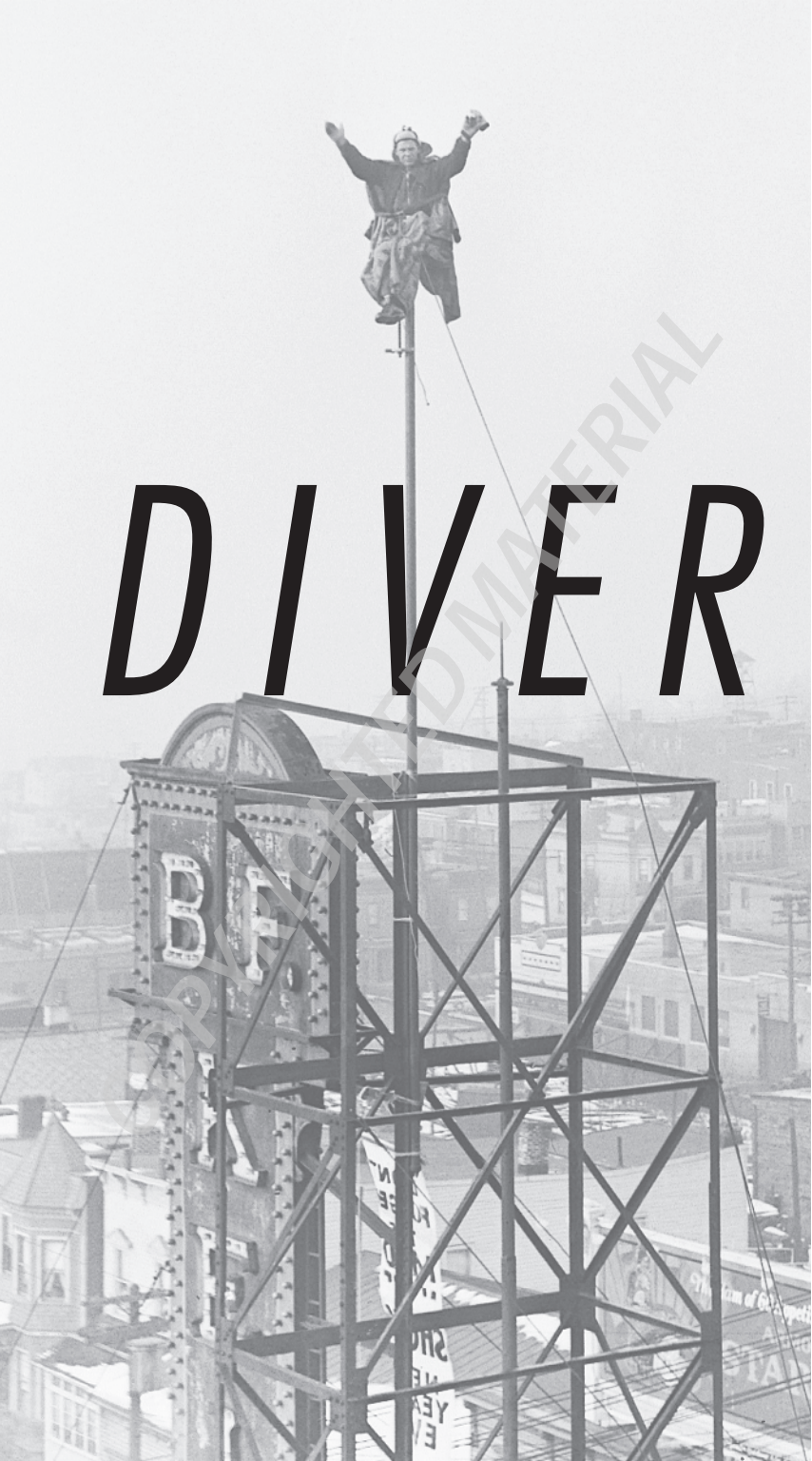


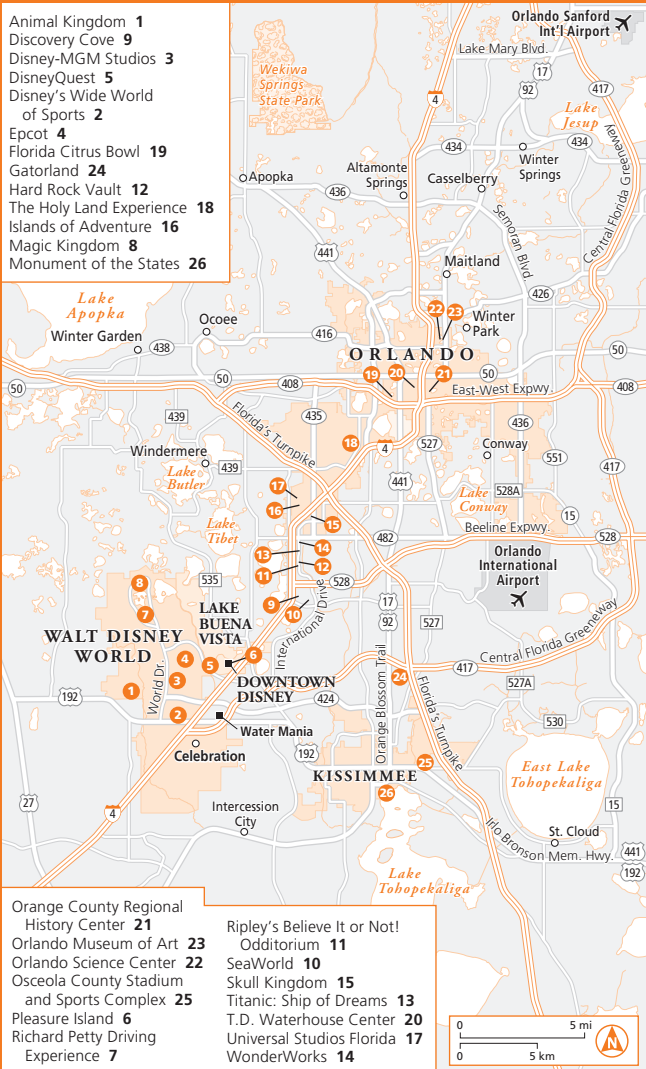
# DIVER



*S I O N S*

3

## Map 10: Orlando Attractions



## Basic Stuff

If you can't find anything to do in Orlando, then you simply aren't trying. For better or worse, Orlando is the ultimate playground, where no matter what your age, you'll find some excuse to revert back to your childhood. Not that that's all bad. But when you're paying up to \$55 a ticket for one day's entertainment, jumping in without some kind of plan can just suck you dry.

Of course you need to do the Big Three: Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld. Each has its own charm and must-do's. From there, if you still have time (and money left), there's everything from Gatorland to Ripley's Believe It or Not. From dinner shows to indoor skydiving, just about every interest is represented in glorious form, just waiting for you to partake in its charm.

However you feel about the Disney empire, a visit to its theme parks will show you what this company does best: create an environment where no detail is overlooked, where every scrap of litter is whisked away the moment it's dropped. No other theme park welcomes so many international visitors, yet homogenizes every "cast member" (don't ever call them employees) into a perennially Prozac-perky welcome wagon that won't offend anyone. Seriously—every cast member attends "Disney University" where they are trained, down to hand gestures, how not to accidentally offend any park guest, regardless of nationality.

Eventually, Disney's 27,000-acre spread will offer every form of entertainment known to man, neatly packaged and perfected. Even now, it could take you a week just to skim Disney's highlights, what with all the golf courses, horseback rides, watersports, and myriad other offerings that most day guests are too overwhelmed to scope out.

If you're a tourist, the insidious ease and self-containment of Walt Disney World, along with its reliability—always clean, always friendly, always scrupulously maintained—can suck you in like quicksand. If you're a traveler, though, you might be tempted to break out beyond the gates of Walt Disney World. Not that there's anything particularly rustic or authentic out there. Orlando's theme parks and attractions number almost 100, but if you make enough passes along I-4, you'll swear there are more, what with all the high-tech billboards grabbing your attention.

At the other end of what's known as the tourist corridor of I-4, there's turbo-charged Universal Orlando, which is the most-visited attraction in the country after the Disney theme

parks. Once upon a time there was one park, Universal Studios Florida. Today, Universal Orlando has mushroomed into a complete destination resort, including two major amusement parks, Universal Studios Florida, and Islands of Adventure; the CityWalk entertainment complex, featuring a mix of restaurants and cafes, live music, nightclubs, theaters, and specialty shops; and a cluster of themed hotels and resorts. Somewhere in between Disney and Universal, you'll find SeaWorld and its sister attraction, Discovery Cove, both treading the line between theme park and conservation aquarium.

There are a few attractions off the beaten path. Travel into Kissimmee, and you'll find Gatorland, where one of the featured shows presents live alligators jumping up to snatch dead chickens.

## Getting Your Bearings

Here's the drill: **I-4** (aka Interstate 4, the main tourist thoroughfare) officially runs east and west, no matter what it looks like on the map (where it always mysteriously appears to go north-south), and the exit numbers go higher as you head east.

The southern edge of WDW's borders rides along **U.S. 192** (aka the Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy.), which is the main east-west road through Kissimmee. Locals know it as "Hotel Row," as most of the budget properties in town are located here. Head south out of the Magic Kingdom and you'll eventually run into U.S. 192. **Highway 535**, known also as Apopka-Vineland Road, runs northwest diagonally from U.S. 192, past I-4 and Disney, and up to Sand Lake Road and beyond. Epcot Center Drive (which originates...oh, go ahead and guess) becomes **Highway 536** once you pass I-4, and goes on to Highway 535 and I-Drive before turning into **Highway 417** (a toll road also known as the Central Florida Greenway). If you follow the **Osceola Parkway** (aka Hwy. 424, because every major road in Orlando appears to have multiple personality disorder) out of the Animal Kingdom, it eventually runs through the northern edge of Kissimmee, right near Gatorland, before intersecting the **Florida Turnpike** (no nickname—it should protest!). U.S. 192 also intersects the Florida Turnpike about 30 minutes east of Disney.

If you're headed over to SeaWorld, the main road to remember is **International Drive** (known better as **I-Drive**), which runs north/south until it gets up to Wet 'n' Wild and borders SeaWorld on the east. The Central Florida Parkway borders

### INSIDER TRAFFIC TIP

*The busy I-4 corridor is often a nightmare, so locals (like me) prefer to take Turkey Lake Road when heading from Disney to Universal or SeaWorld. If you're on Disney property, go past Downtown Disney, down Hotel Plaza Boulevard, and turn left onto Apopka-Vineland Road. Go up a block and turn right at the light (by the Olive Garden) onto the Palm Parkway, which after curving through a small hotel area, turns into Turkey Lake Road. The first stoplight on Turkey Lake is the Central Florida Parkway—turn right if you're going to SeaWorld or Discovery Cove. Continue on and just past the intersection with Sand Lake Rd., you'll see the backside of Universal Studios Florida. Turn right to get to the parking garage.*

SeaWorld on the south, I-4 on the west, and **Highway 528** (better known as the **Bee Line Expwy.**) on the north. The Bee Line also runs out to Orlando International Airport.

Up by Universal, you'll first encounter **Sand Lake Road** (aka Hwy. 482), which intersects with I-Drive near that street's northern end. **Kirkman Road** (Hwy. 435) runs from Sand Lake Road, north past Universal and beyond. The Florida Turnpike runs from eastern Kissimmee and intersects I-4 just east of Universal. See how easy all of this is to understand (okay, my editor didn't think so either, so she ordered me to tell you to get yourself a really good map before you set out—and that there are a lot of gas stations around if you get lost).

Finding your way around Walt Disney World itself is actually more complicated, though the signs have gotten better over the last few years. Most newcomers stagger around at first, awestruck by the sheer size and scope of Disney World—which encompasses nearly 50 square miles' worth of theme parks, resort hotels, golf courses, and water parks. For starters, there are the Big Four—the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom—as well as Downtown Disney (see the Dining and Nightlife & Entertainment chapters), and Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon (see the Getting Outside chapter). Each park is miles from the others, carved into a landscape that once consisted of mangrove swamps and orange groves; guests navigate the property by bus, car, monorail, and ferryboat. To survive, you've got to get map-happy: Stop at Disney's Transportation and Ticket Center (or the guest services desk at a Disney resort) where, along with plunking down loads of money for those essential park passes, you can pick up a good map of the entire property along with route information for

Disney's monorail, buses, and boats. Grab another map every time you enter a theme park, and you won't be forced to drop a breadcrumb trail.

## Jump the Lines

Even though Disney perfected the art of line distraction—designing diversions to preoccupy you while you wait hours in line, they were also the first to introduce a method for jumping the line (without risking the wrath of the universe) at the busiest attractions. The idea behind the miraculous FASTPASS is that instead of waiting hours on end in line, you put your ticket in a machine that spits back out your ticket (don't forget it!) and a reservation slip with a time window imprinted on it (usually an hour, but sometimes less). So while everyone else is sweltering in line, you're now free to go to a different attraction. When your assigned time arrives (and for the primo rides, it may be a while), you get into a relatively short line, give the cast member your slip, and climb aboard. Note that you can only get up to two FASTPASS slips at a time. Until you use one, you won't be able to get another. Not 100% perfect, but a solution that works wonders in soothing the savage tourist. All the major attractions at the Disney theme parks are now outfitted with the FASTPASS.

Universal has gone one step better, offering a few different options for those not wanting to languish in horrendous lines. UNIVERSAL EXPRESS is similar to the FASTPASS in principle...you get a ticket that allows you to come back at a later time to get in the shorter line. However, guests staying at any of Universal's three resorts (the Portofino Bay, Hard Rock Hotel, and Royal Pacific) can use their room key to instantly jump into the EXPRESS line—no waiting for a ticket time. The room keys also work for line-jumping at most restaurants in the parks and at CityWalk, and all line-jumping privileges are good from the day you check in to the day you check out (not just through checkout time, but the whole day!).

## Theme Park Strategy

You've gotta have a game plan at the World, or the overwhelming sprawl will leave you dazed and confused, wondering, "Did I leave the kids at Splash Mountain, or was it Big Thunder Mountain? Did I park at the 'Chip' lot, or was it 'Dale'?" A few tips:

- If your time is limited, consider staying at a Disney hotel; you'll spend less time commuting, and thus more

- time at the parks, and you may also be able to benefit from the special early-admission mornings.
- If you plan to visit either of the Universal parks, consider staying a night at their resorts for the room key privileges described above.
  - If you can come during the off season, that's all the better for avoiding lines. Basically that's anytime except major U.S. school holidays, mid-March to mid-April, Christmas, and summer.
  - Unless you're a huge Disney character fan, skip the midafternoon parades and head for the most popular rides then, when lots of park visitors have been siphoned off to stand on the sidewalks craning their necks at floats and costumed characters. If a parade's being staged (such as when the Magic Kingdom is open late for peak periods) twice, skip the earlier one—the later one will be less crowded.
  - If you start to burn out mid-day, take a break (for a late lunch, a swim, or a nap) and return to the park around 5 or 6pm, refreshed and raring to go—when everyone else is heading home. Re-entering the park is allowed, even if you're not a Disney guest, as long as you keep your ticket and get your hand stamped on your way out.
  - Don't waste your time at the parks' full-service restaurants, except at Epcot, where the restaurants are as much fun as the attractions. Instead, stuff your backpack full of goodies (although this is technically against the rules), and just grab snacks, fruit, and fast food on your theme park days.

## Price Tag for the Kingdom and Beyond

*Note:* All prices in this section include tax and were rounded up to the nearest dollar.

When it comes to Disney admission prices, there are just about as many ticket options as there are tiny plastic bricks in a Lego pirate ship—and figuring them out takes as much time as putting the ship together. Okay, it's not quite that bad...but just watch the puzzled faces of guests as they gaze at the ticket window. Basically, this is about what it will cost you for the most popular admission options: **1-day, 1-park ticket**, \$59 (adults), \$47 (children 3–9); **4-day Park Hopper pass** (4 days admission



to Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Epcot, and Disney-MGM Studios; you can go to more than one park on the same day), \$234 (adults), \$188 (children 3–9); **5-day Park Hopper Plus pass** (same as 4-day PH pass, except this pass is good for any 5 days; PLUS a choice of two visits to any of the following: Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon, Pleasure Island, and Disney’s Wide World of Sports Complex. You cannot park hop at the minor parks when using your Plus options. Each admission to a minor park counts as one Plus option.), \$300 (adults), \$241 (children 3–9); **6-day Park Hopper Plus pass** (same as 5-day PH Plus pass, except this pass is good for any 6 days and you get 3 Plus options), \$332 (adults), \$267 (children 3–9). Visits with multi-day passes do not need to be consecutive and unused days and the Plus visits never expire. There are also other options, including **Ultimate Park Hopper passes** that give unlimited admission to all Disney parks (including the “Plus” parks) for the length of stay—this one is available only to Disney resort guests, and prices vary according to the length of your stay.

On the non-Disney front, **1-day/1-park admission** to Universal Studios Florida or Islands of Adventure (including tax and rounded up) is \$59 for adults and around \$47 for children 3 to 9. If you plan to visit Universal Orlando parks more than 2 or 3 days, consider getting an **annual pass** (currently around \$170, plus tax), which not only allows unlimited park admission, but offers discounts on dining and shopping, as well as free parking. Note that Universal almost always offers some kind of ticket or pass deal on its website at [www.universalorlando.com](http://www.universalorlando.com).

SeaWorld’s **single-day admission** is \$58, though you can save 10% if you purchase 7 or more days in advance online ([www.seaworld.com](http://www.seaworld.com)) and print out your ticket. A good value for those wanting to spend more than one day at the park is the **FunCard**, which is usually on sale from January to April. For a little more than the price of a 1-day ticket (\$64), you get unlimited admission through December 31 of the year you purchase the pass. Save even more with a range of **annual passes**, many of which not only include other Anheuser-Busch parks nationwide, but can be purchased using the company’s EZPay plan (no interest monthly payments and no credit check, though you must have a credit card to purchase).

**Discovery Cove**, SeaWorld’s sister park, offers daily packages with and without a personal dolphin swim. With the dolphin swim, the price is between \$243 and \$264 per day (without the dolphin swim, \$137–\$158). These prices may seem steep,

but they include lunch, snorkel, use of goggles and wetsuit, and a 7-day admission pass to SeaWorld or Busch Gardens (get a 14-day pass to both for about \$30 more).

For those interested in park hopping between several non-Disney parks, the **Orlando FlexTicket** offers unlimited admission to Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, SeaWorld, and Wet 'n' Wild Orlando for 14 consecutive days from the first day the pass is used. A four-park ticket is \$191 for adults and \$155 for children ages 3 to 9. A five-park ticket, which adds Busch Gardens in Tampa (and includes a free shuttle service to the park), is \$228 for adults and \$191 for children 3 to 9. There is also a shuttle bus from many I-Drive locations to Busch Gardens that runs about \$10 round-trip per person.

## The Lowdown

**Best use of technology...** Nods to Universal, for three of its over-the-top attractions, which their spin masters call the “most thrilling and technologically advanced rides and attractions ever made....” Who’s to argue after taking a ride (let’s call it a trip) on the **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man**? This ride combines the sensory tricks of the famed Back to the Future...The Ride attraction and the 3-D accomplishments of Terminator 2. Spider-Man is with you all the way, seemingly within your grasp, as your car hurtles through New York street scenes, past spewing water pipes and raging fires, smashing into vehicles as you go. The ride culminates when Doc Ock takes aim at you with his anti-gravity gun, sending you into a 400-foot sensory plunge. It’s not to be missed, though you’ll have to be prepared to stand in line for the thrill; waits of 60 to 90 minutes are not uncommon. Next door, at the Studios, you’ll find Universal’s newest ride, **Revenge of the Mummy**, which combines a coaster run with magnetism and the best cinematic special effects technology (flame ceilings, scarabs pouring out of the walls) for a ride that will touch on your worst phobias. Universal also offers **Terminator 2 3-D**, a live-action and special effects spectacular that is one outrageous outing. Even diehard fans of the movie will be impressed. Not to be outdone, Disney has revamped the **Tower of Terror** at Disney-MGM Studios to completely randomize the drop sequences...not even the cast members herding

you into the elevator know which one you'll get. And over at Epcot is the newest Disney star, **Mission: Space**, where NASA technology is used to create an astronaut simulator so effective they've had to install "lunch bags" for all the motion sickness it causes.

**Where the wild things are...** Is it a theme park? A zoo?

A nature preserve? Disney's **Animal Kingdom** tries to be all of these things. But if it's thrills you seek, you're better off sticking to the tried-and-true theme parks—animals are the main attraction here. If you're not a big animal fan, this park probably won't even take you half a day to navigate. Major thrill rides here are limited, but if you like the idea of spending the day with a few of God's other creatures, you'll really enjoy this park. **Kilimanjaro Safaris** is one of the more popular attractions—and one of my must-do's at Disney. Riding in special safari trucks, you head out into the African wilderness (well, one manufactured by Disney to replicate their version of the Dark Continent). There's a hokey storyline about saving elephants from poachers, and a rickety bridge that threatens to fall apart (this is Disney—you miraculously escape), but if you can ignore all that, you'll enjoy the thrill of seeing giraffes and zebras wandering by. I've had, on separate occasions, close-up encounters with an ostrich protecting its eggs and a white rhino that, as we rounded the bend by it, raised its head and almost smacked the camera in my hand. Just be sure you come early or later in the day—most animals (unlike many of the humans here) know better than to go traipsing around during the heat of the day and snooze during the afternoons. There are three other walking tours of exotic animal habitats not to miss: **Pangani Forest Exploration Trail** (gorillas, meerkats, and so on), **Maharajah Jungle Trek** (tigers, rare birds), and the **Discovery Trails** around the Tree of Life (birds, tortoises, lemurs).

If your animal tastes run to the aquatic, **SeaWorld** is a wonderful place to spend a day or two. Where else can you get up close with sea lions, manatee, dolphins, stingrays, and killer whales? SeaWorld's sister park, **Discovery Cove**, offers the ultimate in aquatic thrills. Play tag with stingrays in a small lagoon or swim side by side with schools of fish; you can even frolic with playful dolphins. You don't just observe at this park, you're part of the action.

**It's a scream...** When it comes to haunted houses, it doesn't get much worse (or better, depending on your point of view) than **Skull Kingdom**, an independent attraction located outside Orlando's major theme parks. Skull Kingdom is very, very scary. You'll be sent off into pitch-dark corridors, feeling your way around as sinister and spooky characters—sometimes live and sometimes-animated robots—jump out at you at every corner. Special effects like blasted air, falling spider webs, opening doors, and loud noises will keep you jumping each step of the way. Nicely done. Universal's **Revenge of the Mummy** can induce outright fear in the extremely phobic. Fear of coasters? Check. Fear of the dark? Check. Fear of bugs? Check. Fear of flames? Check. The ride itself isn't that scary. It's the phobias it taps into that do the real damage. **Dinosaur** at Animal Kingdom takes riders back 65 million years, in order to rescue the planet's last dinosaur before a meteor slams into Earth. You'll encounter the requisite robotic dinos along the way, experience the herky-jerky when you encounter meteor showers, and spend a good amount of time in the dark. But it's the last few dinosaurs that have most people screaming on this ride. It should come as no surprise that any ride based on Rod Serling's famous take on people's fears and phobias leaves its riders screaming. And you'll hear plenty of shrieking at **The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** in Disney-MGM Studios. Admittedly, some of the screams are because of the random precipitous drops in the dark (not to mention the incredibly eerie atmosphere), and those drops are downright scary. So frightening, in fact, that a Disney Imagineer who helped design the ride has never ridden it and turns white at the very thought of boarding.

**Best places to lose your lunch...** Despite its undisputed position as Theme Park Central, Orlando's great parks were actually long devoid of top-notch roller coaster thrills. Not anymore. Islands of Adventure, promoted as the world's "most technologically advanced theme park," offers some of the best stomach-lurching thrills I've ever encountered. The **Dueling Dragons** ride, a mass of intertwining metal, hurls dragon-shaped racing cars at each other for a high-speed, near-miss nightmare. The cars travel up to 60 mph and come within (what seems like) less than 12 inches of each other. Most coaster crazies name it

the top adrenaline producer in town. The **Incredible Hulk Coaster** shoots riders up 10 stories, with the same G-force power as a fighter jet, then turns them upside down, and sends them into a maze of tracks, plunging them under a bridge, and into underground trenches. (And, in concert with some of its riders, it actually glows green at night—how's that for realism!) You can't miss the 200-foot steel tower that houses **Doctor Doom's Fearfall**. As you get strapped into your seat, feet dangling, you'll learn that Doctor Doom has created a machine designed to drain the fear from you. It will basically drain everything from you (including color, and possibly stomach contents), as you fire up to the top of the structure and then plummet to the ground at an unreasonably speedy rate. Disney has countered Universal's entries with Disney-MGM Studios' **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster starring Aerosmith**, its first high-speed launch (0–60 mph in 2.8 seconds), upside-down roller coaster ride. On this ride, you'll be fastened into a mock "stretch limo" and thrown into a mangled maze of twists and turns, including three upside-down segments. Along the way, there are familiar Tinseltown scenes (though who's paying attention?) and a loud (there are 120 onboard speakers in each coaster train) Aerosmith soundtrack synchronized to every twist and turn (but, again, who has time to notice?). During the ride's grand opening, I rode this for the first time with members of Aerosmith—this ride even made Steven Tyler a bit weak in the knees. Let's not forget **Kraken** over at SeaWorld. My coaster aficionado friend Jeff, who tirelessly road every coaster in Central Florida within the span of a week, thinks it's worth venturing over to SeaWorld just for this adrenaline pumper. And need I mention **Mission: Space**? Don't even try this one if you're prone to motion sickness. Not sure? Pick up some Dramamine before you hit Epcot—due to the laws of supply and demand, motion sickness medication costs significantly more at Mouse Gears, the closest store to this ride.

**Best thrill rides for weenies...** It happens to the best of us. You don't want to be relegated to the kid rides, but the sight of two inverted corkscrews makes you practically pass out. Try **Big Thunder Mountain** at the Magic Kingdom—it's basically a rickety ride on a runaway mine train, with

cool props such as skeletons that you may not notice as you're whipping around. A few sudden plummets and high-speed curves will give young ones and ride weenies some mild thrills as they travel through an old-mining-town scenery of faux rocks, fake chickens, and rushing waterfalls. Other than the speed factor, it's probably the tamest of all the adult coasters. **Note:** This one's better at night when you can't see where you're going. Epcot's **Test Track** also relies on speed, among other things, for its thrills. Where else can you slam your car into a wall (well, almost) and walk away with nary a scratch? Also at Epcot, try **The Maelstrom** in Norway. It's a pretty tame water ride with only a couple of small drops; you don't even have a lap bar. And, of course, there's the perennial favorite, **Space Mountain**, which is tame enough for most chickens, yet thrilling enough for regular coaster crazies. The main fright factor on this coaster is the darkness...it is literally pitch black in the dome that houses this indoor ride. **Tip:** A good way to judge the fear factor of any coaster is to look at the safety rig on each seat. If there's just a lap bar, the ride is mostly speed with a few drops. Anything that requires a shoulder harness is usually going to flip you upside down at least once.

**Stimulating simulators...** Each of the Big Three offers up a simulator-type ride. Generally, these involve getting into a "car" of some sort that moves side to side, up and down, in time with the movie being projected on the screen in front of you. At Universal Studios Florida, **Back to the Future...The Ride** does an incredibly convincing job of hurtling you, herky-jerky, through space (and nearly down a dinosaur's throat) in a souped-up DeLorean (far more successful in this fantasy than it ever was in reality). Sea-World has **Wild Arctic**, a lurching helicopter "flight" through the heart of a glacier. My personal favorite is the long-running **Star Tours**, a Star Wars-inspired adventure (the Force is definitely with this one) at the Disney-MGM Studios with a sense of humor (and the absolute coolest line-waiting area). Sit in the last row to get the most oomph from the action.

**Wipe out...** Water rides: Either you love them or hate them. If you're in the former group, you won't find a better drive-and-drench ride than the **Jurassic Park River Adventure**

at Islands of Adventure. Riders travel through a prehistoric land inhabited by fierce, unbelievably real-looking dinosaurs. Creatures five stories tall growl and bare their teeth, some within inches of your face. The ride speeds up as you try to escape from a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, ending in a stomach-flopping, 85-foot plunge into water. (Steven Spielberg, who helped designed it, could stomach the dinosaurs, but not the drop—he reportedly asked to be let off before the big nose dive when he rode it at Islands' grand opening). A bit tamer, but just as wet, is **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls**. This water flume ride sends riders plummeting 75 feet at 50 mph until you actually head beneath the surface of the water (the H<sub>2</sub>O is contained by glass, but, fear not, you'll still get soaked). **Splash Mountain** at Magic Kingdom is a 12-minute log flume ride featuring the characters and music from *Song of the South*. Riders travel through Brer Rabbit's land of gardens, swamps, and caves, before a thrilling 87-foot, 40-mph drop at the end that will leave you completely drenched if you're seated in the first log. This is the best part of the ride, and it's the section which people see when they pass by or stand waiting in line. (Typically shrewd placement on Disney's part.) At Disney's Animal Kingdom, you can cool down on the popular **Kali River Rapids**. The faux setting is the turbulent Chakrandi River and along the way you'll be bumped, dipped, rolled, and properly drenched. Similar in tone (but actually bouncier and faster) are Islands of Adventure's **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges**. If you can avoid getting waterlogged on the simulated white-water rapids (you can't), the kids too short to ride this one man high-powered water canons along the route and are only too happy to take out their frustrations on you. *Bon voyage!* It's only fitting that SeaWorld should have its own water-coaster thrill ride. On **Journey to Atlantis**, riders are plunged eight at a time into a battle for the lost city of Atlantis (which has mysteriously risen to the surface of a Greek harbor, and is naturally the subject of a media frenzy) via a swirling vortex, with blasting fountains and sprays of water along the way. You know the first plunge is coming (you can see this one from the queue line), but just when you think it's over, you'll get your second dip-and-drench. Special effects include evil sirens, morphing sets (a golden seahorse turns into Hermes, who doubles as guide

and fighter for the forces of good), and maelstroms that threaten to swamp the boats. The ride, unveiled in 1998, is SeaWorld's costliest expansion to date, covers an area of six football fields, and reaches speeds of 50 mph. SeaWorld makes it even more sadistic by allowing passersby to man water cannons that are aimed right at your boat following the first drop.

**For Mario Andretti wannabes...** Think you can handle a few laps of white-knuckled, heart-pounding speed? Then don a crash helmet and your rookie stripes, and hop into the shotgun seat of a stock car at the **Richard Petty Driving Experience** (Tel 800/BE-PETTY). This fantasy experience costs \$99 for a three-lap simulated Winston Cup qualifying run. The car, driven by one of Richard Petty's professional instructors, travels up to 145 mph. If you'd like to get your own hands on the wheel and your foot on the gas, sign up for the 3-hour Rookie Experience (\$379). The racetrack is in the Magic Kingdom parking lot; drive to the entrance of Magic Kingdom and you'll hear the engines roar. *Tip:* Tell the attendants you're going to Richard Petty, and you won't have to pay for parking. Epcot's **Test Track** sends drivers screeching through hairpin turns and spins at speeds of up to 65 mph. It's the longest (distance-wise anyway), fastest ride in Disney history. So what if you're not actually doing the driving?

### **The Kingdom for kids and the young at heart...**

Now some of you may be toting kids to these parks. Tiny tots are the Magic Kingdom's biggest fans—and Disney's bread and butter—so it comes as no surprise that they've added more to please them in recent years. At **Mickey's Toontown Fair**, little ones get to visit Mickey and Minnie's houses, cool off in a mini-water park, and ride **Goofy's Barnstormer**, a tame, just-for-kids roller coaster. The biggest draw is meeting Mickey and his friends. Stand in line and you'll get a one-on-one meeting with the Big Cheese himself. **The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh** in Fantasyland takes you through the Hundred Acre Wood on a very "Blustery Day." A bit of bounce and twirl adds to the whimsical journey. Expect long waits, however, for a ride that ends way too soon. The heaviest nostalgia trip for adults can be found at Fantasyland, where



preschoolers gape in wide-eyed wonder at **Cinderella's Golden Carousel**. Perhaps the most imaginative ride in Fantasyland is **Peter Pan's Flight**, a 4-minute excursion in which you journey to Neverland and pass over an especially enchanting view of nighttime London. It's unusual in that your "ships" are suspended from a rail above instead of on the usual track, though I'd love to see a quick slide towards the Skull Island installed. The downside: The lines are almost always excruciating, so unless you FASTPASS it, you'll age several years before you get aboard.

**Snow White's Adventures** used to give every 6-year-old nightmares; that nasty old witch seemed to pop out at every turn. Now the ride has been retuned so that the focus is on lovely Snow White, not the poisoned apple-bearing witch—meaning it's not going to thrill anyone who's not deeply into the whole story. The international animatronic community of **It's a Small World** continues to pump out its excruciatingly catchy tune after all these years. I like to torture people by taking them on this one; it's a hazing ritual that challenges one's sanity and everyone should go through it at least once. After winding through the displays of 289 dolls with the song playing continuously, my guests all but run me over trying to get off the ride (although my editor tells me it's a great place to cool off in summer). The ride closed down in 2004 for renovations—improved audio system, new sets, and so on—and won't reopen until spring 2005. Many will also find the **Country Bear Jamboree** a tortuous rite of passage, but kids seem to love this animatronic musical show.

Meanwhile, over in Adventureland, those randy, rummy **Pirates of the Caribbean** are still sailing—just a little more politically correct thanks to a recent renovation. (Is it too much to ask that the company that produced the popular movie based on the ride get Johnny Depp or Orlando Bloom to do a voice-over or quick video? Sheesh!) In Liberty Square, the best thing going is the **Haunted Mansion**, a G-rated fun house with friendly ghosts and lots of special effects. It's a cult favorite that attracts many a return visitor. This one's fine for the apprehensive—nothing reaches out and grabs you. This is Disney, after all. Check out the cute (if corny) tombstones as you leave. And a special note for those who think all Disney cast members are programmed with smiles plastered on their faces—you

won't find a grin here, except on the ghosts. It's hauntingly refreshing.

Working on the notion that if you like one ride...you'll like it again somewhere else, Disney sometimes recycles ideas. Take the basic premise of a bunch of cars spinning slowly around a center with each car able to raise and lower by a lever controlled by the rider. Now name the ride. You'd be correct if you said **Dumbo the Flying Elephant** (Fantasyland), **Magic Carpets of Aladdin** (Adventureland), **Astro Orbiter** (Tomorrowland), or **TriceraTop Spin** (DinoLand U.S.A./Animal Kingdom). And if the whole family seems on the verge of collapse, take a rest on the **Walt Disney World Railroad** that leaves from Main Street and circles the entire Magic Kingdom with stops in Adventureland and Mickey's Toontown. (*Hint:* This is a great way to get from one side of the park to another on crowded days.)

**Best place to find Mickey in person...** Three little words, spoken in a whisper, have enough power to ripple through a crowd and clear the lines at Space Mountain: "*Look, there's Mickey.*" (Tempting, huh?) If you think the line was long at the teacups, wait till you wait for the Big Cheese's paw print. Our first suggestion: Sign up for at least one character meal. Some folks we know make reservations for two or three "meet and eat" sessions (featuring different characters at each meal) during their stay. This guarantees that their kids will get to hug their favorite friends, and fill their autograph books (these are sold for about \$6 at nearly every Disney shop). You'll avoid disappointment and save more time for the park's rides and attractions, instead of spending your precious hours hunting down Winnie and friends. That said, Disney has improved matters for young paparazzi. At Magic Kingdom, head for **Mickey's Toontown Fair**: You'll find two separate lines, one waiting to greet Mickey, the other featuring Mickey's pals (Minnie, Pluto, and others). You'll wait in line, but the payoff is a sure shot at a one-on-one encounter with the world's most famous mouse. You'll also find Ariel sitting in her Grotto over in Fantasyland. At MGM Studios, Disney characters like Goofy and Donald hang out in front of the **Sorcerer's Hat** every day around 4pm. Several characters can also be found along Mickey and Tigger avenues. At Animal Kingdom, you'll want to

make a beeline for **Camp Minnie-Mickey**. The character-greeting trails feature top stars such as Mickey, Minnie, Pluto, Goofy, Winnie, Tigger, and more. Rafiki (of *The Lion King* fame) and Pocahontas hang at **Conservation Station**. Chip 'n' Dale are often found greeting tykes along the boulevard leading to Africa. Character greetings at Epcot tend to be more serendipitous. Some characters can be spotted in the country from which their story originated: Aladdin in Morocco, Snow White in Germany, and so on.... But don't count on it. Either look for the double-decker character bus that shows up in the afternoon or head over to the **International Gateway** (between Britain and France) where several characters are usually perched.

By the way, Disney doesn't have the lock on character friends. At Islands of Adventure you can hardly get away from the cartoon and movie characters wandering about. Every time I've visited, I've encountered Spider-Man, Captain America, and Wolverine at **Marvel Super Hero Island**. And my editor's bumped into Thing One (or was it Two?) and the Cat in the Hat at **Seuss Island**, and Olive Oyl at **Toon Lagoon**. And on the Studios side of Universal, expect to run into Shrek and Fiona, along with a slew of Nickelodeon characters like Spongebob Squarepants.

### **The Magic Kingdom for big kids...err...adults...**

Some attractions are perfect for all ages. The best in this category is **Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin**, a ride that pits two players against each other in a ride through a shooting gallery to save Earth from the evil emperor Zurg. Want to score higher points? Never take your finger off the trigger. Pumping the trigger like a normal gun only causes breaks in the laser targeting system, which can make you score lower. For a low-tech blast to your childhood—just try to make it across the barrel bridge on **Tom Sawyer Island** without giggling. **Mickey's PhilharMagic** is a fun 3-D romp through various Disney movies as Donald chases Mickey's sorcerer's hat. Of course, being the newest of the 3-D shows to hit Walt Disney World, this one adds a fourth level....smell-o-vision. I walked out craving an apple pie.

**Only if the lines in the Magic Kingdom are non-existent...** The **Tomorrowland Speedway**, featuring motorized, slow-moving go-carts that are confined to a

narrow track, is definitely a bore unless you're 5 years old and really think you're driving. *Zzzz*. Nobody seems too enchanted by the **Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse** (in nearby Adventureland), either—it always seems to have a long, noisy line, and it doesn't seem worth the agony just to see a man-made tree (covered with vinyl leaves) housing a giant tree house. If the kids really need to stretch their legs and you need to sit for a spell, take the raft trip to **Tom Sawyer Island** (in Frontierland), where kids can explore a cave, a fort, and a secret passageway. Can you tolerate cute, cuddly, and corny? Take in the **Country Bear Jamboree**, where audio-animated bears sing, dance, and tell silly jokes. The **Enchanted Tiki Room**, now updated with characters from *Aladdin*, falls into the same category, with more than 200 birds, plants, and statues chirping and chatting in a tropical serenade. It seems to strike a chord with toddlers and nostalgia buffs—this was Disney's first audio-animated attraction—but considering Orlando's other offerings in the special effects department these days, why bother?

**Epcot's greatest hits...** After the Magic Kingdom, Epcot is a letdown for the 6-and-under set, which makes it perfect for adults who can swallow its earnest sugarcoated educational stuff. The first thing you'll see at Epcot is the massive silver geosphere called **Spaceship Earth** (you know, the giant golf ball). Most guests stop right here and take the ride through the history of communication, but you should bypass it until the end of the day, when the slow pace and air conditioning will make it worthwhile. Instead, circle to the right, behind the **Innoventions** pavilion, to the **Journey into Imagination** pavilion and the wild 'n' crazy *Honey, I Shrank the Audience*—definitely a wake-up call if you've arrived at Epcot bleary-eyed. This is the wackiest attraction at Epcot, a 3-D film featuring Rick Moranis from *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*, and the special effects are terrific for adults as well as kids. You'll jump out of your seat—literally. I wouldn't hang around this pavilion afterward though; instead, cut through Innoventions Plaza, and go directly to the side-by-side **Test Track** and **Mission: Space** rides. **Universe of Energy** has employed Ellen DeGeneres and Bill Nye the Science Guy to tell the tale of fossil fuels and alternative energy sources in the very entertaining **Ellen's Energy Adventure**. Just watch out for those spitting dinosaurs.

If you've already done Splash Mountain, you'll probably want to skip Norway's **The Maelstrom**, where you board a Viking ship and navigate a North Sea storm, with trolls peering at you from behind the rocks. If you do ride, look behind you after the first drop for a quick thrill. The biggest lines are found at **The American Adventure**, an unabashedly patriotic show featuring audio-animatronics characters in a journey through American history. It's a feel-good history lesson that can make some viewers get teary, while others drift off. Perhaps one of its best features is its length: 30 minutes, long enough for you to sneak in a nap.

**What not to miss at USF...** So you did pretty well in your last 10K road race? It'll serve you well at Universal Studios Florida. It's nearly impossible to cram all the rides here into one day, but it can be done. Just get plenty of sleep the night before, wear comfortable shoes, and be ready to hustle, big time. Pick up a map and daily entertainment schedule, and circle the rides and shows on your "must-see" list. Then as soon as you're through the gate, run like hell to **Revenge of the Mummy**, which always has long lines. Stop en route to pick up a quick EXPRESS pass for **Shrek 4-D** (if you don't have a Universal resort room key). This attraction uses 3-D movie effects married with seats that move and bounce to continue the story of Shrek and Fiona. It's fun for all ages and *very* popular! *Tip:* Those with bad backs or those who are pregnant should request seats in the front row as they are stationary. **Terminator 2 3-D** features the creepy-steely T-1,000,000, and live-action doubles of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Edward Furlong, who roar onto the stage on Harleys and then into a giant movie screen, a very cool trick you absolutely must see. To tell you more would spoil the fun—see this one for yourself. Your adrenaline pumping? Excellent time to hit **Men in Black Alien Attack**, where you can zap icky aliens as you ride through the streets of New York. You zig, you zag, you hurtle through the city at breakneck speed—a lot like a real Big Apple cab ride. Shoot the alien with the newspaper—it's Steven Spielberg. For maximum points, watch for the red button to light up and hit it for a quick 100,000 points...otherwise, you may end up as Bug Bait. Next, in order of importance, are **Back to the Future...The Ride**—a fast-paced simulator ride through space and time in a

mock DeLorean; **Earthquake: The Big One** (a cable-car ride through the great San Francisco earthquake); a cruise in the **Jaws** boat, where everybody can be shark bait for a day (I can tell when the shark is coming but it always scares most people); and the **E.T. Adventure**, a swooping bike ride through the sky that ends with a personal thank you from E.T. himself. The only ride that has ever disappointed me at this park is **Twister**. Based on the movie (as are all things in USF), I expected to be thrust into a mock-tornado. What I got was a lot of wind serving up a small tornado in the distance as I stood on a “patio” with the rest of my group. Then a bucket of water was flung at my face. Whooh hoo.

If (and only if) you’ve got younger kids, you can try to get them slimed on-air at **Nickelodeon Studios**, an homage to the all-kids network (best time is midafternoon). They’ll also love the newish **Jimmy Neutron’s Nicktoon Blast** simulator ride—just beware the Chicken Dance. Regardless of age, don’t miss the very cute **Animal Planet Live!** show, which demonstrates why actors are almost always upstaged by animals.

**Best and worst of Islands of Adventure...** The endless lines say it all: At the Islands, thrill rides are the thing. Like carnival rides on steroids, the **Incredible Hulk** and **Dueling Dragons** roller coasters are truly gut-twisting, while **The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man** is the ultimate high-tech adventure (it’s only slightly less intense if you whip off the 3-D glasses). **Doctor Doom’s Fearfall** is Disney’s **Tower of Terror** run amok (not to mention a shameless—and lesser—rip-off of same). Meanwhile, at the replicant version of Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg was a creative consultant on this attraction, which first debuted in Universal Studios Hollywood), you’ll be scared witless as velociraptors stalk you inside the diabolical **Jurassic Park River Adventure**. Don’t confuse it with **Triceratops Encounter**, where you’ll walk and walk and walk, all for the dubious pleasure of watching a (very) lifelike dinosaur urinate. Skip it, and board the charming **Pteranodon Flyers**, but only if you’ve got a small child in tow, or at least very short adult—somebody in your pair has to be *56 inches tall or less* to “glide” in the two-person gondolas, which hang suspended from a curving track. (And note that the

line for this one can reach back all the way to the Jurassic period.) Nostalgic fun for all ages is **The Cat in the Hat** ride at Seuss Landing, where you'll spin (and spin some more) through the book's familiar storyline.

**Star productions at Disney-MGM Studios...** If you found the Magic Kingdom so sweet it made your teeth ache, and Epcot a bit too heavy in the dining-and-shopping category, here's your reward. Disney-MGM Studios has action aplenty. Impromptu fires, rainstorms, explosions, and gunplay are among the predominant themes at this amusement-park-cum-movie-and-TV-studio. Only a few attractions here are geared solely toward little kids: **Honey, I Shrank the Kids Movie Set Adventure** (not to be confused with Epcot's Honey, I Shrank the Audience), and **Playhouse Disney: Live on Stage!** Most everything else can be equally enjoyed by adults, school-age kids, and hard-to-please teens. Thrill seekers will want to bolt to the **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster**. An original Aerosmith soundtrack, created exclusively for the ride, blasts into your "limo" as it travels at breakneck speed through Tinseltown. Try to hit this ride before lunch. There are lots of twists and turns, and three upside-down inversions. The **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** is the—*ahem*—towering achievement of Walt Disney Imagineering. You'll see it as you drive into the park; the structure looms as a delightfully Gothic presence at the end of Sunset Boulevard, all cracked pink stucco with a sparking electric sign and gaping hole in the wall. This one's got all the goodies that have made TZ a cult favorite for decades: levitating eyeball, "doo-doo-doo-doo" theme, Rod Serling, even holographic ghosts. Then there's the moment you enter the you-know-what and free-fall 13 stories in the out-of-control service elevator, only to do the whole thing all over again. At the end, you may want to spring for the souvenir photo of yourself, mouth agape, taken as the plunge begins. You'll be glad you—heh, heh—dropped in. For a study in contrasts, make your next stop the **Beauty and the Beast** stage show. It's your typical beast-meets-girl love story, performed by live actors, and the music is terrific. How romantic is it? Notice how many couples are holding hands as they leave the theater. Or maybe they just don't want to get separated as they make a mad dash for **Star Tours**, a vastly popular

motion-simulation ride—get there early or late to avoid long lines. Even if the *Star Wars* plotlines have faded somewhat from your memory, the Force will still be with you; on this ride, the story's beside the point. The real thrill is lurching through time and space (while dodging in-your-face asteroids) in a runaway "Starspeeder" (read: mechanized simulator).

Everybody knows the real stars in action flicks are the stunt doubles. See them in action—minus the boring retakes and makeup sessions—at the **Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular**. Special effects, razzle-dazzle stunts, and pyrotechnics make this show worth the (incredibly long) wait. Wear a bright-colored shirt, wave your arms spastically, and you might be called up on stage as an extra. (**Warning:** If you sit in the front row, you'll be so close to the action your eyeballs will sizzle.) Had enough mechanized action? Tops in the gee-whiz techno category is, believe it or not, **Voyage of the Little Mermaid**. People without kids in tow might bypass this "sleeper" attraction—but if they do, well, it's their loss. This stage show combines animation, puppetry, lasers, and live performers in a mini-version of the Disney movie. No, you're not just getting misty at this story of boy meets fish, you're actually getting misted. And if the names Kermit, Miss Piggy, and Gonzo mean anything to you (and even if they don't—for shame!), don't miss the wonderfully wacky **Jim Henson's Muppet\*Vision 3-D**. Housed in a perfect re-creation of the Muppets' theater (complete with the blessedly crotchety Statler and Waldorf critiquing the action from the balcony), it's a zany mix of 3-D film, animatronics, live-action, and special effects.

By now, your hair's soaked and your clothes reek of propane, signs you're having a swell time at Disney-MGM. Time to go win some prizes at **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It!** Based on the popular game show (before Disney overran it on ABC and killed it), everyone in the audience gets to participate in the lightning quiz round. Advance to the hot seat and you can work your way up to the grand prize (usually a Disney cruise). And shame on you if you don't make it to **The Great Movie Ride**, Disney-MGM's homage to the magic of the movies. After watching a delightful montage of movie clips in a pre-staging area (housed in a replica of Graumann's Chinese



Theatre), you'll take a tram ride through re-created movie sets enhanced by audio-animatronics (the *Wizard of Oz* set will make you wonder why Dorothy ever wanted to go back to Kansas). And just when you think you know what this ride is about, the tour guide announces—you've got it—"Something's wrong, folks!"

**Best in show...** And the prize goes to...Indiana Jones and his stuntmen and women, stars of the *Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular* at Disney-MGM Studios. It's a not-to-be-missed live-action show full of out-of-control vehicles, real explosions, falling rocks, flying spears, crumbling buildings, and amazing movie stunts. You'll recognize some of the settings from the movies, and you'll get a peek at the secrets behind the scenes. Once again working on the theory if you like it once, you'll like it twice, another stunt show involving even bigger explosions is slated to appear in a former backlot area at MGM. Do we get mini-fire extinguishers when we get seated? Surprisingly hip (for a Disney show) is **Tarzan Rocks!** at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Perfect for fidgety preteens, this live stage show features an impossibly buff Tarzan and an impossibly skinny Jane, both of whom are upstaged by a swarm of flip-happy in-line skaters. And the **Festival of the Lion King**, also at Animal Kingdom, offers up a Broadway-esque version of the famous Circle of Life. It's one of the best shows in town—don't miss it.

Also compelling is SeaWorld's new 30-minute **Odyssea**. Similar to Cirque du Soleil, it combines acrobatics, music, comedy, and special effects in a set that transports guests into a faux underwater world. Very well done and a great way to escape the Florida heat. **Pets Ahoy!** is SeaWorld's entry into the animal-show arena, featuring silly skits (the emcee seems totally embarrassed to be there) with a menagerie of dogs, cats, birds, rats, even potbelly pigs. The warm, fuzzy side of this is that most of these animals were rescued from shelters.

**To sea or not to see...** Anheuser-Busch, the owner of **SeaWorld Orlando**, has pumped a ton of money into this park to make it a player. There's a lot more to this place than Shamu these days, including thrill rides, new shows, and a stomach-lurching roller coaster. Still, Shamu rules,

charming even the most jaded of us, especially kids (who insist upon sitting close to the action—the first few rows are usually the splash zone—so that everybody in their party gets drenched). Even if you’ve seen the **Shamu Adventure** show before—and they change it regularly, to keep things interesting—you’ll still “ooh” and “ahh” as the sleek, black-and-white killer whale shoots out of the water, straddled by a trainer. Beyond Shamu and the resident dolphins, sea lions, and otters, this park packs some exciting surprises, including some thrill rides that can compete with the best of the bunch over at Universal and Disney. (*Hint:* Pay attention to the motion sickness warnings.) The **Kraken** roller coaster is a must-do for coaster crazies. SeaWorld calls it the longest, tallest (15 stories, to be exact), fastest in Orlando.... You’ll hurl, you’ll twirl, your stomach will lunge, and your heart will plunge.... Are we having fun yet? It features a floorless design—that is, your feet will dangle—and you also have nothing in front of you to wrap those white-knuckled fingers around.... The coaster exceeds 65 mph with seven inversions, including a cobra roll, zero-gravity roll, and vertical loops and spins. The **Wild Arctic** is a simulated helicopter ride (you can also do this without the jostling motion) through a glacier. Strapped in your seat, you dodge icebergs and zigzag through a frozen landscape, then walk through re-created arctic settings to view real polar bears and walrus. (*Hint:* Don’t do this immediately after the Shamu show, when you’re soaking wet, because the thermostat is set to chilly and pneumonia just isn’t cool.) Then there’s **Journey to Atlantis**, SeaWorld’s ambitious water-coaster thrill attraction, which combines cool special effects (they call them “aqualusions”) with a hair-raising boat ride. Other new features at SeaWorld include a Key West-themed village and a new **Waterfront** area of dining and shops.

Rides aside, the action at SeaWorld centers around its shows; you plan your itinerary around them, and spend the rest of your time touring walk-through exhibits. At any of the aquatic shows, the first few rows are the splash zones—you will get wet sitting there, so place your butt accordingly. My favorite show is “**Clyde & Seamore Take Pirate Island,**” a sea lion and otter show. Get up close and personal with two sea lions and an otter as they enact a pirate skit with their trainers. Another of SeaWorld’s virtues is its

**Shark Encounter** aquarium, a walk-through tunnel populated with the scarier denizens of the deep, such as moray eels, barracudas, rays, scorpion fish, and (of course) sharks. It's way cooler than the Living Seas at Epcot. I'd also make it a point to take a peek at the sea lions at **Pacific Point Preserve** and the so-ugly-they're-cute manatees at **Manatees: The Last Generation?** These walruslike creatures, sometimes called sea cows, are a Florida treasure, currently threatened by red tide and motorboat propellers. Over 21? Make sure to visit the **Hospitality Center** at the far back corner of the park for your free samples of various Anheuser-Busch liquid refreshments. You can even take a short "beer school" here; upon completion, you'll receive an Honorary Brewmaster certificate. Now that's entertainment!

**Another roadside attraction...** So, you've done Disney and the adventurers in your group are moaning the B-word...what next? **DisneyQuest**, five stories of virtual reality, will keep them busy for hours. Its various zones offer tons of options, including the opportunity to design a roller coaster and then ride it (not so adventurous now, are we), take a minicourse in animation, play vintage video games (Centipede anyone?), and battle 3-D pirates for hidden treasure. The cost seems steep at first (\$33 adults; \$27 kids 3–9), but imagine how many quarters you've dropped in an hour at the local arcade. If you want to see wild animals (in non-Disney habitats), head out to **Gatorland**. That this 50-year-old park still competes against entertainment giants such as Disney and Universal is endearing, and one can only hope that the old-fashioned, Florida-flavored attraction will survive. You enter Gatorland through a giant, tooth-filled gator's jaw, and plan your day (3 hr. should do it) around shows including **Gator Wrestlin'** (self-explanatory), **Jungle Crocs of the World** (ditto), and **Gator Jumparoo** (wherein gators leap high out of the water to be hand-fed a snack of dead chickens—it's actually quite the crowd pleaser). For \$100, you can take part in a trainer program and wrangle a gator of your own. Gatorland is a commercial alligator farm covering some 110 acres, whose gators have been featured in myriad TV commercials and movies, including *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Try not to think about the fact that their cousins end up as belts in the boutique and as gator chowder in Pearl's Smoke

House restaurant. Nice features of the park include its natural Florida setting, a cypress swamp, and its role as a wading bird sanctuary and rookery. From February through summer, snowy egrets, American egrets, herons, and other shorebirds build hundreds of nests and care for their young amid the alligators' 10-acre breeding marsh. The gator wranglers and snake handlers also share a lot of information about their charges in a down-home, folksy manner, along the lines of "Never insult an alligator until you've crossed the river," and this bit of advice on how to recognize a deadly coral snake: "If the nose is black, that's bad for Jack." You'll leave the park with a healthy respect for these toothy reptiles, especially as they emerge from the gator wrestling nonsense with their dignity intact.

Another "must-do" is the **Hard Rock Vault** at the Mercado shopping plaza. No longer hidden behind thick sheets of plexiglass, many of the displays (holy relics include Buddy Holly's specs and Jim Morrison's leather pants) are set up to be touched. Sign up for their online mailing list ([www.hardrock.com/Vault](http://www.hardrock.com/Vault)) to get the occasional free invite.

Meanwhile, *Titanic* fever lives on at **Titanic: Ship of Dreams**, also at the Mercado. This permanent exhibition combines the historic (Titanic dinnerware and other artifacts), the dramatic (actors pretending to be ship's passengers and survivors), and the weird (a chess table made from wood floating around the Titanic wreck site). Ultimately, it's both sad and chilling. Of course, you're snapped back to reality when you see Leo's costume from the James Cameron *Titanic* flick, and copies of the famous necklace in the gift shop. **Ripley's Believe It or Not!** doesn't even pretend to take itself seriously. Even the building is a joke: It's set into the ground at an angle, enough so that the exit is dizzying, as though the whole thing were being sucked into a giant sinkhole. Among the bizarre exhibits on display are replicas of the world's tallest man and the world's fattest man (so far, it sounds like typical talk-show fare), the man with two pupils in each eye, an actual shrunken head, and a 1907 Rolls-Royce crafted from matchsticks. If you're drawn to carnival freak shows and Diane Arbus photographs, you'll love the place. Just don't touch the fertility statues—several years ago when the attraction first received them, several women on staff became pregnant. Coincidence? Do you really want to find out?

### Post-Theme Park Pampering

*After hours spent trekking through theme parks, what could be finer than a few hours at a luscious spa? Disney has two full-service spas (at **Disney's Grand Floridian** and the new **Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa**) that offer a number of soothing treatments, including an herbal eyelift number that eliminates (at least temporarily) those tiny furrows that develop from waking up at 4am to beat the crowds at the Magic Kingdom. Nearby, the staff at the **Wyndham Palace Resort & Spa** perform a special theme-park foot massage that leaves weary feet feeling refreshed and baby's-bottom soft. My first choice at Universal Orlando: the European full-service **Mandara Spa** at the Portofino Bay Hotel. Try a soothing herbal body wrap, or maybe one of their mud therapies, followed by a shiatsu massage. (See the Accommodations chapter for info on all of the above resorts.) But if you're at USF and have at least a quarter, head over to the restrooms in front of **Animal Planet Live!** or at **Richter's Burgers** and you'll find a small coin-operated foot massager. Plunk in a little silver and get enough instant relief to carry you through the rest of the day.*

Finally, if you'd like to add a little educational value to your entertainment, check out the wacky **WonderWorks** at Pointe\*Orlando on International Drive. This interactive entertainment center, housed in a zany, upside-down building, features a variety of unusual activities. Sit in an electric chair, experience the sensation of an earthquake or hurricane, play computer-simulated basketball, make giant bubbles, see what you'll look like 25 years from now (yeah, you really want to do that)...and more. Basically a science exhibit gone mad.

For something a little less interactive, how about the **Monument of the States** in Kissimmee? Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, a local doc got the idea to erect this tall mass of rocks (it looks kind of like a Jenga game with an Eagle on top) as a symbol of America's unity. So he wrote the governors of each state (and FDR, for good measure) asking them to send him a bit of local rock to contribute to the monument. Miraculously, they did! And (shades of "if you build it, they will come") so did many others. The monument includes donations from 22 countries for a total of 1,500 stones (and some

odd additions, including a petrified apple, a cannonball, and...a map of Holland?).

One of the most controversial attractions in town is the **Holy Land Experience**, an attraction that claims to

tell the life of Jesus through “dramatic musical productions” and “biblical presentations” on grounds designed to look like Jerusalem at the time of Christ. Most Orlando rabbis protest that it’s nothing but a giant conversion ploy. I’m not out to stomp on anyone’s religious preferences...I just have a problem with the general idea of a theme park dedicated to Jesus. But maybe that’s just me (Mel Gibson probably loves it)...

**Join the parade...** NOT. Unless you have a child who absolutely insists on attending Disney’s overcrowded street displays, or you’re a huge fan of Disney characters, your best bet is to avoid them like the plague. Instead, take advantage of the chance to hit the more popular rides while the lines are shorter. Check the schedule for parade times, or just watch as folks begin to claim their space on the streets, sometimes an hour before the show begins. At the Magic Kingdom, the **Share a Dream Come True** parade is held at 3pm daily, and the route is always packed with elbow-to-elbow, stroller-to-stroller crowds lining Main Street to watch the daily extravaganza of floats, giant inflated Disney characters, live dancers, clowns, and more. The same holds true for Magic Kingdom’s nighttime **SpectroMagic**. The 20-minute spectacle walks the 3.4-mile Main Street parade route, and includes a host of giant Disney characters outlined in glittery lights. It really is beautiful to watch, even if you’re not a Disney devotee. Problem is, folks start lining up for the event a full 1 to 2 hours beforehand! Ditto for **Mickey’s Jammin’ Jungle Parade** at Disney’s Animal Kingdom where the scene is always depressingly the same: sweat-drenched, irritable crowds waiting for the floats, costumed performers, and music to arrive. Better to attend your hometown parade, and spend your time here at the park’s rides and attractions. The new **Fantasmic!** show at Disney–MGM Studios is a nightly spectacular of lights, lasers, and water, and it’s a must for Disney fans. The extravaganza, which features music and characters from Disney classics (what else?) lasts about 25 minutes, but (and this is a big but), you’ll usually need to get in line at least an hour ahead of time to snag a seat (it’s inside an amphitheater, so, alas, you can’t see it from outside), unless you pay for a Fantasmic! Dinner Package (see the Dining chapter), which gives you a jump-the-line pass and offers seating in a special section at the show.

**Got game?...** Disney does at its gigantic (220 acres!) new **Wide World of Sports** complex. You can fulfill your sports fantasies by throwing pitches, shooting hoops, and so on, at the Multi-Sports Experience. If you're more of a voyeur, more than 30 different sporting events, including football, tennis, track, soccer, and baseball, are featured, and all levels—amateur, youth, and professional—are represented. The Atlanta Braves and Tampa Bay Buccaneers conduct spring training at this facility. If you want to catch a game, pick up a schedule—something is going on here every day of the year. You can also see top-notch Orlando Magic basketball action at the downtown **T.D. Waterhouse Center**, but tickets may be tough to come by. Sometimes fans can pick them up outside the arena the night of the game (scalping is illegal, but cops generally look the other way). In early spring, the Houston Astros baseball team holds spring training at the **Osceola County Stadium and Sports Complex** in Kissimmee. Minor-league baseball action goes on most of the year at this complex, as well. Also check the schedule for the **Florida Citrus Bowl**, where a number of professional sports events are hosted, including an occasional NFL game (usually an exhibition), NCAA Division I college football contests, and soccer matches. The Citrus Bowl is held here annually, and both World Cup and Olympic soccer action have taken place here.

**For a look at Orlando before Mickey arrived...**

Long before there were theme parks, there was Central Florida, a hot, isolated wilderness that was home to cattle ranchers, orange growers, and those looking for a tropical paradise far from civilization. Take a look at Orlando's pioneer past at the **Orange County Regional History Center**, a quiet oasis on Central Boulevard. While much of this small museum consists of archival materials, there's an old (1926—that's old for Florida) fire station and a re-created pioneer kitchen, newspaper press room, and Victorian parlor. Located in the Loch Haven Park complex is the **Orlando Museum of Art**, one of the best museums in the South. Its permanent collections feature 19th- and 20th-century American, pre-Columbian, and African art; artists represented include Childe Hassam and Judy Pfaff. Finally, if you've got young kids hanging with you, inside the same complex, there's the **Orlando Science Center**, a hands-on

science museum geared toward children that is a great favorite with local grade-school groups (and thus an avoid-at-all costs spot if you want to avoid kids).

**Behind the scenes...** Did you realize that more than 10,000 rosebushes decorate the World Showcase grounds? Or that the **Morocco** pavilion was a gift from the Kingdom of Morocco, and is made up of more than 9 tons of handcrafted tile? Bet you didn't know that the **Swiss Family Treehouse** has 600 branches and 800,000 vinyl leaves. If you have a passion for detail (or maybe you're boning up to compete on *Jeopardy!*), check into one of the many backstage tours offered at the theme parks. The **Hidden Treasures of the World Showcase** (\$59, plus admission) is a 2-hour walking tour that concentrates on the architecture and construction techniques of Epcot's individual country pavilions. Don't want to walk? No problem. How about **Around the World at Epcot**, which lets you tour the park on a futuristic Segway riding machine. You must be 16 or older and 250 pounds or less to participate...oh, and willing to part with \$80, *plus* park admission. At SeaWorld, be a **Trainer For a Day** (\$250; includes 7-day pass to SeaWorld) and you'll do everything from helping with food preparation and area cleanup to learning training techniques and interacting with the killer whales, sea lions, otters, walruses, and bottlenose dolphins. Note that the "day" here is only 4 hours. You'll need to plan ahead—this program books up months in advance. The park also offers some less-pricey behind-the-scenes tours, each lasting about an hour (cost: just \$15), which include your choice of a shark encounter, a manatee visit, or a penguin meet. These can be arranged when you enter the park.

You have to have an extraordinary interest in Disney to endure, much less enjoy, the **World's Backstage Magic** tour (\$199 per person), which takes guests behind the scenes to see how Disney does it. You'll explore the "utilidor" system beneath the Magic Kingdom and travel backstage at three of the Disney theme parks. The good news is that you don't have to pay park admission, and lunch is included; the bad news is that the tour lasts 7 hours, you don't go on any rides (you really stay behind the scenes), and it sometimes feels like a day at school. The 4½-hour **Keys to the Kingdom** tour is similar to Backstage Magic—



you'll see the utilidors and production center—but you'll have to wait in line at the attractions and pay park admission. This one is open to guests 16 years old and up. The over-3-hour **Backstage Safari** tour is a look at how Disney created the Animal Kingdom and cares for its animals. For availability and reservations for all these tours, call Tel 407/WDW-TOUR. If none of these sound like your kind of pleasure, and you have 10 or more in your group, you can always sign up for a **Disney VIP** tour (cost: \$85 an hour, with a 5-hr. minimum), a custom-designed program tailored to your individual interests; it might include a shopper's tour of the Kingdom, a behind-the-scenes look at one or all of the theme parks, or whatever else you might have in mind. (How about a no-waiting-in-lines tour? Nope. Even VIPs don't get to jump the lines at Disney.) To book, call Tel 407/560-4033 up to 48 hours in advance (not available Dec 25–31).

There are also 5-hour **VIP tours** at either Universal Studios Florida or Islands of Adventure, which include a guided tour and line-cutting privileges at a number of high-profile attractions, for \$120 per person. A 6-hour, 2-park VIP tour covers both parks and costs \$150 per person. Prices for both tours *do not cover admission to the parks!* For more information on the VIP tour, call Tel **407/363-8295**.

**Bright lights and Disney nights...** Forget about spotting the Big Dipper in this town: Nightly fireworks finales pepper the skies over Disney World. The impressive **Electrical Water Pageant** is the kind of presentation Disney does best: A come-to-life cartoon character travels the Seven Seas to the strains of music and light. Watch as King Neptune slithers through the water, leading an array of animated sea life (okay, it's actually a 1,000-ft. barge, transporting an imaginative maze of lights and music, weaving through the Seven Seas Lagoon and Bay Lake). Combine this with dining at a Disney resort—you can see the show from the Polynesian (where it begins at about 9pm), and the Grand Floridian, Wilderness Lodge, Fort Wilderness, and Contemporary resorts. **Wishes!** (do all Disney fireworks shows have to have exclamations?), the new nightly closing show at the Magic Kingdom is rather impressive. But you don't really get the scope of how large the fireworks display is until you watch it from one of the area

resorts. And I can't imagine how much they have to pay "Tinkerbell" to slide down the wire from the castle to Tomorrowland. Yikes! The **IllumiNations** show at Epcot is hugely popular—people start lining up along the lagoon hours before showtime. Fireworks and laser lights are set off over the World Showcase Lagoon, to classic musical scores, as each "country" lights up. It's stirring but not necessarily worth a special trip (although if you happen to be in town, stick around). If you want to see this, be prepared to stake out your viewing spot up to 2 hours before showtime. Finally, it's **New Year's Eve** every night at **Pleasure Island**, as a laser-and-light show, fireworks, and professional dancers help ring in a hectic, ever-recurring new year (go ahead, make that pledge and you may actually be able to keep it until the next celebration). The Pleasure Island cast tries hard to make you have fun, and the party-hearty tourists lining the streets don't seem to have too many problems getting into the mood while throwing confetti—and knocking back cocktails.

**One size does not fit all...** It'd be nice if we were all one size...the seats at theme park attractions could accommodate everyone without difficulty. But for those not born with a Madison Avenue build, here's a basic primer so you don't have to worry about getting squished, bumped, or bruised. At Disney, the only rides where a bigger booty or chest could be a real problem are: **Dinosaur** (Animal Kingdom)—the seats are narrow and lack legroom, and may leave bruises from all the jerking around; **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** (Disney-MGM Studios) has a shoulder harness that may not fit larger chests (leave that WonderBra at home); **Space Mountain** (Magic Kingdom) has a T-bar lap harness that may not come down securely on those proportioned with large thighs or long legs; **Test Track** (Epcot) doesn't offer much arm space between seats so ask the cast member to leave the middle seat empty for more upper body room. SeaWorld bats 50/50; **Journey to Atlantis** has plenty of seat room. **Kraken**, on the other hand, has a shoulder harness that may not fit larger chests. There's a sample seat at the front of the attraction line—if you can't fit that, you won't be able to ride. **Islands of Adventure coasters** also sport harness issues; try the seats hanging at the entrances to each ride to see if you'll fit

(look for the double-strap examples as they have more room than single-strap seats). **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls** is seriously height-challenged—the long-legged will have lots of kinks to massage out upon exiting the flume.

**The future is getting clearer...** Universal Orlando and SeaWorld don't have any new rides planned for the immediate future...or if they do, they weren't talking when this book went to press. Disney, however, has four major attractions on the books, all set to open by 2006. Gone is the too-scary-for-Disney attraction, **ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter** at Magic Kingdom. Replacing it will be the kinder, gentler **Stitch's Great Escape!** The storyline for the ride is set prior to the popular movie, *Lilo & Stitch*, showing what actually happened when rascally Experiment 626 (aka Stitch) was originally captured. Expect plenty of mayhem. Over at Animal Kingdom, visitors can expect to climb the mighty **Expedition: Everest**. At over 200 feet high, it will be the tallest mountain in Florida (man-made, but who cares?), housing a wild coaster ride involving a runaway train and the abominable snowman. After its success at Disney's California Adventure park, WDW is importing **Soarin' Over California**, which will be the newest addition to The Land pavilion at Epcot (displacing the much loved **Food Rocks!**). I have no doubt the ride will be fun, but (hello)...this *is* Florida. It'd be nice if they re-shot the movie to reflect the home court. Finally, moving in over at the backlot area of Disney-MGM Studios is the **Moteurs...Action! Stunt Show Spectacular**, said to be inspired by a Disneyland Paris stunt show.



## The Index

**Animal Kingdom (p. 118)** WDW Disney's critter-packed park takes you through jam-packed trails littered with natural barrier cages that serve as the homes for everything from moles to gorillas.... Tel 407/824-4321. [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). Walt Disney World. Daily; hours vary seasonally, although the park closes at dusk. Single-day admission \$55 adults, \$44 children 3-9. Discount multi-day pass options available.

See Map 10 on p. 110.

**Discovery Cove (p. 116)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE SeaWorld's sister park offers daily all-inclusive packages with and without a personal dolphin swim. A great interactive experience if you can get past the price tag.... Tel 407/370-1280 (toll-free 877/434-7268). [www.discoverycove.com](http://www.discoverycove.com). 6000 Discovery Cove Way. Hours vary seasonally. Admission with dolphin swim \$229-\$249 ages 6 and up; without dolphin swim \$129-\$149 ages 6 and up. Tickets must be reserved in advance.

See Map 10 on p. 110.

**Disney-MGM Studios (p. 130)** WDW One hundred thirty-five acres of TV and movie magic, featuring the awesome Twilight Zone Tower of Terror.... Tel 407/824-4321. [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). Walt Disney World. Daily; hours vary seasonally. Single-day admission \$55 adults, \$44 children 3-9. Discount multi-day pass options available.

See Map 10 on p. 110.

**DisneyQuest (p. 134)** WDW A giant modern day arcade with five floors of virtual reality fun. Design a roller coaster, battle evil aliens, or find lost treasure. Great for those who need a break from the Mouse scene.... Tel 407/828-4600. [www.disneyquest.com](http://www.disneyquest.com). 1486 East Buena Vista Dr., in Downtown Disney West Side. Sun-Thurs 11:30am-11pm; Fri-Sat 11:30am-midnight. Admission \$32 adults, \$26 children 3-9.

See Map 10 on p. 110.

**Disney's Wide World of Sports (p. 138)** WDW This mega-sports complex covers all the bases. You name it, it's played here. Sports nuts can play out their fantasies at the Multi-Sports

Experience.... Tel 407/939-1500. [www.disneysports.com](http://www.disneysports.com). 6910 S. Victory Way, near Magic Kingdom. Daily 10am–5pm. Admission \$11 adults, \$7.75 children 3–9.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Epcot (p. 127)** Walt Disney's visionary community comes across as an educational toy store–cum–faux United Nations. It's the best of the Disney parks for the adult set.... Tel 407/824-4321. [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). Walt Disney World. Daily; hours vary seasonally. Single-day admission \$55 adults, \$44 children 3–9. Discount multi-day pass options available.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Florida Citrus Bowl (p. 138)** DOWNTOWN ORLANDO Home to a number of sports events, including Division I college football and soccer matches.... Tel 407/423-2476. 1 Citrus Bowl Place. Hours and ticket prices vary according to event.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Gatorland (p. 134)** ORLANDO Florida's largest alligator farm, housing 5,000 gators and crocs, and thousands of shorebirds. Learn all about 'em, then watch someone wrestle a gator.... Tel 407/855-5496 (toll-free 800/393-5297). [www.gatorland.com](http://www.gatorland.com). 14501 S. Orange Blossom Trail (U.S. 441; between Osceola Pkwy. and Hunter's Creek Blvd.). Daily 9am–6pm, although closing times vary seasonally. Admission \$20 adults, \$9.95 children 3–12 (prices include tax).

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Hard Rock Vault (p. 135)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE If you love walking through the Hard Rock Cafe, looking at all the displays, get your butt over to the Vault, where you can get a little more personal with rock 'n' roll's legacy.... Tel 407/599-7625. [www.hardrock.com](http://www.hardrock.com). Mercado Shopping Center, 8445 International Dr. Daily 9am–midnight. Admission \$15 adults, \$8.95 children 5–12.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**The Holy Land Experience (p. 136)** ORLANDO Jesus Christ goes head-to-head with Mickey. For this religious theme park, you gotta be a believer.... Tel 407/367-2065 (toll-free 866/872-4659). [www.holylandexperience.com](http://www.holylandexperience.com). 4655 Vineland Rd. Daily 9am–4pm. Admission \$30 adults, \$20 children 4–12.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Islands of Adventure (p. 129)** UNIVERSAL ORLANDO Tops in town for thrills and chills, the park features state-of-the-art thrills-and-chills roller coasters, 3-D film, live-action and simulator rides, and water flumes.... Tel 407/363-8000 (toll-free 800/711-0080). [www.universalorlando.com](http://www.universalorlando.com). 1000 Universal Studios Plaza. Daily; hours vary. Single-day admission \$55 adults, \$45 children 3–9. Multi-day discount pass options available.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Magic Kingdom (p. 126)** WDW Disney's first Florida theme park, the 100-acre Magic Kingdom is the sugarcoated heart of Walt Disney World.... Tel 407/824-4321. [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). *Walt Disney World. Daily; hours vary seasonally. Single-day admission \$55 adults; \$44 children 3-9. Discount multi-day pass options available.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Monument of the States (p. 136)** KISSIMMEE A statue erected after Pearl Harbor as a symbol of America's unity.... *No phone. Lakefront Park, 300 E. Monument Ave. Daily 24 hr. Free admission.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Orange County Regional History Center (p. 138)** DOWNTOWN ORLANDO Explore Orlando's pioneer past through old photographs, re-created settings, and a 1926 firehouse with antique firetrucks.... Tel 407/836-8500 (toll-free 800/965-2030). [www.thehistorycenter.org](http://www.thehistorycenter.org). 65 E. Central Blvd. Mon-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun noon-5pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. Admission \$7 adults; \$3.50 children 3-12.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Orlando Museum of Art (p. 138)** ORLANDO Hosts special exhibitions throughout the year, and the permanent collections feature 19th- and 20th-century American art, pre-Columbian and African art, and a hands-on exhibit for children.... Tel 407/896-4231. [www.omart.org](http://www.omart.org). 2416 N. Mills Ave. (in Loch Haven Park) Tues-Fri 10am-4pm; Sat-Sun noon-4pm. Admission \$8 adults, \$7 seniors, \$5 children 6-18.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Orlando Science Center (p. 138)** ORLANDO Small and child-friendly, this museum features interactive science exhibits and a planetarium.... Tel 407/897-6350. Fax 407/514-2000. [www.osc.org](http://www.osc.org). 777 E. Princeton St. (between Orange and Mills aves., in Loch Haven Park). Tues-Thurs 9am-5pm; Fri-Sat 9am-9pm; Sun noon-5pm.; closed Mon. Admission (includes exhibits, Cinedome film, and planetarium) \$15 adults; \$9.95 children 3-11.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Osceola County Stadium and Sports Complex (p. 138)** KISSIMMEE Home of the Houston Astros baseball team's spring training.... Tel 407/839-3900. [www.osceola.org](http://www.osceola.org). 631 Heritage Park Way (off Bill Beck Blvd. at Hwy. 192). Ticket prices and hours vary.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Pleasure Island (p. 141)** WDW Every night is New Year's eve at Disney's biggest club and bar district.... Tel 407/934-7781. [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). 1590 Buena Vista Dr., in Downtown Disney. Daily 7pm-2am. Admission \$21.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Richard Petty Driving Experience (p. 123)** WDW Go-carts are for wusses. Race a 600-horsepower Winston Cup car at breakneck speeds. All you need to do is sign your life away on a release form and hand over a paycheck or three.... *Tel 407/939-0130 (toll-free 800/237-3889). www.1800bepetty.com. 3450 N. World Dr., off Magic Kingdom parking lot. Daily 9am–5pm. Admission \$105–\$1,330 depending on package option selected (prices include tax).*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium (p. 135)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE "Truth is stranger than fiction," Robert Ripley believed, and the oddities and exhibits displayed at this museum are mighty strange, indeed.... *Tel 407/345-8510. www.ripleysorlando.com. 8201 International Dr. Daily 9am–1am. Admission \$16 adults, \$11 children 4–12.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**SeaWorld (p. 118)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE What's black and white and wet all over? Shamu, naturally. Pay your respects to the big guy, collide with an avalanche, and take a side trip to Key West at the world's most popular marine-life park.... *Tel 407/351-3600 (toll-free 800/327-2424). www.seaworld.com. 7007 SeaWorld Dr. Daily; hours vary seasonally. Single-day admission \$54 adults, \$45 children 3–9. Discount multi-day pass options available.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Skull Kingdom (p. 119)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE Very, very spooky attraction, full of dark corners, special effects, and live characters. If you like haunted houses, don't miss it.... *Tel 407/354-1564. www.skullkingdom.com. 5933 American Way (just off the intersection of International Dr. and Universal Blvd.). Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 6pm–midnight. Admission day show \$9 per person, night show \$15 per person.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**T.D. Waterhouse Center (p. 138)** DOWNTOWN ORLANDO Home to the Orlando Magic basketball team.... *Tel 407/849-2001 for information; 407/839-3900 for tickets through Ticketmaster. www.orlandocentroplex.com. 600 W. Amelia St. (between I-4 and Parramore Ave.). Ticket prices and hours vary.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Titanic: Ship of Dreams (p. 135)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This permanent exhibit combines authentic artifacts, movie memorabilia, and costumed actors. Only for true *Titanic* buffs.... *Tel 407/248-1166. www.titanicshipofdreams.com. The Mercado, 8445 International Dr. (3 blocks south of Sand Lake Rd.). Daily 10am–8pm. Admission \$17 adults, \$12 children 6–11.*

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**Universal Studios Florida (p. 128)** UNIVERSAL ORLANDO Just when you thought Universal's rides couldn't get any hairier, they open *Revenge of the Mummy*, featuring an indoor roller coaster, special sensory effects, and major scares. This proves why Universal Orlando is still tops in the thrills department.... Tel 407/363-8000. [www.universalorlando.com](http://www.universalorlando.com). 1000 Universal Studios Plaza. Daily; hours vary seasonally. Single-day admission \$55 adults, \$45 children 3-9. Multi-day discount pass options available.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**

**WonderWorks (p. 136)** INTERNATIONAL DRIVE This attraction is full of amusing interactive exhibits like the bubble machine, sound tunnels, virtual reality sports, and computer games. Mostly for kids and the young at heart.... Tel 407/351-8800. [www.wonderworksonline.com](http://www.wonderworksonline.com). Pointe\*Orlando, 9067 International Dr. Daily 9am-midnight. Admission \$17 adults, \$13 children 4-12.

**See Map 10 on p. 110.**