 are admitted free of charge. A two-day, two-park pass costs \$104, \$90 for children. A three-day, two-park pass runs \$120, \$104 for children.

Several multiday ticket options are available, including annual passes and a flex ticket that includes SeaWorld, Wet 'n Wild, and Busch Gardens in Tampa. The website www.universalorlando.com has a list of options, with some tickets only available online. Most multiday tickets must be used within 14 days.

Arriving, Parking, and Transportation

Universal Orlando can be accessed directly from I-4. Once on-site, you will be directed to park in one of two multi-tiered parking garages. Be sure to write down the location of your car before heading for the parks. From the garages, moving sidewalks deliver you to Universal CityWalk; from CityWalk you can access the main entrances of both Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure theme parks. Even with the moving walkways it takes about 10–12 minutes to commute from the garages to the entrances of the theme parks. Parking is \$8 for cars, \$9 for RVs, and it's free after 6 p.m. Valet parking is available for \$16; follow the signs.

UNIVERSAL THEME PARK DINING

CityWalk and the Universal hotels have a handful of good restaurants, but inside the theme parks, if you're looking for more than quick-service fare, there are just two recommendations: **Mythos** (phone (407) 224-4533) at Islands of Adventure, and **Lombard's** (phone (407) 224-6400) at Universal Studios. Lombard's does a nice job with seafood, while Mythos's pricier offerings are more eclectic, from wood-fired pizzas to pork tenderloin. You'll need reservations for both.

Universal Studios

Universal's first Central Florida theme park is all about “living the movies,” with stage sets, soundstages, and backlots—the “lands” are loosely delineated as you wander from **Production Central** to **New York, San Francisco/Amity, World Expo, Woody Woodpecker's Kidzone**, and **Hollywood**.

Universal Studios is laid out in an upside-down L configuration. Beyond the main entrance, a wide boulevard stretches past several shows and rides to a New Your City backlot. Branching off this pedestrian thoroughfare to the right are five streets that access other areas of the studios and intersect a promenade circling a large lake.

Top Attractions

Animal Planet Live! Too cute—live animals, from pigs and dogs to horses, parrots and a baby chimpanzee—take center stage to show off. Some audience members get to participate. Universal Express Pass available.

Back to the Future ... The Ride A seven-story Omnimax screen and a flight simulator disguised as a time-traveling DeLorean take you on a jarring, jolting high-speed chase from the Ice Age to the year 2015. Though the story line doesn't make much sense, the visual effects are wild and powerful. Not for anyone with motion sickness. Guests must be 40 inches tall to ride. Universal Express Pass available.

Earthquake—The Big One Remember this movie? This attraction puts you on a San Francisco subway train before the big one hits (8.3 on the Richter), creating fires, crashes, tumbling walls, and a tidal wave. You have to be 40 inches tall to ride. Universal Express Pass available.

Jaws The thriller that kept hordes from the beaches is brought to life with a three-ton shark that menaces your little boat. *Jaws* builds an amazing degree of suspense, with nonstop action leading up to the moment the Great White makes his appearance. Universal Express Pass available.

Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast A kid-pleaser from the minute you're buckled in your "rocket," the lights go down, and you "lift off" for a bumpy ride through the animated world of Nickelodeon characters. By the final moments, kids are squealing with delight and most grown-ups look relieved that the jostling rockets have settled back to earth. Universal Express Pass available.

Men in Black Alien Attack This supercharged video game lets you chase aliens with your on-board laser gun. And these bad guys shoot back, sending your car spinning out of control. You rack up points and depart a winner or loser. You must be 42 inches tall to ride. Universal Express Pass available.

Nickelodeon Studios Fans of the Nickelodeon network line up for "Nick Slime Time," live from the studios on select weekday afternoons. Head over to the Nick Studios to pick up a ticket for one of the coveted seats. Throughout the day, tours show set construction, soundstages wardrobe, props, lighting, video production, and special effects.

Shrek 4-D Universal Studios' newest attraction picks up where the Oscar-winning *Shrek* left off, with Shrek, Princess Fiona, and their chatterbox Donkey setting off for a honeymoon. Within seconds after putting on OgreVision glasses, the audience gets startling proof that 4-D means there are cutting-edge special effects in the theater as well as on-screen. In-your-face spiders, a fire-breathing dragon, and a wild plunge down a waterfall (your seats bob and bounce, too) make for a spectacular, fast-paced attraction. Universal Express Pass available.

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Terminator 2: 3-D The attraction, like the *Terminator* films, is all action, and you don't really need to understand much. Ah-nold wants you out of the building in this battle to prevent mankind's extinction at the cold, steel hands of futuristic cyborgs. You're immersed in the battle with live action stunts, special effects, and 3-D . . . it's "hasta la vista, baby." Universal Express Pass available.

Twister: Ride It Out Based on the hit movie *Twister*, but this time you're on the set with a screaming, five-story tornado with wind, pounding rain, and a flying cow just 20 feet from where you are standing. The ominous funnel even has the terrifying "freight train" sound, created by circulating more than two million cubic feet of air per minute. Universal Express Pass available.

COMING SOON: REVENGE OF THE MUMMY

At press time, construction was under way on Universal Studios' next blockbuster, "Revenge of the Mummy," scheduled to open in April 2004. Ten years in development, Universal says it's the first indoor ride to fuse roller-coaster technology, robotics, and pyrotechnic special effects, including a "ceiling of flame" inches overhead. Guests will hurtle through Egyptian sets in this psychological thrill ride based on the popular *Mummy* films.

Islands of Adventure

This theme park expanded Universal's offerings, and features the best collection of roller coasters and thrill rides of any Central Florida attraction. Many of the rides have characters for inspiration—The Cat in the Hat, Spider-Man, Popeye, The Incredible Hulk, and the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park.

The park is configured with five islands, each with rides, attractions, shows, and restaurants: **Seuss Landing**, **Toon Lagoon**, **Marvel Super Hero Island**, **The Lost Continent**, and **Jurassic Park**.

Islands of Adventure is arranged much like the World Showcase section of Epcot, in a large circle surrounding a lake. Each island is self-contained and visually consistent in its theme.

Top Attractions

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man Spider-Man is frenetic, fluid, and astounding. The visuals are rich and wild, but not jerky, as you're immersed in a 3-D world to help Spider-Man retrieve the Statue of Liberty from the bad guys. It's a high-tech battle from start to finish, including a 400-foot drop that leaves you wondering just how they did that. A little too intense for some kids. Universal Express Pass available.

Caro-Seuss-el Totally outrageous, everyone can be a kid again when they pick their personal favorite Seuss character for a spin on the elaborate carousel, from the Dog-a-lobes and Mulligatawnies from "If I Ran the Zoo" to the Elephant-birds from "Horton Hatches an Egg." Universal Express Pass available.

The Cat in the Hat Chaotic fun for all ages, this ride brings the famous Seuss book to life with Thing 1 and Thing 2, and the goldfish who tries to maintain order in the house as you ride by on “couches” through 18 different sets. Universal Express Pass available.

BREEZE PAST THE LONG LINES

If you can afford it, Universal Studios offers a guided tour of the top attractions for \$100 per person. An employee meets your family and escorts you to the front of the line at major attractions. Theme park tickets are \$55 and \$46 for ages 3–9, so you’re spending about \$45 not to stand in interminably long lines, but you also get free valet parking, a DVD (we got *The Mummy Returns*), and a collectible pin. It’s a great way to experience the best of the park in a few hours. Just be aware that many of the attractions on the tour are not suitable for children under age 6.

Dudley Do-Right’s Ripsaw Falls Wet, wet, wet, so don’t even consider this flume ride unless getting soaked is an option. Dudley Do-Right has to save Nell from the evil Snidely Whiplash, and just like an episode of *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, there’s an inescapable waterfall. Riders must be at least 48 inches tall. Universal Express Pass available.

Dueling Dragons Hulk may look scarier, but these inverted coasters get high marks from daredevils who love the two intertwined tracks that whiz over, under, and around each other at speed up to 60 mph—at one point a mere 12 inches apart. It’s the park’s highest coaster and also claims the longest drop—115 feet. Guests must be 54 inches tall to ride. Universal Express Pass available.

The Incredible Hulk Coaster There’s nothing quite like blastoff from 0 to 40 mph in two seconds, then an inversion, seven rollovers, and two dips underground. It’s over in two minutes and 15 seconds—before you know it, you’re lining up again. Guests must be 54 inches tall to ride. Universal Express Pass available.

Jurassic Park River Adventure You drift pleasantly along until, of course, something goes awry. Before you know it, you’re prey for a Tyrannosaurus rex who descends on your ride car just before an eight-story plunge—the longest, fastest, steepest water descent in a theme park. Riders must be at least 42 inches tall. Universal Express Pass available.

Popeye & Bluto’s Bilge-Rat Barges Water again, and most of the riders looked like drowned rats as they exit the white-water raft ride—not only from the churning waters, but thanks to overzealous (and dry) park guests who take aim at riders with water cannons along the way. Be a good sport, or skip this one. Riders must be at least 48 inches tall. Universal Express Pass available.

Poseidon’s Fury: Escape from the Lost City You’ve a front-row seat for the battle between Poseidon and Zeus—water and fire—in this dramatic theatrical performance that includes more than 350,000 gallons of water and 200 fiery effects. It wraps with quite an impressive flourish. Universal Express Pass available.

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Universal Studios CityWalk

CityWalk, a 30-acre entertainment district, stretches between the two theme parks. After parking in the garage, you must walk through CityWalk to reach either of the two Universal theme parks.

Perhaps CityWalk's biggest claims to fame are **Emeril's Restaurant Orlando** by famed Chef Emeril Lagasse, and **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville**, where the musician has been known to drop by for an impromptu concert. Other eateries include **Hard Rock Café** (next door is a Hard Rock Live concert venue), **NBA City**, **Bob Marley—A Tribute to Freedom**, **Motown Café**, **NASCAR Café**, **Pat O'Brien's**, and **Latin Quarter**.

A 20-screen, **Universal Cineplex** draws crowds on weekends and rainy days. Shopping is limited but fun, with about a dozen specialty shops carrying everything from cigars to surf and beach wear.

Children are welcome in most of the restaurants. Shops open at 10 a.m. daily, and many are open until midnight. A CityWalk Party Pass costs \$9, \$12 with a movie pass.

Greater Orlando Area

It is true that but for Walt Disney, Orlando might remain a sleepy central-Florida hamlet to this day. However, it is equally correct that the thousands of tourists who see no more of Greater Orlando than the Disney and Universal parks bypass a wealth of recreation, shopping, and entertainment in Orlando and nearby towns. Besides lavish theme parks like SeaWorld and Wet 'n Wild (see Attractions below), which pale only in comparison to their gargantuan neighbors, Orlando is home to peculiar roadside attractions, themed hotels and eateries, and, thankfully, tasteful respites from the outlandish. And although most of them subsist on residual Disney-vacation dollars, tourists can easily spend a week or two in Orlando without setting foot in a Disney or Universal theme park.

Golf

ChampionsGate, International Course

1400 Masters Boulevard, Championsgate
(888) 558-9301 or (407) 787-4653; www.championsgatgolf.com

Established 2001 | **Designer** Greg Norman | **Holes** 18

Tees Trophy/Legends/Champions/Heritage

Par 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 143/137/132/117

Fees \$50 before 3 p.m. (Florida residents); \$68 (non-Florida residents), \$48 after 3 p.m. **Cart rental** Included **Club rental** \$40 per set **Payment** V, MC, AmEx **Tee times** 60 days in advance **Facilities** Pro shop, driving range, practice greens, locker rooms, restaurant, beverage cart, and club and shoe rentals.

Comments The tougher and more highly ranked of the two layouts at Champions Gate, the International lives up to its name by re-creating the

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feel of the championship courses of the British Isles. Laid out in a links style, the course has carpet-like fairways framed by the stark unfinished look of brown dunes, mounds, and severe pot bunkers. From the tips, it is one of the state's most challenging courses.

Grand Cypress, New Course

1 North Jacaranda, Orlando

(800) 835-7377, (407) 239-4700; www.grandcypress.com/golf/golfclub.htm

Established 1988 | **Designer** Jack Nicklaus | **Holes** 18

Tees Black/White/Red **Par** 72/72/72 **Slope** 126/117/117

Fees Seasonal from \$115–\$175 **Specials** Golf packages available **Cart rental** Included in green fees **Club rental** \$60 per set **Payment** V, MC, AmEx, D **Tee times** 60 days in advance **Facilities** Pro shop, driving range, practice greens, locker rooms, restaurant, beverage cart, carts equipped with Global Positioning Systems, and club and shoe rentals.

Comments The New Course is Jack Nicklaus' homage to the famous Old Course at St. Andrews, Scotland, the birthplace of golf. The first and last two holes are replicas of those at the Old Course, and other features such as the famous Swilcan Bridge and some of the huge bunkers are recreated here.

In between are Nicklaus's original holes, done in a links style, with double greens, pot bunkers, tall rough, and wide, hard fairways.

Grenelefe Golf and Tennis, West Course

3200 FL 546, Haines City

(800) 237-9549; (863) 422-7511; www.westgateresorts.com

Established 1971 | **Designers** Robert Trent Jones Sr. and David Wallace | **Holes** 18

Tees Dark Green/Light Green/White/Yellow

Par 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 130/126/122/118

Fees \$45 **Specials** \$25 unlimited golf **Cart rental** Included in green fees **Club rental** \$20 per set **Payment** V, MC, AmEx, D **Tee times** 10 days in advance **Facilities** Pro shop, driving range, putting green, restaurant

Comments Grenelefe has three courses, but the main attraction is the West course—stretching more than 7,300 yards from the tips. In fact, six of the ten par-4s on the course are over 400 yards and most of the par-3s over 200 yards. But the real beauty of Grenelefe is that it tests your touch as well as your strength. The greens tend to be small and well bunkered; your approach shots are as important as your drives.

Mission Inn Golf and Tennis Resort, El Campeon Course

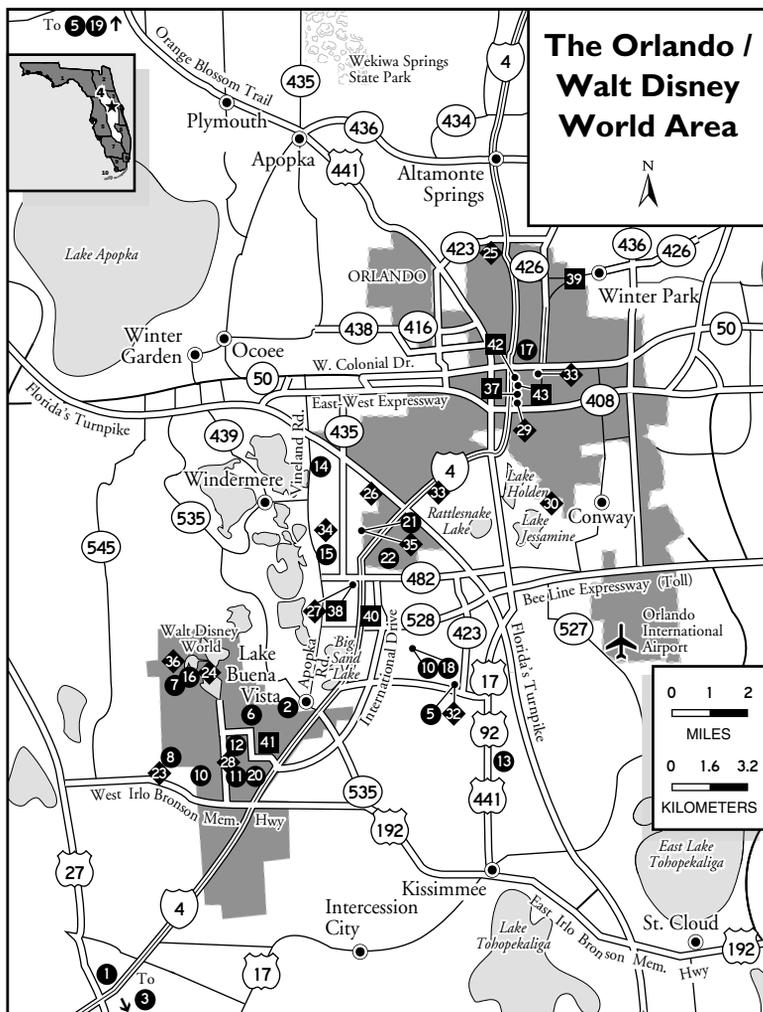
10400 CR 48, Howey-In-The-Hills

(352) 324-3885; www.missioninnresort.com

Established 1926 | **Designer** Charles Clark | **Holes** 18

Tees Blue/White/Gold/Red **Par** 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 133/128/119/118

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Fees \$50 **Specials** Call in inquire **Cart rental** Included **Club rental** \$50 per set **Payment** V, MC, AmEx, DC **Tee times** 7 days in advance **Facilities** Driving range, putting green, pro shop, restaurant

Comments El Campeon plays through 625 acres of isolated, rolling terrain featuring a number of lakes, elevation changes up to 85 feet, sculpted bunkers, and tight fairways lined with mature oaks. The back 9 has a series of difficult and intriguing holes. Known as the "Devil's Delight," the 17th is a 538-yard par-5 that easily lives up to its moniker.

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GOLF COURSES

- ① Champions Gate
- ② Grand Cypress
- ③ Grenelefe Golf & Tennis, West Course
- ④ Mission Inn Golf & Tennis Resort
- ⑤ Ritz-Carlton Golf Club
- ⑥ Walt Disney World Resort-Eagle Pines/Osprey Ridge
- ⑦ Walt Disney World Resort-Magnolia/Palm

ATTRACTIONS

- ⑧ Animal Kingdom
- ⑨ Blizzard Beach
- ⑩ Discovery Cove
- ⑪ Disney-MGM Studios
- ⑫ Epcot
- ⑬ Gatorland Zoo

- ⑭ Holy Land Experience
- ⑮ Islands of Adventure
- ⑯ Magic Kingdom
- ⑰ Orlando Science Center
- ⑱ SeaWorld Orlando
- ⑲ Silver Springs
- ⑳ Typhoon Lagoon
- ㉑ Universal Studios Orlando
- ㉒ Wet 'n' Wild

RESTAURANTS

- ㉓ Boma
- ㉔ California Grill
- ㉕ Del Frisco's
- ㉖ Delfino Riviera
- ㉗ Emeril's Restaurant Orlando
- ㉘ Flying Fish
- ㉙ Hue

- ㉚ Le Coq Au Vin
- ㉛ McCormick & Schmick's
- ㉜ Norman's at the Ritz-Carlton
- ㉝ Pho 88
- ㉞ Seasons 52
- ㉟ Tchoup Chop
- ㊱ Victoria & Albert's

NIGHTCLUBS

- ㊲ Bösendorfer Lounge
- ㊳ CityWalk
- ㊴ Fiddler's Green
- ㊵ Matrix/Metropolis
- ㊶ Pleasure Island
- ㊷ Sky60
- ㊸ Tabu

Ritz-Carlton Golf Club

4012 Central Florid Parkway, Orlando; (407) 393-4900; www.grandelakes.com

Established 2003 **Designer** Greg Norman **Holes** 18

Tees Black/Gold/Blue/White/Green

Par 72/72/72/72/72 **Slope** 139/135/127/121/115

Fees \$85 for hotel guests, \$95 for nonguests **Cart rental** Included **Club rental** \$20 per set **Payment** All major credit cards accepted **Tee times** 14 days in advance **Facilities** Very large driving range, pro shop, showers, Fairway Pub & Grill

Comments This new course is promoted as “enjoyable for golfers of every skill level.” A Golf Caddie-Concierge Program, the first of its kind at a U.S. golf resort, offers a professional attendant to accompany each twosome or foursome. Along with traditional caddie services, the concierge caddies provide other services, including food and beverage orders and dinner reservations. The club also has a “Golf FORE Kids Etiquette Class” for kids 5–12.

Walt Disney World Resort, Eagle Pines, and Osprey Ridge

3451 GolfView Drive, Lake Buena Vista;
(407) WDW-GOLF; www.disneyworld.com

Eagle Pines Course

Established 1992 | **Designer** Pet Dye | **Holes** 18

Tees Talon/Crest/Wings/Feathers

Par 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 131/125/115/116

280 *Part Five* **Orlando: Walt Disney World and Beyond****Osprey Ridge Course****Established** 1992 | **Designer** Tom Fazio | **Holes** 18**Tees** Talon/Crest/Wings/Feathers**Par** 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 135/128/121/122

Fees Seasonal, \$105–\$170; call for current rates **Specials** Twilight rates; replay rates are 50% of applicable full rate on the same day, on a space-available basis, and may not be reserved in advance. **Cart rental** Included **Club rental** \$45 per set **Payment** All major credit cards accepted **Tee times** Resort guests can reserve tee times up to 90 days in advance, and day guests can reserve up to 30 days in advance by calling (407) WDW-GOLF. All reservations must be guaranteed with a credit card. **Facilities** Pro shop, driving range, practice green, locker rooms, club and shoe rentals, snack bar, beverage cart, and Sand Trap Bar & Grill (Osprey Ridge).

Comments At **Eagle Pines**, in contrast to neighboring Osprey Ridge, Pete Dye crafted a course reminiscent of the Carolina Sandhills, with fairways lined with native grasses and flanked by waste areas of straw and sand. Dish-shaped greens are at or below the levels of the fairway, emphasizing approach shots. Water is in play on nearly every hole, and aesthetically, this is the most impressive of the Disney courses.

The Tom Fazio layout at **Osprey Ridge** is a thoroughly modern course, the construction of which required much earth moving. Its main characteristics are large rolling mounds and elevated tees and greens. The greens are huge, which makes them easy to hit but leaves long approach shots.

Walt Disney World Resort, Magnolia and Palm

1950 West Magnolia/Palm Drive, Lake Buena Vista;
(407) WDW-GOLF; www.disneyworld.com

Magnolia Course**Established** 1971 | **Designer** Joe Lee | **Holes** 18**Tees** Blue/White/Gold/Red **Par** 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 128/128/123/123**Palm Course****Established** 1971 | **Designer** Joe Lee | **Holes** 18**Tees** Blue/White/Gold/Red **Par** 72/72/72/72 **Slope** 133/128/124/123

Fees Seasonal, \$105–\$170; call for current rates **Specials** Twilight rates; replay rates are 50% of the applicable full rate on same day, on a space-available basis, and may not be reserved in advance. **Cart rental** Included **Club rental** \$45 per set **Payment** All major credit cards accepted **Tee times** Resort guests can reserve tee times up to 90 days in advance, and day guests can reserve up to 30 days in advance by calling (407) WDW-GOLF. All reservations must be guaranteed with a credit card. **Facilities** Pro shop, driving range, practice green, locker rooms, sports bar, beverage cart, and club and shoe rentals

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Comments A fine Joe Lee creation, **Magnolia** shares its best traits with the Palm, including excellent greens, practice facilities, a dramatic finishing sequence, and plenty of water. From the back tees it is Disney's longest course and features a whopping 97 bunkers, including the famous one in the shape of Mickey Mouse's head. But the layout is slightly less challenging than the Palm, with no water on most of the par-3s.

The Palm is Disney's best course, with lesser-known architect Joe Lee showing up the marquee designers that headline the Bonnet Creek Golf Club. The defining characteristic is a set of holes where water separates tees from landing areas and landing areas from greens, a wet take on desert-style target golf. The signature 18th, with its island green, caps a fine set of finishing holes and has been ranked as high as fourth in difficulty among all holes on the PGA Tour's many venues. But four sets of well-spaced tees make the course playable for all abilities.

Attractions

International Drive

International Drive, or "I-Drive," is the epicenter of Central Florida's tourism business. This is where you'll find most of the factory outlet stores, many hotel chains, and just about any fast-food restaurant you can dream up.

If you're staying on I-Drive, there are myriad small attractions that are great for rainy days, or if you're short on time or have overspent the budget for the premier parks. The **I-Ride Trolley** (phone (407) 248-9590; www.iride-trolley.com) is a fun way to get around International Drive. A single fare is 75 cents; kids under 12 ride free. Hours are 8 a.m.–10:30 p.m. daily.

Along with Wet 'n Wild water park (profiled below), here are a few top attractions:

WonderWorks (9067 International Drive; (407) 351-8800; wonderworksonline.com), in the distinctive "upside-down" building, is an interactive playground where you can experience earthquakes and hurricanes, swim with sharks, put yourself inside a huge bubble, design and ride a roller coaster, or play in the world's largest laser-tag arena. The owners visited science centers all over the world, then re-created the best of the best. Hours are 9 a.m.–midnight daily; the cost is \$17, \$13 ages 4–12.

Ripley's Believe It or Not (8201 International Drive; (407) 363-4418; www.ripleysorlando.com) is just plain fun, filled to the rafters with oddities like shrunken heads, unusual animals, and animals made of matchsticks. Hours are 9 a.m.–1 a.m. daily; cost is \$16, \$11 ages 4–12.

Vans Skateboard Park (5220 International Drive; (407) 351-3881; www.vans.com) is the place to go if you've got a kid who's jonesin' for a little skateboard time. The skatepark features 61,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor skating with riding areas and obstacles. Highlights include the "Dough Boy," an above-ground bowl, and a 40-foot competition-size vertical ramp. Grown-ups can hang out on the mezzanine viewing area.

The **Hard Rock Vault** (8437 International Drive; (407) 445-7625; www.hardrock.com) showcases about 1,000 artifacts from more than 200

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artists, from blues pioneers to heavy metal and punk stars—from an Elvis jumpsuit to Michael Jackson's red jacket. Pieces have been chosen from memorabilia displayed at the more than 100 Hard Rock Cafés around the world. Also a music listening room.

Gatorland Zoo

14501 South Orange Blossom Trail, Kissimmee; (407) 855-5496; www.gatorland.com

Hours Daily, 9 a.m.–dusk

Admission \$20 for adults, \$10 for children ages 3–12, free for ages 2 and under

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Pre-school ★★★ | Teens ★★★★★ | Over 30 ★★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★★★ | Seniors ★★★ |

Touring Time Average 3 hours; minimum 1½ hour

Rainy-Day Touring Some of the exhibit is under cover

Author's Rating ★★★; a unique Florida experience

Description and Comments A kitschy roadside attraction, but the kids really love to see the alligators leap as high as five feet from the water and snatch the whole chickens in *Gator Jumparoo*, one of three daily shows at this old-fashioned attraction.

The 70-acre park opened in 1949, and the trademark gaping gator jaws at the entrance were put in place back in 1962. The jaws lead to a boardwalk spanning a seven-acre lake filled with dozens of the critters.

Gator Wrestlin' Cracker-Style demonstrates how Florida cowboys used to go one-on-one with the reptiles.

Covered walkways lead past monkeys, goats, deer, bears, and wild birds. At the far end of the park is an ancient cypress swamp with a three-level observation tower that offers a great view of gators and thousands of birds nests.

Holy Land Experience

4655 Vineland Road, Orlando; (866) 872-4659

Hours 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday–Thursday; 9 a.m.–6 p.m. Friday and Saturday; noon–6 p.m. Sunday; closed Thanksgiving and Christmas Day

Admission \$30, \$20 ages 6–12

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Pre-school ★ | Teens ★★ | Over 30 ★★★ |
| Grade school ★★ | Young Adults ★★ | Seniors ★★★ |

Touring Time Average 3 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Not recommended

Author's Rating ★★

Description and Comments The Holy Land Experience is a peaceful retreat and a fascinating look at places recorded in the Bible. From the moment you pass through the gates of the “Walled City,” the architecture transports you to Jerusalem, circa 1450 B.C. to A.D. 66, with replicas of Calvary's garden

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tomb, the Qumran Caves (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947), the Wilderness Tabernacle, the Temple of the Great King, and the Plaza of the Nations. The newest addition is the Scriptorium, which houses one of the world's finest private collections of biblical artifacts—cuneiform, scrolls, codices, manuscripts, and Bibles. Throughout the day, live shows are staged, showing, for instance, ancient Jewish rituals in the Wilderness Tabernacle or the resurrection of Jesus. The park's Christian message is obvious.

Orlando Science Center

777 East Princeton Street, Orlando; (407) 514-2000; www.osc.org

Hours Tuesday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m.; Sunday, noon–5 p.m.; closed Monday

Admission \$10 for adults, \$9 for senior citizens; \$7.50 for children ages 3–11; \$7 for adults, \$6 for senior citizens, \$5 for children ages 3–11 additional for films, and combo tickets are available for \$13 adults, \$12 senior citizens and \$10.50 children ages 3–11.

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| Pre-school ★★★ | Teens ★★★ | Over 30 ★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★ | Seniors ★★ |

Touring Time *Average* 4 hours; *minimum* 2 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Recommended

Author's Rating ★★★★★; this new science center keeps kids entertained for hours, and there's plenty for adults to do, too

Description and Comments A good place to start is on the ground floor (one story down from the entrance), where children ages 8 and under—no parents allowed—let their imaginations run free in Kids Town. They can explore the root system of a tree by crawling through an underground tunnel, build with blocks at the construction site, and shop in the miniature stores.

The number of exhibits can be overwhelming—there are ten interactive exhibition halls on four floors, so take a few moments to study a guide map.

Make time during your visit to experience a show in the CineDome (separate admission), with an eight-story domed screen that immerses you in the image—traveling to the depths of a live volcano, swimming with a great white shark, racing through the human blood stream.

The Orlando Science Center is a perfect rainy-day solution. Even parking is covered, with a new 600-space garage that's connected to the building by a glass walkway.

SeaWorld Orlando

7007 SeaWorld Drive, Orlando; (407) 351-3600; www.seaworld.com

Hours Open daily at 9 a.m., closing time varies by season

Admission \$52 for adults, \$43 for children ages 3–9, free for ages 2 and under; \$7 for parking

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Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Pre-school ★★★★★ | Teens ★★★★★ | Over 30 ★★★★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★★★ | Seniors ★★★★★ |

Touring Time Average 6 hours; minimum 4 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Not recommended

Author's Rating ★★★★★

Description and Comments SeaWorld is a world-class marine-life theme park that admirably combines entertainment, education, research, and conservation to create a fascinating experience. And it's got Kraken, Orlando's longest, fastest, steepest roller coaster. The newest addition is the WaterFront, a five-acre area with live entertainment, themed restaurants, and shops and boutiques.

The park is open every day of the year, and you should allow at least six hours to see the shows and exhibits—a great plan is to arrive at midday and stay later into the evening when temperatures are cooler and there are nighttime fireworks and laser shows.

Make a left when you enter the park and start your day in Key West at SeaWorld, where the kids can pet the dolphins or stingrays while you strategize a game plan for the day.

Unless you want to head straight for the two thrill rides—Kraken or Journey to Atlantis—the *Dolphin Fest* in the Key West area is as good a place as any to start the day. While you're waiting for the show to start, you can observe (and sometimes feed) the dolphins, turtles, stingrays, and other species indigenous to the Florida Keys.

SeaWorld primarily features open-air theater shows or walk-through exhibits, so you will spend a lot less time waiting in line at SeaWorld than you would at a Disney park. Just check show times and be at the theater about 15 minutes early—there's plenty of seating, and even if you're a few minutes late you won't miss much (with one exception, the sea lion and otter show).

The park is big enough to recommend seeing shows in some order. Rent strollers for little ones since there's quite a bit of walking. Wheelchairs can move around easily.

Aside from *Key West Dolphin Fest*, there are three other big daytime shows: the *Shamu Adventure*, *Clyde and Seamore Take Pirate Island*, and *Pets Ahoy!*. When you arrive, develop your touring itinerary around these four shows. New WaterFront shows worth checking out if time allows include *Kat 'n' Kaboodle*, a street show with 16 exotic breeds of cats; and *Rico & Rozal's Musical Feast*, a 25-minute musical revue.

If you're visiting on a tight schedule, the only "don't miss" is the *Shamu Adventure*. Where else can you sit inches away from Shamu, the 8,000-pound killer whale, and be splashed by his wake? Keep in mind that Shamu's antics can really soak your clothes, so if it's chilly, you may want to sit a few rows back from the splash zone. There's also a nighttime Shamu show—definitely worth staying past sunset.

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The only consistent waits are for the Kraken roller coaster, Journey to Atlantis water-coaster thrill ride, and Wild Arctic, a fast-paced flight simulator. For Wild Arctic, you can bypass the ride and walk into a superb exhibit of live beluga whales, walruses, harbor seals, and polar bears.

Animal attractions include sea lions, harbor seals, sharks, penguins manatees, dolphins, stingrays, pelicans, spoonbills, flamingos, and the Anheuser-Busch Clydesdale horses, plus a tidal pool and tropical reef.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE WET KIND

SeaWorld's Sharks Deep Dive lets you go underwater in a sturdy metal cage with more than 50 sharks in a 660,000-gallon saltwater tank. You can snorkel or scuba, and up to two at a time can occupy the cage for about 30 minutes. The cost is \$125 or \$150 depending on whether you snorkel or use scuba gear.

If you prefer whales, another program lets you interact one-on-one with a false killer whale, and help out with a SeaWorld training session. The cost is \$200 for the two-hour program.

To make reservations for either program, call (800) 432-1178 or book online at www.seaworld.com.

Sea World's Discovery Cove

6000 Discovery Cove Way, Orlando; (877) 4-DISCOVERY

Hours Open daily from 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Admission All-inclusive, \$229; without dolphin swim, \$129; trainer for a day, \$399. Includes a seven-day pass to SeaWorld Orlando.

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Pre-school ★★★★★ | Teens ★★★★★ | Over 30 ★★★★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★★★ | Seniors ★★★★★ |

Touring Time *Average* 7 hours; *minimum* 5 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Not recommended

Author's Rating ★★★★★

Description and Comments A welcome departure from the hustle and bustle of other Orlando parks, Discovery Cove lets you swim with dolphins, snorkel with tropical fish, and just plain relax on a sandy beach without driving 50 miles to the Atlantic Ocean. The park requires reservations and is limited to 1,000 guests a day. You pay for that privilege, but the experience is worth it.

The park is a manageable 30 acres and beautifully landscaped, with four main attractions: the Dolphin Lagoon, swimming with stingrays, snorkeling with 4,000 tropical fish, and a 100-foot-long aviary filled with birds.

Visitors check in at a concierge desk and a personal guide takes them for a walking tour and overview of the park. Dolphin Lagoon is the only timed part of the day. Otherwise, you're free to swim, sleep, eat, and play on the

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sandy beaches. A word of caution: bring water socks or rubber pool shoes, as the sand gets scorching hot in the middle of the day.

The highlight, of course, is the bottlenose dolphins, and children must be age 6 or older to get in the water with the mammals. The program starts with a 30-minute orientation for groups up of to eight swimmers, then swimmers wade into Dolphin Lagoon for a shallow water introduction. Next, three guests at a time go with the trainer into deeper water to swim, snorkel, or hang onto a dorsal fin for a high-speed ride.

The Ray Lagoon inhabitants are harmless (no barbs), and it's a startling experience to snorkel amidst dozens of sleek southern and cownose rays, some up to four feet in diameter. If you hold out a hand, they will take a finger in their mouths (they have no teeth).

The Coral Reef is designed with underwater shipwrecks and grottos and more than 75 species of tropical fish. Barracudas and sharks are just inches from snorkelers, separated by acrylic glass.

The free-flight aviary is a treat for tropical-bird lovers with more than 30 species and hundreds of birds, from tiny thrushes and starlings to big, brightly colored parrots—they're friendly enough to perch on heads, arms, and hands.

You need to be comfortable in the water, but not an exceptional swimmer to enjoy Discovery Cove, as everyone must wear a personal flotation device in the Dolphin Lagoon, the Coral Reef, and Tropical River. There also is an abundance of lifeguards. If you wear sunscreen, Discovery Cove offers one that is safe for the animal habitats, and it is the only sunscreen you can wear there. Wetsuits also are offered, but the water temperature is 78°–85° year-round.

Silver Springs

5656 East Silver Springs Boulevard, Silver Springs; (352) 236-2121;
www.silversprings.com

Hours Daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., with longer hours during summer and select holidays

Admission \$33 for adults, \$30 seniors 55 and older, \$24 for children ages 3–10, free for ages 2 and under

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Pre-school ★★★ | Teens ★★ | Over 30 ★★★★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★ | Seniors ★★★★★ |

Touring Time Average 5 hours; minimum 3 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Not recommended

Author's Rating ★★★

Description and Comments Billed as “Florida’s Original Attraction,” Silver Springs is a 350-acre nature park surrounding the headwaters of the beautiful Silver River.

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The attraction, celebrating 125 years, is a Florida tradition. Chances are if you enjoyed it as a kid, you'll enjoy watching your own children experience this piece of old Florida. If you've never been before, be forewarned—the animals are real; there are no nifty mechanical fish; and the boats are not on a track.

The hallmark of Silver Springs is a tour of the natural springs in the glass-bottom boats. More than half a billion gallons of water bubble out of the ground each day, forming a crystal-clear lagoon in the midst of a luxurious tropical jungle. Wildlife abounds both above and below the water, but it is the diverse aquatic life seen through the glass that captivates most visitors. The boat ride, relaxed and unhurried, is informatively narrated by the driver of the boat. The boats are covered top and side, providing protection from sun and rain. Boats depart every few minutes.

Also at Silver Springs are a Jeep Safari through 35 acres of Florida backwoods, lots of live animal shows, reptile shows, and a kids' playground.

Wet 'n Wild

6200 International Drive, Orlando; (407) 351-1800; www.wetnwild.com

Hours Daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., with extended hours in peak seasons

Admission \$32 for adults, \$16 for seniors ages 55 and older, \$26 for children ages 3–9, free for children ages 2 and under (admission does not include tube or towel rentals)

Appeal by Age Group

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Pre-school ★★★★★ | Teens ★★★★★ | Over 30 ★★★★★ |
| Grade school ★★★★★ | Young Adults ★★★★★ | Seniors ★★ |

Touring Time *Average* 5 hours; *minimum* 3 hours

Rainy-Day Touring Not recommended

Author's Rating ★★★★★; it's not themed or as aesthetically pleasing as the Disney water parks, but the rides are awesome, and there are more than you'll find anywhere else. Just be prepared for the crowds.

Description and Comments Before Disney started building water parks, this was the place to cool off in Central Florida. Universal Orlando acquired the park, so it's been spiffed up substantially. Conveniently located on 25 acres on International Drive, Wet 'n Wild still offers more rides than any other water park, and teenagers in particular can make a day of it.

Wet 'n Wild doesn't offer the themed ambience of the Disney water parks, but in over 20 years the rides have gotten higher, faster, and more popular—waits for a 60-second splashdown can be up to 20 minutes. But thrill-ride enthusiasts swear that patience pays off for rides like the new Blast that propels riders down a 390-foot slide with powerful jets and rushing water; Fuji Flyer, which sends four passengers plunging down six stories through 450 feet of banked curves; and the Black Hole, which propels riders through 600 feet of twisting, turning, watery darkness.

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Of course, there are tamer rides, like the Bubba Tub or Raging Rapids that the whole family can experience together. And for children under 48 inches tall (or under age ten), Kids Park features miniature versions of the park's most popular attractions along with water-oriented playground equipment.

Though the park employs an army of certified lifeguards, we recommend constant vigil for children under age ten and non-swimmers. The park gets quite crowded during peak seasons, and it can be a major headache just keeping up with little ones.

Pools are heated on chillier days. The fast food is mediocre, but you're allowed to bring along a picnic (but no alcoholic beverages). And don't forget the sunscreen.

Shopping

Central Florida is a shopper's mecca. With more than 52 million square feet of retail space, Orlando is the fastest growing retail market in the United States, according to the Orlando–Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Beyond the ubiquitous mouse ears and T-shirts, avid shoppers can find a wide array of items, from hard-to-find imports from Epcot's World Showcase (see page 255) to bargains at hundreds of off-price outlets.

DISNEY OUTLET STORES

At **Belz Factory Outlet Mall** (5401 Oakridge Road, Orlando; (407) 352-9611) and in the **Lake Buena Vista Factory Stores** (15591 SR 535, Orlando; (407) 238-9301), you can find marked-down Disney goods, but the selection is limited. And in between the markdowns was full-priced merchandise, so beware. If you're not picky, you can round up a fair number of souvenirs. Both stores are owned by one company, so stock is comparable. The Belz store is slightly larger, but when we visited the shop at the Lake Buena Vista Factory Stores had supplemented space with a giant outdoor tent sale, which they often do.

Outlets

Like every major tourist destination in the United States, central Florida has hundreds of factory outlets, and most are near major attractions. The granddaddy of outlet shopping in Orlando is still one of the best: Belz Factory Outlet World and Belz Designer Outlet Centre, both just off the north end of International Drive. The two comprise the largest of the outlet centers—160 name-brand stores. This is where the locals head for bargains.

Belz Factory Outlet Mall (5401 West Oakridge Road; (407) 352-9611; www.belz.com), the largest center of its kind in the United States, includes 185 stores in two separate malls and four annexes. Hours are Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Major stores include Anne Klein, Bugle Boy, Danskin, Etienne Aigner, The Gap, Guess, Jockey, Levi's, Mikasa, Nike, Oneida, Olga Warner, and Reebok.

Just around the corner is **Belz Designer Outlet Center** (5211 International Drive; (407) 352-3632; www.belz.com). Hours are Monday–

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Saturday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. If you only have time to shop one outlet center, this is the one, mainly for the great buys at Off 5th—the Saks Fifth Avenue outlet. If you're lucky enough to be in town during a sale, the overstuffed racks in the big store offer some great bargains, with designer togs and shoes for up to 75% off. Also in this center are Coach, Donna Karan, Jones New York, Ann Taylor Loft, Cole Haan, Kenneth Cole, and Waterford/Wedgwood.

Belz also operates the nearby **Festival Bay** (5250 International Drive; (407) 351-7718; www.belz.com), featuring Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, Ron Jon Surf Shop, Shepler's Western Wear, Steve & Barry's University Sportswear, Hilo Hattie Hawaiian-themed shop and 30 smaller shops. A 20-screen Cinemark Theaters and Van's Skatepark are also part of the center.

Orlando Premium Outlets (8200 Vineland Avenue; (407) 238-7787; www.premiumoutlets.com) is setting new standards for Orlando outlet shopping, with 110 shops, open Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m. An array of shops includes Banana Republic, Barneys New York, Brooks Brothers, DKNY, Escada, Fubu, Giorgio Armani, Louis Feraud, Nautica, Nike, Polo Ralph Lauren, TSE, and Versace. You'll also find Disney's Character Premiere, with plenty of Disney merchandise, and a food court with numerous fast-food options.

Traditional Shopping

Orlando recently welcomed the long-awaited **Mall at Millennia** (4200 Conroy Road, Orlando; (407) 363-3555; www.mallatmillenia.com), anchored by Bloomingdale's, Macy's, and Neiman Marcus. Of about 150 stores, nearly half are new to the Orlando market, including Cartier, Burberry, Crate & Barrel, Tiffany & Co., Gucci, and Louis Vuitton. The two-level mall has seven full-service restaurants, a full-service concierge, and a U.S. post office.

We're told that next to Disney World, more tourists visit **Florida Mall** (8001 South Orange Blossom Trail, Orlando; (407) 851-6255; www.simon.com) than any other central Florida destination—one of the reasons it offers currency exchange and foreign-language assistance. It's the biggest mall in the area, with about 200 shops, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom's, Lord & Taylor, Brooks Brothers, Pottery Barn, and Restoration Hardware. Hours are Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–9:30 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

Another not-to-be-missed shopping destination in central Florida is **Park Avenue** in Winter Park, a small town just north of Orlando. The street, anchored by Rollins College on the south end, is lovely for strolling, window-shopping, and dining, and has a mix of high-end shops. Favorites include Restoration Hardware, Pottery Barn, Tuni's (women's chic apparel), Bebe's (trendy children's wear), Williams-Sonoma, Gap, Talbot's, Caswell-Massey, Crabtree & Evelyn, Timothy's Gallery (exquisite one-of-a-kind jewelry), and Birkenstock. Prices are high, but there are terrific sidewalk sales a few times a year.

Most stores open at 10 a.m. but close early, generally by 6 p.m., including weekends. Traffic on the two-lane brick street can be a bear, so avoid

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driving down Park Avenue; instead, take a side street and search for on-street parking a block or two off the main drag. Or use the new parking garage on the south end of the street.

To get to Park Avenue from the International Drive–Disney World–Universal area, take Interstate 4 north, exit at Fairbanks Avenue, and head east. Park Avenue is approximately five miles from the exit.

Dining

Central Florida, though not a culinary capital, has more than 2,000 restaurants, many of them familiar chains geared to serving tourists who patronize the attractions. If you're looking for ethnic cuisine, dozens of Asian restaurants are clustered around Mills Avenue at Colonial Drive in Orlando, where Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese cuisines have turned storefronts into a culinary tour of the Far East. And the new “Restaurant Row” on Sand Lake Road just west of International Drive, offers 11 dining options, all opened in the last two years, with cuisine ranging from seafood to steak, Japanese, Pan-Asian, and Thai.

There are more than 200 Walt Disney World restaurants. In addition to the profiles later in this section, some favorite are listed on page 266.

Boma

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, Walt Disney World Resort; (407) WDW-DINE

Meals served Breakfast, dinner **Cuisine** South-African–inspired cuisine
Entree range \$15 breakfast buffet; \$24 dinner buffet **Reservations** Accepted
Payment All major credit cards

Comments This is one of Central Florida's most recommended “all-you-care-to-eat” experiences, with cooking stations featuring grilled meats, fish, and vegetables, with curries, chutneys, and other interesting sauces. Soups and stews get high marks. Cultural representatives from South Africa serve as hosts.

California Grill

Disney's Contemporary Resort, Walt Disney World Resort; (407) WDW-DINE

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** New American **Entree range** \$18–\$32
Reservations Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments This award-winning restaurant atop the Contemporary is one of Orlando's best dining experiences. It's hard to decide which is more fun: watching the energetic chefs in the open kitchen or a sunset over Disney World. And they dim the lights and pipe in music for the Magic Kingdom fireworks, so ask for a window seat. From starters to desserts, Chef John State's creations are extraordinary—salmon with lobster mashed potatoes and pork tenderloin with creamy polenta are two classics. And the sushi chef is a standout.

Greater Orlando Area 291**Delfino Riviera**

Portofino Bay Hotel, Universal Orlando; (407) 503-3463

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** Italian **Entree range** \$16–\$42 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments Elegant dining here features traditional cuisine from the Ligurian region of Italy—authentic flavor combinations of shellfish, pasta, and other favorites, deftly orchestrated by Chef Massimo Fedozzi. There's a solid wine list with more than 200 vintages from Italy and France. Flawless service and a strolling guitarist add to the romance.

Del Frisco's

729 Lee Road, Orlando; (407) 645-4443

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** Steakhouse **Entree range** \$20–\$36 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments The quintessential steakhouse, Del Frisco's decor is dark woods and soft lighting, with the retro feel of supper clubs of days gone by. Efficient servers balance tray of martinis, succulent prime steaks, Australian lobster tails, and other hefty entrees—so loosen your belt.

Emeril's Restaurant Orlando

Universal Studios CityWalk; (407) 224-2424

Meals served Lunch and dinner **Cuisine** New Orleans contemporary **Entree range** Lunch \$19–\$25; dinner \$20–\$40 **Reservations** Yes **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments Emeril's Restaurant Orlando is a mecca for fans of the flamboyant chef and his high-calorie, New Orleans-style cooking—giant plates heaped with fish and meats. Entrees are big enough to share. Much of the food is heavily sauced; we love the simple grilled rib eye steak with garlic mashed potatoes. Save room for the banana-cream pie.

Flying Fish

Disney's BoardWalk Resort, Walt Disney World Resort; (407) WDW-DINE

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** Seafood/New American **Entree range** \$20–\$34 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments Another favorite of locals. You can bet on the freshest seafood at Flying Fish (the potato-wrapped snapper is sensational), but the New York strip is also a winner. Chef Robert Curry changes his menu to reflect seasonal fruits and vegetables. If the restaurant is crowded and you can't get a seat, ask for a spot at the bar in front of the exhibition kitchen.

Hue

629 East Central Boulevard, Orlando; (407) 849-1800

Meals served Lunch, dinner **Cuisine** American **Entree range** \$13–\$32

292 Part Five Orlando: Walt Disney World and Beyond**Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards**Comments** The kitchen turns out cool, creative fare in this chic downtown spot, like a tender, tamari-roasted duck breast with stir-fried veggies and pearl pasta or wood-grilled ahi tuna with a sesame glaze. If you just want to nibble, the grilled flat breads or a half-dozen fresh oysters do the trick. Prices are steep and service is so-so, but no one seems to mind.**Le Coq Au Vin***4800 South Orange Avenue, Orlando; (407) 851-6980***Meals served** Lunch, dinner **Cuisine** French **Entree range** \$12–\$27**Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards**Comments** If you want to eat where the chefs eat on their night off, this is the place. Chef Louis Perrotte's humble little restaurant serves simple French fare, from the classic coq au vin to seafood, steak, and veal dishes. The sweetbreads with morel mushrooms is a favorite of regulars. And Perrotte's crème brûlée and soufflé are divine.**McCormick & Schmick's***4200 Conroy Road, Orlando; (407) 226-6515***Meals served** Lunch, dinner **Cuisine** Seafood **Entree range** \$12–\$20**Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards**Comments** The menu changes daily according to what's freshest from waters around the globe. You might find Albacore tuna from Hawaii, Mako shark from Costa Rica, Alabama catfish, cod from Massachusetts and Florida rock shrimp. On the half shell—six kinds of oysters, including Malpeques from Prince Edward Island in Canada, Blue Points from New York and Olympias from Washington State. Meat lovers will find filet, sirloin, and New York strip on a corner of the menu. More than a dozen wines are offered by the glass, with a list that's mostly Californian.**Norman's at the Ritz-Carlton***4012 Central Florida Parkway, Orlando; (407) 393-4333***Meals served** Dinner **Cuisine** Latin/Caribbean/Asian **Entree range** \$55–\$79 (3- and 5-course meals) **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards**Comments** Just debuting at press time, this chic new restaurant introduces Norman Van Aken's cuisine to Orlando, an interesting blend of Latin, Caribbean, and Asian styles. For fans of the chef's Coral Gables restaurant, this promises to be a culinary bright spot.**Pho 88***730 North Mills Avenue, Orlando; (407) 897-3488***Meals served** Lunch, dinner **Cuisine** Vietnamese **Entree range** \$5–\$19**Reservations** Not necessary **Payment** All major credit cards

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Comments Vietnamese families fill many of the tables in this spacious and spotless dining room that once was a grocery store. The chicken noodle soup arrives with a side dish piled high with fresh basil, jalapeños, and lime to toss in at your will. Shrimp and pork with egg noodles offers the hot broth on the side to add as desired. Every dish is fresh and delicious, and most of the ingredients are familiar, though the adventuresome will find elaborate combinations. Order a lychee juice or fresh lemon drink instead of dessert.

Seasons 52

7700 Sand Lake Road, Orlando; (407) 354-5212

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** American **Entree range** \$10–\$20 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments The novel concept behind this “casually sophisticated” grill and wine bar is that seasonally inspired menus change every week. The biggest buzz, however, is that none of the entrees is more than 450 calories, none of the desserts more than 250 calories. Delicious entrees like spicy rare tuna with stir-fried bok choy and a melt-in-your-mouth filet mignon are generous and satisfying, but save room for the brilliant “mini indulgences” at meal’s end: each dessert arrives in a shot glass, just three or so bites. Options include tiramisu, Key lime pie, and strawberry shortcake. You might be tempted to order two. More than 65 wines are offered by the glass, with more than 100 by the bottle.

Tchoup Chop

Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando; (407) 503-CHOP

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** Pan Asian **Entree range** \$18–\$32 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments Chef Emeril Lagasse’s new restaurant takes Asian cuisine and “kicks it up a notch” with his unique style. Tchoup Chop (pronounced chop-chop) has a gorgeous “tiki bar” decor complete with bamboo, waterfalls, sculpted gardens, and giant woks in full view. Favorite main dishes include Kona-coffee-glazed duck breast served with vegetable chow mein, Kahlua slow-roasted pork and noodle sauté, and banana leaf-steamed fish with chile-onion salsa and sake-soy glaze. The restaurant also features specialty drinks (try the Pago Pago, tropical mint-flavored rum with lime juice and fresh mint leaves) and a tea menu.

Victoria & Albert’s

Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, Walt Disney World Resort; (407) WDW-DINE

Meals served Dinner **Cuisine** Continental **Entree range** \$90 per person, with wine pairing add \$45 **Reservations** Accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

Comments This is Central Florida’s only five-Diamond restaurant, a delightful experience from start to finish. There are just 65 seats in the intimate dining room, or try for the coveted Chef’s Table in the kitchen. Creations change

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daily, and Chef Scott Hunnel pays special attention to every guest with his six-course, prix-fixe menu. From vegetarian to wild game, the menu is always exciting.

Dinner Shows

If you're looking for after-dark entertainment, consider a dinner show. The food isn't memorable, but there's plenty of it, and the entertainment is wholesome fun.

Arabian Nights Dinner Attraction Equestrian performance featuring more than 60 horses, including white Lipizzans, and great riders. The highlight is a high-speed chariot race re-created from the film *Ben Hur*. Dine on prime rib or vegetable lasagna; for children, it's chicken fingers and mashed potatoes. Adults, \$44; children ages 3–11, \$27. Showtimes: Sunday–Thursday 6 p.m., Friday–Saturday 8:30 p.m. Located at 6225 West Irlo Bronson Highway (US 192); (407) 239-9223.

Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede It's a friendly rivalry between the North and the South, with 32 horses, ostrich racing, singing, dancing, and four courses of messy finger food (you have to request utensils)—vegetable soup (sipped from your own ladle), chicken, barbecued pork, potatoes, corn on the cob, and apple turnovers. The show finale is a patriotic tribute written by Dolly Parton. Adults, \$44; children ages 3–11, \$29. Shows nightly at 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. Located at 8251 Vineland Avenue, Orlando; (407) 238-4455; www.dixiestampede.com.

Hoop-de-Doo Revue Even sophisticated New Yorkers end up hooping and hollering at this long-running show in Pioneer Hall. The revue plays three times nightly (5, 7:15, and 9:30 p.m.) with all-you-can-eat ribs and fried chicken. Adults, \$49; children ages 3–11, \$25. This one books up fast, so call early for reservations. Located at Disney's Fort Wilderness Campground and Resort; (407) 939-3463.

Makahiki Luau This luau offers two hours of authentic island entertainment and a four-course meal, including teriyaki chicken, grilled mahimahi, Kahlua pork with orange sauce, and coconut muffins. Adults, \$38; children ages 3–9, \$28. Showtimes are 5:30 and 8:15 p.m. Held at SeaWorld; (407) 363-2200.

Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament This cavernous dining hall takes you back to the days of knights, chivalry, and regal feasts with a banquet in an eleventh-century-style castle—and a show about a Princess's love for a handsome knight and a confrontation between a turncoat warrior and a defender of the crown. The four-course meal—chicken, ribs, bread, potatoes, soup, and dessert—isn't served with silverware; you dine just like in the olden days—eating with your hands. Adults, \$46; children ages 3–11, \$30. Shows nightly at 6:15 and 8:30 p.m. Located at 4510 North Irlo Bronson Highway (US 192), Kissimmee; (800) 229-8300.

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Spirit of Aloha This new show replaces Disney's longstanding luau, with comedy, dancing, familiar Hawaiian songs and music from the Disney film *Lilo & Stitch*. Dine on roasted chicken, wild rice, vegetables, and dessert. Seatings nightly at 5:15 and 8 p.m. Adults, \$49; children ages 3–11, \$25. Held at Disney's Polynesian Resort; (407) 939-3463.

Arts and Culture

The world's finest collection of Tiffany glass is part of the collection at the **Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art** in Winter Park (445 North Park Avenue, Winter Park; (407) 645-5311; www.morsemuseum.org), a jewel of a museum that also includes elements of Tiffany's 1893 chapel for the World's Columbian Exposition, completely reassembled and on exhibit.

The **Orlando Museum of Art** (2416 North Mills Avenue; (407) 896-4231; www.omart.org) offers permanent and traveling exhibitions, and the nearby **Mennello Museum of American Folk Art** (900 East Princeton Street; (407) 246-4278; www.mennellomuseum.com) showcases the work of Earl Cunningham and other American folk artists. In downtown Orlando, the **Orange Country Regional History Center** (65 East Central Boulevard; (407) 836-8500; www.thehistorycenter.org) offers a snapshot of Central Florida pre-Disney, in the days of cowboys and orange groves.

Nightlife**Bösendorfer Lounge**

Who Goes There Well-dressed professional crowd

Westin Grand Bohemian, 325 South Orange Avenue, Orlando; (407) 313-9000; www.grandbohemianhotel.com

Cover No **Minimum** No **Mixed drinks** \$7 **Food available** Yes **Hours** 11 a.m.–midnight Sunday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. Friday–Saturday

What goes on The posh Bösendorfer Lounge, named after the rare \$250,000 Imperial Grand Bösendorfer Piano in the adjacent Klimt Rotunda (named for the collection of artwork in the room by Gustav Klimt), brings a new level of chic to downtown Orlando. You'll find attractively dressed men and women sipping martinis and chatting quietly at the round bar decorated in black marble with red stones and mirror pieces. Long red sconces hang from the gold-leaved ceiling for soft, sensual lighting. Sofas and chairs in soft red velvet decorate the rest of the room.

Comments This is a slightly older crowd than most of the downtown clubs. The adjacent dining room makes the Grand Bohemian a perfect (though expensive) spot for drinks and dinner.

CityWalk

Who Goes There A mix of locals and tourists, all ages

Universal Orlando; (407) 363-8000; www.citywalkorlando.com

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Cover \$9 **Minimum** No **Food available** Yes **Hours** Club opening times vary from late afternoon to early evening, restaurants are open beginning at 11:30 a.m.

What goes on Along with shopping and dining, there are live music venues and dance clubs:

Bob Marley—A Tribute to Freedom A small courtyard features live reggae. \$5 cover charge after 8 p.m.

CityJazz Live jazz and martinis draw an upscale crowd. \$5 cover charge after 7 p.m.

The Groove Dance club with special effects, three themed VIP lounges, and loud music—all more appealing to a 20-something crowd. Opens at 9 p.m. with \$5 cover charge.

Hard Rock Live Orlando This concert venue draws top performers; check www.hardrocklive.com or call (407) 351-LIVE for upcoming bands.

Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville Live music for Parrotheads, \$5 cover charge after 10 p.m.

Latin Quarter Live entertainment draws a lively crowd to dine and dance to Latino music.

Motown Restaurant DJs and dancing start around 8 p.m. in this restaurant with a cool collection of Motown memorabilia. \$5 cover after 10 p.m.

Pat O'Brien's Orlando Dueling pianos and a “flaming fountain” patio—and don't forget the infamous Hurricane drink. \$5 cover charge after 9 p.m.

Comments Because cover charges aren't in effect until late evening, arrive early, check out the clubs, and if you like, settle into one for the rest of the night—many are both restaurants and clubs, so you can have dinner and dance the night away under the same roof.

Fiddler's Green

Who Goes There All ages and bank accounts

544 West Fairbanks Avenue, Winter Park; (407) 645-2050

Cover No **Minimum** After 10 p.m. you must be 21 or older **Mixed drinks** \$4.25 **Food available** Yes **Hours** 11:30 a.m.–2 a.m. Monday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–midnight Sunday

What goes on The parking lot is packed by 6 p.m. on Thursday and Friday nights, when the regulars crowd in for pint of lager or stout, a game of darts, and camaraderie. You'll often hear a British, Irish, or Scottish accent, patrons who miss the UK and feel right at home in the dark and cozy bar, with framed drawings of pub life and carved woodwork. Irish folksingers often entertain.

Comments The quintessential Irish pub with friendly service, and ambience to spare. If you're hungry, the adjacent dining room serves delicious fish and chips and shepherd's pie.

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Who Goes There Tourists, conventioners, and a few locals

9101 International Drive (Pointe Orlando); (407) 370-3700; www.pointeorlando.com

Cover Depends on night and event **Minimum** 18 (depends on night)

Mixed drinks \$5 **Food available** No **Hours** 8 p.m.–3 a.m.

What goes on The two clubs, side by side on the second floor of Pointe Orlando retail center, draw mostly a 20-something crowd, but conventioners of all ages show up to party. The two clubs have different themes. Metropolis features a Moulin Rouge-inspired decor, with dark woods and crushed velvet lounge areas. Music is 1980s, 1990s, and Top 40, with a separate room for billiards. Across the walkway, the industrial decor at Matrix—cobalt blue and stainless steel, with funky furniture like lip-styled loveseats—draws a crowd to dance to techno, Eurotrance, and Top 40 on one of Orlando's largest dance floors. Together the clubs have about 30,000 square feet, with room for 3,000 patrons.

Comments Dress for success: no tennis shoes, no baseball caps or jerseys, and they frown on jeans.

Pleasure Island

Who Goes There Locals, but mostly tourists, a mix of ages

Walt Disney World Resort; (407) 934-7781; www.disneyworld.com

Cover \$21 **Minimum** No **Mixed drinks** Cost varies in each club **Food available** Yes **Hours** 8 p.m.–2 a.m.

What goes on There are restaurants, shops, and eight clubs:

Adventurers Club Patterened after a stuffy English gentlemen's club, the Adventurer's Club is a two-story, turn-of-the-century affair with big armchairs, walls covered with animal heads (some of which talk), and other artifacts. The club's library downstairs in the main attraction, with a cabaret-inspired show every hour or so.

BET SoundStage Club Opened in partnership with Black Entertainment Television, this club features hip-hop, soul, and R&B. The dance floor is cool and showy, and the club gets packed as bands finish up at the West End Stage directly outside. Restricted to ages 21 and up.

The Comedy Warehouse Normally five shows nightly, including up-and-coming comedians and the "Who, What & Warehouse" Improv Company players.

8Trax A 1970s disco with lava lamps, mirror balls, and the sound from disco to recorded music from groups and artists like the Village People, Donna Summer, Bee Gees, Doobie Brothers, Tavares, and many others.

The Jazz Company The place for live jazz in Central Florida. The crowd, more diverse in age and appearance than at other clubs, sits at tables flanking the stage on three sides.

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Mannequins Dance Palace A ritzy, techno-pop rock dance club with a revolving dance floor, incredible lighting, wild special effects, and the Island Explosion Dancers. The music is all DJ, but the sound system is superb. There is often a line waiting to enter. Patrons must be at least 21.

Motion A DJ spins the hottest chart hits nightly, backed by a huge video screen, pulsing speakers and swirling lights.

Rock 'n' Roll Beach Club Oldies and current rock, with first-rate bands. Electronic games and pool are available for those who don't wish to dance.

Comments Guests younger than 18 must be accompanied by a parent after 7 p.m. Guests who are 18, 19, and 20 will be admitted to clubs (except Mannequins and BET SoundStage Club) but will not be served alcohol. And parking can be a hassle, as the lot often fills up—it's easier to find a spot on the back side of Downtown Disney West Side and enter via the bridge connecting West Side to Pleasure Island.

Sky60

Who Goes There The South Beach crowd—chic, sexy, and expensive, mostly in their 20s and 30s

64 North Orange Avenue, Orlando; (407) 425-7588

Cover Weekends **Minimum** No **Mixed drinks** Expensive **Food available** No **Hours** From happy hour until 2 a.m.

What goes on Sky60's opening was a turning point for downtown Orlando, with its super-chic, all-white decor and an elite clientele who prefer to keep the place a secret. A rooftop terrace features private cabanas where you can hang out with friends or share drinks with strangers. DJs spin dance music, but it's a mellow crowd.

Comments If you love the Delano on Miami Beach, you'll love Sky60 and the cool confines of the rooftop—where you can actually hear what the person next to you is saying.

Tabu

Who Goes There 20-somethings dominate, but celebrities of all ages have been spotted in the private VIP lounge.

46 North Orange Avenue, Orlando; (407) 648-8363; www.tabunightclub.com

Cover \$7 women, \$10 men **Minimum** 18 **Mixed drinks** \$4 **Food available** No **Hours** 9 p.m.–3 a.m.

What goes on Located in the historic Beacham Theatre downtown, Tabu looks pretty nondescript from the sidewalk, but inside Art Deco decor and three dance floors with hip-hop DJs or live bands keep the upscale crowd pumped. Dress for success, or you may be turned away at the door. The crème de la crème hurry to the upstairs VIP lounge, where stars from Britney Spears to Michael Jordan have been spotted.

Comments Themed events, from catwalk fashion shows, to live-comedy acts and concerts are a big draw for locals; check the website for upcoming events.

Side Trips

Kissimmee/Osceola County Walt Disney World dramatically changed this quiet burg that's home to cattle farmers and real-life cowboys. Kissimmee is the town closest to the front door of Walt Disney World, just ten miles to the east, and today it's most noted for dozens of big hotels, tiny motels, souvenir shops, fast-food restaurants, and more that are packed side by side on US 192, a road that stretches from downtown Kissimmee through the main entrance to Walt Disney World.

But there's much more to Kissimmee and Osceola County, and for visitors who want to step outside the man-made attractions and connect with nature, the area is known for fishing, canoeing, boating, and airboating (see Outdoor Adventures, page 242). Lake Tohopekaliga near downtown Kissimmee has a waterfront park with a three-mile stretch that's perfect for strolling or bike riding. And for the real thing, visit the Silver Spurs Arena in February or October for one of the top rodeos in the nation, with bull and bronco riding, steer wrestling, and barrel racing. For tickets, call (407) 67-RODEO two months before the event.

Winter Park This charming town just north of Orlando on I-4 has great shopping on Park Avenue and two offbeat recommendations: the Scenic Boat Tour (at the dock at East Morse Boulevard at Interlachen Avenue; (407) 644-4056; www.scenicboattours.com), a relaxing, one-hour cruise through the lakes and canals of this historic little burg, and the Morse Museum of American Art (445 Park Avenue North, (407) 645-5311), showcasing the rarest collection of Tiffany glass in the world. The boat tour leaves the dock daily (except Christmas) from 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Cost is \$6, \$3 ages 2–11. (407) 644-4056. The Morse Museum is open 9:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Tuesday–Saturday, 1–4 p.m. Sunday. Cost is \$3, \$1 ages 12 and under. (407) 645-5311.

Mount Dora Antique fans might enjoy a trek to this small town 25 miles northwest of Orlando, where Renningers Antique Center (20651 US 441, Mount Dora; (352) 383-8393; www.renningers.com) draws crowds of antique collectors on the weekends. Named for its 184-foot elevation, Mount Dora has a quaint downtown with antique and gift shops, galleries, bookstores, restaurants, the historic Lakeside Inn and small bed-and-breakfast lodgings. The historic Cannonball steam train (phone (352) 735-4667; www.mtdoratrain.com) makes an hour-long run between Mount Dora and downtown Orlando.

Cassadaga People come from all over the world to visit this curious little town, designated as a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. Located midway between Daytona and Orlando off I-4 (at Exit 114), Cassadaga is home to the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, with about 25 spiritualist mediums—counselors who communicate with spirits—who offer their services to visitors. For more information, visit www.cassadaga.org.