

# The Best of Walt Disney World & Orlando

In the beginning, Orlando may have been a sleepy little Southern town filled with farmland as far as the eye could see, orange groves galore, and only two attractions to its name (a water-ski show and some great big gators). Then came the Mouse. More specifically, a mouse named Mickey and his creator, a man of fantastic imagination and vision named Walt Disney. Life in Orlando would never be the same. Since the opening of Walt Disney World back in 1971, Orlando has grown to become one of the world's top vacation destinations. Almost 48 million people from all parts of the world make their way to this city each year to sample its unending array of exciting, unique, and diverse activities. Those of us who continue to return year after year can count on each visit to provide a host of new experiences and memories.

When Disney World first opened its gates to the public, I doubt if anyone but Walt Disney, the original Imagineer, could have predicted what lay ahead. Disney, searching for an East Coast location for his second theme park, decided Orlando was just the place he was looking for. In 1964, in a covert operation that would have made James Bond proud, Walt Disney began quietly purchasing large quantities of land in and around the Orlando area, and within months he had acquired property nearly twice the size of Manhattan. In 1965, Walt announced to the public his plans to bring to Orlando the world's most spectacular theme park. Fashioned after Disneyland in California, construction soon began on Disney's Magic Kingdom. Unfortunately, Walt Disney was never able to see his dream come to life, as he passed away in 1966, just 5 years shy of the opening of what, to this day, is still the world's most spectacular theme park—Walt Disney World.

Disney's legacy, while commercialized over the years, has practically become a rite of passage, not to mention a national shrine to which visitors flock by the millions. And if you have kids, a visit here is almost a requirement. The opening of Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom started a tourist boom in Central Florida the likes of which has never been seen elsewhere. Today, The Kingdom That Walt Built entices visitors with four theme parks; a dozen smaller attractions; a shopping, dining, and entertainment district; tens of thousands of hotel rooms; a vacation club (otherwise known as timeshares); scores of restaurants; and even two cruise ships (soon to be four). Universal Orlando adds to the dizzying array with two theme parks, three luxury resorts, and an entertainment complex that's home to several unique restaurants, clubs, shops, and entertainment venues. SeaWorld tosses in three theme parks and an entertainment, dining, and shopping district of its own. And those are just the major players. All in all, there are just shy of 100 attractions, both large and small, that will keep you coming back for more. There are also plenty of restaurants, ranging from fine dining to on-the-fly fast food; many of the more casual restaurants are as themed as the parks themselves. And the city doesn't lack for hotels and resorts either, with roughly 117,000 rooms, villas, and suites to go around by the end of 2010. If you can believe it, the landscape is still changing, evolving, growing, and expanding to ensure your experiences will do the same each and every time you stay and play in Orlando.

## Fun Facts **By the Numbers**

Orlando's theme parks, though seeing increasing attendance levels, are still affected by the recent downturn in the economy. Though predictions state that levels will continue to rise over the next few years, they will likely do so at a much slower pace. Parks, however, continue to entice visitors to return and to stay longer by offering special deals and adding wild and wonderfully new attractions. Here are the 2008 attendance estimates (and their national rankings) for all of the major Orlando parks according to TEA Inc., and Economic Research Associates:

- No. 1: Magic Kingdom, 17 million
- No. 3: Epcot, 10.9 million
- No. 4: Disney's Hollywood Studios, 9.6 million
- No. 5: Disney's Animal Kingdom, 9.5 million
- No. 6: Universal Studios Florida, 6.2 million
- No. 7: Sea World Orlando, 5.9 million
- No. 8: Islands of Adventure, 5.3 million

Beyond the fast-paced excitement, glitz, and glitter of Orlando's theme parks, you'll find Central Florida's more natural side, with hidden treasures just waiting to be discovered. More than 300 lakes, springs, and rivers are waiting to be explored and enjoyed. There are numerous parks and gardens, many with trails for walking and hiking, and the area's wildlife sanctuaries and zoos showcase Florida's animal inhabitants. The number of recreational opportunities—picnics in parks, boating along waterways, fishing, biking, and hiking, to name a few—is almost limitless. And Orlando's rich history and culture come to life through its many museums, galleries, and theaters.

Where to go, what to do, when to do it . . . with so many decisions to make, you may very well find your head spinning. Because of the vast quantity of offerings, a vacation to Orlando necessitates a reasonable amount of planning, not to mention budgeting. The sheer number of attractions and available activities requires that you narrow down your choices to fit both your schedule and your budget properly. Entrance fees can be daunting (a 1-day ticket to one of the major parks averages around \$75 for adults and \$63 for kids 3–9), and when you add in the costs of dining, accommodations, and souvenirs, sticker shock at the high price tag is not out of the question. A typical family of four could easily end up spending several hundred dollars a day! Some parks have begun offering deals to bring down the average daily price of your ticket if you buy multiday passes, but don't give them too much credit—the parks are wagering they'll generate additional revenue with all of the money you'll spend on extra hotel nights and meals. But even if you do have deep pockets, Orlando offers so much to experience that to take it all in properly would require far more time than the average vacation would allow. I doubt if even two or three vacations could do the trick.

That's exactly why this book was written: to make available to you the most up-to-date and detailed information on what Orlando has to offer. A mix of options that takes into account every budget and taste is included in each chapter so you can make the most informed decisions possible. With this book, you'll have the tools to plan ahead and

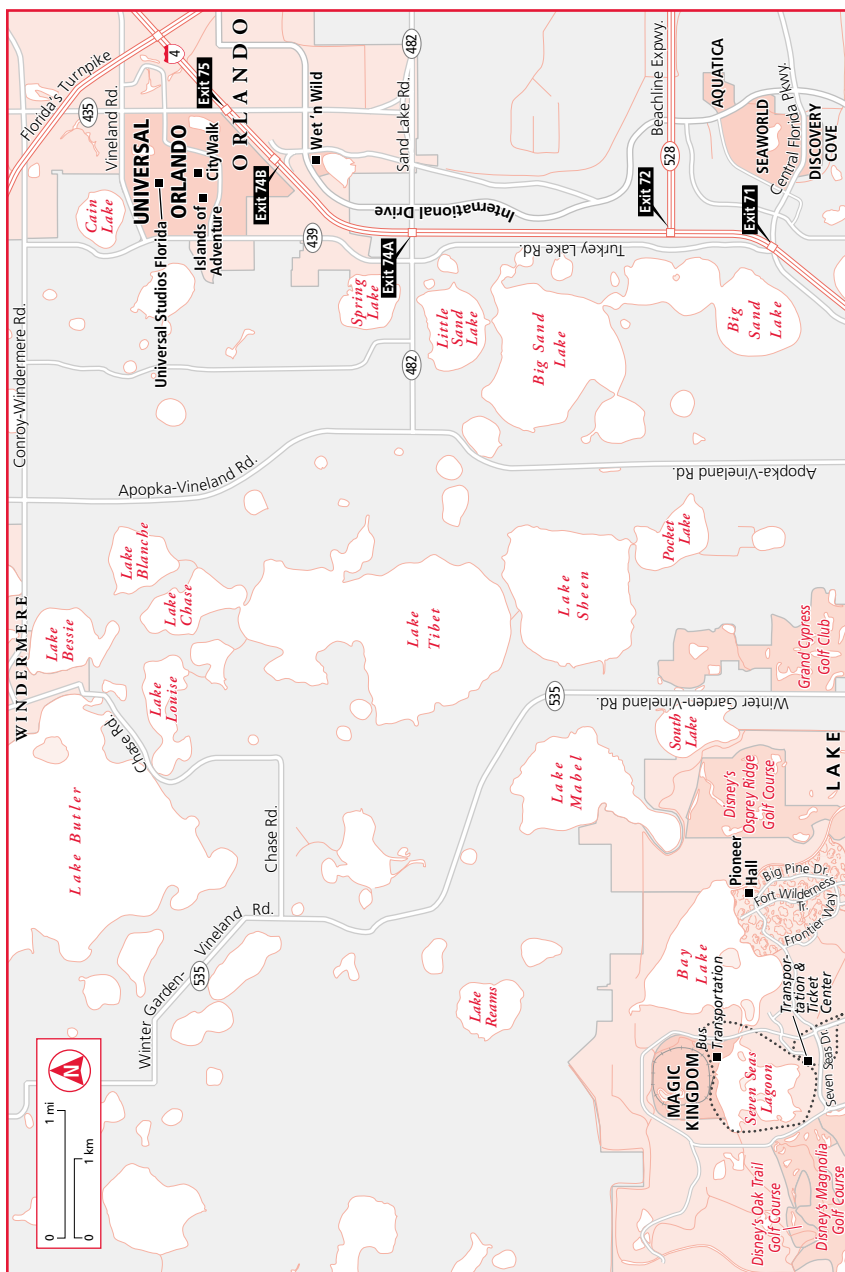
ensure that your family has the best vacation possible. I have traveled to Central Florida more times than I can count in the past 20 years. Single, married, with kids, and without, I've stood in all the lines, ridden the rides, and dined in the restaurants—even during the height of summer and spring break. In other words, I've done all of the hard work so you don't have to, and I give realistic and practical travel tips throughout this book in order to help you enjoy a more magical vacation. At the same time, I also give you options to help make your vacation more affordable and to keep expenses to a minimum while still having the maximum amount of fun. The Orlando tourism gurus will ensure your family has a steady stream of new things to see and do.

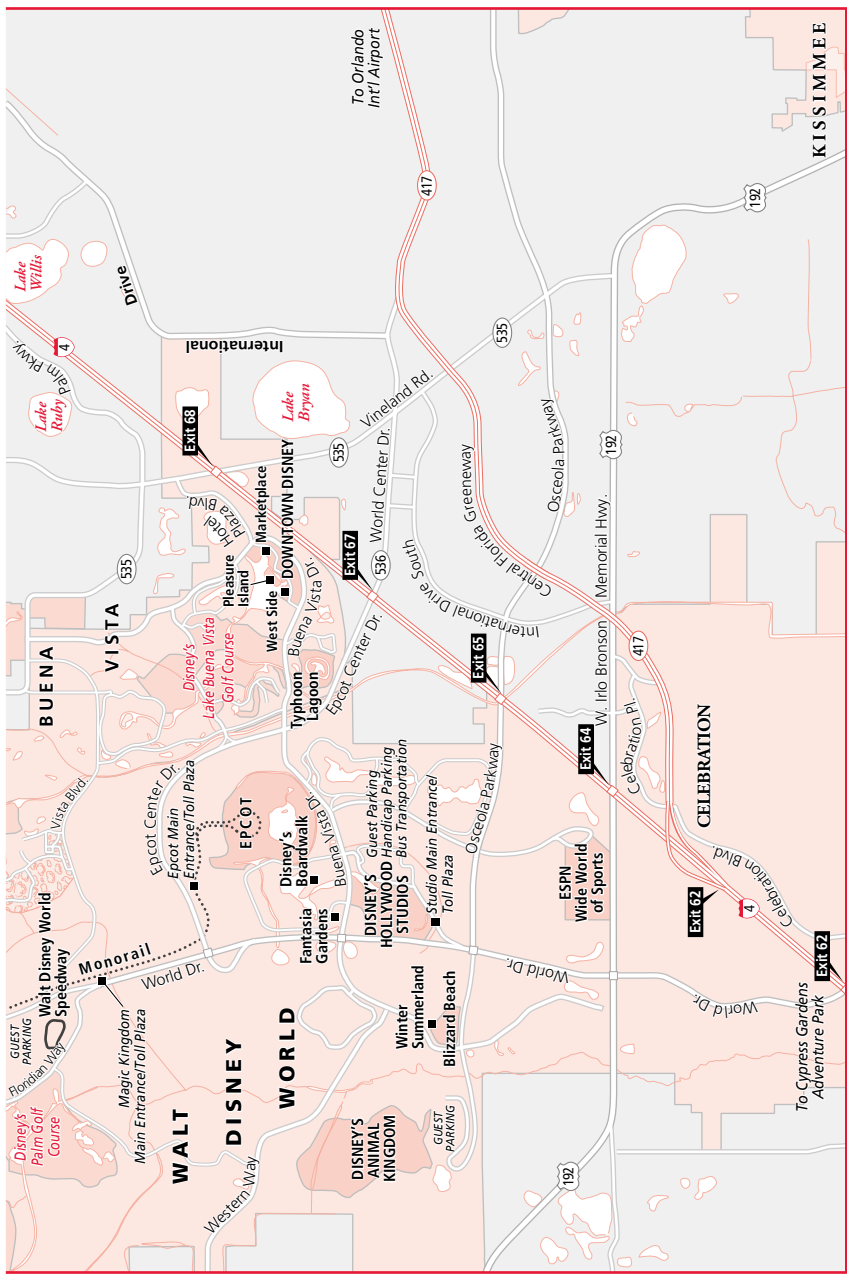
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## 1 THE BEST ORLANDO EXPERIENCES

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- **Explore Disney's Animal Kingdom.** Explore Disney's most spectacular and wildest Imagineering to date. Trek through the jungles of Africa along the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail or set out on safari across the savanna with Kilimanjaro Safaris. Journey through the exotic lands of Asia and embark on an expedition to the peaks of Expedition Everest; then explore the mysteries of Anandapur wandering the Maharajah Jungle Trek. Be sure not to miss Finding Nemo—The Musical or The Festival of the Lion King, absolutely the best shows in all of WDW. See p. 247.
- **Go Globe-Trotting at Epcot.** You can travel around the world in only an afternoon at the World Showcase pavilions, rocket through space on a thrilling mission to Mars at Mission: Space, travel back in time to the age of the dinosaurs at the Universe of Energy, and dive deep below the sea to explore the ocean's inhabitants at The Seas with Nemo & Friends. And there's no better way to cap your day off than watching Epcot's IllumiNations, a spectacular fireworks, laser lights, and fountain show. See p. 218.
- **Take Center Stage at Disney's Hollywood Studios.** Though it is more grown-up than the Magic Kingdom, it has plenty of great shows to entertain the kids and attractions to thrill movie buffs. Don't miss Toy Story Mania, the American Idol Experience, Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, and Fantasmic!—an innovative, after-dark mix of live action, waterworks, fireworks, and laser lights that rivals IllumiNations. See p. 236.
- **Escape to the Magic Kingdom.** It may seem an obvious choice, but Disney's oldest is still the most magical of Orlando's theme parks. Speed through the universe on Space Mountain, watch Donald's antics at Mickey's Philhar-Magic, laugh out loud at the Monsters, Inc. Laugh Floor, or wave hello to the ghouls of the Haunted Mansion. Cap your day with the impressive Wishes fireworks display. There's plenty here to entertain all ages. See p. 195.
- **Experience Universal Orlando.** Universal Studios Florida and its sister, Islands of Adventure, are both chock-full of thrilling rides and spectacular shows that combine cutting-edge technology, high-tech special effects, and incredible imagination and creativity. The attention to detail throughout the parks is amazing—check out the street sets at USF and the wildly unique landscapes of IOA and you'll see what I mean. For thrill seekers, not-to-be-missed attractions include Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit, Revenge of the Mummy, Men in Black Alien Attack, Dueling Dragons, the Incredible Hulk Coaster, the Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, and Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls. See chapter 7.





- **Dive into the Eco-Edutainment of SeaWorld, Discovery Cove, and Aquatica.** Your kids may never realize just how much they're learning as they explore, watch, and touch their way through these theme parks' eco-exhibits and experiences. With the addition of Manta, Journey to Atlantis, and Kraken, **SeaWorld** (p. 294) added a bit of zip and zing to the lineup, ensuring that those in need of an adrenaline rush aren't left out in the cold (or over at the other parks). But it's still the hands-on encounters, such as touching silky rays as they glide by you in droves, and up-close views of animals ranging from polar bears and penguins to killer whales, that draw the crowds. **Discovery Cove** (p. 304) is more of an island retreat than a theme park. Rest and relax on the beach or swim right along with the fishes. The big draw here is the chance to take a dip with the dolphins. **Aquatica** (p. 306), the latest addition to SeaWorld's lineup, combines high-speed thrills (with raft rides and racing tunnels), up-close animal encounters (with Commerson's dolphins, colorful fish, brilliant macaws, and more), and a whimsical South Pacific atmosphere to create an eco-themed water park unlike any other.
- **Go Wild at Gatorland.** Located between Orlando and Kissimmee, this

throwback park is a great way to spend a half-day (an especially good choice for that extra time on your day of arrival) and costs less than a third of the price of some of the major theme parks. In addition to the animal exhibits, *Gator Jumparoo*, a signature show since the park opened in 1949, and *Gator Wrestling*' are worth a look. Other options include a train ride, a children's water playground, and an aviary. If you have some extra spending money for a once-in-a-lifetime experience, consider becoming a Trainer for a Day. See p. 308.

- **Pamper Yourself with a Spa Treatment.** Rest, relax, and rejuvenate—you may very well need to if you intend on surviving all of the fast-paced activities you've planned. After a few days at the parks, it should almost be a requirement. **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-3000), **Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/827-4455), the **Mandara Spa** at Universal's Portofino Bay Hotel (☎ 888/322-5541 or 407/503-1000) and at the WDW Dolphin (☎ 407/934-4000), and the **Canyon Ranch SpaClub** at the Gaylord Palms (☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-2051) all offer an array of fabulous treatments, some with salon services to boot.

## 2 THE BEST THRILL RIDES

Orlando lays claim to some of the biggest and baddest thrill rides and roller coasters anywhere—certainly one of the largest collections of them in any one locale. So if your idea of fun is to twist and turn at speeds only a jet should reach, dive uncontrollably from dizzying heights to below ground level and back, or see just how far up into your throat your stomach can go—this is the place for you. Here are the

city's top stomach churners and G-force generators.

- **Manta** (SeaWorld): Gliding, swooping, and diving (this one's a very smooth ride) at speeds of up to 56 mph, you'll fly face-down and headfirst (yikes!) along some 3,359 feet of twisted steel track. You'll spin through four inversions (including inline spins, flat spins, and a pretzel loop) and drop a heart-

- pounding 113 feet to within feet of the water below before it's over (which is in just under 3 min.)—in the end throwing out a spray of water some 14 feet high and some 60 feet long. See p. 301.
- **Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit** (Universal Studios): You're the star as this high-speed musically themed multisensory thriller has riders rocking out (while being recorded by a sophisticated on-and-off-board video system) at speeds of up to 65 mph, twisting and turning, dipping and diving along the intertwining track set some 17 stories above the walkways of Universal Studios and the CityWalk lagoon—oh, did I mention the record-breaking non-inverted loop?—it's the world's largest. So crank up the tunes (you get to pick 'em ahead of time) and enjoy the ride—after it's over you can pick up a copy (for a fee) of your ride—think music video with a high-tech twist. See p. 279.
  - **Incredible Hulk Coaster** (Islands of Adventure): It's the smoothest ride in town, but you'll still blast from 0 to 40 mph in 2 seconds flat (on your way up to 60 mph), spin upside down more than 100 feet above the ground, dive straight back down only to spin your way through seven rollovers, and then drop deep below ground on this big, green, mean machine. (You might glow as green as the coaster when you're done.) See p. 288.
  - **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** (Disney's Hollywood Studios): You'll launch from 0 to 60 mph in 2.8 seconds, heading straight into the first of several inversions as 120 speakers in your "stretch limo" blast Aerosmith at (yeeow!) 32,000 watts right into your ears. To add to the thrill of this indoor coaster, the entire experience takes place in the dark. See p. 243.
  - **Dueling Dragons** (Islands of Adventure): Whether you choose the dragon of fire or of ice, your legs will dangle below as you sharply twist and turn through five inversions at speeds of 55 to 60 mph. The two intertwined coasters come within only inches of each other (12 to be exact), only just missing a collision, not two, but three times. See p. 291.
  - **Summit Plummet** (Disney's Blizzard Beach): This one starts slow, with a lift ride (even in Florida's 100°F/38°C dog days) to the 120-foot summit. But it finishes with the (self-proclaimed) world's fastest body slide—a test of your courage and swimsuit—as it virtually goes straight down and has you moving sans vehicle at 60 mph by the end. See p. 260.
  - **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** (Disney's Hollywood Studios): The name says it all. The ride transports guests into the Twilight Zone as a haunted hotel's service elevator slowly rises—only to plummet 13 stories, terrifying those inside. But the freefall fun doesn't end there. The tower's computer program randomly alternates drop sequences to make sure you never experience the same ride twice. When you get off and your legs finally stop shaking, *some of you* will want to ride again. See p. 245.
  - **The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man** (Islands of Adventure): Combining the best of all worlds—3-D movie effects, a moving simulator car, and live action—this is by far the best ride in Orlando. Your vehicle spins, twists, pitches, and dives through elaborate sets as Spider-Man tries to save the world (and you) from total annihilation. The chase ends in a dramatic, simulated 400-foot drop that feels an awful lot like the real thing. It doesn't

## **Tips** Orlando's Best Online Sites

Considering that Orlando welcomes nearly 48 million visitors each year, it should come as no surprise that literally hundreds of websites are devoted to vacationing here. These include information on just about everything, from the history of Walt Disney World to getting around town.

There are several sites written by Disney fans, employees, and self-proclaimed experts. A favorite ([www.hiddenmickeys.org](http://www.hiddenmickeys.org)) is all about **Hidden Mickeys**, a park tradition (see chapter 6, "Exploring Walt Disney World"). These subtle Disney images can be found scattered throughout the realm, though they sometimes are in the eye, or imagination, of the beholder. **Deb's Unofficial Walt Disney World Information Guide** ([www.allearsnet.com](http://www.allearsnet.com)) is the best around, loaded with great tips and information on everything Disney, from the parks and resorts to the restaurants, nightlife, and much more. It now includes information on Universal Orlando as well.

Definitely take a look at Disney's official site, [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com), if you're planning a pilgrimage to the House of Mouse. The website recently got a top-to-bottom overhaul, making it easier to navigate and much more informative. It's loaded with some excellent photos and 360-degree views of Disney's resorts, rooms, parks, and more. **Magical Gatherings**, available on the Disney site as well, is a free downloadable online tool allowing you to plan your group's Disney vacation, via computer, with other family members (or friends), no matter where they live. You can plan itineraries, take group polls, list everyone's favorites, and even chat to come up with the perfect plan. **My Disney Vacation**, also available on the Disney site, allows you to plan your entire Disney vacation from start to finish—you can even create your very own

offer the same type of thrills as a coaster, but it's sure to get your Spidey senses tingling. See p. 287.

- **Kraken** (SeaWorld): Named for a mythological creature, this stomach-churning ride is a beast! This floorless, open-sided coaster reaches speeds of up

to 65 mph as it combines steep climbs, deep drops, and seven tremendous loops reaching high above water before plunging below the ground, to make it one of the most aggressive and intense coasters anywhere. See p. 301.

## 3 THE BEST WATER RIDES

- **Splash Mountain** (Magic Kingdom): You'll follow the adventure of Brer Rabbit and his friends, based on the 1946 movie *The Song of the South*, before taking a 52-foot vertical plunge straight down to the water below. See p. 205.
- **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls** (Islands of Adventure): Dudley Do-Right and Snidely Whiplash are once again at odds, and you're caught right in the middle. This flume sends you plummeting not once, but twice, and that



customized theme-park maps to mirror the itinerary you've planned out online.

If you're looking to save a few dollars, try **Mousesavers** ([www.mousesavers.com](http://www.mousesavers.com)), which features information, insider Disney tips, and (the biggest perk) exclusive discounted deals for area hotels, resorts, and packages.

If a trip to one of Universal Orlando's theme parks or CityWalk is on your dance card, then stop at **www.universalorlando.com**. You can order tickets (including exclusive Internet-only deals), make resort reservations, and find out about special events, among other things on the site. Fish fans can get in the know about SeaWorld at **www.seaworld.com** and Discovery Cove at **www.discoverycove.com**.

Though a relative newcomer, Travel Insights Online (**www.travel-insights.com**) is filled with travel tips, in-depth reviews, and information on Disney, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld. Also included are reviews of the area's kid-friendliest restaurants and resorts, a boon for parents.

If you're seeking general information about the city, accommodations, dining, nightlife, or special events, head over to the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau site at **www.orlandoinfo.com**. *Orlando Weekly* ([www.orlandoweekly.com](http://www.orlandoweekly.com)) offers cutting-edge reviews and recommendations for arts, movies, music, restaurants, and much more. *The Orlando Sentinel* ([www.orlandosentinel.com](http://www.orlandosentinel.com)), along with all the local news and goings-on, features Go2Orlando, a section loaded with information on the area's dining, attractions, shopping, and more.

second drop sends you 15 feet below the surface of the water before you make your escape. See p. 289.

- **Jurassic Park River Adventure** (Islands of Adventure): A seemingly calm tour through the age of the dinosaurs suddenly takes a turn for the worse. Before you know it, your only escape route involves a dramatic 85-foot drop almost straight down, and it's touted as the "longest, steepest, fastest water descent ever built." See p. 290.
- **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges** (Islands of Adventure): Up to 12 riders splash and churn through a wacky series of twists and turns and dips and drops (some pretty intense ones, too) in order to help Popeye once again save his sweetie, Olive Oyl, from the dastardly clutches of Bluto. No one will walk away from this one without getting completely soaked—it's the wettest and wildest raft ride in town. See p. 289.
- **Journey to Atlantis** (SeaWorld): This flume ride sends you careening around the sharpest of curves as the forces of good and evil battle to claim Atlantis for their own. Before you know it, you're being thrown into total darkness, emerging only to find yourself plummeting down several steep, watery drops. See p. 300.

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## 4 THE BEST ROMANTIC HIDEAWAYS

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- **Courtyard at Lake Lucerne** (Downtown; ☎ 800/444-5289 or 407/648-5188): This charming little B&B is an eclectic mix of some of Orlando's oldest homes—each impeccably restored and meticulously furnished to period. Ask for the honeymoon suite for a really romantic getaway; just off the main room is a quaint little glass-enclosed porch—the perfect spot to watch the sunset or sip a glass of wine. See p. 124.
  - **Disney's Wilderness Lodge** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639): This grand resort is reminiscent of the lodge found at Yellowstone National Park. The spewing geyser out back, the mammoth stone hearth in the lobby, the Artist's Point 360-degree view of Bay Lake, and the towering forest sheltering the resort from the rest of the world are just a few of the reasons to stay here. Some guest rooms have patios or balconies overlooking the lake, woodlands, or meadow. See p. 90.
  - **Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639): This uniquely themed resort, home to Jambo House (the original lodge) and the Kidani Village (Disney's newest vacation club villas), is set against a Disneyesque version of the African savanna. The resort's grand lobby—
- with its thatched roof, ornate shield chandeliers, and large stone fireplace—is just a sampling of the spectacular architecture and decor that runs throughout this remotely located resort. Have a romantic meal at one of the resort's great restaurants; then catch the sunset over the savanna. See p. 90.
- **Portofino Bay Hotel** (Universal Orlando; ☎ 888/322-5541 or 407/503-1000): This enchanting resort recreates the romantic atmosphere and architecture of its namesake town in Italy. Lounge in the ultracomfy rooms, the state-of-the-art spa, or at one of the three heated pools. And it's only a stroll away from both of Universal Orlando's theme parks. See p. 116.
  - **Villas of Grand Cypress** (Orlando; ☎ 800/835-7377 or 407/239-4700): This luxury villa-style resort offers lush grounds dotted with bougainvillea and hibiscus, lakes fat with largemouth bass and bream, and grounds speckled with trumpeter swans, wood ducks, and the occasional fox or bobcat. It shares a golf academy, racquet club, and equestrian center with the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress. Best of all, the woodsy grounds make you feel as if you're far, far from Disney, which is right next door. See p. 101.

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## 5 THE BEST LUXURY RESORTS

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- **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (Orlando; ☎ 407/934-7639): This magnificent Victorian inn—Disney's best hotel—has an opulent five-story lobby complete with a Chinese Chippendale aviary. An orchestra plays big-band music every evening near Victoria & Albert's, the resort's five-star restaurant. See p. 85.
- **Gaylord Palms** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-2000): This destination resort features impeccable service; themed guest rooms (the Emerald Bay rooms are the best) with luxe amenities; a lush, 4½-acre glass-topped atrium; and (best of all) a branch of the renowned Canyon Ranch Spa. See p. 100.

- **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort** (Orlando; ☎ 800/233-1234 or 407/239-1234): This standout has some impressive treats, including a half-acre pool with a dozen waterfalls and three spas, 12 tennis courts, 4 Jack Nicklaus–designed golf courses, and a 45-acre nature walk. All that adds up to luxury. See p. 101.
- **Ritz-Carlton Orlando** (Grande Lakes; ☎ 800/682-3665 or 407/206-2400): Perks at this posh getaway, set in the Grande Lakes Resort, include luxurious rooms with first-class amenities, a 40,000-square-foot spa, a championship golf course, top-notch child-care facilities, and a lazy river pool. See p. 117.
- **Ginn Reunion Resort** (Orlando; ☎ 888/418-9611 or 407/662-1000): Lavish villas, stunning private homes, and the posh Reunion Grand Hotel are just the tip of the iceberg at this luxury resort. The personalized service will simply spoil you while the extensive recreational facilities (including top-notch golf courses, a full-service colonial-style spa, a water park, a kids' club, and more) will make you think twice about ever wanting to leave. See p. 108.

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## 6 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED ACCOMMODATIONS

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- **Disney's Port Orleans Resort** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-5000): Here's a good value by Disney standards. It has dual Southern charm in its French Quarter and Riverside areas, and the pool has a water slide curving from the mouth of a colorful dragon. See p. 92.
- **Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/827-4000): It's the only official resort on Hotel Plaza Boulevard to offer Disney's Extra Magic Hour option. Other pluses include a huge variety of services, two pools, and spacious junior suites. And it has a great location next to Downtown Disney. See p. 98.
- **Staybridge Suites Lake Buena Vista** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 800/866-4549 or 407/238-0777): Close to the action of Downtown Disney and the theme parks, this resort's one- and two-bedroom suites have full kitchens and are larger and more comfortable than most of the competition. And breakfast is on the resort—a complimentary buffet of hot and cold items is set out daily so you don't have to deal with the hassle of dining elsewhere. See p. 106.
- **Lake Buena Vista Village Resort & Spa** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 800/866-4549 or 407/238-0777): Off the beaten path, yet close to Disney, this upscale resort's oversized two-, three-, and four-bedroom suites have full kitchens, washers and dryers, and plasma TVs. A 7,300-square-foot pirate-themed pool will keep the kids entertained, while the full-service spa ensures the adults will remain relaxed. See p. 120.

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## 7 THE BEST THEME RESTAURANTS

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Orlando has elevated themed dining to an art form. The food at these restaurants may not be the best in town (though it

won't be terrible either), but you can't beat the atmosphere.

- **World Showcase restaurants** (Epcot; ☎ 407/939-3463): Epcot's World Showcase is home to Orlando's best collection of theme restaurants in one setting. Dine in Italy, chow down in China, or watch a belly dancer do her thing as you eat couscous in Morocco. You'll have a blast no matter which dining spot you choose. See p. 134.
- **Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant** (Disney's Hollywood Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463): Your table is set inside a 1950s-era convertible, your carhop (umm . . . waitress) serves you popcorn as an appetizer, and you can zone out on sci-fi flicks on a giant movie screen while you eat. It's an out-of-this-world experience. See p. 148.
- **50's Prime Time Café** (Disney's Hollywood Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463):

Ozzie and Harriet would feel right at home inside this replica of Mom's kitchen (ca. 1950), where classic TV shows play on black-and-white screens. Servers may threaten to withhold dessert (choices include s'mores!) if you don't finish your meatloaf, so clean that plate! See p. 147.

- **T-Rex Cafe** (Downtown Disney Marketplace; ☎ 407/828-8739): Set some million or so years in the past, this paleontologist's playground is waiting to be explored—especially if you're dining with the kids. Bubbling geysers, a fossil dig site, life-sized animatronic dinosaurs, an hourly meteorite shower, eerily glowing rooms, and themes of fire and ice—it's all here. It's definitely one of the most creative dining spots at Disney. See p. 159.

## 8 THE BEST PLACES FOR ADULTS

Let's face it: Orlando and the theme-park zones usually crawl with kids. That's fine if you have your own in tow, but if you're looking for some quality adult time (or at least a place not necessarily swarming with children), you do have some options. Some people are incredulous when informed that Orlando is the honeymoon capital of the United States, but it happens to be true; so be assured that there are activities, hotels, and so on that are geared to adults here (though, admittedly, avoiding kids altogether is tough). Aside from the romantic hideaways discussed above, here are some good bets for adults:

- **Visit Epcot.** Of all the major theme parks in Orlando, this one, thanks to its scientific and cultural themes, is the most adult-oriented of the bunch. Shop, stroll, and dine your way through the nations of the World Showcase; take a behind-the-scenes tour of the park's horticulture or architecture; or explore the technological- and scientific-themed

attractions of Future World. Just be sure to break in your walking shoes before you arrive! See p. 218.

- **Swim with Dolphins at Discovery Cove.** It's popular with families, but thanks to the park's limit on guest entry (a mere 1,000 people per day), adults won't get overwhelmed by kids at SeaWorld's sister park. There are plenty of places to catch rays in relative serenity, and the dolphin swim's a thrill at any age. See p. 304.
- **Have a Meal in an Upscale Restaurant.** Though it's not a firm rule (especially inside the theme parks), generally speaking, the more you pay for dinner, the more likely it is that you won't encounter children at your meal. So if you're looking for a romantic meal, save up and splurge (and I mean splurge). Great options in town for a special dinner include **Victoria & Albert's** (p. 151), **Emeril's** (p. 163), **Tchoup Chop** (p. 163), **California Grill** (p. 153),

**The Chef's Table** (p. 160), **Ocean Prime** (p. 166), and **The Flying Fish** (p. 154). For a great brunch, head to **La Coquina** (p. 160). For other options, check out chapter 5, "Where to Dine."

- **Explore Winter Park.** This upscale town north of Orlando oozes old money and Southern charm. And the pace here is decidedly slower than the mad rush of the theme parks (adults usually love it; kids get bored). Stroll Park Avenue's shops and restaurants, or take a boat tour along the lake. See p. 65.
- **Party the Night Away at Universal CityWalk or the Disney Resorts.** With the closing of Pleasure Island's clubs for "re-imagining," Universal's nighttime entertainment district is now the place to hang for the 21-and-older set. Top clubs include **The Groove**, **Rising Star**, **Pat O'Brien's**, and the **Red Coconut Club**. See p. 340. Over at the resorts, in this case Disney's Coronado Springs, **Rix** (p. 342) is the hottest place to party

the night away for a 30-something crowd and visiting celebs and VIPs.

- **Head for the Circus.** Cirque du Soleil, that is. Forget about finding any animals, though. Cirque's stylish *La Nouba* combines theatrics, acrobatics, and the incredible style that the Montreal-based troupe is known for. It's an incredible (albeit pricey) way to spend an evening in Orlando. See p. 338.
- **Rev Your Engines at the Richard Petty Driving Experience and the Indy Racing Experience.** If you've ever watched the Daytona 500 or the Indy 500 race and imagined yourself at the wheel, this attraction is for you. Ride shotgun in a real NASCAR race car, or drive yourself (after a crash classroom course—no pun intended). It's an adrenaline-pumper you won't find in a theme park, and nobody younger than 18 is allowed (height and weight restrictions apply). See p. 263.