

PART ONE

PLANNING *before* YOU LEAVE HOME

GATHERING INFORMATION

IN ADDITION TO THIS GUIDE, WE RECOMMEND that you obtain:

1. THE WALT DISNEY TRAVEL COMPANY FLORIDA VACATIONS BROCHURE AND VIDEO/DVD This resource describes Walt Disney World in its entirety, lists rates for all Disney resort hotels and campgrounds, and describes Disney World package vacations. The brochure and video/DVD are available from most travel agents or by calling the Walt Disney Travel Company at ☎ 407-828-8101 or 407-934-7639. Be prepared to hold; you may have a long wait. When you get a live representative on the line, tell them you want the video or DVD vacation planner that lists the benefits and costs of the various packages.

2. THE DISNEY CRUISE LINE BROCHURE AND DVD This brochure provides details on vacation packages that combine a cruise on the Disney Cruise Line with a stay at Disney World. Disney Cruise Line also offers a free DVD that tells all you need to know about Disney cruises and then some. To obtain a copy, call ☎ 800-951-3532 or order at www.disneycruise.com.

3. THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO WALT DISNEY WORLD WEB SITE Our Web site, www.touringplans.com, offers a free online trip organizer, 100 touring plans, and updates on changes at Walt Disney World, among other features. The site is described more fully later in this chapter.

4. ORLANDO MAGICARD If you're considering lodging outside Walt Disney World or if you think you might patronize

attractions and restaurants outside of Disney World, it's worthwhile to obtain an Orlando Magicard, a Vacation Planner, and the *Orlando Official Accommodations Guide* (all free) from the Orlando Visitors Center. The Orlando Magicard can be conveniently downloaded from a new Web site, www.orlandoinfo.com/magicard. To order the accommodations guide, call ☎ 800-643-9492. For more information and materials, call ☎ 407-363-5872 or visit www.go2orlando.com. Phones are staffed during weekday business hours; allow four weeks for delivery.

5. FLORIDA TRAVELER DISCOUNT GUIDE Another good source of discounts on lodging, restaurants, and attractions throughout the state is the *Florida Traveler Discount Guide*, published by Exit Information Guide. The guide is free, but you will be charged \$3 (\$5 shipped to Canada) for handling. Call ☎ 352-371-3948 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST, or go to www.travelerdiscountguide.com. Similar guides to other states are available at the same number. It's sometimes difficult to get through on the phone, however. Also, their www.roomsaver.com Web site has hotel coupons you can print off your computer.

6. KISSIMMEE-ST. CLOUD TOUR & TRAVEL SALES GUIDE This full-color directory of hotels and attractions is one of the most complete available and is of particular interest to those who intend to book lodging outside of Disney World. In addition to hotels and motels, the directory lists rental houses, time-shares, and condominiums. To receive a copy, call the Kissimmee-St. Cloud Convention and Visitors Bureau at ☎ 800-327-9159 or check out www.floridakiss.com.

7. GUIDEBOOK FOR GUESTS WITH DISABILITIES If you have disabled individuals in your family or group, check out each park's *Guidebook for Guests with Disabilities*, available online at www.disneyworld.com.

WALT DISNEY WORLD ON THE WEB

DISNEY'S OFFICIAL WEB SITE, www.disney.com, offers much of the same information as the Walt Disney Travel Company's vacation guidebook, but the guidebook has better pictures. Though the Web site is supposedly updated daily, we frequently find errors. Now you can purchase theme-park admissions and make resort and dining reservations on the Internet. The site also offers online shopping, weather forecasts, and information on renovations and special events.

Other Recommended Web Sites

Len Testa, Internet guru and *Unofficial Guide* coauthor, has combed the Web looking for the best Disney sites. Here are Len's picks:

BEST OFFICIAL THEME-PARK SITE For the third consecutive year, the official Walt Disney World Web site (www.disneyworld.com) gets the nod over the official Universal Studios site (www.universalorlando.com) and the official SeaWorld Web site (www.seaworld.com). Each contains information on ticket options, park hours, attraction height requirements, disabled guest access, and the like. Disney's site is more comprehensive. On the minus side, however, the Disney site is so loaded with high-tech gimmickry (music, video, pop-up images, and more) that it takes much longer to bring up each screen.

BEST GENERAL UNOFFICIAL SITE The Walt Disney World Information Guide (www.allearsnet.com) is the first Web site we recommend to friends interested in going to Disney World. It contains information on virtually every hotel, restaurant, and activity in the World. Want to know what the rooms look like at the Disney resorts before you book a reservation? This site has photos of rooms at every resort—sometimes for each floor of a particular resort. The Web site is updated several times per week, and includes menus from Disney restaurants, ticketing information, maps, driving directions, and more.

We also read www.mouseplanet.com on a weekly basis. Besides timely information, MousePlanet delivers detailed, multipart stories on a wide range of Disney theme-park subjects, including restaurants, resorts, and transportation. The site hosts a lively set of discussion boards featuring a wide range of theme-park topics, and their “updates” section is the most comprehensive available.

UNOFFICIAL GUIDE WEB SITES The *Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* Web site can be found at www.touringplans.com. Our Web site features more than 100 touring plans for the Disney parks, a comprehensive free online trip planner, and more. The official Web site of the *Unofficial Guide* Travel and Lifestyle Series, providing in-depth information on all the *Unofficial Guides* in print, is at www.theunofficialguides.com.

BEST MONEY-SAVING SITE We humbly suggest that Mary Waring's www.mousesavers.com is the kind of Web site for which the Internet was invented. The site keeps an updated list of discounts and reservation codes for use at Disney resorts. The codes are separated into categories such as “For

anyone,” “For residents of certain states,” and so on. The site also lists discount codes for rental cars and non-Disney hotels in the Orlando area.

BEST DISNEY DISCUSSION BOARDS The best online discussions of all things Disney can be found at **mousepad.mouseplanet.com** and **www.disboards.com**. With tens of thousands of members and millions of posts, the discussion boards are the most active and popular on the Web. Posting a question on any aspect of an upcoming trip is likely to get you helpful responses from lots of folks who’ve been in the same situation. For discussion boards that feel more familiar than your neighborhood bar, try **www.disneyecho.emuck.com**. Disney visitors living in the United Kingdom can say “cheerio” to one another on the boards at **www.wdisneyw.com/forums**, where tips on transatlantic airfare discounts, visa requirements, American customs, and more can be found.

BEST DISNEY BLOG John Frost’s unofficial Disney blog (**the disneyblog.typepad.com**) is witty, concise, and updated continuously. Topics cover everything in the Disney universe, from theme parks and movies to the latest Disney rumors. Best of all, you’ll find links to other Disney-related sites on the Web to continue your addiction, er, planning.

BEST SITE FOR WDW LIVE ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULES Orlando resident Steve Soares posts the daily performance schedule a week in advance for every live show in Walt Disney World. This information is invaluable if you’re trying to integrate these shows into your touring plans. Visit **pages.prodigy.net/stevesoares** for the details.

magic.com every few days for the latest news and rumors on Disney World. The site is popular with Disney fans and park cast members, who often provide insider information on upcoming attractions and developments. It also has pages dedicated to major rides, parades, and shows in each park, including audio and video. User forums allow you to read and post messages.

A close second is **www.screamscape.com**. Editor Lance Hart and crew continue to do an excellent job of uncovering the very latest on Disney projects still in development. Years after its debut, Screamscape is one of the sites we check a couple of times per week.

BEST THEME-PARK-INSIDER SITE If *The E! True Hollywood Story* did an episode on theme-park development, it would end up with something like **www.jimhillmedia.com**. Well researched and supplied with limitless inside information, Jim Hill’s

columns guide you through the internal squabbles, shareholder revolts, budget compromises, and outside competition that made (and make) Walt Disney World what it is.

BEST TRIVIA SITES Lou Mongello's excellent *Walt Disney World Trivia Book* has an equally good Web site, www.disneyworldtrivia.com, with message boards, park news, and more. Lou hosts live Internet chats at his site, usually on Tuesdays. Lou also hosts the *WDW Radio Show* podcast. Check it out on iTunes and at www.wdwradio.com.

At long last, fans of Steve Barrett's *Hidden Mickeys* book now have an online destination to keep updated on the latest tri-circle sightings at www.hiddenmickeysguide.com.

BEST ORLANDO WEATHER INFORMATION Printable 15-day forecasts for the Orlando area are available from www.accuweather.com. We find this site to be especially useful in the winter and spring months, when temperatures can vary dramatically. During summer, the ultraviolet index forecasts will help you choose between a tube and a keg of sunscreen.

BEST WEB SITE FOR TRAFFIC, ROADWORK, AND CONSTRUCTION INFORMATION Visit www.expresswayauthority.com for the latest information on road work and construction in the Orlando and Orange County areas. The site also contains detailed maps, driving directions, and toll-rate information for the most popular tourist destinations.

BEST DRIVING DIRECTIONS The printable directions available at www.mapquest.com are accurate and efficient. We especially like the feature that allows you to get driving directions for the return drive with the click of a button. Perhaps future maps will be able to flag every Stuckey's roadside stand along your route, too.

There are hundreds of other Disney sites, as well as sites that rate and contrast thrill rides in theme parks in the United States and all over the world. Start with the sites listed above and follow the links.

DISNEY WORLD INFORMATION BY MAIL

INFORMATION ABOUT WALT DISNEY WORLD is also available at the public library, travel agencies, AAA, or by contacting any of the addresses on the following page.

IMPORTANT DISNEY WORLD TELEPHONE NUMBERS

WHEN YOU CALL THE MAIN INFORMATION number, you will be offered a menu of options for recorded information

IMPORTANT WALT DISNEY WORLD ADDRESSES
Walt Disney World Info/Guest Letters/Letters to Mickey Mouse

P.O. Box 10040
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-0040

Walt Disney World

Central Reservations
P.O. Box 10100
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-0100

Convention and Banquet Information

Walt Disney World Resort South
P.O. Box 10000
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000

Walt Disney World Educational Programs

P.O. Box 10000
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000

**Merchandise Mail Order
(Guest Service Mail Order)**

P.O. Box 10070
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-0070

Walt Disney World Ticket Mail Order

P.O. Box 10100
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-0140

Compliments, Complaints, and Suggestions

Walt Disney World Guest Communications
P. O. Box 10040
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000

IMPORTANT WALT DISNEY WORLD PHONE NUMBERS

General Information	☎ 407-824-4321
Accommodations/Reservations	☎ 407-934-7639 or ☎ 407-824-8000
Convention Information	☎ 407-828-3200
Dining Advance Reservations	☎ 407-939-3463
Disabled Guests Special Requests	☎ 407-939-7807
Lost and Found	☎ 407-824-4245
Merchandise Guest Services Department	☎ 407-363-6200
Resort Dining and Recreational Information	☎ 407-939-3463
Telecommunication for the Deaf	
Reservations	☎ 407-939-7670
WDW Information	☎ 407-939-8255
Walt Disney Travel Company	☎ 407-828-3232

on theme-park operating hours, recreation areas, shopping, entertainment complexes, tickets and admissions, resort reservations, and directions by highway and from the airport. If you are using a rotary telephone, your call will be forwarded to a Disney information representative. If you are using a Touch-Tone phone and have a question not covered by recorded information, press eight (8) at any time to speak to a Disney representative.

WHEN *to GO to* **WALT DISNEY WORLD**

SELECTING THE TIME OF YEAR FOR YOUR VISIT

WALT DISNEY WORLD IS BUSIEST Christmas Day through New Year's Day. Thanksgiving weekend, the week of Washington's birthday, Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, spring break for colleges, and the two weeks around Easter are also extremely busy. What does "busy" mean? As many as 92,000 people have toured the Magic Kingdom alone on a single day in these peak times! While this level of attendance isn't typical, it is possible, and 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 after the Thanksgiving weekend until the week before Christmas. The next slowest times are November through the weekend preceding Thanksgiving, January 4 through the first week of February, and the week after Easter through early June. Late February, March, and early April are dicey. 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.

The Downside of Off-season Touring

Though we strongly recommend going to Walt Disney World in the fall, winter, or spring, there are trade-offs. The parks often open late and close early during the off-season. When they open as late as 9 a.m., everyone arrives at about the same time, which makes it hard to beat the crowd. A late opening coupled with an early closing drastically reduces the

hours available to tour. Even when crowds are small, it's difficult to see a big park like the Magic Kingdom or Epcot between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Early closing (before 8 p.m.) also usually means that evening parades or fireworks are eliminated. And, because these are slow times at Disney World, some rides and attractions may be closed for maintenance or renovation. Finally, central Florida temperatures fluctuate wildly during the late fall, winter, and early spring; daytime lows in the 40s and 50s are not uncommon.

Given the choice, however, small crowds, bargain prices, and stress-free touring are well worth risking a little cold weather or a couple of closed attractions. So much easier is touring in the fall and other "off" periods that our research team, at the risk of being blasphemous, would advise taking children out of school for a week at those times rather than battling the summer crowds. Or, consider scheduling your Disney World trip immediately following the last week of school in the spring or during the week prior to school starting in the fall. The crowds will be well below summer peak. Obviously, this strategy will require some advance planning and organization, but the payoff is well worth the effort.

EXTRA MAGIC HOURS

"EXTRA MAGIC HOURS" IS A PERK FOR families staying at a Walt Disney World resort, including the Swan, Dolphin, and Shades of Green, and the Hilton in the Downtown Disney resort area. On selected days of the week, Disney resort guests will be able to enter a Disney theme park one hour earlier, or stay in a selected theme park up to three hours later than the official park-operating hours. Theme-park visitors not staying at a Disney resort may stay in the park for Extra Magic Hour evenings but cannot experience any rides, attractions, or shows. In other words, they can shop and eat.

CROWD CONDITIONS AND THE BEST AND WORST PARKS TO VISIT FOR EACH DAY OF THE YEAR

Each year we receive more than 1,000 e-mails and letters inquiring about crowd conditions on specific dates throughout the year. Readers also want to know which park is best to visit on each day of their stay. To make things easier for you (and us!), we provide a calendar on our Web site, www.touringplans.com, and keep it totally updated for you. For each date, we offer a crowd-level index based on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least crowded and 10 being most crowded. Our calendar takes into account all holidays, special events, and more, as described below. The same calendar lists the best and worst

park(s) to visit in terms of crowd conditions on any given day. All you have to do is look up the days of your intended visit on the calendar.

SUMMER AND HOLIDAYS If you visit on a nonholiday mid-summer day, arrive at the turnstile 30 minutes before the stated opening on a non-early-entry day. If you visit during a major holiday period, arrive 40 to 60 minutes ahead of the official opening time. Hit your favorite rides early using one of our touring plans, and then return to your hotel for lunch, a swim, and perhaps a nap. Don't forget to have your hand stamped for re-entry when you exit. If you are interested in the special parades and shows, return to the park in the late afternoon or early evening. Work under the assumption that, unless you use FASTPASS, early morning will be the only time you can experience the attractions without long waits. Finally, do not wait until the last minute in the evening to leave the park. The exodus at closing is truly mind-boggling.

Epcot is usually the least crowded park during holiday periods. Expect the other parks to be mobbed. To save time in the morning, purchase your admission in advance. Also, consider bringing your own stroller or wheelchair instead of renting one of Disney's. If you are touring Epcot or the Magic Kingdom and plan to spend the day, try exiting the park for lunch at one of the nearby resort hotels. Above all, bring your sense of humor and pay attention to the morale of your party. Bail out when it gets to be more work than fun.