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# America's Playground

Approaching Orlando—and this guide

IN 1886, A YOUNG UNMARRIED MAILMAN, FRUSTRATED WITH HIS FRUITLESS endeavors in the Midwest, moved to the woolly wilderness of Central Florida to make a better go of life. The land was no one's friend. Summers were oppressively hot, the lightning relentless, and the tough land, by turns sodden and scrubby, seemed to defy clearing. The only domestic creatures that thrived in Central Florida, it seemed, were the cattle, and even they turned out stringy and chewy. Undaunted—and in love with a girl from a neighboring farm—the young man planted a grove of citrus trees and waited for things to get better. They didn't. His trees died in a freeze and the young man was forced to return to delivering the mail to support himself. By 1890, the young man gave up. He moved, defeated, to Chicago to seek work. He was joined by his new bride, whose father had been injured clearing Florida pine and died. Back in the smoke of the Midwest, they had children and settled for what was to be an anonymous existence.

One day, 8 decades later, long after the young man and woman had lived full lives and passed away, two of their sons would return to Central Florida, that land that broke their father, and together they would transform the recalcitrant swamp into the most famous fantasyland in the world.

The American dream appeared to fail for Elias Disney. Little did he know it was only skipping a generation, and that his sons Walt and Roy would become synonymous with the very land that rejected him. Had he known that the Disney name would in due time define Central Florida, would he have been so despondent? Even if he could have had a fleeting vision of what was to be, and what his family would mean to this place and indeed to the United States, could he even have believed it?

The Disney brothers turned a place of toil into a realm of pleasure, a place where hardworking people can put their entertainment in reliable hands. The English have their Blackpool; Canadians have their Niagara Falls. Orlando rose to become the preeminent resort for the working and middle classes of America, and the breathtaking ingenuity of its inventions now inspires visitors from everywhere on Earth. While other countries segregate their holiday destinations by income or some other petty quality, Orlando, in the classic American egalitarian style, is all things to all people, from all countries and backgrounds.

This guide is written with a keen awareness that Orlando represents something even more powerful to American culture and history than merely being the fruit of a dream. It's something we all share. No matter who you are, no matter where you grew up, no matter what your politics, you probably went at least once to Walt Disney World and Orlando—or if you didn't, you desperately wanted to. What other thing in our culture can we all claim to share? What else has given children for the past two generations such sweet dreams? I've always said that if

somehow Walt Disney World went out of business tomorrow, the National Park Service would have to take it over. It means that much to us.

So don't think of the amusements of Orlando as mere moneymaking enterprises. Of course they are, and it's easy to name legitimate issues with how they're run. But Walt Disney World, and by extension Orlando, is also Americana incarnate. The taste for showmanship and fantasy that Walt Disney World crystallizes, now known as Disneyfication, has become the defining mind-set of modern culture, in which even local grocery stores and shopping malls are dressed up like film sets and the "story" of your local burger joint is retold on the side of its soda cups.

Orlando tells us about our own culture, and it defines who we are and who we dream of being. Virtually nothing about today's Orlando is natural or authentic, and yet there may be no more perfect embodiment of our national culture. To understand this invented landscape is to understand our civilization and our generation. And if you observe Orlando with a long view—starting with young Elias Disney cutting his hands trying to budge a tough Florida pine—you will be a part of the explosive, unexpected powers of the American dream.

And one more thing: As you'll soon see, it's a hell of a lot of fun.

## THE SIGHTS YOU MUST SEE

Walt Disney World operates four top-drawer theme parks every day of the year: **Magic Kingdom**, the most popular theme park on Earth, is an improved iteration of the original Disneyland and the park that started it all; **Epcot** is a new-brew version of an old-style world's fair; **Disney's Animal Kingdom** blends animal habitats with theme park panache; and **Disney's Hollywood Studios** presents a show-heavy salute to the movies. Every bit as elaborate and cunning, Universal Orlando's two parks, **Universal Studios Florida** and **Islands of Adventure**, command great respect and get the adrenaline pumping a bit stronger. The gardens and marine mammals at **SeaWorld Orlando** serve to soothe. Those seven parks, all of which are in the top 10 most visited in the world, would take over a week to see fully, but there are still a few more. **Busch Gardens Africa** provides animal sightings with coaster after celebrated coaster, and three water parks combine cooling water with kinesthetic energy: **Typhoon Lagoon** for family-friendly slides, **Blizzard Beach** for more aggressive ones, and **Wet 'n Wild** for no-holds-barred thrills.

**IF YOU HAVE ONLY 1 DAY IN ORLANDO** Well, I'm sorry for you. Just as it's impossible to eat an entire box of Velveeta in one sitting, you can't get the full breadth of Orlando in a day. But there is a must-see attraction: Walt Disney World's **Magic Kingdom** (p. 108). There is enough diversion at every Orlando theme park to keep you busy from morning to midnight—it's all a matter of willpower, and at what point you can tear yourself away. Ride the great Disney Audio-Animatronic odysseys **Pirates of the Caribbean**, **Haunted Mansion**, and "it's a small world," and brave the drops of **Splash Mountain** and **Space Mountain**. While you're there, take a free spin on the **monorail** through the iconic **Contemporary Resort**, and then connect for the free round-trip ride to **Epcot** (p. 134) and back, where you'll see the other top Disney park from above. Stay until closing, through the **fireworks** and the **parade**, or, if you've had

enough, head to a quintessentially kitschy dinner banquet spectacle such as **Arabian Nights** (p. 93). Hope you're not hungry for subtlety!

**IF YOU HAVE ONLY 2 DAYS IN ORLANDO** Do the **Magic Kingdom** for sure, but for your second day, drop into **Epcot** and pass the morning hours seeing **Future World**, and then have lunch at one of the ethnic eateries of **World Showcase**, such as in **Morocco** or **Japan**. Hopefully, you bought an admission ticket that allows for park hopping, so you can duck into **Disney's Hollywood Studios** (p. 152) to try the superlative **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror**, or as long as it's before 5pm, into **Disney's Animal Kingdom** (p. 163) to sample the newly built **Expedition Everest** roller coaster.

**IF YOU HAVE 3 OR 4 DAYS IN ORLANDO** Now it's time to consider branching out beyond the Mouse. If you're here for theme parks, you should go directly to **Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure** (p. 192), one of the most elaborate amusement parks in the world, and don't neglect some of its most celebrated rides: **the Adventures of Spider-Man**, **Incredible Hulk Coaster**, and **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges**. If you have small kids or you don't like thrills, then **SeaWorld Orlando** (p. 204), with its **Shamu** show and multiple marine animal habitats, makes for a soothing change of pace. Fill in spare time by visiting the secondary Disney theme parks (**Animal Kingdom** and **Hollywood Studios**) or by spending a few hours at **Universal Studios Florida** (p. 180). During the evening, spend a night at the shopping-and-clubs zone of Universal's **CityWalk** (p. 281), or for an experience that's a little less canned, hit a pedestrian zone such as **Old Town** (p. 229) in Kissimmee, the smooth clubs of **Church Street** (for example, **Cheyenne Saloon & Opera House**, p. 289) downtown, the carnival atmosphere of **International Drive** north of Sand Lake Road (p. 225), or the Vietnamese culinary delights of **ViMi** (see "A Gastronomic Tour of Little Vietnam," p. 88) downtown. You might need a fine arts fix, too: **The Morse Museum's** (p. 237) dazzling collection of Tiffany glass, followed by a boat cruise past the mansions of **Winter Park** (p. 237), might be just the ticket, as would be a stroll through the galleries of the **Downtown Arts District** (p. 234). At the moment you get sick of roller coasters—or when the temperature cracks the boiling point, whichever comes first—head for a water park: **Blizzard Beach** (p. 172) for a heavily themed experience, or **Wet 'n Wild** (p. 225) for unvarnished thrills.

**IF YOU HAVE 5 OR MORE DAYS IN ORLANDO** Finally—you're approaching a vacation long enough to enable you to actually relax, and to take time to sit by the pool. Of course, if you stuck to a schedule as rigid as one major theme park per day, it would still take you 8 days to knock down the biggies, and that's before setting your belly on a single water slide. Take a day to drive out to **Kennedy Space Center** (p. 241), or if you need some peace, take a dip in a natural spring, such as **DeLeon Springs** (p. 265).

**IF IT'S RAINING** Universal Studios Florida, with its many air-conditioned shows, waiting areas, and its covered parking, is the best choice. SeaWorld Orlando, where you'll spend lots of time walking outside, is the worst in rain. If it's a **scorcher**, both Universal Studios and Disney's Hollywood Studios have lots of sheltered activities, but you'll be best served by one of the three water parks

(**Wet 'n Wild**, **Blizzard Beach**, or **Typhoon Lagoon** [p. 173]) which get crowded, but are fine choices—though, of course, your hotel pool holds water as a heat reliever, too. The worst park on hot or wet days is the exposed **Disney's Animal Kingdom**.

## THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE

Of course, Orlando's identity as a theme park mecca only began in 1971, and the city has a deep culture of its own. Sample the high art collected by its high-society settlers at Winter Park's **Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art** (Tiffany glass by the shelf; p. 237), the **Cornell Fine Arts Museum** (lush decorative arts of every description; p. 238), or the **Orlando Museum of Art** (fine works from every era; p. 233). The reason all those blue bloods migrated here? The fine weather and the beautiful water. While some people rave about the horticultural achievements at botanical gardens such as the **Harry P. Leu Gardens** (p. 264) or **Historic Bok Sanctuary** (p. 265), I personally crave swimming in the 72-degree natural springs at **DeLeon Springs State Recreation Area** (where you can make your own pancakes and then have a swim in pure water; p. 265); a canoe paddle at **Wekiwa Springs State Park** (just north of downtown; p. 266); or, in winter, watching some of the area's original residents, wild manatees, swim at **Blue Spring State Park** (p. 266). Even Orlando tourism has its antecedents: **Gatorland** (p. 235) is a pleasing, corn-fed throwback from another era. And modern history has fewer finer monuments than the still-active launch pads at the **Kennedy Space Center** (p. 241), where America accomplished the impossible, over and over again.

## LODGING TO BEAT THE RECESSION

Although pretty much everyone comes here to see Disney, not everyone can afford to stay there; prices start at \$82 in the quietest seasons (barring sales) for a mediocre room in its **Pop Century** or **All-Star** resorts (p. 43). So rent an entire house instead. **All Star Vacation Homes** (p. 29) decorates its properties, all within 4 miles of Disney, to the highest design standards from as little as \$119 for two bedrooms, plus a living room pullout—and companies such as **Alexander Holiday Homes** (p. 29), **IPG Florida Vacation Homes** (p. 30), and **Oak Plantation** (p. 52) do it for as little as \$79 a night. **Orlando Courtyard Suites** (p. 53) gives you a motel-style atmosphere with top-end apartment units starting at \$89. Other affordable hotels such as **Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites Orlando Lake Buena Vista East** (p. 52) and **Rodeway Inn at International** (p. 61) get you a straight-ahead standard room for nostalgic prices. Of course, many people have saved up all year for the chance to splash out on their Orlando hotel experience, and for them, there are places where you can get a better-than-average experience for market value. The **Courtyard at Lake Lucerne** (p. 38), set in the city's oldest documented home, is impossibly romantic; and the **Nickelodeon Family Suites** (p. 59) entertains kids with the flamboyance of a theme park.

## FOOD, BEYOND THE CHAINS

Orlando is one of those places where even blasé restaurants are priced like splurges, but I sort the wheat from the chaff and tell you which special-occasion tables get

you the most for your buck, including **California Grill** (overlooks the Magic Kingdom fireworks from atop the Contemporary Resort; p. 67), and **Todd English's bluezoo** (impeccable fish; p. 67). More importantly, I point out fabulous restaurants, many family run, that have been elbowed into the background by the proliferation of also-ran chains. These guys could put Epcot's World Showcase to shame, and at a fraction of the price: **Bruno's Italian Restaurant** (*abbondanza!* Right in the franchise zone of Disney, too! p. 77); **Nile Ethiopian Cuisine** (authentically African, down to the coffee ceremony; p. 82); **Asia Bagus** (Indonesian, smartly done, also near Disney; p. 77); **Havana's Cuban Cuisine** (the real stuff, right by Disney; p. 78); **Blackwater Bar B-Q** (divine Brunswick stew, and dead cheap; p. 84); and **Seasons 52** (no dish will hit you for more than 475 calories, and desserts are served by the shot glass; p. 83). And a selection of little places will put you in touch with the locals: The veggie chili at the friendly **Dandelion Communita Cafe** (p. 85) is to die for, while **Vinhs Restaurant** (p. 89) in the Vietnamese district makes its own roast pork using a secret recipe. Yes, as it turns out, there are a lot of dining secrets in this town.

## THE BEST "OTHER" EXPERIENCES

There's no better way to get under the skin of Orlando than to sneak backstage. Far from spoiling the show, behind-the-scenes tours only enrich your understanding and appreciation for the feats of urban planning that have been achieved here, and what's being accomplished every single day in the name of your entertainment. Walt Disney World's **Backstage Magic** (p. 248) is a 7-hour primer on the resort's operational secrets, from the secret utilidors underfoot at the Magic Kingdom to the warehouse where the Audio-Animatronic figures are repaired. You fulfill the childhood fantasy of having an empty theme park all to yourself, paired with the pleasure of learning to ride a Segway scooter, on **Around the World at Epcot** (p. 249). SeaWorld's **Dolphin Spotlight** (p. 252) is a rare chance to feed a dolphin family by hand, and at Busch Gardens Africa, you can do the same thing with nosy giraffes from a flatbed truck on the **Serengeti Safari** (p. 254), even after dark using night-vision tools. For even deeper learning, Kennedy Space Center's **Astronaut Encounter** (p. 253) affords the opportunity to meet and talk with a real NASA astronaut who has been to space. Outside the theme parks, Orlando is rich with more opportunities to see how people live, from unusual planned communities (the picture-perfect Stepford town of **Celebration** [p. 258] and the psychics of the haunted 19th-century hamlet **Cassadaga** [p. 259]) to some of the most vital Christian evangelical projects in America (such as the **WordSpring Discovery Bible translation center**; p. 260). When you're worn out from thinking, take a night off to kick back at a **spring training** (p. 254) baseball game or a **drive-in movie** (p. 255)—Orlando is one of the only places in America that can boast both options. But the activity you may treasure most of all is the chance to volunteer to help a Make-A-Wish kid's Orlando dream come true at **Give Kids the World Village** (p. 262), a specialized resort that must be seen to be believed.

## SUGGESTED DISNEY ITINERARIES

You shouldn't march into the parks with a stopwatch and a map like some kind of warrior or military strategist. That's the surest way to have a stressful vacation, and

to make some miserable memories. The parks simply are not best enjoyed that way—you get the most out of them if you don't put too much pressure on yourself and if you make time for discoveries. Besides, fixed plans of attack are easily rendered useless by changes in the weather, ride breakdowns, swells or droughts in the crowds, or if your kid suddenly gets grouchy and needs a nap. And in the peak seasons of July or after Christmas, waits can be so extreme that you'd be lucky to get a half-dozen rides or shows in. But these suggested routes, good for most times of year, will help you prioritize what's worth seeing, and when.

I suggest eating meals between 10:30am and noon (lunch) and 4 and 5pm (dinner) to avoid getting caught in crowds and losing valuable time. But you can fit meals anywhere into the following plans when you're hungry.

## The Magic Kingdom

### FOR THOSE WITH KIDS UNDER 8

No coasters, just easy rides and lots of characters

Major attractions to collect **Fastpass** for within 90 minutes of opening if you're *not* following the plan: Peter Pan's Flight and the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh.

1. When the gates open, head to **Fantasyland**, and ride in the following order: Peter Pan's Flight, Dumbo the Flying Elephant (omit if your kids don't care), the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Snow White's Scary Adventures, "it's a small world."
2. Visit **Mickey's Toontown Fair** if you want to meet Mickey. If not, omit for now.  
*Secondary option:* Ride the **train** from **Toontown Fair** to **Frontierland** to reach **Adventureland**.
3. Cross to **Adventureland** to ride Pirates of the Caribbean and the Jungle Cruise.
4. It may be hot by now, so see these two neighboring indoor shows, where you'll be seated: the Enchanted Tiki Room and the Country Bear Jamboree.
5. See the parade from **Frontierland** or **Main Street, U.S.A.**  
*Secondary option:* If you'd rather see the evening parade, take **the raft to Tom Sawyer Island** before it starts.
6. If your kids are willing, ride the Haunted Mansion.
7. On your way to **Tomorrowland** via **Fantasyland**, visit Ariel's Grotto, watch Mickey's PhilharMagic, and (time permitting) check out Tinker Bell at Pixie Hollow.
8. In **Tomorrowland**, ride Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin and Stitch's Great Escape!
9. Ride the Speedway if your child meets the height requirement.
10. If there's time, hit rides you missed (the Carrousel, Astro Orbiter).
11. Watch the **evening parade** and the **fireworks** before departing.

### FOR THOSE WITH TEENAGERS

Thrills, fewer kiddie rides

Major attractions it's smart to have a **Fastpass** for—get the first within 90 minutes of opening, get another after that's used, and so on: Splash Mountain, Space Mountain, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin.

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1. When the gates open, head to **Frontierland** and ride Big Thunder Mountain Railway. On the way out, grab a **Fastpass** for Splash Mountain (come back to ride it when the pass comes due).
2. In **Adventureland**, ride Pirates of the Caribbean and Jungle Cruise.
3. Cross the park via **Fantasyland**, collecting a **Fastpass** for either Peter Pan's Flight or the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, to **Tomorrowland** and ride Space Mountain and Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin.  
*Secondary option:* See Monster's Inc. Laugh Floor (it's indoors and you'll be seated).
4. Go to **Fantasyland** for the Mad Tea Party, Mickey's PhilharMagic, and any rides that catch your fancy. You'll be getting hot and tired about now, so something like "it's a small world" might hit the spot.
5. Ride the Haunted Mansion.
6. Take the raft to Tom Sawyer Island where the kids can have free reign and, upon returning, shoot a few rounds at the Frontierland Shootin' Arcade or maybe do a lap on the **riverboat**.
7. Ride the train from **Frontierland** to **Main Street, U.S.A.**
8. See the **parade** and **fireworks** from **Main Street, U.S.A.**, or in front of the **Castle**.  
*Secondary option:* If the parade isn't of interest, pick rides anywhere except in Adventureland to re-ride or try; lines will be dramatically shorter during the parade.

### FOR THOSE WITH NO KIDS

A mix of thrills and fun kiddie stuff

Major attractions it's smart to have a **Fastpass** for—get the first within 90 minutes of opening: Splash Mountain, Space Mountain, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin.

1. Upon opening, ride Peter Pan's Flight, "it's a small world," and the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh. That'll put you in the mood.
2. Head to **Frontierland** and ride Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. Get a **Fastpass** to Splash Mountain, and ride that either now or when it comes due.
3. Ride Pirates of the Caribbean and Jungle Cruise.
4. See the Enchanted Tiki Room or the Country Bear Jamboree.
5. Get out of **Adventureland** before the parade starts; it cuts the land off from the rest of the park.
6. It's hot outside! Ride the Haunted Mansion. Repeat until spooked.
7. Stay indoors by seeing Mickey's PhilharMagic.
8. Head to **Tomorrowland** and ride Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin and Space Mountain.
9. You're probably getting a little tired by now, so sit down and enjoy the Tomorrowland Transit Authority.
10. Then take your time to explore **Mickey's Toontown Fair**, and then take the **train** to **Frontierland** to explore Tom Sawyer Island. Ride the **riverboat** if you have a half-hour.
11. Enjoy the **parade**.  
*Secondary option:* If you have rides you missed or you'd like to repeat, the parade is a prime time for that, but don't miss the **fireworks** just after.

## FOCUSING ON ATTRACTIONS FROM THE CLASSIC DISNEY ERA

1. When the park opens, head to **Fantasyland** and ride the stuff that will stay packed all day: Peter Pan's Flight, "it's a small world," the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, and (if you can stomach it) Mad Tea Party.
2. Take a minute to observe Dumbo the Flying Elephant and the beautiful Carrousel, but don't ride unless you're dead set on it.
3. Head to **Adventureland** for Pirates of the Caribbean and the Jungle Cruise.
4. See the Enchanted Tiki Room.
5. Head to **Frontierland** for Country Bear Jamboree.
6. Take the **raft** to Tom Sawyer Island.
7. Ride the Haunted Mansion.
8. Go to **Tomorrowland** and ride the Speedway.
9. See Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress.
10. Take a spin on the Tomorrowland Transit Authority.
11. Stroll down **Main Street, U.S.A.**, for ice cream and shopping, making sure to stop at the Town Square Exhibition Hall to catch some vintage Disney cartoons.
12. Board the **train** there for a full circle of the park.
13. You are now well rested—and you've seen the stuff Walt had a hand in. Take the rest of the day to explore at will. Don't miss some of the greats of the post-Walt era: Space Mountain, Splash Mountain, and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. For something cool and indoors, Mickey's PhilharMagic is a modern attraction that's very faithful to the old Disney spirit.

## Epcot

Major attractions to collect **Fastpass** for within 90 minutes of opening: Soarin', Test Track.

1. When the gates open, go immediately to **the Land** and ride Soarin'. Get a **Fastpass** for it as you leave if you'd like to do it again (many people do).
2. Ride Test Track.
3. Ride Mission: Space.
4. Visit the Seas with Nemo and Friends.
5. Ride Living with the Land, and if you got a Fastpass, do Soarin' again. If you're hungry, Sunshine Seasons, in this pavilion, is a terrific place to eat.
6. Ride Spaceship Earth and visit Innovations.  
*Secondary option:* See Universe of Energy or, third option, visit Imagination! (the line's never long) and see Honey, I Shrunk the Audience.
7. Enter **World Showcase** at Mexico and ride Gran Fiesta Tour.
8. Ride Maelstrom at Norway. You have now enjoyed all the rides in World Showcase.
9. Continue along **World Showcase** at your own pace, avoiding the temptation to rush. The movies, in China, France, and Canada, are all worth seeing; the shops can be surprisingly good; and the street entertainment choices are excellent.
10. Catch the American Adventure; the Voices of America perform about 15 minutes before showtimes, and they're listed in the Times Guide.
11. Continue along **World Showcase**. Pause for a pint in the United Kingdom.

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- Remember **Future World** closes at 7pm, so if you have time before then, re-ride anything you loved (Spaceship Earth isn't usually crowded late in the day).
- Eat dinner in the land of your choice and catch IllumiNations.

### Disney's Hollywood Studios

Major attraction to collect **Fastpass** for within 90 minutes of opening: Toy Story Midway Mania. If you have little kids with you, Voyage of the Little Mermaid.

#### IF YOU HAVE SMALL CHILDREN IN TOW

- When the gates open, ride Toy Story Midway Mania. You'll probably want to get a **Fastpass** on the way out so you can ride it again later.
- See Voyage of the Little Mermaid.
- See Playhouse Disney—Live on Stage!
- See Mickey at the Magic of Disney Animation.
- Do the Great Movie Ride.
- Visit Buzz and Woody at Pixar Place.
- Take the Backlot Tour (it usually shuts down by late afternoon).
- Target a performance of Beauty and the Beast—Live on Stage for around now.
- See Muppet\*Vision 3-D.
- See the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular.
- If you think the kids can handle them, slot in the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror and the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster.
- See Fantasmic! (if it's performing tonight).

#### IF YOU DON'T HAVE LITTLE KIDS WITH YOU

- When the gates open, ride Toy Story Midway Mania. You'll probably want to get a **Fastpass** on the way out so you can ride it again later.
- Head to the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror and the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster and ride them. If the wait for either is over 30 minutes, **Fastpass** one and do the other (that is, if you haven't already got a Fastpass outstanding for Midway Mania).
- See Voyage of the Little Mermaid.
- Do the Great Movie Ride.
- Take the Backlot Tour (it usually shuts down by late afternoon).
- Target a performance of Lights, Motors, Action! to fall around now.
- Ride Star Tours.
- See the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular.
- See Muppet\*Vision 3-D.
- Tour Walt Disney: One Man's Dream (you can also do this anytime lines seem intolerable everywhere else).
- Make a pass to the American Idol Experience.
- See Fantasmic! (if it's performing tonight).

### Disney's Animal Kingdom

Major Attractions to **Fastpass** for within 90 minutes of opening: Expedition Everest.

**FOR ADULTS & TEENS**

1. When the gates open, head straight to **Africa** for Kilimanjaro Safaris. (If you're a coaster person, grab a **Fastpass** for Expedition Everest on the way there, but no dawdling!)
2. If you Fastpassed Everest, enjoy the Pangani Forest Exploration. If not, go to **Asia** to ride Everest before the line gets too crazy.
3. Explore the Maharajah Jungle Trek.
4. Ride Kali River Rapids.
5. See Flights of Wonder.
6. See the next performance of *Finding Nemo—The Musical*.
7. Ride Primeval Whirl and TriceraTop Spin.
8. Ride DINOSAUR.
9. Go see It's Tough to Be a Bug!, and afterward walk the **Discovery Trails** and look for animals embedded in the Tree of Life.
10. Walk the **Pangani Forest Exploration Trail**, and if it's quiet and you're interested, re-ride Kilimanjaro Safaris to get a different experience than before.
11. Go to **Camp Minnie-Mickey** to see *Festival of the Lion King*.
12. If you have time or energy, take the **train** to and from Rafiki's Planet Watch for a 20-minute walk-through (budget 45 min. total).
13. Catch the **parade**, re-ride anything you loved, and head out by closing at 5pm (the usual time).

**IF YOU HAVE SMALL CHILDREN WITH YOU**

1. When the gates open, head straight to **Africa** for Kilimanjaro Safaris.
2. Enjoy the Pangani Forest Exploration.
3. Explore the Maharajah Jungle Trek.
4. Ride Kali River Rapids.
5. See Flights of Wonder.
6. See the next performance of *Finding Nemo—The Musical*.
7. Ride Primeval Whirl and TriceraTop Spin.
8. Go see It's Tough to Be a Bug!, and afterward walk the **Discovery Trails** and look for animals embedded in the Tree of Life.
9. Walk the **Pangani Forest Exploration Trail**, and if it's quiet and you're interested, re-ride Kilimanjaro Safaris to get a different experience than before.
10. Go to **Camp Minnie-Mickey** to see *Festival of the Lion King* and to meet the Disney characters.
11. If you have time or energy, take the **train** to and from Rafiki's Planet Watch for a 20-minute walk-through (budget 45 min. total).
12. Catch the **parade**, re-ride anything you loved, and head out by closing at 5pm (the usual time).

**Combining Disney's Animal Kingdom & Disney's Hollywood Studios into a Single Day**

You really don't *have* to pay for 2 days' worth of park tickets for these two. As long as you have the Park Hopper ticket option, you can see the big highlights of these two parks in 1 action-packed day. You will miss some lesser attractions, but to be

honest, neither park can fill a whole day each. Animal Kingdom usually opens at 8am, which lets you get a head start on things.

Which park you do first is a toss-up. The animals are most active first thing in the morning at Animal Kingdom, but the line at Hollywood Studios' Toy Story Midway Mania gets crazy by noon, and the Fastpasses are often gone by then. I'm starting with Animal Kingdom, knowing that the line for Midway Mania will likely be well over an hour, but if you don't think Midway Mania is for you (see p. 158 for a description), that problem will vanish.

#### Start at **Disney's Animal Kingdom**

1. When the gates open, head straight to **Africa** for Kilimanjaro Safaris. (If you're a coaster person, grab a **Fastpass** for Expedition Everest on the way there, but no dawdling!)
2. If you Fastpassed Everest, enjoy the Pangani Forest Exploration. If not, go to **Asia** to ride Everest before the line gets too crazy.
3. Explore the Maharajah Jungle Trek.
4. Ride Kali River Rapids.
5. If you enjoy live musicals, see the next performance of *Finding Nemo—The Musical*. This will take nearly an hour, so trim this if it's too close to lunch.
6. Ride DINOSAUR (You may want to do this while waiting for *Nemo* to start.)
7. Go see It's Tough to Be a Bug!, and afterward walk the **Discovery Trails** and look for animals embedded in the Tree of Life.
8. Leave the park and have lunch on U.S. 192, where food's cheaper. You can reach it quickly by following the signs to the Animal Kingdom Lodge and turning left at the light before its entrance. That's Sherbeth Road, and it winds to U.S. 192. After lunch, drive east on 192 a few miles and follow the signs back to Disney.

#### Head to **Disney's Hollywood Studios**

9. First, go to Toy Story Midway Mania at **Pixar Place**. If there are any Fastpasses left, get one and come back later. If not, endure the line—it should be the only big one of your day, but at least it will be indoors, and Mr. Potato Head is entertaining.
10. Go ride Twilight Zone Tower of Terror and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster.
11. Do the Great Movie Ride.
12. Take the Backlot Tour (it usually shuts down by late afternoon).
13. Target a performance of Lights, Motors, Action! to fall around now.
14. Ride Star Tours.
15. If you have time, see Muppet\*Vision 3-D.
16. If you have time, see the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular.
17. See Fantasmic! (if it's performing tonight).
18. Go back to your hotel and collapse.

## PLANNING UNIVERSAL & SEAWORLD

At the other parks (Universal, SeaWorld, Busch Gardens), crowds aren't usually so horrific as to require you to prioritize so carefully. Use the star ratings in each chapter to guide you to the must-sees, but here are some pointers:

At **Universal Studios**, simply put the shows lower on your list. If you want to enjoy the most elaborate attractions at the Studios, head for (in this order) the Rockit coaster, the Mummy, the Simpsons Ride, Jaws, Men in Black, and E.T. Once you've knocked those down, see Twister, Shrek, and Disaster!, and then pick the shows that interest you most. **Note:** Because so many queues are indoors here, this is a great park to see if the forecast calls for hot or rainy weather, although the Rockit coaster will shut down if there's lightning about.

If you have little children with you, prioritize E.T. and the surrounding **Woody Woodpecker's Kidzone** children's area first, along with the Animal Actors show.

At **Islands of Adventure**, start when the gates open, without fail. Don't miss Spider-Man and the Hulk coaster (the two most popular rides), **Jurassic Park**, and in the heat of the day, Ripsaw Falls and the Bilge-Rat Barges. Wind up with the Cat in the Hat. Then you can bat clean-up with fun stuff like the Discovery Center and Dr. Doom's Fearfall. Remember that most people start their touring by going left (into Marvel Super Hero Island), so you should too so that you have a chance of beating the inevitable lines at the Hulk and Spider-Man.

If you have little children with you, prioritize **Seuss Landing** first, followed by Pteranodon Flyers in the **Jurassic Park** area and Me Boat, the Olive in **Toon Lagoon**.

For **SeaWorld**, pick the Shamu show you want to see (I like the evening one because you can usually leave easily afterward) and build your day around it. I recommend you don't miss Clyde & Seamore and Pets Ahoy!, with Blue Horizons close behind. Fill the time in between those with Manta and Kraken, as well as visits to the various habitats (Sharks Deep Dive and Wild Arctic are standouts). Do Journey to Atlantis when the heat is strongest—you will get drenched, and it'll feel great; it's beside Kraken. Cap summer nights with Mystify.