

Frommer's®

Walt Disney World® & Orlando

2006

by Laura Miller

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"Detailed, accurate, and easy-to-read information for all price ranges."

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About the Author

Laura Miller is a freelance writer based in Orchard Park, New York, though she's spent countless hours scouring Central Florida's theme parks, hotels, resorts, and restaurants over the years—both with and without her husband and five children. A family-travel expert who religiously makes an annual pilgrimage (or two or three) to the Land the Mouse Built, she's currently researching and writing a guide to Florida just for families.

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—Laura Miller

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

Frommer's Florida

Walt Disney World® & Orlando For Dummies

Frommer's Irreverent Guide to Walt Disney World®

Frommer's Walt Disney World® with Kids

The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World®

Mini Mickey: The Pocket-Sized Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World®








Beyond Disney: The Unofficial Guide

Frommer's Florida's Best-Loved Driving Tours

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Find** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Kids** Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

| | | | | | |
|----|------------------|------|------------|---|------|
| AE | American Express | DISC | Discover | V | Visa |
| DC | Diners Club | MC | MasterCard | | |

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- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
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- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Walt Disney World & Orlando

Though plenty of new attractions and resorts made their Orlando debut in the past year, the major Central Florida headlines of 2004 were a trio of rather unwelcome (but well-publicized) summer visitors named Charley, Ivan, and Jeanne. Together, the hurricanes wrought some of the most devastating destruction in Central Florida in decades.

The good news: recovery from the storms of 2004 is on-going, and the tourist district in and around Orlando was relatively unaffected (though it did see its fair share of damage). The only real visual reminders of the hurricane season are downed trees alongside Walt Disney World's roadways. If anything, the storms merely speeded up face-lifts and renovations that were already planned or underway. New rides and attractions, as well as accommodations, are being added even as I write this.

Here's a summary of just some of the things that have changed in the year since this Frommer's guide was last revised:

PLANNING YOUR TRIP Disney World kicked off an 18-month-long celebration, touted as the Happiest Celebration on Earth, in honor of Disneyland's 50th anniversary in May 2005. As part of the celebration, WDW has introduced the ultra-convenient **Disney's Magical Express**, which provides complimentary shuttle service between Orlando International Airport and any Disney-owned resort. Not only will the shuttle service

get Disney resort guests to their hotels, but it will also deliver their baggage straight from the plane to their room, allowing them to bypass luggage claim! The innovative service saves both time and money, not to mention a few of your back muscles. As an added bonus, guests can check their luggage and print out boarding passes for their return trip before leaving their Disney resort, allowing them to skip the long lines at the airport. Currently only select airlines participate in the program.

For tips on planning your vacation to Mickeyville, see chapter 2, "Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando."

WHERE TO STAY **The Reunion Resort & Club of Orlando** (☎ 888/418-9611 or 407/662-1000 or), a planned resort community finished its first of several phases (final completion won't occur for almost a decade). Already opened are a series of spectacular villas, two (soon to be three) championship golf courses, pools, and an extensive water park and recreational area.

The new **Omni at Championsgate** (☎ 407/390-6664) offers 730 luxurious accommodations as well as a fabulous array of recreational activities. There are two championship golf courses and one of the best pool areas around, with both a family pool (including a lazy river) and an adult pool. Try the 10,000-square-foot spa if all that poolside relaxation doesn't do the trick.

The **Nickelodeon Family Suites** (☎ 407/387-5437), formerly The Holiday Inn Family Suites, officially reopened in May 2005. A multimillion-dollar makeover has transformed the property to reflect a Nickelodeon theme throughout, and the resort's even more kid-friendly than before.

And other properties in town aren't resting on their laurels. The **Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld** (☎ 407/248-7302) gave their pool and outdoor recreational area a \$2.5 million dollar facelift. And the **Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort** (☎ 800/782-4414 or 407/827-4000) recently underwent a \$16.5 million refurbishment, adding new lighting, carpeting, and furnishings.

For complete details on these and other lodging options in and around Orlando, see chapter 5, "Where to Stay."

WHERE TO DINE Internationally acclaimed chef Todd English has opened the artsy **Todd English's bluezoo** (☎ 407/934-1111) inside The Dolphin at WDW, and it's already the hippest hottest happenest place to dine in town. Cheap it's not, but the seafood and coastal cuisine are superb.

Also new on the restaurant front is the Portofino Bay Hotel's **Bice** (☎ 407/503-3463), the area's newest upscale Italian restaurant. Replacing the Delfino Riviera, it features family-style dining and authentic Italian fare in an upscale chic setting.

See chapter 6, "Where to Dine," for a complete menu of Orlando restaurants.

EXPLORING WALT DISNEY WORLD In January 2005, Disney launched **Magic Your Way**, an entirely new way to purchase Disney park tickets that rewards vacationers who stay and play at the House of Mouse a bit longer than they may have before. Gone are the days of the 4- and 5-day park-hopper and length-of-stay passes. Replacing them are

base tickets with a number of add-ons and options that you can pick and choose from (and pay extra for). Stay only a day at a single park and you'll now pay a whopping \$59.75 (not including tax!) for an adult and \$48 for kids ages 3 to 9; stay 4 days or longer and your price per day can drop significantly under the normal single-day ticket price, even if you tack on an extra option, such as park-hopping privileges. For complete details on the new pricing scheme, see p. 177.

Aside from the new ticketing system, the big news at Disney is the **Happiest Celebration on Earth** (☎ 407/824-4321; www.disneyworld.com), which began on May 5, 2005 in honor of Disneyland's 50th anniversary and will last for 18 months. Several new attractions, imported from other Disney parks, have opened as part of the event, including the "Cinderellabration" production show (brought over from Tokyo Disneyland). Other debuts include:

- The **Soarin'** (taken from Disneyland California) attraction at Epcot allows guests to fly high above the ground while surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of the California landscape.
- The action packed **Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show** (taken from Walt Disney Studios Paris) hits the stage at Disney-MGM Studios in late 2005. This high-speed stunt show takes the audience behind the scenes of a spy thriller, showcasing stunts featuring cars, motorcycles, and jet skis.
- **Turtle Talk with Crush** allows visitors at Epcot's Living Seas the chance to interact with Crush, the cool little sea turtle dude from *Finding Nemo*. He actually chats and jokes around with guests as they pass by his movie-screen tank.

- **Crush 'n' Gusher** adds yet more chills to Typhoon Lagoon's already thrilling array of slides and rides. Three different courses, each filled with watery twists and turns, send you careening through an island fruit factory before a final splashdown.

See chapter 7, "Exploring Walt Disney World," for complete details on all of Disney's latest improvements, events, and rides.

EXPLORING UNIVERSAL ORLANDO & SEAWORLD Universal Studios Florida added only one new show in 2005, but it's a biggie: **Fear Factor Live** (☎ 800/837-2273 or 407/363-8000; www.universalorlando.com) is the first ever reality show turned into a theme park attraction. Opened in May of 2005, the show allows Universal Studios guests the opportunity to compete against each other on stage in front of a live audience performing stunts based on those of NBC's hit show *Fear Factor*.

Revenge of the Mummy made its debut at Universal Studios in mid-2004, replacing the classic **Kongfrontation**. The smooth ride features some pretty sophisticated technology to create a rather intense experience that involves (among other things) skeletal warriors and flaming walls.

Other news out of Universal includes higher single-day ticket prices (\$59.75 adult, \$48 kids ages 3–9). Universal is, however, testing out a handful of package deals, including *buy two, get three free*—which includes a total of five days at the Universal parks and admission to CityWalk for \$ 99.95 a person. Higher parking prices are also in effect for 2006, now up to \$9.

In the yearly special events department, **Universal's Mardi Gras** celebration will now take place only on one day each week, usually Saturday, instead of running for several weeks in February. **Halloween Horror Nights** will now be celebrated at both Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios Florida. Note that entry to all of these special events is not included with your park admission.

SeaWorld (☎ 800/327-2424 or 407/351-3600; www.seaworld.com) has opened a new dining establishment, the Spice Mill Restaurant, in its 5-acre shopping, dining, and entertainment district, **The Waterfront**.

For more on Universal Orlando and SeaWorld, check out Chapter 8, "Exploring Beyond Disney."

ORLANDO AFTER DARK Set to open at Downtown Disney (Pleasure Island) just as this book hits the shelves, is a yet-to-be-named **Irish Pub** that will replace the Pleasure Island Jazz Company. Traditional Irish fare will be served up with a modern flair in an authentic setting filled with custom-made Irish furnishings and antiques. Irish music and entertainment will be featured.

Located along I-Drive, **Fiasco's Circus & Magic** (☎ 407/226-7220) is the newest dinner show to hit town. Guests can expect to laugh their way through dinner as the circus-style performers attempt to entertain them with magic tricks and other comedic fun. The menu, representing dishes from all over the world, is the largest around, offering over 100 items.

For more information on Orlando's nightlife, see chapter 10, "Walt Disney World & Orlando After Dark."

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. Over 44 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 new visit to provide a host of new experiences and magical 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 five years shy of the opening of what, to this day, still is the world's most spectacular theme park—Walt Disney World.

Disney's legacy, while commercialized over the years, has practically become a right 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, two nightclub districts, tens of thousands of hotel rooms, a vacation club (otherwise known as timeshares), scores of restaurants, and even two cruise ships. Universal Orlando adds to the dizzying array with two theme parks, three luxury resorts, and an entertainment complex, home to several unique restaurants, clubs, shops, and entertainment venues. SeaWorld tosses in two theme parks and an entertainment, dining, and shopping district of its own. And those are just the major players. All in all, there are over 95 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

Fun Fact **By the Numbers**

Orlando's theme parks are beginning to reap the benefits of a stronger economy as they see increasing attendance levels—accompanied by predictions that these levels will continue to rise steadily over the next few years. Parks are also enticing visitors to return and to stay longer by offering special deals, and adding wild and wonderfully new attractions. Here are the 2004 attendance estimates (and their national rankings) for all of the major Orlando parks according to *Amusement Business* magazine:

- No. 1: Magic Kingdom, 14 million
- No. 3: Epcot, 8.6 million
- No. 4: Disney-MGM Studios, 7.9 million
- No. 5: Disney's Animal Kingdom, 7.3 million
- No. 6: Universal Studios Florida, 6.9 million
- No. 7: Islands of Adventure, 6.0 million
- No. 9: Sea World Orlando, 5.2 million

and resorts either, with more than 112,000 rooms, villas, and suites to go around (and even more on the way). 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.

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. Over 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 requires 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 budget properly. Entrance fees can be daunting (a 1-day ticket to one of the major parks averages around \$59 for adults and \$48 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 multi-day passes, but don't give them too much credit—the parks are wagering they'll generate additional revenues with all of the money you'll spend on extra hotel nights and meals. But even if you do have deep pockets, there is so much to experience in Orlando 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 take

into account every budget and taste are 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 over the past 16 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. (If you have any doubts about that, check out the “What's New in Walt Disney World & Orlando” chapter for a look at all the debuts made this past year alone.)

1 The Best Orlando Experiences

- **Head over to 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 half 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 Wrestlin** are worth a look. Other options include a train ride, children's water playground, and aviary. If you have some extra spending money, consider becoming a Trainer for a Day for a once in a lifetime experience. See p. 292.
- **Spend a day 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 Living Seas. 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. 208.
- **Visit Disney-MGM Studios.** Though it is more grown-up than the Magic Kingdom, it has a lot of great activities for kids and movie buffs alike. Don't miss Tower of Terror, **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster**, and Fantasmic!—the innovative, after-dark mix of live action, waterworks, fireworks, and laser lights that rivals IllumiNations. See p. 226.
- **Make your way around the Magic Kingdom,** even if you've been here many times before. 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 PhilharMagic, 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. 188.
- **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.

Not-to-be-missed attractions include The Revenge of the Mummy, Back to the Future, Men in Black Alien Attack, Dueling Dragons, the Incredible Hulk Coaster, The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, and Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls.

- **Experience the Eco-Edutainment of SeaWorld and Discovery Cove.** Cleverly disguised as a theme park, your kids may never realize just how much they're learning as they explore, watch, and touch their way through both parks' eco-exhibits and shows. With the addition of Journey to Atlantis and Kraken, **SeaWorld** (p. 279) added a bit of zip and zing to the lineup, ensuring those in need of an adrenalin 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 the animals, ranging from polar bears and penguins to killer whales, that draw the crowds. **Discovery Cove** (p. 289), is more of an island retreat than theme park. Rest and relax on

the beach, or swim right along with the fishes. The big draw here is the chance to swim with dolphins.

- **Treat Yourself to 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), **The Spa at the Wyndham Palace Resort** (☎ 800/996-3426 or 407/827-2727), the **Man-dara Spa at Universal's Portofino Bay Hotel** (☎ 888/322-55541 or 407/503-1000), the **Canyon Ranch SpaClub at the Gaylord Palms** (☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-2051), the **Ritz-Carlton Spa at the Grande Lakes Resort** (☎ 800/576/5760 or 407/206-2400), **The Spa at Orlando World Center Marriott** (☎ 407/239-4200), and **The Spa at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate** (☎ 407/390-6664) all offer an array of fabulous treatments, some with salon services to boot.

2 Best Thrill Rides

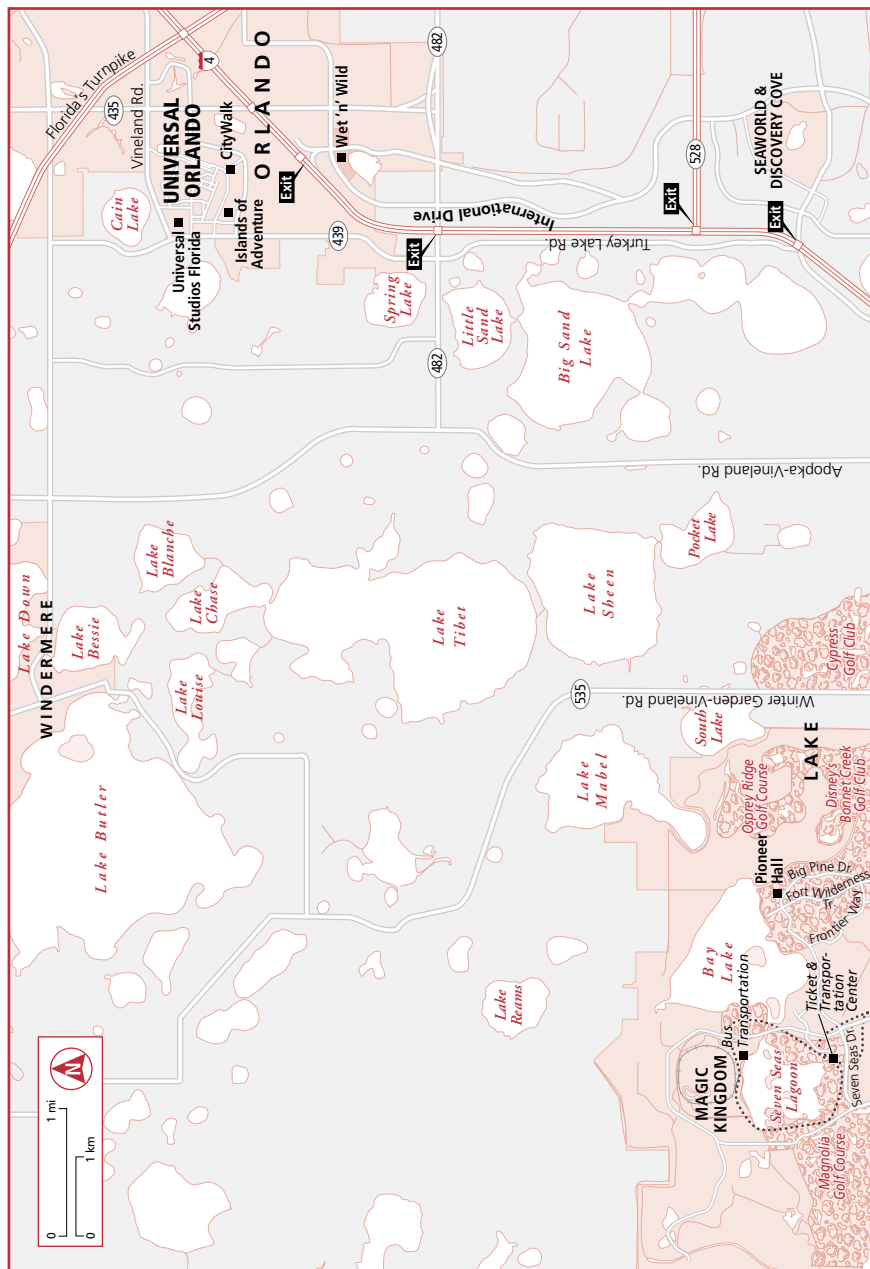
Orlando lays claim to some of the biggest and baddest thrill rides and roller coasters anywhere—certainly one of the largest collections of them in any one locale. So if your idea of fun is to twist and turn at speeds only a jet should reach, dive uncontrollably from dizzying heights to below ground 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.

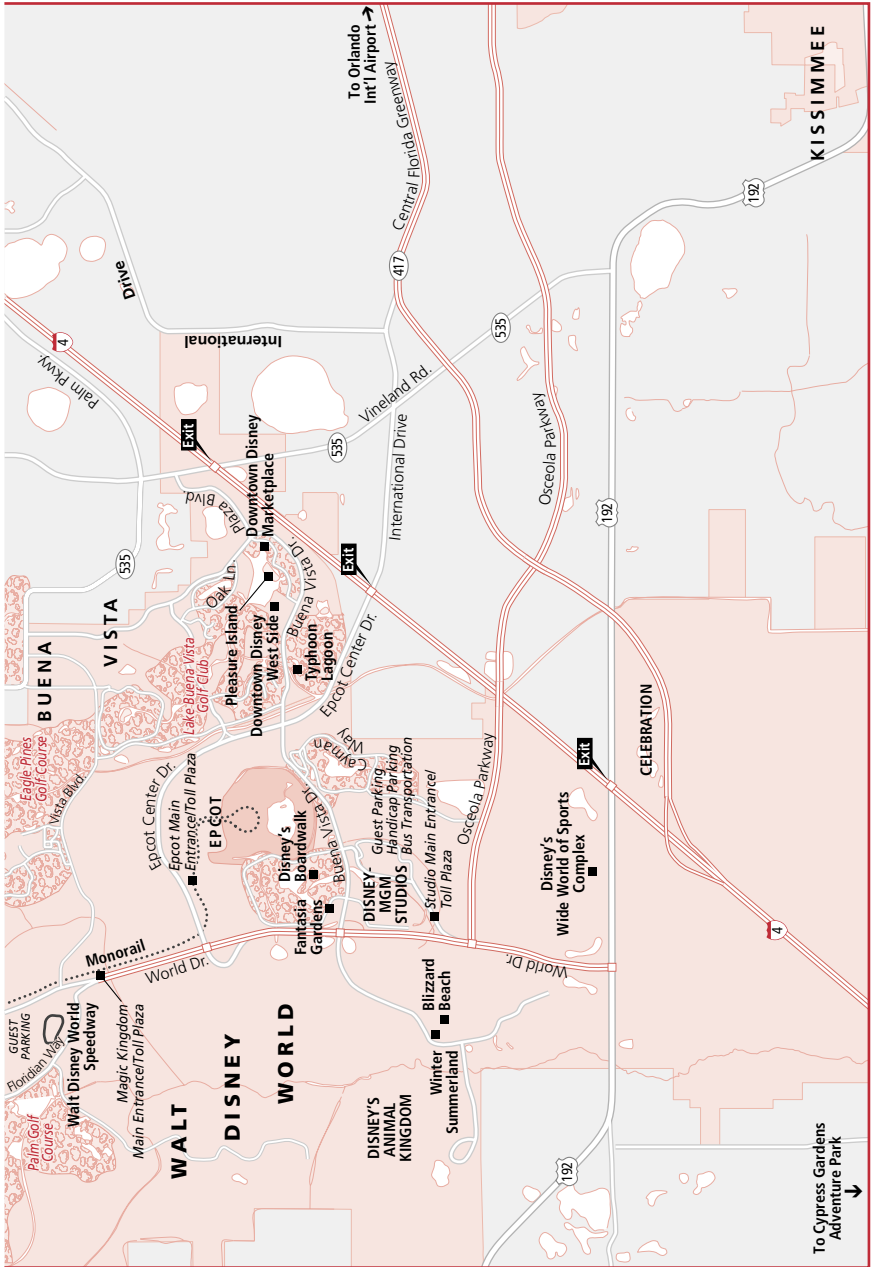
- **Incredible Hulk Coaster** (Islands of Adventure): It's the smoothest ride in town, but you'll still blast from 0 to 40 mph in 2 seconds flat (on your way up to 60 mph), spin upside down more than 100 feet above the ground,

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. 274.

- **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** (Disney-MGM 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 (yeeeeow!) 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. 233.
- **Dueling Dragons** (Islands of Adventure): Whether you choose the

Orlando's Theme Parks





Tips Orlando's Best Online Sites

Considering that Orlando welcomes over 44 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) is about **Hidden Mickeys**, a park tradition (see chapter 7, "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** (<http://wdwig.com>, www.allearsnet.com) is one of the best around, loaded with great tips and information on everything Disney from the parks and resorts to the restaurants and nightlife.

Definitely take a look at Disney's official site, www.disneyworld.com, if you're planning a pilgrimage to the House of Mouse. It 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° 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 (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.

If you're looking to save a few dollars, try **Mousesavers** (www.mouse-savers.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.

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) offers cutting-edge reviews and recommendations for arts, movies, music, restaurants, and much more. *The Orlando Sentinel* (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.

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 (12 to be exact) of each other,

only just missing a collision, not two, but three times. See p. 277.

- **Summit Plummet** (Disney's Blizzard Beach): This one starts slow, with a lift ride (even in Florida's 100° dog days) to the 120-foot summit. But it finishes with the 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.
- **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** (Disney-MGM 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 now features a new twist—a 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. 234.

- **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 Spiderman 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 offer the same type of thrills as a coaster, but it's sure to get your Spidey senses tingling. See p. 273.
- **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. 285.

3 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. 197.
- **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 second drop sends you 15 feet below the surface of the water before you make your escape. See p. 274.
- **Jurassic Park River Adventure** (Islands of Adventure): A seemingly

calm tour through the age of the dinosaur suddenly takes a turn for the worse. Before you know it, your only escape route involves a dramatic 85-foot drop almost straight down, that's touted as the "longest, steepest, fastest water descent ever built." You will get drenched. See p. 276.

- **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. 284.

4 The Best Romantic Hideaways

- **Disney's Wilderness Lodge** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639): This property is reminiscent of the lodge at Yellowstone. The geyser out back, the mammoth stone hearth in the lobby, the dining room's 360-degree view of Bay Lake, and the nightly electric water pageants are just a few of the reasons to stay here. Some guest rooms have patios or balconies overlooking the lake, woodlands, or a meadow. See p. 98.
- **Portofino Bay Hotel** (Universal Orlando; ☎ 800/235-6397 or 407/503-1000): This lovely resort re-creates the romantic atmosphere and architecture of its namesake town in Italy. Lounge in the ultra-comfy 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. 118.
- **The Villas of Grand Cypress** (Orlando; ☎ 800/835-7377 or 407/239-4700): This luxury condominium 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. 108.
- **Westin Grand Bohemian** (Downtown; ☎ 866/663-0024 or 407/313-9000): You'll find precious few kids but lots of couples seeking privacy at this downtown gem. The plush rooms, Heavenly Beds, and classy artwork all serve to inspire romance. See p. 126.

5 The Best Luxury Resorts

- **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (Orlando; ☎ 407/934-7639): This magnificent Victorian inn 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. 94.
- **Gaylord Palms** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-0000): 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. 107.
- **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, four Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses, and a 45-acre nature walk. All that adds up to luxury. See p. 107.
- **Ritz-Carlton Orlando** (Grande Lakes; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 407/529-2255): Perks at this posh getaway 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. 121.

6 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Disney's Port Orleans Resort** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-3400): 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 that curves out of a faux dragon's mouth. See p. 100.

- **The 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 the 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 Walt Disney World. See p. 106.

- **Staybridge Suites** (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 to help you relax, the resort will do your grocery shopping for you, so you don't have to deal with the hassle. See p. 111.

7 Best Theme Restaurants

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-MGM Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463): Your table is set inside a Fifties-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. 146.

- **50's Prime Time Café** (Disney-MGM Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463): Ozzie and Harriet would feel right at home inside this replica of mom's kitchen (circa 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. 145.
- **Enchanted Oak Tavern** (Islands of Adventure; no phone): Merlin himself would feel right at home at this dimly lit dining hall, set inside a hollowed-out "tree." The evocative decor looks even better after you've imbibed one of the 45 different beers on tap at the restaurant's Alchemy Bar. See p. 279.

Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando

Winging it once you get there simply won't do when your destination is Walt Disney World. Without some pre-trip preparation, you will likely find yourself so overwhelmed upon arriving in Orlando that you will miss out on exactly what it was you came for in the first place—fun. In this chapter you'll find just about everything you need to know before you go, including tons of helpful information to get you started. In addition to the information contained in the following pages, you'll find more useful tips and information in chapters 5 through 8—those covering the area's best hotels, restaurants, theme parks, and smaller attractions.

1 Visitor Information

The best place to find information on Orlando and central Florida is the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 8723 International Dr., Suite 101, Orlando, FL 32819 (☎ **407/363-5872**; www.orlandoinfo.com). Staffers can answer questions, assist you with reservations, help you find discounts, and send maps and brochures, such as the *Official Visitors Guide*, *African-American Visitors Guide*, *Area Guide to Restaurants*, *Unexpected Orlando*, and *Official Accommodations Guide*. The free packet should arrive in about 3 weeks and includes the Orlando "Magicard," which is good for over \$500 in discounts on hotel rooms, car rentals, attractions, and more—the website also details all of the latest discounts. **Tip:** Keep the card handy so you won't lose out on any available discounts once you get into town. You can stop by once you've arrived and pick up additional brochures, maps, and other information, too.

If you don't mind a machine, you can get all of the above by calling ☎ **800/643-9492** or 800/551-0181.

Another good site worth checking out is www.flausa.com, which includes plenty of useful information on the entire Central Florida region.

For general information about **Walt Disney World**, including vacation brochures and videos or to ask questions, you can write to Walt Disney World, Box 10000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000; or call ☎ **407/934-7639**, 407/824-4321, or 407/824-2222. On the Internet, visit www.disneyworld.com. If you don't mind waiting a couple of days for an answer, you can also e-mail questions to wdw.guest.communications@Disney.com.

For information about **Universal Studios Florida**, **CityWalk**, and **Islands of Adventure**, call ☎ **407/363-8000**, or write to **Universal Orlando**, 1000 Universal Studios Plaza, Orlando, FL 32819. On

the Internet, visit **www.universalorlando.com**.

For information about **SeaWorld**, call ☎ 407/351-3600 or visit online at **www.seaworld.com**. For **Discovery Cove** information and reservations call ☎ 877/4-DISCOVERY, or 407/370-1280. For online information visit **www.discoverycove.com**.

You can also visit the **Kissimmee–St. Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 1925 E. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee, FL 34744; or write to P.O. Box 422007, Kissimmee, FL 34742-2007 (☎ 800/327-9159 or 407/847-5000; **www.floridakiss.com**). The folks there will send a packet of maps, brochures, coupon books, and the *Kissimmee–St. Cloud Vacation Guide*, which details area accommodations and attractions.

For information on the **International Drive** area, call ☎ 407/248-9590 or head online to **www.InternationalDriveOrlando.com**. The staff can provide information on hotels, restaurants, attractions, shops, and the I-Ride Trolley. Be sure request their detailed map of the I-Drive area—it's very useful.

For information about places to stay, eat, and visit north of the Orlando metro area, contact the **Winter Park Chamber of Commerce Welcome Center** at ☎ 877/972-4262.

ONLINE INFORMATION

The websites listed above also provide a great abundance of other helpful and necessary information. Disney's **www.disneyworld.com** has theme park maps; current ticket prices; driving directions; park hours for specific days; information on attractions (including refurbishment schedules), special events, recreational activities, resorts (including pricing and photos), and dining. There's also Disney Cruise Line information; an online booking service; a

new online tool for vacation planning; and much, much more.

Deb's Unofficial Walt Disney World Information Guide (**www.allearsnet.com**) is an excellent information source and arguably the best unofficial Disney guide on the Internet. While Disney doesn't own or operate it, it's run and written by true blue fans of Mickey. Though not entirely objective, the site's information is almost always right on the mark. The site includes comprehensive insider information on tickets, touring the parks, Disney restaurant menus (many with prices), the Disney Cruise Line, and the WDW resorts, as well as other valuable travel tips. Some sections are aimed at travelers with special needs.

The sites operated by Universal Orlando (**www.universalorlando.com**) and SeaWorld (**www.seaworld.com**) offer information on the parks along with maps, ride descriptions, ticket prices, restaurant descriptions, upcoming events, resort information (for Universal), and more. While both sites have been improved greatly in the last year or so, both still lack the thoroughness of Deb's and the Disney sites.

The city's newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*, produces an online site at **www.orlandosentinel.com**. It has a variety of entertainment information. If you go to another Sentinel-produced website, **www.go2orlando.com**, you'll find the focus on attractions, accommodations, restaurants, discounts, and other things important to visitors. Also visit **www.insidecentralflorida.com** for information about dining, clubs, performances, theme parks, sports, and special events.

If you're looking for the best tips and insider information on saving some cash on your Disney vacation, go to **www.mousesavers.com**—the website includes a list of discount and reservation codes for the Disney resorts, as well as special discounts and offers of their own.

Walt Disney World & Orlando—Red Alert Checklist

- Along with The Mouse, Orlando's biggest draw is its warm and sunny climate. Though it may seem obvious, a word of caution is warranted regarding Florida's most natural and abundant commodity—the sun. The Florida sun is hotter and stronger than in many other parts of the country and, as such, requires that you and especially your kids take some extra precautions if you plan on enjoying it—and your vacation. One of the most important survival rules of an Orlando vacation: **Use sunscreen!** Pour on one with an SPF rating of at least 30 or higher, especially for kids, who need protection even more than you do. Florida's sun can deliver a dangerous burn year-round—a souvenir we guarantee you do not want to take home with you—or cause sun poisoning. The sun can pack a powerful punch even on a cloudy day, so don't leave the sunscreen and hats behind. Other ways you can protect yourself include wearing wide-brimmed hats, airy clothes, and sunglasses. If you have a child in a stroller, a light blanket will help to protect infants or sleeping toddlers from the sun's rays. Also remember to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to avoid dehydration, and have your kids do the same, even if they say they aren't thirsty. Last but certainly not least, don't forget to pack a pair of comfortable walking shoes for those days spent pounding the theme-park pavement.
- Don't miss out on one of Orlando's great dining experiences. You can make same-day or day-before reservations in most Orlando eateries, but there are some exceptions to the rule, which, among many others include Emeril's (p. 159) and Victoria & Albert's (p. 148). In fact, any Disney restaurant—especially those serving character meals or a dinner show—can have a waiting list a mile long in peak periods. To avoid disappointment, be sure to use Walt Disney World's **Priority Seating** (☎ 407/939-3463), which lets you stake a claim to a table up to 90 days in advance, 180 days in some cases. Call as soon as possible to arrange for your Priority Seating as some of the more popular restaurants and shows get booked within hours—sometimes even minutes—of the time they start booking seating times.
- Many visitors come with their hearts set on (and days planned around) seeing a specific attractions, staying at a particular hotel, or dining at a

2 Money

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money and provide a convenient record of all your expenses. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN. If you've forgotten yours, or didn't even know you had one, call the number on the

back of your credit card and ask the bank to send it to you. It usually takes 5 to 7 business days, though some banks may provide the number over the phone if you tell them your mother's maiden name or some other personal information.

Disney parks, resorts, shops, and restaurants (but not most fast-food outlets)

certain restaurant only to be disappointed if for some reason there is an interruption in its operation or a change in its schedule. All the parks have **reduced hours** at certain times of the year—even on certain days of the week—some shows are staged only occasionally, and rides can be temporarily closed. Before you promise your family or yourself anything, call or check the websites listed throughout this book. Also note that theme park rides can occasionally break down or have to be shut down due to weather conditions (though you won't get a break on ticket prices when your favorite rides or shows are dark). Some of the websites listed earlier in this chapter, including Deb's Unofficial Walt Disney World Information Guide, have "**rehab**" schedules and update them almost daily. The parks can change their hours not only seasonally, but weekly—even daily—so check the week's schedule when you arrive so you'll know if you have to adjust your itinerary because of a just-scheduled closing.

- If you purchased traveler's checks, make sure to record the check numbers and store the documentation separately from the checks.
- Remember to pack your camera, an extra set of camera batteries, and purchase plenty of film. If you have a digital camera, remember to bring the recharger (if your batteries are rechargeable ones of course) and extra memory storage.
- Bring along your ID cards, including AAA and AARP cards, student IDs, the Orlando "Magicard," and so on, as producing them will help save a few dollars along the way.
- Speaking of identification, did you bring a photo ID? That's a necessity at the airports, among other places, so keep it handy.
- Make sure to bring along emergency drug prescriptions, any prescription medicine you are currently using, and the phone number of your Doctor, pediatrician, and insurance company (and your insurance card) along with an extra pair of glasses and/or contact lenses.
- Leave a copy of your itinerary with someone at home, and keep an extra copy yourself. Be sure it includes your hotel, car, and airplane information, as well as any reservation numbers for shows or restaurants.

accept five major credit cards: American Express, Diners Club, Discover, MasterCard, and Visa. Additionally, the WDW and Universal resorts will let you charge purchases made in their respective park shops and restaurants to your hotel room, but you must settle up when you check out. Be sure, however, to keep track of your spending as you go along so you

won't be surprised when you get the total bill.

ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine). The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of

| What Things Cost in Orlando | US\$ | £UK |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Taxi from airport to Walt Disney World (up to four people) | 50 | 26 |
| Shuttle from airport to Walt Disney World (2 adults, 2 kids) | 86–102 | 45–54 |
| Double room at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa (very expensive) | 349–870 | 184–458 |
| Double room at Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort (moderate) | 134–209 | 71–110 |
| Double room at Staybridge Suites Lake Buena Vista (moderate) | 129–299 | 68–157 |
| Double room at Disney's All-Star Music Resort (inexpensive) | 77–131 | 41–69 |
| Six-course fixed-price dinner for one at Victoria & Albert's, not including tip or wine pairing (very expensive) | 95–155 | 50–82 |
| All-you-can-eat buffet dinner at the Disney theme park restaurants, not including tip or wine (moderate) | 26 | 14 |
| Roll of ASA 100 Kodak film, 36 exposures, purchased at Walt Disney World | 11 | 6 |
| Tube of sun block in the theme parks | 9 | 5 |
| Evening movie tickets at AMC, Pleasure Island | 5.50–8.50 | 3–5 |
| Adult 4-Day Park Hopper admission to Walt Disney World | 220 | 116 |
| Child 4-Day Park Hopper admission to Walt Disney World | 183 | 96 |
| Adult 1-day, one-park admission to Walt Disney World | 59.75 | 31 |
| Child 1-day, one-park admission to Walt Disney World | 48 | 25 |
| Adult 1-day, one-park admission to Universal Orlando or SeaWorld | 59.75 | 31 |
| Child 1-day, one-park admission to Universal Orlando or SeaWorld | 48 | 25 |
| Adult 4-park, 14-day Orlando FlexTicket | 184.95 | 97 |
| Child 4-park 14-day Orlando FlexTicket | 150.95 | 79 |
| Admission to Discovery Cove with Dolphin Swim | 229–259 | 121–136 |
| Adult admission to Orlando Science Center | 14.95 | 8 |
| Child admission to Orlando Science Center | 9.95 | 5 |
| Adult admission to Gatorland | 19.95 | 11 |
| Child admission to Gatorland | 9.95 | 5 |

your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be

sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) before you leave home and be sure to find out your daily withdrawal

limit. Also check on what fees, if any, your bank may assess for using another bank's ATM (and note that the bank in Florida will likely charge you a usage fee as well).

ATMs are located on Main Street in the Magic Kingdom and at the entrances to Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom. They're also at Pleasure Island, in Downtown Disney Marketplace, at Disney resorts, and in the Crossroads Shopping Center.

There also are ATMs near Guest Services at Universal Studios Florida, Islands of Adventure, and SeaWorld.

Inside most of the theme park entrances, you'll find park maps showing the locations for all ATMs. If this isn't the case when you visit, look for the maps at Guest Relations or Guest Services desks near the entrances, or at most inside-the-park shops.

Outside the parks, most malls have at least one ATM and they're in some convenience stores, such as 7-Elevens and Circle Ks, as well as in grocery stores and drugstores. There are frequently extra charges for using nonbank ATMs or bank ATMs not affiliated with your home branch. Depending on your institution, those charges can range from \$1 to \$3.50 per transaction—the average is \$2.75 across Florida.

Be *very* careful when using ATMs, especially at night and in areas that are not well lit and heavily traveled. Don't let the land of Mickey lull you into a false

sense of security. Goofy and Pluto won't mug you, but some of their estranged neighbors might. Cuddly characters aside, this is a big city and the crime rate here is the same as in comparable locations. When entering your PIN at an ATM, make sure you shield the keyboard from others in line. And if you're using a drive-thru, keep your doors locked.

In addition to getting cash out of an ATM, you can also buy **Disney dollars** (currency with the images of Mickey, Minnie, and so on) in \$1, \$5, and \$10 denominations. They're good at WDW shops, restaurants, and resorts, as well as Disney stores everywhere. This is a great way to give a preset allowance to kids for their souvenirs. If you have any of these dollars leftover, you can exchange them for real currency upon leaving WDW, or keep them as a souvenir. **Note:** Pay close attention if you have a refund coming. Some items, such as strollers, wheelchairs, and lockers, require a deposit, and Disney staffers will frequently use Mickey money for refunds instead of the cash. If you don't want it, just let them know and they'll be happy to give you real cash.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. Traveler's checks used to be the only sound alternative to traveling with dangerously large amounts of cash. They

Value Online Ticketing

The Orlando theme parks have jumped head first into the Internet discounting game. **Disney** (www.disneyworld.com), **Universal** (www.universallorlando.com), and **SeaWorld** (www.seaworld.com) offer price discounts for online ticket purchases. Another advantage to ordering online is that the parks often feature Web-only deals, such as free extra days at the parks. Note that you must purchase tickets from your home (not from a laptop or hotel business center once you have arrived). Tickets must also be ordered in time to arrive at your home via mail, so keep your timeline in mind when purchasing.

were as reliable as currency, but, unlike cash, could be replaced if lost or stolen.

These days, traveler's checks seem less necessary because most cities have 24-hour ATMs that allow you to withdraw small amounts of cash as needed. However, keep in mind that you will likely be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own, so if you're withdrawing money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks—provided that you don't mind showing identification every time you want to cash one.

You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and (for cardholders only) \$1,000. You will however, pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. You can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ☎ **800/221-7282**; Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the fee.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several

other banks. The service charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1,000. Call ☎ **800/732-1322** for information. **MasterCard** also offers traveler's checks. Call ☎ **800/223-9920** for a location near you. AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a \$9.95 service fee at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ **866/339-3378**.

You can cash traveler's or personal checks of \$25 or less (drawn on U.S. banks, if you have a driver's license and major credit card), and exchange foreign currency at **SunTrust** Bank, 1675 Buena Vista Dr., across from Downtown Disney Marketplace. The bank also has an ATM. It's open weekdays from 9am to 4pm and until 6pm on Thursday (☎ **407/828-6106**).

For tips and telephone numbers to call if your wallet is stolen or lost, go to "Lost & Found" in the Fast Facts section of chapter 4.

3 When to Go

Orlando is the theme-park capital of the world, and you could almost argue that there really is no off season here, though the busiest seasons are whenever kids are out of school. Late May to just past Labor Day, long holiday weekends, winter holidays (mid-Dec to early Jan), and most especially spring break (late Mar to Apr). Do, however, keep in mind that kids in other hemispheres follow a completely different schedule all together. Obviously, an Orlando—and most especially a Disney vacation—is most enjoyed when the crowds are at the thinnest and the weather is the most temperate. Hotel rooms (likely the largest chunk of your vacation bill) are also priced lower (albeit slightly) during the off season, though don't expect that period to follow the traditional winter/summer patterns of most areas.

Peak-season rates can go into effect during large conventions and special events. Even something as remote as Bike Week in Daytona Beach (about an hour by car northeast) can raise prices, including during the off season. These kinds of events will especially impact the moderately priced hotels and resorts located off Walt Disney World.

Best times: The week after Labor Day until the week before Thanksgiving when the kids have just returned to school, the week after Thanksgiving until mid-December, and the 6 weeks before and after school spring vacations (which generally occur around Easter).

Worst times: The absolute worst time of year to visit is during spring break—usually the two weeks prior to and after Easter. The crowds are unbelievable, the

 **Tips Weather Wise**

It's not uncommon for the skies to open up on Orlando, even when the day began with the sun ablaze. Florida is well known for its afternoon downpours, so don't be too concerned—storms don't usually last too long. Most people simply run for temporary cover and then resume their activities when the rain slows to a drizzle or stops all together. It is wise, however, to bring along some type of rain gear as storms can spring up rather quickly. A small fold-up umbrella can protect you until you can get to shelter. If you forget your gear, rain ponchos can be purchased throughout the parks for about \$6 for a child-size poncho, or \$8 for an adult size. The child-size poncho also happens to cover the average stroller quite well, protecting camera equipment and souvenirs—not to mention the child sitting inside it.

Don't let a rainy afternoon spoil your fun. Crowds are dramatically thinner on these days and there are plenty of indoor attractions to enjoy, particularly at Epcot, Disney-MGM, Universal Studios Florida, and even SeaWorld, where many of the attractions are actually indoors. The flip side, of course, is that many of the outdoor rides at Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld are temporarily closed during downpours and lightning storms.

lines are unbearable (my kids have waited upwards of 2 hours to hop on some of the most popular attractions), waiting times at local restaurants can lead to starvation, and traffic—particularly on International Drive—will give you a headache. The December holidays and summer, when out-of-state visitors take advantage of school breaks and many locals bring their families to the parks (taking advantage of Florida resident discount months, which usually fall in May and November) can also prove a challenge. Packed parking lots are the norm during the week before and after Christmas, and the summer brings with it oppressive heat and humidity. *Seriously consider pulling your kids out of school* for a few days around an off-season weekend to avoid the long lines. (You may be able to keep them in their schools' good graces by asking teachers to let them write a report on an educational element of the vacation. Epcot, SeaWorld, and the Orlando Museum of Science offer the

most in the way of educational exhibits.) Even during these periods, though, the number of international visitors guarantees you won't be alone.

Note: If you're taking advantage of a land/cruise package (see "Disney Cruise Packages," later in this chapter), make sure you take into account the Florida hurricane season, which runs from around June 1 to November 30 (when the majority of Central Florida's afternoon downpours tend to occur). Inland, the worst is usually only sheets of rain and enough wind to wipe the smile right off your face. That said, the summer of 2004 (when 3 hurricanes passed through the area) was a noticeable reminder that worse can happen. If you are on the coastal areas or at sea, you will likely be at the point where the storms hit their hardest, making them extremely dangerous. Tornadoes and lightning—two particularly active summer curses—should also not to be taken too lightly.

Central Florida Average Temperatures

| | | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| High | °F | 72 | 73 | 78 | 84 | 88 | 91 | 92 | 92 | 90 | 84 | 78 | 73 |
| | °C | 22 | 23 | 26 | 29 | 31 | 33 | 33 | 33 | 32 | 29 | 26 | 23 |
| Low | °F | 49 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 66 | 71 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 65 | 57 | 51 |
| | °C | 10 | 10 | 13 | 16 | 19 | 22 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 19 | 14 | 11 |

ORLANDO AREA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

Capital One Florida Citrus Bowl.

New Year's Day kicks off with this football game in downtown Orlando. It pits the second-ranked teams from the Southeastern and Big Ten conferences against each other. Tickets are \$55 before November 1 and \$65 thereafter. Call ☎ 800/297-2695 or 407/423-2476 for information or **Ticketmaster** at ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900 for tickets (on the Internet, visit www.fcsports.com). A free downtown parade is held a few days before the game and features marching bands and floats.

Walt Disney World Marathon. About 90% of the 16,000 runners finish this 26.2-mile "sprint" through the resort area and parks. It's open to anyone over 18 years of age, including runners with disabilities as long as they are able to maintain the pacing requirements. If you are unable to do so, you'll be picked up and transported to the finish line. The registration fee is \$95 and includes a medal, cap, and other extras for those who finish—along with souvenirs for all who enter. The registration deadline is usually in early November, and pre-registration is required. There's also a half-marathon (\$85) and a Family Fun Run that includes shorter races for adults and kids (\$25, if postmarked by Dec 26, 2005, \$30 after that; \$5 per child for the kids' races). Call ☎ 407/939-7810

or go to www.disneysports.com. January 5–8.

Zora Neale Hurston Festival. This 4-day celebration in Eatonville, the first incorporated African-American town in America, highlights the life and works of the author and is usually held the last weekend in January. Eatonville is 25 miles north of the theme parks. Admission is \$5 to \$12 for adults, \$3 for kids under 17. Additional fees are charged for lectures or seminars. Call ☎ 407/647-3307 or check out www.zoranealehurstonfestival.com.

February

Atlanta Braves. The Braves have been holding spring training at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex since 1998. There are 15 home games during the 1-month season. (The team arrives in mid-Feb; games begin in early Mar.) Tickets are \$13 to \$21. You can get more information at ☎ 407/939-GAME (4236) or www.disneysports.com. To purchase tickets, call Ticketmaster at ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900. You can also get online information at www.atlantabraves.com or www.majorleaguebaseball.com.

Houston Astros. The Astros train at Osceola County Stadium, 1000 Bill Beck Blvd., Kissimmee. Tickets are \$14 to \$17. Get them through Ticketmaster at ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900. For information, check the Astros' website at www.astros.com.

Mardi Gras at Universal Orlando. Floats, stilt walkers, live entertainment,

and beads thrown to the crowd add to the fun of this event. A party to rival the original held in New Orleans, it's definitely geared for an adult crowd with plenty of drinking and carousing. Special discounted tickets are available allowing entrance to the park only after 5pm (\$39.95), otherwise it's included in regular park admission (\$59.95). The celebration runs one night a week (usually Sat) from mid-February to mid-April. For information, call ☎ **888/389-4783** or 407/363-8000, or go online to **www.universallorlando.com**.

Silver Spurs Rodeo. It features real yippee-I-O cowboys in calf roping, bull riding, barrel racing, and more. This rodeo is the largest in the eastern United States. It's held at the Silver Spurs Arena, 1875 E. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee. It runs for three days in February (and again for 3 days in Oct). Call ☎ **407/847-4052** or visit **www.silver-spursrodeo.com** for details. Tickets run from \$10, \$15, and \$25 when purchased ahead of time, to \$12, \$18, and \$30 at the gate.

March

Bay Hill Invitational. Hosted by Arnold Palmer and featuring Orlando-based golfers such as Tiger Woods, this PGA Tour event is held at the Bay Hill Club, 9000 Bay Hill Blvd. Daily admission is \$40 to \$45. Call ☎ **866/764-4843** or 407/876-7774, or check out **www.bayhillinvitational.bizland.com**.

Sidewalk Arts Festival. Held in Winter Park's Central Park, this 3-day exhibition draws artists from all over North America during the third full weekend in March. The festival is consistently named one of the best in the nation by *Sunshine Artist* magazine. Admission is free, though you may have to pay for parking. Call ☎ **407/672-6390** or

407/644-8281, or go to **www.wpsaf.org** for details.

Florida Film Festival. The Enzian Theater has been showcasing American independent and foreign films for more than a decade. This annual event was named one of the top 10 such events in the world by *The Ultimate Film Festival Survival Guide, 2nd Edition*. Call **407/629-1088** or 407/629-0054, or look up **www.floridafilmfestival.com**.

April

Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival. This 6-week-long event showcases gardens, topiary characters, floral displays, speakers, and seminars. The festival is free with regular park admission (\$59.95 adults, \$48 kids 3–9). For more information, call ☎ **407/934-7639** or visit **www.disneyworld.com**. The festival kicks off in late April and goes through early June.

May

Orlando International Fringe Festival. Over 100 diverse acts from around the world participate in this eclectic event, held for 10 days in May at various venues in downtown Orlando. Entertainers perform drama, comedy, political satire, and experimental theater. Everything performed on outdoor stages, from sword swallowing to *Hamlet*, is available free to Fringe attendees after they purchase a festival button for about \$10. Tickets for indoor events vary, but most are under \$10. Call ☎ **407/648-0077** or surf the Web to **www.orlandofringe.org** for details.

Star Wars Weekends. Every year, Disney features a fan-fest full of activities for *Star Wars* fanatics. Characters are on hand for up-close meet-and-greets, as well as a handful of *Star Wars* actors. Games, parades, and special entertainment top off the festivities. The celebrations run for five consecutive weekends beginning in May.

Fun Fact It's A Small World—Or Is It?

WDW covers more than 47 square miles, roughly the same size as the Island of Manhattan. Believe it or not, only one-fourth of the property has actually been developed. Makes you wonder what Disney will do next.

Viva La Musica is a celebration of Latin culture and music held annually at SeaWorld. Festivities include concerts and crafts and food displays throughout the park. There is no extra charge to join in the fun, which happens on two successive weekends in the beginning of May. For more information and exact dates, head online to www.seaworld.com.

June

Gay Weekend. The first weekend in June attracts tens of thousands of gays and lesbians to central Florida for what amounts, with add-ons, to a week of festivities. It grew out of “Gay Day,” held unofficially at Disney World since the early 1990s and drawing some 100,000 people to the area. Special events at Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld also cater to gays and lesbians. Look for online information on discounts, packages, hosts, and more at www.gayday.com or www.gaydays.com. Also, see “Gay & Lesbian Travel,” later in this chapter.

July

Independence Day. Disney's Star-Spangled Spectacular brings bands, singers, dancers, and unbelievable fireworks displays to all the Disney parks, which stay open later than normal. Call ☎ 407/934-7639 for details or surf over to www.disneyworld.com. **SeaWorld** (☎ 407/351-3600; www.seaworld.com) features a dazzling laser/fireworks spectacular. There's also a free fireworks display in downtown Orlando at Lake Eola Park. For information, call ☎ 407/246-2827. Other

fireworks events are listed in the local newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*.

Tampa Bay Bucs. The NFL Tampa Bay Buccaneers run their training camp at the Wide World of Sports Complex from late July through August. For information call ☎ 407/939-GAME (4236) or go to www.buccaneers.com for more information.

September

Night of Joy. The first weekend (Thurs–Sun) in September, the Magic Kingdom hosts a festival of contemporary Christian music featuring top artists. This is a very popular event, so obtain tickets early. Performers also make an appearance at Long's Christian Bookstore in College Park, about 20 minutes north of Disney. Admission to the concert is \$37.95 for one night (7:30pm–12:30am), \$61.95 for 2 nights. Use of Magic Kingdom attractions is included. Call ☎ 407/934-7639 for concert details; for information about the free appearance at Long's, call ☎ 407/422-6934. Universal has gone head-to-head with Disney on this one, scheduling its **Rock the Universe** concert the same weekend (☎ 866/788-4636). Big-name Christian bands and speakers headline the event. Tickets (which include admission to the parks after 4pm) cost \$36.95 for one night or \$59.95 for both nights of the event. A package including both nights of celebration, as well as 3 full days of admission to the parks (Fri–Sun), runs \$89.95.

October

Orlando Magic Basketball. The NBA team plays half of its 82-game regular season between October and April at the TD Waterhouse Centre, 600 W. Amelia St. Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$100. A few tickets, usually single seats, are often available the day before games involving lesser-known NBA challengers. Call ☎ **407/896-2442** for details, **877/803-7073** or 407/839-3900 for tickets. Online go to www.nba.com/magic.

Halloween Horror Nights. Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure (☎ **888/389-4783** or 407/363-8000; www.universalorlando.com) transforms its grounds on select nights during October and into November into haunted attractions. Live entertainment and special shows, hundreds of ghouls and goblins roaming the streets, along with specially designed haunted houses make for a truly terrifying experience. The park essentially closes at dusk, reopening in a new macabre form from 7pm to midnight or later. Full admission (\$59.95 adults) is charged for this event, which is definitely geared to grown-ups (as the liquor flows freely and the frightfulness is *truly* that). Guests are not allowed to wear costumes so Universal employees can spot their peers easily.

Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party. The Magic Kingdom (☎ **407/934-7639**; www.disneyworld.com) invites you to join Mickey and his pals for a far-from-frightening time. In this one, you can come in costume and trick-or-treat throughout the Magic Kingdom from 7pm to midnight on any of 10 or so nights. The alcohol-free party includes parades, live music, and storytelling. The climax is a bewitching fireworks spectacular. Unlike the celebration at Universal Studios, this one is completely family-friendly. A separate

admission fee is charged (\$32.95 adults, \$27.95 kids 3–9), and you need to get tickets well in advance.

The FUNAI Classic at Walt Disney World. Top PGA tour players compete at WDW golf courses during the month of October. Many tour professionals, including Tiger Woods, call Orlando home, so there's usually plenty of first-rate talent on display. Daily ticket prices range from \$15 to \$35. Tickets for the 4-day event run about \$50. For information, contact Walt Disney World Golf Sales, P.O. Box 10000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830 (☎ **407/824-2250**; www.disneyworld.com). You also can get tickets through Ticketmaster (☎ **877/803-7073** or 407/839-3900).

Epcot International Food & Wine Festival. Here's your chance to sip and savor the food and beverages of 25 cultures. More than 60 wineries from across the United States participate. Events include wine tastings for adults, seminars, food, dinners, concerts, and celebrity-chef cooking demonstrations. Tickets for the dinner-and-concert series or wine tastings are \$79 to \$125 including gratuity. The event also features 25 food-and-wine marketplaces where appetizer-size portions of dishes ranging from pizza to octopus on purple potato salad sell for under \$5 each. Entrance to the festival is included in park admission. Call ☎ **407/934-7639** for details or check out www.disneyworld.com. October 1 to mid-November.

November

ABC Super Soap Weekend. If you're a fan of ABC's daytime soaps, this is one you won't want to miss. Soap celebs are on hand for parades, parties, Q&As, music, and more in this weekend catering to fans and fanatics alike. The events are included with Disney-MGM Studios admission (\$59.95 adults, \$48 kids

3–9). Call ☎ 407/397-6808 or check out www.disneyworld.com for details.

Walt Disney World Festival of the Masters. One of the largest art shows in the South takes place at Downtown Disney Marketplace for 3 days during the second weekend in November. The exhibition features over 150 top artists, photographers, and craftspeople, all winners of juried shows throughout the country. You can listen to the music of the jazz festival or enjoy one of the many family activities all for free. Call ☎ 407/934-7639 or visit www.disneyworld.com.

The Osborne Family Spectacle of Lights. This attraction has returned by popular demand after being closed down for renovations in 2004 and 2005. Lighting up the nights at the Disney-MGM Studios are millions of sparkling bulbs acquired from a family whose Christmas light collection got a bit too bright for their neighbors. The holiday display runs from November to early January.

December

Christmas at Walt Disney World. During the holiday festivities, Main Street in the Magic Kingdom is lavishly decked out with twinkling lights and Christmas holly, all the while carolers are greeting visitors throughout the park. Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom also offer special embellishments and entertainment throughout the holiday season, and the Disney resorts are decked out

with towering Christmas trees, wreaths, boughs, and bows.

Some holiday highlights include **Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party**, an after-dark (7pm–midnight) ticketed event (\$41.95 adults, \$31.95 kids 3–9). This takes place on select nights at the Magic Kingdom and offers a festive parade, fireworks, special shows, and admission to a handful of rides. Also included are cookies, cocoa, and a souvenir photo.

Holidays Around the World and the **Candlelight Procession** at Epcot feature hundreds of carolers, storytellers from a host of international countries, celebrity narrators telling the Christmas story, a 450-voice choir, and a 50-piece orchestra in a very moving display. Fireworks are included. Regular admission (\$59.95 adults, \$48 kids 3–9) is required. Call ☎ 407/934-7639 for details on all of the above or go to www.disneyworld.com. The holiday fun lasts from mid-December to early January.

Macy's Holiday Parade. *That's not a typo!* Universal and Macy's (the latter a tenant at the Mall at Millenia, p. 310) teamed up for the first time in December 2002 to offer a smaller version of **Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade** held at Universal Studios Florida. It runs from mid-December to early January, featuring several of the floats and gigantic balloons from the original New York City parade. (☎ 407/363-8000; www.universalorlando.com). Park admission (\$59.75 for adults, \$48 for

Fun Fact Disney in December

No snow? No problem. While there may be a lack of the white stuff in Orlando during the month of December (or any other month for that matter), WDW more than makes up for it by decking the halls as only Disney can do: 11 miles of garlands, 3,000 wreaths, and 1,500 Christmas trees in all, decorate Walt Disney World during the holiday season.

kids 3–9) is required. Over at Islands of Adventure, even the Grinch celebrates the holidays at Seuss Landing, which is decked out like Whoville for the holidays, including wintry decorations and “Whos” running all about to create a festive mood.

Walt Disney World New Year’s Eve Celebration. For 1 night a year, the Magic Kingdom is open until the wee hours for a massive fireworks explosion.

Other New Year’s festivities in WDW include a big (and pricey) bash at Pleasure Island featuring music headliners, a special Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue at Fort Wilderness, and guest performances by well-known musical groups at Disney–MGM Studios and Epcot. Call ☎ 407/934-7639 for details or visit www.disneyworld.com. December 31.

4 Insurance, Health & Safety

TRAVEL INSURANCE AT A GLANCE

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, cancelled tickets, or medical expenses. The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age, health, and the type of trip you’re taking, but expect to pay between 5% and 8% of the vacation itself.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE

Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip (though restrictions apply), if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the State Department declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won’t cover vague fears, though, as many travelers discovered who tried to cancel their trips in October 2001 because they were wary of flying.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance may be a good buy if you’re getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 12 months? Insurance policy details vary, so reading the fine print is very important to ensure it includes what you actually need.

A good resource is “**Travel Guard Alerts**,” a list of companies considered high-risk by Travel Guard International (see website below). Protect yourself further by paying for the insurance with a credit card—by law, consumers can get their money back on goods and services not received if they report the loss within 60 days after the charge is listed on their credit card statement.

For information, contact one of the following recommended insurers: **Access America** (☎ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (☎ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE Most health insurance policies cover you if you get sick away from home, but check ahead of time, particularly if you’re insured by an HMO. You should also call your own physician prior to receiving any treatment (or as soon as possible thereafter); many insurers require some type of notification if you expect emergency expenses to be covered. If you fail to inform them of your predicament, you may find yourself stuck with the bill.

Tips Quick ID

Tie a colorful ribbon or yarn around your luggage handle, opt for colorful luggage rather than the usual black, or use a distinctive luggage tag. This makes it much easier to identify among the many other practically identical suitcases circling the luggage belt. If your luggage gets lost, this will help to identify it as well.

If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (☎ 410/453-6300; www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (☎ 800/821-2828; www.travelassistance.com; for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ☎ 800/777-8710).

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE On domestic flights, checked baggage is covered up to \$2,500 per ticketed passenger. On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage coverage is limited to approximately \$9.07 per pound, up to approximately \$635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage because many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. Most airlines require that you report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

CAR-RENTAL INSURANCE

Car-rental insurance costs around \$25 a day. If you hold a private auto insurance

policy, you are **probably** covered in the U.S. for loss or damage to the car, as well as liability in case a passenger is injured. The credit card you used to rent the car also may provide some coverage. Double check with your insurance company as well as the car-rental company regarding what may or may not be covered on both ends. **Note:** Many car-rental companies now charge steep out-of-service fees, if the car is out of commission for any reason after its return.

Car-rental insurance probably does not cover liability if you caused the accident. Check your own auto insurance policy, the rental company policy, and your credit card coverage for the extent of coverage: Is your destination covered? Are other drivers covered? How much liability is covered if a passenger is injured? (If you rely on your credit card for coverage, you may want to bring a second credit card with you. Damages may be charged to your card, and you may find yourself stranded with no money.) You don't need any surprises spoiling your vacation, so look at your coverage before reaching the rental counter.

THE HEALTHY TRAVELER

Limit your exposure to Florida's strong sun, especially during the first few days of your trip and, thereafter, during the hours of 11am to 2pm, when the sun is at its strongest. Use a sunscreen with the highest sun protection factor (SPF) available (especially for children) and apply it liberally. If you have children under a year old, check with your pediatrician before applying a sunscreen—some ingredients may not be appropriate for infants.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

If you worry about getting sick away from home, consider purchasing **medical travel insurance**, and carry your ID card in your purse or wallet. In most cases, your existing health plan will provide the coverage you need. See “Travel Insurance at a Glance,” above, for more information.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (☎ 888/633-4298;

www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert’s 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won’t make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don’t forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses.

5 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

There’s no reason for those of you with disabilities to miss most of the fun that Orlando and the theme parks have to offer—as long as you engage in a little advance planning.

ACCOMMODATIONS Every hotel and motel in Florida is required by law to have a special room or rooms equipped for wheelchairs. A few have wheel-in showers. Walt Disney World’s **Coronado Springs Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-1000; www.disneyworld.com) has 99 rooms designed to accommodate guests with disabilities. **Disney’s Polynesian** and the **Grand Floridian** resorts are both particularly well suited to guests who use wheelchairs as their location on the monorail system makes travel to the Magic Kingdom and Epcot a bit easier. Make your special needs known when making reservations. For other information about special Disney rooms, call ☎ 407/939-7807.

If you don’t mind staying 15 minutes from Disney, **Yvonne’s Property Management** (☎ 877/714-1144 or 863/424-0795; www.villasinorlando.com) is a rental agent for, among other things, some handicapped-accessible homes that have multiple-bedrooms, multiple-baths

with accessible showers, full kitchens, and pools outfitted with lifts. Most cost less than \$250 a night and are located in Davenport.

Medical Travel Inc. (☎ 800/778-7953; www.medicaltravel.org) is another source of rentals, scooters and vans, and medical equipment, and can satisfy other needs of disabled travelers, including those with terminal illnesses, and their families.

TRANSPORTATION Public buses in Orlando have hydraulic lifts and restraining belts for wheelchairs. They serve Universal Orlando, SeaWorld, the shopping areas, and downtown Orlando. Disney shuttle buses all accommodate wheelchairs as does the monorail system and some of the watercraft that travel to the parks and resorts.

If you need to rent a wheelchair or electric scooter for your visit, **Walker Medical & Mobility Products** offers delivery to your room, and there’s a model for guests who weigh up to 375 pounds. These products fit into Disney’s transports and monorails as well as rental cars. Get more information by calling ☎ 888/726-6837 or 407/331-9500, or on the Internet go to **www.walkermobility.com**. **CARE Medical Equipment**

(☎ 800/741-2282 or 407/856-2273; www.caremedicalequipment.com) offers similar services.

Disney (☎ 407/934-7639; www.disneyworld.com) offers wheelchair rentals at the parks, Downtown Disney, and in more limited numbers, at the resorts. In addition, a very limited number of Electric Convenience Scooters are also available for rent at the parks. **Note:** Although the Segway is becoming increasingly popular as a mode of transportation for those with disabilities, neither Disney nor SeaWorld permit them inside any of their parks. Universal Orlando does allow them inside their parks. Segways can be rented at **Relay**, 715 Bloom St., #200 (☎ 866/96RELAY or 321/939-7555), a company located in the town of Celebration.

Amtrak (☎ 800/872-7245; www.amtrak.com) provides redcap service, wheelchair assistance, and special seats if you give 72 hours notice. Travelers with disabilities are also entitled to a 15% discount off the lowest available adult coach fare. Documentation from a doctor or an ID card proving your disability is required. Amtrak also provides wheelchair-accessible sleeping accommodations on long-distance trains. Service dogs are permitted aboard and travel free. TDD/TTY service is also available at ☎ 800/523-6590, or you can write to P.O. Box 7717, Itasca, IL 60143.

Greyhound (☎ 800/752-4841; www.greyhound.com) allows a passenger with disabilities to travel with a companion for a single fare, and if you call 48 hours in advance, they'll arrange help along the way. The bus line also allows service animals.

THEME PARKS Many attractions at the parks, especially the newer ones, are designed to be accessible to a wide variety of guests. People with wheelchairs and their parties are often given preferential treatment so they can avoid lines.

The available assistance is outlined in the guide maps you get as you enter the parks. All of the theme parks offer some parking close to the entrances for those with disabilities. Let the parking booth attendant know your needs, and you'll be directed to the appropriate spot. Wheelchair and electric cart rentals are available at most major attractions, but you'll be most comfortable in your chair or cart from home if you can bring it. Keep in mind, however, that wheelchairs wider than 24½ inches may be difficult to navigate through some attractions. And crowds may make it tough for any guest.

At Walt Disney World: Disney's many services are detailed in each theme park's *Guidebook for Guests with Disabilities*. You can pick one up at Guest Relations near the front entrances to each of the parks. Also, you can call ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-2222 for answers to any questions regarding special needs. The guide is also available online at Disney's website, www.disneyworld.com. Examples of services are as follows:

- Almost all Disney resorts have rooms for those with disabilities.
- Braille guidebooks, cassette tapes, and portable tape players are available at City Hall in the Magic Kingdom and Guest Relations in the other parks (a \$25 refundable deposit is required).
- Service animals are allowed in all parks and on some rides.
- All parks have special parking lots near the entrances.
- Assisted listening devices are available to amplify the audio at selected attractions at WDW parks. Also, at some attractions, hearing-impaired guests can use handheld wireless receivers that allow them to read captions about the attractions. Both services are free but require a \$25 refundable deposit.

Tips Don't Forget the 407

Local calls in Orlando require that you dial the area code **(407)** followed by the 7-digit local number, even when calling just across the street.

- Wheelchairs and electric carts can be rented at all of the parks.
- Downtown Disney West Side, with crowded shops and bars, may be a bit difficult to navigate in a wheelchair. The movie theater is, however, wheelchair accessible.
- For information about Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs) or sign-language interpreters at Disney World live shows, call ☎ **407/827-5141** (TDD/TTY). You can usually get an ASL interpreter at several events and attractions if you call no later than 2 weeks in advance.

At Universal Orlando parks: Guests with disabilities should go to Guest Services, located just inside the main entrances, for a *Disabled Guest Guidebook*, a TDD, or other special assistance. Wheelchair and electric cart rentals are available in the concourse area of the parking garage. Universal also provides audio descriptions on cassette for visually impaired guests and has sign-language guides and scripts for its shows (advance notice of 1–2 weeks is required; call ☎ **888/519-4899** [TTY] or 407/224-5929 [voice] for details). You can also get additional information online at **www.universalorlando.com**. From the main page, click either on Islands of Adventure or Universal Studios Florida, and scroll down the left side to the “ADA page.”

At SeaWorld: The park has a guide for guests with disabilities, although most of its attractions are easily accessible to those in wheelchairs. SeaWorld also provides a Braille guide for the visually impaired and a very brief synopsis of its shows for the

hearing impaired. Sign language interpreting services are available at no charge but must be reserved by calling ☎ **407-363-2414** at least a week in advance of your visit. Assisted listening devices are available at select attractions for a \$20 refundable deposit. For information, call ☎ **407/351-3600** or check out the park's website at **www.seaworld.com**.

OTHER RESOURCES You can get information online at the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau's (CVB)** website, **www.orlandoinfo.com**.

WheelchairsOnTheGo.com is a comprehensive website that lists information on accessibility in Florida, from ground transportation to medical equipment rentals, accommodations, and attractions (and plenty more).

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ **507/451-5005**; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers, wheelchair travelers, and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to disabled travelers include **MossRehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; **SATH (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality)** (☎ **212/447-7284**; www.sath.org; annual membership fees: \$45 adults, \$30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed

recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)** (☎ 800/232-5463; www.afb.org), a referral resource for the blind or visually impaired that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

Access-Able Travel Source (☎ 303/232-2979; www.access-able.com) offers extensive access information and advice for traveling around the world with disabilities.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact if you're a senior citizen when you make your travel reservations. Many hotels, resorts, and restaurants offer discounts to seniors. In most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

You can order a copy of the ***Mature Traveler Guide***, which contains local discounts mainly on rooms but also on attractions and activities, from the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 8723 International Dr., Suite 101, Orlando, FL 32819 (☎ 800/643-9492 or 800/551-0181; www.orlandoinfo.com). You can also find it online at the CVB's website (click the "senior" link under "other areas" on the left side of the home page).

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 888/687-2277 or 202/434-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Amtrak (☎ 800/872-7245; www.amtrak.com) offers a 15% discount on the lowest available coach fare (with certain travel restrictions) to people 62 and over.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include: the quarterly magazine ***Travel 50 & Beyond*** (www.travel50andbeyond.com) and ***101 Tips for Mature Travelers***, available from Grand Circle Travel (☎ 800/221-2610 or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com).

FAMILY TRAVEL

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes.

No city in the world is geared more to family travel than Orlando. In addition to its theme parks, Orlando's recreational facilities provide an abundance of opportunities for family fun. Most restaurants have lower-priced (\$4–\$7) children's menus (if not, the appetizer menu works just as well) and fun distractions such as placemats to color while younger diners wait for their food. Many of the hotels and resorts offer children's activity centers (see chapter 5, "Where to Stay," for details).

Keep an eye out for coupons discounting meals and attractions; they can be found practically everywhere. The Calendar section in Friday's *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper often contains coupons and good deals. Many restaurants, especially those in tourist areas, offer great discounts that are yours for the clipping. Check the information you receive from the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter) including free or cheap things to do. Additionally, many hotel lobbies and attractions have free coupon books for the taking.

Some theme parks offer parent-swap programs in which one parent can ride without the children, then switch off and let the other parent ride without returning

to the end of the line. Inquire at Guest Services or Guest Relations, near the park entrances for details on which rides are included.

Here are more suggestions for making traveling with children easier:

- **Are Your Kids Old Enough?** Do you really want to bring an infant or toddler to the parks? If you plan on visiting Disney several times as your children grow, then the best age for a first visit to Disney is just about three years old. Why? Because the kids are old enough to walk around, enjoy the sights and sounds, and a good deal of the rides and shows as well. The thrill rides would most likely frighten them, but most inappropriate rides for the tiny tot set have height restrictions that prevent any unfortunate mistakes. If, however, this trip is going to be a one-time trip, then I recommend waiting until your child is between 7 and 10. They'll still be able to appreciate the magic and wonder of the experience but won't

have reached the stage where all they'll want is chills and thrills.

Some of the characters walking about may make young kids a bit nervous, though most will run right up to Donald or Mickey and give them a big hug. Younger kids may need a nap just when you want to see a show or hop on an attraction, but if you have kids this is nothing new to you. When you plan your day's activities, be sure to account for necessary breaks and naps. Will your whole family be able to enjoy the experiences that Disney, along with the other parks, have to offer? This is something you will have to decide. My five kids range in age from 3 to 11, and we have traveled with just about every age combination you can think of. On our first family trip, my oldest (now 11) was 4, and his two younger siblings were ages 3 and 1. While the one-year-old has absolutely no recollection of the trip, he was thoroughly amused by the sights and



Kid-Friendly Tours

SeaWorld earns its reputation as an education-friendly park with a variety of small-group tours. One of the most interesting is the **Polar Expedition Guided Tour**. This hour-long trek gives kids a chance to come face-to-face with a penguin and get a behind-the-scenes look at polar bears and beluga whales. **Animal Rescue**, another hour-long tour, lets guests see some of the park's rescue and rehabilitation work with several species, including manatees and sea turtles. Both cost \$15 per person, plus park admission (☎ 800/406-2244; www.seaworld.com). Both tours are kid-friendly, though the latter may appeal more to the older ones. Both are on a first-come, first-served basis, so reserve your place at the Guided Tour Information Desk when you enter the park. In June, July, and August, **Camp SeaWorld** has 200 classes including sleepover programs and family courses (☎ 800/406-2244; www.seaworld.com).

At Walt Disney World, the kid-friendliest tour is the **Family Magic Tour**, an interactive scavenger hunt that costs \$25 per person, plus admission (☎ 407/939-8687; www.disneyworld.com).

sounds everywhere we went. The 3-year-old (now 9) still remembers plenty. You'll need to take into account your kids' stamina, interest, and tolerance levels before you decide whether to make the trip and when planning your daily itineraries. My kids could go well into the evening inside the parks, but many other children can't, so it may take you longer to cover a park (it took me 2–3 days to do Magic Kingdom when my youngest was 2). My 7-year-old nephew was petrified by some of the rides in the parks, and even my own kids, who'll try anything once and have never been wary of rides, freak out at attractions involving sensory effects. It may be repetitious, but I'll say it again: Know your own child before deciding whether he or she's ready for this sort of trip. Not every child will fall in love with Disney World at first sight, and it's a rather large expense to incur if junior's going to be frightened, sleepy, or cranky for the whole trip.

- **Planning Ahead** Make reservations for “character breakfasts” at Disney (see chapter 6, “Where to Dine”) as soon as possible. Disney usually accepts them up to 90 days in advance, and many are booked minutes after the 90-day window opens so mark your calendar to call. Also, in any park, check the daily schedule for character appearances (all of the major ones post them on maps or boards near the entrances) and make sure the kids know when they're going to get to meet their heroes. It's often the highlight of their day. (Be wary, however, of promising specific characters, as schedules and character line-ups can change.) Advance planning will help you avoid running after every character you see. The “in” thing of late is getting character autographs. The lines can be quite long so

you may want to pick and choose just a couple of favorite characters to do this with.

- **Packing** Although your home may be toddler-proof, hotel accommodations aren't. Bring blank plugs to cover outlets and whatever else is necessary to prevent an accident from occurring in your room. Most hotels have some type of cribs available; however they are usually limited in number. As well, some hotels have bedrails available, though they are not available as readily as cribs are. Locals can spot tourists by their bright red, just-toasted sunburn; both parents and children should heed this reminder: *Don't forget to bring and use sunscreen with an SPF rating of at least 30.* If you do forget it, it's available at convenience stores, drugstores, and some theme-park shops. Young children should be slathered, even if they're in a stroller, and be sure to pack a wide-brim hat for infants and toddlers. Adults and children alike should drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.
- **Accommodations** Kids under 12, and, in many cases, those as old as 17, stay free in their parent's room in most hotels, but to be certain, ask when you book your room. Most hotels have pools and other recreational facilities that will give you a little no-extra-cost downtime. If you want to skip a rental car and aren't staying at Disney, International Drive and Lake Buena Vista are the places to stay. Hotels often offer family discounts; some offer “kids eat free” programs, and some provide free or moderate-cost shuttle service to the major attractions. International drive also has the I-Drive Trolley, which travels the length of the road and makes numerous stops along the way.
- **Ground Rules** Set firm rules before leaving home regarding things such

as bedtime and souvenirs. It's easy to get off track as you get caught up in the excitement of Orlando, but don't allow your vacation to seize control of your better judgment. Having the kids earn their own money or at least allotting a specific pre-arranged amount for them to spend works wonders. Making them part of your decisions also works wonders. They're far more accommodating and cooperative when they understand that everyone in the family gets a say in the plan for the day and that they will eventually get to do something or go somewhere that they want to.

- **At the Parks** Getting lost is unfortunately all too easy in a place as strange and overwhelming as the theme parks. Toss in the crowds and it's amazing it doesn't happen more often. For adults (yes, they get lost too) and older kids, arrange a lost-and-found meeting place before you arrive in the parks, and if you become separated, head there immediately. Make sure your kids know to find a staff member (point out the special name-tags staff members wear) to help them. Attach a name-tag with the child's first name and your cell-phone (or hotel) number to the inside of younger kids' T-shirts and tell them to find a park employee (and only a park employee) immediately and show them the tag if they become lost.
- **Read the Signs** Most rides post signs that explain **height restrictions**, if any, or identify those that may unsettle youngsters. Save yourself and your kids some grief before you get in line and are disappointed. (The ride listings in chapter 7, "Exploring Walt Disney World," and chapter 8, "Exploring Beyond Disney: Universal Orlando, SeaWorld & Other Attractions," note any minimum heights; as

do the guide maps you can get at the parks.) A bad experience, whether it be a dark, scary section of a ride, the loop-de-loop of a roller coaster, or too big of a drop, can cause your child long-lasting anxiety. It can also put a damper on things for the rest of your day (and possibly even your vacation).

I've explained to my older boys that if they hear adults screaming, that's a pretty good indication that a ride is not the best choice for them. With younger kids you have to be steadfast in your decisions, though most height restrictions will keep those who really shouldn't be riding at bay. With the older ones, well, you may have to indulge them a bit and let them ride just one—they likely won't make the same mistake twice. Note that once you get past the height restriction, age is not always as much of a deciding factor when it comes to rides as one might think. It really depends on your child's previous experiences and their personalities. I've seen 5-year-olds squeal with glee on rides that I can't even stomach; on the other hand, I've observed kids as old as 8 or 10 walk out of some of the attractions with those "touchy feely" effects practically in tears.

- **Take a Break** The Disney parks, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld have fabulous interactive play areas offering both parents and young kids a break. By all means take advantage of them. They allow kids to expend some of their pent-up energy after having to wait in lines and not wander far from mom and dad all day long. They offer a nice break for you, too (if you can sit down to watch them that is). Note that many of these kid zones are filled with water squirters and shallow pools, and most of the parks feature a fair number of water-related attractions, so getting

wet is practically inevitable—at least for the kids. It's advisable to bring along a change of clothes or even a bathing suit. You can rent a locker (\$7 or less) for storing the spares until you need them. During the summer, the Florida humidity is enough to keep you feeling soggy, so you may appreciate the change of clothing even if you don't go near any water.

- **Show Time** Schedule an inside air-conditioned show two or three times a day, especially mid-afternoons in the summer. You may even get your littlest tikes to nap in the darkened theater. For all shows, arrive at least 20 minutes early to get the better seats, but not so early that the kids are tired of waiting (most waits are outside in the heat at Disney, while Universal has covered queue areas at most attractions).
- **Snack Times** When dreaming of your vacation, you probably don't envision hours spent standing in lines, waiting and waiting (unless you have done this before that is). It helps to store some lightweight snacks in a backpack, or in the stroller if you have one, especially when traveling with small children. This may save you some headaches, as kids get the hungriest just when you are the furthest from food. It will also be much healthier, and will certainly save you money, as the parks' prices are quite high.
- **Bring Your Own?** While you will have to haul it to and from the car and on and off trams, trains, or monorails at Disney, having your own stroller can be a tremendous help. It will be with you when you need it—say, back in the hotel room as a high chair, or for an infant in a restaurant when a highchair is inappropriate. Remember to bring the right stroller, too. It should be lightweight, easy to fold and unfold with

one hand, have a canopy, be able to recline for naps, and have plenty of storage space. The parks offer stroller rentals for around \$7; however these are hard and uncomfortable. They do not recline and have little or no storage space for the gear that goes along with bringing the kids. And they are absolutely inappropriate for infants and young toddlers. They are good, however, if you have older kids who may just need an occasional break from walking. For infants and small toddlers, you may want to bring a snugly sling or backpack-type carrier for use in traveling to and from parking lots and while you're standing in line for attractions.

- **Recommended Reading** *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* is a good source of additional information as is *Frommer's Walt Disney World with Kids*.

We've listed some additional tips for tackling the theme parks in the section "Making Your Visit More Enjoyable," in chapter 7.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVEL

The popularity of Orlando with gay and lesbian travelers is confirmed by the expansion of the June "Gay Day" celebration at Disney World into a weekend event that includes Universal Orlando and SeaWorld. Park-goers can wear red on Gay Day to signify their support of the gay and lesbian community. Additional information on the event can be found at www.gayday.com or www.gaydays.com.

For information about events for that weekend or throughout the year, contact **Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Community Services of Central Florida**, 934 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, FL 32803 (☎ 407/228-8272; www.glbcc.org). Welcome packets usually include the latest issue of the *Triangle*, a quarterly newsletter

dedicated to gay and lesbian issues, and a calendar of events pertaining to the gay and lesbian community. Though not a tourist-specific packet, it includes information and ads for local gay and lesbian clubs. **Gay Orlando Network** (www.gayorlando.com) is another planning resource for travelers. **Watermark** (☎ 407/481-2243; www.watermarkonline.com) is another gay-friendly publication; it can be found in many bookstores.

Orlando is a Southern town, but the entertainment industry and the theme parks have helped in the building of a strong gay and lesbian community. Same-sex dancing won't draw any unwelcome attention at most of the clubs at Pleasure Island, especially the large, crowded Mannequins. Many of Universal's City-Walk establishments are similarly gender blind. The tenor of crowds can change, however, depending on what tour is in town, so respect your own intuition.

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) (☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ 800/397-2681; www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines.

Now, Voyager (☎ 800/255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known gay-owned-and-operated travel service.

TRAVELING WITH PETS

For those of us who wouldn't dream of going on vacation without our pets, more and more lodgings are going the pet-friendly route. Be aware however, policies vary from property to property, so call ahead to find out the particulars of your hotel.

None of the Disney resorts allow animals (except service dogs) to stay on the premises or have their own kennels, (the only exception being Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground, where you can have your pet at the full hook up campsites) but resort guests are welcome to board their animals overnight in kennel facilities at the Ticket & Transportation Center. If you only require boarding during the day, kennels are located at all four Disney parks. Universal Orlando & SeaWorld will board small animals during the day only.

Universal's three Loews-run resorts do allow pets on-site. In fact, "Loews Loves Pets" is a program that caters to pets and their families by offering such pet-friendly amenities as food, leashes, bedding, toys, and more. Pet walking, pet pagers, and door hangers to let the resort staff know that there is a pet in the room are also available.

An excellent resource is **www.petswelcome.com**, which dispenses medical

Tips The Peripatetic Pet

It is illegal in Florida to leave your pet inside a parked car, windows rolled down or not. The sweltering heat can easily kill an animal in only a few minutes. All of the major theme parks have kennel facilities available, so if you have brought your pet along, take advantage of them.

Make sure your pet is wearing a name-tag that includes your name and phone number, as well as the phone number of a contact person who can take the call if your pet gets lost while you're away from home.

tips, names of animal-friendly lodgings and campgrounds, and lists of kennels and veterinarians. Also check out www.dogfriendly.com, which features links to

Orlando accommodations, eateries, attractions, and parks that welcome canine companions.

6 Planning Your Trip Online

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity**, and **Orbitz**, sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try Expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go to Expedia.co.uk and Opodo.co.uk.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it’s wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare to your favorite destination becomes available.

Also remember to check **airline websites**, especially those for low-fare carriers such as Southwest, JetBlue, and AirTran, whose fares are often misreported or simply missing from discount travel websites. Even with major airlines, you can often save money by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency’s transaction fee. Many of the lowest discount fares are usually only available if you **book online**: Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from your destination, go to “Getting There,” on p. 41.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. Most of these are announced on Tuesday or Wednesday and must be purchased online. Most are only valid for travel during a very limited time frame—usually within the same month—though some (such as Southwest’s) can be booked further out. Sign up for weekly e-mail alerts at airline websites or check mega-sites that compile comprehensive lists of last-minute specials, such as

Smarter Travel (www.smartertravel.com). For last-minute trips, **site59.com** and **lastminutetravel.com** often have better deals than the major sites.

If you’re willing to give up some control over your flight details, use what is called an “**opaque**” fare service like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or its smaller competitor **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a “mystery airline” at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers—and the possibility of being sent from Philadelphia to Chicago via Tampa is remote; the airlines’ routing computers have gotten a lot better than they used to be. But your chances of getting a 6am or 11pm flight are pretty high. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire, but you have to play their “name your price” game. If you’re new at this, the helpful folks at **BiddingForTravel** (www.biddingfortravel.com) do a good job of demystifying Priceline’s prices and strategies. **Note:** In 2004 Priceline added non-opaque services to its roster. You now have the option to pick exact flights, times, and airlines from a list of offers—or opt to bid on opaque fares as before.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of *Frommer’s Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Shopping online for hotels is generally done one of two ways: by booking through the hotel’s own website or

Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend **Frommers.com** (www.frommers.com), voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine*. We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, bookstore, and online-booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Destinations** section, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,500 destinations around the globe; the **Frommers.com Newsletter**, with the latest deals, travel trends, and money-saving secrets; our **Community** area featuring **Message Boards**, where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); and our **Photo Center**, where you can post queries and share money-saving tips. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

through an independent booking agency (or a fare-service agency like Priceline; see below). Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia.com** offers a long list of special deals and has photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for. **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable are **Hotels.com** and **Quikbook.com**. An excellent free program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxenet.net), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of—and conveniently lists the total price of the room, including the taxes and service charges. It covers all of the major Orlando hotels.

Priceline and Hotwire are even better for hotels than for airfares; with both, you're allowed to pick the general neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering up your money. You can forget about getting a WDW hotel on either with the possible exception of the Dolphin (p. 96) or Swan (p. 97).

On the down side, many hotels stick Priceline guests in their least desirable

rooms. Be sure to go to the **Biddingfor Travel** website (see above) before bidding on a hotel room on Priceline; it features a fairly up-to-date list of hotels that Priceline uses in major cities. For both Priceline and Hotwire, you pay upfront, and the fee is nonrefundable. Remember that your bid does not include local hotel taxes and any resort or parking fees a hotel may charge.

One last tip: It's always a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

7 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Travelers have any number of ways to check their e-mail and access the Internet on the road. Of course, using your own laptop gives you the most flexibility, and many hotels in Orlando do provide data-ports in their rooms. For a list of hotels wired for Internet access, check out **www.wiredhotels.com**. Disney offers high-speed and Wi-fi access to guests at several of its resorts, and all of Universal Orlando's resorts offer high-speed Internet access. Many Orlando hotels offer Wi-Fi access in public areas, however only a few provide in-room access.

If you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail from cybercafes. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes, two places to start looking are at **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**. For a start there's a small Internet cafe located inside the Lake Buena Vista Factory Outlets.

At Walt Disney World, there is an Internet cafe inside DisneyQuest (p. 250), and you can also send e-mail at Innoven-tions in Epcot (p. 214), though you have to pay the park admission fees to use the Web terminals. Payphones with touch-screen displays offering Internet access have been installed at locations throughout Walt Disney World; you can access your e-mail for 25¢ a minute with a 4-minute minimum.

Many hotels have either a business center with computers available, or in some instances there may be a computer located in the lobby for guest use. Some even have Web TV available in the guest rooms, where a keyboard works in conjunction with the television. In either case, there will likely be fees for using them, generally payable with your credit card or, in a few cases, cash only (much like a vending machine).

Online Traveler's Toolbox

- **Airplane Seating and Food.** Find out which seats to reserve and which to avoid (and more) on all major domestic airlines at www.seatguru.com. And check out the type of meal (with photos) you'll likely be served (if any) on airlines around the world at www.airlinemeals.com.
- **Intellicast** (www.intellicast.com) and **Weather.com** (www.weather.com). These sites give weather forecasts for all 50 states and for cities around the world.
- **Mapquest** (www.mapquest.com). This best of the mapping sites lets you choose a specific address or destination, and in seconds, it will return a map as well as detailed directions if you request them.
- **Time and Date** (www.timeanddate.com). See what time (and day) it is anywhere in the world.
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.x-rates.com). See what your dollar or pound is worth in more than 100 other countries.
- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com), for locations of PLUS ATMs worldwide, or **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com), for locations of Cirrus ATMs worldwide.

USING A CELLPHONE

It's a good bet that your cellphone will work in a major city such as Orlando, but take a look at your wireless company's coverage map on its website before heading out just as a precaution. If you need to, you can **rent** a phone from **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchglobal.com) or a rental car location, but be aware that you'll pay \$1 a minute or more for airtime.

If you're not from the U.S., you'll be appalled at the poor reach of our **GSM**

(**Global System for Mobiles**) **wireless network**. Your phone will probably work in most major U.S. cities; it definitely won't work in many rural areas. (To see where GSM phones work in the U.S., check out www.t-mobile.com/coverage/national_popup.asp). And you may or may not be able to send SMS (text messaging) home. Assume nothing—call your wireless provider and get the full scoop. In a worst-case scenario, you can always rent a phone; InTouch USA will deliver to the area hotels.

8 Getting There

BY PLANE

THE MAJOR AIRLINES There are over 37 scheduled airlines and several more charter companies serving the more than 31 million passengers who land in Orlando each year. **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com) provides nearly 20% of the flights to and from Orlando International Airport, offering service from roughly 150 cities.

Other carriers include **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.ca), **America West** (☎ 800/235-9292; www.americawest.com), **American** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.americanair.com), **British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297; www.britishairways.com), **Continental** (☎ 800/525-0280; www.continental.com), **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com), **United Airlines** (☎ 800-241-6522; www.united.com), and **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com) to name a few.

Several so-called no-frills airlines (those offering lower fares but providing few or no amenities) fly to Orlando as well. The biggest is **Southwest Airlines** (☎ 800/435-9792; www.southwest.com), which has flights from many U.S. cities to Orlando and Tampa. **Spirit Air** (☎ 800/772-7117; www.spiritair.com) is another no-frills choice. **JetBlue Airways**

(☎ 800/538-2583; www.jetblue.com) is a low-cost carrier that operates out of a number of U.S. cities, and offers direct flights to Orlando out of New York City. The latter has video screens offering 24 TV channels—a big plus for those traveling with kids—and is a huge favorite with Frommer's editors.

The newest no-frills airline is really the stepsister of Delta: **Song Airlines** (☎ 800/359-7664; www.flysong.com). As of 2004, the airline had personal video monitors—for child-distracting satellite TV and video games—installed on all of its jets.

ORLANDO'S AIRPORT

Orlando International Airport (☎ 407/825-2001; www.state.fl.us/goaa) offers direct or nonstop service from 60 U.S. cities and two dozen international destinations. Rated one of the top airports in the country, it's a thoroughly modern and user-friendly facility with tons of restaurants, shops, a 446-room on-premises Hyatt Regency Hotel, and centrally located information kiosks. All major car-rental companies are located at or near the airport; see "Getting Around" in chapter 4 and Appendix B ("Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites") for more information about car rentals.

Tips Unplugged

If you're flying with a cold or sinus problems, use a decongestant 10 minutes before ascent and descent, to minimize pressure buildup in the inner ear. Kids have an especially tough time with pressure in their ears during ascent and descent. Older kids can chew a piece of gum, and the younger kids should drink (a bottle or sippy cup of their favorite drink) to help alleviate the pressure.

AN ALTERNATIVE **Orlando Sanford International Airport** (☎ 407/585-4000; www.orlandosanfordairport.com) is much smaller than the main airport, but it has grown a bit in recent years, thanks mainly to a small fleet of international carriers including Air 2000, Britannia, and Aeropostal. The airport has Avis, Alamo, Dollar, and Hertz rental-car desks on-site and shuttles to Budget and Enterprise. Mears Transportation shuttles (see below) also serve it.

AIRPORT TRANSPORTATION

Orlando International is 25 miles east of Walt Disney World and 20 miles south of downtown. At rush hour (7–9am and 4–6pm), the drive can be torture and take up to an hour or more; at other times, it's about 30 to 40 minutes depending on your exact destination. **Mears Transportation Group** (☎ 407/423-5566; www.mearstransportation.com) has vans that shuttle passengers from the airport (you catch them at ground level) to the Disney resorts and official hotels, as well as most other Orlando properties. Their air-conditioned vehicles operate around the clock, departing every 15 to 25 minutes in either direction. Rates vary by destination. Round-trip fare for adults is \$25 (\$18 for kids 4–11) between the airport and downtown Orlando or International Drive; \$29 (\$21 for kids 4–11) for Walt Disney World/Lake Buena Vista or West U.S. 192. Children 3 and under ride free.

QuickTransportation/Orlando (☎ 888/784-2522 or 407/354-2456; www.quicktransportation.com) is a bit more personal. Their folks greet you at

baggage claim with a sign bearing your name. They're more expensive than Mears, but they're coming for you. And they're only going to *your* resort. This is a good option for four or more people. Rates run from \$80 (up to seven people, round-trip) to I-Drive/Universal Studios and \$130 for the Disney empire.

Tiffany Towncar (☎ 888/838-2161 or 407/370-2196; www.tiffanytowncar.com) offers a \$95 round-trip rate for up to five people in a van from Orlando International to Disney (\$70 to International Dr. or Universal).

Disney's **Magical Express** is a new service that began operating in May 2005 and will run throughout the 18-month-long "Happiest Celebration on Earth" event at WDW. It's offered to WDW resort guests flying on select airlines to Orlando International Airport. If you use it, Disney will get your bags from the airport to your room without your having to lift a finger. Attach special luggage tags; Disney will send you ahead of time, check your bags at your departure city, and when you get to Orlando, check in at the special Disney desk before boarding a Disney bus that will transport you to your resort. Your luggage will be waiting for you in your room when you arrive. The service will save you both time and money; it must be booked at least 10 days in advance of your arrival through your travel agent or through Disney (☎ 407/934-7639; www.disneyworld.com).

DRIVING TO WALT DISNEY WORLD To get from the airport to the attractions, take the **North** exit out of

the airport to **Highway 528 West**. Follow signs to **I-4**; it takes about 30 to 40 minutes to get to Walt Disney World if the traffic isn't too heavy (however you can double that if it is rush hour or if there's an accident). When you get to I-4, follow the signs **west** toward the attractions.

Note: It's always a good idea when you make reservations to ask about transportation options between the airport and your hotel. Also be sure to ask how far you have to travel to pick up and drop off a rental car. Some lots are miles from the airport, and you could potentially spend lots of time waiting in line and catching shuttles before you actually get to the airport on your day of departure.

GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1½ hours** before a domestic flight and **2½ hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and they may be able to whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport. Keep your ID at the ready to show at check-in, the security checkpoint, and sometimes even the gate. (Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for domestic flights, but they do for international flights to most countries.)

In 2003, the TSA phased out **gate check-in** at all U.S. airports. And **E-tickets** have made paper tickets nearly obsolete. Passengers with E-tickets can beat the ticket-counter lines by using airport **electronic kiosks** or even **online check-in** from your home computer. Online check-in involves logging on to your airlines' website, accessing your reservation, and printing out your boarding pass—and the airline may even offer you bonus

miles to do so! If you're using a kiosk at the airport, bring the credit card you used to book the ticket or your frequent-flier card. Print out your boarding pass from the kiosk and simply proceed to the security checkpoint with your pass and a photo ID. If you're checking bags or looking to snag an exit-row seat, you will be able to do so using most airline kiosks. Even the smaller airlines are employing the kiosk system, but always call your airline to make sure these alternatives are available.

Security checkpoint lines are getting shorter than they were during 2001 and 2002, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners. Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security, except for folks escorting disabled passengers or children.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't**. The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov/public/index.jsp) for details.

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

Airlines go bankrupt, so protect yourself by **buying your tickets with a credit card**, as the Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy.) **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against “carrier default” for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust mid-trip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than \$25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

Airport screeners may decide that your checked luggage needs to be searched by hand. You can now purchase luggage locks that allow screeners to open and relock a checked bag if hand-searching is necessary. For more information on the locks and a list of retailers selling them, visit **www.travelsentry.org**. If you use something other than TSA-approved locks, your lock will be cut off your suitcase if a TSA agent needs to hand-search your luggage.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

There’s no shortage of discounted and promotional fares to Orlando. November, December, and January (excluding holidays) often bring fare wars that can result in savings of 50% or more, but, in a slower economy, specials may be available more often. Watch for ads in your local newspaper and on TV, call the airlines, or check out their websites. Here are some other ways to keep your airfare costs down:

- Passengers who can book their tickets **long in advance**, who can **stay over Saturday night**, or who **fly midweek** or **at less-trafficked hours** may pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.
- No-frills airlines have reduced their price advantage, but some **charter**

flights still go to Florida, especially during the winter season and particularly from Canada. They often cost less than regularly scheduled flights, but they tend to be very complicated. It’s best to go to a good travel agent and ask them to find one for you.

- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see “Planning Your Trip Online,” earlier in this chapter).
- **Consolidators**, also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets, although they usually can’t beat the Internet on fares within North America. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Miami Herald*. **Beware:** Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines, which may leave at inconvenient times and experience delays. One reliable consolidator is **FlyCheap** (☎ 800/FLY-CHEAP; www.1800flycheap.com), which is owned by package-holiday megolith MyTravel and has especially good access to fares for sunny destinations.
- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Accrue enough miles, and you’ll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It’s free, and you’ll get the best choice of seats, faster response to phone

inquiries, and prompter service if your luggage is stolen, your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don't need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.

- For many more tips about air travel, including a rundown of the major frequent-flier credit cards, pick up a copy of *Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

BY CAR

Orlando is 436 miles from Atlanta; 1,312 miles from Boston; 1,120 miles from Chicago; 1,009 miles from Cleveland; 1,170 miles from Dallas; 1,114 miles from Detroit; 1,088 miles from New York City; and 1,282 miles from Toronto.

- From Atlanta, take I-75 south to the Florida Turnpike to I-4 west.
- From points northeast, take I-95 south to Daytona Beach and I-4 west.
- From Chicago, take I-65 south to Nashville, then I-24 south to I-75, then south on the Florida Turnpike to I-4 west.
- From Cleveland, take I-77 south to Columbia, S.C., and then I-26 east to I-95 south to I-4 west.
- From Dallas, take I-20 east to I-49, south to I-10, east to I-75, then south on the Florida Turnpike to I-4 west.
- From Detroit, take I-75 south to the Florida Turnpike, then exit on I-4 west.
- From Toronto, take Canadian Route 401 south to Queen Elizabeth Way, then south to I-90 (New York State Thruway), east to I-87 (New York State Thruway), south to I-95 over

the George Washington Bridge, then south on I-95 to I-4 west.

AAA (☎ 800/222-1134; www.aaa.com) and other auto club members should call their local offices for maps and optimum driving directions.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak trains (☎ 800/872-7245; www.amtrak.com) pull into stations at 1400 Sligh Blvd. in downtown Orlando (23 miles from Walt Disney World), and 111 Dakin Ave. in Kissimmee (15 miles from WDW). There are also stops in Winter Park, 10 miles north of downtown Orlando at 150 W. Morse Blvd.; and in Sanford, 23 miles northeast of downtown Orlando, 800 Persimmon Ave., which is also the end terminal for the Auto Train (see below).

FARES As with airline fares, you can occasionally get discounts if you book far in advance. There may be some restrictions on travel dates for discounted fares, mostly around very busy holiday times. Amtrak also offers money-saving packages—including accommodations (some at WDW resorts), car rentals, tours, and train fare (☎ 800/321-8684).

AMTRAK'S AUTO TRAIN This option offers the convenience of bringing your car to Florida without having to drive it all the way. It begins in Lorton, Virginia—about a 4-hour drive from New York, 2 hours from Philadelphia—and ends at Sanford, 23 miles northeast of Orlando. (There are no stops in between.) Reserve early for the lowest prices. Fares average \$530 (\$1,100 with a berth) for two passengers and an auto. Call ☎ 800/872-7245 for details.

9 Packages for the Independent Traveler

The number and diversity of package tours to Orlando is staggering. But you can save money if you're willing to do the

research. Start by looking in the travel section of your local Sunday newspaper and checking the ads in the back of travel

magazines such as *Travel & Leisure* and *Condé Nast Traveler*. Also, stop at a sizable travel agency and pick up brochures from several companies. Go over them at home and compare the offerings to find the optimum package for your trip.

You should also obtain the *Walt Disney World Vacations* brochure (see contact details at the beginning of this chapter), which lists WDW packages or head to www.disneyworld.com (where you'll find loads of information and can book a package as well). Disney's array of choices can include airfare, accommodations on or off Disney property, theme-park passes, a rental car, meals, a Disney cruise, and/or a stay at Disney's beach resorts in Vero Beach or Hilton Head, South Carolina. Some packages are tied to a season while others are for special-interest vacationers, including golfers, honeymooners, or spa aficionados. For more information, or to book a Disney vacation package, call ☎ **407/939-6244**.

Bank One has teamed up with Disney to offer the Disney/VISA credit card that allows cardholders to accumulate points or Dream Dollars as they are called, for everyday purchases. Certain special purchases qualifying for double or even triple Dream Dollars can be redeemed or applied towards the purchase of Disney tickets, vacation packages, or purchases at

the Disney Store, Disney catalog, and Disney online.

Although not on the same scale as Disney's options, Universal Orlando packages have improved greatly with the addition of the Islands of Adventure theme park, the CityWalk food-and-club district, and Universal's Loews-run hotels. The options include lodging, VIP access to Universal's theme parks, and discounts to other non-Disney attractions. Some include round-trip airfare. Contact **Universal Studios Vacations** at ☎ **800/711-0080** or go online to **www.universalstudiosvacations.com**.

SeaWorld also offers 2- and 3-night packages that include rooms from a choice of a handful of SeaWorld area hotels, car rental, and tickets to SeaWorld. Call ☎ **800/557-4268** or surf the Internet to **www.seaworldvacations.com**.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Major airlines offering Orlando packages include **American Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (☎ 800/221-6666; www.delta.vacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/301-3800; www.co.vacations.com), and **United Vacations** (☎ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com). Packages can include round-trip airfare, accommodations, rental car or

Tips Package Deals

Just about everybody seems to be in the business of package deals these days. While Disney itself offers a handful of package options, the discounts aren't usually that considerable. Do, however, ask reservations clerks what the latest and greatest promotion is, or what may be running at the time you intend to visit. Promotions tend to run for a limited time so be sure to get all the details—when it runs, what it includes, what it doesn't, and so on. You should also search the Disney website (**www.disneyworld.com**) for special deals and promotions.

For up-to-date coverage of promotional offerings and discount codes good at Disney World, check out **www.mousesavers.com**. The site also offers its own slate of Disney specials.



A Mickey Mouse Affair: Getting Married at Walt Disney World

Want to fly up the aisle on Aladdin's magic carpet? Arrive in a glass coach pulled by six white horses? Or take the plunge, literally and figuratively, on the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror?

If you've always dreamed of a fairy-tale wedding, Disney is happy to oblige for a price (though often a large one). Recognizing WDW's popularity as a honeymoon destination—each year, more honeymooners head here than to any other spot in America—Disney, in 1995, cut out the middleman and officially went into the wedding business. And, oh, what big business it is!

Disney's first step was building the multimillion-dollar nondenominational chapel in the middle of the Seven Seas Lagoon. The next step was letting the world know the Disney wedding chapel was open for business. The first nuptials were televised live on the Lifetime television network. (Construction was still in progress at the chapel, so the bride and groom wore white hard hats.) Since it opened, over 20,000 couples, hailing from every state and a number of foreign countries, have mixed matrimony with Disney magic at the chapel, which resembles a Victorian summerhouse. You'll have to cough up at least \$4,200 (and probably a lot more) for a ceremony here.

An intimate wedding at WDW for two starts at about \$3,500 including a 4-night honeymoon at Disney's Port Orleans, theme-park tickets, a daylight ceremony at one of several Disney resort locations, a wedding cake, bouquet for the bride, a marriage certificate signed by Mickey himself, and a host of other trimmings. Custom weddings for parties of more than 8 start at \$7,500. The average Disney wedding costs \$20,000 and has 100 guests (Prince Charming not included). A la carte add-ons range from \$250 for a white-dove fly-over and \$2,200 to arrive in Cinderella's glass coach. It would cost \$42,000 or more to rent the Magic Kingdom for a reception (not including ceremony, food, and other doodads). If you can imagine it, Disney can probably do it, as long as your wallet matches that imagination.

For details, call ☎ **321/939-4610** (☎ 800/370-6009 for honeymoons only) or go to **www.disneyweddings.com** on the Internet.

round-trip airport transfers, unlimited admission to Disney (or other) parks, and other special features. In packages utilizing WDW and Universal Studios resorts, you will receive all of the advantages given to guests of these properties (see chapter 5, "Where to Stay," for details). Prices vary widely depending on the resort you choose, your departure point, and the time of year.

Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59,

Priceline, and Lastminute.com—also do a brisk business in packages. If you're unsure about the pedigree of a smaller packager, check with the Better Business Bureau in the city where the company is based, or go online at **www.bbb.org**. If a packager won't tell you where they're based, don't fly with them.

Touraine Travel (☎ 800/967-5583; **www.tourainetravel.com**) is a source of packages to Disney, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld.

For linksters, **Golf Getaways** (☎ 800/800-4028; www.golfgetaways.com) and **Golfpac Vacations** (☎ 800/327-0878; www.golfpacinc.com) offer play-and-stay packages.

Before you invest in a package tour, get some answers. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each.

Then look up the hotels' reviews in a Frommer's guide and check their rates for your specific dates of travel online.

Finally, look for **hidden expenses**. Ask whether airport departure fees and taxes, for example, are included in the total cost.

10 Disney Cruise Packages

There's hardly a Florida tourist market that WDW hasn't successfully tapped. Ocean-going vacations are no exception. **Disney Cruise Line** (☎ 800/951-3532; www.disneycruise.com) launched the *Magic* and *Wonder* in 1998 and 1999, respectively. It didn't take long before the line made it all the way to the top of the family cruising market.

The *Magic* is Art Deco in style, with Mickey in the three-level lobby and a *Beauty and the Beast* mural in its top restaurant, Lumiere's. The *Wonder*'s decor is Art Nouveau. Ariel commands its lobby, and its featured eatery, Triton's, sports a mural from *The Little Mermaid*.

Subtle differences aside, these are nearly identical twins. Both are 83,000 tons with 12 decks, 875 cabins, and room for 2,400 guests. There are some adults-only areas including **Palo**, an intimate and romantic Italian restaurant; however, both ships have extensive kids' and teens' programs that take up almost an entire deck. They're broken into four age groups: the **Flounder's Reef Nursery** for ages 3 months to 3 years; **Disney's Oceaneer Club** for ages 3 to 7; **Disney's Oceaneer Lab** for ages 8 to 12; and **Common Grounds** (on the *Wonder*) or **The Stack** (on the *Magic*) for ages 13 to 17.

Restaurants, shows, and other onboard activities are extremely family-oriented. One of the line's unique features is a dine-around option that lets you move among main restaurants (each ship has four) from night to night while keeping the same servers.

The 3-night voyages visit Nassau and Castaway Cay, Disney's own private island; 4-day voyages add Freeport. There also are 7-night eastern Caribbean (St. Thomas, St. Maarten, St. John, and Castaway Cay) and 7-night western Caribbean (Key West, Grand Cayman, Cozumel, and Castaway Cay) itineraries. Special 10-day and 14-day Caribbean cruises are offered as well; call for details and rates.

Seven-night land-sea packages include 3 or 4 days afloat, with the rest of the week at a WDW resort. Prices at press time ranged from \$799 to \$5,199 adults, \$399 to \$2,199 kids 3 to 12, and \$139 kids under 3, (**Note:** infants under 12 weeks are not allowed aboard ship) depending on your choice of stateroom and resort. Packages are available that add round-trip air and unlimited admission to the WDW parks, Pleasure Island, and other Disney attractions. Cruise-only options for 3 nights are \$399 to \$2,849 adults, \$229 to \$1,099 kids 3 to 12, and \$99 those under 3; 4-night cruises are \$499 to \$3,249 adults, \$329 to \$1,199 kids 3 to 12, and \$99 kids under 3. Disney's 7-night cruises sell for \$799 to \$5,199 adults, \$399 to \$2,199 kids 3 to 12, and \$139 kids under 3.

All cruises depart from Port Canaveral, which is about an hour east of Orlando by car. If you buy a Land and Sea package, transportation to and from Orlando is included. You can get discounted fares if you book well in advance and go during non-peak periods, and specials or "Magic Rates" run periodically. For more

Tips Avoid The Ups and Downs

Nothing spoils a cruise like a storm—or worse. In the first case, consider avoiding hurricane season altogether (June 1 to Nov 30, though the peak is July to mid-Oct). These unpredictable storms can both spoil your fun and upset the strongest of stomachs. Avoiding the stormy seasons aside, pack a few motion-sickness pills or patches just in case.

Speaking of spoiling a cruise, several cruise ships, including the *Disney Magic*, have had outbreaks of a virus that caused stomach flu–like symptoms in the past. This is no ill reflection on any one line: Cruise ships are closed environments, and sometimes a passenger brings the illness on board. For an Internet rating by the **Centers for Disease Control**, go to www2.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp/vspmain.asp. Note, however, that the site is often weeks out of date.

information, call Disney Cruise Line or check out its very informative website,

which also allows you to plan and reserve shore excursions before you go.

11 Recommended Reading

The best Walt Disney World & Orlando guidebook on the planet (yes, this one) covers almost everything most travelers need and want to know. But there are a few areas where we bow to the expertise of less-than-mainstream or special-interest books. So here are a few additional books that may be available in your local library or bookstore.

- ***National Audubon Society Field Guide to Florida*** (second edition, Audubon Society) is a dandy back-pocket guide that delivers a wonderful education on the state's flora and fauna, parks and preserves, land, weather, natural phenomena, and much more. Plus, it's dripping with pictures to help newcomers and natives alike tell a yellow-bellied slider from a cooter.
- ***A Photo Journey to Central Florida*** (1992, AAA Publications), though somewhat hard to find, features some rather nice photos of the area's architecture, historical sites, and scenic spots, along with pictures of the parks and attractions. It offers a brief glimpse into Florida and its natural

beauty alongside the more commercial aspects of Orlando.

- ***Vegetarian Walt Disney World and Greater Orlando*** (2000, Vegetarian World Guides) is the most comprehensive and enterprising guide around for vegetarians, vegans, or mainstream diners looking for a break from carnivore menus. Susan Shumaker and Than Saffel review 275 restaurants and hotels, more than half of which are on Disney soil. They also give tips about what to eat going to and from Orlando as well as the dos and don'ts of ethnic dining in central Florida. There's also a section on kids' dining.
- ***Mickey's Gourmet Cookbook*** (1994, Disney Editions) is full of some of the most popular recipes from the House of Mouse—a few culinary secrets that Disney is willing to share. You can keep your vacation going even after you get home—providing you can cook. Do note that another way to take home some of the flavor of WDW is to simply ask for the recipe of a dish that you enjoyed. In most

cases, Disney will be happy to e-mail the instructions and ingredients to you at home.

- Kids (and even adults) will enjoy ***Popping Up Around Walt Disney World*** (2004, Disney Editions). This colorful and detailed pop-up book offers an illustrative tour through the world of Disney. It takes readers through the parks, details some of the attractions, and tosses in a bit of trivia, too.
- ***50 Hikes in Central Florida*** (2002, Countryman Press) features a more natural approach to visiting Florida, showcasing its parks and hiking trails for those who prefer the great outdoors.
- ***Hidden Mickeys: A Field Guide to Walt Disney World's Best Kept Secrets*** (2003, The Intrepid Traveler) is filled with trivia, and, of course, those Hidden Mickeys—including tips on where and how to look for them.

For International Visitors

Nowadays, a trip to the United States, whether it's your first or fifth, requires an additional degree of planning. This chapter will provide you with essential information, helpful tips, and advice for the more common challenges that some international visitors may encounter.

1 Preparing for Your Trip

VISITOR INFORMATION ABROAD

There are several **Orlando Tourism Offices** located outside the United States. Information is available from the following sources:

- **Argentina** ☎ **0800-999-1749**; www.orlandoinfo.com/argentina
- **Belgium** ☎ **32-2/705-7897**; www.orlandoinfo.com
- **Brazil** ☎ **0800/556652**; www.orlandoinfo.com/brasil
- **Canada** ☎ **1-800-646-2079**; www.orlandokissimmee.com/canada
- **Germany** ☎ **0800-100-7325**; www.orlandoinfo.com/de
- **Japan** ☎ **3-3501-7245**; www.orlandoinfo.com/japan
- **Latin America** ☎ **407-363-5872**; www.orlandoinfo.com/latinoamerica
- **Mexico** ☎ **01-800/800-4636**; www.orlandoinfo.com/mexico
- **Spain** ☎ **407/363-5872**; www.orlandoinfo.com/espana
- **United Kingdom** ☎ **0800-018-6760**; www.orlandoinfo.com/uk

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Check at your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for current information and requirements. You can also obtain a visa application and other information online

at the **U.S. State Department's** website, at <http://travel.state.gov>.

VISAS The U.S. State Department has a **Visa Waiver Program** allowing citizens of certain countries to enter the United States without a visa for stays of up to 90 days. At press time these included Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Citizens of these countries need only a valid Machine Readable Passport (a passport that includes specific biographical data required by international standards) and a round-trip air or cruise ticket in their possession upon arrival. If they first enter the United States, they may also visit Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, and/or the Caribbean islands and return to the United States without a visa. Further information is available from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Canadian citizens may enter the United States without visas or Machine Readable Passports; they need only proof of residence in most cases.

Citizens of all other countries must have (1) a valid passport that expires at



Walt Disney World Services for International Visitors

Walt Disney World welcomes millions of international guests every year and to help make guests' experience better, Disney offer a language assistance program that provides information from a WDW operator and a telephone interpreter. This service is offered in several languages (☎ 407/824-2222).

Other special services designed for international travelers include the following:

- **Ears to the World** are personal translator units that translate over 25 of Disney's shows and attractions into French, German, Portuguese, Japanese and Spanish. You can pick up a unit at no charge at the Guest Relations desk located just inside each of Disney's major parks.
- Detailed guidebooks and maps to the four major parks are available in Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and Japanese at the five International Information Centers (marked by an "i" on park guide maps) located in the theme parks and at Downtown Disney. Staffed by multilingual cast members, the information centers can also help with tickets, dining arrangements, and a variety of other services.
- Currency exchange of up to \$100 is available at the Guest Relations desk at each major park and at all of the WDW resorts. (For additional locations and information regarding foreign currency exchange, see "Money" later in this chapter.)
- Menus written in French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Japanese are available at most table-service restaurants inside the theme parks and resorts.
- Cast members who speak foreign languages sport a gold badge with the flag of that country on their name-tags.
- World Key Terminals at Epcot offer basic information about the park and assistance with dining reservations in Spanish.
- Phoning home is easier with telephones that have been equipped with software to expedite international calls by allowing guests to dial direct to international destinations. All public telephones located throughout Walt Disney World also provide instructions in French, German, Portuguese, Japanese, and Spanish. International calling cards can be found in vending machines located just inside the main entrances to each of the four main parks.
- There's also online help at www.disneyworld.com. Once you're on the website, go to the bottom of the screen and click "International Sites."

least 6 months later than the scheduled end of their visit to the United States, and (2) a tourist visa, which may be obtained for a minimum fee of \$100 (as high as

\$200 in some countries) from any U.S. consulate.

To obtain a visa, the traveler must submit a completed application form (either in person or by mail) with a

1½-inch-square photo, and must demonstrate binding ties to a residence abroad. Usually you can obtain a visa at once or within 24 hours; however, it can take up to two weeks, even a month under certain circumstances, usually taking longer during the summer rush from June through August. If you cannot go in person, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for directions on applying by mail. Your travel agent or airline office may also be able to provide you with visa applications and instructions. The U.S. consulate or embassy that issues your visa will determine whether you will be issued a multiple- or single-entry visa and any restrictions regarding the length of your stay.

British subjects can obtain up-to-date visa information by calling the **U.S. Embassy Visa Information Line** (☎ 0891/200-290) or by visiting the “Consular Services” section of the American Embassy London’s website at www.usembassy.org.uk.

Irish citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information through the **Embassy of the USA Dublin**, 42 Elgin Rd., Dublin 4, Ireland (☎ 353/1-668-8777; or by checking the “Consular Services” section of the website at <http://dublin.usembassy.gov>.

Australian citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information by contacting the **U.S. Embassy Canberra**, Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6214-5600) or by checking the U.S. Diplomatic Mission’s website at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/consular>.

Citizens of **New Zealand** can obtain up-to-date visa information by contacting the **U.S. Embassy New Zealand**, 29 Fitzherbert Terr., Thorndon, Wellington (☎ 644/472-2068), or get the information directly from the “Services to New Zealanders” section of the website at <http://usembassy.org.nz>.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS Unless you’re arriving from an area known to be suffering from an **epidemic** (particularly cholera or yellow fever), inoculations or vaccinations are not required for entry into the United States. If you have a medical condition that requires **syringe-administered medications**, carry a valid signed prescription from your physician—the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) no longer allows airline passengers to pack syringes in their carry-on baggage without documented proof of medical need. If you have a disease that requires treatment with **narcotics**, you should also carry documented proof with you—smuggling narcotics aboard a plane is a serious offense that carries severe penalties in the U.S.

Requirements for **HIV-positive visitors** entering the United States are vague and change frequently. According to the latest publication of *HIV and Immigrants: A Manual for AIDS Service Providers*, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) doesn’t require a medical exam for entry into the United States, but INS officials may stop individuals because they look sick or because they are carrying AIDS/HIV medicine.

Tips Welcome to America

International visitors who surf the Web can find tons of information from **USA Tourist** (www.usatourist.com) in English, German, French, Spanish, and Japanese. The site has Orlando and Walt Disney World information, hotels, details about the attractions, and travel tips. The **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau** (www.orlandoinfo.com) also provides a wealth of great information in English, German, Japanese, Spanish, and Portuguese.

If an HIV-positive noncitizen applies for a nonimmigrant visa, the question on the application regarding communicable diseases is tricky no matter which way it's answered. If the applicant checks "no," INS may deny the visa on the grounds that the applicant committed fraud. If the applicant checks "yes" or if INS suspects the person is HIV-positive, it will deny the visa unless the applicant asks for a special waiver for visitors. This waiver is for people visiting the United States for a short time, for instance, to attend a conference, to visit close relatives, or to receive medical treatment. It can be a confusing situation. For further up-to-the-minute information, contact **AIDSInfo** (☎ **800/448-0440** or 301/519-6616 outside the U.S.; www.aidsinfo.nih.gov) or the **Gay Men's Health Crisis** (☎ **212/367-1000**; www.gmhc.org).

DRIVER'S LICENSES Foreign driver's licenses are mostly recognized in the U.S., although you may want to get an international license if your home license is not written in English.

PASSPORT INFORMATION

Safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt. Make a copy of the critical pages, including the passport number, and store it in a safe place, separate from the passport itself—not in your checked luggage. If you lose your passport, visit the nearest consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement. Passport applications are downloadable from the websites listed below.

Note: The International Civil Aviation Organization has recommended a policy requiring that *every* individual who travels by air have a passport. In response, many countries are now requiring that children, even infants, must be issued their own passport to travel internationally, where before those under 16 or so may have been allowed to travel on a parent or guardian's passport.

FOR RESIDENTS OF CANADA

You can pick up a passport application at one of 28 regional passport offices or most travel agencies. Canadian children who travel must have their own passport. However, if you hold a valid Canadian passport issued before December 11, 2001 that bears the name of your child, the passport remains valid for you and your child until it expires. Passports cost C\$85 for those 16 years and older (valid 5 years), C\$35 children 3 to 15 (valid 5 years), and C\$20, children under 3 (valid 3 years). Applications, which must be accompanied by two identical passport-size photographs and proof of Canadian citizenship, are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office**, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (☎ **800/567-6868**; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/passport). Processing takes 5 to 10 days if you apply in person, or about 3 weeks by mail.

FOR RESIDENTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

To enter the U.S., you must have a Machine Readable Passport. To pick up an application for a passport, visit the nearest Passport Office, major post office, or travel agency. You can also contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ☎ **0870/571-0410** or visit its website at www.passport.gov.uk. Passports are £33 for adults and £19 for children under 16, with another £30 fee if you apply in person at a Passport Office. Processing takes about 2 weeks. (1 week if you apply at the Passport Office in person)

FOR RESIDENTS OF IRELAND

You can apply for a 10-year passport, costing €57, at the **Passport Office**, Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (☎ **01/671-1633**; www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those under age 18 and over 65 must apply for a €12 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall,

Cork (☎ 021/272-525) or over the counter at most main post offices.

FOR RESIDENTS OF AUSTRALIA

You can get an application from your local post office or any branch of Passports Australia, but you must schedule an interview at the passport office to present your application materials. Call the **Australian Passport Information Service** at ☎ 131-232, or visit the government website at www.passports.gov.au. Passports for adults are A\$144 and for those under 18 are A\$72.

FOR RESIDENTS OF NEW ZEALAND

You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ☎ 0800/225-050 or ☎ 04/474-8100 (both in New Zealand), or log on to www.passports.govt.nz. Passports for adults are NZ\$80 and for children under 16 NZ\$40.

CUSTOMS

WHAT YOU CAN BRING IN

Every visitor more than 21 years of age may bring in, free of duty, the following: (1) 1 liter of wine or hard liquor; (2) 200 cigarettes, 100 cigars (but not from Cuba), or 3 pounds of smoking tobacco; and (3) \$100 worth of gifts. These exemptions are offered to travelers who spend at least 72 hours in the United States and who have not claimed them within the preceding 6 months. It is altogether forbidden to bring into the country foodstuffs (particularly fruit, cooked meats, and canned goods) and plants (vegetables, seeds, tropical plants, and the like). Foreign tourists may bring in or take out up to \$10,000 in U.S. or foreign currency with no formalities; larger sums must be declared to U.S. Customs on entering or leaving, which includes filing form CM 4790. For more specific information regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection, contact your

nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or the **U.S. Customs** office (☎ 202/927-1770 or www.customs.ustras.gov).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME

U.K. citizens returning from a non-EU country have a customs allowance of: 200 cigarettes; 50 cigars; 250 grams of smoking tobacco; 2 liters of still table wine; 1 liter of spirits or strong liqueurs (over 22% volume); 2 liters of fortified wine, sparkling wine, or other liqueurs; 60cc of perfume; 250cc of toilet water; and £145 worth of all other goods, including gifts and souvenirs. People under 17 are not allowed the tobacco or alcohol allowance. For more information, contact HM Customs & Excise at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, request the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.ccradrc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C\$750 exemption, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, one can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada valued at less than C\$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under \$60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as expensive foreign cameras. Note: The \$750 exemption can only be used once a year and only after an absence of 7 days.

The duty-free allowance in **Australia** is A\$400 or, for those under 18, A\$200. Citizens age 18 and over can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125 milliliters of alcohol. If you're returning with valuables you already own,

such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263, or log on to **www.customs.gov.au**.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all 3 if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 0800/428-786 or 04/473-6099; **www.customs.govt.nz**).

HEALTH INSURANCE

Although it's not required of travelers, health insurance is highly recommended. Unlike many European countries, the United States does not usually offer free or low-cost medical care to its citizens or visitors. Doctors and hospitals are expensive, and in most cases will require advance payment or proof of coverage before they render their services. Policies can cover everything from the loss or theft of your baggage and trip cancellation to the guarantee of bail in case you're arrested. Good policies will also cover the costs of an accident, repatriation, or death. See "Insurance, Health & Safety" in chapter 2 for more information. Packages such as **Europ Assistance's "Worldwide Healthcare Plan"** are sold by European automobile

clubs and travel agencies at attractive rates. **Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc.** (☎ 800/821-2828; **www.worldwideassistance.com**) is the agent for Europ Assistance in the United States.

Though lack of health insurance may prevent you from being admitted to a hospital in nonemergencies, don't worry about being left on a street corner to die: The American way is to fix you now and bill the living daylight out of you later.

If you get sick or are injured in Orlando, there are basic first-aid centers in all of the major theme parks. There's also a 24-hour toll-free number for the **Poison Control Center** (☎ 800/282-3171). Disney and many other resorts have in-room medical service 24 hours a day through **Centra Care** by calling ☎ 407/238-2000.

Doctors on Call Service (☎ 407/399-3627) is a group that makes house and room calls in most of the Orlando area. **Centra Care** has several walk-in clinics listed in the Yellow Pages, including ones on Turkey Lake Rd. (near Universal) (☎ 407/351-6682) and at Lake Buena Vista, near Disney (☎ 407/934-2273), and on U.S. 192 (W. Irlo Bronson Highway) in the Formosa Gardens Shopping Center (☎ 407/397-7032). Prescriptions can be filled at pharmacies such as **Walgreens** and **Eckerd Drugs**, which have some stores that are open 24 hours a day; all of which are listed in the Yellow Pages. Many area discount stores, such as **Kmart** and **Target**, and grocers such as **Publix** or **Goodings** also have pharmacies.

INSURANCE FOR BRITISH TRAVELERS Most big travel agents offer their own insurance and will probably try to sell you their package when you book a holiday. Think before you sign. **Britain's Consumers' Association** recommends that you insist on seeing the policy and reading the fine print before buying travel insurance. **The Association of British Insurers** (☎ 020/7600-3333;

Fun Fact Laying Out the International Welcome Mat

Orlando welcomes an average of just over 2 million international visitors each year. Over 75% cross an ocean to get to see the Mouse, with the remaining 25% coming from America's neighbors to the north and south. The British lead the international brigade with an average 937,000 citizens of the U.K. making the trip annually. Canada (530,500), Brazil (68,000), and Japan (29,000) round out the rest of the top four.

www.abi.org.uk) gives advice by phone and publishes *Holiday Insurance*, a free guide to policy provisions and prices. You might also shop around for better deals: Try **Columbus Direct** (☎ 020/7375-0011; www.columbusdirect.net).

INSURANCE FOR CANADIAN TRAVELERS Canadians should check with their provincial health plan offices or call **Health Canada** (☎ 613/957-2991; www.hc-sc.gc.ca) to find out the extent of their coverage and what documentation and receipts they must take home in case they are treated in the United States.

MONEY

CURRENCY The U.S. monetary system is very simple: The most common **bills** are the \$1 (colloquially, a “buck”), \$5, \$10, and \$20 denominations. There are also \$2 bills (seldom encountered), \$50 bills, and \$100 bills (the last two are usually not welcome as payment for small purchases). All the paper money was recently redesigned, making the famous faces adorning them disproportionately large. The old-style bills are still legal tender.

There are seven denominations of coins: 1¢ (1 cent, or a penny); 5¢ (5 cents, or a nickel); 10¢ (10 cents, or a dime); 25¢ (25 cents, or a quarter); 50¢ (50 cents, or a half dollar); the gold-colored “Sacagawea” coin worth \$1; and, prized by collectors, the rare, older silver dollar.

Note: The “foreign-exchange bureaus” so common in Europe are rare even at airports in the United States and nonexistent

outside major cities. It's best to leave any currency other than U.S. dollars at home—it may prove a greater nuisance to you than it's worth. If you must, you can exchange foreign currency at **Guest Relations** desks at all four Disney parks, or at **City Hall** in the Magic Kingdom and **Earth Station** at Epcot. Currency can also be exchanged at Walt Disney World resorts, as well as some of the larger area resorts, and at the **SunBank** across from Downtown Disney Marketplace. There are also currency exchanges at Guest Services at Universal Orlando and SeaWorld.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS Though traveler's checks are widely accepted, make sure that they're denominated in U.S. dollars, as foreign-currency checks are often difficult to exchange if they are accepted at all. The three traveler's checks that are most widely recognized—and least likely to be denied—are **Visa**, **American Express**, and **Thomas Cook**. Be sure to record the numbers of the checks, and keep that information in a separate place in case they get lost or stolen. Most businesses are pretty good about taking traveler's checks, but you're better off cashing them in at a bank (in small amounts, of course) and paying in cash. **Remember:** You'll need identification, such as a driver's license or passport, to exchange a traveler's check.

CREDIT CARDS & ATMs Credit cards are the most widely used form of payment in the United States: **Visa** (Barclaycard in Britain); **MasterCard**

(EuroCard in Europe, Access in Britain, Chargex in Canada); **American Express**; **Diners Club**; **Discover**; and **Carte Blanche**. With the exception of Carte Blanche, all of these credit cards are accepted at the Disney, SeaWorld, and Universal parks. Most places in Orlando will accept at least one type of credit card, though there are a small number of stores and restaurants that will not take them, so be sure to ask in advance. Most businesses will display a sticker near their entrance to let you know which cards are accepted there. (**Note:** Businesses may require a minimum purchase, generally around \$10, to use a credit card; in addition, some will require photo ID when you use your card).

It is strongly recommended that you bring at least one major credit card. You must have a credit or charge card to rent a car. Hotels and airlines usually require a credit card imprint as a deposit against expenses, and in an emergency a credit card can be priceless. Be aware as well that there are differing policies when using credit cards and debit cards so be sure to check if additional fees apply when using your debit card.

You'll find **automated teller machines (ATMs)** in most tourist areas, shopping centers, and often in larger resorts, as well as downtown. Some ATMs let you draw U.S. currency against your bank and credit cards. Check with your bank before leaving home, and remember that you will need your personal identification number (PIN) to do so. Most accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, as well as ATM cards from other U.S. banks. Expect to be charged up to \$4 per transaction (sometimes more), however, if you're not using your own bank's ATM. In rare cases, you may get charged fees by both your own bank and the one that owns the ATM you are using. (See "Money" in chapter 2, "Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando," for ATM locations.)

SAFETY

Walt Disney World and Orlando are generally safe, and the theme park areas are even safer. That said, this is still a major city, and crime is not unheard of. Take the same general precautions you would at home to minimize your chances of becoming the victim of a crime.

GENERAL SAFETY U.S. urban areas tend to be less safe than those in Europe or Japan. Stay alert. While Orlando isn't a high-crime area, visitors should exercise a normal amount of caution. Street signs in downtown Orlando help keep visitors from wandering into the less-desirable neighborhoods. If there are any doubts as to which neighborhoods are safe, it is wise to ask the local tourist office or your car-rental agency for advice. You should always avoid deserted areas, especially at night, when darkness just adds to the potential for a problem. Don't go into city parks at night unless there's an event that attracts crowds. Don't have valuables with you on the streets or blatantly display flashy cameras or electronic equipment. If you're using a pricey camera, stow it in a plain bag when you're not taking pictures. Keep money, credit cards, passports, and your driver's license in a money belt or small purse and wear it at all times. Keep only the day's spending money with you in your wallet (the remainder in a safe, not your suitcase) and keep it in a front pocket. Make sure to sling your purse strap over your head and across your chest, not just over a shoulder or on your back. This will prevent someone from running by and being able to grab and go with your things. Leave those backpack pocketbooks at home—they are an open invitation for someone to reach in and grab your wallet or other valuables. If you do have an emergency, report it as quickly as possible by calling **911**, which is the emergency police, ambulance, and fire number throughout Florida.

Here are a few other pointers to ensure you don't find yourself targeted by a thief:

- When you get cash for your trip, request small denominations. That way, you won't have to break large bills and leave yourself open to unwanted attention. Generally, \$50 bills are the largest denomination that most businesses will accept, though in some cases they will take a \$100 bill.
- Technically, it isn't actual theft, but the phone charges at hotels may make you feel as if you've been robbed. If you use your hotel room's telephone for calls, you might be charged astronomical sums for both local, otherwise toll-free, and long distance calls (some hotels do offer free local calls). Every hotel is different so be sure to read the instruction card usually found near the phone, or ask about rates and charges at the front desk. A good alternative is to use pre-paid calling cards (available almost anywhere these days), your cellphone, or a calling card from your long distance carrier at a payphone.
- Even if you're staying at a resort on Disney property, always remember to lock your room door, even if you're just going to get ice. Hotels are open to the public, and in a large hotel, security may not be able to screen everyone entering. Take your key with you wherever you go. When you're inside your hotel room, always confirm the identity of anyone knocking on your door before opening it, even if it is hotel staff. If you requested something from the front desk, housekeeping, or room service, call to confirm that someone associated with the hotel has been sent. Some of the top resorts in the area will *call you* when a staff member is on their way to your room.
- Always park in well-lighted areas, and get your car keys or hotel room key out before you get to your door so you can enter or get in quickly. Be aware if there are suspicious characters hanging out in the parking lots or hallways. If you have concerns about someone lurking in the parking lot, head toward the hotel lobby or a public area, such as a restaurant or bar, before going to your room (you don't want a stranger to know where you are staying) and immediately report the person to the hotel staff.

DRIVING

SPEED LIMITS Obey posted speed limits. On highways and interstates, they're usually 55 or 65 mph but as high as 70 in some rural areas. In residential areas, 30 or 35 mph is usually the case.

Note: The corridor between the attractions and downtown Orlando is a speed trap with fines for speeding starting at \$157. Fines double in construction areas and school zones. It is best to stick to the speed limit for safety reasons as well, not just because of the threat of a monetary penalty. With so many tourists, most of them having no idea where they are going (and who are probably paying more attention to their maps than their driving), you will be able to react much more quickly if you are not speeding along.

SEAT BELTS Seat belts are required for all passengers. Children under the age of 3 must be buckled into a car seat and those under 5 must be in a safety restraint. Police will issue tickets to parents who don't put their children in the proper restraints while driving. Many car-rental agencies offer car seat rentals, though if you will be here for more than just a few days you may want to consider bringing your own as the rental cost will almost add up to the price of a new car seat.

AIR BAG SAFETY Children, in or out of car seats, should ride only in the back

seats of cars that are equipped with air bags. Air bags have been linked to the deaths of several young passengers in the U.S. If you do not know if your car is equipped with passenger side air bags, you will need to ask the car rental attendant; however, they are a standard feature on most new-model cars.

DRINKING & DRIVING Don't. It's that simple. Florida's rules are strict and strictly enforced. If you're planning to drink (alcohol that is), especially after an exhausting day in the theme parks, designate a sober driver or find an alternative means of transportation (there are plenty of options). Some clubs even provide free soft drinks to designated drivers. If you don't obey the law, your accommodations may change from a four-star hotel room to a Florida jail cell in short order.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING Drive with extra care in tourist-heavy areas. It's not uncommon for drivers to make sudden turns or to slow down unexpectedly when reading road signs. People often come to near stops on the highway while attempting to read their maps and decipher the Disney signs, which can be confusing. The tourist areas in Orlando are doubly difficult: The locals are in a hurry to get to their jobs, and tourists are scurrying to be the first to the fun. Assume all other drivers have no idea where they're going—which is often close to the truth—and you'll do fine. One of the best things to remember: Keep a safe distance between you and the car ahead of you. And, while it may sound like common sense, don't read a map while driving (you'd be surprised how many do). Get your copilot to do it, use this book to determine your exit in advance, or call ahead to your destination to find out which exit you should take. Stay in the far right lane, the slow lane, when you begin to get near your exit. If you miss your exit, don't panic—there are plenty others

(especially around Disney) that can get you where you want to go.

DRIVING IN THE RAIN Watch for a hazardous condition where oil on the road creates slick patches when the road gets wet. Rainstorms in Florida are intense and frequent; they're almost a daily occurrence in summer. Exercise extreme caution and drive in the far right lane when driving much slower than the speed limit. Don't pull off onto the shoulder of the road. If visibility is especially poor, pull off at the first exit and wait out the storm; they seldom last more than an hour. Florida law requires drivers to turn on their headlights whenever they turn on their windshield wipers.

IF YOU GET LOST Exit numbers continue to change and signs continue to be confusing. On interstates or Orlando's toll roads, don't try a U-turn across the grassy median. Go to the next exit and reenter the highway by accessing the on-ramp near where you get off. Avoid pulling over to ask directions from people on the street. Instead, stop at a convenience store or gas station and ask the clerk. Don't forget, you can get maps ahead of time from the Orlando CVB. If you are renting a car, most agencies will provide a map (some even provide computer-generated directions). Some rental-car agencies offer GPS navigational systems with their rentals as an add-on; inquire when you rent your car. Most of the hotels have maps located in the racks with all of the brochures. They are usually inserts in the local tourist magazines.

SAFETY WHILE DRIVING Question your rental agency about personal safety or ask for a brochure on traveler safety tips when you pick up your car. Obtain written directions from the agency or a map with the route marked in red, showing how to get to your destination. And, if possible, arrive and depart during daylight hours.

If you drive off a highway and end up in a dodgy-looking neighborhood, turn back around and leave the area as quickly as possible. If you have an accident, even on the highway, stay in your car with the doors locked until you assess the situation or until the police arrive. If you're bumped from behind on the street or are involved in a minor accident with no injuries, and the situation appears to be suspicious, motion to the other driver to follow you. Never open the window or get out of your car in such situations. Go directly to the nearest police station, well-lighted service station, or 24-hour store. You may want to look into renting a cellphone on a short-term basis if you don't already have one. One recommended wireless rental company is **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchusa.com).

If you see someone else on the road indicating a need for help, don't stop.

Take note of the location, and call the police by dialing ☎ 911 to make them aware of the situation.

Park in well-lighted, well-traveled areas whenever possible. Keep your doors locked, whether you're inside the car or not. Look around before you get out and never leave packages, pocketbooks, or any kind of valuables in sight. Although theme park lots are patrolled, it's best to secure your valuables at all times. For an added measure of security, you can always lock things in the lockers available near all of the park entrances. If it is an item you really don't need with you that day, use the hotel safe for storage and don't even bring it along.

If someone tries to rob you or steal your car, don't resist. Report the incident to the police immediately.

2 Getting to & Around the U.S.

AIRLINE DISCOUNTS The smarter traveler can find numerous ways to reduce the price of a plane ticket simply by taking time to shop around. For example, overseas visitors can take advantage of the APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) reductions offered by all major U.S. and European carriers. For more money-saving airline advice, see "Getting There"

in chapter 2. For the best rates, compare fares and be flexible with the dates and times of travel.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS CLEARANCE Visitors arriving by air, no matter what the port of entry, should cultivate patience and resignation before setting foot on U.S. soil. Getting through

Tips Prepare to Be Fingerprinted

Starting in January 2004, many international visitors traveling on visas to the United States have been photographed and fingerprinted at Customs in a new program created by the Department of Homeland Security called **US-VISIT**. Non-U.S. citizens arriving at airports and on cruise ships must undergo an instant background check as part of the government's ongoing efforts to deter terrorism by verifying the identity of incoming and outgoing visitors. Those visitors from the 28 countries (mostly in Europe) that don't require a visa for short-term visits are no longer exempt and will also be fingerprinted. The only exceptions to this rule are for children under the age of 14 and adults over the age of 79 (and an extremely select group of government officials). For more information, go to the Homeland Security website at www.dhs.gov/dhspublic.

immigration control can take as long as 2 hours on some days, especially on summer weekends, so be sure to carry this guidebook or something else to read. This is especially true in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks, when security clearances have been considerably beefed up at U.S. airports.

People traveling by air from Canada, Bermuda, and certain countries in the Caribbean can sometimes clear Customs and Immigration at the point of departure, which is much quicker.

BY PLANE **British Airways** (☎ 0345/222-111 from within the U.K.; www.british-airways.com) offers direct flights from London to Orlando, as does **Virgin Atlantic** (☎ 0129/374-774; www.virgin-atlantic.com). You can also try **Continental** (☎ 0293/776-446; www.continental.com).

Canadians can book flights with **Air Canada** (☎ 800/776-3000; www.aircanada.ca), which offers service from Toronto and Montreal to Orlando. Other airlines that fly to Florida from Canada include **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com); **Delta** (☎ 800/361-6770; www.delta.com); **American** (☎ 800/624-6262; www.aa.com); and **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com).

BY CAR A car is the easiest and most convenient way to get around Orlando unless you're strictly committed to staying at Disney, or are willing to put up with the time, expense, and restrictions of

shuttles and cabs. Relying on public transportation is almost impossible.

To rent a car, you are required to have a major credit card and a driver's license (though sometimes a hefty cash deposit can be used instead of a credit card). You must also be at least 25 years old. Some companies will rent to younger people (no younger than 21) but will add a daily surcharge to the bill that can run as high as \$20 per day. There are two gas (petrol) options when renting a car: returning it with a full tank or bringing it back empty and paying the rental company's rate up front. Refueling on your own is the more cost-effective option, especially if you aren't planning on driving long distances. Just be sure to give yourself time to fill up before you bring the car back. All of the major car-rental companies are represented in Florida (see appendix B, "Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites," for the contact information for these companies).

BY RV If you wish to rent a motor home in Orlando, contact **Cruise America**, 2915 N. Orange Blossom Trail, Kissimmee, FL 34744 (☎ 407/931-1409; www.cruiseamerica.com).

BY MOTORCYCLE The increasing popularity of Bike Week and a growing number of weekend road warriors have sparked an increase in places specializing in motorcycle rental. The Harley Davidson, in all shapes and sizes, is the most popular. You must be at least 21 and sometimes 25 years of age, have a motorcycle license, and a major credit card.

Fun Fact Boooooommmmm, Boooooommmmm

You may find yourself occasionally awakened by window-rattling double booms. Don't worry; it's not part of the rumored American crime culture. It's the space shuttle landing at Kennedy Space Center. The twin sonic booms are produced as the shuttle reenters the atmosphere. The loud, thunderous sound can be heard from Cape Canaveral on the coast throughout the Orlando area and all the way to the Gulf Coast. When skies are clear, night launches are really spectacular to see. You can view a launch schedule at www.ksc.nasa.gov.

 **Tips Dialing Alert!**

Even if you're only making a local call within Orlando's 407 area code, you still *must* dial the 407 area code followed by the number you wish to call for a total of 10 digits.

Rental fees start at about \$750 for 1 week or \$150 per day including helmets, locks, and a brief orientation. You can rent bikes at **American V Twin**, 5101 International Dr. (☎ 888/268-8946 or 407/903-0058; www.amvtwin.com) and **Easy Rider**, 527 W. Miller St. (☎ 888/500-0055 or 407/316-8687; www.hogride.com). But plan ahead, months in advance if you're going to be here during Bike Week, late February to early March, or Biketoberfest in mid-October. Both are in Daytona Beach, but a lot of their visitors stay in Orlando.

BY TRAIN International visitors (excluding Canada) can buy an **East Rail Pass**, good for 15 or 30 days of unlimited travel on Amtrak's (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) east coast routes (including Orlando). The pass is available through many foreign travel agents. Prices in 2005 for a 15-day pass were \$210 off-peak, \$270 peak; a 30-day pass costs \$325 off-peak, \$405 peak. (National passes are available and are much more expensive, costing about \$75–\$100 more per ticket.) With a foreign passport, you can also buy passes at some Amtrak offices in the United States, including locations in New York, Miami, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Reservations are generally required and should be made for each part of your trip as early as possible.

BY BUS Although bus travel is often the most economical form of public transit for short hops between U.S. cities, it can also be slow and uncomfortable—certainly not an option for everyone (particularly when Amtrak, which is far more luxurious, offers similar rates). **Greyhound** (☎ 800/231-2222; www.greyhound.com), the sole nationwide bus line, offers an **International Discovery pass** (www.discoverypass.com) that must be purchased before coming to the United States, or by phone through the Greyhound International Office at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City (☎ 212/971-0492). The pass can be obtained from foreign travel agents and costs less than the domestic version. The pass comes in various lengths, but the 15-day version runs about \$299 while the 30-day version runs about \$399. You can get more info on the pass at both websites listed above or by calling ☎ 212/971-0492 (2pm to 9pm GMT) or ☎ 402/330-8552 (all other times). In addition, special rates are available for seniors and students. International visitors must purchase the pass at least 21 days in advance of travel.

For further information about travel to Florida, see “Getting There” in chapter 2, “Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando.”

FAST FACTS: For the International Traveler

Automobile Organizations Auto clubs supply maps, routes, guidebooks, and emergency road service. The **American Automobile Association (AAA)** is the major auto club in the United States. If you belong to an auto club in your

home country, inquire about AAA reciprocity before you leave. You may be able to join AAA even if you're not a member of a reciprocal club; to inquire, call AAA (☎ 800/222-1234). AAA is actually an organization of regional auto clubs; so look under "AAA Automobile Club" in the White Pages of the telephone directory. AAA has a nationwide emergency road service telephone number for members (☎ 800/222-4357).

Business Hours Banks are open from 9am to 4pm weekdays. There's usually 24-hour access to the automated teller machines (ATMs) at most banks and other outlets. A few drive-through branches in Central Florida are open until noon on Saturday. Generally, offices are open from 9am to 5pm weekdays. Stores are open 6 days a week, with many open on Sunday, too; malls and factory outlets usually are open until 9pm Monday through Saturday and from noon to 6pm Sunday.

Climate See "When to Go" in chapter 2 for details.

Currency & Exchange See "Money" in the section "Preparing for Your Trip," earlier in this chapter.

Drinking Laws The legal age for buying and consuming alcoholic beverages is 21; proof of age is required and often requested at bars, nightclubs, and restaurants, so it's always a good idea to bring a photo ID when you go out. Beer and wine often can be purchased in supermarkets.

Do not carry open containers of alcohol in your car or any public area that isn't zoned for alcohol consumption. The police can and will fine you. Nothing will ruin your trip (not to mention your life and possibly the lives of others) faster than getting a citation for DUI ("driving under the influence"), so just don't do it. Also see "Liquor Laws" under "Fast Facts" in chapter 4.

Electricity Like Canada, the United States uses 110 to 120 volts, 60 cycles, compared to 220 to 240 volts, 50 cycles in most of Europe and Australia. In addition to a 100-volt converter (bring one with you; they're hard to find in the U.S.), small appliances of non-American manufacture, such as hair dryers or shavers, require a plug adapter having two flat, parallel pins.

Embassies & Consulates All embassies are located in Washington, D.C. Some consulates are located in major cities, and most nations have a mission to the United Nations in New York City. International visitors can obtain telephone numbers for their embassies and consulates by calling "Information" in Washington, D.C. (☎ 202/555-1212).

The **Canadian consulate** closest to Orlando is at 200 S. Biscayne Blvd., Suite 1600, Miami (☎ 305/579-1600). The **British consulate** is located at 200 S. Orange Ave., Orlando (☎ 407/426-7855). Other consulate offices in Orlando are the **Consulate of Mexico**, 100 W. Washington St., Orlando (☎ 407/422-0514); **Consulate of the Netherlands**, 400 S. Orange Ave., Orlando (☎ 407/425-8000); and **French-American Institute of Orlando**, 522 E. Washington St. (☎ 407/839-0581). These consulates operate with small staffs, and many keep abbreviated business hours. Don't be surprised if you get an answering machine.

Emergencies Call ☎ **911** to report a fire, contact the police, or get an ambulance. This call is free from all public telephones and should be the first call made in case of any serious medical emergency or accident.

The Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, the state tourism promotions board, sponsors a **help line** (☎ **800/647-9284**). With operators speaking over 100 languages, it can provide general directions and can help with lost travel papers and credit cards, minor medical emergencies, accidents, money transfer, airline confirmation, and much more.

Gasoline (Petrol) Petrol is known as gasoline (or “gas”) in the U.S. and is sold at service stations and convenience stores. One U.S. gallon equals 3.75 liters, and 1.2 U.S. gallons equal 1 imperial gallon. There usually are three grades (and price levels) of gasoline available at most gas stations, and you’ll notice that their names change from company to company. The ones with the highest octane are the most expensive. If you have a rental car, use the least expensive, “regular” unleaded gas. Gas prices average \$2 a gallon, but can be 20¢ or 30¢ a gallon higher in the main tourist areas.

Holidays Banks, government offices, post offices, and some stores, restaurants, and museums are closed on legal national holidays: January 1 (New Year’s Day); third Monday in January (Martin Luther King, Jr., Day); third Monday in February (Presidents’ Day); last Monday in May (Memorial Day); July 4 (Independence Day); first Monday in September (Labor Day); second Monday in October (Columbus Day); November 11 (Veterans’ Day/Armistice Day); fourth Thursday in November (Thanksgiving Day); and December 25 (Christmas). However, you will find theme parks, accommodations, and most restaurants open on these days.

Languages Major hotels may have multilingual employees. Unless your language is very obscure, they usually can supply a translator on request. In Central Florida, many people speak Spanish, French, German, and Dutch; and several other languages are growing in frequency, including Chinese and Japanese.

Legal Aid As an international tourist, you’ll probably never become involved with the American legal system. If you are stopped for a minor infraction, such as speeding or some other traffic violation, never attempt to pay the fine directly to a police officer; you may be arrested on the much more serious charge of attempted bribery. Pay fines to the clerk of the court (☎ **407/836-6000** in Orlando or ☎ **407/343-3530** in Kissimmee). If you’re accused of a more serious offense, it’s wise to say and do nothing before consulting a lawyer. Under U.S. law, an arrested person is allowed one telephone call to a party of his or her choice. Call your embassy or consulate immediately if you find yourself in any kind of trouble.

Mail If you want to receive mail on your vacation and you aren’t sure of your address, your mail can be sent to you, in your name, c/o General Delivery at the main post office of the city or region where you expect to be. The post office nearest Disney and Universal (☎ **800/275-8777**) is at 10450 Turkey Lake Rd. The ZIP Code is 32819. You must pick up your mail in person and produce proof of

identity (driver's license, passport, and so on). You could also have it sent directly to your hotel. If you call your hotel in advance, they can provide you with the proper address and information necessary to have mail delivered to you there.

Often found at intersections, mailboxes are blue with a white American eagle logo and carry the inscription U.S. MAIL. Make sure you see this inscription; overnight delivery companies also often have drop-off boxes along the road. Don't forget to add the five-figure postal code, or ZIP Code, after the two-letter abbreviation of the state to which the mail is addressed (FL for Florida, NY for New York, and so on).

Within the U.S., it costs 23¢ to mail a standard-size postcard and 37¢ to send letters weighing up to 1 ounce (that's about five pages of 8½-by-11-inch paper), plus 23¢ for each additional ounce. A postcard to Mexico costs 50¢, a 1-ounce letter 35¢; a postcard to Canada costs 50¢, a 1-ounce letter 60¢; a postcard to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the Far East, South America, or elsewhere costs 70¢; a letter is 80¢ for each ounce.

Measurements The United States doesn't use the metric system. For a full explanation of the American system of measurements, please see "Metric Conversions" on the inside front cover of this guide.

Newspapers & Magazines National newspapers include the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. National newsweeklies include *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. You'll be able to find the *Miami Herald* in many cities around Florida. Most of these publications are available in bookstores and some major hotels. The best buy for local coverage, including entertainment, is the *Orlando Sentinel*.

Much harder to find are newspapers from the United Kingdom. Since 1997, the *London Daily Mail* is printed in Orlando for distribution along the East Coast. Because of the time difference, British travelers can actually pick up a paper at the airport and read the next day's newspaper on the way home.

Radio & Television There are five coast-to-coast television broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and PBS (the Public Broadcasting System)—in America. These, plus two smaller networks (UPN and WB) are available in Orlando, as are cable networks such as HBO, ESPN, and the Disney Channel. (Options on hotel TVs may be limited, so ask.) At Disney resorts, there also are Arabic, German, and Japanese channels.

You'll also find a wide choice of radio stations, broadcasting talk shows and/or music, punctuated by news broadcasts and frequent commercials. Most Central Florida cable networks carry at least two Spanish-language stations, and there are numerous Spanish-language radio stations.

Smoking If you're a smoker, light up where and when you can. Smoking is prohibited in many of Florida's public places. While some bars have smoking areas and most hotels have smoking rooms, many are eliminating them. You're still permitted to inhale in most outdoor areas, but the Disney parks restrict where. **Note:** Don't expect to light up over dinner. In 2002, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment that bans smoking in public work

places, including restaurants and bars that serve food. Stand-alone bars that serve virtually no food and designated smoking rooms in hotels are exempt.

Taxes In the United States, there isn't a VAT (value-added tax) or other indirect tax assessed on most things at a national level. Every state, city, and county has the right to levy its own tax on purchases including hotel bills, restaurant checks, and airline tickets. In the Orlando area, the state sales tax is 6.5%–7%, depending on the county you're in. Hotel taxes can push the totals up to 12%.

Note: Unlike the VAT in many countries, sales taxes are not included in the sticker prices; they are added on at the checkout counter.

Telephone, Telegraph & Fax Pay phones can be found in most restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and stores. **Local calls** made from public pay phones in most locales cost either 25¢ or 35¢. Pay phones do not accept pennies, and few will take anything larger than a quarter.

Most long-distance and international calls can be dialed directly from any phone. **For calls within the United States and to Canada**, dial 1 followed by the area code and the seven-digit number. **For other international calls**, dial 011 followed by the country code, city code, and the telephone number of the person you are calling.

For **reversed-charge or collect calls**, and for person-to-person calls, dial 0 (zero, not the letter O) followed by the area code and number you want; an operator will then come on the line, and you should specify that you are calling collect, or person-to-person, or both. If your operator-assisted call is international, ask for the overseas operator.

Because the telephone system in the U.S. is privately operated, long-distance rates can vary widely. Calling from your hotel room is convenient, but, generally, hotel surcharges on long-distance and local calls are astronomical. You're usually better off using a public pay telephone. Hotels sometimes charge a fee if you use your telephone credit card or call a toll-free number (with an **800, 888, 877, or 866** area code), so ask about surcharges before you dial.

Prepaid calling cards—widely available in convenience stores and drug-stores—don't have the best per-minute rates in town, but are likely fairer than the ones charged by your hotel. Cards can usually be purchased in \$5 or \$10 increments. Be sure to check for an expiration date before purchasing the card as well as which countries can actually be called when using the card.

For **local directory assistance** ("information"), dial **411**; for long-distance information, dial 1, then the appropriate area code and **555-1212**. There are two kinds of directories in the U.S. The **White Pages** list household numbers and business subscribers in alphabetical order. The **Yellow Pages** list all local services and businesses; they often include maps listing ZIP Codes and public transportation routes.

Most telegraph and telex services in the U.S. are provided by **Western Union**. You can bring your telegram into the nearest Western Union office (there are hundreds across the country) or dictate it over the phone (☎ **800/325-6000**). You can also telegraph money, or have it telegraphed to you, very quickly over the Western Union system, but this service can cost as much as 15 to 20 percent of the amount sent.

Most hotels have **fax machines** available for guest use (be sure to ask about the charge to use it). Many hotel rooms are even wired for guests' fax machines. A less expensive way to send and receive faxes may be at stores such as **The UPS Store** (formerly Mail Boxes Etc.), a national chain of retail packing service shops. (Look in the Yellow Pages directory under "Packing Services.")

Time **Orlando**, like most of Florida, is on **Eastern Standard Time (EST)**. When it's noon in Orlando, it's 7am in Honolulu, 9am in Vancouver, 11am in Winnipeg, and 5pm in London.

Daylight savings time is in effect from the first Sunday in April through 2am on the last Sunday in October. Daylight savings time moves the clock 1 hour ahead of standard time (7pm becomes 8pm and so on).

Tipping Tips are a very important part of certain workers' income, and gratuities are the standard way of showing appreciation for services provided. (Tipping is certainly not compulsory if the service is poor!) Service in the United States generally tends to be good, and gratuities are increasingly being added automatically to some services, particularly those in restaurants, so check the bill closely before adding a gratuity—service is seldom good enough to double a tip.

In hotels, tip **bellhops** at least \$1 per bag (\$2–\$3 if you have a lot of luggage) and tip the **chamber staff** \$1 to \$2 per day (more if you or your kids have left a disaster area for him or her to clean up). Tip the **doorman** or **concierge** only if he or she has provided you with some specific service (for example, calling a cab for you or obtaining difficult-to-get theater tickets). Tip the **valet-parking attendant** \$1 every time you get your car.

In restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, tip **service staff** 15% to 20% of the check, tip **bartenders** 10% to 15%, and tip **checkroom attendants** \$1 per garment.

As for other service personnel, tip **cab drivers** 15% of the fare; tip **skycaps** at airports at least \$1 per bag (\$2–\$3 if you have a lot of luggage); and tip **hairdressers** and **barbers** 15% to 20%.

Toilets You won't find public toilets or "restrooms" on the streets in most U.S. cities, but they can be found in hotel lobbies, bars, restaurants, museums, department stores, railway and bus stations, and service stations. Large hotels and fast-food restaurants are probably the best bet for good, clean facilities. If possible, avoid the toilets at parks and beaches, which tend to be dirty; some may be unsafe. Restaurants and bars in resorts or heavily visited areas may reserve their restrooms for patrons. Some establishments display a notice indicating this. You can ignore this sign or, better yet, avoid arguments by paying for a cup of coffee or a soft drink, which will qualify you as a patron. Within the theme parks, restrooms will be clearly marked on the park maps. Don't panic if you find the flushing handle is missing. Many new toilets are installed with lasers that trigger the flush automatically when you leave the stall.

Getting to Know Walt Disney World & Orlando

It's hard to believe that Walt Disney World first opened its gates to the public just over thirty-five years ago. I doubt anyone could have imagined the incredible transformation that followed in the wake of Magic Kingdom's 1971 debut. Orlando has evolved from a relatively quiet southern farming community into an international vacation destination. An incredible array of recreational activities, shopping and dining experiences, as well as world-class accommodations, await those who visit, and it's all set right in the middle of the natural beauty of Central Florida.

Walt Disney World (WDW) is now home to four major theme parks of its own, two water parks, an incredibly diverse complex full of shopping, dining, and entertainment venues, along with tens of thousands of hotel rooms, scores of restaurants, and to top it all off—two cruise ships.

But there's more to Orlando than Mickeyville. With over 95 attractions both big and small, the city features a practically endless array of options. You could spend weeks here and still not experience all of the exciting things that

Orlando has to offer. You can take in the action-packed thrills of **Universal Studios Florida**, **Islands of Adventure**, and the excitement of Universal's nightclub and restaurant district, **CityWalk**. If, however, you are in need of something with a bit less hustle and bustle, **SeaWorld** features a laid-back park experience and crowds that aren't so horrid. **Gatorland**, one of the city's first tourist attractions (yes, there was life here before Mickey arrived), is a throwback attraction where you can walk about leisurely and enjoy natural surroundings, a lack of crowds and lines, and an admission price that won't break the bank.

One piece of advice: Yes, the theme parks are a central part of an Orlando vacation. But, even with all there is to do in the parks, everyone should spend at least a day away from the hubbub to regroup and revitalize; even just a night away will work wonders if you just can't seem to pull yourself away for an entire day. There's plenty of great ways to spend a day or evening off here, from shopping to swimming to mini golf, and more.

1 Orientation

VISITOR INFORMATION

Once you've arrived, you can stop in at the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau (Orlando CVB)**, 8723 International Dr., Suite 101, Orlando; however it's best to call ahead (**© 407/363-5872**; www.orlandoinfo.com) for information on the area's offerings. Staffers at the CVB can help answer your questions, as well as send out maps, brochures, and coupons good for discounts or freebies. It's worth a

visit even if you take the advice in chapter 2, “Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando,” and send for them before arriving. The CVB sells discount tickets to several attractions (savings on single-day passes to Universal and SeaWorld are \$3 or less; only Disney’s 4-day or longer passes are discounted). The CVB’s multilingual staff can make dinner reservations and hotel referrals for you. The CVB is open daily from 8am to 8pm, except Christmas. From I-4, take Exit 74A east 2 blocks, turn south on International Drive and continue 1 mile. The center is on the left, at the corner of I-Drive and Austrian Row.

The **Kissimmee–St. Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau** is located at 1925 E. Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway/U.S. 192, Kissimmee (☎ 800/327-9159 or 407/847-5000; www.floridakiss.com). It also offers maps, brochures, and discount coupons. From I-4, take Exit 64A/U.S. 192 east about 12 miles to Bill Beck Blvd., then go left into the CVB’s parking lot. Again, you can call and have these items sent to you ahead of time so you can do some planning at home.

If you’re driving from the north on I-75, you can stop at the **Disney Welcome Center** in Ocala, Fla. (exit 350 at Hwy. 200), about 90 miles north of Orlando (☎ 352/854-0770). The center sells park tickets and Mickey ears, helps plan your park itinerary, and also makes hotel reservations. Hours are from 9am to 6pm daily (until 7pm June, July, and Aug).

Five tourism centers around Florida have statewide information. They’re located 4 miles north of Jennings on I-75 south; 3 miles north of Campbellton on Highway 231; 7 miles north of Yulee on I-95; 16 miles west of Pensacola on I-10 east; and at the capitol in Tallahassee.

Finally, nearly all hotel lobbies and many restaurants, highway rest stops, and attractions have racks brimming with brochures for area activities. Many are filled with dining discounts and cost-cutting coupons, so cover your bases and pick up a few of everything.

INFORMATION (& MORE) AT THE AIRPORT

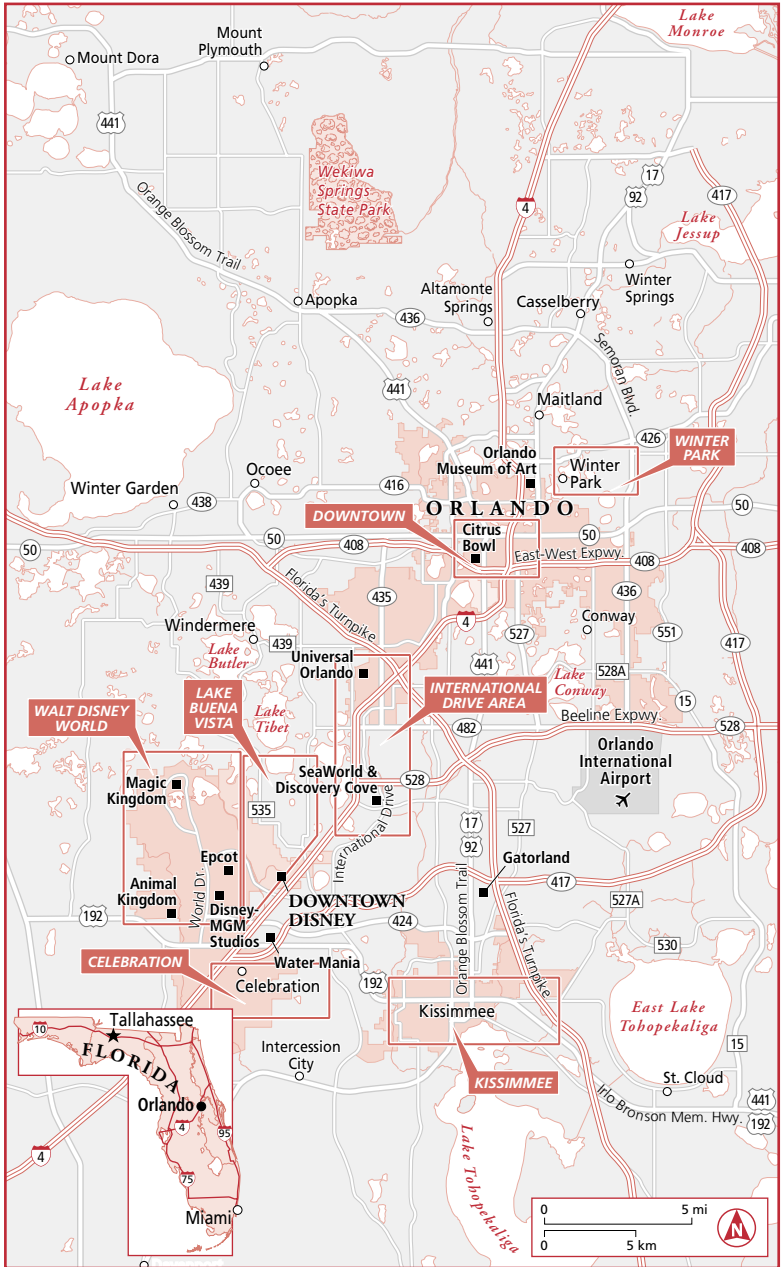
Passengers arriving at or departing from Orlando International Airport can stroll over to one of two Disney shops. The **Magic of Disney** (☎ 407/825-2360) is in the main terminal, third level, right behind the Northwest Airlines ticket desk. **Disney Earport** (☎ 407/825-2339) is in the main terminal, across from the Hyatt Regency. They sell WDW multiday tickets, make dinner show and hotel reservations at Disney resorts, and provide brochures and assistance. They’re open daily, usually from 7am to 10pm, but know that the airport stores are filled with a rather run-of-the-mill selection of Disney merchandise; unless you’re on your way home and forgot to buy that must-have Mickey for Auntie Gertrude, you’ll find a far better array of offerings elsewhere.

The **Universal Studios Stores** (☎ 407/825-2473), usually open daily from 7am to 9pm, sell park tickets at two locations: Airside A, main terminal, and Airside B, Delta side before security, both on the third level. **SeaWorld** stores, at Airside A and B, are open from 7am to 9pm (☎ 407/825-2614). **Kennedy Space Center** (☎ 407/445-1788) has two locations at the airport, located in both the East and West Halls, for space buffs coming through town.

CITY LAYOUT

Orlando’s major artery is Interstate 4. Locals call it the **I-4** or that #@%*^#! It runs diagonally across the state from Tampa to Daytona Beach. The exits along this route

Orlando Neighborhoods



Fun Fact **Cars, Cars Everywhere**

If the traffic outside isn't enough for you, you can find cars inside as well. The rocking Race Rock Café located on International Drive is known for parking NASCAR racers in its lobby and having mini-racers streaking across its ceiling. Another hot spot for car fans is the NASCAR Café at Universal's CityWalk (p. 325), which is loaded with racing memorabilia and driving-related video games.

will take you to Disney, Universal, SeaWorld, International Drive, U.S. 192, Kissimmee, Lake Buena Vista, and north to downtown Orlando and Winter Park. Most exits are well marked, but construction is common and exit numbers have been changed in the last few years. If you get directions by exit number, always ask the name of the road to help avoid getting lost. (Cellphone users can dial ☎ 511 to get a report of I-4 delays.)

The **Florida Turnpike**, a toll road, crosses I-4 and links with I-75 to the north and Miami to the south. **U.S. 192/Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway** is a major east–west artery that reaches from Kissimmee to U.S. 27, crossing I-4 near World Drive, the main Walt Disney World entrance road. Recent construction has widened this stretch of highway and made driving a bit easier while the addition of large numerical markers have made locating hotels, restaurants, and attractions much easier as well. The **B-Line Expressway** (Hwy. 528), also a toll road, goes east from I-4 past Orlando International Airport to Cape Canaveral and Kennedy Space Center. The **East–West Expressway** (also known as Hwy. 408) is a toll road that can be helpful in bypassing surface traffic in the downtown area. The **417**, also a toll road, runs from north of the Orlando International Airport to I-4 just below U.S. 192. This route is a good alternative to I-4 if you are staying on the lower end of International Drive, World Center Drive, or areas east of the I-4, as it is far less traveled than the main highway.

If you're jockeying between Disney and Universal, one of the lesser traffic evils is **Apopka–Vineland Road**. It tends to be less cluttered than I-4 or International Drive. Follow it north from Lake Buena Vista and the northeast side of Disney to Sand Lake Road, then go right/east to Turkey Lake Road, then left/north to Universal Orlando. Another way to avoid the highway when driving between Universal Orlando and Disney is to take the Palm Parkway (just off Apopka–Vineland Rd.) to Turkey Lake Road, which will take you right to Universal.

I-4 and Highway 535 roughly bound **Walt Disney World** to the east (the latter is also a northern boundary) and U.S. 192/Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway bounds it to the south. World Drive is WDW's main north–south artery. Epcot Center Drive (Hwy. 536/the south end of International Dr.) and Buena Vista Drive cut across the complex in a more or less east–west direction; the two roads cross at Bonnet Creek Parkway. Despite a reasonably good highway system and explicit signs, it's easy to get lost or miss a turn here. I've gotten lost on Disney property at least once or twice on every trip. Again, pay attention and drive carefully. Don't panic or pull across several lanes of traffic to make an exit, especially once you're on Disney property—there's always another exit just ahead where you can get turned around. All roads lead to the parks, and you'll soon find another sign directing you to the same place. It may take

a bit longer, but Goofy will still be there. A big help to maneuvering the Disney property is the transportation map, as it has all of the roadways on property and it is easy to follow, even if the roads themselves may not be. Be sure to pick one up, either at the parks or at a Disney resort hotel—just ask the front desk or concierge for a copy.

Clever landscaping hides the fact that many parts of WDW are very close together. It took me several trips to discover that Disney–MGM Studios was just behind the BoardWalk, which is right next to the WDW Swan and the WDW Dolphin, which is across the lake from Disney's Yacht and Beach Club Resorts, which are next to Epcot—you get the picture. Walking can occasionally be the most efficient way to get from one place to another; it's always worth looking at a map to check before you set out anywhere.

ORLANDO NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Walt Disney World Though Walt Disney World and Orlando are often considered synonymous, (surprise!) WDW isn't situated in Orlando. It's actually located southwest of the city in Lake Buena Vista. WDW encompasses over 47 square miles and claims four major theme parks, two smaller water parks, several smaller attractions, numerous themed resorts, a plethora of restaurants and shops, and an entertainment district.

Downtown Disney Though not actually a neighborhood, Downtown Disney is certainly large enough to be distinguished as such. It encompasses Disney's two nighttime entertainment districts—Pleasure Island and Downtown Disney West Side—as well as its shopping and dining complex, the Downtown Disney Marketplace. The area is filled with clubs, entertainment venues, unique restaurants, and shops. Here you can celebrate New Year's Eve every night, shop till you drop, or tempt your taste buds—all in the space of a single evening.

Lake Buena Vista Lake Buena Vista actually encompasses all of WDW but also includes much of the area bordering the resort. Here you can find the "official" (but not Disney-owned) hotels situated along Hotel Plaza Boulevard. The area along 535 (known

locally as Apopka–Vineland), is home to its own share of resorts and restaurants. Though the region is bustling, many of its resorts, restaurants, and shops are set along alcoves and tree lined side streets, far from the main thoroughfare, to maintain a quieter, more charming atmosphere.

Celebration As you drive through this quaint little town, full of beautiful homes trimmed in gingerbread, some of them with white picket fences, shade trees, and some of the loveliest landscaping around, you may find yourself musing about this 4,900-acre community's seeming perfection. The fact that Disney had a hand in its creation then should come as no great surprise—experts that they are at creating the perfect version of almost anything. The Market Street area's charming collection of shops, restaurants, even its own small hotel, is reminiscent of a bygone era—and a perfect upscale version at that.

Kissimmee Brought back to life by a multimillion dollar "Rebeautivation" project, U.S. 192, Kissimmee's main tourist strip, now sports extra wide sidewalks, colorful (and plentiful) streetlamps, landscaping, and location markers. Even the roadway itself has been improved to handle traffic more easily and safely. Kissimmee is lined

practically end to end with a variety of budget and moderate resorts and hotels, most of which cater to families (though a few more upscale options have started to spring up), a plentitude of casual restaurants, and a handful of minor attractions.

International Drive Area (Hwy. 536)

Known as **I-Drive**, this busy tourist zone is home to more than 100 resorts and hotels, countless restaurants, attractions both big and small, shopping, entertainment, and even its own transportation system—the **I-Ride Trolley**. There is literally something here for everybody. The areas north of Sand Lake Road are by far the most congested, filled to capacity with T-shirt shops, tourist traps, resorts, restaurants, and attractions. If you head south, towards the intersection at S.R. 528 (aka the Beeline Expressway), it's still chock-full of restaurants and hotels but the landscaping is far more appealing and tree-lined walkways offer a more pleasant place to walk. The driving, however, is still slow going at best.

Downtown Orlando Orlando is actually a lot smaller than most major U.S. cities but has a charm all its own. The downtown area is actually northeast of Walt Disney World on I-4. It's far less congested with tourists than the theme park zones. Here you'll find upscale restaurants and hotels, along with theaters, museums, the very visitor-friendly Orlando Science Center, nightclubs, and more. Shopping is plentiful, and dozens of antiques shops line "Antique Row" on Orange Avenue near Lake Ivanhoe.

Winter Park Those who make the effort to get up to Winter Park, located just north of downtown (Orlando, that is), will enjoy its upscale ambience and quaint southern charm. The town's biggest draw is Park Avenue, with its collection of upscale shops and restaurants set along tree-lined cobblestone streets. This part of the suburbs is a great adult getaway and a good place to relax and escape the WDW, Universal, and I-Drive crowds. It's not, however, a good place to take the kids.

2 Getting Around

In a city that thrives on its attractions, you won't find it difficult to get around—especially if you have a car. Don't count on the city bus system to get you where you want to go—not quickly or efficiently anyway. If you're traveling outside the tourist areas, avoid the 7 to 9am and 4 to 6pm rush if at all possible. Commuter traffic can be bad anywhere but here the complication of tourist traffic makes it even more of a headache. And don't expect weekends to be any better—the locals who run the hotels, restaurants, and attractions still have to get to work, making commuter traffic a 7-day-a-week problem. Most of the parks don't open until 9am or so, and they usually stay open at least until dusk; you won't miss much by leaving a little later. (The exception is Animal Kingdom, where the animals move around earliest in the day, then seek shelter and shade for the remainder of the day; see "Animal Kingdom" in chapter 7, "Exploring Walt Disney World.")

International Drive has two alternate means of transportation—pedestrian and the **I-Drive Trolley**. I don't recommend the former in the area around Sand Lake Road because, though there are plenty of sidewalks, you may be taking your life in your hands if you try to cross this extremely busy road. The further south you move along I-Drive, the easier walking becomes. The **I-Ride Trolley** (☎ 407/248-9590; www.iridetrolley.com) is a safer bet. It makes 54 stops between the Belz Factory Outlets on

the north end of the drive and SeaWorld to the south. The trolley runs every 15 minutes, from 8am to 10:30pm, and costs 75¢ for adults and 25¢ for seniors; kids under 12 ride free, and exact change is required. There's an unlimited 1-day pass available for \$2 per person. Thanks to I-Drive's high traffic volume, the trolley offers a decent (and fun) alternative to the bumper to bumper traffic.

The good news, if you are driving, is that road signs throughout the area are more accurate than they were a few years back. But to make sure you're heading the right way, follow the directions supplied for the various attractions and hotels later in this book. Call ahead to your destination to check if there is any construction you should be aware of before heading out. Most attractions give directions as a voice-mail option when you call the main number, but you can also ask for an operator to get clarification.

Some hotels offer transportation to and from some theme parks and other tourist destinations; the service may or may not be free, however, so be sure to check with your individual hotel for details. It's not difficult getting around town, but it can get expensive, so know your options when you're deciding on your hotel.

BY DISNEY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

If you plan to stay at and spend most of your time at Disney, there's an extensive, free transportation system that runs throughout the entire WDW property.

Disney resorts and official hotels offer unlimited free transportation via bus, monorail, ferry, or water taxi to all WDW properties throughout the day, and at times, well into the evening. If, however, you want to venture elsewhere (say, to Universal or SeaWorld), you'll just have to pay extra to do so.

If you're staying at the Disney resorts, using the system can save you money on a rental car, insurance, and gas, as well as all those parking fees (\$8 a day at the WDW theme parks). The drawback however, is that you're at the mercy of Disney's schedules, which are often slow and, at times, *very* indirect; bus trips from the outlying resorts (especially Fort Wilderness) to the various parks (and vice versa) can take over an hour during peak times.

If you have time before locking in your trip, call ☎ 407/934-7639 and ask the information specialist for Disney's new shopping and dining guide, which includes a copy of the **Disney World Transportation Guide Map**. (It shows where various resorts are in relation to the attractions you want to visit.) Along with the maps in this guide, pick up a guide map when you land at the Guest Services desks at any of the Disney resorts and theme parks, or view a more generic map and download it at www.disneyworld.com (you'll need Adobe Acrobat Reader).

The best rule when using Disney transportation: Ask the driver or someone at your hotel's front desk to help you take the most direct route. Keep asking questions along the way. Unlike missing a highway exit, missing a bus stop means you may reach your pension before you reach your destination.

BY CAR

Whether or not to rent a car while in Orlando is one of the most important decisions you will make when planning your trip (just behind selecting your hotel). First, think about your vacation plans. If you're planning on going beyond the boundaries of Disney to Universal, SeaWorld, or anywhere along I-Drive, a rental car may well be a necessity. If you want to head out in the evenings to smaller attractions, dinner shows, or other activities not located within the realm of Disney, a car will definitely allow

Tips Look Both Ways

Traveling on foot anywhere in Orlando, most especially on International Drive, can be tricky. If you have to walk across a parking lot or street, *be careful*. The Surface Transportation Policy Project's pedestrian safety report recently named Orlando the most dangerous city in the country for pedestrians. Drivers are paying far more attention to their maps and street signs, not the people running in front of them. Though walking up and down the sidewalks on International Drive or U.S. 192 can be an enjoyable way to get to a restaurant or mini-golf course without having to pack up the car, you need to pay strict attention when it comes to crossing the street and should avoid crossing multiple lane roads altogether.

you the most flexibility. If you plan to limit your vacation only to WDW, then a car may prove to be an extra and unnecessary expense.

If you've decided to stay right on Disney property, the question to ask yourself is how, exactly, will you get to the parks? If the Magic Kingdom is accessible only by taking a bus, switching to the monorail, and then catching a ferry, you may want to opt for a car. The least expensive properties, the All-Star resorts, are among the farthest from the Disney parks. Wait times between buses can be considerable—if not unendurable.

During peak hours in the busiest seasons, you may have trouble getting a seat on the bus, so keep that in mind if you're traveling with seniors or with companions with disabilities. Also, if you're bringing along children and strollers, consider the frustration factor of loading and unloading strollers and all of the paraphernalia that comes with them on and off buses, ferries, and trams.

A car may drastically cut the commute time between the parks and hotels not directly on the monorail routes, so decide how much your time is worth and how much the car will cost plus the \$8 per day theme-park parking charge (Disney resort guests, however, are exempt from the parking fees) before making a decision about renting.

In general, if you're going to spend all of your time at Disney and you're ready, willing, and able to handle the transportation network's schedules, there's no sense renting a car that will sit in the parking lot. But if you're on an extended stay—a week or more—you'll probably want a car for at least a day or two to venture beyond the tourist areas. You can discover downtown Orlando, visit museums, or tour the Space Coast; it may be necessary for your sanity, not to mention your survival. After heading from park to park, day after day, a reality check may very well be in order, and there's no better way to come back down to earth than to enjoy some of Florida's more natural offerings.

If you are going to be spending the majority of your vacation outside the House of Mouse, a car is an absolute necessity (unless you plan on staying solely within the bounds of Universal Orlando for your entire trip). While there are plenty of transportation options such as shuttles, trolleys, and taxis, utilizing them every time you venture outside of your hotel can't be done without losing your sanity (and lots of cash)—don't even think of doing it!

All of the major car-rental companies are represented in Orlando and maintain desks at or near the airport. Many agencies provide discount coupons in publications targeted at tourists, though you should keep in mind that AAA discounts and online

offers are often better. You may also want to ask your travel agent if he or she has a recommendation, or whether a discount is included in any vacation packages. Also, it never hurts to ask about specials. **Note:** Disney has an Alamo car-rental desk (☎ 800/327-2996) right on property, so if you're interested in renting for only a few days instead of your entire vacation this may be a good option for you.

See appendix B, "Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites," in the back of this book for contact information.

BY BUS

Stops for the **Lynx** bus system (☎ 407/841-5969; www.golynx.com) are marked with a "paw" print. It will get you to Disney, Universal, and I-Drive (one way fare is \$1.25 adults, 50¢ kids 8–18 with valid school ID; express passes and daylong passes are available as well), but it's generally not very tourist-friendly.

Mears Transportation (☎ 407/423-5566; www.mearstransportation.com) operates buses to all the major attractions, including Kennedy Space Center, Universal Studios, SeaWorld, and Busch Gardens (yes, in Tampa), among others. Their service is the largest in the area, and with good reason. Rates will vary based on where you are going and where you are coming from of course, so call ahead for the particulars. Many of the area hotels use Mears for their shuttle service to the parks and attractions.

BY MOTORCYCLE

The increasing popularity of Bike Week and a growing number of weekend road warriors have sparked an increase in places specializing in motorcycle rental. The Harley Davidson, in all shapes and sizes, is the most popular. You must be at least 21 and sometimes 25 years of age, have a motorcycle license, and a major credit card. Rental fees start at about \$750 for 1 week or \$150 per day including helmets, locks, and a brief orientation. You can rent bikes at **American V Twin**, 5101 International Dr. (☎ 888/268-8946 or 407/903-0058; www.amvtwin.com). But plan ahead, months in advance if you're going to be here during Bike Week, late February to early March, or Biketoberfest in mid-October. Both are in Daytona Beach, but a lot of their visitors stay in Orlando.

BY TAXI

Taxis will line up in front of major hotels in addition to a few smaller properties. The front desk will be more than happy to hail one down for you. If you wish, you can also call **Yellow Cab** (☎ 407/699-9999) and **Ace Metro** (☎ 407/855-1111) on your own. Both are good choices; however, rates can run as high as \$3.25 for the first mile, \$1.75 per mile thereafter, though occasionally you can get a flat rate if you ask. In general, cabs are economical only if you have four or five people aboard and aren't going very far or very many times. You could actually rent your own car (depending on the model) for the price of just a few taxi rides.

FAST FACTS: Walt Disney World & Orlando

Ambulances See "Emergencies," below.

American Express There's an American Express Travel Service Office located at 7618 West Sand Lake Rd. (☎ 407/264-0104).

Babysitters Many Orlando hotels, including all of Disney's resorts, offer babysitting services, usually from an outside service such as **Kids Night Out** (☎ 800/696/8105 or 407/828-0920; www.kidsniteout.com), or **All About Kids** (☎ 800/728-6506 or 407/812-9300; www.all-about-kids.com). In-room rates usually run somewhere between \$10 and \$15 per hour for the first child and \$1 to \$2 per additional child, per hour. Several Orlando resorts have good child-care facilities with counselor-supervised activity programs right on the premises with rates that run per child per hour, or, in some cases, on a set schedule. The Disney resorts' programs—offered at its expensive-category properties—generally run from 4:30pm to midnight and include activities and movies, and a meal. They're open to kids ages 4 to 12 (kids must be potty-trained); cost is \$10 per child per hour. Reservations are a good idea; call ☎ 407/939-3463.

Business Hours Theme park operating hours vary depending on the time of year, even on the day of the week. While most open at 8 or 9am and close at 6 or 7pm, you should call or check a park's website for its most current schedule before arriving. Other businesses are generally open from 9am to 5pm, Monday through Friday. Bars are usually open until 2am, with some after-hours clubs staying open into the wee hours of the morning (though the alcohol stops flowing at 2am).

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," in this chapter, and appendix B, "Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites."

Climate See "When to Go," in chapter 2 for detailed information.

Doctors & Dentists There are basic first-aid centers in all of the theme parks. There's also a 24-hour, toll-free number for the **Poison Control Center** (☎ 800/282-3171). To find a dentist, call **Dental Referral Service** at ☎ 800/235-4111 or go online to www.dentalreferral.com.

Disney offers in-room medical service 24 hours a day (☎ 407/238-2000). **Doctors on Call Service** (☎ 407/399-3627) makes house and room calls in most of the Orlando area. **Centra Care** has several walk-in clinics listed in the Yellow Pages, including ones on Turkey Lake Road, near Universal (☎ 407/351-6682); at Lake Buena Vista, near Disney (☎ 407/934-2273); and on U.S. 192 (W. Irlo Bronson Hwy.) in the Formosa Gardens shopping center (☎ 407/397-7032).

Hospitals **Sand Lake Hospital**, 9400 Turkey Lake Rd. (☎ 407/351-8550), is about 2 miles south of Sand Lake Road. From the WDW area, take I-4 east to the Sand Lake Road exit and make a left on Turkey Lake Road. The hospital is 2 miles up on your right. To avoid the highway, take Palm Parkway (off of Apopka-Vineland near Hotel Plaza Blvd.); it turns into Turkey Lake road. The hospital is 2 miles up on your left. **Celebration Health** (☎ 407/303-4000), located in the near-Disney town of Celebration, is at 400 Celebration Place. From I-4, take the U.S. 192 exit. At the first traffic light, turn right onto Celebration Avenue. At the first stop sign, take another right. **Note:** Be sure to check with your health care provider or insurance carrier regarding regulations for medical care outside your home area.

Emergencies Dial ☎ 911 to contact the police or fire department, or to call an ambulance. For less urgent requests, call ☎ 800/647-9284, a number sponsored

by the **Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation**, the state tourism promotion board. With operators speaking over 100 languages, this source can provide directions and help with lost credit cards, medical emergencies, accidents, money transfers, airline confirmation, and much more.

Internet Access You will find a few local cybercafes listed at www.cybercafes.com or www.netcafeguide.com. Most hotels and resorts provide some form of Internet access whether via Web TV, a dataport, Wi-Fi, or a business center; charges vary.

Kennels The major theme parks offer animal boarding usually for about \$6 per day. For information on Disney's kennel facilities, call ☎ **407/824-6568**. Resort guests can board their pets overnight for \$9 (\$11 for those not staying at Disney) at the Transportation and Ticket Center's kennel on Seven Seas Drive near the Polynesian Resort. SeaWorld and Universal also offer kennels, but overnight boarding is not available (though all Universal Orlando resorts welcome pets). A current vaccine record is a must at all kennels. **Note:** For more information on traveling with your pet in Orlando, see "Traveling With Pets," on p. 37.

Liquor Laws The minimum drinking age in Florida is 21. No liquor is served in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World. Alcoholic drinks are available, however, at the other Disney parks and are quite evident at Universal Orlando's parks (even more so at its seasonal celebrations).

Lockers You can rent lockers at all Disney, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld parks. The cost varies but averages \$7 a day, including a \$2 refundable deposit. Many other attractions, such as the water parks, also offer lockers, sometimes at a lower fee. Inquire at a Guest Services desk. For safety purposes, it's better to keep valuables, such as camera equipment or other electronic equipment, in a locker rather than in your car.

Lost Children Every theme park has a designated spot for adults to be reunited with lost children (or lost spouses). Ask where it is when you enter any park (or consult the free park guide maps) and instruct your children to ask park personnel (not a stranger) to take them there if they get separated from you. Point out what park personnel look like so they will know who to go to. Children 7 and under should wear name-tags.

Lost & Found Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen while in Orlando and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ☎ **800/847-2911** or 410/581-9994. American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ☎ **800/221-7282**. MasterCard holders should call ☎ **800/307-7309** or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ☎ **800/555-1212**.

If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (☎ 800/325-6000; www.westernunion.com).

Identity theft or fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you've lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are **Equifax** (☎ 800/766-0008; www.equifax.com), **Experian** (☎ 888/397-3742; www.experian.com), and **TransUnion** (☎ 800/680-7289; www.transunion.com). Finally, if you've lost all forms of photo ID, call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you've filed.

Newspapers & Magazines The *Orlando Sentinel* is the major local newspaper, but you can also purchase the Sunday editions of other papers (most notably, the *New York Times*) in some hotel gift shops or bookstores such as Barnes & Noble or Borders. Don't count on finding daily editions of West Coast papers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, without making special arrangements. The Friday edition of the *Sentinel* includes extensive entertainment and dining listings as does the *Sentinel's* website, www.orlandosentinel.com. *Orlando Weekly* is a free, alternative paper that has a lot of entertainment and art listings focused on events outside tourist areas.

Pharmacies There's a **Walgreens** 24-hour pharmacy at 7650 W. Sand Lake Road (☎ 407/345-9497). Other 24-hour locations can be found near Universal Orlando and Kissimmee by logging on to www.walgreens.com. Numerous other pharmacies in and around the Orlando area are listed inside the Yellow Pages.

Photography Two-hour film processing is available at all major parks. Look for the PHOTO EXPRESS sign. You can buy film, batteries, and disposable cameras in all of the theme parks, but you'll save money on almost everything if you shop at drugstores such as Walgreens or local grocery stores. These places often run specials for discounted processing or free double-prints, saving you a significant amount of money. They're listed in the Yellow Pages under "Photo Finishing." The parks carry only a small selection of memory chips for digital cameras; if you need rechargeable batteries, you will have to go to one of the many camera shops found off park property.

Post Office The post office most convenient to Disney and Universal is at 10450 Turkey Lake Rd. (☎ 800/275-8777). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9am to noon. A smaller location, closer to Disney, is at 12133 Apopka Vineland (S.R.535) in Lake Buena Vista, just up the road from Hotel Plaza Boulevard (☎ 800/275-8777). If all you need is to buy stamps and mail letters, you can do that at most hotels.

Safety Just because Minnie, Mickey, Donald, and Goofy all live here doesn't mean that a few more seedy characters aren't lurking about as well. Even in the most magical place on Earth you shouldn't let your guard down; Orlando has a crime rate that's comparable to that of other large U.S. cities. Stay alert and

remain aware of your surroundings. It's best to keep your valuables in a safe. Most hotels today are equipped with in-room safes or offer the use of a safety deposit box at the front desk, just for that purpose. Keep a close eye on your valuables when you're in public places—restaurants, theaters, and even airport terminals. Renting a locker is always preferable to leaving your valuables in the trunk of your car, even in the theme-park lots. Be cautious, even when in the parks, and avoid carrying large amounts of cash in a backpack or fanny pack, which could be easily accessed while you're standing in line for a ride or show. And don't leave valuables unattended under a stroller—that's pretty much asking for them to be stolen.

If you're renting a car, carefully read the safety instructions that the rental company provides. Never stop for any reason in a suspicious, poorly lighted, or unpopulated area, and remember that children should never ride in the front seat of a car equipped with air bags.

Special Diets Kosher, salt-free, and other dietary needs can be arranged at sit-down restaurants inside the Disney parks and resorts with 24-hour or longer notice. Call ☎ **407/939-3463**.

Taxes A 6.5% to 7% sales tax (depends on the local county you happen to be in) is charged on all goods with the exception of most edible grocery-store items and medicines. Hotels add another 2% to 5% in resort taxes to your bill, so the total tax on accommodations can run you up to 12%.

Telephone Because of its growth spurt, Orlando has had to go to 10-digit dialing. If you're making a local call in Orlando's 407 area code region, even across the street, *you must dial the 407 area code followed by the number you wish to call*, for a total of 10 digits.

Time Orlando is in the **Eastern Standard Time (EST)** zone, which is 1 hour later than Chicago and 3 hours later than Los Angeles. Call ☎ **407/646-3131** for the correct time and temperature.

Weather Call ☎ **321/255-0212** for the local weather forecast (they answer as National Weather Service in Melbourne, FL, but after that you get an option to punch in 412 from a touch-tone phone, which plugs you into the Orlando forecast). A local 24-hour news station, Channel 13, offers weather forecasts several times an hour. You can also check out the Weather Channel on your hotel TV or at **www.weather.com** for the most up-to-date information.

Where to Stay

There seemed to be no end to Orlando's hotel boom a few years ago. About 4,000 new rooms were added every year through 2000, and then things began to slow down. The good news (though maybe not for your pocketbook) is that tourism numbers (and hotels) are rising once more.

The large-scale luxury resort, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, opened in the fall of 2004, while right down the road the first phase of The Reunion Resort & Club has opened to guests. The Orlando area now has more than 114,000 rooms, including scores of places located in or near the major-league tourist draws: Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando, SeaWorld, and the rest of International Drive. Disney alone has 31 resorts (2 of them added within the last 2 years), timeshares, and "official" hotels.

Beautifully landscaped grounds are the rule at properties in WDW, neighboring Lake Buena Vista, Universal Orlando, and on the mid and southern portions of I-Drive. But the beauty of the area is often offset by the beast of heavier traffic and, at times, higher prices. No matter

what your budget or crowd tolerance, there is something for everyone. If you're looking for an inexpensive or moderately priced motel, check out the options in Kissimmee (though that area is no longer limited only to the budget conscious) and, to a lesser degree, on the northern end of International Drive.

Once you have decided on your vacation dates, book your accommodations as soon as possible, especially if you want to stay on Disney or Universal property. Advance reservations are an absolute necessity if you're planning on staying at the moderate or preferred resorts in this area. In addition to the individual listings in this chapter, there are several places where you can find discounted rooms.

HotelKingdom.com (☎ 877/766-6787 or 407/294-9600; www.hotelkingdom.com) is a good source of room or vacation rental bargains, with another good place being the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau** (☎ 800/643-9492; www.orlandoinfo.com). You can also use the Kissimmee-St. Cloud site (www.floridakiss.com) or call ☎ 800/333-5477.

HOW TO CHOOSE A HOTEL & SAVE MONEY

All of the rates cited in the following pages are what they call "rack rates." That means they're typical prices listed in the hotel brochures or the ones that hotel clerks give over the telephone. You can almost always negotiate a better price by purchasing package deals, by assuring the clerks they can do better, or by mentioning to the clerk that you belong to one of several organizations that receive a discount such as AARP, AAA, or a labor union. The Orlando Magicard can save you plenty of cash as well (see p. 14 for more on this cost-saving option). Even the type of credit card you use could get you a **5% to 10% discount** at some of the larger chains. Any discount you get will

help ease the impact of local resort taxes, which aren't included in the quoted rates. *These taxes will add 11% to 12% to your bill depending on where you're staying.*

The **average, undiscounted hotel rate** for the Orlando area is currently about \$85 per night double, and that rate in good times climbs about 5% a year. The lowest rates at WDW are at the Pop Century and three All-Star resorts, which, depending on the season, can run from \$77 to \$131. They're pricier than comparable rooms in the outside world, but though they are small and basic, they are still Disney-owned and offer the same on-property advantages as Disney's more expensive resorts.

WDW's 2005 value seasons or lowest rates are generally available from January 1 to February 16, August 28 to October 4 (except Labor Day weekend), and November 27 to December 19. Regular season rates are available from April 17 to August 27 and October 4 to November 26. Peak rates apply from February 17 to April 16, preholiday rates from November 27 through December 19, and holiday rates from December 20 through December 31. While the actual dates will shift a little (and will also change depending on the level of hotel you choose), the same periods should apply in 2006.

If you're not renting a car or staying at a Walt Disney World or Universal resort, be sure to ask when booking your room if the hotel or motel offers **transportation to the theme parks** and, if so, whether there's a charge and exactly what it is if they do. Some hotels and motels offer free service with their own shuttles (listed in the reviews in this chapter). Others use Mears Transportation (see "Getting Around" in chapter 4), and rates can be as high as \$15 per person round-trip (some hotels make these arrangements for you; others require you to do it). On the other hand, if you have a vehicle, expect to pay \$8 a day to park it at Disney and SeaWorld, \$9 at Universal.

If you stay at a WDW resort or one of Disney's "official" hotels, transportation is complimentary within WDW. For more information on this and the other advantages of staying at Disney properties, see "The Perks of Staying with Mickey," below.

In or out of Walt Disney World, if you book your hotel as part of a **package** (see "Packages for the Independent Traveler" in chapter 2 for more details), you'll likely enjoy some type of savings. The **Walt Disney Travel Company** (☎ 407/934-7806) offers a number of Disney resort packages.

Outside Disney, you'll probably be quoted a rate better than the rack rates contained in the following listings, but you should try to bargain even further to ensure you get the best rates possible. Ask about discounts for students, government employees, seniors, military, firefighters, police, AFL-CIO, corporate clients, and, again, AARP or AAA, holders of the Orlando Magicard, even frequent traveler programs (whether you have hotel or airline membership). Special Internet-only discounts and packages may also be featured on hotel websites, especially those of the larger chains. No matter where you end up staying, always ask again when you arrive if there are any additional discounts or promotions available. But never come to Orlando without a reservation: Taking chances on your negotiating skills is one thing, taking your chances on room availability is quite another. Orlando is a year-round destination, with a heavy convention and business trade, and international vacationers flock here during periods when domestic travelers aren't. If you come without a reservation, you may find yourself extremely disappointed—or completely out of luck.

In the "Amenities" section of the accommodations descriptions that follow, we mention **concierge levels** where available. In these hotels within a hotel, guests pay more to enjoy a luxurious private lounge (sometimes with great views), free continental or full breakfasts, hot and cold hors d'oeuvres served at cocktail hour, and/or late-night

Staying for Less

Although many people participate in the airlines' frequent-flier programs, not many take advantage of the major hotel chains' frequent-stay clubs. Even if you don't stay in a hotel for more than your yearly vacation, you may be able to realize real savings by joining its program.

Like the airlines, many hotels will let you build points for staying at a participating property, dining in its restaurant, or using another service they include as a partner. Although programs vary, points can generally be traded for free nights, discounted rates, special perks, or, in some cases, frequent-flier miles. And the price to join is right—it's free. Simply joining a hotel club may make you immediately eligible for discounts, give you express check-in and checkout privileges, and provide free breakfasts, local calls, or a morning newspaper. And there's no reason you can't join more than one.

Here are a few frequent-stay programs that offer perks to travelers:

- **Six Continents Hotels Priority Club** (☎ 800/272-9273; www.priorityclub.com) covers the Inter-Continental Resorts, Crowne Plaza hotels and resorts, Holiday Inns, and Staybridge Suites. Priority Club members get express check-in, access to discounted rates at select hotels, and other perks. The perks vary according to hotel but often include breakfast, local phone calls, late checkout, and/or parking.
- **Choice Hotels International Guest Privileges** program (☎ 888/770-6800; www.guestprivileges.com) covers Sleep, Quality, Comfort, and Clarion properties. Participants receive perks such as express check-in, special rates, room upgrades based on availability, extended checkout times, and free local calls and newspapers.
- **Hyatt Hotel's Gold Passport** program (☎ 800/304-9288; www.goldpassport.com) gives members a private reservation phone number and express check-in, complimentary newspapers, and access to the hotel's fitness center. You'll also receive special offers and discounted rates from select Hyatt properties.
- **Hilton HHonors** program (☎ 800/548-8690; www.hiltonhhonors.com) covers Hilton, Conrad, DoubleTree, Embassy Suites, Hampton Inn, and Homewood Suites properties. It offers expedited check-in, a dedicated reservation line, late checkout, and a free daily newspaper.

Other frequent-stay programs include **Starwood Hotels Preferred Guest** (☎ 888/625-4988; www.starwood.com), **Marriott Rewards** (☎ 801/468-4000; www.marriottrewards.com), and **Loews First** (☎ 800/563-9712; www.loewshotels.com).

cordials and pastries. Rooms are usually on higher floors, and guests are pampered with additional special services (including private registration and checkout, a personal concierge, and nightly bed turndown) and amenities (such as upgraded toiletries, bathroom scales, terry robes, hair dryers, and more). Ask for the specifics when you reserve a room.

You'll also find counselor-supervised **child care** or **activity centers** at some hotels. Very popular in Orlando, these can be marvelous, creatively run facilities that might offer movies, video games, arts and crafts, storytelling, puppet shows, indoor and outdoor activities, and more. Some provide meals and/or have beds where a child can sleep while you're out on the town. Check individual hotel listings for these facilities.

RESERVATION SERVICES

Many of the Kissimmee hotels listed under "Places to Stay in the Kissimmee Area," found later in this chapter, can be booked through the **Kissimmee-St. Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau** (☎ 800/333-5477; www.floridakiss.com). The same goes for Orlando and the **Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau** (☎ 800/643-9492; www.orlandoinfo.com).

Florida Hotel Network (☎ 800/293-2419; www.floridahotels.com), **Central Reservation Service** (☎ 800/555-7555 or 407/740-6442; www.crshotels.com), and **Hotels.com** (☎ 800/246-8357; www.hotels.com) are three other services that can help with room reservations and other kinds of reservations in central Florida. You can also book Disney World hotels direct by calling ☎ 407/934-7639 or visiting www.disneyworld.com; Universal Orlando properties can be booked by calling ☎ 800/837-2273 or 407/363-8000, or by visiting www.universalorlando.com.

HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

The hotels listed in this chapter are divided by location and price category. As you might expect, many of the inexpensive properties are the farthest from the action and/or have the most Spartan, unimaginative accommodations.

Keep in mind, however, that this isn't one of the world's best bargain destinations. Unlike other Florida tourist areas, there are few under-\$60 motels that meet the standards demanded for listing in this book. That's why we've raised the price bar. The ones in our **inexpensive** category charge an average of less than \$90 per night for a double room. Those offering \$90 to \$180 rooms make up the **moderate** category; \$180 to \$250 rooms are listed as **expensive**, and anything over \$250 is listed as **very expensive**. Any included extras (such as breakfast) are listed for each property. Orlando's peak and off seasons are often complicated as the peak times are sporadically disbursed throughout the calendar. Even remote things such as the International Sweet Potato Growers convention in Orlando can raise off-season prices. These especially impact moderately priced properties outside WDW.

Keep in mind that rates are per night double unless otherwise noted, and they don't include hotel taxes of 11% to 12%. Also, most Orlando hotels and motels let **kids under 12 (and usually under 18) stay free** with a parent or guardian if you don't exceed maximum room occupancy. But to be safe, ask for details when booking your room.

Tips Tight Squeeze

An average hotel or motel room in the Orlando area has about 325 to 400 square feet and beds for four; while hardly a castle, most travelers find it adequate for a short stay. We've made a special note in the listings of properties where the rooms are substantially larger or smaller than the average.

1 The Best Hotel Bets

For more of our favorite Central Florida hotels and motels see chapter 1, “The Best of Walt Disney World & Orlando.”

- Best for Families:** Every Disney resort caters to families, with special menus for kids, video-game arcades, free transportation to the parks, extensive recreational facilities, and, in some cases, character meals. However, some stand out in particular amongst the others. **Disney's Old Key West Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/827-7700) offers the relaxed laid-back charm of the Florida Keys and some of the best rooms on Disney property for families. Camping at the remote and wooded campgrounds of **Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-2900) makes for a more down-to-Earth family experience. To enjoy the wilderness of a different kind try **Disney's Animal Kingdom** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/938-3000) where the animals of the African Savannah seemingly come right to your doorstep. Outside the House of Mouse, **Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn** (☎ 877/387-5437 or 407/387-5437), features 2- and 3-bedroom Kid Suites, multilevel water slides and extensive play areas, and an all-new Nickelodeon decor. The **La Quinta Inn Lakeside** (☎ 407/396-2222) features plenty of casual dining, playgrounds, pools, and lots of recreational activities.
- Best Inexpensive Hotels:** That's easy: If you're going to stay on WDW property, you can't beat the prices at **Disney's All-Star Movies Resort**, **Disney's All-Star Music Resort**, **Disney's All-Star Sports Resort**, and the new **Disney's Pop Century Resort**. To book a room at any of Disney's inexpensive resorts, call ☎ 407/934-7639. The **Comfort Suites Maingate Resort** (☎ 888/390-9888 or 407/390-9888) offers a spacious room and plenty of amenities at reasonable rates. It's one of the nicest inexpensive properties in the Kissimmee area and is only 1½ miles west of Disney.
- Best Budget Motel:** The **Fairfield Inn International Drive** (☎ 800/228-2800 or 407/363-1944) has clean rooms, a quiet location close to Universal Orlando, and lots of restaurants within walking distance. All these things make it a good budget choice. If you want to stay closer to Mickey, the **La Quinta Inn Lakeside** (☎ 800/531-5900 or 407/396-2222) offers lots of recreational activities, nice rooms, and free shuttle service to the theme parks at bargain rates.
- Best for Business Travelers:** The **Crowne Plaza Universal** (☎ 407/355-0550), **Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld** (☎ 800/327-6677 or 407/351-5555), **Gaylord Palms** (☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-0000), **Marriott's Orlando World Center** (☎ 800/621-0638 or 407/239-4200), and the **Peabody Orlando** (☎ 800/732-2639 or 407/352-4000) offer full concierge service, excellent restaurants, spacious lounges, and an extensive array of business services.
- Best Location:** **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-3000), **Disney's Polynesian Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-2000), and **Disney's Contemporary Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-1000) are on the WDW monorail route, providing easy access to the parks. The **Portofino Bay Hotel** (☎ 888/322-5541 or 407/503-1000), **Hard Rock Hotel** (☎ 888/232-7827 or 407/363-8000), and **Royal Pacific Resort** (☎ 800/232-7827 or 407/503-3000) are within walking distance of both Universal Orlando parks, and there's also boat service to the dock at CityWalk.
- Best Service:** The elegant **Peabody Orlando** (☎ 800/732-2639 or 407/352-4000) offers attentive pampering from one of the most delightful staffs found in

the area. The **Gaylord Palms** (☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-0000) also makes it their business to treat you as if you were their only guest.

- **Best Pools:** All of the Walt Disney World resorts have wonderfully whimsical themed swimming pools, and usually of Olympic-size. Arguably, the best is shared by **Disney's Beach Club Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-8000) and **Disney's Yacht Club Resort** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-7000). Storm Along Bay, a 3-acre, free-form pool and water park, stretches between them, including a shipwreck for exploring and sand bottom pools for a toe tickling experience. Outside the Disney complex, the best resort pool in Orlando can be found at the **Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort** (☎ 800/233-1234 or 407/239-1234). It's a half-acre, lagoon-like, water-world pool that flows through rock grottoes, is spanned by a rope bridge, and has 12 waterfalls and two steep water slides. The addition of the 24,000-square-foot lazy river pool shared by the **Ritz-Carlton and JW at Marriott Grande Lakes** (☎ 800/576-5760 or 407/576-5760), however, may give it some stiff competition.

2 The Perks of Staying with Mickey

The decision on whether to bunk with the Mouse is one of the first you'll have to make when planning an Orlando vacation. In the sections "Places to Stay in Walt Disney World" and "'Official' Hotels in Lake Buena Vista" of this chapter, you'll find information on the 31 hotels, resorts, villas, timeshares, and campsites that are owned by Disney or are "official" hotels—those that are privately owned but have earned Disney's seal of approval. All 31, including the new Saratoga Springs Resort and Spa, are in WDW or Lake Buena Vista.

In addition to their proximity to the theme parks, there are other advantages to staying at a Disney property or one of the "official" hotels. The following amenities are included at all Disney resorts; **some** are offered by the "official" hotels, but be sure to ask when booking:

- Guests and their baggage get free transportation from Orlando International Airport via Disney transportation to their Disney resort using **Magical Express** (albeit only until Disney's "Happiest Celebration on Earth" ends in October 2006). See p. 42 for more on this option.
- Unlimited **free** transportation on the **Walt Disney World Transportation System's** buses, monorails, ferries, or water taxis to and from the four WDW parks, from 2 hours prior to opening until 2 hours after closing. **Free** transportation is also provided to and from Downtown Disney and Pleasure Island, Downtown Disney Marketplace, Typhoon Lagoon, Blizzard Beach, and the WDW resorts. Three of them—the Polynesian, Grand Floridian, and Contemporary resorts—are located on the Disney monorail system. The transportation services offered can save money you might otherwise spend on a rental car, parking, and shuttles. It

Tips The Early Bird . . .

Disney's new **Extra Magic Hour** lets resort guests into the parks either an hour before other guests, or allows them to stay and play up to three hours after everyone else has to head home. Many of the more popular rides and attractions are operational (pick up the latest schedule for a complete listing), as are some shops and restaurants. For more information on this program, see p. 202.

also means you're guaranteed admission to all of the parks, even during peak times when parking lots sometimes fill to capacity.

- Kids under 17 stay free in their parent's room, and reduced-price children's menus are available in most restaurants.
- Character breakfasts and/or dinners at some restaurants.
- The **Extra Magic Hour** (see the box "The Early Bird . . .," above).
- TVs equipped with the Disney Channel, **nightly bedtime stories** (Channel 22, 7–10pm, audio only), and WDW information stations.
- A Lobby Concierge (replacing the old Guest Services desk) where you can buy tickets to all Disney parks and attractions without standing in long lines at the parks and get information on dining, recreation, and everything Disney.
- Playing privileges, **preferred tee times**, and, in some cases, free transportation to one of the Disney golf courses. (See "Hitting the Links" in chapter 8.)
- WDW has some of the **best swimming pools** in Orlando and recently has built new ones or remodeled old ones as zero-entry or zero-grade pools, meaning there's a gradual slope into the water on at least one side rather than only a step down. These include pools at the Grand Floridian, Animal Kingdom, and Polynesian resorts and others.
- On-premises car rental is available at the Magic Kingdom Auto Plaza through Alamo ☎ **407/824-3470** (there are also car-rental desks at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin).
- The recreational options (not including the parks) are extensive and include fishing, tennis, boating, surfing, parasailing, horseback riding, golf, and more. Many activities may cost a few dollars extra; however, they're all right at your fingertips, many offering experiences you won't find elsewhere.
- Disney's **refillable mug program** lets you buy—for around \$12—a bottomless mug for soda, coffee, tea, and/or cocoa at its resorts. The offer is for the length of your stay, but it isn't transferable to the theme parks. You can use it only at the property at which it is bought, with two exceptions: Mugs are transferable between the Beach Club and Yacht Club resorts or among the three All-Star resorts.
- Resort guests can charge most purchases (including meals) made anywhere inside WDW to their room. In most cases, purchases made inside the theme parks can be delivered to your room at no extra charge.

But there are also **disadvantages** to staying with the Mouse:

- The complimentary Walt Disney World Transportation System can be *excruciatingly time-consuming*. There are times when you have to take a ferry to catch a bus to get on the monorail to reach your hotel. The system makes a circuit but may not necessarily take the most direct path for you. It can take up to an hour or more to get to a place that's right across the lagoon from you.
- Resort rates tend to be about **20% to 30% higher** than comparable hotels and motels away from the parks.
- Without a car or another means to get off the property, you'll either be resigned to paying Disney's higher prices or paying for shuttles to get to Orlando's other offerings.
- If you don't spend a little time away from the Disney parks, the all-Mickey, all-the-time atmosphere can get a little overwhelming, and you'll miss out on the real Florida and all the other great parks, restaurants, shops, and activities Orlando has to offer.

WALT DISNEY WORLD CENTRAL RESERVATIONS OFFICE (CRO) & WALT DISNEY TRAVEL COMPANY

To book a room or package at Disney's resorts, campgrounds, and "official" hotels through the **Walt Disney World Travel Company**, contact the **Central Reservations Office (CRO)**, P.O. Box 10000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000 (☎ 407/934-7639; www.disneyworld.com).

CRO can recommend accommodations suited to your price range and specific needs, such as being near a particular park, facilities that offer supervised child-care centers, or a pool large enough to swim laps. But the staffers who answer the phones usually don't volunteer information about a better deal or a special *unless you ask*.

Be sure to inquire about Disney's numerous package plans, which can include meals, tickets, recreation, and other features. The right package can save you money and time; but having a comprehensive game plan first is helpful in computing the cost of your vacation in advance.

CRO can also give you information about various theme-park ticket options, the airlines, and car rentals. It can also make dinner-show reservations for you at the resort of your choice.

OTHER SOURCES FOR ORLANDO PACKAGES

In addition to the Disney sources above, there are several other travel companies that offer packages utilizing Disney resorts. In addition to **AAA** (☎ 800/732-1991; www.aaa.com) and **American Express Vacations** (☎ 800/346-3607; <http://travel.americanexpress.com/travel/personal>), almost all of the major airlines offer vacation packages to Orlando. See "Packages for the Independent Traveler" in chapter 2 for more options. Give each source a call, ask for brochures, and compare offerings to find the best package for you.

On a slightly smaller scale than Disney, **Universal Orlando** offers several travel packages that can include resort stays, VIP access to the parks, discounts to other Orlando attractions, and cruises. Airfare and car rentals are also available. You can book a package by calling ☎ 800/711-0080 or 407/224-7000. On the Internet, visit www.universalstudiosvacations.com. **SeaWorld** also offers vacation packages that include stays at nearby resorts and park tickets. These can be booked by calling ☎ 800/423-8368, or visiting www.seaworld.com.

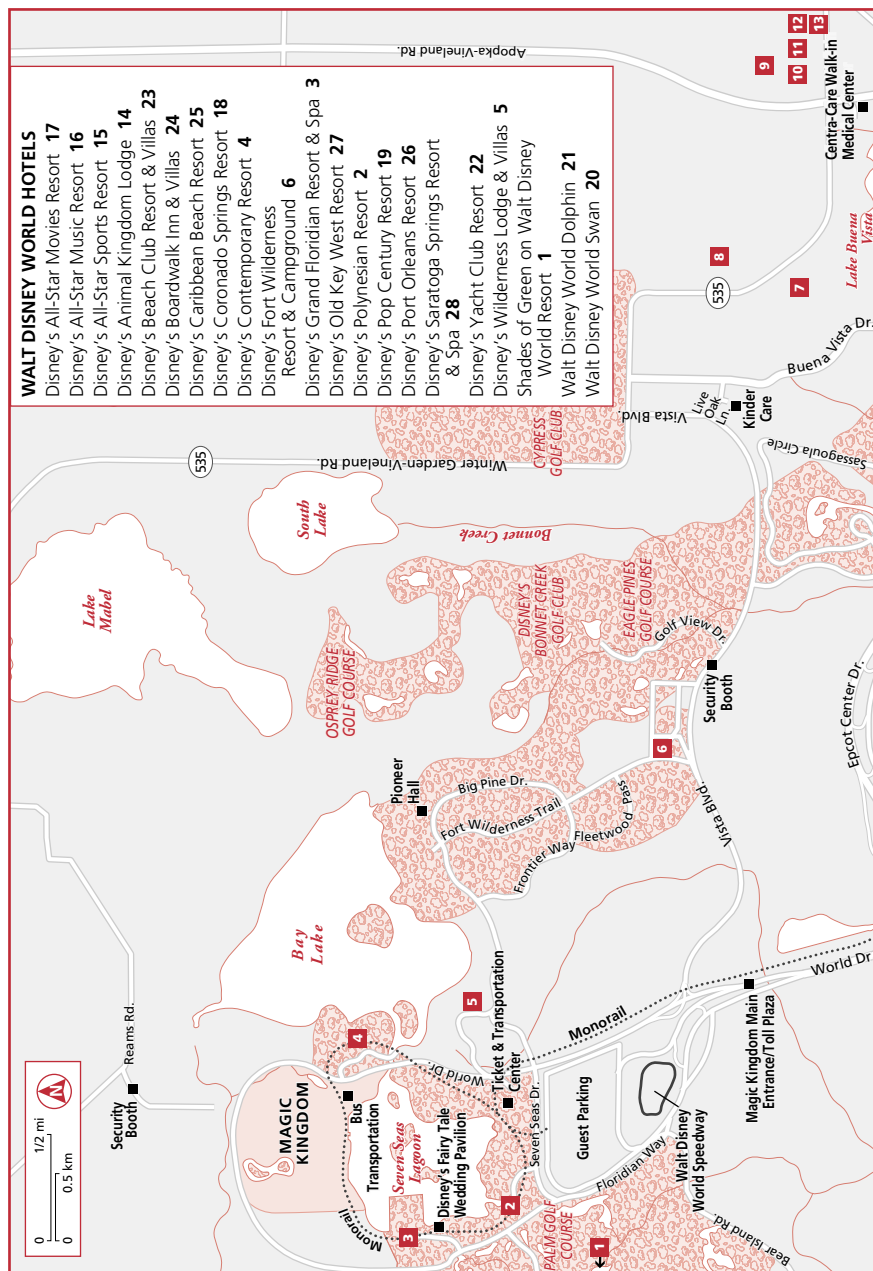
Tips Special Treatment

AAA (☎ 800/732-1991; www.aaa.com) members can take advantage of special lodging programs at select WDW resorts and preferred parking at the theme parks if they purchase a AAA Disney vacation package or prepurchase their park tickets at participating AAA locations (these cannot be purchased at the parks!). A member's Hospitality Desk located right inside the Magic Kingdom's Town Square provides basic member services.

3 Places to Stay in Walt Disney World

The resorts in this section are either Disney-owned or "official" Disney hotels that offer many of the same perks. All are on the Disney Transportation System, which means those of you who don't want to venture too far will be able to do without a car.

Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Accommodations



If you do decide that Disney is your destination, come up with a short list of preferred places to stay, then call CRO (☎ 407/934-7639) for up to the minute rates. Web surfers can get information at www.disneyworld.com.

Those who come by auto will find large signs along all of the major roads on Disney property pointing the way to the various resorts. You'll find these hotels listed on the map, "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Accommodations," on p. 90.

Individual resorts don't have their own **golf courses**, but WDW has 99 holes situated along the northern end of the property (see "Hitting the Links" in chapter 8). The same goes for kennels; resort guests can board their pets overnight at the Transportation & Ticket Center on Seven Seas Drive, near Disney's Polynesian Resort.

Prices in the following listings reflect the range available at each resort when this guide was published. Rates vary depending on season and room location, but the numbers should help you determine which places fit your budget.

Note: Most hotels and resorts, Disney or otherwise, have cribs (or portable cribs) available (though limited in number) at no extra charge. Rollaways or cots are usually available as well; however, many resorts will charge around \$10 per night to use them. Refrigerators (mini ones anyway) as well are sometimes available though some hotels may charge up to \$10 per night for the privilege.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Disney's Beach Club Resort ★★ ★ This property re-creates the grand turn-of-the-20th-century Victorian seaside resorts of Cape Cod and has a more casual ambience than its sister, the Yacht Club (detailed below), with which it shares restaurants, shops, and numerous recreational activities. Striped and floral wicker furnishings, seashells, and beach umbrellas adorn the hotel's casual interior. The Beach Club is close enough to Epcot to allow you to walk to the park, though most guests prefer to take the ferry (the parks are workout enough!). The shipwreck at Stormalong Bay (a huge free-form swimming pool and water park that sprawls over 3 acres) invites you to explore its decks, climb around, and slide into the water waiting below. It includes a stretch of sandy beach, sand-bottom pools, whirlpools, and waterslides (including a toddler slide, so no one misses out). Room views range from the pool (more expensive) to the parking lot. Some rooms have balconies.

Note: Both the Beach Club and Yacht Club (see below) offer the chance to charter a reproduction of a 1930s mahogany runabout to **cruise Crescent Lake** or see Epcot's IllumiNations fireworks display (from \$120 plus tax for up to 12 people for a 45-min. cruise to catch the fireworks; ☎ 407/824-2621).

Tips The Beach Club's Baby Sister

Disney's **Beach Club Villas** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-2175; www.disneyworld.com) make up a resort inspired by Cape May seaside homes of the early 20th century with clapboard exteriors and intricate white wood trim. The 280-room resort, opened in July 2002, is a member of the Disney Vacation Club that rents studios and 1- and 2-bedroom villas (\$294-\$449 studios, \$400-\$1,040 villas) to mainstream guests when their owners are not staying on the property. Amenities are shared with the Yacht Club and Beach Club resorts, with the exception of the Villa's quiet pool—which is only accessible to villa guests. It, too, is close to Epcot's International Gateway.

1800 Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-0100. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-8000. Fax 407/934-3850. www.disneyworld.com. 583 units. \$294–\$680 double; \$495–\$2,165 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; grill; 4 lounges; 3-acre pool and play area; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; health club; jogging trail; volleyball; croquet; Jacuzzi; watercraft rental; fishing; playground; supervised children's program; video arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation for a fee to non-Disney theme parks; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's BoardWalk Inn ★★☆☆ Disney's plush 1940s-style "seaside" resort is worth a visit even if you don't stay here. The grounds encompass 45 acres along Crescent Lake, and just a ferry ride across the lake from Epcot. It's a great place to recapture a little bit of yesteryear, whether that means relaxing in a wooden rocker overlooking the courtyard or strolling along the many shops, restaurants, and clubs that line the resort's quarter-mile boardwalk. After the sun goes down, the boardwalk springs to life with street performers, food vendors, and midway games, reminiscent of the hustle and bustle of the Atlantic City Boardwalk in its heyday. (**Note:** The activity on the BoardWalk reaches well into the late evening hours, as does the noise, which carries to the rooms overlooking it.) Some of the Cape Cod-style rooms have balconies, and the corner units offer a bit more space. At night, the rooms overlooking the boardwalk, mostly those in the center, enjoy a view of Epcot's fireworks display. The more expensive rooms overlook the boardwalk or pool; the less expensive ones can't avoid a view of the parking lot but are sheltered from the boardwalk clamor. Hang on to your swimsuit if you hit the pool's famous—or infamous, depending on how you look at it—200-foot "keister coaster" water slide. See also the reviews for the **Flying Fish Café** (p. 150), **Spoodles** (p. 151), and **ESPN Club** (p. 153) restaurants.


2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-5100. Fax 407/934-5150. www.disneyworld.com. 378 units. \$294–\$690 double; \$560–\$2,095 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet \$7. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; groceries; grill; 2 lounges; 3 clubs; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; health club; croquet; Jacuzzi; bike and sports equipment rentals; playground; supervised children's activity center; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Tips Sink Space

Although Disney's resort rooms have notoriously cramped bathrooms, all but its inexpensive resorts sport double sinks, usually set in a small dressing area outside the bathroom. So while you may bang your shin on the shower, at least you won't have to wait in line to brush your teeth.

Disney's BoardWalk Villas ★★☆☆ Located on the same site as the BoardWalk Inn, and sharing its amenities and ambience, the villas are a great option for those traveling in larger groups. Sold as timeshares, they're also rented to traditional tourists. Rooms range from standard-size studios (with separate sleeping and living quarters) and villas to 3-bedroom units with 2,100 square feet and beds for 12. Most have a balcony or patio and the same trimmings as the BoardWalk Inn, above. Studio rooms have kitchenettes while the larger suite style villas have full kitchens. The service is impeccable, and the location near Epcot (plus Disney's MGM-Studios is just a hop, skip, and a jump behind it) is convenient as well. The spacious accommodations are great for families traveling together.

2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. © 407/934-7639 or 407/939-5100. Fax 407/934-5150. www.disneyworld.com. 520 units. \$289–\$1,915. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; grill; 2 lounges; 3 clubs; 2 outdoor heated pools, kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; health club; croquet; Jacuzzi; bike and sporting equipment rental; playground; supervised children's activity center; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms; groceries. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, full kitchen with dishes (villas); fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, microwave, washer and dryer (villas).

Disney's Contemporary Resort  This hotel is best known for its convenient location right beside the Magic Kingdom (rooms offer great views of the park and Bay Lake); it's also one of only three resorts on Disney's monorail system (the Grand Floridian and Polynesian are the others). The 15-story, 30-year-old A-frame (lots of concrete and glass) dates back to WDW's infancy, and though a complete renovation in 1999 updated its facilities and rooms, the pool and grounds are fairly plain Jane. This is the least themed of the Disney resorts, and it just doesn't offer the "magical" atmosphere of the others in its category. The rooms and public areas have a modern (some might say dull) Art Nouveau feel. The best views are from upper floors, where the rooms are a tad quieter than those on the lower floors, which are exposed to noisy public areas and the monorail (which runs right through the hotel). Come here for dinner at **Chef Mickey's** (p. 172) or the **California Grill** (p. 150), but if you have kids check into accommodations elsewhere.

4600 N. World Dr. (P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. © 407/934-7639 or 407/824-1000. Fax 407/824-3539. www.disneyworld.com. 1,008 units. \$244–\$695 double; \$800–\$1,190 suite; Concierge level \$405–\$2,465. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; food court; 2 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools, kids' pool; 6 lighted tennis courts; fitness center; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa   From the moment you step into the opulent five-story domed lobby, you'll feel as if you've slipped back to an era that started with the late 19th century and lasted through the Roaring '20s, when a guy named Gatsby was at the top of his game. Expect tea to be served in the afternoon (4pm daily) while a piano runs the spectrum from lullabies to ragtime; then, as the evening arrives, a small, '40s-fond band takes the helm upstairs. The Floridian has become the romantic choice for couples, especially honeymooners, who like luxuriating in the first-class spa and health club—the best in WDW. Virtually all of the inviting Victorian-style rooms overlook a garden, pool, courtyard, or the Seven Seas Lagoon; many have balconies, and the "dormer rooms" have vaulted ceilings. It's one of three resorts located directly on the monorail system and near the Magic Kingdom.

Don't miss the reviews of its top-end restaurants, **Victoria & Albert's** (p. 148) and **Citricos** (p. 147), as well as some **special programs for young aspiring cooks** (p. 145).

4401 Floridian Way (P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. © 407/934-7639 or 407/824-3000. Fax 407/824-3186. www.disneyworld.com. 867 units. \$349–\$870 double; \$615–\$2,535 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; grill; character dining; 3 lounges; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; beach; 2 lighted tennis courts; health club; spa; watercraft rentals; playground; supervised children's center; arcade; concierge; car-rental desk; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Moments A Piece of Yesterday, Today

The *Grand 1*, the Grand Floridian's 44-foot yacht, is available for hire for groups of 2 to 13. It cruises Seven Seas Lagoon and Bay Lake, where in the evenings you can see the Magic Kingdom's Fantasy in the Sky fireworks or arrange a gourmet-dinner cruise. Voyages are \$400 per hour (dinner at an additional cost) including a captain and deck hand (☎ 407/824-2439 or 407/824-2682).

Disney's Old Key West Resort ★★ Palms and pastels surround you with an understated theme (at least by Disney standards) at this beautiful resort, architecturally mirroring Key West at the turn of the 20th century. It's a good choice for those not into gingerbread overload. Located between Epcot and Downtown Disney West Side, it offers some of the quietest, homiest rooms on WDW property. Old Key West is affiliated with the Disney Vacation Club—a timeshare program—but many units are rented when not being used by owners. The 156-acre complex has tree-lined brick walkways edged by white picket fences. Two-bedroom villas have enough beds for eight; grand villas (2,202 sq. ft.) sleep 12. Villas have whirlpool tubs. All of the accommodations sport balconies or patios, and all have kitchens or kitchenettes.

1510 N. Cove Rd. (off Community Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/827-7700. Fax 407/827-7710. www.disneyworld.com. 761 units. \$259–\$379 studio; \$350–\$805 1- and 2-bedroom villas; \$1,070–\$1,505 grand villa. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Restaurant; convenience store; 4 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; 3 tennis courts (2 lighted); health club; basketball; volleyball; shuffleboard; Jacuzzi; sauna; watercraft rentals; bike rentals; playground; arcade game room; activity center with board games; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; massage; babysitting; laundry service; groceries. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen or kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, microwave, washer and dryer (villas).

Disney's Polynesian Resort ★ Just south of the Magic Kingdom, the 25-acre Polynesian Resort resembles the South Pacific with its thick tropical foliage, luaus, and waterfalls. The resort's extensive play areas and volcanic themed swimming pools make it a great choice for those traveling with kids. Public areas offer canvas cabanas, hammocks, and big swings overlooking a 200-acre lagoon. Most rooms accommodate five; however the bathrooms tend to be a bit cramped (typical of Disney rooms). Many rooms have views of the grounds or Seven Seas Lagoon; some lagoon-view rooms offer great views of Cinderella Castle (at a higher price, of course), so request your desired view when making your reservation. See the review of the 'Ohana restaurant on p. 153 and its **Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show** on p. 315.

600 Seven Seas Dr. (P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-2000. Fax 407/824-3174. www.disneyworld.com. 847 units. \$304–\$580 double; \$410–\$720 concierge level; \$510–\$2,550 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; 2 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; beach; watercraft rental; playground; supervised children's center; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's Yacht Club Resort ★★ The Yacht Club has an atmosphere loaded with the posh elegance found in a turn-of-the-20th-century New England yacht club (as imagined by Disney). It is definitely more upscale than its sister resort, the Beach Club (see above), as the rooms, views, service, and atmosphere (nautically themed, of course) are a step or so better. Here you'll find fine leather furnishings, antique glass

chandeliers, and brass accents adorning the lobby. It's geared more toward adults and families with older children, though young kids are certainly catered to (this is Disney after all). It shares a 25-acre lake, a first-class swimming pool, and magnificent landscaping with the Beach Club. Rooms have beds for up to five and most have balconies; views run from asphalt to Crescent Lake and the gardens; you would, however, have to be a contortionist to see the lake from some of the "water-view" rooms, so if this is a must, make sure that you request one with a direct view. Epcot is a 10- to 15-minute walk from the front door, but save your energy for the parks and use the Disney ferry.

1700 Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. © 407/934-7639 or 407/934-7000. Fax 407/924-3450. www.disneyworld.com. 621 units. \$294–\$525 double; \$435–\$680 concierge level; \$540–\$2,345 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, \$7 valet. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; grill, lounge; 3-acre water play area; 2 outdoor heated pools, kids' pool; beach; 2 lighted tennis courts; croquet; sand volleyball; Jacuzzi; watercraft rentals; supervised children's center; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, fridge (upon request), coffeemaker, iron, safe.

Walt Disney World Dolphin ★ If Antonio Gaudí and Dr. Seuss had teamed up on an architectural design, they might have created something like this Starwood resort and its sister, the Walt Disney World Swan (see below). This hotel centers on a 27-story pyramid with two 11-story wings crowned by 56-foot twin dolphin sculptures. Because it isn't as theme-intensive as the other Disney resorts, it's popular with business travelers and those who prefer their accommodations a little less sugary. Rooms offer views of the grounds and parts of WDW and were upgraded throughout 2004. The resort shares a grotto pool with waterfalls, water slide, and whirlpools, as well as a Body by Jake health club with the Swan. Look for the Mandara Spa to open

Out with the Old . . .

Disney's **Saratoga Springs Resort and Spa** (© 407/827-1100 or 407/934-3400; www.disneyworld.com) is the newest of the Disney Vacation Club timeshare resorts. It opened its first phase in spring 2004 (it will eventually sport 840 rooms upon full completion) and transports guests back in time to the heyday of upstate New York's 19th-century resorts. The small resort town of Saratoga Springs is evoked through lavish gardens, Victorian architecture, bubbling springs, and a country setting. The resort's main pool brings to mind its namesake's natural springs, with "healing" waters spilling over the rocky landscaping. Kids will appreciate their own water play area, and the playground and activity center (unsupervised) that's filled with games. The spa offers an array of treatments if you're in need of some rejuvenation after a day at the parks; if you're still in the mood for a workout, there's a health club as well. Accommodations resemble those of the other Disney vacation properties and range from studios that sleep four to grand villas that can sleep up to 12 people quite comfortably. Rates run from \$259 to \$379 for a studio to \$350 to \$1,505 for villas. Downtown Disney is just across the lagoon.

Tips When a WDW Property Is Not a WDW Property

As mentioned earlier there are nine “official” Disney hotels that aren’t owned by Disney itself. That’s true. But there are a couple of asterisks. The Walt Disney World Swan and the Walt Disney World Dolphin have the Walt Disney name and are located right on the WDW resort property, but they’re not Disney-owned resorts, so they are considered “official” resorts.

in late 2005. Camp Dolphin is a supervised children’s program for kids ages 4 to 12, offering a variety of activities to keep the little ones busy while mom and dad enjoy some time alone. Epcot is the nearest park, just a short water taxi ride away, and the BoardWalk and Beach and Yacht Club resorts are within walking distance, greatly expanding the dining and entertainment options within reach of your own two feet; however, with the addition of Todd English’s bluezoo (see p. 151), you may not need to go too far for a really good meal.

Note: Unlike the Disney-owned hotels, both the Dolphin and Swan assess a hefty \$10 resort fee (per day), and refrigerators are not an option (you can get an empty minibar that really doesn’t get all that cold for \$25 per day—ouch!).

1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 22653), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-2653. ☎ **800/227-1500** or 407/934-4000. Fax 407/934-4884. www.swandolphin.com or www.disneyworld.com. 1,509 units. \$259–\$409 double; \$625–\$3,255 suite. Resort fee \$10. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$7, valet parking \$14. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; grill; 2 lounges; 4 outdoor heated pools; children’s pool; beach; 4 lighted tennis courts; health club; volleyball; basketball; jogging trail; watercraft rentals; playground; supervised children’s center; 2 game rooms; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, video games, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Walt Disney World Swan ★ Not to be outdone by the huge dolphins at its sister property, this high-rise Westin resort is topped with dual 45-foot swan statues and seashell fountains. It offers a good location as it is close to Epcot, Disney’s MGM-Studios, Fantasia Gardens, and the nightlife of the BoardWalk. While the theme doesn’t scream Mickey Mouse, the decor and atmosphere are colorful and inviting. It shares a beach, health club, children’s program, a number of restaurants, and other trimmings with the Dolphin (see above). The best room views are from the 11th and 12th floors’ Royal Beach Club, the hotel’s concierge level; the beach next to the pool offers a great view of Epcot’s IllumiNations fireworks. Note that the guest rooms were all upgraded in 2003 (they now sport Westin’s famous “Heavenly Beds”) and are just a tad smaller than those at the Dolphin.

1200 Epcot Resorts Blvd. (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 22786), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-2786. ☎ **800/248-7926**, 800/228-3000, or 407/934-3000. Fax 407/934-4499. www.swandolphin.com or www.disneyworld.com. 756 units. \$259–\$495 double; \$865–\$2,835 suite. Resort fee \$10. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$7, valet parking \$14. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; grill; lounge; 4 outdoor heated pools; children’s pool; beach; 4 lighted tennis courts; basketball; volleyball; jogging trail; health club; watercraft rental; playground; supervised children’s center; 2 game rooms; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, video games, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge ★★☆☆ The feel of an African game-reserve lodge surrounds you as you enter this resort's lobby, which features a thatched roof and ornate shield chandeliers. The room layout follows a *kraal* design (a semicircular layout) that overlooks a 30-acre savannah, giving guests an occasional view of birds, giraffes, and other animals that call the savannah home. (Not all rooms have savannah views—you have to pay more for that—though you can get the scenery for nothing through large picture windows in the lobby and from a nature trail set behind the pool area.) Typical rooms are a bit smaller than those in Disney's Very Expensive category, making it slightly more crowded for four. All rooms have balconies, complete with “mosquito netting” curtains. The 9,000-square-foot pool has a waterslide, a wading area for young children, and a good view of the savannah. The lodge is adjacent to Animal Kingdom, but most everything else on WDW property is quite a distance away. Families will appreciate the animals and array of activities for kids, not to mention the fabulous breakfast and dinner buffet at **Boma** (p. 149), while the more relaxed and sedate nature of the resort makes it a good spot for couples as well.

2901 Osceola Pkwy., Bay Lake, FL 32830. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/938-3000. Fax 407/939-4799. www.disneyworld.com. 1,293 units. \$199–\$510 double; \$435–\$620 concierge level; \$640–\$2,300 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet parking \$9. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; lounge; outdoor heated pool, kids' pool; health club; playground; supervised children's center; children's and family activities; arcade; concierge; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; shopping arcade; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's Wilderness Lodge ★★☆☆ The geyser out back, the mammoth stone hearth in the lobby, and bunk beds for the kids are just a few reasons this resort is a favorite of families, though couples will find the surroundings to their liking as well. In keeping with the spirit of the Great American Northwest, the lodge has the feel of a rustic national park lodge, as it is patterned after one found in the beautiful Yellowstone National Park. Surrounded by 56 acres of oaks and pines, it offers a woodsy and remote setting. That geyser mentioned above “spouts off” periodically throughout the day just to add to the authenticity, and the nightly electric water pageants can be viewed from the shores of Bay Lake. The lodge also has an immense swimming area, fed by a thundering waterfall whose water flows in from the “hot springs” in the lobby. The nearest park is the Magic Kingdom, but because the resort is in a remote area, it can take some time to get there. The main drawback is the difficulty in accessing other areas via the WDW Transportation System. See the review of the **Artist Point** restaurant on p. 149.

Tips A Night Out

Several of the higher-priced Disney resorts—including Animal Kingdom Lodge, Beach Club, Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, and Wilderness Lodge as well as the Polynesian Resort—have supervised kid care, usually from 4 or 4:30 pm to midnight daily (\$10 per child 4–12, per hour, dinner and activities included; ☎ 407/939-3463). Disney also offers in-room sitters through **Kid's Night Out** (☎ 407/827-5444). The Walt Disney World Dolphin, an “official” resort, also offers a supervised childcare program.

Note: The lodge offers a free tour touting its architecture, Wednesday through Saturday at 9am (kids will likely be bored), and each day a select family gets to traipse up to the roof to raise the resort's flag (if you're interested, ask at the front desk upon check-in).

The 181 units at the **Villas at Disney's Wilderness Lodge** were added in November 2000. This is another Disney Vacation Club timeshare property that rents vacant rooms. It offers a more upscale mountain retreat experience, and more room than accommodations at the Wilderness Lodge, though the properties share a grand lobby, amenities, and activities. The one- and two-bedroom villas have 727 and 1,080 square feet, respectively.

901 W. Timberline Dr. (on the southwest shore of Bay Lake just east of the Magic Kingdom; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/938-4300. Fax 407/824-3232. www.disneyworld.com. 908 units. \$199–\$560 lodge; \$284–\$1015 villas; \$360–\$490 concierge level; \$370–\$1,220 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 lounges; outdoor heated pool, kids' pool; beach; jogging trail; 2 Jacuzzis; watercraft rentals; fishing; bike rentals; horse drawn carriage rides; supervised children's center; children's and family activities; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe, washer and dryer (villas).

MODERATE

Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort ★★ *Value* With its moderate pricing scheme and recreational activities, the Caribbean Beach is a great choice for families. The resort's rooms are spread across five villages (all Disney moderate resorts share a similar general layout) of pastel colored buildings, each named for the islands of Aruba, Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique, and Trinidad (north and south). The lush tropical greenery adds a touch of island atmosphere. Parrot Cay, the resort's main pool area and playground, is themed to an old Spanish style fort, complete with water cannons, water slides, and waterfalls. Always ask for a recently refurbished room when booking. The closest park is the Disney MGM–Studios, though it can take up to 45 minutes to get there using Disney transportation—it's probably best to rent a car if you stay here.

900 Cayman Way (off Buena Vista Dr.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/934-3400. Fax 407/934-3288. www.disneyworld.com. 2,112 units. \$134–\$209 double. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Restaurant; food court; lounge; large outdoor heated pool; 6 smaller pools in the villages; kids' pool; beach; jogging trail; volleyball; Jacuzzi; watercraft rentals; multiple playgrounds; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's Coronado Springs Resort ★ An American Southwestern theme carries through four- and five-story grand hacienda-style buildings in shades of pink and desert sand stucco, with terra-cotta tile roofs and shaded courtyards. The pool area, inspired by the Mayan ruins of Mexico, sports a tremendous Mayan temple with cascading water and a twisting waterslide. (Watch out for the spitting jaguar—he will likely surprise you as you pass by!) The rooms are identical in size to those in the Caribbean Beach Resort; including the small bathrooms. Those located nearest the central public area, pool, and lobby tend to be a bit noisier. The nearest park is Animal Kingdom, but the Coronado is at the southwest corner of WDW and a good distance from most other areas in the park.

1000 Buena Vista Dr. (near All-Star resorts and Blizzard Beach), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-1000. Fax 407/939-1003. www.disneyworld.com. 1,921 units. \$134–\$209 double; \$290–\$1,140 suite. Extra

Tips Value in the Eyes of the Beholder

Disney's All-Star resorts charge a "preferred room" rate, but don't expect much for the top rate of \$131. Guests who book it are paying for location: Preferred rooms are closer to the pools, food court, and/or transportation. If you've got a rental car or don't mind walking, don't bother paying extra; some of the quietest rooms at the All-Stars are the standard ones.

person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Restaurant; grill/food court; 2 lounges; 4 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; health club; volleyball; Jacuzzi; sauna; watercraft rentals; bike rentals; playground; 2 arcades; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; salon; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Disney's Port Orleans Resort ★★ *(Value)* Port Orleans has the best location, landscaping, and, perhaps, the coziest atmosphere of the resorts in this class. This southern-style property is really a combination of two distinct resorts; the French Quarter and Riverside. The French Quarter offers magnolia trees, wrought iron railings, cobblestone streets, and an idealistic vision of New Orleans' famous French Quarter. Riverside transports you back to Louisiana's Mississippi River towns, its rooms housed in buildings resembling grand plantation homes and the "rustic" wooden shacks of the bayou. Overall, this resort offers some romantic spots and is relatively quiet, making it popular with couples. The pools, playgrounds, and array of activities make it a favorite for families as well. The recently refurbished Doubloon Lagoon pool in the French Quarter is a family favorite, with a water slide that curves out of a Sea Serpent's mouth before entering the pool. The rooms and bathrooms (equivalent to all rooms at Disney's moderate resorts) are somewhat of a tight fit for four, though the Alligator Bayou rooms have a trundle bed that allows for an extra child, and the vanity areas now have privacy curtains. Port Orleans is just east of Epcot and Disney-MGM Studios. **Note:** All 1,080 rooms in the French Quarter side reopened in March 2004 after closing for a top-to-bottom refurbishment. The 2,048 rooms in Riverside will be renovated in phases throughout 2005.

2201 Orleans Dr. (off Bonnet Creek Pkwy.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639, 407/934-5000 (French Quarter), or 407/934-6000 (Riverside). Fax 407/934-5353 (French Quarter) or 407/934-5777 (Riverside). www.disneyworld.com. 3,056 units. \$134-\$209 double. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Restaurant; food court; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pools; Jacuzzi; watercraft rentals; fishing; bike rentals; playgrounds; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry services. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (upon request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Shades of Green on Walt Disney World Resort ★ *(Value)* Shades of Green, nestled among 3 of Disney's golf courses near the Magic Kingdom, is open only to folks in the military and their spouses, military retirees and widows, 100% disabled veterans, and Medal of Honor recipients. If you qualify, don't think of staying anywhere else—it's the best bargain on WDW soil. And it's even better now thanks to a \$92 million renovation that was completed in 2004. The refit nearly doubled the room capacity of the resort and added fully ADA-compliant rooms with wide doorways and roll-in showers. In addition to the new rooms and suites (housing up to eight), existing rooms were completely overhauled. All the large rooms offer TVs with wireless

keyboards (access to the Internet is offered for a fee), balconies or patios, and pool or golf-course views. Transportation—though slow—is available to all of the Disney parks and attractions.

1950 W. Magnolia Dr. (across from the Polynesian Resort). ☎ 888/593-2242 or 407/824-3400. Fax 407/824-3665. www.shadesofgreen.org. 599 units. \$76–\$116 double (based on military rank); \$225–\$250 suite. Extra person \$10. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 lounges; 2 heated outdoor pools; kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; fitness center; arcade; activities desk; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; babysitting; laundry services. *In room:* A/C, TV, refrigerator, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Disney's All-Star Movies Resort Most kids love the larger-than-life themes at the three All-Star resorts; however it can be Disney overload for many adults. Movies such as *Toy Story*, *101 Dalmatians*, and *Fantasia* live on in a very big (and I mean BIG) way at this family-friendly resort. Gigantic larger-than-life characters such as Buzz Lightyear, Pongo, and even Mickey himself mark this resort's buildings. They add the only Disney flair to what is essentially a no-frills, budget motel with basic, tiny (only 260 sq. ft.) rooms. Think old-school roadside motels, when all you expected was a clean bed and a bathroom (the ones here are positively Lilliputian). The soundproofing leaves something to be desired, especially with the number of children staying here. Like its two siblings (listed below), the All-Star Movies Resort is pretty isolated in WDW's southwest corner. If, like the White Rabbit, you're often "late for a very important date," renting a car is a far better choice than the Disney Transportation System.

1991 W. Buena Vista Dr., Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-7000. Fax 407/939-7111. www.disneyworld.com. 1,900 units. \$77–\$131 double. Extra person \$10. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Food court; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; playground; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry services. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (\$10 a night), safe.

Disney's All-Star Music Resort Giant trombones and musical themes from jazz to calypso are the only things differentiating this from the other All-Star resorts (they're all clones of each other—including the microscopic bathrooms—except for the different themes). While the extra frills at the other Disney resorts won't be found at the All-Stars, the rooms do have a significant perk: They're the least expensive (by a large margin) of all the Disney resorts. Most people, however don't come to WDW to lounge in their rooms, so if you're only going to be here to sleep, the cramped quarters may not be so bad. The closest parks are the Blizzard Beach and Animal Kingdom, which you can reach (not necessarily in an expedient manner) via the Disney Transportation System.

Tips Getting Away

If you want to enjoy the amenities and service of a Disney resort but can't do without some beach time, the Disney Vacation Club offers visitors the option of renting a room just 2 hours south of WDW at its **Vero Beach Resort** (☎ 407/939-7775; www.dvcreorts.com), directly on the Atlantic Ocean, with sand, surf, and all the Disney trimmings included. Studios, standard rooms, one- and two-bedroom villas, and three-bedroom cottages are all available ranging about \$165 to \$1,105 per night. You will need to arrange for your own transportation.

1801 W. Buena Vista Dr. (at World Dr. and Osceola Pkwy.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-6000. Fax 407/939-7222. www.disneyworld.com. 1,920 units. \$77–\$131 double. Extra person \$10. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Food court; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; playground; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (\$10 a night), safe.

Disney's All-Star Sports Resort It's a replay of the other All-Star resorts, including the tight quarters (if you aren't a team player, the togetherness may cause frayed tempers after a while). The difference here is the theme, with buildings designed around

Fun Fact Sizing Things Up

Disney's Pop Century Resort sports a gigantic Big Wheel in its 1970s courtyard. If an actual child were to ride it, proportionally, he or she would have to weigh approximately 800 pounds.

football, baseball, basketball, tennis, and surfing themes. The turquoise surf buildings have huge waves along the roofs with colorful surfboards mounted on exterior walls and pink fish swimming along balcony railings. Again, if your threshold for visual overload is low, you may want to choose a different resort. As mentioned above, the rates and themes draw mostly families with

little kids and the noise level can get quite high, so if you're looking for a quiet vacation or romantic getaway, these resorts are out of bounds.

1701 W. Buena Vista Dr. (at World Dr. and Osceola Pkwy.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/939-5000. Fax 407/939-7333. www.disneyworld.com. 1,920 units. \$77–\$131 double. Extra person \$10. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Food court; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; playground; arcade; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (\$10 a night), safe.

Disney's Pop Century Resort *Value* After numerous delays, the first phase of Disney's latest inexpensive resort debuted in December 2003. Gigantic memorabilia representing the hottest fads of decades past—from Duncan Yo-Yos and the Rubik's Cube to flower power and 8-tracks—mark the exteriors of the Pop Century's buildings. Another clone of the All-Star school (though a slight step up because the rooms are newer and the furniture a tad nicer), you won't get a lot of frills, but the price is right for families on a budget. A family of four, could, with a bit of effort, squeeze into the small, basic rooms. The resort is divided into decades, starting with the Legendary Years of the 1900s to 1940s (scheduled to open in phases over the next couple of years), and the Classic Years of the 1950s to 1990s (the only section currently operating). The resort is closest to the Wide World of Sports Complex but a bit of a ride (yes, you should definitely rent a car) from everything else.

1050 Century Drive Dr. (off the Osceola Pkwy.; P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/938-4000 or 407/939-6000. Fax 407/938-4040. www.disneyworld.com. 2880 units. \$77–\$131 double. Extra person \$10. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets \$9 a night. **Amenities:** Food court; lounge; 2 heated outdoor pools; kids' pool; arcade; WDW Transportation System; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge (\$10 a night), safe.

A DISNEY CAMPGROUND

Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground ★ Pines, cypress trees, lakes, and streams surround this woodsy 780-acre resort. The only disadvantage of staying here is the distance from Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom (it is

close to Magic Kingdom). But if you're a true outdoors type, you may appreciate the feeling of being more sheltered from some of the Mickey madness. There are 784 campsites for RVs, pull-behind campers, and tents (110/220-volt outlets, grills, and comfort areas with showers and restrooms).

Some sites are open to pets (the ones with full hook ups)—at an additional cost of \$3 per site, not per pet, which is less expensive than using the WDW resort kennel, where you pay \$9 per pet. The 408 wilderness cabins (actually trailers made to look like cabins) offer 504 square feet, enough for six people once you pull down the Murphy beds, and they also feature kitchens and daily housekeeping service. Cabins also feature an outside deck with grill. Roughing it Disney style isn't so rough with all the comforts of home. Nearby Pioneer Hall is home to the popular **Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue**, which I review on p. 314. In addition, there are plenty of outdoor recreational activities, including horseback riding, fishing, swimming, a petting farm, and playgrounds. The nightly campfire and marshmallow roast, followed by a Disney movie shown right in the great outdoors, is a big hit with families.

3520 N. Fort Wilderness Trail (P.O. Box 10000), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000. ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-2900. Fax 407/824-3508. www.disneyworld.com. 784 campsites, 408 wilderness cabins. \$38–\$55 campsite double; \$234–\$339 wilderness cabin double. Extra person \$2 campsites, \$5 cabins. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; grill; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; watercraft rentals; outdoor activities (fishing; horseback, pony, and carriage and hay rides; campfire programs); 2 game rooms; WDW Transportation System, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; babysitting; laundry services. *In room (cabins only):* A/C, TV/VCR, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, outdoor grill, hair dryer.

4 "Official" Hotels in Lake Buena Vista

These properties, designated "official" Walt Disney World hotels, are located on and around Hotel Plaza Boulevard, which puts them at the northeast corner of WDW. They're close to Downtown Disney Marketplace, Downtown Disney West Side, and Pleasure Island. The boulevard has been landscaped with enough greenery to make it a contestant for Main Street, U.S.A.

Guests at these hotels enjoy some WDW privileges (see "The Perks of Staying with Mickey," earlier in this chapter), including free bus service to the parks, but **be sure to ask when booking** which privileges you'll get because they do vary from hotel to hotel. Their locations put you close to the parks, and even closer to the action of Downtown Disney, but, unlike the resorts on WDW property, which occupy their own completely separate areas, the hotels here are set along the tree lined boulevard. Traffic can be a frustration, as the boulevard is a main access route to Downtown Disney from the outside world. Also note that the Walt Disney World Dolphin and Walt Disney World Swan (listed in the previous section) should be considered the eighth and ninth of the "official" hotels because they're not Disney-owned. The difference is they're located directly on the WDW property.

Another perk of the "official" hotels is that they generally offer a less intense Mickey ambience, although some do offer character breakfasts a few days each week (ask the person answering the reservation line for details and schedules). Decide for yourself if that's a plus or a minus.

You can make reservations for all of the below-listed properties through the **CRO** (☎ 407/934-7639) or through the direct hotel numbers included in the listings. To ensure you get the best rates, however, call the hotel or its parent chain directly to see if there are special rates or packages available.

You'll find all of these hotels located on the map "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Accommodations," earlier in this chapter.

EXPENSIVE

Wyndham Palace Resort ★★ This hotel is the most upscale of the Hotel Plaza Boulevard-area properties and is popular with leisure travelers, though business people still make up 75% of its guests. For that reason, some of the best rates are offered in July and August, contrary to the mainstream tourist resorts. Many of the upscale business-standard rooms have balconies or patios; ask for one above the fifth floor with a "recreation view." That's the side facing the Wyndham's pools, Downtown Disney, and, in the distance, Disney-MGM Studios' Tower of Terror. The "Epcot view" offers views of the IllumiNations fireworks but little else. Allergy and asthma sufferers can take advantage of the Evergreen rooms, which offer individual air filtration systems and nonallergenic amenities. The best place to catch those fireworks is in the lounge at **Arthur's 27**, the resort's signature restaurant (p. 156). The resort is known for its spacious fitness center and full-service European-style spa (massage, wraps, steam room, saunas, salon, fitness center, and more), which are open to the public. The recreational facilities are extensive, set off on Recreation Island. One of the pools is situated partially indoors, providing cover from sun and rain.

1900 Buena Vista Dr. (just north of Hotel Plaza Blvd.; P.O. Box 22206), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ **800/996-3426** or 407/827-2727. Fax 407/827-6034. www.wyndham.com/hotels/MCOPV/main.wnt. 1,014 units. \$149–\$269 double; \$209–\$618 suite. Resort fee \$10. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet parking \$10. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; grill; 4 lounges; 3 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; 3 lighted tennis courts; half basketball court; sand volleyball court; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; playground; arcade; concierge; complimentary bus service to WDW parks, transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; car-rental desk; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and video games, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, Web TV (fee).

MODERATE

Best Western Lake Buena Vista Hotel ★ *Value* This 12-acre lakefront hotel is reasonably modern, with nicer rooms and public areas than you might find in others within the chain. Rooms are located in an 18-story tower, and all have balconies. The views improve from the 8th floor and up, and those on the west side have a better chance of seeing something Disney. The hotel's 18th-floor lounge, Toppers, offers an excellent view of the Magic Kingdom's fireworks. Accommodations in this category are usually a step above the "moderates" inside WDW, and this one is not an exception. You can reserve an oversized room (about 20% larger) or WDW fireworks-view room for \$15 more a night. You can also get the same rooms with full American breakfast for up to four people for \$20 more per night. **Note:** It definitely pays to surf the corporate website at **www.bestwestern.com** if you plan to stay here. It sometimes offers great deals and special rates for this hotel.

2000 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (between Buena Vista Dr. and Apopka-Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ **800/348-3765** or 407/828-2424. Fax 407/828-8933. www.orlandoresorthotel.com. 325 units. \$99–\$159 standard for 4; \$199–\$399 suite. Resort fee \$5.95. 5th person \$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; grill; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; tennis courts; playground; arcade; Guest Services desk; complimentary bus service to WDW parks, transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; limited room service; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, video games (fee), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Holiday Inn in The Walt Disney Resort *Value* This former Courtyard by Marriott got a \$6 million facelift, and the full-service resort is now very popular with families. The inner and outer glass elevators, however, still remain a fun ride for everyone, and

Tips Added Extras


Several of the properties in this chapter add resort fees to their daily room rates. That's part of an unfortunate but growing hotel trend of charging for services that used to be included in the rates, such as use of the pool, admission to the health club, or in-room coffee or phones. If it's a concern, ask if your hotel charges such a fee when booking so you don't get blindsided at checkout.

further renovations to improve its appearance are in the works. The rooms will comfortably sleep four and offer the usual amenities found at a typical Holiday Inn. For a great view of the Magic Kingdom's fireworks display, a room on the west side is best, and the higher up the better (floors 8–14 are the best).

1805 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (between Lake Buena Vista Dr. and Apopka-Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 800/223-9930 or 407/828-8888. Fax 407/827-4623. www.downtowndisneyhotels.com or www.holidayinnwdw.com or www.hiorlando.com. 323 units. \$86–\$129 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 lounges; kids eat free program; 2 heated outdoor pools; kids' pool; Jacuzzi; playground; arcade; Guest Services desk; complimentary bus service to WDW parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; car-rental desks; limited room service; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, video games (fee), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

DoubleTree Guest Suites ★★ Children have their own check-in desk and theater, and they get a gift upon arrival at this hotel, the best of the "official" hotels for families traveling with little ones (how can you not love a hotel that gives you freshly baked chocolate chip cookies at check-in?). Adults may find some of the public areas lacking in personality, though the hand-painted mural that spans the lobby and large aviary is a nice touch. All of the accommodations in this seven-story hotel are two-room suites that offer 643 square feet—large by most standards—with space for up to six. This is the easternmost of the "official" resorts, which means it's farthest from the Disney action, but closest to (even within walking distance of) the shops, restaurants, and activities located in the Crossroads Shopping Center, or along Apopka-Vineland Road. If you have kids along, this is your best choice among the Hotel Plaza Boulevard properties.

2305 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (just west of Apopka-Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 800/222-8733 or 407/934-1000. Fax 407/934-1015. www.doubletreeguestsuites.com. 229 units. \$119–\$249 double. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 lounges; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; 2 lighted tennis courts; volleyball; playground; arcade; kids theater; Disney Store; concierge; car-rental desk; complimentary bus service to WDW parks; transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; limited room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, video games (fee), dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, microwave.

Grosvenor Resort  This lakeside resort is within walking distance of Downtown Disney Marketplace's shops. The high-rise with low-rise wings has a British Colonial look and public areas. Unfortunately, time seems to be taking its toll on some of the rooms, which could definitely use a bit of refurbishing (so if you choose this hotel and are less than pleased, I recommend you complain and ask for a new one). Nevertheless, its frequent package deals make it popular with budget travelers. Ask for a Tower Room on the west side (floors 9–19) for a limited view of Lake Buena Vista. A Saturday night mystery dinner theater (\$40 adults, \$11 kids 3–9) is held in the Baskerville's restaurant for an entertaining evening away from Disney. A character breakfast is also offered three mornings a week.

1850 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (just east of Buena Vista Dr.), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 800/624-4109 or 407/828-4444. Fax 407/828-8192. www.grosvenorresort.com. 626 units. \$86–\$135 double. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet parking \$8. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools; 2 lighted tennis courts; fitness center; sport court; shuffleboard; volleyball; Jacuzzi; playground; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; complimentary bus service to WDW parks, transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; babysitting; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and VCR, dataport, coffeemaker, safe.

Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort ★★ This upscale resort welcomes many a Disney vacationer, even though business travelers constitute the bulk of its clientele. Its major claim to fame: It's the only official resort on Hotel Plaza Boulevard to offer guests Disney's Extra Magic Hour option (see p. 202 for details). The lobby boasts a nautical flair and its public areas reflect a New England theme, sporting shingles, weathered-wood exteriors, and seafaring touches. The pleasantly decorated rooms range in size from a standard double to suites offering plenty of space in which you can relax and unwind. Rooms on the north and west sides of floors 6 through 10 offer a view of Downtown Disney (just a short walk away) and, in the distance, the Magic Kingdom fireworks. The resort offers a variety of recreational options, including a large pool area (with two pools and plenty of space to soak up the sun), and a game room for kids.

1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (just east of Buena Vista Dr.), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 800/782-4414 or 407/827-4000. Fax 407/827-3890. www.hilton.com. 814 units. \$160–\$345 double; \$359–\$1,500 suite. Resort fee \$8.52. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet parking \$10. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; deli; mini market; 3 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools; kids' pool; fitness center; volleyball; Jacuzzi; sauna; children's center; arcade; concierge; car-rental desk; complimentary bus to WDW parks, transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; business center; Disney Store; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hour room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms; ATM. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, _coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, video games (fee), safe.

Hotel Royal Plaza ★ The Plaza is one of the boulevard's originals, but renovations over its 25 years (some are currently underway) have kept it in relatively good shape. A favorite with the budget-minded, its hallmark is a friendly staff (some of whom have been there since the hotel opened) that provides excellent service. The rooms are oversized with enough space for five and are tastefully decorated. Poolside rooms have balconies and patios; the tower rooms have separate sitting areas, and some offer whirlpool tubs in the bathrooms. If you want a view from up high, ask for a room facing west and WDW; the south and east sides keep a watchful eye on I-4 traffic. The inner courtyard offers a quiet escape where you can sit by the pool and soak up the Florida sunshine surrounded by scattered palm trees.

1905 Hotel Plaza Blvd. (between Buena Vista Dr. and Apopka–Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ☎ 800/248-7890 or 407/828-2828. Fax 407/827-6338. www.royalplaza.com. 394 units. \$69–\$235 double; \$159–\$699 suite. Resort fee \$8. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet parking \$8. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; lounge; outdoor heated pool; 4 lighted tennis courts; Jacuzzi; fitness center; business center; Guest Services desk; complimentary bus service to WDW parks, transportation for a fee to non-Disney parks; limited room service; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, video games, and VCR, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

5 Other Lake Buena Vista Area Hotels

The hotels in this section are within a few minutes' drive of the WDW parks. They offer a great location but not the Disney-related privileges given to guests in the

“official” hotels, such as Disney bus service and character breakfasts. On the flip side, because you’re not paying for those privileges, hotels in this category are generally a shade less expensive for comparable rooms and services.

Note: These hotels are also listed on the “Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Accommodations” map in this chapter.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Gaylord Palms ★★☆☆ It’s a convention center in disguise, but the Gaylord Palms appeals to vacationers, too, and is not your run-of-the-mill resort. It could be considered a destination unto itself, offering its own entertainment, fabulous dining, shops, and recreational facilities. The ½-acre octagonal Grand Atrium, topped by a glass dome, surrounds a miniature version of the Castillo de San Marcos, the old fort at St. Augustine. Waterfalls, lush foliage, and a rocky landscape complete the feel.

The resort and its rooms are divided into themes: Emerald Bay, a 362-room hotel within the hotel, has an elegant air; St. Augustine captures the essence of America’s oldest city; Key West delivers the laid-back ambience of Florida’s southernmost city; and the Everglades uses a misty swamp, snarling faux gator, fiber-optic fireflies, and tin-roofed shanties to muster a wild-and-wooly air. The rooms are spacious, beautifully decorated, and well appointed (the soundproofing, though, could be a bit better); each has its own balcony. The kids’ pool features a huge eight-legged octopus waterslide, and cabanas at the adult pool have Internet access. And if you need to unwind further, try the 20,000-square-foot branch of the famous **Canyon Ranch Spa**. As is befitting a luxury resort, the service is impeccable; yet it’s also extremely friendly and welcoming, not standoffish, as is the case at many other resorts of this class.

6000 Osceola Pkwy., Kissimmee, FL 34747. ☎ 877/677-9352 or 407/586-0000. Fax 407/239-4822. www.gaylordpalms.com. 1,406 units. \$239–\$450 double, \$625–\$2700 suites. \$10 daily resort fee. Extra person \$20. Kids under 18 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$7; valet \$15. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 lounges; golf (nearby); 2 outdoor heated pools; fitness center; spa; supervised children’s center; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; free transportation to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service; massage; babysitting; dry cleaning; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and video games, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort ★★☆☆ *Finds* A favorite of honeymooners and those seeking a luxurious adult oasis, however there’s plenty for families as well. This getaway’s lobby has lush foliage from which macaws wave to passersby, with winding walkways and landscape lighting to add to the ambience. The 18-story atrium has inner and outer glass elevators (ride the outers to the roof for a panoramic rush). The rooms are beautifully decorated with a Laura Ashley flair and easily sleep four. If you find, however, you are in need of additional space, you can usually request a connecting room for a discounted price. The west-side rooms on floors seven and up have a distant view of Cinderella Castle and the Magic Kingdom’s fireworks. (This vantage point also shows how much of WDW and the surrounding area still remain wooded.) The Hyatt shares a golf club and academy, racquet club, and equestrian center with its sister property, Villas of Grand Cypress (see below); both offer excellent packages aimed at the sports set. The Hyatt’s half-acre, 800,000-gallon pool is one of the best in Orlando and features caves, grottoes, waterfalls, a rope bridge, and a 45-foot water slide. A very nice childcare facility is also available. **Hemingway’s**, its signature restaurant (p. 157), has a Key West theme and a menu featuring seafood.

Tips Marriott Montage

The December 2000 christening of **Marriott Village at Lake Buena Vista**, 8623 Vineland Ave., Orlando, FL 32821 (☎ 877/682-8552 or 407/938-9001; www.marriottvillage.com), brought together three of the flagship's properties in a cluster just east of Lake Buena Vista, 3 miles from WDW. The resort includes a 400-room SpringHill Suites (\$99–\$179 double), a 388-room Fairfield Inn (\$69–\$119 double), and a 312-room Courtyard by Marriott (\$109–\$149 double). Children under 17 stay free in parent's room, and an extra person costs an additional \$10.

All rooms have fridges. Each property has adult and kids' pools, fitness centers, kids' clubs, whirlpools, and Guest Services desks. All offer transportation for a fee (\$5–\$12 per person per day) to Disney parks and non-Disney parks. There are three restaurants within walking distance. To get there, take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka–Vineland Rd., then head south to Vineland, and go left a half-mile to the village. There's free self-parking, and valet parking costs \$8.

1 N. Jacaranda (off Hwy. 535), Orlando, FL 32836. ☎ 800/233-1234 or 407/239-1234. Fax 407/239-3800. www.hyattgrandcypress.com. 750 units. \$279–\$585 double; \$695–\$5,750 suite. Optional \$13 daily resort fee (includes health club, free local calls, daily newspaper, and in-room coffee). Extra person \$25. Children 18 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking, valet \$12. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 lounges; large heated outdoor pool; 45 holes of golf; 12 tennis courts (5 lighted); health club; 2 racquetball courts; spa; watersports equipment; children's center; arcade; concierge; car-rental desk; free Disney shuttle; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; store; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms; equestrian center. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Villas of Grand Cypress ★★☆☆ *Finds* This is an exceptional place to retreat to at the end of the day, though it's definitely a splurge in the budget department. At its “modest” end, this Mediterranean-inspired resort starts with standard-size rooms with Roman tubs and patios, many of them backing up to ponds whose inhabitants include mallards, soft-shelled turtles, and largemouth bass eager for bread crusts or whatever else you can spare. Floor plans progress to elegant one- to four-bedroom villas that reach about 1,100 square feet on the top end. Some include kitchens, dining rooms, and patios. The resort shares a golf club and academy, racquet club, and equestrian center with the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort (see above). Inside the resort, you're almost completely sheltered from Disney, which is situated only a few hundred yards away. Take some time to wander the lush grounds, which are dotted with lakes, bougainvillea, and hibiscus. There are also walking and jogging trails. Shuttle buses allow you to park your car and get around the resort and to the nearby theme parks without driving. Unlike its sister Hyatt property, this resort caters primarily to adults, but Villa guests with kids can use the Hyatt's childcare and other facilities—even the pool.

1 N. Jacaranda (off Hwy. 535), Orlando, FL 32836. ☎ 800/835-7377 or 407/239-4700. Fax 407/239-7219. www.grandcypress.com. 146 villas. \$215–\$500 club suite; \$315–\$2,000 1- to 4-bedroom villa. Resort fee \$12. 1 extra person over the room limit stays free. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 lounges; outdoor heated pool; 45 holes of golf; 12 tennis courts (5 lighted); health club; 2 racquetball courts; spa; watersports equipment; children's center (at the Hyatt); car-rental desk (Hyatt); arcade; concierge; free Disney shuttle, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; salon (Hyatt); 24-hr. room service; massage (in-room); babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe, full kitchens (some).

EXPENSIVE

Marriott's Orlando World Center ★★ *Finds* An upscale resort that caters to both business and leisure travelers alike. Golf, tennis, and spa lovers will find plenty to do at this 230-acre resort, as will families. The lobby's centerpiece is a 28-story tower fronted by flowers and fountains. The large, comfortable and beautifully decorated rooms sleep four, and the higher poolside floors offer views of Disney. For a large-scale resort, it is surprisingly easy to get around, as it is not spread out, so much as up. The largest of its five pools has water slides and waterfalls surrounded by plenty of space to relax among the palm trees and tropical plants. There's plenty of dining right on site ranging from counter service casual to fine dining; the **Mikado Japanese Steakhouse** (p. 167) headlines the hotel's four restaurants. The location, only 2 miles from the Disney parks, is a fabulous plus. The large, comfortable and beautifully decorated rooms sleep four, and the higher poolside floors offer views of Disney.

8701 World Center Dr. (on Hwy. 536 between I-4 and Hwy. 535), Orlando, FL 32821. © 800/621-0638 or 407/239-4200. Fax 407/238-8777. www.marriott.com. 2,111 units. \$159–\$410 for up to 5; \$750–\$1600 suite. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet \$16. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 2 lounges; 3 heated outdoor pools; heated indoor pool; kids' pool; 18-hole golf course; 8 lighted tennis courts; health club; spa; whirlpool; sauna; concierge; car-rental desk; transportation to all theme parks for a fee; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

MODERATE

Embassy Suites Lake Buena Vista ★ Set near the end of Palm Parkway, just off Apopka–Vineland, this fun and welcoming all-suite resort is close to all the action of Downtown Disney and the surrounding area, yet still remains a quiet retreat. Each suite sleeps five and includes separate living area (with a pullout sofa) and sleeping quarters. The roomy accommodations make it a great choice for families. Some of the other perks here include a complimentary cooked-to-order breakfast and a daily manager's reception.

8100 Lake Avenue, Orlando, FL 32836. © 800/257-8483, or 407/239-1144. Fax 407/238-0230. www.embassysuitesorlando.com. 333 units. \$129–\$229, extra person \$15. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self parking, Valet \$ 7. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; lounge; indoor and outdoor heated pools; kids pool and play area; whirlpool and sauna; fitness center; tennis court; basketball court; business center; high-speed Internet access, laundry service; room service; free shuttle to Disney parks. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, fridge, microwave, safe, hairdryer, iron.

Hawthorn Suites Lake Buena Vista ★ *Value* One of the features that is most appealing about this 5-year-old property is its floor plan. Its 500-square-foot standard rooms have four areas: a living room with a pullout sofa, chair, and TV; a full kitchen with a dining room table for four; a bathroom with vanity; and a bedroom with a recliner and TV. Two-bedroom units are also available. The extras here are a big plus, too. The Hawthorn offers a free hot American breakfast buffet daily, a social hour (hors d'oeuvres, beer, and wine) Monday through Thursday, and a complimentary light meal on Wednesday evenings. The atmosphere is friendly, the service is good, and it's just 3 minutes from Hotel Plaza Boulevard.

8303 Palm Pkwy. Orlando, FL 32836. © 800/936-9417, 800/527-1133, or 407/597-5000. Fax 407/597-6000. www.hawthornsuiteslbv.com. 120 units. \$99–\$169 for 4–6. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; basketball court; Jacuzzi; free shuttle to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, kitchen, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Nickelodeon Family Suites Resort by Holiday Inn ★★ *Finds Kids* This all-suite property, a former Holiday Inn transformed into the first ever Nickelodeon-branded resort, is one of the best properties in the Orlando area for families. Its two-bedroom Kid Suites feature a second bedroom for the kids with either bunk or twin beds, mini kitchens, and a pullout sofa in the living area. Three-bedroom suites are also available and include more space, a second bathroom, and a full kitchen. Renovations, set to conclude as this book hits the shelves, will include an all-new lobby; an activity center full of restaurants, an arcade, shops, and nightly entertainment; and redecorated rooms—all themed with Nickelodeon colors and characters. The resort's two pool areas are veritable water parks, with extensive multilevel water slides, flumes, climbing nets, and water jets. Activities are scheduled poolside, and there are also a wide variety of recreational options, including a small mini-golf course, playgrounds, and sand play areas. A daily character breakfast is offered in addition to the hotel's regular breakfast buffet (at the latter, kids eat free with paying adults).

14500 Continental Gateway (off Hwy. 536), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32821. ☎ 877/387-5437 or 407/387-5437 or 866/GO2-NICK. Fax 407/387-1489. www.hifamilysuites.com or www.nickhotel.com. 800 units. \$169–\$275 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; several fast-food counters; mini market; 2 water park pools; mini-golf course; fitness center; 2 Jacuzzis; 3 outdoor Ping-Pong tables; 2 shuffleboard courts; game room; complimentary recreation center for ages 4–12; tour desk; free shuttle to Disney and non-Disney parks; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and VCR (some with Nintendo), dataport, full kitchen (select suites), fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort Lake Buena Vista ★ *Kids* Just a mile from the Disney parks, this inn caters to kids in a big way. They can check in at their own check-in desk, watch a movie at the theater in the lobby area, or have fun at Camp Holiday, the supervised activity center (one of the best around). The hotel's 231 Kid Suites have beds for up to six and themes (an igloo, a space capsule, castle, and more); however, standard rooms are also available. If you like sleeping in, ask for a room that doesn't face the pool area. Kids under 12 eat free in their own restaurant, though fine dining it isn't (kids won't care about that anyway). The resort also offers plenty of other dining options. Recent renovations have spruced up appearances throughout, and additional improvements are scheduled.

13351 Apopka–Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535 (between Hwy. 536 and I-4), Lake Buena Vista, FL 32821. ☎ 800/366-6299 or 407/239-4500. Fax 407/239-7713. www.kidsuites.com. 507 units. \$99–\$149 standard for up to 4; \$119–\$179 Kid Suite. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Pets under 25 pounds \$25. **Amenities:** Restaurant; food court; mini mart; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; fitness center; Jacuzzi; playground; supervised children's center (fee); family activities; children's movie theater; arcade; Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney parks, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Tips Special Delivery

Gooding's Supermarkets (☎ 407/827-1200; www.goodings.com) offers grocery delivery service to theme-park area hotels in Lake Buena Vista, Disney, Celebration, I-Drive, and Kissimmee. There is a \$50 minimum, and a \$10 service charge is added to all orders. You can order groceries (but no alcohol) online up to 48 hours before your requested delivery date (delivery hours are between 9am–6pm). For details, see the website or call. This is a great service if you are staying in a hotel room with kitchen facilities, or if you have kids and want to stock your room with snacks and supplies.

Don't Worry, Dinners Delivered

For those of you who can't stand the thought of heading out to dinner after a long day at the parks, **Take Out Express** is a restaurant delivery service that will bring dinner to you from 4:30pm to 11pm daily. Simply check out their list of participating restaurants in the area (and there are plenty of favorites to choose from), order from their menu, and your meal will be on its way. There is a charge of \$4.99 per restaurant (you can order from more than just one) as well as the price of your order (and don't forget to tip). Call ☎ **407/352-1170** to order or for more information.

Homewood Suites Orlando ★ These moderately priced family suites are less than 2 miles from Disney, located near Downtown Disney. This hotel is a good choice if you want a little home-style comfort and the chance to perform do-it-yourself stuff in the fully equipped kitchen. The hotel is only 7 years old, so everything is still in good shape. The two-bedroom suites sleep up to six offering a decent amount of room. A social hour (hors d'oeuvres, beer, and wine) is held Monday through Thursday.

8200 Palm Pkwy. (off S. Apopka-Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535), Orlando, FL 32836. ☎ **800/225-5466** or 407/465-8200. Fax 407/465-0200. www.homewood-suites.com. \$109-\$199 double. Extra person \$15. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 18 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Mini-grocery; outdoor heated pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; game room; concierge; car-rental desk; free shuttle to Disney parks, transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; business center; babysitting; laundry service; valet; safe deposit boxes; pizza delivery. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, dataport, fully equipped/stocked kitchen, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, daily newspaper.

Staybridge Suites Lake Buena Vista ★★ This chain hotel is located just off Apopka-Vineland, close to the action of Downtown Disney and the theme parks, as well as many restaurants. An excellent choice for families, this hotel's room sizes, price, and friendly staff are three more good reasons to stay here. Featured are one- and two-bedroom suites (can sleep up to 8), all with full kitchens (some two-bedroom suites have two bathrooms). The suites have large, comfortable separate living areas when compared to other all-suite hotels. A particularly unique plus to this property is the complimentary grocery shopping service offered. You can check off items on the list, drop it off at the front desk, and your items will be delivered you—even if you are not in your room. Prices run about 50¢ to \$1.50 higher than those you'll find at the supermarket, but the convenience factor often makes the expense worth it for time-strapped families.

8751 Suiteside Drive, Orlando FL 32836. ☎ **800/866-4549** or 407/238-0777. Fax 407/238-2640. www.ichotelsgroup.com. 150 units. \$159-\$299. Rates include continental breakfast. Rollaway beds and cribs available at no charge. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Deli; convenience store; outdoor heated pool; children's pool; 24-hr. exercise room; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. game room; free shuttle to Disney parks; Guest Services desk; 24-hr. laundry service; nonsmoking rooms; accessible suites; complimentary grocery delivery service. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, kitchen, dataport, hair dryer, ironing board, iron, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Hampton Inn Lake Buena Vista Location rules at this modern property, which is only 1 mile from the entrance to Hotel Plaza Boulevard on the northeast corner of Disney. It's not fancy, but the price is right and there are lots of nearby places to eat, shop, and party. Rooms on the fourth or fifth floors have microwaves and mini-fridges; request one and ask if the rate is higher than for a room on a lower floor.

150 Palm Pkwy., Orlando, FL 32836. ☎ **800/370-9259** or 407/465-8150. Fax 407/465-0150. www.hamptoninnlbv.com. 147 units. \$69–\$149 for up to 4. 5th person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; Jacuzzi; Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, some rooms with microwave and fridge.

6 Places to Stay in the Kissimmee Area

This stretch of highway (U.S. 192, also known as Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway) is within close proximity to the Disney parks. Over the last few years a revitalization of the area has added features such as extra wide sidewalks, streetlamps, highway markers, and widened roads to make it a more friendly and appealing area to stay and play. Traffic here can nevertheless be frustrating, especially when you are trying to cross the street. Budget hotels and restaurants abound, though a few higher priced luxury resorts are starting to appear a bit off of the main drag. While Disney is close by, Universal and SeaWorld are not. They are a good 20-minute (or more) ride away. If you don't have a car, Mears Transportation (see “Getting Around” in chapter 4) is a good bet to take you there for about \$10 to \$20 per person per day round trip.

In addition to the hotels reviewed below, the **Double Tree Resort Orlando Villas At Maingate**, 4787 West Irlo Bronson Hwy. (☎ **407/397-0555**; www.doubletree.com), offers spacious 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom town house accommodations with kitchens that are great for families and larger groups. The **Quality Suites Maingate East**, 5876 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy. (☎ **800/848-4148** or 407/396-8040; www.choicehotels.com), offers suites with separate bedroom and living areas, and fully stocked kitchens. And the **Radisson Resort Parkway**, 2900 Parkway Blvd. (☎ **800/833-3333** or 407/396-7000; www.Radisson.com) set back in off the main drag has decent, but basic, rooms, a nice pool area with a water slide, and beautifully landscaped grounds.

Note: You'll find the hotels and motels described on the map “Kissimmee Accommodations” on p. 113.

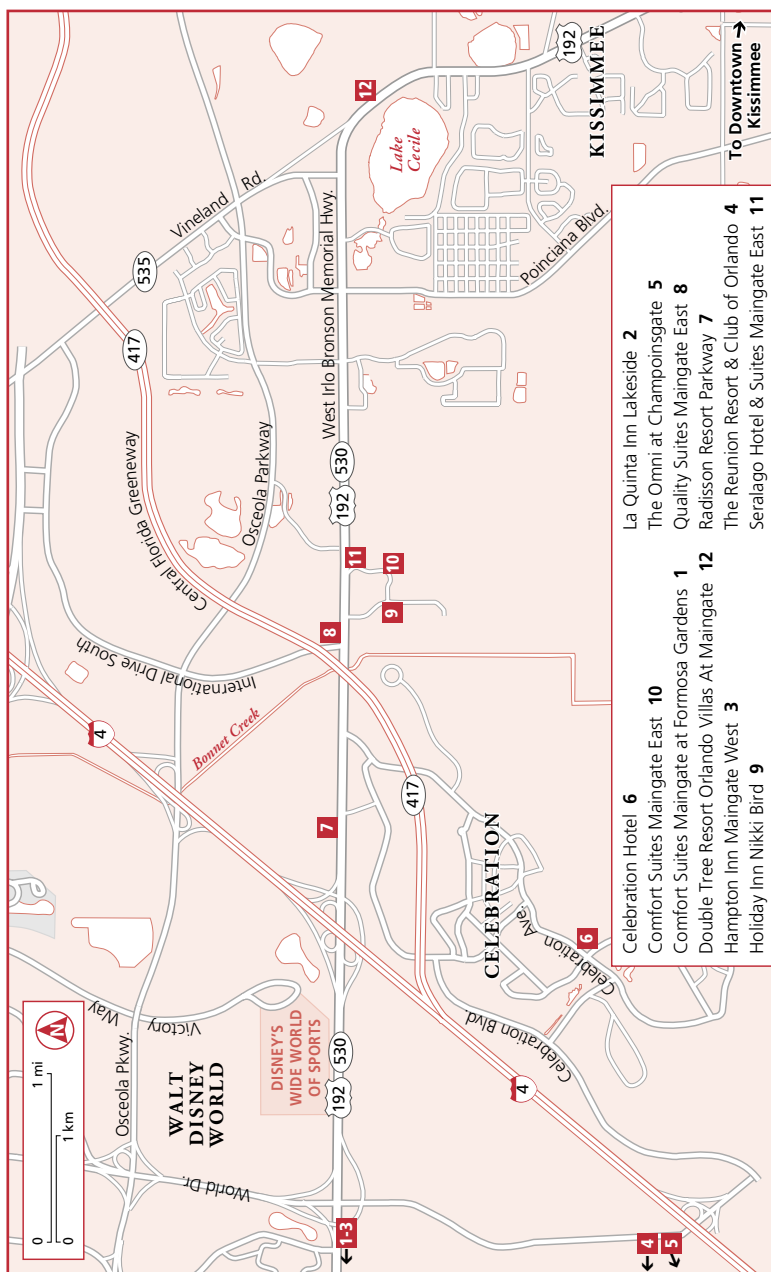
EXPENSIVE

Celebration Hotel ★★ This hotel is as picture perfect as the town that surrounds it. Its three-story, wood-frame design is straight out of 1920s Florida, as is its interior. A beautiful dark wooded bar is set just off to the right as you enter, and the lobby is filled with antiques and artwork, creating a warm inviting atmosphere. The beautifully decorated rooms have incredibly comfortable beds; to enjoy a soothing view, ask for a lakefront room. The upscale ambience caters to adults, especially those seeking a romantic getaway. The only drawback: you'll have to deal with the traffic on U.S. 192 to get anywhere.


700 Bloom St. ☎ **888/499-3800** or 407/566-6000. Fax 407/566-6001. www.celebrationhotel.com. 115 units. \$139–\$219 for up to 4; \$289–\$470 suite. \$10 daily resort fee. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking; valet \$13. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; outdoor heated pool; 18-hole golf course; state-of-the-art health-and-fitness center; spa; concierge; free shuttle to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; nearby shopping district. *In room:* A/C, TV/Nintendo, dataport, hair dryer, iron, safe.



The Omni at ChampionsGate ★★★ One of the newest luxury resorts to spring up just south of the Disney district in ChampionsGate, The Omni offers a comprehensive array of leisure facilities, including two championship golf courses designed by Greg Norman, a vast pool area with its very own lazy river, and a 10,000 square-foot spa. The beautifully decorated rooms feature 9-foot ceilings and are filled with plush


Kissimmee Accommodations





amenities, including bathrobes and free Wi-Fi Internet access. The service is as impressive as the facility itself, and there's a program especially geared to youngsters so parents can get some relaxation time on their own.


8390 ChampionsGate Blvd.  407/390-6664. Fax 407/390-6600. www.omnihotels.com. 730 units. \$199–\$350 standard; \$450–\$2500 suite; \$10 daily resort fee. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet \$12. Pets under 25 lbs. accepted (\$50 fee). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; grill; 3 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools; lazy river; 2 18-hole gold courses; tennis courts; health and fitness center; volleyball; spa; Omni Kids Program; video arcade; concierge; free shuttle to WDW parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; 24-hr. business center; retail gallery; salon; 24-hr. room service; valet laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV/Nintendo, pay movies, dataport and free Wi-Fi, mini-bar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe, robes, CD player.





The Reunion Resort & Club of Orlando   This luxury resort community not just a resort, is still in its early phases (with a completion date set for some 10 years into the future). Currently, only the villas and some vacation homes (both available for rent to visitors) are open. The spectacular villas feature a rather unique layout. Bedrooms are located on the ground level, with the main living area and additional bedrooms on the second level (making it less likely you'll have to drag your luggage up a flight of stairs). Some of the villas have private patios or balconies; some of the vacation homes have their own private pools. Scheduled to open just as this book hits the shelves is an extensive on-site water park (in addition to other resort pools located throughout the property). Two championship golf courses are already operational. A kids program offering a variety of supervised activities is set to begin in 2006 as well. On the downside: The property charges an exorbitantly high “gratuity” fee.

1000 Reunion Way  888/418-9611 or 407/662-1000. Fax 407/662-1111. www.reunionresort.com. Eventually 8000 units. \$255–\$495 villas, \$305–\$835 homes. 9.6% gratuity fee assessed on total bill. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Numerous pools; water park; 3 golf courses; kids program. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, DVD/CD player, dataport, fully stocked kitchen, microwave, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe, washer/dryer.

MODERATE

Comfort Suites Maitgate East   Set back from the main drag, this fairly new and welcoming hotel is one of the nicest in the area. The lobby and accommodations—consisting of studio and one-bedroom suites—are bright and inviting. The main pool and the children's pool, with an umbrella fountain to keep everyone cool, are open around the clock. For entertainment, Old Town (a small-scale shopping, dining, and entertainment complex) is next door, and a great miniature golf course is located just in front of the property.

2775 Florida Plaza Blvd., Kissimmee, FL 34746.  888/782-9772 or 407/397-7848. Fax 407/396-7045. www.comfortsuitesfl.com. 198 units. \$65–\$150 double. Extra person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; fitness center; game room; concierge; free shuttle to Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld parks; business center; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, refrigerator, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Holiday Inn Nikki Bird     Spread out over 26 acres, this family-friendly resort has one of the most extensive array of recreational facilities in its class, including 3 pools and 2 toddler pools with squirting fountains, tennis courts, and more. And it's only a mile from the WDW entrance to boot. Thanks to the great landscaping, you'll never know its located along one of the busiest stretches of highway around (the location's a big plus, as the dining and entertainment choices in this area are practically countless). Kid Suite rooms offer a separate children's sleeping area, video games, and an additional TV. Kids can play at the supervised Camp Nikki while mom and dad relax and enjoy some adult time.

7300 West U.S. 192, Kissimmee, FL 34747. ☎ 407/396-7300. Fax 407/396-9196. www.holiday-inn.com. 530 units. \$99-\$149, extra person no charge. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 1 lounge; snack/convenience store; 3 heated pools; 2 children's pools; 3 lighted tennis courts; fitness center; basketball; volleyball; horseshoes; playground; supervised children's activity center; video game room; concierge; car-rental desk; free transportation to WDW parks; laundry service; valet; safety deposit boxes. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, video games, dataport, mini fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe, CD player (in some).


INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the accommodations described here, there are scores of other inexpensive but serviceable motels, including chains (see appendix B, "Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites"). Most are within a few miles of Disney, have rooms in the 300-square-foot range, and arrange transportation to the parks. Many sell attractions tickets, but be careful. Many deeply discounted ticket offers are too good to be true. Some people land at the parks with *invalid tickets* or waste a half-day or more listening to a timeshare pitch to get 30% to 40% off the regular price (single-day Disney park tickets are \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for kids 3–9). If a discount is more than \$2 to \$5 per ticket, it's probably too good to be true.

Stick to buying tickets through the parks or accept the modest discounts offered by such groups as AAA, AARP, and the visitor information centers listed in chapter 2, "Planning Your Trip to Walt Disney World & Orlando."

Tips Coming Soon

While there is no projected opening date yet, **Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts** has purchased 400 acres in Celebration with plans to build a 425-room hotel with an 18-hole golf course.

Comfort Suites Maingate at Formosa Gardens  Just across the street from the La Quinta Inn Lakeside (see below) and up the road from WDW, this clean, comfortable, place to stay has kept itself modern and in good shape. The "suites" have a small dividing wall slightly separating the living area from the sleeping quarters, but the illusion of privacy is there. Accommodations are a bit bigger than most and can squeeze in up to six. A bit of tropical landscaping gives it an inviting atmosphere and shelters guests from busy U.S. 192. At least 10 restaurants and a small shopping plaza are within walking distance, and there's a miniature golf course right across the street. 7888 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee, FL 34747. ☎ 888/390-9888 or 407/390-9888. Fax 407/390-09811607. www.kisscomfertsuite.com. 150 units. \$50–\$150. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; Jacuzzi; arcade; car-rental/Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney, Universal, SeaWorld and Wet 'n Wild parks; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, fridge, microwave, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hampton Inn Maingate West Just 1½ miles west of WDW, this welcoming motel is a good choice for the budget-conscious vacationer. The rooms are nicely decorated, but are a bit on the small side, making them a snug fit for four. While there are not a lot of frills, the property is well maintained and provides the basics with good taste. There's no restaurant, but a free breakfast is served in the lobby, and there are more than enough dining choices just a minute or two away to keep you from going hungry.

3000 Maingate Lane, Kissimmee, FL 34747. ☎ 800/936-9417 or 407/396-5457. Fax 407/396-9899. www.hamptoninnmaingatewest.com. 118 units. \$69–\$119 double. Extra person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool;

Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, iron.

Seralago Hotel & Suites Maingate East ★ Kids Value Location (it's just down the road from Disney) and price are just some of the perks at this former Holiday Inn. The revamped hotel sports new colors and a bright new look but still features themed Kid Suites with separate sleeping areas for your tots, as well as standard rooms and regular two-room suites. The rooms provide a reasonable amount of space for a family of five, with the two-room unit sleeping up to eight. There are plenty of family recreational activities, from swimming to tennis, and the hotel's movie theater shows free family films nightly. There's a family-friendly food court, and kids 12 and under eat free (2 kids per paying adult) in the hotel's cafe.

5678 Irla Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee, FL 34746. ☎ 800/366-5437, 407/396-4488. Fax 407/396-8915. www.orlandofamilyfunhotel.com. 614 units. \$59–\$119 double. Extra person \$10. Children 18 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; food court; convenience store; lounge; 2 outdoor heated pools; toddler pool; 2 tennis courts; exercise room; basketball; volleyball; Jacuzzi; playground; arcade; Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney parks; transportation to non-Disney parks for a fee; limited room service; laundry service; small movie theater. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, video games, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, CD players (in some).

Tips Homes Away from Home

Some travelers, especially those who like all the comforts of home or are traveling in groups of five or more, bypass motels in favor of rental condos or homes. Rates vary widely depending on quality and location, some may require at least a 2- or 3-night minimum. A lot of these properties are 5 to 15 miles from the theme parks and offer no transportation, so having a car is a necessity.

On the plus side, most have two to six bedrooms and a convertible couch, two or more bathrooms, a full kitchen, multiple TVs and phones, and irons. Some have washers and dryers. Homes often have their own private screen-enclosed pool, while condos have a common one.

On the minus side, they can be lacking in services. Most don't have daily maid service, and restaurants can be as far away as the parks. (There's another reason you'll need a car.) And unless a condo or home is in a gated community, don't expect onsite security. Some properties offer dinnerware, utensils, and salt-and-pepper shakers—check when you book as amenities vary widely.

Rates range from about \$75 to \$450 per night (\$300–\$3,200 per week).

All Star Vacation Homes (☎ 888/249-1779 or 407-997-0733; www.allstarvacationhomes.com) is one of the area's best home and condo rental outfits, with a wide variety of properties to choose from—all of them within a 4-mile radius of Disney. Do check their website—you will be able to see the exact home you are renting, as opposed to a “typical” room. Other popular players include **Holiday Villas** (☎ 800/344-3959; www.holidayvillas.com); **Summer Bay Resort** (☎ 888/742-1100; www.summerbayresort.com); **LikiTiki Village** (☎ 407/239-5000); **Bahama Bay Resort** (☎ 888/782-9722); and **Cypress Point Orlando** (☎ 407/597-2700).

La Quinta Inn Lakeside ★★ *Kids Value* The hand-painted exteriors, lobby, and common areas of this hotel give it a unique charm not found in its hotel brethren. Just up the road from the Disney entrance, this 24-acre resort looks deceptively small when you first pull up (most of the accommodations are hidden behind the lobby area), but amenities include numerous recreational options (pools, playgrounds, and so on), a food court, good-sized convenience store, and bountiful free breakfast. Rooms are standard in size and offerings, but are nicely decorated and will comfortably sleep four. Other pluses include a childcare facility and free transport to *all* the major theme parks.

7769 Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee, FL 34747. ☎ 800/531-5900 or 407/396-2222. Fax 407/396-7087. www.LaQuintainnLakeside.com. 651 units. \$59–\$139 double. Extra person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. Discount packages available. Small pets accepted (\$25 fee). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; food court; 3 outdoor heated pools; 2 kids' pool; small mini-golf; 2 tennis courts; exercise room; Jacuzzi; playgrounds; kids activities; Guest Services desk; free bus to Disney, Universal and SeaWorld parks; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and PlayStation, dataport, fridge, coffee maker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

7 Places to Stay in the International Drive Area

The hotels and resorts listed here are 7 to 10 miles north of Walt Disney World (via I-4) and 1 to 5 miles from Universal Orlando and SeaWorld. The advantages of staying on I-Drive: It's a destination unto itself, filled with accommodations, restaurants, and small attractions; it has its own inexpensive trolley service (see "Getting Around" in chapter 4), and it's centrally located for those who want to visit Disney, Universal, SeaWorld, *and* the downtown area. The disadvantages: The north end of I-Drive is badly congested; the shops, motels, eateries, and attractions along this stretch can be as tacky; and some of the motels and hotels don't offer free transportation to the parks (the going rate is \$6–\$15 round-trip).

You'll find these places located on the map "International Drive Area Accommodations" in this section.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Peabody Orlando ★★ ★ *Moments* The five mallards that march into a lobby fountain every morning at 11am and then back out at 5pm, accompanied by John Philip Sousa's *King Cotton March*, are just part of the appeal of this luxury hotel, famous for its friendly (and not stuffy) service. Primarily a business and convention destination, the Peabody also appeals to adults looking for a classy hotel that provides top-of-the-line service, amenities, and atmosphere. If your budget allows the splurge, you won't be disappointed. Rooms sleep up to five, and are tastefully decorated and well appointed. Those on the west side (6th floor and higher) offer a distant view of Disney and its fireworks displays. The Peabody's signature restaurant, **Dux**, and the **B-Line Diner** are reviewed in chapter 6, "Where to Dine." **Tip:** Your best chance at getting bargain rates is in July and August; that's when the convention trade falls flat, and occupancy drops to as little as 20%.

9801 International Dr. (between Bee Line Expressway and Sand Lake Rd.), Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ 800/732-2639 or 407/352-4000. Fax 407/354-1424. www.peabodyorlando.com. 891 units. \$400–\$490 standard room for up to 3; \$750–\$1,700 suite. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking, valet \$10. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; deli; 3 lounges; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; 4 lighted tennis courts, instruction available (fee); fitness center; spa; Jacuzzi; game room; concierge; guest-services desk; shuttle to WDW and other parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer.

Tips **Smaller Homes Away from Home**

Several area timeshare resorts rent rooms or apartments to tourists when the owners aren't using them. The **Disney Vacation Club** (☎ 407/939-7775; www.dvcreorts.com) offers studios and one- to two-bedroom apartments at its timeshare resorts. Some have small fridges and microwaves; others have full kitchens. Rates start at about \$250 per night and can run up to 1,550 per night. Outside Disney World, per-night rates begin at \$200 to \$250 per night for one- and two-bedroom apartments with kitchens. As with hotel rooms, you can get major discounts off the rack rates (as low as \$70 a night) for these properties if you do your homework. An especially nice choice is **Sheraton's Vistana Resort** (☎ 866/208-0003; www.starwoodvo.com). Another good place to look is the **Marriott Vacation Club** (☎ 800/845-5279; www.vacationclub.com).

One minor caveat: Because each room and apartment that's rented is individually owned, quality can vary, so be sure to specify your exact requirements when booking.

Portofino Bay Hotel ★★ *Finds* Universal's first hotel is as grand as Disney's Grand Floridian and is a perfect getaway for couples and adults seeking a romantic, upscale atmosphere. This 5-year-old resort is a replica of the village of Portofino, Italy, complete with a harbor and canals on which boats travel to the theme parks. Old World ambience is carried throughout the public areas, restaurants, and rooms. The luxurious rooms are large (with sleep space for five). The beds have Egyptian-woven sheets, and the pillows are so soft you'll want to take them home. Ask for a view overlooking the piazza and "bay" area. Hypoallergenic rooms are available. The Portofino doesn't just have swimming pools; its beach pool has a fort with a water slide, and the villa pool rents several private cabanas. The resort's privately run Mandara Spa (www.mandaraspaspa.com) features a state-of-the-art fitness center and full-service spa. The drawbacks: There are stairs everywhere you turn (be prepared for some exercise), and the sheer size of the resort can make it difficult to find your way around. Look for a review of the Portofino's newest restaurant, **Bice**, on p. 159.

Note: Guests enjoy special privileges at the Universal Orlando theme parks, including front-of-the-line access to rides and preferred seating at shows and restaurants.

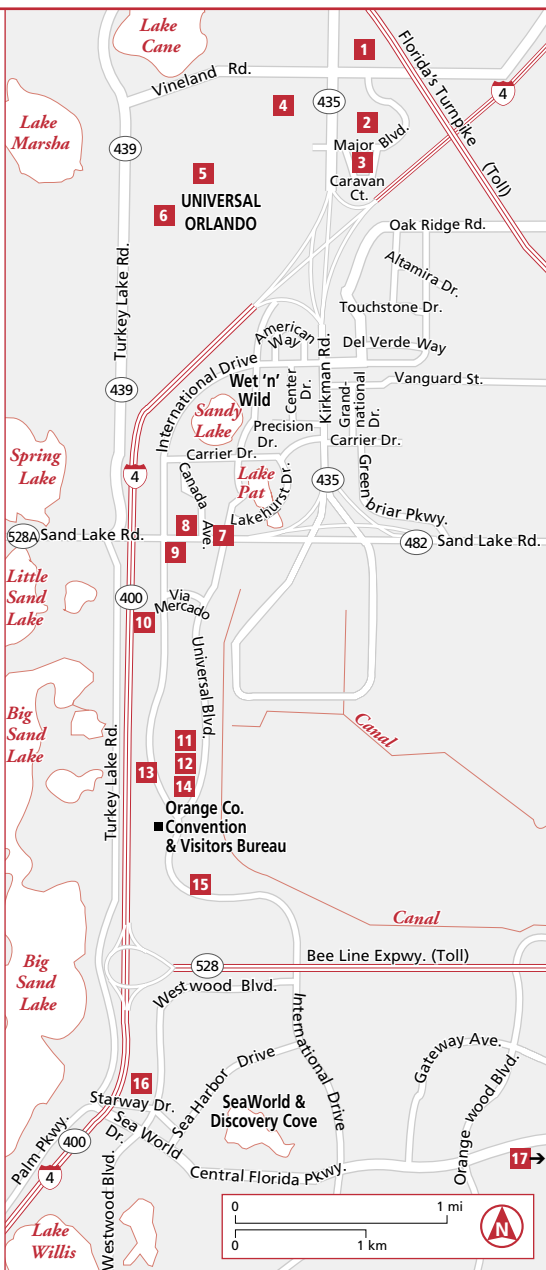
5601 Universal Blvd., Orlando FL 32819. ☎ 800/235-6397 or 407/503-1000. Fax 407/224-7118. www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando. 750 units. \$259–\$429 double; \$459–\$2,200 suite and villas. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$6; valet \$12. Pets accepted (no fee, though deposit against damage required). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; deli; 3 lounges; 2 outdoor heated pools (1 for concierge and suite guests only); kids' pool; bocce courts (concierge and suite guests only); fitness center; spa; watercraft rentals; playground; supervised children's center; activities; arcade; concierge; tour desk; free water-taxi transportation to Universal Orlando parks; free shuttle to SeaWorld; transportation to WDW parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Crowne Plaza Orlando-Universal ★ This sleek 15-story high-rise is conveniently located a block east of I-Drive and caters primarily to business travelers. Although it's closer to Universal Orlando and SeaWorld (about midway between them), getting to Disney is no problem because the hotel offers free shuttles to the

International Drive Area Accommodations

- Amerisuites/Universal **3**
- Crowne Plaza
Orlando-Universal **7**
- Doubletree Hotel at the
Entrance to Universal
Orlando **2**
- Embassy Suites Hotel **13**
- Fairfield Inn
International Drive **8**
- Hampton Inn at
Universal Studios **1**
- Hard Rock Hotel **5**
- J.W. Marriott Orlando **17**
- La Quinta Inn & Suites
Convention Center **11**
- Peabody Orlando **15**
- Portofino Bay Hotel **4**
- Radisson Barcelo Hotel **9**
- Renaissance Orlando
Resort at SeaWorld **16**
- Ritz-Carlton Orlando **17**
- Royal Pacific Resort **6**
- Sierra Suites **12**
- SpringHill Suites **14**
- Staybridge Suites **10**



major parks. It's also close to the I-Ride Trolley, which saves shoe leather for those interested in exploring International Drive. The subdued rooms (most inside the Crowne Wing, along with the hotel's meeting space) are well appointed and offer floor-to-ceiling windows. Some of the pricier rooms (with Jacuzzi tubs) are in the circular Atrium Tower, where you can climb to the top in high-speed glass elevators. Facilities include a state-of-the-art fitness center.

7800 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **866/864-8627** or 407/355-0550. Fax 407/355-0504. www.crowneplazauniversal.com. 400 units. \$219–\$279 double; presidential suites \$450–\$600. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking; valet \$8.50. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; lounge; heated pool; fitness center; game room; concierge; tour desk; free transportation to Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld; business center; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/video games and pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, CD player.

Hard Rock Hotel ★★ ★ *Kids* You can't get any closer than this to Universal Studios Florida. Opened in 2001, this California mission-style resort sports a rock-and-roll theme with rates a shade less expensive than the Portofino (see above). The atmosphere here is also more casual (though with an air of sophistication) than that of its Universal Orlando sisters, and it's the most kid-friendly resort, too. The collection of rock memorabilia found scattered throughout the public areas of the hotel is impressive. The pool area, however, takes center stage here: A tremendous oasis of palm trees and rocky landscaping surround a large freeform pool whose most unique feature is a first-rate underwater sound system that makes sure you don't miss a beat. The rooms and amenities at the Hard Rock are a cut above some of Disney's comparable properties, even the Animal Kingdom Lodge (p. 98). The rooms are very comfortable, with a sophisticated modern decor. Unfortunately, though the rooms are fairly soundproof, a few notes seep through the walls, so you may want to ask for one that's away from the lobby area. **Tip:** One of the biggest perks of staying on Universal property is that guests get no-line access to almost every ride at Universal's theme parks, and seating privileges for shows and restaurants.

5800 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/232-7827** or 407/503-2000. Fax 407/224-7118. www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando. 650 units. \$229–\$409 double; \$409–\$1770 suite. Extra person \$25. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$6; valet \$12. Pets accepted (no fee, though deposit against damage required). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; grill; 2 lounges; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; fitness center; playground; kids' club; arcade; concierge; free water-taxi transportation to Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, and CityWalk; free shuttle to SeaWorld; transportation to WDW parks for a fee; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV, video games (fee), minibar, fridge (select rooms), microwave (select rooms), hair dryer, iron, safe, CD player, DVD player (fee), high speed internet access (fee).

Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld ★★ This resort just goes to show that you should never judge a book by its cover. What appears to be a rather blah looking hotel from the exterior, is absolutely beautiful and inviting on the interior, with luxurious touches throughout. A glass-covered atrium can be seen high above the stunning indoor courtyard area filled with lush gardens, cascading waterfalls, and an elegant free-flight aviary. The tastefully decorated rooms are oversized, providing plenty of space to spread out and relax. You can't beat the location if you are a fan of SeaWorld—the park is just across from the hotel. The entire pool area was recently renovated, making it even more inviting.

6677 Sea Harbor Dr., Orlando, FL 32821. ☎ **800/327-6677** or 407/351-5555. Fax 407/351-1991. www.renaissancehotels.com. 778 units. \$149–\$309 double. Extra person no charge. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking; valet parking \$12. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; grill; 3 lounges; outdoor heated

pool; kids' pool; golf privileges (fee); 4 lighted tennis courts, available instruction (fee); health club; basketball; volleyball; spa; 2 Jacuzzis; sauna; playground; arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; transportation to all the parks for a fee; business center; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, fridge (select rooms), hair dryer, safe, high speed Internet (fee), PlayStation.

Royal Pacific Resort ★★ *Value* The third of Universal Orlando's three resorts has an open-air courtyard with an exquisite orchid garden, palm trees, waterfalls, and lagoons, including one in which a float plane with a 90-foot wingspan is docked (the scene reminds more than a few people of *Gilligan's Island*). The Royal Pacific doesn't quite succeed at creating a Polynesian paradise (you can hear the screams of riders on the Hulk Coaster from the pool area), but it's definitely the best Universal resort in the theme department.

The rooms, though smaller than those at other Universal resorts, are attractively decorated with lovely wood accents and carvings; they are far better than those at comparable Disney resorts. And the lagoon pool area—the largest in Orlando—is lovely. The big plus: Guests get no-line access to almost every ride at Universal Studios Florida and Islands of Adventure, and seating privileges for shows and restaurants. The big minuses: The self-parking lot (\$6) is a very long hike from the hotel, and I've heard several complaints in specific reference to this hotel about run-ins with barking dogs (Loews hotels are pet-friendly).

Finds Two Grand Hotels

Part of the 500-acre Grande Lakes Resort complex, the **Ritz-Carlton Orlando** ★★, 4012 Central Florida Pkwy. (☎ 800/241-3333 or 407/529-2255; www.ritzcarlton.com), debuted in July 2003 as the city's newest destination for deep-pocketed travelers. The posh 584-room luxury hotel (\$229–\$399 double, \$599–\$5000 suites) features exquisitely manicured grounds, a lobby designed after an Italian Palazzo, and a 40,000-square-foot, three-level spa with 40 treatment rooms. The spacious rooms at this smoke-free hotel have balconies, flatscreen TVs, hand-painted Italian furniture, and lots of other luxury perks. The level of service is exceptional.

Sharing quarters (and most recreational facilities, from pools to an 18-hole golf course to several childcare programs) with the Ritz at the Grande Lakes development is the less expensive 1,000-room **JW Marriott Orlando** ★, 4040 Central Florida Pkwy. (☎ 800/241-3333 or 407/206-2300; www.grandelakes.com). The smoke-free resort (\$189–\$369 for up to four people per room, \$299–\$4000 for suites) has a fabulous 24,000-square-foot **Lazy River** pool that winds through rock formations and small waterfalls (depth 3–5 ft.). The tiptop rooms at the Moorish-themed resort are on par with those in Disney's moderate class. Ask for a west-facing room for the best views.

The major drawback: The hotels are outside of the main tourist areas, a 7- or 8-mile drive southeast of SeaWorld and about the same distance east of Walt Disney World. Free transportation is provided to Universal Orlando, but for the other parks, you're on your own.

6300 Hollywood Way, Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/232-7827** or 407/503-3000. Fax 407/503-3202. www.loewshotels.com/hotels/orlando. 1,000 units. \$199–\$369 double; \$299–\$1,670 suite. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$6, valet parking \$12. Pets accepted (no fee, though deposit against damage required). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 3 lounges; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; cabanas; putting green; shuffleboard; volleyball; Jacuzzi; sauna; recreational activities; play area; supervised children's center; arcade; concierge; free water-taxi transportation to Universal parks; free shuttle to SeaWorld; transportation for a fee to WDW parks; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Staybridge Suites ★ Like its Lake Buena Vista cousin (reviewed on p. 111), this hotel is friendly, well run, and neat as a pin. Price and spacious one- and two-bedroom suites (the latter 550 sq. ft., with beds for eight) are two of its biggest pluses. The hotel attracts both leisure and business travelers. Courtyard rooms have balconies. The property is across the street from the Mercado shopping village and its restaurants, and just up the road from Pointe Orlando and its offerings. A free expanded continental breakfast is included daily.

8480 International Dr. (between Bee Line Expressway and Sand Lake Rd.), Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/866-4549** or 407/352-2400. Fax 407/352-4631. www.staybridgesuites.com. 146 units. \$129–\$299. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Deli; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; arcade; Guest Services desk; transportation to all theme parks for a fee; business center; laundry service; valet; ATM. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, pay movies, video library, dataport, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, iron, safe.

MODERATE

AmeriSuites Universal It's tough to beat the value and roominess of these kitchenette-equipped suites, especially if your goal is to be very close to the Universal theme parks without having to pay the hefty rates that come with staying on park property. The modern, spacious rooms allow you to stretch out more than in standard hotel/motel accommodations, and the location is especially convenient if Universal Orlando is your target.

5895 Caravan Court, Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/833-1516** or 407/351-0627. Fax 407/331-3317. www.amerisuites.com. 151 units. \$89–\$139 for up to 4. Rates include free buffet breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; tour desk; free transportation to all theme parks; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, dataport, kitchenette, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

DoubleTree Hotel at the Entrance to Universal Orlando ★ Location alone (right across the street from Universal Orlando) earns this hotel a star. Built for the convention trade, this former Radisson was just renovated and features reasonably nice rooms. Stay here and save over the Portofino Bay, Hard Rock, and Royal Pacific hotels (reviewed earlier). Rooms on the west side, floors 6 through 18, offer views of the Universal parks and CityWalk. DoubleTree's famous chocolate chip cookies are complimentary upon check in (though you may want to buy some to take home because they're *that* good).

5780 Major Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/333-3333** or 407/351-1000. Fax 407/363-0106. www.doubletreeorlando.com. 742 units. \$99–\$209 double. Extra person \$20. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self or valet-parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; grill; lounge; outdoor heated pool; kids' pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; arcade; free transportation to Universal and SeaWorld parks; transportation for a fee to Disney/airport; salon; limited room service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Embassy Suites Hotel ★ This is another hotel with a run-of-the-mill exterior hiding an impressive interior atrium highlighted by brick and wrought iron accents, palm trees, and lush foliage. Eight floors of suites surround the atrium, some with balconies overlooking the courtyard below. Suites are fairly spacious, with separate living and

sleeping areas. This is one of the few hotels to offer both an indoor and outdoor pool. Another big advantage: The proximity to I-Drive's nightlife, restaurants, and shops. There's a complimentary reception in the evenings.

8978 International Dr., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/EMBASSY** or 407/352-1400. Fax 407/363-1120. www.embassy-suites.com. 244 units. \$149–\$289. Extra person \$10. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking; valet parking \$8. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; 2 heated pools (1 indoor 1 outdoor); toddler pool; fitness center; game room; Guest Services desk; free transportation to Disney; 24-hour business center; room service; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Hampton Inn at Universal Studios There's nothing fancy about this simple hotel, but it's in a good location if you plan to spend most of your time at Universal Orlando, which is only 2 blocks away. It's also relatively close to SeaWorld and Downtown Orlando and about 10 miles from Disney. Some rooms have microwaves and refrigerators. Although there's no restaurant on the premises, there are several within walking distance.

5621 Windhover Dr., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/426-7866**, 800/231-8395, or 407/351-6716. Fax 407/363-1711. www.hamptoninn.com. 120 units. \$69–\$159 double. Extra person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; free transportation to Universal and SeaWorld, transportation for a fee to Disney; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, iron.

La Quinta Inn & Suites Convention Center ★ Opened in 1998, this is one of a handful of upscale, moderately priced motels on Universal Boulevard, which runs parallel to (but isn't as congested as) I-Drive. The hotel is aimed at business travelers, but this is Orlando, so families traveling with kids are welcomed with open arms. King rooms are designed for extended stays and have a fridge and microwave. A limited number of two-room suites offering separate living and sleeping areas are available.

8504 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **800/531-5900** or 407/345-1365. Fax 407/345-5586. www.laquinta.com. 185 units. \$65–\$125 double. Extra person \$6. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 18 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; transportation to all theme parks for a fee; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, Nintendo, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Radisson Barcelo Hotel Like many I-Drive properties, the Radisson offers a good location for people whose vacations center on Universal Orlando or SeaWorld, and a central location for travelers who plan to visit Disney and downtown, too. Rooms are brightly decorated (the Deluxe towers rooms are larger and worth the extra dough) and have refrigerators, but views are basic. Otherwise, you'll be watching traffic on I-4 or I-Drive. As a plus, kids 10 and under eat free with a paying adult at breakfast.

8444 International Dr., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ **888/380-9696** or 407/345-0505. Fax 407/352-5894. www.radisson-orlando.com. 520 units. \$69–\$189 double. Extra person \$15. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; grill; lounge; outdoor heated pool; lighted tennis court; bocce court; Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Universal Orlando and SeaWorld, transportation for a fee to Disney parks; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies and video games, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Sierra Suites Orlando Convention Center Another respite from I-Drive on the less-than-congested Universal Boulevard, this one's a few blocks north of the Convention Center and convenient to Universal Orlando's theme parks. You can walk to some minor attractions, and if you take the footpath west a few hundred feet, you can catch the I-Ride Trolley (see "Getting Around" in chapter 4). Size-wise, the rooms are

I-Drive Alternatives

If you're coming into town during peak season and you're having trouble finding a room, the 1,052-room **Wyndham Orlando Resort**, 8001 International Dr. (☎ 800-WYNDHAM or 407/351-2420; www.wyndham.com), is an impeccably landscaped property that's good for families and features numerous pools, playgrounds and a kids club for children ages 4–12. The 1,338-room **Caribe Royale**, 8101 World Center Dr. (☎ 800/823-8300 or 407/238-8000; www.cariberoyle.com), offers spacious and newly remodeled one-bedroom suites (kitchenettes) and two-bedroom villas (Jacuzzis and full kitchens). The grounds are beautifully landscaped, the pool has cascading waterfalls and a 75-foot water-slide a playground nearby, and the service is tops.

standard motel fare with the added bonus of kitchens. The staff is friendly, but there's no kids' pool and no view to speak of.

8750 Universal Blvd. ☎ 800/474-3772 or 407/903-1500. Fax 407/903-1555. www.sierrasuites.com. 137 units. \$89–\$169 for up to 4. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; arcade; Guest Services desk; free shuttle to Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, dataport, kitchen, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

SpringHill Suites Orlando Convention Center *Value* Like the Sierra Suites (see the review above), this property offers another chance to stay near but not in the middle of the I-Drive crowds and traffic. Clean, very spacious suites (about 700 sq. ft., with beds for five and a separate living area) and reasonable rates make this all-suite property worth considering, though you'll have to pay to get to all of the theme parks. 8840 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ 888/287-9400 or 407/345-9073. Fax 407/345-9075. www.springhillsuites.com. 167 units. \$79–\$139 double. Extra person \$10. Rates include continental breakfast. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; concierge; transportation for a fee to the theme parks; business center; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minifridge, microwave, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

INEXPENSIVE

Fairfield Inn International Drive ★ *Value* If you're looking for I-Drive's best value, it's hard to beat this one. This Fairfield combines a quiet location off the main drag, down-to-earth rates, and a clean, modern motel in one package. It's not only the best in this category, but arguably a half step ahead of the Hampton, La Quinta, and Sierra Suites in the previous one. The rooms are very comfortable, the staff is friendly, and there are a number of restaurants within walking distance of the hotel.

8342 Jamaican Court (off International Dr. between the Bee Line Expressway and Sand Lake Rd.), Orlando, FL 32819. ☎ 800/228-2800 or 407/363-1944. Fax 407/363-1944. www.fairfieldinn.com. 135 units. \$69–\$84 for up to 4. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; Guest Services desk; transportation for a fee to the parks; laundry service; valet. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, safe.

8 Orlando Bed & Breakfasts

Although most of the properties in Orlando are resorts or chains, there are a few good bed-and-breakfast options. These properties offer a respite from the crowded, run-and-gun world of theme parks, and they're ideal for couples looking for a little quiet time or romance. Note that most of the inns and B&Bs in Orlando do not accept

children—a major selling point for some visitors. If you choose to stay at one of these properties, you'll need a car or some other kind of transportation, because these inns do not provide it. Unless otherwise noted, all B&Bs in this section can be found on the "Accommodations & Dining Elsewhere in Orlando" map on p. 169. You can find other options in the area through Florida Bed and Breakfast Inns (☎ 800/524-1880; www.florida-inns.com).

EXPENSIVE

Courtyard at Lake Lucerne ★ *Finds* Speaking of romance, you might feel the sting of Cupid's arrows in this downtown hideaway. Each of the Courtyard's buildings is historic. The Art Deco Wellborn, a late-bloomer that arrived in 1946, offers 14 one-bedroom apartments and a honeymoon suite (styles range from Thai to the Fab '50s). The Norment-Parry Inn is an 1883 Victorian-style home with six rooms decorated with English and American antiques; four have sitting rooms, all have private baths. It, too, has a honeymoon suite highlighted by a walnut bed and a Victorian fireplace. The I. W. Phillips House, built in 1919, is reminiscent of old Southern homes with large verandas. Upstairs, there are three suites, one with a whirlpool, all with verandas overlooking the gardens and fountain. Finally, the Dr. Phillip Phillips House, built in 1893, made its bed-and-breakfast debut on Valentine's Day 1999 with six rooms.

211 N. Lucerne Circle E., Orlando, FL 32801. ☎ 800/444-5289 or 407/648-5188. Fax 407/246-1368. www.orlandohistoricinn.com. 30 units. \$89–\$225 double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free self-parking. Take Orange Ave. south; immediately following City Hall (dome building with fountains and glass sculpture), turn left onto Anderson. After 2 lights, at Delaney Ave., turn right. Take first right onto Lucerne Circle. Be aware of one-way streets. Follow the brown "historic inn" signs. Children are permitted. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, microwave, coffeemaker.

MODERATE

Veranda Bed & Breakfast *Finds* Located in Thornton Park, this inn near scenic Lake Eola is another option if you want to stay near Downtown. Its four buildings date back to the early 1900s. All units (studios to suites) include private baths and entrances; some have garden tubs, balconies, kitchenettes, and four-poster beds. A few of the nicer options include the Washington Suite, which sports a four-poster bed and a Jacuzzi, and the romantic Carriage Suite, which has a four-poster bed and antique claw-foot tub. The two-bedroom, two-bathroom Keylime Cottage (\$209) sleeps four and has a full kitchen.

115 N. Summerlin Ave., Orlando, FL 32801. ☎ 800/420-6822 or 407/849-0321. Fax 407/849-0321, ext. 24. www.theverandabandb.com. 12 units. \$109–\$139 double; \$209 cottage. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. From I-4, take Exit 84, Hwy. 50/Colonial Dr., left 1 mile to Summerlin, turn right, and go 1 mile, crossing Robinson St. The inn is 1 block on the left. Children are not permitted. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, iron on request.

9 Downtown Orlando

The major reason travelers usually give for staying in Downtown Orlando is to avoid the hustle and bustle (and crowds) of the theme park zone. One other plus for many adults who want to get away from kids in child-dominated Orlando is the relative (and I mean relative) dearth of children in the downtown hotels, which generally cater to business travelers.

But if you're traveling in the middle of the peak season, including summer or around the December holidays, you'll likely find yourself bumping into other people

no matter where you go. And if you plan to spend most of your days in the theme parks, and nights at Pleasure Island or CityWalk, then you're better off staying in the thick of things. Unless you avoid driving during rush hour from 7 to 9am and 4 to 6pm, you'll likely spend a lot more vacation time on I-4 and its traffic than you'd like. It will also be harder to escape back to your hotel for an afternoon swim or a nap.

In my opinion, unless you're getting a really fabulous discount at one of Downtown's many business hotels, there's only one property that really stands out in the area and is worth the schlep.

EXPENSIVE

Westin Grand Bohemian ★★ *Finds* Downtown's jewel opened in spring 2001 with an early-20th-century Euro-Bohemian theme. It caters almost exclusively to the business and romance crowds, which means—much to the satisfaction of the adult guests here—you'll find almost no children on the premises. The comfortable and plush rooms have an Art Deco look with plenty of chrome and reds or purples. The "Heavenly Beds" (firm mattresses, down blankets and comforters, and five pillows) are among the best in Orlando. (You can buy one for \$2,200!) The upper floors on the east side overlook the pool; those on the north side face downtown. The classy hotel, which is entirely smoke free, has more than 100 pieces of 19th- and 20th-century American fine art, and its lounge features a rare Imperial Grand Bösendorfer Piano—one of only two in the world and valued at a cool quarter of a million. The downside: You'll have to pay for transportation to all of the theme parks.

Check out the hotel's location on "Accommodations & Dining Elsewhere in Orlando" map on p. 169.

325 S. Orange Ave. (across from City Hall). ☎ 866/663-0024 or 407/313-9000. Fax 407/313-6001. www.grandbohemianhotel.com. 250 units. \$169–\$389 for up to 4; Extra person \$25; \$319–529 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$19. Take I-4 to the Washington St. exit, merge with W. Robinson/Hwy. 526, then south on Orange. The garage is 2 blocks west on Jackson. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; coffee shop; heated outdoor pool; fitness center; spa; concierge; shuttle to the theme parks for a fee; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, Nintendo, CD player.

Where to Dine

It should come as no surprise that Orlando has something for everybody when it comes to pleasing your palate, ranging from fast food to four-star restaurants and everything in between. The city overflows with over 5000 dining options though it's usually noted for its many theme and chain restaurants. The arrival of the Mouse in Orlando launched an invasion of the area by fast-food joints, mostly in response to the number of families now flocking to see Mickey. Theme restaurants, focusing on everything from racecars and rainforests to superheroes and sporting goods weren't far behind.

The local dining scene doesn't compare to that found in such metropolitan foodie hot spots as New York, San Francisco, or Las Vegas, but there are certainly a few places here that could easily hold their own against the competition (disbelievers can grab a chair at **Emeril's** at CityWalk, or **Victoria & Albert's** at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa). That said, keep in mind that Orlando is the undisputed king of U.S. family destinations and restaurants generally do their darndest to cater to their target audience.

As so many of Central Florida visitors spend the biggest chunk of their time at Disney, a good deal of this chapter deals with the restaurants and eateries at Disney. For those of you who find yourselves beyond the boundaries of Mickey's doorstep, there's no need to worry: I also cover what's cooking at Universal Orlando's best restaurants, the hottest dining spots on International Drive, and a fair share of other area dining rooms.

Note to parents: Keep in mind that most moderate to inexpensive restaurants have kids' menus (\$4–\$7), and many offer distractions, such as coloring books and crayons, in the hopes it will keep your little ones otherwise occupied until their dinner arrives. If you go to a place catering to children, expect the noise level to be high. They don't take a vacation from squeals of joy or fits of temper, so you shouldn't expect to either. On the plus side, if it's your kids who tend to turn up the volume, it's far more likely that their antics will go unnoticed when there are others around doing the very same things.

If dining with kids isn't your cup of tea, steer clear of any restaurant where Mickey and Minnie stop by to say "hi" during dinner. Character meals, no matter what restaurant they are in, are guaranteed to be filled with families, making them, at times, excruciatingly loud and almost unnerving to those not used to dining in a room full of children. As a general rule, the more expensive your meal, the less likely you'll be dining with a lot of little ones around. So if you prefer to dine in peace—and can afford it—consider a meal at some of the more expensive restaurants in the resorts, on International Drive, or around Orlando proper. **Tip:** Parents in need of a night off from the kids can arrange for in-room babysitting or supervised childcare (p. 78) so they too can indulge in one of the area's finer dining options.

For additional online information about area restaurants, visit **www.orlando.info.com**, **www.go2orlando.com**, or the websites in the listings that follow.

PRIORITY SEATING AT WDW RESTAURANTS

Walt Disney World's Priority Seating, while similar to a reservation, is not nearly as rigid. Essentially, the system guarantees that you will get the next available table that will accommodate your party *after* you've arrived at a restaurant. In other words, a table isn't kept empty while the eatery waits for you. As such, it's likely that you'll end up waiting anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, even if you arrive at the time you scheduled your meal. You can arrange Priority Seating 90 days in advance at most full-service restaurants in the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, Animal Kingdom, Disney resorts, and Downtown Disney. Priority Seating can also be arranged for character meals (p. 171) and shows throughout the World. To make arrangements, call ☎ 407/939-3463; groups of 8 or more can also call ☎ 407/939-7707.

Nighttime dinner-theater shows (see chapter 10, "Walt Disney World & Orlando After Dark") can be booked up to 2 years in advance (except for Mickey's Backyard Barbecue, which accepts booking only 1 year out). Be aware, however, that these dinner shows require full payment in advance and that cancellations must be made at least 48 hours prior to the time of the show to avoid penalties. **Note:** Since the Priority Seating phone number was instituted in 1994, it has become much more difficult to obtain a table as a walk-in for the resorts' more popular restaurants. I *strongly* advise you to call as far ahead as possible, especially if you're traveling during the peak seasons. It wouldn't hurt to mark your calendar and enter the phone number into your speed dial either. Amazingly, some restaurants can book up quite literally within only a minute or two of the phone lines opening (7:00am) on that 90th day out.

If you don't make your dining plans in advance, you can take your chances by making your Priority Seating arrangements once you have arrived in the parks. In addition to the places listed below, you can always head directly to your desired restaurant to see what's available.

- **In Epcot** at Guest Relations near the entrance in the Innoventions Plaza.
- **In the Magic Kingdom** via the telephones at several locations including the Walt Disney World Railroad station just inside the entrance, and at City Hall near the front of Main Street U.S.A.
- **In Disney-MGM Studios** via the telephones just inside the entrance or at Guest Relations near Hollywood Junction.
- **In Animal Kingdom** at Guest Relations near the entrance. (Note that Rainforest Cafe here is a *verrry* popular place, so the sooner you call for Priority Seating, the better.)
- **In Downtown Disney** at Guest Services in the Marketplace and at West Side.

Also, keep these restaurant facts in mind:

- As of July 1, 2003, *all Florida restaurants* and bars that serve food are **smoke free**.
- The Magic Kingdom (including its restaurants) serves no alcoholic beverages, but liquor is available at Animal Kingdom, Epcot, and Disney-MGM Studios restaurants and elsewhere in the WDW complex. And the selection of liquors and wines available at many of the hotels is varied and extensive; Disney World employs more sommeliers than any other organization on the planet—almost 300 of them.
- All sit-down restaurants in Walt Disney World take American Express, Diners Club, Discover, MasterCard, Visa, and the Disney Visa Card.
- Unless otherwise noted, restaurants in the parks **require park admission**.

- Guests staying at Disney resorts and official properties can make restaurant reservations through Guest Services or the concierge.
- Nearly all WDW restaurants with sit-down or counter service offer children's menus with items ranging from \$4 to \$7, though in a few cases they're \$9 to \$12. Some include beverages and fries.

1 The Best Dining Bets

It may not have the caliber of restaurants of say, a New York or San Francisco, but Orlando has a few premier offerings that would make any foodie Best list. That said, keep in mind that, for the most part, Orlando is a family destination first and foremost—and therefore caters mostly to the masses. Here are our picks for the best eating in town.

- **Best for Kids:** Kids adore the meals served up with Disney characters bounding about and there are plenty to choose from throughout the **Walt Disney World** resorts and theme parks. (For the scoop, see “Only in Orlando: Dining with Disney Characters,” p. 171). They also love the eclectic atmosphere, sounds and visuals of the jungle-themed **Rainforest Cafe** at Downtown Disney Marketplace (☎ 407/827-8500) and Animal Kingdom (☎ 407/938-9100). Monkey business is strongly encouraged there.
- **Best Character Meal:** It doesn't get any better than **Chef Mickey's** breakfasts and dinners at the Contemporary Resort (☎ 407/939-3463). These “events” have their respective namesake and other characters, but a word of warning: They also attract *up to 1,600 guests* each morning. A close second is a meal at the **Crystal Palace Buffet** (☎ 407/939-3463), located in the Magic Kingdom. You will not see Mickey and Minnie, but your kids will be greeted at your table by Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, and some of their pals.
- **Best Spot for a Romantic Dinner:** **Victoria & Albert's** (☎ 407/939-3463) will spoil you with superior service and stylish surroundings. Dinner is an intimate seven-course meal offering some of the finest food around.
- **Best View:** **Arthur's 27** (☎ 407/827-3450) has a wonderful view of the Florida sunsets and Magic Kingdom fireworks, but we recommend skipping the pricey meal in favor of a drink at the cheaper **Top of the Palace Lounge**, both on the 27th floor of the Wyndham Palace Resort in Lake Buena Vista. In Downtown, **Manuel's on the 28th** (☎ 407/246-6580), so named because it's on the 28th floor of a downtown bank building, has equally gorgeous views of setting sun and the downtown skyline.
- **Best Wine List:** For something a bit out of the ordinary try **Jiko** (☎ 407/939-3463) at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, which features one of the most extensive collections (65 vintages) of South African wines in the country.
- **Best Value:** At **Romano's Macaroni Grill** (☎ 407/239-6676), the casual yet lively ambience and the northern Italian cuisine score very high, and prices are low, low, low.
- **Best Oriental Cuisine:** The **Mikado Japanese Steakhouse** (☎ 407/239-4200) in the Orlando World Center Marriott offers a tastier meal, and a more intimate atmosphere than the other Japanese Steakhouses in the area. For Chinese cuisine, head to **Ming Court** (☎ 407/351-9988) which offers a menu as impressive as its elaborate surroundings.

- **Best Barbecue:** Follow your nose to **Bubbalou's Bodacious BBQ** (☎ 407/628-1212) after catching a whiff of the tangy hickory smoke. It tastes as good as it smells and is worth the drive.
- **Best Italian Cuisine:** It's a toss-up between **Christini's** (☎ 407/345-8770), which is definitely on the pricier side, and **Pacino's Italian Ristorante** in Kissimmee (☎ 407/396-8022).
- **Best Seafood:** Of the area's many seafood restaurants, the best around is: **Fulton's Crab House** (☎ 407/934-2628), which offers a creative menu and a rich wine list. **Todd English's bluezoo** (☎ 407/934-4644) blends a unique atmosphere with creative seafood dishes to great success.
- **Best Tapas:** **Cafe Tu Tu Tango** (☎ 407/248-2222) takes the tapas concept to another dimension with items ranging from Cajun egg rolls with blackened chicken to alligator bites in a fabulous artist loft atmosphere.
- **Best Steak House:** The **Yachtsman Steakhouse** at Disney's Yacht Club Resort (☎ 407/939-3463) grills delicious aged steaks, chops, and seafood over a wood fire.
- **Best Late-Night Dining:** The trendy **B-Line Diner** (☎ 407/345-4460) at the Peabody Orlando is open around the clock for eclectic fare ranging from steaks to falafel sandwiches to grits and eggs. You won't be able to pass up one of their decadent desserts.
- **Best Spot for Celebrating:** **Emeril's** at Universal's CityWalk (☎ 407/224-2424) is a great choice for a high-end special occasion. For the pure party factor, you can't beat **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville** (☎ 407/224-2155) at CityWalk.
- **Best Outdoor Dining:** The terrace at **Artist Point** (☎ 407/939-3463), the premier restaurant at Disney's Wilderness Lodge, overlooks a lake, waterfall, and scenery evocative of America's national parks. The **Rose & Crown Pub & Dining Room** at Epcot (☎ 407/939-3463) delivers a front-row seat for the IllumiNations fireworks display.
- **Best Sunday Brunch:** **Atlantis** at the Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld (☎ 407/351-5555) serves a champagne brunch in its sun-drenched atrium. Themes change monthly, but the menu usually features such treats as quail, duck, lamb chops, Cornish hen, clams, mussels, snapper, sea bass, sushi, and more. For a themed brunch, the **House of Blues** (☎ 407/934-2583), at Disney's West Side, has a down-home gospel brunch featuring live foot-stomping music and an array of Southern/Creole vittles that includes greens, red beans and rice, jambalaya, catfish, shrimp, and beef. The food is so-so—the same quality of a dinner show, which this is, morning-style. But the entertainment makes it a certifiable winner. Reservations aren't accepted for parties under six, so arrive early for the 10:30am or 1pm show.

2 Restaurants by Cuisine

AFRICAN

- Boma ★★ (Animal Kingdom Lodge, \$\$\$, p. 149)
 Jiko—The Cooking Place ★ (Animal Kingdom Lodge, \$\$\$, p. 151)

AMERICAN

- B-Line Diner (International Drive Area, \$\$, p. 164)
 Cinderella's Royal Table ★ (Magic Kingdom, \$\$\$, p. 140)

- Columbia Harbour House
(Magic Kingdom, \$, p. 144)
- Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café
(Magic Kingdom, \$, p. 144)
- ESPN Club ★ (Disney's BoardWalk,
\$\$, p. 153)
- 50's Prime Time Café
(Disney-MGM Studios, \$\$,
p. 145)
- Hard Rock Cafe (Universal Orlando,
\$\$, p. 161)
- Hollywood Brown Derby
(Disney-MGM Studios, \$\$\$,
p. 145)
- Liberty Tree Tavern (Magic Kingdom,
\$\$, p. 141)
- Mythos ★ (Islands of Adventure, \$\$\$,
p. 160)
- Panera Bread ★ (Downtown and
elsewhere, \$\$, p. 168)
- Pecos Bills ★ (Magic Kingdom, \$,
p. 144)
- Planet Hollywood (Pleasure Island,
\$\$, p. 154)
- Plaza Restaurant (Magic Kingdom, \$,
p. 144)
- Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant
(Disney-MGM Studios, \$\$,
p. 146)
- Toy Story Pizza Planet
(Disney-MGM Studios, \$, p. 146)
- Tusker House (Animal Kingdom, \$,
p. 147)

BARBECUE

- Bubbalou's Bodacious BBQ ★
(Winter Park, \$, p. 170)
- Wild Jacks (International Drive, \$\$,
p. 167)

BRITISH

- Rose & Crown Pub & Dining Room
(Epcot, \$\$, p. 138)

CALIFORNIA

- California Grill ★★ (Disney's
Contemporary Resort, \$\$\$, p. 150)
- Pebbles ★★ (Lake Buena Vista, \$\$,
p. 158)

- Rainforest Cafe ★ (Downtown
Disney Marketplace & Animal
Kingdom, \$\$, p. 147)
- Wolfgang Puck Grand Café ★
(Disney's West Side, \$\$, p. 156)

CANADIAN

- Le Cellier Steakhouse (Epcot, \$\$,
p. 138)

CARIBBEAN

- Bahama Breeze ★ (Lake Buena Vista,
International Drive, \$\$, p. 165)
- Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville
(Universal's CityWalk, \$\$, p. 161)

CHARACTER MEALS

- Cape May Café (Disney's Beach Club
Resort, \$\$, p. 153)
- Chef Mickey's ★★ (Disney's
Contemporary Resort, \$\$, p. 172)
- Cinderella's Royal Table ★ (Magic
Kingdom, \$\$, p. 140)
- Crystal Palace Buffet ★ (Magic
Kingdom, \$\$, p. 173)
- Donald's Prehistoric Breakfastosaurus
(Animal Kingdom, \$\$, p. 173)
- Garden Grill ★ (Epcot, \$\$, p. 173)
- Liberty Tree Tavern ★ (Magic
Kingdom, \$\$, p. 141)
- 1900 Park Fare ★ (Disney's Grand
Floridian Resort & Spa, \$\$, p. 173)
- 'Ohana Character Breakfast (Disney
Polynesian Resort, \$\$, p. 174)
- Princess Storybook Breakfast (Epcot,
\$\$, p. 174)

CHINESE

- Lotus Blossom Café (Epcot, \$,
p. 140)
- Ming Court ★ (International Drive,
\$\$, p. 165)
- Nine Dragons (Epcot, \$\$, p. 138)

CUBAN

- Bongo's Cuban Cafe (Disney's West
Side, \$\$, p. 155)
- Rolando's ★ (Casselberry, \$\$, p. 170)
- The Samba Room (International
Drive, \$\$, p. 166)

FOOD COURT

Sunshine Seasons in the Land (Epcot, \$, p. 140)

FRENCH

Citricos ★ (Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, \$\$\$, p. 147)

Les Chefs de France (Epcot, \$\$\$, p. 136)

GERMAN

Biergarten (Epcot, \$\$, p. 138)

Sommerfest (Epcot, \$, p. 140)

INTERNATIONAL

Arthur's 27 (Lake Buena Vista, \$\$\$, p. 156)

Black Swan ★ (Lake Buena Vista, \$\$\$, p. 156)

Café Tu Tu Tango ★★ (International Drive, \$, p. 165)

Dux ★★ (International Drive, \$\$\$, p. 162)

La Coquina ★ (Lake Buena Vista, \$\$\$, p. 157)

Manuel's on the 28th ★★ ★ (Downtown Orlando, \$\$\$, p. 167)

Victoria & Albert's ★★ ★ (Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, \$\$\$, p. 148)

ITALIAN

Bice (Universal's Portofino Bay Hotel, \$\$\$, p. 159)

Carrabbas (Kissimmee, \$\$, p. 168)

Christini's ★ (International Drive, \$\$, p. 168)

L'Originale Alfredo di Roma (Epcot, \$\$, p. 136)

Mama Melrose's Ristorante Italiano (Disney-MGM Studios, \$, p. 146)

Pacino's Italian Ristorante ★ (Kissimmee, \$, p. 168)

Pastamore Ristorante (Universal's CityWalk, \$, p. 161)

Portobello Yacht Club ★ (Pleasure Island, \$\$\$, p. 154)

Romano's Macaroni Grill ★ (Lake Buena Vista, \$, p. 158)

Tony's Town Square Restaurant (Magic Kingdom, \$\$\$, p. 141)

JAPANESE

Mikado Japanese Steakhouse ★★ (Lake Buena Vista, \$\$\$, p. 167)

Ran-Getsu of Tokyo (International Drive, \$\$\$, p. 164)

Tempura Kiku (Epcot, \$\$\$, p. 137)

Teppanyaki Dining Room (Epcot, \$\$\$, p. 137)

Yakitori House (Epcot, \$, p. 140)

MEDITERRANEAN

Portobello Yacht Club ★ (Pleasure Island, \$\$\$, p. 154)

Spoodles (Disney's BoardWalk, \$\$\$, p. 151)

MEXICAN

Cantina de San Angel (Epcot, \$, p. 139)

San Angel Inn ★ (Epcot, \$, p. 139)

MISSISSIPPI DELTA

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- Logan's Roadhouse (Kissimmee, \$, p. 170)

TAPAS

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- Siam Orchid ★ (International Drive Area, \$\$, p. 166)

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- Little Saigon ★ (Downtown Orlando, \$, p. 170)

3 Places to Dine in Walt Disney World

From fast food on the fly to fine dining establishments, there are literally hundreds of restaurants scattered throughout Walt Disney World, including those at the theme parks (Epcot, Magic Kingdom, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom), the Disney resorts, and the "official" hotels. And those totals don't include the eateries located throughout the Downtown Disney areas of Pleasure Island, West Side, and the Marketplace, some of which are listed in the Lake Buena Vista section later in this chapter. As a general rule the food at Disney is decent enough, though only a small handful of the restaurants would truly qualify as gourmet. Portions are generally large, practically ensuring that you'll never walk away hungry, though prices match portion sizes accordingly. Be prepared to spend a rather hefty amount each day for just a few meals, a snack, and a drink (or two). If you have kids, sharing may be a good option, especially with very young children who tend not to eat so much when on the go. For those unwilling to share, sit-down and counter-service eateries, at least in the theme parks, do offer pint-sized platters in the \$4 to \$7 range.

The prices for meals at Orlando restaurants—except at theme parks and other attractions—are no more exorbitant than you'd find anywhere else. The better the restaurant, the higher the price you can expect to pay (though you shouldn't necessarily consider a restaurants' pricing a benchmark of its quality). To help you out a bit, the restaurants in this chapter have been categorized by **the price of an average entree** per person. In this chapter, restaurants in the Inexpensive category charge under \$10 for an entree; those in the Moderate category charge anywhere from \$11 to \$20.

Tips Special Tastes

When it comes to eating at Disney, just because something's not on the menu doesn't mean it's not available. Looking for kosher food? Worried WDW can't entertain your vegetarian taste buds? Disney can usually handle those diets as well as other special dietary requirements (fat-free or sugar-free meals, or meals for those with allergies or a lactose intolerance) at any of their full-service restaurants as long as guests give Disney advance notice—usually 24 hours will do. This holds true for other dining requests too. If you are headed to one of the resort's restaurants and know your kids may have a tough time with the menu, chicken nuggets and some other kid-friendly items can be requested in advance. It's easiest to make special requests when you make your Priority Seating arrangements (☎ 407/939-3463) or, if you're staying at a Disney resort, by stopping by the Guest Relations desk.

Expensive restaurants will set you back \$21 to \$30, and Very Expensive restaurants will top that, sometimes by a rather large margin. Do note that when you toss in drinks, appetizers, side dishes, and desserts the final tally at even a moderate restaurant can get rather high. Be sure to budget accordingly.

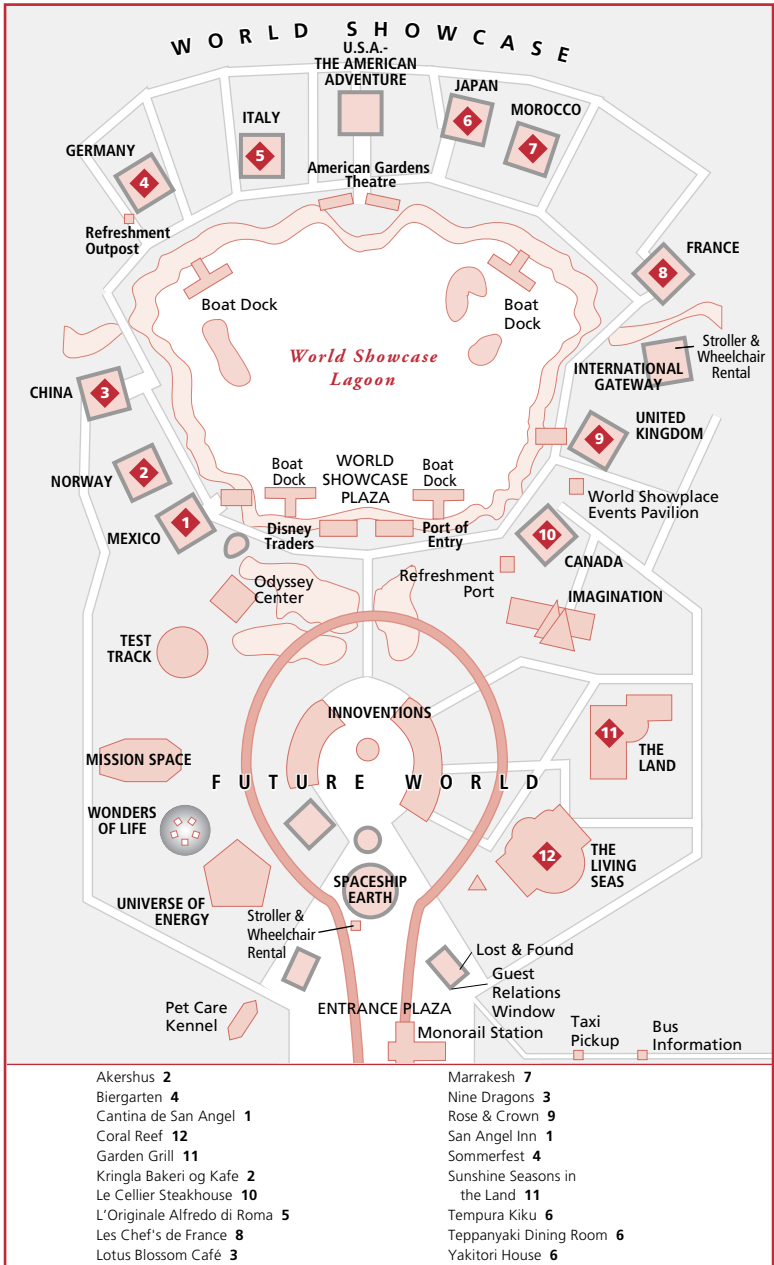
One last note: The restaurants we list in this chapter occasionally change menus (and sometimes more than just occasionally). So items we feature here may not necessarily be on the menu when you visit. And, as entrees vary, so do prices.

That said, it's time to divide and conquer.

IN EPCOT

The world is at your feet at Epcot, quite literally in fact. In addition to the eateries found at Future World, the World Showcase features several ethnic cuisines from around the globe, all served in some rather impressive settings. Though dining at one of the World Showcase pavilions is a traditional part of the Epcot experience, we remind you that many of the following establishments are rather overpriced when compared to an equivalent restaurant beyond the park's boundaries. Unless your budget is unlimited, you may want to consider the more casual counter-service eateries located throughout the park and save the sit-down service for somewhere else. These informal dining spots don't require Priority Seating (for details, check the Epcot guide map that you picked up upon entering the park) and often go overlooked. If you simply can't resist a more formal meal (and it is difficult at times), try eating lunch at the full-service restaurants when the price for a meal is much lower. Almost all of the establishments listed here serve lunch and dinner daily (hours vary with park hours), and, unless otherwise noted, they offer children's meals. All but one or two require theme-park admission and the \$8 parking fee, too. These restaurants are located on the "Epcot Dining" map on p. 135.

Note: Because the clientele at even the fanciest Epcot World Showcase restaurant comes directly from the park, you don't have to dress up for dinner, but do bring along a sweater or sweatshirt to ward off the sometimes chilly indoor temperatures. **Priority Seating**, which reserves your place but not a specific table, is available at all WDW sit-down restaurants and is strongly recommended. Otherwise, the chances of getting a table without a wait—often a long wait—are pretty slim. Call ☎ 407/939-3463 for Priority Seating.



EXPENSIVE

Les Chefs de France **TRADITIONAL FRENCH** Focusing on nouvelle cuisine, Les Chefs de France is one of the most expensive restaurants at Epcot, but not without good reason. An eye-catching, domed-glass exterior hides an Art Nouveau interior, filled with candelabras and glass-and-brass partitions, that offers an intimate setting. You can credit three internationally acclaimed chefs—Paul Bocuse, Roger Verge, and Gaston LeNotre—with the menu here, which combines fresh Florida ingredients with a good dose of French imports. Light sauces (when compared to more traditional French cooking, that is) compliment such tasty entrees as sautéed chicken with wild mushrooms, and Mediterranean seafood casserole. A substantial wine list complements the menu, and the desserts and pastries are among the best in the World. The service, however, can get a bit lackluster when the restaurant is busy.

France Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$16–\$18 lunch, \$15–\$28 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 5pm–1 hr. before park closes. Parking \$8.

Coral Reef **SEAFOOD** All of the seating at this aptly-named establishment surrounds a **5.6-million-gallon aquarium** filled with tropical fish and a coral reef. While some of Disney's denizens swim by, songs such as Debussy's "La Mer" and Handel's "Water Music" softly bathe the background. Tiered seats, mainly in semicircular booths, allow everyone a good view. You'll be provided with pictorial fish listings so you can put names on the faces swimming by your table. This is one of the most popular restaurants in all of the parks, especially with kids—what could be better than a fish tank of tremendous proportions to entertain tinier tots while you eat? The menu primarily features fresh seafood and shellfish, including grilled mahimahi, Florida snapper, and salmon. A selection of landlubber fare is available as well. Wine is available by the glass.

Living Seas Pavilion, Future World. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$13–\$24 lunch, \$16–\$32 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 4:30pm–park closing. Parking \$8.

L'Originale Alfredo di Roma *Overrated* **SOUTHERN ITALIAN** It may be the most popular restaurant in Epcot. L'Originale is actually L'Replica of Alfredo de Lelio's eatery in Rome, and the menu includes his celebrated fettuccine dished out in an exhibition kitchen. Fresh pastas and traditional Italian favorites dominate the menu, though there are pork, veal, seafood, and chicken dishes available as well. The wine list is reasonably extensive. The dining room noise level can be quite high, so if you want a quieter meal, ask for a seat on the veranda. The restaurant itself is beautiful, filled with tile accents, fountains, and statues; the music of strolling musicians also occasionally fills the air.

Italy Pavilion World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463 or 407/827-8418. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$10–\$25 lunch, \$17–\$38 (most under \$25) dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–park closing. Parking \$7.

Marrakesh ★ *Finds* **MOROCCAN** This unique dining spot exemplifies the spirit of Epcot more than any other restaurant. The restaurant's hand-set mosaic tiles, latticed shutters, and painted ceiling represent some 12 centuries of Arabic design. Exquisitely carved faux ivory archways frame the dining area. Unfortunately many guests shy away mistakenly thinking the cuisine's just too exotic—don't be put off. The menu features marinated beef shish kabob; braised chicken with green olives, garlic, and lemon; and a medley of seafood, chicken, and lamb. Most entrees come with the national dish, couscous (steamed semolina with veggies). If you can't decide what you want, sampler platters allowing you a taste of everything are available. Belly

dancers and musicians entertain you while you dine. There's a small selection of wine and beer.

Morocco Pavilion, World Showcase. © 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$11–\$22 lunch, \$18–\$32 dinner; \$28–\$30 prix fixe. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–park closing. Parking \$8.

Tempura Kiku JAPANESE Only 25 guests can sit around the central counter at this smallest of Japan's eateries, but if you get a seat, you will enjoy the tempura-battered shrimp, chicken, scallops, or beef. While the portions may be small, they are usually quite tasty. Tempura Kiku also serves sushi, sashimi, Kirin beer, plum wine, and sake along with a handful of specialty drinks.

Japan Pavilion, World Showcase. © 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating for teppanyaki; reservations not accepted at tempura counter. Main courses \$9–\$14 lunch, \$13–\$25 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1 hr. before park closes. Parking \$8.

Teppanyaki Dining Room JAPANESE If you've been to any of the Japanese steakhouse chains (*teppanyakis*), you know the drill: Diners sit around grill tables while white-hatted chefs rapidly dice, slice, stir-fry, and occasionally launch a morsel or two onto your plate with amazing skill. Unfortunately, the culinary acrobatics here are better than the cuisine, which is rather average. (For a real treat, try the Mikado Japanese Steakhouse reviewed on p. 167.) Expect entrees to have chicken, steak, shrimp, scallops, lobster, or a combination. Miso soup, a small salad with ginger dressing, stir fried veggies, and white rice accompany every meal, though you should opt for the fried rice—it's a much better choice—even if it does cost extra. Like Tempura Kiku (see above), Kirin beer, plum wine, and sake are served. Diners here sit at communal tables, making this a good bet for people traveling alone. It's also a lively and entertaining experience for kids.

Japan Pavilion, World Showcase. © 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$9–\$21 lunch, \$16–\$35 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1 hr. before park closes. Parking \$8.

MODERATE

Akershus NORWEGIAN Akershus is a re-created, 14th-century castle where you can sample an all-you-can eat feast of hot and cold dishes, making it a bargain for big eaters. It is also reasonably good food, though some diners will find it difficult to adapt to the Scandinavian taste. Entrees change but usually include venison stew, roast pork, gravlax, smoked mackerel, mustard herring, an array of Norwegian breads and cheeses, smashed rutabaga, and more. Cold items are served smorgasbord-style; hot items are ordered from the kitchen (and you can order as many items as your stomach can handle). The staff is friendly, and the white-stone interior, beamed ceilings, leaded-glass windows, and archways add to the authentic atmosphere. Norwegian beer

Fun Fact By The Numbers . . .

Walt Disney World hosts millions of people each year, and those millions of people eat . . . a lot! Every year the mouse serves up over 10,000 dessert soufflés at Victoria and Albert's and 31,000 Cobb salads at the Hollywood Brown Derby. Inside the theme parks, Disney annually dispenses 1.6 million turkey legs, 2.6 million chocolate-covered Mickey Mouse ice cream bars, 322,000 pounds (or 5 million bags) of popcorn, and more than a million pounds of watermelon. Wow!

and aquavit complement a list of French and California wines. Note: The character meal options here have been expanded to include lunch and dinner. The popular Princess breakfast (p. 174) includes mostly American fare, but the lunch and dinner buffets include a sampling of Norwegian fare along with a handful of kid-friendly favorites.

Norway Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Lunch buffet adult \$14, child \$9; dinner buffet adult \$20, child \$9. Character breakfast adult \$22, child \$12; character lunch adult \$23.99, child \$13; character dinner adult \$28, child \$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–park closing. Parking \$8.

Biergarten GERMAN The Biergarten, with its festive atmosphere, feels like a Bavarian village at Oktoberfest. A working waterwheel and geranium-filled flower boxes adorn the Tudor-style houses that line the dining area. An oompah band entertains with their accordions and cowbells, and guests are encouraged to dance and sing along. The all-you-can-eat buffet is filled with Bavarian fare (assorted sausages, pork schnitzel, sauerbraten, spaetzle, and sauerkraut) as well as rotisserie chicken. Beck's and Kirschwasser—served in immense steins—are both on tap for adults.

Germany Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Lunch buffet adult \$16, child \$8; dinner buffet adult \$21, child \$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–3:45pm and 4pm–park closing. Parking \$8.

Le Cellier Steakhouse CANADIAN This restaurant's French Gothic facade and steeply pitched copper roofs lend it a castle-like ambience. The lantern-lit dining room resembles a wine cellar, and you'll sit in tapestry-upholstered chairs under vaulted stone arches. If you're in the mood for steak, this is the right place; offerings include the usual range of cuts—including filet, veal chop, and prime rib. Other options include cast-iron seared trout, barbecued duck and confit, pork porterhouse, and maple- and ginger-glazed salmon. The lunch menu features lighter fare, including sandwiches and salads. Wash down your meal with a Canadian wine or choose from a selection of Canadian beers; for an after-dinner treat, try a Canadian ice wine.

Canadian Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$7–\$20 lunch, \$16–\$37 dinner, 3-course excursion \$35, wine pairing \$27 per person. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–park closing. Parking \$8.

Nine Dragons REGIONAL CHINESE When it comes to decor, Nine Dragons shines with carved rosewood furnishings and inlaid ceilings. Some windows overlook a lagoon. But (is there an echo?) the food doesn't match its surroundings. Main courses feature Mandarin, Shanghai, Cantonese, and Szechuan cuisines, but portions are small and the prices are high, especially when compared to Chinese restaurants elsewhere. The dishes include spicy beef stir-fried with squash in *sha cha* sauce; lightly breaded lemon chicken; and a casserole of lobster, shrimp, and scallops sautéed with ginger and scallions. If you're a group and don't mind sharing, 2-person and 4-person sampler plates offer a bit of everything for you to try. Chinese and California wines are offered.

China Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12.50–\$22 lunch, \$13–\$39 dinner; \$44 sampler for 2, \$60 sampler for 4. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Rose & Crown Pub & Dining Room BRITISH Visitors from the U.K. flock to this spot, where English folk music and the occasionally saucy server entertain you as you feast your eyes and palate on a short but traditional menu. It beckons with cod and

chips wrapped in newspaper, bangers and mash, prime rib with Yorkshire pudding, and, the best of the bunch, an English pie sampler (pork and cottage, and chicken and leek). The interior has dark oak wainscoting, beamed Tudor ceilings, and a belly-up bar. Speaking of the bar, it features lighter fare such as sausage rolls, Cornish pasties, and a Stilton cheese and fruit plate. Wash it down with a pint of Irish lager, Bass Ale, or Guinness Stout (the pub has an ale warmer to make sure Guinness is served at 55 degrees, just like its British guests prefer). If you only want to grab a pint or a snack at the bar, you don't need Priority Seating.

Note: The outdoor tables, weather permitting, offer a fantastic view of IllumiNations (p. 225). These seats are first-come, first served, so ask the hostess when you arrive if a patio table is available.

Tip: If you're in a hurry, you can grab some tasty fish (cod) and chips to go at Harry Ramsden's, a small quick-service kiosk adjoining the pub.

United Kingdom Pavilion, World Showcase. 📞 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating for dining room, not for pub. Main courses \$16–\$19 lunch, \$17–\$30 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1 hr. before park closes. Parking \$8.

San Angel Inn ★ MEXICAN It's always night at the San Angel, where you can dine under starry skies (a la Disney) and feast on some of the best South-of-the-Border cuisine in all of the theme parks. The restaurant offers one of the best (and most romantic) atmospheres around. Candlelit tables set the mood, and the menu delivers reasonably authentic food—don't expect to find Americanized hard-shell tacos and nachos here. *Mole poblano* (chicken simmered in a combination of chili, green tomatoes, ground tortillas, 11 spices, and a hint of chocolate) is a popular choice. Another favorite: *filete motuleño* (grilled beef tenderloin served over black beans, melted cheese, pepper strips, and fried plantains—a sweet, banana-like fruit). The occasional rumble of a volcano and the sounds of the distant songbirds can be heard as you wait for your dinner—you may find yourself singing right along if you've tried too many margaritas or had more than your limit of Dos Equis.

Mexico Pavilion, World Showcase. 📞 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12–\$18 lunch, \$18–\$24 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

INEXPENSIVE

Cantina de San Angel MEXICAN Counter-service eateries are the most common places to grab a bite in the parks, and this one's a good notch above Taco Bell. Come here for a decent burrito, taco, or churro on the fly. Located just across from the San Angel Inn, it offers a good view of the lagoon and umbrella-shaded tables. You can also grab a Dos Equis or frozen margarita.

Mexico Pavilion, World Showcase. 📞 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. No Priority Seating. Meals \$7–\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–1 hr. before park closes. Parking \$8.

Kringla Bakeri og Kafe NORWEGIAN The lunch-pail crowd loves this combination cafe-bakery. Grab-and-go options include a plate of smoked salmon and scrambled eggs, smoked ham and Jarlsberg cheese sandwiches, but it's the array of tempting pastries, cakes, cookies, and waffles with strawberry preserves that bring most here. Sit in the small, open-air seating area (just beyond the door, adjacent to the Stave Church) and let your kids work off excess energy at the Viking ship. Wine is sold by the glass.

Norway Pavilion, World Showcase. 📞 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. No Priority Seating. Sandwiches and salads \$4–\$6. Treats \$3–\$5. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Lotus Blossom Café CHINESE If you've in a hurry but still in the mood for some good Chinese, this counter-service stop offers fast-food favorites such as stir-fry, egg rolls, hot and sour soup, sweet and sour chicken, and fried rice. There's a small, covered outdoor patio, though the decor is not nearly as ornate as that of its neighbor, the Nine Dragons. Chinese beer and wine are available.

China Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. No Priority Seating. Meals \$4–\$6.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Sommerfest GERMAN At the rear of the Germany pavilion, this outdoor eatery's quick-bite menu includes bratwurst and frankfurter sandwiches (one is still a hot dog) with sauerkraut. The black forest cake and apple strudel go nicely with a glass of German wine or a Beck's beer.

Germany Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. No Priority Seating. All meals under \$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Sunshine Seasons in the Land *Value* FOOD COURT The food isn't gourmet, but of all cafeterias and counter-service stops in the World, the recently renovated Sunshine Seasons has the most diversity because it has five walk-ups in one. It's especially good if you're traveling with kids who possess finicky (and varied) palates; it's often crowded with families for that very reason. There's an Asian Wok shop (stir-fry and barbecue), a wood-fired grill (Atlantic Salmon), a sandwich shop (Black-forest ham, salami, Cuban), and a soup and salad counter (with veggies from the Land's own gardens). There's also a small bakery. An open kitchen allows everyone to watch the behind-the-scenes action. Wine by the glass, a frosty draft, and bottled beer are also available.

Land Pavilion, Future World. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Reservations not accepted. Meals \$5–\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Yakitori House JAPANESE Resembling the teahouse of the Imperial Summer Palace, this small eatery offers a menu of *yakitori* (skewered chicken with soy sauce and sesame), teriyaki chicken and beef, and a handful of other beef, chicken, and seafood items too. The food is reasonably good though a little on the blah side, and portions are smaller than at many other Disney restaurants. There's seating both indoors and out, but no matter where you dine, you'll be overlooking tranquil Japanese gardens and a gentle waterfall.

Japan Pavilion, World Showcase. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Reservations not accepted. Meals \$3–\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

In addition to the restaurants mentioned below, there are plenty of fast-food outlets located throughout the park. You may find, however, that a quiet sit-down meal is an essential but all-too-brief way to get away from the day's activities. The restaurants listed below can all be found on the “Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining” map on p. 142. And remember—Magic Kingdom restaurants *don't serve alcohol*.

For information on Magic Kingdom's Crystal Palace restaurant, see “Only in Orlando: Dining with Disney Characters,” at the end of this chapter.

EXPENSIVE

Cinderella's Royal Table ★ AMERICAN You'll be greeted by handmaidens before making your way inside this royal restaurant—by far, the most popular place to dine

in Magic Kingdom. Those who enter are usually swept off their feet as they're transported back to a time when medieval kings and queens reigned (a feeling that's helped along by the Gothic interior, which includes leaded-glass windows, stone floors, and high-beamed ceilings). The servers treat you like a lord or lady (I'm not kidding, that's how they'll address you) and the menu has fetching names, but the fine print reveals traditional entrees. The Earl's Poulet, plainly speaking, is roasted chicken, the Loyal Knight is spice-crusted salmon, and the Grand Duke is a New York strip.

Note: Because of its location and ambience, a meal here is sought by everyone from little girls who dream of Prince Charming to romantics seeking a more intimate meal. The problem: This is actually one of the smallest dining rooms in the World, making Priority Seating arrangements a must. And you'll have your work cut out for you to get one—it may very well take several calls (and a lot of flexibility on your part) to ensure a spot. This is especially true if you want to dine at the popular character meals (p. 172).

Cinderella Castle, Fantasyland. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$13–\$16 lunch, \$21–\$26 dinner; character breakfast adult \$22, child \$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:45pm and 4pm–1 hr. before park closing. Parking \$8

Tony's Town Square Restaurant ITALIAN Inspired by the cafe in *Lady and the Tramp*, Tony's dishes up lunches and dinners of pastas and pizzas in a pleasant if somewhat harried dining room featuring etched glass and ornate gingerbread trim. The lunch menu includes pasta primavera, spaghetti, *frutti di mare* (clams, mussels, and shrimp with pasta), salads, and more. Evening fare might include sautéed veal with wild mushrooms, roasted chicken with peppers and onions, or char-crusted pork. Kids will enjoy the pizzas and plainer pastas. Original cels from the movie (including the film's famous spaghetti smooch) line the walls. Additional seating is available in a sunny, plant-filled solarium. **Tip:** Dinner is by far the busiest time to dine here, but if you time it just right, you can see the Wishes fireworks display after your meal and will be close enough to the park exit to make a quicker getaway than most.

Main Street. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$9–\$12 lunch, \$19–\$25 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8:30–10:45am, noon–2:45pm, and 4pm–park closing. Parking \$8.

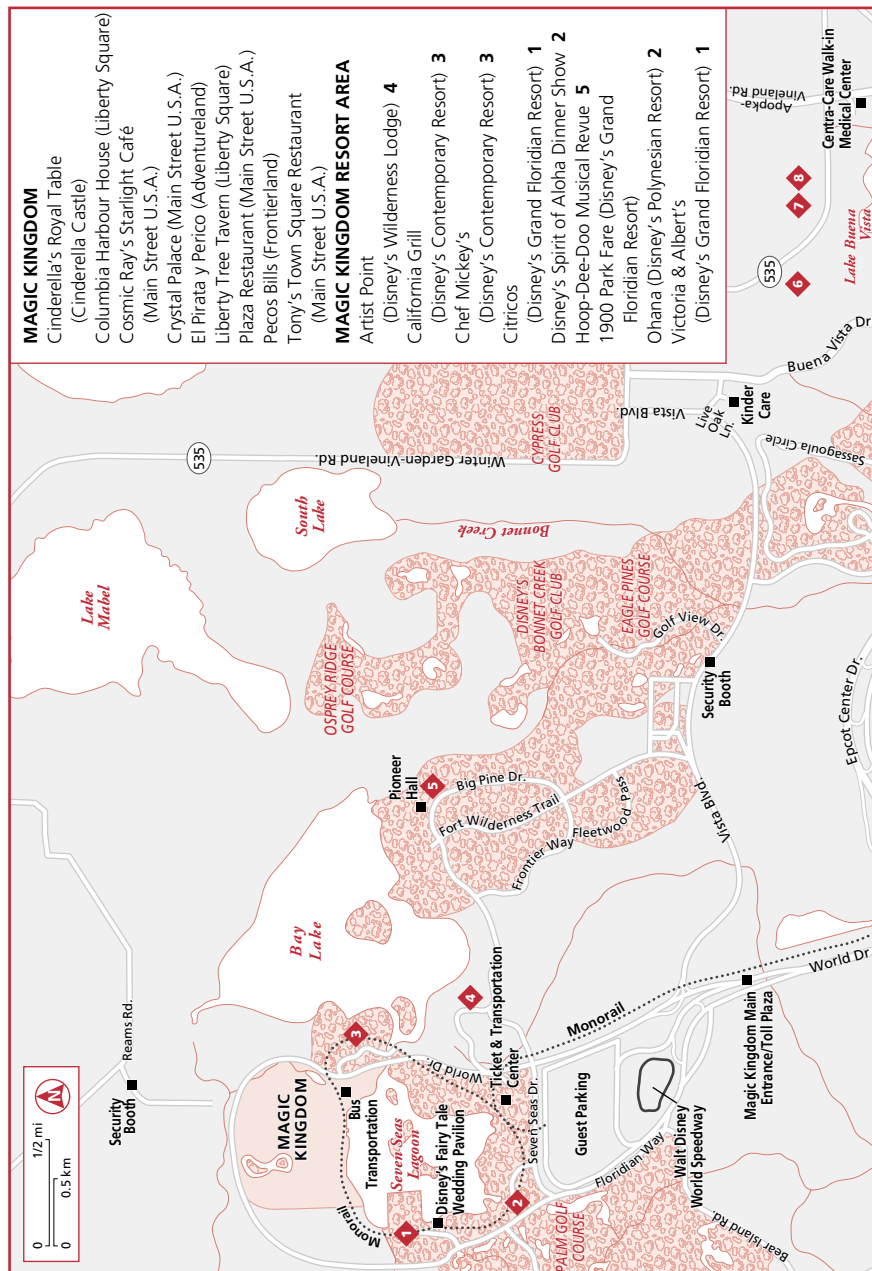
MODERATE

Liberty Tree Tavern AMERICAN Step into a replica of an 18th-century Colonial pub and its historic atmosphere, including oak-plank floors, pewter ware-stocked hutches, and a big brick fireplace hung with copper pots. The background music suits the period. Lunch includes sandwiches, seafood (such as cured salmon and crab cakes), salads, soups, burgers, and pot roast. The nightly character dinner is a set family-style meal that includes roast turkey, carved beef, smoked pork with a mashed-potatoes stuffing, and macaroni and cheese—along with apple crisp and vanilla ice cream to top it off. While the fare's not all that interesting, it is appropriate to the early-American setting (see “Only in Orlando: Dining with Disney Characters,” later in this chapter).

Note: If you're looking for a buffet with a bit more to offer than just the usual fare you could try Epcot's **Akershus** (p. 137) or Animal Kingdom Lodge's **Boma** (p. 149); if you don't want to venture outside of Magic Kingdom, this is your best option.

Liberty Square. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$11–\$15 lunch; character dinner buffet adult \$22, child \$11. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 4pm–park closing. Parking \$8.

Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining



Boatwright's Dining Hall
(Disney's Port Orleans Resort) **14**

(Disney's Port Orleans Resort) **14**

Cane May Café (Disney's Beach

ESPN Club (Disney's Boardwalk) 10

Flying Fish Cafe
(Dinner's Ready!) 10

Jiko—the Cooking Place 9

(Disney's Boardwalk) **10**(WDW Dolphin) **11**

(Disney's Yacht Club Resort) **12**

For Restaurants in Epcot itself — please see the “Epcot Dining” map in this chapter.

DISNEY'S
ANIMAL
KINGDOM

Bongao's Cuban Cafe 15

Earl of Sandwich (Downtown)

Eulton's Crab House **17**

House of Blues 15

Portobello Yacht Club **16**Wolfgang Puck Café **15**

Please see the "Disney-MGM Studios" map in Chapter 7

Please see the "Animal Kingdom"

map in Chapter 7.

Disney's Wide World
of Sports

Arthur's 27 (Wyndham Palace Resort) **18**
Black Swan (Villas of Grand Cypress) **7**

Black Swan (Villas of Grand Cypress) 7

Hemingaway's (Hyatt Regency)

La Coaguina (Hwy# 100, Pecos, Grand

Cypress) b

Romano's Macaroni Grill 8

MAGIC KINGDOM PARK, DISNEY-MGM STUDIOS,
DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM. DISNEY'S FORT WILDERNESS

Kissimmee →

INEXPENSIVE

Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café AMERICAN The largest of the park's fast-food spots, this café features an appropriately huge menu. Three separate counters, similar to a food court, serve a variety of chicken options (whole- or half-roisserie, dark meat, white meat, fried or grilled), sandwiches, burgers, hot dogs, cheese steaks, soups, and salads. The combination of its casual atmosphere and varied menu makes Ray's a great choice for those with kids. Do note, however, that you may have to wait in more than one line here, as each station offers a different selection. Other minuses: The large dining area fills up quickly at lunch and dinner, and the noise level is generally high. *Tip:* Kosher meals are available here for direct-purchase (though they're not particularly noteworthy in the taste department).

Main Street. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. All items \$7-\$14. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Pecos Bills ★ AMERICAN Set in an old-time saloon of sorts, this sit-and-go fast-food joint serves up burgers, hot dogs, salads, and a great chicken wrap sandwich. There's also a fixin's bar full of extras. Portions are large, though, like all other park

New Arrival

The **Plaza Pavilion** in Magic Kingdom's Tomorrowland was transformed in the spring of 2005 into Tomorrowland Terrace Noodle Station. Its new menu includes Oriental-style chicken and shrimp dishes, vegetarian noodles, stir fry, egg rolls and other Asian-themed cuisine.

dining options, so are the prices. Its good location—just between Frontierland and Adventureland—means that those traveling clockwise through the park will probably hit the area just in time for lunch. It can get very crowded at peak meal times, though there is quite a bit of indoor and outdoor seating.

Tip: If your cravings are running more toward Mexican than American, head through the indoor seating area in the back to the seasonal **El Pirata y**

Perico, a covered outdoor snack spot featuring tacos, empanadas, chips, and taco salad (all under \$6). It's located in Adventureland, just across from Pirates of the Caribbean.

Frontierland. ☎ 407/939-3643. www.disneyworld.com. All items \$5-\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11 am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Columbia Harbour House ★ AMERICAN/SEAFOOD This small eatery often goes overlooked because of its size—it features only a handful of cozy little rooms, all nautically themed—but it does offer some rather decent light fare. Battered fish and shrimp—far meatier than most—sandwiches, clam chowder, and fruit are featured on the menu.

Liberty Square. ☎ 407/939-3643. www.disneyworld.com. All items \$5-\$7. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Plaza Restaurant AMERICAN It shouldn't be confused with the nearby Plaza Ice Cream Parlor, but the sundaes, banana splits, and other ice-cream creations at this popular dining spot are arguably the best in WDW. This 19th-century inspired restaurant features tasty if expensive sandwiches (turkey, Reuben, cheese steak, chicken, and burgers) that come with an order of fries or potato salad. You can eat inside in an Art Nouveau dining room or at umbrella-shaded tables on a veranda overlooking Cinderella Castle.

Main Street. © 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Meals \$8–\$11; ice cream \$4–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

AT DISNEY–MGM STUDIOS

Some of the most uniquely themed restaurants in all of WDW are set among the movie sets, action-packed shows, and wild rides of Disney–MGM studios. That fact, in turn, makes them some of the most difficult to get into. Be sure to make Priority Seating arrangements if you want to eat at any full-service restaurant here. Listed below are the best of the bunch. They're located on the two maps, "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining" (p. 142) and "Disney–MGM Studios Theme Park" (p. 227).

EXPENSIVE

Hollywood Brown Derby AMERICAN This elegant restaurant is modeled after the famed Los Angeles celebrity haunt where Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper once held court. It features some of the finest food and the fanciest surroundings in the park—along with some of the highest prices. White linens, chandeliers, and potted palms all add to the upscale atmosphere, and over 1,500 caricatures of its most famous patrons over the years line the walls, including those of Lucile Ball, Betty Davis, and Clark Gable. Owner Bob Cobb created the original restaurant's signature Cobb salad in the 1930's. (It's so popular that this Derby serves over 31,000 of them a year.) Dinner entrees at Disney's version include pan-fired grouper with balsamic roasted asparagus, mustard-crust rack of lamb with acorn squash and sweet-and-sour cabbage, and spiced-pan roasted pork with white cheddar grits. The Derby's signature dessert, grapefruit cake with cream-cheese icing, is the perfect way to end your meal. The Derby features a full bar and a modest selection of California wines.

Hollywood Blvd. © 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$13–\$19 lunch, \$19–\$28 dinner. Fantasmic package adult \$37, child \$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

MODERATE

50's Prime Time Café *(Kids)* AMERICAN Did you ever want to go back to when life was simpler—well you can here, even if it's just for a meal. The homey dining room looks just like mom's kitchen did back in the 1950s, complete with Formica counter tops and black-and-white TVs showing clips from classics such as *My Little Margie*. The servers add to the fun, greeting diners with lines like, "Hi Sis, I'll go tell

Tips A Royal Debut

In the spring of 2004, **The Earl of Sandwich** (the famous edible was invented by said earl in 1762 when he was too busy playing cards to eat a real meal—and found that putting meat between two slices of bread allowed for both) made its debut in Downtown Disney. The casual eatery offers a great selection of hot and cold sandwiches, including French roasted beef with cheddar and horseradish sauce, turkey with apple bacon and Swiss cheese, and ham with brie and dijonnaise. Cobb and Chinese chicken salads are available as well. There's a small amount of indoor seating though most diners head for the benches outside. If you're looking for a quick, light meal at a decent price (sandwiches and salads run from \$4 to \$6), this is the place to head.

Tips Disney-MGM Dining Alternative


If you forgot to make Priority Seating arrangements or couldn't get a table at your chosen restaurant, try the **Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant's** next-door neighbor, the **ABC Commissary**. While not a themed restaurant per se, it offers one of the most diverse menus in the park, featuring items such as Cuban sandwiches, vegetable noodle stir-fry, tabbouleh wraps, fish and chips, burgers, and more. They offer rather good desserts as well. Most items cost \$4 to \$7. Plainer than most Disney eateries, it really does resemble a commissary, and TVs lining the walls play commercials for the latest and greatest shows running on Disney-owned ABC.

Mom you're home," and they may threaten to withhold dessert if you don't eat all your food. Kids love it. The entrees—fried chicken, meatloaf, pot roast, and open-faced sandwiches, among others—aren't quite as good as mom used to make, but are decent nonetheless. The desserts, including s'mores and sundaes, are worth the wait. Beer and specialty drinks (they make a mean margarita) are served.

Near the Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular. ☎ **407/939-3463**. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$11–\$17 lunch, \$13–\$20 and dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Mama Melrose's Ristorante Italiano ITALIAN Set along a simulated New York street, this large, casual neighborhood eatery is filled with red checkered table cloths, wood floors, and red vinyl booths, welcoming to all that enter. The best bets here are the wood-fired flatbreads (grilled pepperoni, four-cheese, portobello mushroom, and others) offered at both lunch and dinner. The dinner menu also includes seafood in a spicy marinara sauce, veal osso buco, and oak-grilled salmon.

Near the Backlot Tour. ☎ **407/939-3463**. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12–\$15 lunch, \$12–\$22 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant  **AMERICAN** This restaurant's simulated nighttime sky is filled with fiber optic twinkling stars that look down on you as you sit in a chrome "convertible" watching a giant screen showing '50s and '60s sci-fi flicks, zany newsreels, cartoons, and B horror-movie clips, such as *Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster*. Fun-loving carhops deliver free popcorn along with your meal. The menu, almost as fun to read as the movies are to watch, features such items as Attack of the Killer Club Sandwich, the Beach Party Panic, Red Planet. Once you're done translating, you'll choose from a selection of sandwiches, ribs, burgers, seafood, pasta, steak, and salads. Kids' meals are served on souvenir glow-in-the-dark flyers. The food is average; it's the atmosphere that keeps the crowds coming. Priority Seating is highly recommended.

Near Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular. ☎ **407/939-3463**. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12–\$17 lunch, \$14–\$17 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

INEXPENSIVE

Toy Story Pizza Planet AMERICAN The menu here is far from original, but it will satisfy some of the younger (and pickier) eaters in your family with pizza, salad, drinks, and desserts. It's a big favorite of kids, thanks to the array of arcade games located just next door—just remember to bring plenty of change.

In the Muppet's Courtyard. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating not accepted. All meals \$6–\$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–park closing. Parking \$8.

IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

There are few restaurants in the newest of Disney's parks, and most that exist are counter-service or grab-and-go places. Only two restaurants here are actually notable enough to deserve a listing.

MODERATE

Rainforest Cafe ★ *Kids* CALIFORNIA Expect California fare with an island spin at this Rainforest, and its cousin, listed later in this chapter on p. 155. Menu offerings tend to be tasty and somewhat creative, with far more choices that most can contend with. That said, the cafe, like other Disney restaurants, tends to fall on the pricier side of dining. Fun dishes include Mogambo Shrimp (sautéed in olive oil and served with penne pasta), Rumble in the Jungle Turkey Wrap (with romaine, tomatoes, and bacon), and Maya's Mixed Grill (ribs, chicken breast, and shrimp). Tables situated among the dining room's vines and generally inanimate animals are usually packed; that's partially due to the lack of other full-service dining options at Animal Kingdom, but also due to the actual popularity of this loud and lively establishment. Beer, wine, and other alcoholic concoctions are served.

Just outside Animal Kingdom entrance. *Admission not required* (though there is an entrance from inside the park, too.). ☎ 407/938-9100. www.rainforestcafe.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses \$10–\$40 (most under \$25) lunch and dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm. Parking \$8.

INEXPENSIVE

Tusker House AMERICAN Located in the Harambe Village, this grab-and-go spot features some fast-food options that offer a bit of culinary flair. Grilled chicken salad with focaccia bread, rotisserie or fried chicken, grilled salmon, and a roasted vegetable sandwich are all on the menu here. Beer and wine are served. The food is tasty enough though portions are small.

In Africa, near entrance. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. No Priority Seating. Main courses \$7–\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–4:30pm. Parking \$8.

IN THE WALT DISNEY WORLD RESORTS

Most restaurants listed in this category continue the Disney trend of being above market price. On the flip side, many offer food and atmospheres that are much better than what you'll find in the theme parks. The quality level means that even those not staying at Disney resorts like to dine at these restaurants, so Priority Seating is a must if you don't want to miss out on a table. All of the restaurants in this section are located on the "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining" map on p. 142.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Citricos ★ NEW FRENCH The second of The Grand Floridian's most popular upscale restaurants (Victoria & Albert's is No. 1) offers a menu featuring a fusion of French and Mediterranean cuisine with a Florida twist. Items change regularly, but you might find yummy grilled lamb chops with crispy polenta and puttanesca sauce; braised autumn vegetables with goat cheese, pesto, and beurre blanc; or grilled salmon with roasted fennel and potatoes. The Old World decor includes plenty of wrought-iron railings, mosaic-tile floors, flickering lights, a show kitchen, and a view of the Seven Seas Lagoon and Magic Kingdom fireworks. Add a three-course wine pairing

for \$25. The Chef's Domain offers an experience similar to the Chef's Table at Victoria & Albert's, **but beware:** Citricos won't piece together a group. You have to pay the full \$650 sticker price (ouch!) for the table whether there are 2 or 12 in your party.

4401 Floridian Way, in Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$21–\$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 5:30–10pm; Chef's Domain Tues–Sat 6 and 8:30pm.

Victoria & Albert's ★★★ *Finds* INTERNATIONAL It's not often that I can describe dinner as "an event," but Disney's most elegant restaurant deserves that distinction. Dinner is next to perfect—if the portions seem small, they're designed that way to make sure you can get through all seven courses—and the setting is exceptionally romantic. The fare changes nightly, but expect a feast fit for royalty (and costing a royal fortune). You might begin with roasted duck with candy-striped and golden beets, followed by Monterey abalone with lemon and baby spinach. Then, pheasant consommé might precede an entree such as tamari-glazed bluefin tuna over bok choy stir-fry or veal tenderloin; pheasant with porcini pasta and truffle foam; or Australian Kobe Beef tenderloin. English Stilton served with a burgundy-poached pear sets up desserts such as vanilla bean crème brûlée and Kona chocolate soufflé. The intimate dining room (with seating for only 65) is crowned by a domed, chapel-style ceiling. Victorian lamps softly light 20 exquisitely appointed tables; a harp plays softly in the background, and your servers (always named Victoria and Albert) provide service that is unmatched anywhere else in Orlando. The luxurious experience ends as a personalized menu is presented to you and a rose given to all the ladies in your party.

Tip: Wine pairings, which provide a wine with most courses for an extra \$50 per person, are a great way to enhance the dinner experience.

4401 Floridian Way, in Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating required. Jackets required for men. Not recommended for children. Prix fixe \$95 (\$105 on holidays) per person, \$145 with wine pairing; \$125 Chef's Table, \$185 with wine. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. 2 dinner seatings daily Sept–June 5:45–6:30pm and 9–9:45pm; 1 dinner seating July–Aug 6:45–8pm. Chef's Table 6pm only. Free self- and validated valet parking.

Yachtsman Steakhouse ★ SEAFOOD/STEAKS/CHOPS It is somewhat of a backhanded compliment to name this the best steakhouse in Disney—there are only two true steakhouses on property. Even so, when you compare it to similar spots in

Finds **The Chef's Table: The Best Seat in the World**

There's a special dining option at **Victoria & Albert's**. Reserve the **Chef's Table** (far, far in advance) and dine in a charming alcove hung with copper pots and dried flower wreaths at an elegantly appointed candlelit table in the heart of the kitchen! Begin by sipping bubbly with the chef while discussing your food preferences for a menu (up to 13 courses) created especially for you. There's a cooking seminar element to this experience: Diners get to tour the kitchen and observe the artistry of the chefs at work. The Chef's Table can accommodate up to 10 people a night. It's a leisurely affair, lasting 3 or 4 hours. The price is \$125 per person without wine, \$185 including five wines. This is so popular that Disney takes Priority Seating reservations 180 days in advance, so reserve *early* by calling 407/939-3463.

Fun Fact **Cooking for Kids**

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa offers two special cooking programs for children. **Grand Adventures in Cooking** invites up to 12 youngsters, 4 to 10 years old, to make dessert in a 2-hour decorating class (\$29 per child). The **Wonderland Tea Party** gives kids the same age a 1-hour primer in cupcake decorating—with their fingers! They also feast on heart-shaped PBJs and sip apple juice “tea” while they play with Alice and the Mad Hatter (\$29 per child). Call ☎ 407/824-3000 or 407/939-3463 for details on both programs.

the outside world, the Yachtsman would still earn high grades. Its grain-fed Western beef is aged, cured, and cut here. You can see the cuts in a glass-enclosed aging room, and the exhibition kitchen provides a tantalizing glimpse of steaks, chops, and seafood being grilled over oak and hickory. Steak options range from an 8-ounce filet to a 12-ounce strip to a belly-busting 24-ounce T-bone. A filet and warm-water lobster tail combo tops the price chart. If you're not in the mood for beef, the Yachtsman also serves Chilean sea bass, scallops, and one daily vegetarian special. The decor includes knotty-pine beams, plank floors, and leather-and-oak chairs. The staff is very cordial. The Yachtsman has an extensive wine list, though it's not in the same league as the other two contestants in this category.

1700 Epcot Resorts Blvd., in Disney's Yacht Club Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. Priority Seating recommended. Main courses \$21–\$80. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Free self- and valet parking.

EXPENSIVE

Artist Point ★ *Finds* SEAFOOD/STEAKS/CHOPS Enjoy a grand view of Disney's Wilderness Lodge and rather impressive murals of the Pacific Northwest as you dine in this two-story restaurant, whose immense windows overlook waterfalls, rocky landscaping and the resort's erupting geyser. In keeping with the park-lodge theme, iron chandeliers hang from the ceilings, and the tables and furnishings are made of exposed wood and full of animal carvings. The menu changes seasonally and might feature grilled buffalo sirloin with sweet potato hazelnut gratin and sweet onion jam; or pan-seared tuna with roasted parsnips, shallots and chanterelle mushrooms. There's terrace seating for fair weather. Expect a reasonably extensive wine list now exclusively featuring wines from the Pacific Northwest. **Note:** Artist Point has a much more relaxed atmosphere than some of the busier WDW resort restaurants.

Tip: If you're looking for a more family-oriented dining at the Wilderness Lodge, try the **Whispering Canyon Café**, where kids can horse race on broom sticks, and everyone gets a hoopin' and a hollerin' at dinner. Meals are served family style (though a la carte service is available if you so desire).

901 W. Timberline Dr., in Disney's Wilderness Lodge. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating recommended. Main courses \$21–\$34. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Free self- and valet parking.

Boma ★★ *Moments* AFRICAN One of two restaurants in the Animal Kingdom Lodge, this one is themed after an African marketplace. There's plenty of open space to roam about, a thatched roof strewn with colorful banners, and large wood tables shaped to look like tree trunks. The show kitchen and wood-burning grill send delicious aromas wafting throughout the room and fill the dinner buffet with diverse delicacies from more than 50 African nations. Adventurous diners can expect such treats

as Moroccan seafood salad (mussels, scallops, shrimp, and couscous), curried coconut seafood stew, chicken pepper pot soup, and much more. The watermelon rind salad is a specialty, but don't forget to save room for the yummy desserts. Kids will appreciate the penne pasta with meatballs and tomato sauce, chicken fingers, and macaroni and cheese as well as the large selection of fresh fruit. The restaurant is set up in sections, each with a chef who can answer your questions about the cuisine. And if there's something you particularly liked, just ask for the recipe—Disney is surprisingly good about sharing their culinary secrets. There's also a breakfast buffet. **Tip:** Most tables here seat larger parties, so couples or single diners may end up waiting longer for a table.

2901 Osceola Pkwy., at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Breakfast buffet \$15 adults, \$8 kids 3–11; dinner buffet \$25 adults, \$11 kids. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7–11am and 5–10pm. Free self-parking.

California Grill ★★ CALIFORNIA Located on the Contemporary Resort's 15th floor, this stunning restaurant offers views of the Magic Kingdom and lagoon below while your eyes and mouth feast on an eclectic menu. A Wolfgang Puckish interior incorporates Art Deco elements (curved pearwood walls, vivid splashes of color, polished black granite surfaces), but the central focus is an exhibition kitchen with a wood-burning oven and rotisserie. The menu's headliners change to take advantage of fresh market fare but may include seared yellowfin tuna, black grouper with mushroom risotto, and soft-shell crabs with corn salad. The Grill also has a nice sushi and sashimi menu (tuna, crab, and shrimp, among others) ranging from appetizers to large platters. This is one of the few spots in WDW that isn't inundated with kids. The list of California wines helps complement the meal and views.

Note: It can be tough to get a table at the Grill, especially on weekends and during Disney fireworks hours, so make a reservation as early as possible.

4600 N. World Dr., at Disney's Contemporary Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$20–\$35; sushi and sashimi \$10–\$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Free self-parking.

Flying Fish Café SEAFOOD Chefs at this upscale Coney Island-inspired restaurant take the stage in a show kitchen that turns out entrees such as potato-wrapped red snapper with a creamy leek fondue; coriander-crusted yellowfin tuna with shiitake mushrooms; and oak-grilled salmon with bread salad, arugula, eggplant, and roasted peppers. The food is better than what you'll find at the Coral Reef (p. 136) and Cape May Café (p. 153), but not in the same league as Artist Point (p. 149), the bluezoo (p. 151), or some of Orlando's other quality seafood restaurants. Considering the show kitchen and vibrant colors inside, this is a nice escape from the usual theme park dining. **Note:** If you can't get a table here, ask about sitting at the counter—you get a great view of the kitchen.

2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd., at Disney's BoardWalk. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$21–\$39. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Free self-parking.

Tips For Smaller Stomachs

If your kids aren't satisfied with the offerings on the kids' menu, try the appetizer menu. They'll have more to choose from and the price is right. Also, always ask if half-portions are available; they are generally not advertised, though some restaurants offer them upon request.

Tips Pint Sized Portions

If your kids are adventurous in the dining department but can't handle adult-sized portions, several Disney restaurants allow kids to sample dishes geared to adult tastes that are served in portion sizes suited to smaller stomachs (and at smaller prices, too). Options include:

- **Coral Reef** (Epcot): Grilled mahimahi (\$9)
- **Flying Fish Café** (BoardWalk): Lettuce Salad (\$3), buttermilk fried fish (\$8)
- **L'Originale Alfredo di Roma Ristorante** (Epcot): Fettuccine Alfredo (\$7)
- **Artist Point** (Wilderness Lodge): Baked salmon with mashed potatoes and veggies (\$9)
- **Citricos** (Grand Floridian): Chicken noodle soup (\$2), oak-grilled filet of beef (\$12)
- **California Grill** (Contemporary): Steak with mashed potatoes and veggies (\$9)

Jiko—The Cooking Place ★ AFRICAN The Animal Kingdom Lodge's signature restaurant is a nice diversion from the normal Disney restaurants and a complementary addition to the multicultural dining rooms at Epcot's World Showcase. Jiko's show kitchen, sporting two wood-burning ovens, turns out a unique menu of international cuisine with African overtones. Dishes, depending on the season, might include broiled buttermilk curry shrimp, pan-roasted monkfish, grilled salmon with heirloom potatoes and spinach in a horseradish vinaigrette, and pomegranate-glazed quail. The wine list features South African vintages exclusively. The muted atmosphere of the restaurant and surroundings of the Animal Kingdom Lodge makes this a good place for a relaxing and unique dining experience.

2901 Osceola Pkwy., at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$17–\$33. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Free self-parking.

Spoodles TAPAS/MEDITERRANEAN This lively (read: noisy) family restaurant features an open kitchen. The enterprising tapas menu encourages food sharing, which increases the fun factor. The treats include sautéed chili garlic shrimp, fried calamari, and a sampler platter. Entrees include Moroccan-spiced tuna and a grilled pork porterhouse with goat-cheese polenta. Spoodles has added a respectable wine list, including tableside sangria presentations. **Note:** Although popular, the quality here doesn't rival Café Tu Tu Tango, another tapas favorite (p. 165). During the peak summer tourist season, thanks to its location at the BoardWalk, the wait can be long, even with Priority Seating, so this may not be the best option for famished families. Though there's plenty of indoor seating, try for a table on the small patio outside, so you can take in all of the action on the Boardwalk.

2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd., at Disney's BoardWalk. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$18–\$28, sampler \$25; tapas \$6–\$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7–11am, noon–2pm, and 5–10pm. Free self-parking.

Todd English's bluezoo ★★ SEAFOOD Set inside the WDW Dolphin, this is the hippest, hottest, happenest place to dine in town. Internationally acclaimed chef

Tips Anyone Hungry?

There are plenty of places throughout the World to eat and eat and then eat some more, so plan on heading to these food-fests when you're plenty hungry. Disney boasts 10 **all-you-can-eat** restaurants, which is really Disney's polite way of saying feel free to eat absolutely everything in front of you.


Restaurants include: **'Ohana** at the Polynesian Resort, **Whispering Canyon** at the Wilderness Lodge, **Boma** at the Animal Kingdom Lodge, **Cape May Café** at the Beach Club Resort, **Crystal Palace** at the Magic Kingdom, **Liberty Tree Tavern** at the Magic Kingdom, **Garden Grill** at Epcot, **Restaurant Akershus** (Norway) at Epcot, **Hollywood & Vine** at Disney-MGM Studios, **Chef Mickey's** at the Contemporary Resort, and **1900 Park Fare** at the Grand Floridian.

Todd English has created an amazing menu of fresh seafood and coastal dishes that are served with creative flair in an artsy setting. An exhibition kitchen showcases the chefs at work, and the dining areas feature a contemporary (and very blue) decor scheme designed to evoke the ocean, with lots of hip lighting and curved walls. Appetizers include the amazing "Olive's" classico flatbread, a roasted beet salad, and teppan-seared sea scallops. Melt-in-your-mouth entrees include lobster Bolognese, spit-roasted block of swordfish, and fresh grilled fish served in a choice of three unique sauces. Unlike those at many upscale restaurants of this caliber, the portions here are meal-worthy, not miniscule. That said, the prices here are hefty, and do not include side dishes (veggies, for example), which will run you an extra \$5 to \$7. Dress is casual (this is Disney); however, the atmosphere is definitely adult and upscale.

Tip: The front of the restaurant has a unique sectioned-off bar and lounge where live music is often featured or a DJ spins a selection of today's hottest tunes.

1500 Epcot Resort Blvd, at the WDW Dolphin. ☎ 407/934-1111. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating recommended. Main Courses \$22–\$50. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 3:30–11pm. Free self-parking; free, validated valet parking (validate ticket on your way out).

MODERATE

Boatwright's Dining Hall  **NEW ORLEANS** A family atmosphere (noisy), good food (by Disney standards), and reasonable prices (ditto) make Boatwright's a hit with Port Orleans Resort guests, if not outsiders. Most entrees have a Cajun/Creole spin. The jambalaya is sans seafood but is filled with vegetables, rice, chicken, and sausage, all rather spicy and giving it quite a kick. Vegetarians will appreciate the vegetable medley and the four-cheese ravioli. Other dinner items include bayou seafood stew, bourbon-glazed chicken, pork ribs, and pot roast. Boatwright's is modeled after a 19th-century boat factory, complete with the wooden hull of a Louisiana fishing boat suspended from its lofty beamed ceiling. Most kids like the wooden toolboxes on every table; each contains a saltshaker that doubles as a level, a wood-clamp sugar dispenser, a pepper-grinder-cum-ruler, a jar of unmatched utensils, shop rags (to be used as napkins), and a little metal pail of crayons.

2201 Orleans Dr., in Disney's Port Orleans Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating recommended. Main courses \$7–\$11 breakfast, \$14–\$20 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7–11:30am and 5–10pm. Free self-parking.

Cape May Café SEAFOOD This New England–style clambake offers a selection of oysters, clams, mussels, baked fish, and small peel-and-eat shrimp. Accompaniments include corn on the cob, potatoes, and other assorted veggies. Landlubbers fear not; there is a selection of not-so-fishy fare including pasta, barbecued pork ribs, and sirloin tips. The casual nautical theme carries into the restaurant from the surrounding Beach Club resort. The Cape May Café also offers a character breakfast buffet every morning (p. 172).

1800 Epcot Resorts Blvd., at Disney's Beach Club Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating. Dinner buffet \$24 adults, \$10 children 3–11. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–9:30pm. Free self- and valet parking.

ESPN Club ★ AMERICAN If you are a sports enthusiast, this is *the* place for you. Upon entering you will be surrounded by monitors showing every possible sporting event and lots of sports-related memorabilia. The restaurant also has a small video arcade. The all-American fare includes such choices as “Boo-Yeah” chili, hot wings, and burgers. Sandwiches and salads are available as well. The service is impeccable—never have I had a waiter so quick on his feet. While the food is quite good, it's really the atmosphere that draws the crowds here.

2101 N. Epcot Resorts Blvd. at Disney's BoardWalk. ☎ 407/939-1177. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating is not available. \$8–\$16 lunch and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–1am, Fri–Sat 11:30 am–2am. Valet or free self-parking.

'Ohana ★ *Kids* PACIFIC RIM Its star is earned on the fun front, but the decibel level here can get a bit overwhelming, especially those looking for a relaxing evening out. Inside, you're welcomed as a “cousin,” which fits because *'Ohana* means *family* in Hawaiian. As your food is being prepared over an 18-foot fire pit, the staff keeps your eyes and ears filled with all sorts of shenanigans. The blowing of a conch shell summons a storyteller, coconut races get under way in the center aisle, and you can shed your inhibitions and shake it in the hula lessons. When it starts, the meal is served rapid fire (ask your waiter to slow the pace if it's too fast). The edibles include a variety of skewers (think shish kabob), including turkey, shrimp, steak, and pork. You'll also find lots of trimmings and a full bar with limited wine selections (tropical alcoholic drinks are available for an added fee). **Note:** Ask for a seat in the main dining room, or you won't get a good view of the entertainment.

1600 Seven Seas Dr., at Disney's Polynesian Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Priority Seating strongly encouraged. \$25 adults, \$11 children 3–11; character breakfast \$18 adults, \$10 kids 3–11 (p. 174). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7:30–11am and 5–10pm. Free self- and valet parking.

Fun Fact Where's Mickey?

All over the Walt Disney World Resort you will find Mickey Mouse popping up in some rather interesting places. You had better take a good look at your food before you take a bite; you may be surprised to find it staring back at you. Mickey can be found in pancakes, waffles, muffins, pastas, and pats of butter. He can be seen in fruits and cheeses, sandwiches, and sundaes. There are Mickey mashed potatoes, ice cream bars, cookies, and cakes. Even cucumbers are grown (with a little help from a plastic mold) to look like the famous mouse.

4 Places to Dine in Lake Buena Vista

In this section, we've listed restaurants located in Downtown Disney and the Lake Buena Vista area. Many eateries listed below can be found on the "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining" map on p. 142. Downtown Disney is located 2½ miles from Epcot off Buena Vista Drive. It encompasses the Downtown Disney Marketplace, a complex chock full of cedar-shingled shops and themed restaurants overlooking a scenic lagoon; the adjoining Pleasure Island, a lively nighttime entertainment venue full of clubs and some restaurants of its own; and Downtown Disney West Side, a slightly more upscale collection of shops, restaurants, Cirque du Soleil (p. 321), and a multiplex. The restaurants below have kids' menus, usually in the \$4 to \$6 range, though sometimes higher.

Note: Pleasure Island's restaurants don't require admission.

AT PLEASURE ISLAND

EXPENSIVE

Portobello Yacht Club ★ SOUTHERN ITALIAN/MEDITERRANEAN The pizzas here go beyond the routine to *quattro formaggio* (mozzarella, gorgonzola, fontina and parmesan with sun-dried tomatoes) and *margherita* (Italian sausage, plum tomatoes, and mozzarella). But it's the less casual entrees that pack people into this place. The menu changes from time to time. *Spaghettoni alla portobello* (pasta with pieces of Alaskan king crab, scallops, shrimp, and clams in light olive oil, wine, and herbs) is the house specialty though you'll find offerings such as wood roasted Atlantic salmon, charcoal-grilled sea bass, as well as steaks and pastas. Situated in a gabled Bermuda-style house filled with nautical accents throughout, the Portobello's awning-covered patio overlooks Lake Buena Vista. Its cellar is small, but there's a nice selection of wine to match the meals.

1650 Buena Vista Dr., at Pleasure Island. ☎ 407/934-8888. www.levyrestaurants.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12–\$50; pizzas \$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Free self-parking.

MODERATE

Planet Hollywood *Overrated* AMERICAN Those who flock to this restaurant come for the unique surroundings, memorabilia, and scenery from some of Hollywood's hottest movies, much like those who head to the Hard Rock (a far better choice) to check out their musical montage. Diners, however, are doomed to be disappointed. Though the atmosphere is fairly neat (including a planetarium-like ceiling), the Planet's servers can cop an attitude, and the food is blasé. If you must, you'll find the usual blah suspects: wings, sandwiches, big burgers, ribs, pizzas, pasta, and steaks. Lines can get long during special events and in peak season.

1506 Buena Vista Dr., at Pleasure Island (look for the big globe). ☎ 407/827-7827. www.planethollywood.com. Limited Priority Seating. Main courses \$9–\$29 (most under \$18). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am. Free self-parking.

AT DOWNTOWN DISNEY MARKETPLACE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Fulton's Crab House ★ SEAFOOD Lobster (Maine and Australian) and crab (stone, king, and Dungeness) dominate the menu at this fun and fashionable eatery, which is housed in a replica of a (permanently moored) 19th-century Mississippi riverboat. It's one of the area's best seafood houses—and your bill will reflect that. One popular meal for two combines Alaskan king crab, snow crab, and lobster with

potatoes and creamed spinach. The tuna mignon (served rare) and Dungeness crab cakes are delicious. And there's a scattering of Florida seafood, including black grouper and red snapper. In mild weather, consider dining on the deck. Be prepared for a long wait (even with Priority Seating); try having a late lunch to lessen your waiting time. Fulton's has one of Lake Buena Vista's better wine lists.

1670 Buena Vista Dr., aboard the riverboat docked at Downtown Disney. ☎ 407/934-2628. www.levyrestaurants.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$12–\$45 lunch, \$16–\$47 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–4pm and 5–11pm. Free self-parking.

MODERATE

Rainforest Cafe ★ *Kids* CALIFORNIA Don't arrive starving unless you have Priority Seating. Without it, waits average 2 hours, although even with it you'll wait longer than at Animal Kingdom's Rainforest Cafe (p. 147). Expect fare with an island spin at this Rainforest and its cousin. The menu can be tasty and creative, though somewhat overpriced. Fun dishes include Caribbean Coconut Shrimp (with a sweet mango sauce), and Maya's Mixed Grill (ribs, chicken breast, and shrimp) but the menu goes on and on (and on) with an extensive variety of salads, pastas, pizzas, burgers, sandwiches, seafood, beef, chicken, and pork. The setting is its biggest draw (though the food really is pretty good), filled with jungles, waterfalls, and animatronic animals—with the occasional clap of thunder in the background, so don't expect a quiet evening out. Kids are thoroughly entertained by all the action; adults can calm their nerves with the beer, wine, and other alcoholic mixers.

Downtown Disney Marketplace; near the smoking volcano. ☎ 407/827-8500. www.rainforest.com. Priority Seating. Main courses \$11–\$40 lunch and dinner (most under \$25). AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 10:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–midnight. Free self-parking.

DISNEY'S WEST SIDE

MODERATE

Bongo's Cuban Cafe *Overrated* CUBAN Singer Gloria Estefan and her husband, Emilio, created this eatery with high expectations. This one's exterior, with a giant pineapple standing tall against the Downtown Disney skyline, is hard to miss. The interior is Art Deco with a Havana flavor, and hand-painted murals of Cuba in its heyday line the walls. A Dezi Arnaz impersonator gets things going every night as the restaurant fills with loud Latin music. Alas, the food isn't great, though the prices say it ought to be. The *palomilla* (a thin, tenderized steak) can't match what you find in Rolando's (p. 170). The *ropa vieja* (shredded beef) is tasty but dry, and the *arroz con pollo* (chicken with yellow rice) would be a highlight if the portion matched the price. The best bet: the Cuban sandwich—thinly toasted bread with ham, pork, and cheese—is safe and sanely priced. For a more relaxing experience, grab a drink at the bongo-shaped bar and head upstairs to the patio or lounge.

1498 Buena Vista Dr., in Disney's West Side. ☎ 407/828-0999. www.bongoscubancafe.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7–\$35 (many under \$20). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am. Free self-parking.

House of Blues MISSISSIPPI DELTA Most folks come for the blues bands and Sunday's gospel brunch, a foot-tapping, thigh-slapping music affair worth high marks on the entertainment side. (The omelets are good, and there are enough fillers—bacon, salads, dessert, and bread—that few leave hungry.) The average food has a New Orleans flavor and includes such offerings as pan-seared voodoo shrimp; and gumbo with chicken, andouille sausage, and okra. The rustic backwater bayou interior has a Cajun Voodooish sort of feel and is by far the most interesting in Downtown Disney,

filled (literally) with bottle caps and buttons, skeletal etchings, and hand painted folk art. Do check out the restrooms; they're decorated with that diamond plating seen on the beds of some pickup trucks, especially in the South.

1490 Buena Vista Dr., at Disney's West Side, beneath water tower. ☎ 407/934-2583. www.hob.com. Reservations not accepted (except brunch). Main courses \$14–\$26; pizza and sandwiches \$9–\$11; brunch \$30 adults, \$15 children 3–9. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am; brunch 10:30am and 1pm. Free self-parking.

Wolfgang Puck Grand Café ★ CALIFORNIA This restaurant's sushi bar, an artistic copper-and-terrazzo masterpiece, delivers some of the best sushi in Orlando. You can also eat gourmet pizza, with thin crusts and exotic toppings, inside or on an outdoor patio. Upstairs, the main dining room offers an upscale atmosphere and tables that are available only through Priority Seating. The seasonally changing menu might feature Szechuan beef and crimini satay with a spicy vegetable stir fry and cilantro mint sauce; or pumpkin ravioli with sage, hazelnut butter, and parmesan. Desserts include a crème brûlée sampler plate. The colorful lower level can be noisy, so conversation is difficult, and the *wait for a table downstairs can be excruciatingly long*. The fare and the atmosphere are more casual, however, and prices are a bit more relaxed as well. Puck's also has a grab-and-go express restaurant that has sandwiches, pizzas, desserts, and more.

1482 Buena Vista Dr., at Disney's West Side. ☎ 407/938-9653. www.wolfgangpuck.com/myrestaurants. Reservations not accepted on lower level. Priority Seating for main dining room. Main courses upstairs \$19–\$75; main courses cafe \$12–\$32; pizza and sushi \$11–\$300. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am. Free self-parking.

ELSEWHERE IN LAKE BUENA VISTA

VERY EXPENSIVE

Arthur's 27 *Overrated* INTERNATIONAL The biggest reason to come here is the dining room's spectacular views out over Walt Disney World; beautiful sunsets take center stage in the early evening hours followed by the nighttime fireworks displays at Epcot and the Magic Kingdom. The dining room, elegantly decorated with accents of gold and black, has the feel of a 1930's supper club (minus the smoke). Its circular structure features intimate alcoves that face the windows, allowing for those panoramic views. The food is good but not nearly as good or spectacular as the views—or the hefty price tag. You can choose from a standard menu that includes such items as herb-crusted rack of lamb, or pineapple- and soy-glazed duck. Or, opt for either the 4- or 5-course prix fixe menus. Overall, portions lean toward the small size. The wine list is commendable but priced well above retail. Dinner for two (from the standard menu) including appetizer, salad, entree, modest wine, dessert, and tip easily can climb to well above \$200.

Tip: Make an 8pm reservation (well in advance) for a table facing the 9pm Disney fireworks. Or skip the meal and go for the fireworks view in the Top of the Palace Lounge, also on the 27th floor. But arrive early. It gets crowded.

1900 Lake Buena Vista Dr., in the Wyndham Palace Resort, just north of Hotel Plaza Blvd. ☎ 407/827-3450. Reservations recommended. Jackets suggested for men. Main courses \$31–\$51; \$68–\$74 prix fixe; no kids' menu. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm. Free self-parking. Take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka–Vineland Rd., north to Hotel Plaza Blvd., then left to the Wyndham.

Black Swan ★ INTERNATIONAL This is a very sophisticated and elegant restaurant in a Gatsby sense (if Fitzgerald were here to give it more of a modern tilt). A pianist plays softly in the entryway, and many tables overlook the lush Villas of Grand Cypress resort. Service is formal and attentive. It's a great place for a nice dinner,

although not necessarily a romantic one. A favorite temptation is the jumbo prawns stuffed with lump crabmeat encrusted in a tempura and coconut batter. Other options include prime strip steak in a Louisiana spiced pepper dust, and sesame-crusting Maine scallops. Note that the Swan adds an 18% gratuity to all bills. **Tip:** Seating is on two levels, but you should skip the second level, which has more of a gulp-and-grab atmosphere.

1 N. Jacaranda (off Hwy. 535), in the Villas of Grand Cypress. ☎ 800/835-7377 or 407/239-1999. www.grandcypress.com. Reservations required for nonguests, recommended for others. Main courses \$32–\$40. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tue–Sat 6–10pm. Free self-parking. Take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka–Vineland Rd., north, then left at second traffic light (after ramp light) onto Hwy. 535. It's on the right.

La Coquina ★ INTERNATIONAL Expect an imaginative menu from the most acclaimed of the Hyatt Regency's five restaurants. La Coquina is an upscale but casual eatery that is well appointed with marine life and seashell themes and has a color scheme that includes lots of soft pinks and whites. Roasted veal tenderloin, seared ahi tuna with black pepper, roasted foie gras, buffalo tenderloin, and red pepper–marinated duck are just a sampling of what you will find on the menu. The setting is intimate and the small dining area transformed with ambient lighting, and music. The newly added Chef's Table (available Wed–Sat) allows guests to dine right in the kitchens, watching as the expert chefs prepare their meal. Make the very-hard-to-obtain reservations for this ultra-popular experience as far in advance as possible. The Sunday brunch also allows diners to try out the intimate setting of the kitchen, though most opt to sit in the main dining room.

1 Grand Cypress Blvd., in the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort. ☎ 407/239-1234. www.grandcypress.com. Reservations recommended. Jackets suggested for men. Main courses \$20–\$45; chef's table \$75; Sunday brunch \$55 (\$65 holidays); no kids' menu. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10pm. Free self- and validated valet parking. Take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka–Vineland Rd., north to Winter Garden–Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535, then left.

EXPENSIVE

Hemingway's SEAFOOD The interior of Hemingway's has a Key West air, and the walls are hung with sepia photos of the author and his fishing trophies. The restaurant has a romantic indoor dining room lit by hurricane lamps, and the wooden deck overlooks a waterfall. Several smaller rooms add to the intimate atmosphere, and the tall picture windows allow for plenty of natural light and some beautiful views. Several of the restaurant's dishes are displayed in a glass case near the entry, so if you have any questions the chefs are there to answer. Highlights include beer-battered coconut shrimp with horseradish sauce and orange marmalade or the blackened swordfish with Cajun tartar sauce. The wine list is decent, but to stay in the spirit of the experience, order the *Papa Dobles*, a potent rum concoction invented by Hemingway, who, according to legend, once downed 16 at one sitting! It's usually child free, though there is a kids' menu.

1 Grand Cypress Blvd., in the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort. ☎ 407/239-3854. www.hyattgrandcypress.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$21–\$36. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm. Free self- and validated valet parking. Take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka–Vineland Rd., north to Winter Garden–Vineland Rd./Hwy. 535, then left.

MODERATE

The Crab House SEAFOOD Even if it is a chain, this casual restaurant offers a good variety of seafood (and a handful of options for landlubbers) at satisfactory prices. The all-you-can-eat seafood and salad bar is great for those who like variety and has lots of tasty dishes. The regular menu features a variety of fish dishes, seafood,

Maine lobster, and, of course, crabs—from Alaskan and king to Maryland blue. The service is friendly and relatively prompt. Fishing gear and lobster traps are spread about the casual dining room, and brown paper (good for kids to draw on) lines the tables. **Note:** The chain has several other branches in the Orlando area.

8496 Palm Parkway, Orlando, Fl. 32836. (just off Apopka-Vineland across and up from Hotel Plaza Blvd.) © 407/239-1888. www.crabhouseseafood.com. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$10–\$24; lobster varies according to market. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Open daily 11:30am–11pm. Free self-parking. Take I-4 to exit 68 (535) turn right, follow past the Crossroads to Palm Parkway, turn right. The restaurant is back a bit on the right.

Pebbles ★★ *Finds* CALIFORNIA If you want to dine like a gourmet without the hefty price, this is the restaurant for you. Pebbles is a locally owned chain that has a reputation for great food and creative appetizers. Its pleasant atmosphere is styled after Key West, casual and comfortable. The portions are generous and presented with an artistic flair. The Pebbles twin filets are seared, then bathed in a golden lager and delivered with caramelized onions and three-cheese mashed potatoes. The Mediterranean Salmon is sprinkled with artichokes, capers, feta, polenta, and a balsamic demi-glaze. Some lighter bites include crab cakes with Key lime remoulade, and baked chèvre coconut shrimp with sweet-and-sour sauce. **Note:** Pebbles also has a location in Winter Park, 2516 Aloma Ave. (© 407/678-7001).

12551 Apopka-Vineland Rd., in the Crossroads Shopping Center. © 407/827-1111. www.pebblesworldwide.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$10–\$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Free self-parking. Take the I-4 Hwy. 535/Apopka-Vineland Rd. exit north to the Crossroads Shopping Center on the right.

INEXPENSIVE

Romano's Macaroni Grill ★ *Value* NORTHERN ITALIAN Though it's part of a multistate chain, Romano's has the down-to-earth cheerfulness of a mom-and-pop joint. The laidback atmosphere makes it a good place for families or those looking for a casual dinner at a good price. The menu offers thin-crust pizzas made in a wood-burning oven and topped with such items as barbecued chicken. The grilled chicken portobello (simmering between smoked mozzarella and spinach orzo pasta) is worth the visit. Equally good is an entree of grilled salmon with a teriyaki glaze, also with spinach orzo pasta. Premium wines are served by the glass.

12148 Apopka-Vineland Rd. (just north of County Rd. 535/Palm Pkwy.). © 407/239-6676. www.macaronigrill.com. Main courses \$6–\$15 at lunch, \$8–\$17 at dinner (most under \$12). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Free self-parking. Take I-4 Exit 68, Hwy. 535/Apopka-Vineland Rd. north and continue straight when Hwy. 535 goes to the right. Romano's is about 2 blocks on the left.

5 Places to Dine in Universal Orlando

Universal Orlando stormed onto the restaurant scene with the mid-1999 opening of its dining and entertainment venue, CityWalk, which is between and in front of its two parks, Universal Studios Florida and Islands of Adventure. But Universal's sudden entry onto the food front doesn't mean quality was lost in the rush. In fact some of the best dining options around can be found here—even inside the theme parks (and most especially at Islands of Adventure). Several of Universal's restaurants offer cuisine ranging from respectable light bites to dependable dinners (a few even border on fine dining!), with most offering unique and casual atmospheres. Do note, of course, that the better-than-average food and surroundings come with higher-than-average prices. Universal takes “priority seating” arrangements for its park and CityWalk restaurants

and they can be made up to 30 days in advance by calling ☎ 407/224-3613 for USF restaurants, 407/224-4012 for IOA restaurants, and 407/224-3663 for CityWalk (except Margaritaville and NBA City) dining spots. Actual reservations are available only for **Mythos** (☎ 407/224-4534) and **Emeril's** (☎ 407/503-2467). For more information on dining at Universal, call ☎ 407/224-9255.

Note: Most of the restaurants below can be found on the “CityWalk” map on p. 323. All of the hotel restaurants listed can be found on the “International Drive Area Dining” map on p. 163.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Bice ITALIAN Universal Orlando’s newest restaurant, appropriately located in the romantic Italian setting of the Portofino Bay Hotel, replaces the Delfino Riviera. The new family-owned and -operated restaurant (part of a Milan-based international chain), still features Italian fare served in an upscale atmosphere, though the operation is now a bit more down to Earth. The extensive menu includes items such as a Belgian endive salad in a light Dijon mustard dressing with gorgonzola cheese and toasted walnuts; spaghetti with Maine lobster, cherry tomatoes, and braised green onions; and veal chops in a porcini sauce. The dining room overlooks the waters along the piazza of the hotel, itself a beautiful and romantic setting—try and get a table on the patio. The interior decor is a bit less impressive, though still nice enough with its fresco ceiling and muted lighting.

5601 Universal Studios Blvd., in the Portofino Bay Hotel. ☎ 407/503-3463 or 407/503-1415. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$18–\$48. AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm. Free 3-hr. validated self-parking, valet parking \$10. From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

Emeril's ★★ NEW ORLEANS It’s next to impossible to get short-term reservations for dinner (less than 3–4 weeks in advance) at Emeril’s unless your stars are aligned or you come at the opening bell and take your chances with no-shows (which is highly unlikely). If you do get in, you’ll find the dynamic cuisine is worth the struggle. The Creole-inspired (and seasonally changing) menu is varied and might include such dishes as a grilled double-cut pork chop with a cider pepper glaze or a roasted American rack of lamb with a Creole mustard crust. If you want some vino with your meals, the back half of the building houses a glass-walled, 12,000-bottle, above-ground wine cellar. The warehouse-style decor is casual and inviting yet still upscale; original artwork, much of it by New Orleans artists, lines the walls. If you want a show, I highly recommend you try for one of eight counter seats where you can watch chefs working their magic, but to get one, reservations are required *excruciatingly* early (2–3 months in advance, especially during holidays, in summer, and on weekends).

Note: Lunch costs about half what you’ll spend on dinner, and the menu has many of the same entrees. It’s also easier to get a reservation, and the dress code is more casual—jackets are recommended for the guys at dinner, although that goes against

Tips No Reservation?

If you must have dinner at Emeril’s and can’t get a reservation, try dropping by around 3:15pm. Those who make a date have to confirm by 3pm on the day of their reservations, and there always are a few who don’t show. If you’re lucky, you may be able to pick up their slack.

the grain after a long day in the parks. No matter when you come, leave the kids at home—this restaurant caters to adults.

6000 Universal Studios Blvd., in CityWalk. © 407/224-2424. www.emerils.com/restaurants/orlando_emerils. Reservations necessary. Main courses \$18–\$28 lunch, \$31–\$50 dinner. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm. AE, DISC, MC, V. Parking \$8 (free 2-hr. valet parking at lunch; free self-parking after 6pm). From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

The Palm STEAKS/SEAFOOD This upscale restaurant is the 23rd member of a chain started more than 75 years ago in New York. The food is good, though, as is the case with most Disney and Universal restaurants, somewhat overpriced for the value received. Beef and seafood rule a menu headlined by a 36-ounce New York strip steak for two (\$67) and a 3-pound Nova Scotia lobster (market price). There are, however, plenty of steaks, pasta, seafood, and salads to please every palate. There are even a few options for those on smaller budgets. The decor leans toward the upscale supper club of the '30s and '40s, and the walls are lined with caricatures of celebrities and stars.

5800 Universal Blvd., in the Hard Rock Hotel. © 407/503-7256. www.thepalm.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9–\$31 lunch, \$17–\$38 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–11pm; Sat 5–11pm; Sun 5–10pm. Free 3-hr. validated self-parking, valet \$10. From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

EXPENSIVE

Emeril's Tchoup Chop ★★ PACIFIC RIM Pronounced *chop chop*, the Royal Pacific Hotel's headline restaurant and Emeril Lagasse's second in Orlando is named for the location of his original restaurant—Tchoupitoulous Street in New Orleans. The interior blends colorful flowers, sculpted gardens, and mini waterfalls with batik fabrics, carved wood grilles, and glass chandeliers. The exhibition kitchen offers a look at the chefs making your meal in woks or on wood-burning grills. The Polynesian and Asian influenced menu includes such temptations as macadamia-crusted Atlantic salmon with steamed rice and stir-fried vegetables; Kahlúa-braised pork served over a Hawaiian omelet; and wok-fried filet mignon with vegetable chow mein and crispy oysters. **Note:** The dress code here is more casual than at Emeril's (listed earlier), but it's still pretty upscale, so leave the T-shirts and tanks at home.

6300 Hollywood Way, in Universal's Royal Pacific Hotel. © 407/503-2467. www.emerils.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses \$13–\$34. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm. Valet parking \$5. From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

Mythos ★ AMERICAN/SEAFOOD/STEAK If you've ever wanted to dine inside a volcano covered in cascading waterfalls and images of Greek Titans, then here's the place for you. Actually, this upscale restaurant, which overlooks Islands of Adventure's Inland Sea, is quite classy. Diners are transported to a mythical underwater world upon entering the restaurant's cavernous interior, where low lighting and eerie music help set the atmosphere. The menu features wood-fired pizzas; salads, ranging from a simple bowl of greens to a full-fledged meal; and elaborate entrees of fish, seafood, and steaks. Simpler fare is available as well, including artistically presented burgers. **Tip:** You can actually dine here without paying for park admission, though you'll have to leave a credit-card number at the gate and will be faced with a time limit. If you're running late, the restaurant can call the gate to let them know so you won't be charged.

1000 Universal Studios Plaza, in Islands of Adventure. © 407/224-9255, 407/224-4534. www.universalorlando.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–park closing. Parking \$9 (free after 6pm). From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

MODERATE

Hard Rock Cafe AMERICAN The largest Hard Rock Cafe on the planet features a 1959 pink Cadillac spinning above the bar. With its size, however, comes that much more noise—and the sound levels are loud. Kids love it, but adults shouldn't even think about having a conversation here. The menu is the same found at Hard Rocks round the world and includes burgers, chicken, okay steaks, and fried this-and-that. And, of course, it has its very own souvenir shop, too. The food is average American fare; it's the experience that draws people in. **Note:** The adjacent Hard Rock Live! is a huge venue for concerts.

6000 Universal Studios Blvd., near Universal CityWalk. ☎ 407/351-7625. www.hardrock.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9–\$23. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am. Parking \$9 (free after 6pm). From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville CARIBBEAN The casual laid back atmosphere may take you away to paradise, but the noise level after 4pm makes it futile for Parrot Heads and plain folk alike to try to talk with their table mates. But most people come to Margaritaville in the evenings to party, not to participate in a deep conversation. Come for lunch if you want to actually speak with your fellow diners during your meal. The back "Porch of Indecision" offers the quietest spot in the place to dine. Despite the cheeseburgers in paradise (yes, they're on the menu at \$8–\$9), the menu has Caribbean leanings and includes a Cuban meatloaf survival sandwich, Creole shrimp marinara, Jimmy's jammin' jambalaya, and corn and crab bisque. And, while it's not contending for a critic's choice award, it's fairly tasty grub. But watch the tab: At \$6 to \$8 a pop for margaritas, the bill can climb to \$50 or more per person for a routine meal that includes even the jerk chicken or crab cakes. If you don't hanker for margaritas, the drink menu is almost as long as the main menu and features domestic and imported beer, as well as some unique tropical concoctions.

1000 Universal Studios Plaza, in CityWalk. ☎ 407/224-2155. www.margaritavilleorlando.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$22 (most under \$15). AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2 am. Parking \$9 (free after 6pm). From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

Pastamore Ristorante SOUTHERN ITALIAN This family-style restaurant greets you with display cases brimming with mozzarella and other goodies lurking on the menu. The antipasto primo is a meal unto itself. The mound includes bruschetta, eggplant Caponata, melon con prosciutto, grilled portobello mushrooms, olives, a medley of Italian cold cuts, olives, plum tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, and more. The menu also features such traditional offerings as veal Marsala, chicken piccata, shrimp scampi, fettuccine Alfredo, lasagna, and pizza. The food is actually pretty interesting, and the presentation isn't bad either. There's an open kitchen allowing a view of the chefs, and the atmosphere is pleasant and lively. Pastamore has a basic beer and wine menu. You can also eat in the Marketplace Café, where a lighter menu—breakfast fare and sandwiches—is served from 8am to 2am.

1000 Universal Studios Plaza, in CityWalk. ☎ 407/363-8000. www.universalorlando.com. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$7–\$18. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5pm–midnight, the marketplace café is open 8am–2am. Parking \$9 (free after 6pm). From I-4, take Exit 75B, Kirkman Rd./Hwy. 435, and follow the signs to Universal.

6 Places to Dine in the International Drive Area

International Drive has one of the area's larger collections of fast-food joints but mixed in around its midsection and southern end are some of the region's better restaurants.

South I-Drive is 10 minutes by auto from the Walt Disney World parks. Restaurant Row, located in a small area just above I-Drive along Dr. Phillips Boulevard and Sand Lake Road, is currently the hottest dining area in Orlando. Most of the restaurants listed here are located on the “International Drive Area Dining” map on p. 163.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Atlantis ★ SEAFOOD/STEAKS/CHOPS The relatively small dining room of this hotel restaurant has a warm, woody feel, especially if you ask for one of the intimate booths separated by etched-glass panels. Chef’s specials such as a Mediterranean seafood medley (Florida lobster, black grouper, shrimp, and scallops) frequently complement menu standards such as grilled sea bass or pan-seared duck and rock shrimp. Sunday’s champagne brunch is served in the resort’s huge atrium. Themes change monthly, but the 100-item menu often has treats such as quail, duck, lamb chops, Cornish hen, clams, mussels, sea bass, sushi, and more. Although pricey, it’s one of Orlando’s most popular brunches.

6677 Sea Harbour Dr., in the Renaissance Orlando Resort. ☎ 407/351-5555. www.renaissancehotels.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$24–\$36; Sunday brunch \$32 adults, \$16 children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm; Sun brunch 10:30am–2pm. Free self-parking, valet parking \$9. From I-4, take Exit 71/Central Florida Pkwy. east and follow the signs to SeaWorld.

Dux ★★ *Finds* INTERNATIONAL The name is a tribute to the Peabody Orlando’s resident ducks, who parade ceremoniously in and out of the lobby every day (p. 294), while the food is a tribute to chefs who create a menu that changes weekly. It might include succulent oven-roasted grouper with bok choy, mushrooms, and ginger sauce. At other times, hope for a tender veal chop marinated in apple cider and honey and served medium rare; steamed red snapper in tomato fricassee and fennel; or sautéed salmon on a bed of couscous with black olives, tomatoes, and chives. A vegetarian entree is served each night. And don’t skip dessert, especially if the hot chocolate mousse is on the menu.

Dux is best reserved for a very special night out or a meal on an expense account. Candlelit tables surround a large chandelier, and textured gold walls are hung with watercolors of the various duck species. (Speaking of ducks, you won’t find any on the menu—staffers say that would be sacrilege.) The impeccable service that’s a signature of the hotel carries into the restaurant, and Dux has one of the best wine lists in Orlando. **Note:** Because the convention trade slows in August, it’s one of the best times to try Dux and avoid crowds. Early birds sometimes have the dining room to themselves.

9801 International Dr., in the Peabody Orlando. ☎ 407/345-4550. www.peabodyorlando.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$26–\$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–10pm. Free self- and validated valet parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then south. Hotel is on the left across from the Convention Center.

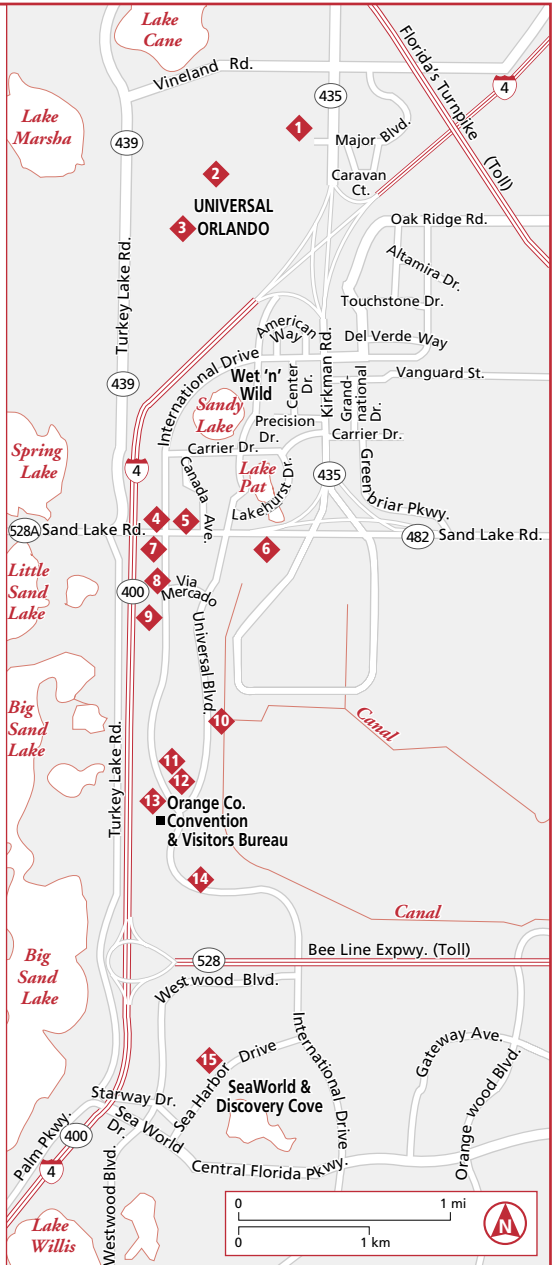
EXPENSIVE

Christini’s ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Insiders from the Universal Orlando/Hollywood set like to hang out in this “survivor” restaurant, which had its coming out in 1984. A tender broiled veal chop seasoned with sage and served with applesauce is one of the headliners. Other acts include pan-seared Chilean sea bass over shrimp-and-lobster risotto; jumbo shrimp flamed with brandy and vodka, then simmered in a spicy sauce and served with linguine; and a prosciutto-wrapped tuna filet sautéed in butter with shiitake and oyster mushrooms. The food is quite good, and the wine list

International Drive Area Dining

- Atlantis (in the Renaissance Orlando Resort) **14**
- B-Line Diner (in the Peabody Orlando) **12**
- Bahama Breeze **8**
- Bice (in the Portofino Bay Hotel) **1**
- Cafe Tu Tu Tango **7**
- Charlie's Lobster House **11**
- Christini's **4**
- Dux (in the Peabody Orlando) **14**
- Fiasco's Circus & Magic **10**
- Fishbones **5**
- Hard Rock Café (in the Hard Rock Hotel) **3**
- Ming Court **13**
- The Palm (in the Hard Rock Hotel) **3**
- Ran-Getsu of Tokyo **12**
- Roy's Restaurant **7**
- The Samba Room **7**
- Siam Orchid **6**
- Tchoup Chop **2**
- Wild Jacks **5**

For Restaurants in Universal Orlando's CityWalk, please see the "CityWalk" map in chapter 10.



Value Self-Service Suppers

If you're on a tight budget and your room has a kitchen or a spot to sit and grab a bite, consider dining in a night or two and saving a few bucks. Area grocers, many with delis that turn out ready-to-eat treats, include **Albertson's** near I-Drive (7524 Dr. Phillips Blvd., ☎ 407/352-1552; www.albertsons.com) and **Gooding's** in Lake Buena Vista (Crossroads Shopping Plaza, 12521 Hwy. 535/ Apopka-Vineland Ave., ☎ 407/827-1200; www.goodings.com). You can find more options in the Orlando Yellow Pages under "Grocers."

is definitely a winner. Christini's is a little more formal than some tourists like. It's also a little pricey, and some diners feel the restaurant and its staff put on airs because of the studio crowd. But on a good night, you may see the stars.

7600 Dr. Phillips Blvd. ☎ 407/345-8770. www.christinis.com. Reservations suggested for men. Main courses \$18–\$45 (many under \$30). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, west to Dr. Phillips Blvd., turn right, then left into the Marketplace Shopping Plaza.

Ran-Gettsu of Tokyo JAPANESE Authentic cuisine, including a sushi bar, has made Ran-Gettsu a popular haunt for moneyed Asian tourists, though some travelers find the prices too high for its menu. *Tekka-don*, tender slices of tuna that are mild enough for first-timers, is a refreshing choice on the sushi side; so are platters, such as sashimi, maki rolls, and thinly sliced *chirashi* (rice topped with assorted seafood). *Yosenabe* is a bouillabaisse with an unconventional though savory twist—duck and chicken are added to the seafood mix; lobster is available at an added cost. Speaking of seafood, *una-ju* delights eel lovers; the filets are grilled in kabayaki sauce. Less adventurous palates may prefer shrimp tempura or a steak served in teriyaki sauce. A traditional Japanese drum show is performed in the evening, Thursday through Saturday. Ran-Gettsu has a small wine list as well as sake and plum wine.

8400 International Dr., near Orlando Convention Center. ☎ 407/345-0044. www.rangettsu.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$40 (most under \$25); sushi entrees \$14–\$41 (most under \$25). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then south. Restaurant is on right.

Roy's Restaurant PACIFIC RIM Created in Hawaii in 1988 by chef Roy Yamaguchi, this small chain made its Orlando debut in 2001. The restaurant has an island theme and, unlike the nearby Samba Room (see below), an atmosphere that allows for intimate conversation. The emphasis is on fresh seafood (though other items are offered as well), prepared with a variety of sauces and imaginatively garnished and presented with an Asian-style flair. Menus change occasionally, but entrees might include wood-roasted lemongrass shrimp with black-rice risotto; seared mahimahi with macadamia-lobster sauce; Korean-style barbecue beef with shiitake mushrooms; and Mongolian-style pork tenderloin in a sake, soy, and pineapple sauce. Roy's also has a reasonably deep wine list.

7760 W. Sand Lake Rd. ☎ 407/352-4844. www.roysrestaurant.com. Reservations suggested. Main courses \$17–\$36. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Take I-4 Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, and go west 1 mile. Restaurant is on left.

MODERATE

B-Line Diner AMERICAN You can sink into upholstered booths or belly up to the counter on a stool in this '50s-style diner. The round-the-clock menu features comfort

foods such as a chicken potpie that's up to what mom made; a ham and cheese sandwich on a baguette; and roast pork with grilled apples, sun-dried cherry stuffing, and brandy-honey sauce. The portions are hearty but so are the prices. And though it is a diner-style restaurant, it is not particularly kid friendly, unless your children are exceptionally well behaved.

9801 International Dr., in the Peabody Orlando. ☎ 407/345-4460. www.peabodyorlando.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$4–\$16 at breakfast, \$7–\$18 at lunch, \$9–\$26 (most under \$18) at dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 24-hr. Free self- and validated valet parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then south. Hotel is on the left across from the Convention Center.

Bahama Breeze ★ CARIBBEAN This chain restaurant sports a creative menu that offers a variety of delicious sandwiches and chicken, fish, and pasta entrees with Caribbean twists. Try starting out with the Creole baked goat cheese before moving on to the Cuban sandwich, one of the most authentic around. If that is not to your liking, try the pan-seared pork, or Bahamian chicken kabobs. The atmosphere is island casual, with rich wood and wicker throughout. On a warm evening ask to eat outside. Once famous for its long waits, the restaurant now accepts call-ahead reservations—be sure and do so. **Note:** A second branch is located in Lake Buena Vista at 8735 Vineland Ave., near the I-4 intersection (☎ 407/938-9010).

8849 International Drive, Orlando. ☎ 407/248-2499. www.bahamabreeze.com. Call ahead is available. Lunch and dinner \$9–\$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 4pm–1:30am; Sat noon–1:30am; Sun noon–1am. Free self-parking. From I-4, take exit 74A, follow I-Drive 1 mile south.

Café Tu Tu Tango ★★ *Finds* INTERNATIONAL/TAPAS Authentic cuisine and the eclectic atmosphere of a Mediterranean artists' loft—complete with working artist—are the main draws at this interesting tapas bar. The portions are small, but the tastes are big. The roasted pears on pecan crisps—topped with Spanish bleu cheese and a balsamic reduction—are a must. The staff is fabulous and your server will be happy to educate you about the menu or make suggestions. Wine is available by the glass or bottle.

8625 International Drive. ☎ 407/248-2222. www.cafetututango.com. Reservations accepted but not required. Tapas (small plates) \$4–\$11. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Free self-parking. From I-4, take exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy 528, east to International Drive, then south. It is on the left.

Fishbones SEAFOOD The fish at this nautically themed restaurant is handpicked daily to ensure freshness and taste. You can create your own meal by mixing and matching sauces and salsas to enhance your selected fish (of which there are plenty of varieties to choose from). If fish isn't your dish, other offerings include rack of lamb, prime rib, and duck. Portions are large, the atmosphere is friendly, and children are catered to with a special kids' menu.

6707 Sand Lake Rd., off of International Dr. Entrees run \$13–\$40 (most below \$25). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–10:30pm, Fri–Sat until 11pm. Free self-parking. From I-4 take exit 74A, go east on SR 482 (Sand Lake Rd.) .3 miles.

Ming Court ★ CHINESE Local patronage and a diverse menu make this one of Orlando's most popular Chinese eateries (which was recently named one of the top 100 Chinese restaurants in the country by a major restaurant trade publication). Start off with the duck lettuce cup before going on to the lightly battered, deep-fried chicken breast—it's got plenty of zip from a delicate lemon-tangerine sauce. If you're in the mood for beef, there's a grilled filet mignon that's seasoned Szechuan-style (the topping has roasted onions, garlic, and chili). The mildly innovative menu is extensive, featuring the freshest ingredients (there's not a freezer on-site). Portions are

sufficient, there's a moderate wine list, and the service is quite good. The candlelit interior is decorated in soft earth tones and creates a romantic atmosphere. Glass-walled terrace rooms overlook lotus ponds, filled with colorful koi, and a plant-filled area under a lofty skylight ceiling. A musician plays classical Chinese music on a *zheng* (a long zither) at dinner. The children's menu features a boxed meal featuring your choice of Oriental-style shrimp, pork, beef, or chicken (and french fries!), and comes with a story for kids to read along with their dinner. **Tip:** The restaurant's website is extensive and features lots of information on and photos of individual dishes.

9188 International Dr., between Sand Lake Rd. and Bee Line Expressway. ☎ 407/351-9988. www.ming-court.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7–\$13 lunch, \$13–\$36 dinner; dim sum mostly \$3–\$5. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 4:30–10:30pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then south. It's on the right.

The Samba Room CUBAN Don't count on intimate conversation, because the Cuban and Brazilian music here is loud, Loud, LOUD. It's also one of the things that attracts regulars, so don't ask your server to have it turned down. (He or she won't, even if you say "please.") The kitchen turns out an enterprising menu that includes rum-raisin, plantain-crusted mahimahi on coconut rice with mango mojo; paella (chicken, mussels, fish, and sausage over rice); and sugarcane beef tenderloin with chipotle mashed potatoes and spiced mushrooms. There's a patio for mild-weather al fresco dining.

7468 W. Sand Lake Rd. ☎ 407/226-0550. www.e-brands.net. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$16–\$30. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight. Free self-parking. Take I-4 Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, west 1 mile. Restaurant is on left.

Siam Orchid ★ *Finds* THAI Owners Tim and Krissnee Martsching grow chilies, mint, cilantro, lemongrass, wild lime, and other ingredients in their garden, and the quality of their entrees is consistently high. Pad Thai (soft rice noodles tossed with ground pork, minced garlic, shrimp, crab claws, crabmeat, crushed peanuts, and bean sprouts in a tongue-twanging sweet sauce) is one of our favorites. Royal Thai (chicken chunks, potato, and onion in a yellow curry sauce) is another crowd pleaser. For intimate dining, request a *khun toke*, a private enclosure that's the Thai answer to Japanese *tatami* rooms. The split-level dining room has cushioned booths and banquettes and bamboo chairs; some tables overlook a lake. Siam Orchid serves sake and Thai beers from a full bar.

7575 Universal Dr. (between Sand Lake Rd. and Carrier Dr.). ☎ 407/351-0821. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$24. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm; daily 5–11pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to Universal, then go north to the restaurant (on the left).

Room Service

For those of you who would rather take a break from eating out, there are Orlando restaurants that are more than willing to come to you. A local delivery service, "Take Out Express," will deliver take-out from a number of area restaurants (even more than one at a time for an extra charge) right to your hotel room. The delivery cost is about \$5 to order from one restaurant, with a separate (though lower) delivery charge for each additional restaurant you order from. Call ☎ 407/352-1170 for details or to order.

Wild Jacks BARBECUE/STEAKS Come hankering for red meat or don't come at all to this chuck wagon-style eatery. Jacks serves Texas-size (and sometimes Texas tough) hunks of cow grilled on an open pit and served with jalapeño smashed potatoes and corn on the cob. The ribs are generally moist and tender, but at crowded times, when the kitchen gets backed up, they may be dry and chewy. The menu also has chicken, salmon, and pork, but it's not a good idea to experiment in a beef house. To add to the mood, you'll be treated to mounted buffalo heads, long-stuffed jackalopes, and more dying-calf-in-a-hailstorm, twitch-and-twang country-western music than a city slicker can endure in a lifetime. Wash the meal down with an icy longneck (there is a wine list, but it's very basic).

7364 International Dr. (between Sand Lake Rd. and Carrier Dr.). ☎ 407/352-4407. Reservations accepted. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Main courses \$11–\$21. Daily 4–10pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then go south. It's on the right.

7 Places to Dine Elsewhere in Orlando

There's life beyond the main tourist areas, as a lot of locals and some enterprising visitors discover. The restaurants in this part of the chapter are located on the map "Accommodations & Dining Elsewhere in Orlando" on p. 169.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Manuel's on the 28th ★★☆☆ *Moments* INTERNATIONAL The 28th floor of a downtown bank provides part of the name and all of the view, which is no less than beautiful after dark. You can see the city and the distant theme parks (fireworks, too), and this is the rare case where the food actually matches the visuals. Despite a smallish kitchen, the chefs work wonders with a changing menu. When available, we can't resist the miso-marinated Chilean sea bass with seaweed salad. Seafood lovers also might encounter asparagus-seared ahi tuna with rice risotto and lump crab hollandaise. And the five peppercorn Angus filet with smoked gouda potatoes wows the red-meat crowd. To make sure you don't miss out on the view, the dining room has floor-to-ceiling windows. Expect very professional service and a far-above-par wine cellar.

390 N. Orange Ave., in the NationsBank Building. ☎ 407/246-6580. www.manuelsonthe28th.com. Reservations required. Jackets suggested for men. Main courses \$26–\$45. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–9:45pm. Free self-parking. From I-4 take Exit 82C/Anderson St. east to Orange Ave., then left/north to NationsBank Building.

EXPENSIVE

Mikado Japanese Steakhouse ★★☆☆ JAPANESE This restaurant offers a tastier meal and a more intimate atmosphere than the other Japanese steakhouses in the area. The sushi menu is one of the areas best as is its *teppanyaki*. Here the chefs slice, dice, and send the occasional piece of chicken, seafood, and beef from their grill to your plate, and the chef's addition of a few extra special spices make it the best *teppanyaki* in the area. Shoji screens lend intimacy to a dining area where windows overlook rock gardens, reflecting pools, and a palm-fringed pond. Sake, from the restaurant lounge, is the recommended mood enhancer.

8701 World Center Dr. (off Hwy. 536), in Marriott's Orlando World Center. ☎ 407/239-4200. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$16–\$35 adults. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm. Free self- and validated valet parking. Take I-4 Exit 67/Hwy. 536 east to the Marriott World Center.

MODERATE

Carrabbas ★ ITALIAN Here's yet another chain, but one that is well run, with above-average food. The menu features such specialties as *tagliarini picchi pacchiu* (a fine pasta with crushed tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, and basil served with either chicken or shrimp) and pollo Rosa Maria (fire-roasted chicken stuffed with fontina cheese and prosciutto, and topped with mushrooms and a basil lemon butter sauce). Also available are wood-fired pizzas, an array of soups and salads, pastas, and other favorite Italian classics. The atmosphere is casual but lively; the interior features a show kitchen and lots of exposed brick. Don't forget to save room for dessert—they're large enough to share (though you may not want to!)

7890 Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway (U.S. 192), in the Formosa Gardens plaza, Kissimmee. ☎ 407/390-9600. www.carrabbas.com. Main courses \$11-\$20 dinner only. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun-Thurs 4-10pm, Fri-Sat 4-11pm. Free self parking. From I-4 take exit 64 for US 192, continue on and it is on the left in the Formosa Gardens Plaza.

Pacino's Italian Ristorante ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN The house specialty, veal osso buco, is a delicious collision of veal shank, mushrooms, Barolo wine, herbs, and mushrooms. At 32 ounces, the porterhouse steak is a belly-buster, and the house's *frutti di mare* has shrimp, calamari, clams, and scallops sautéed with white wine and herbs and heaped onto a mound of linguine. The ceiling's fiber optics help create an illusion of dining under the stars; there's a patio if you want the real thing. Some servers can be a little aloof, but the price and taste make up for it.

5795 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy./U.S. 192, Kissimmee. ☎ 407/396-8022. www.pacinos.com. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$14-\$27 (most under \$20). AE, MC, V. Daily 4-10pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 64A/U.S. 192 east 1 mile.

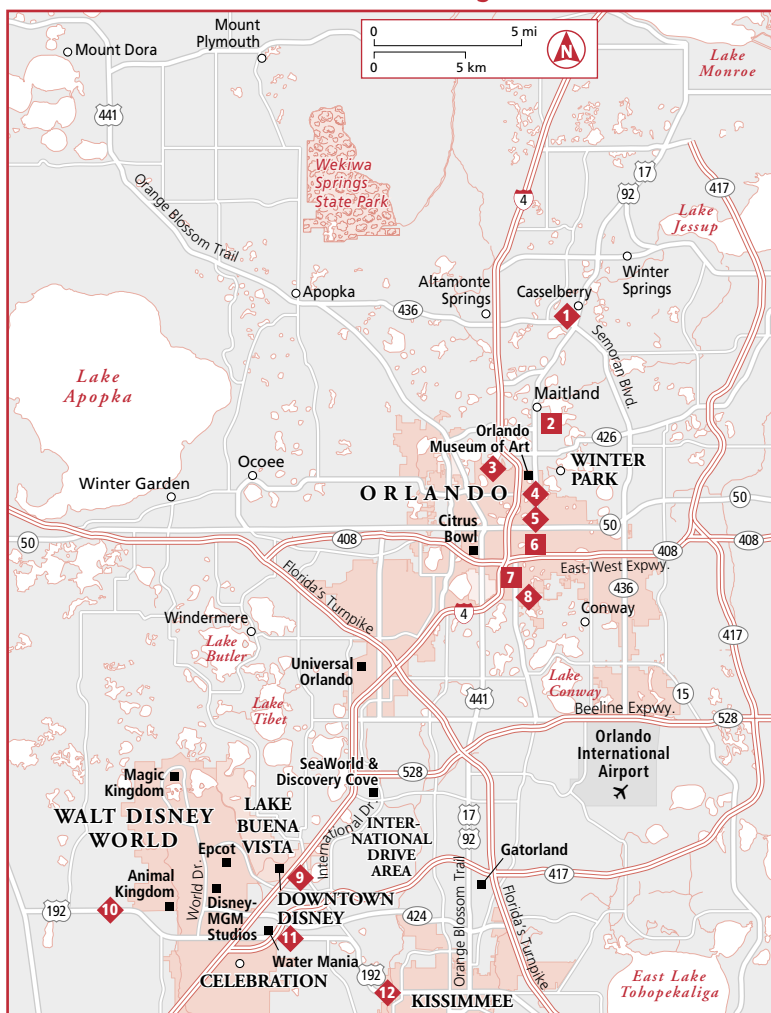
Panera Bread ★ AMERICAN This trendy cafe/bakery is a great place for a light meal, and its quick growth in the area (there are several locations) attests to its popularity among locals and tourists. The cafe menu offers a variety of delicious soups (broccoli cheddar, black bean, vegetable sirloin, and others) and salads (Asian sesame chicken, Caesar, and more). But the real main events are sandwiches such as turkey with chipotle mayonnaise, roast beef with creamy horseradish sauce, portobello and mozzarella panini, and a dozen others. The menu also includes an assortment of fresh bakery items (bagels, brownies, croissants, pastries, and such).

296 E. Michigan St., Orlando. ☎ 407/481-9880. www.panerabread.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7-\$14; baked goods \$1-\$5. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon-Sat 6:30am-9:30pm; Sun 7am-8:30pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 80B, U.S. 17/92, and go north to Michigan, then right 1½ miles.

Value Bargain Buffets

We won't list them all, but if you spend time on International Drive or U.S. 192/Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway between Kissimmee and Disney, you'll see billboards peddling all-you-can-eat breakfast buffets for \$5 to \$8. This is a good way to fill your tanks early and skip or at least go easy on lunch, especially if your day is in the theme parks, where lunches are overpriced. Breakfast buffets are served by **Golden Corral**, 8033 International Dr. (☎ 407/352-6606); **Ponderosa Steak House**, 6362 International Dr. (☎ 407/352-9343) and 7598 U.S. 192 W. (☎ 407/396-7721); and **Sizzler Restaurant**, 9142 International Dr. (☎ 407/351-5369) and 7602 U.S. 192 W. (☎ 407/397-0997).

Accommodations & Dining Elsewhere in Orlando



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne **7**
 Thurston House **2**
 Westin Grand Bohemian **6**

DINING ◆

Bubbalou's Bodacious BBQ **3**
 Carrabbas **10**

Little Saigon **5**
 Logan's Roadhouse **12**
 Manuel's on the 28th **4**
 Mikado Japanese Steakhouse **9**
 Pacino's Italian Ristorante **11**
 Panera Bread **8**
 Rolando's **1**

Rolando's ★ *Finds* CUBAN If you like neighborhood-style Cuban cuisine, you won't be disappointed here. This mom-and-pop restaurant serves large portions of traditional Cuban fare, such as *arroz con pollo* (chicken with yellow rice), *ropa vieja* (shredded beef), and, if you call a few hours or a day in advance, *paella* (fish and shellfish served on a bed of rice). Entrees are served with yucca (a chewy root) or plantains (a cooked banana-like fruit). The plain dining room has Formica tables, old photographs of Cuba, and potted philodendrons suspended from the ceiling. Soft lighting adds a smidgen of ambience, and there's a very limited beer and wine list.

870 E. Hwy. 436/Semoran Blvd., Casselberry. ☎ 407/767-9677. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$4–\$6 lunch, \$8–\$18 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–9:30pm; Sat noon–10pm; Sun noon–8:30pm. Free self-parking. From I-4, take Exit 82A, Hwy. 408/East–West Expressway, head east, and make a left on Hwy. 436.

INEXPENSIVE

Bubbalou's Bodacious BBQ ★ *Value* BARBECUE You can smell the hickory smoke emerging from this restaurant for blocks, the tangy scent cutting through the humid Florida air. This is, hands down, some of the best barbecue you'll find anywhere. And, if nothing else, you have to love the name. There are other things on the menu. If you can eat the night or day away, go for "The Big-Big Pig" platter (beef, sliced pork, and turkey with fixin's). There also are several barbecue baskets, combos, dinners, and sandwiches, as well as side orders ranging from fried pickles and okra to collard greens and black-eyed peas. The uninitiated should stay away from the "Killer" sauce, which can render your taste buds useless, likely for hours; you might even taste-test the mild before moving up to the hot. The beans are the perfect side dish. Only the sometimes-soggy garlic bread brings the meal down, but not too far. Beer is available.

1471 Lee Rd., Winter Park (about 5 min. from downtown Orlando). ☎ 407/628-1212. www.bubbalous.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$4–\$13 with larger sizes available for take out up to \$25. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–9pm; Fri–Sat 10am–10pm. Free self-parking. Take I-4 Exit 88, Lee Rd./Hwy. 423, and follow your nose; Bubbalou's is on the left next to a dry cleaner.

Little Saigon ★ *Finds* VIETNAMESE Asian immigrants created the demand for Viet cuisine, and this noisy little eatery is one of the best. Better yet, it doesn't attract many tourists. Try the summer rolls—a soft wrap filled with rice, shrimp, and pork served with a delicious peanut sauce. Head next for the grilled pork and egg over rice and noodles or barbecued beef with fried egg and rice. If your appetite is larger than average, try one of the traditional soups with noodles, rice, vegetables, and either chicken, beef, or seafood. The numbered menu isn't translated well, so you may need to ask your server exactly what goes into No. 86. (Some don't speak English, so ask to speak to a manager.) As a testament to the restaurant's authenticity, tables here are usually filled with members of the local Vietnamese community. There are very limited wine and beer choices.

1106 E. Colonial Dr./Hwy. 50 (near downtown Orlando). ☎ 407/423-8539. Reservations not accepted. Main courses under \$5 lunch, \$5–\$10 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–9pm. Free self-parking. Take Exit 83B, Colonial Dr./Hwy. 50, off I-4 and head east. Turn right on Thornton Ave. The parking lot is immediately to the left.

Logan's Roadhouse *Kids* SOUTHWESTERN Set along the busy thoroughfare of U.S. 192 in Kissimmee, this laid-back eatery serves up a varied menu of southwestern favorites and barbecue. Kick back and relax a spell, and go ahead and throw those peanut shells on the floor, (your mom won't yell at you here). Standouts include the San Antonio chicken wraps; the mesquite-grilled salmon, chicken, and pork; and the barbecued chicken and ribs. You can also get however a host of sandwiches, salads,

Not Just Fries Anymore

Some of you may not be able to go your entire vacation without a trip to McDonald's for a Big Mac. If you just can't pass up a trip to Mickie D's for a fast-food fix, the good news is that Orlando has a handful of uniquely themed McDonald's unlike any you'll find in your neighborhood. All of them sport unique and eclectic menus, which, in addition to the usual fare, add (among other items) pizzas, portobello eggplant, turkey wraps, panini, and crême brûlée cheesecake.

The 24-hour McDonald's **European Café** 7344 Sand Lake Road, Orlando, (☎ 407/264-0776) boasts two levels with plenty of glass to allow sunlight to pour in. You won't mistake it for a European café (it's still a McDonald's, so don't get too carried away), neat features include a pool table and arcade games on the second level, and fabulous views of the sand lakes.

The **Ancient Ruins** branch, located at 5401 Altamira Dr., (☎ 407/345-9477), is themed (wonder of wonders) to the ancient ruins of Greece, complete with broken columns, stone walls, and frieze-style moldings.

Moving on to Africa, the **Club Safari** location, 2944 S. Kirkman Rd. (☎ 407/296-6265), boasts an African Safari theme complete with rich wooden fixtures, African masks and artwork, crystal chandeliers, and animal prints galore. Animatronic toucan and Tiki figures sing jungle jingles, and you can't help but take note of the 13-foot bronze giraffe and two bronze tigers keeping watch.

Chrome shines everywhere you turn at the **Motorcycle McDonald's**, 5400 S. Kirkman Rd. (☎ 407/352-1526). Tail pipes, shocks and various other bike parts adorn the restaurant's walls.

Finally, the **world's largest McDonald's** can also be found in Orlando, right on 6875 Sand Lake Rd. (☎ 407/351-2185). The location boasts a huge tubular maze with 25,000 feet of twists, turns, sliding, crawling, and jumping space for kids to play in. Another unique feature: You can book hotels, transportation, buy attraction tickets, and get daily park information, all while enjoying your fries and a Coke (or, in this case, maybe a gourmet coffee).

seafood, steaks, burgers and rib-sticking sides. The casual roadhouse decor, friendly service, and varied menu full of kid-friendly favorites make this one a great choice for families.

4510 Irló Bronson Memorial Highway (U.S. 192 at the intersection of International Drive South), Kissimmee. ☎ 407/390-0500. www.logansroadhouse.com. Main courses \$6-\$17. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10:30pm, Fri–Sat 11am–11:30pm. Free self-parking. Take exit 64 towards Celebration, and follow U.S. 192 (the restaurant is on your left).

8 Only in Orlando: Dining with Disney Characters

Dining with your favorite costumed characters is a treat for many Disney fans, but it's a truly special occasion for those under 10. Some of the most beloved movie characters seemingly come to life: shaking hands, hugging, signing autographs, and posing

for family photos (most never speak with the exception of the princesses and a very small handful of others—just so you know). These are huge events—it's not uncommon for Chef Mickey's, listed below, to have **1,600 or more guests on a weekend morning**—so make reservations as far in advance as possible (when you book your room, if not earlier) and don't expect more than just a few moments of one-on-one, but what time there is, is sure to bring a smile to little ones faces.

The prices for character meals are much the same, no matter where you're dining. Breakfast (most serve it) runs \$17 to \$20 for adults and \$9 to \$10 for children 3 to 11; those that serve dinner charge \$22 to \$26 for adults and \$10 to \$13 for kids. The prices vary a bit, though, from location to location.

To make reservations for WDW character meals, call ☎ **407/939-3463**. American Express, Diners Club, Discover, MasterCard, Visa, and the Disney Visa Card are accepted at all character meals.

You'll find all of the restaurants mentioned in this section on the map, "Walt Disney World & Lake Buena Vista Dining," earlier in this chapter. For Internet information, go to **www.disneyworld.com**.

Note: Although the character appearances below were accurate when this book went to press, line-ups and booking requirements change frequently (as do menus and prices). We strongly recommend against promising children they will meet a specific character at a meal. And you should never mention dining with the characters unless your Priority Seating arrangements are confirmed first; character meals book up quickly and trying to arrange Priority Seating too late in the game (or worse, attempting to walk in) will mostly likely result in disappointment. If you have your heart set on meeting a certain character, call to confirm his or her appearance when making your Priority Seating arrangement.

Cape May Café The Cape May Café, a delightful New England-themed dining room, serves lavish buffet breakfasts (eggs, pancakes, bacon, pastries) hosted by **Admiral Goofy** and his crew—**Chip 'n' Dale** and **Pluto** (characters may vary). Its location at the Beach Club Resort makes it a great way to start the day when you're on your way to nearby Epcot.

1800 Epcot Resorts Blvd., at Disney's Beach Club Resort. \$18 adults, \$10 children. Daily 7:30–11am.

Chef Mickey's ★★ The whimsical Chef Mickey's offers buffet breakfasts (eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, fruit) and dinners (entrees change daily; salad bar, soups, vegetables, ice cream with toppings). Aside from the characters, kids will also enjoy watching the monorail go by overhead as it passes through the Contemporary Resort. **Mickey and Minnie and various pals** make their way to every table while meeting and mingling with guests. While this is one of the largest restaurants offering character dining, if you plan on dining here during spring break and around the holidays, it's best to make Priority Seating arrangements well ahead of time.

4600 N. World Dr., at Disney's Contemporary Resort. Breakfast \$18 adults, \$10 children; dinner \$27 adults, \$12 children. Daily 7–11:30am and 5–9:30pm.

Cinderella's Royal Table ★ Cinderella Castle—the most recognized icon in all of the WDW resort, not to mention the center of the Magic Kingdom serves character breakfast buffets daily (a variety of breakfast favorites including scrambled eggs, bacon, Danish), and recently began serving family-style buffet lunches (choice of 5 entrees, salads, and dessert) as well. Hosts vary, but **Cinderella** always puts in an appearance.

This is one of the most popular character meals in the park and the hardest to get into, so **reserve far, far in advance** (reservations are taken 90 days in advance, and you must make them with a guaranteed credit card payment that will *cost you \$10 per adult and \$5 per kid if you cancel them*). To have the best shot at getting in, be flexible about your seating arrangements and dining times, and call Disney exactly at 7am EST on your first date of reservations eligibility (if you aren't sure what date that is, call Disney and they'll help you figure it out). If you get through on your first try (lucky you!), tell the reservations clerk you want Cinderella's Table for whatever date you've picked. Don't even think about requesting a specific time—take whatever you can get (most reservations will be gone by 7:15am).

In Cinderella Castle, at the Magic Kingdom. Breakfast \$22 adults, \$12 children; lunch \$23.99 adults, \$12.99 children. Daily 8–11:15am, noon–3pm. Theme park admission required.

Crystal Palace Buffet ★ The prettiest of the Magic Kingdom's restaurants, the Crystal Palace features a glass exterior that glimmers in sunlight. **Winnie the Pooh** and pals hold court here throughout the day. The restaurant serves breakfast (eggs, French toast, pancakes, bacon and more), lunch, and dinner. The latter features a long list of hot and cold entrees that usually include some type of poultry, beef, seafood, an array of veggies, salads, and kid-friendly favorites. The dessert buffet includes a make-your-own-sundae bar.

At Crystal Palace, in the Magic Kingdom. Breakfast \$18 adults, \$10 children; lunch \$20 adults, \$11 children; dinner \$23 adults, \$12 children. Daily 8–10:30am, 11:30am–2:45pm, 4pm–park closing. Theme park admission required.

Donald's Prehistoric Breakfastosaurus **Donald**, **Goofy**, and **Pluto** host a buffet breakfast (eggs, bacon, French toast) in Dinoland U.S.A.'s Restaurantosaurus.

In Dinoland U.S.A., at Disney's Animal Kingdom. \$17 adults, \$9 children. Daily park opening–10am. Theme park admission required.

Garden Grill ★ There's a "Momma's-in-the-kitchen" theme at this revolving restaurant, where hearty, family-style meals are hosted by **Mickey** and **Chip 'n' Dale**. (Mickey sure gets around, eh?) Lunch and dinner (chicken, fish, steak, vegetables, potatoes) are served.

In the Land Pavilion at Epcot. Lunch \$20 adults, \$10 children; dinner \$22 adults, \$10 children. Daily noon–3pm, 5–8pm. Theme park admission required.

Liberty Tree Tavern ★ This Colonial-style 18th-century pub offers character dinners hosted by **Minnie**, **Goofy**, **Pluto**, and **Chip 'n' Dale**. The family-style meals include salad, roast turkey, ham, flank steak, cornbread, and apple crisp with vanilla ice cream.

In Liberty Square, in the Magic Kingdom. \$22 adults, \$10 children. Daily 4pm–park closing. Theme park admission required.

1900 Park Fare ★ The elegant Grand Floridian offers breakfast (eggs, French toast, bacon, pancakes) and dinner buffets (steak, pork, fish) at the exposition-themed 1900 Park Fare. Big Bertha—a French band organ that plays pipes, drums, bells, cymbals, castanets, and xylophone—provides music. **Mary Poppins**, **Alice in Wonderland**, and friends appear at breakfast; **Cinderella** and friends show up for Cinderella's Gala Feast at dinner.

4401 Floridian Way, at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. Breakfast \$17 adults, \$10 children; dinner \$26 adults, \$11 children. Daily 7:30–11am and 5–9pm.

Other Casts of Characters

Not wanting to feel left out, Universal Orlando and SeaWorld have instituted their own character dining experiences. Like Disney's meals, these are very popular experiences, so be sure to reserve your spot as far in advance as possible.

At Islands of Adventure, the **Confisco Grill** is home to a character breakfast buffet where Spiderman, Captain America, the Cat in the Hat, and Thing 1 and Thing 2 all join in on the fun. It runs Thursday through Sunday, from park opening until 10:30am. The cost is \$16 adults, \$10 kids 3 to 9. Call ☎ 407/224-4012 for more information or to make reservations.

At SeaWorld, you can chow down on a buffet lunch right alongside the killer whales at the daily **Dine with Shamu**, at the Shamu Stadium. The cost is \$32 adults, \$18 children ages 3 to 9; park admission is required but not included in the cost. The **Shamu and Crew** character breakfast buffet, held at the Seafire Inn in the Waterfront district, is offered only seasonally during the park's Halloween and Christmas celebrations. The action takes place 8:45 to 10:15am. The cost is \$15 adults, \$10 children ages 3 to 9; park admission is required but not included in the cost. For both character experiences, call ☎ 800/327-2420 or check out www.seaworld.com for more information or to make a reservation.

'Ohana Character Breakfast Traditional breakfasts (eggs, pancakes, bacon) are prepared in an 18-foot fire pit and served family style. **Mickey** and friends appear, and children are given the chance to parade around with Polynesian musical instruments. 1600 Seven Seas Dr., in 'Ohana at Disney's Polynesian Resort. \$17 adults, \$9 children. Daily 7:30–11am.

Princess Storybook Character Breakfast **Snow White, Mary Poppins, Princess Aurora, Pocahontas, or Belle** might show up at the morning character meal buffet (scrambled eggs, French toast, sausage, bacon, and potatoes). **Note:** Disney now offers character dining here during lunch and dinner as well. Both meals feature family-style service and offer some Norwegian specialties in addition to traditional American fare. At Akershus Castle in Epcot's Norway Pavilion. Breakfast \$22 adults, \$12 children; lunch adults \$24, children \$13; dinner adults \$28, children \$13. Daily 7:30am–park closing. Theme park admission required.

Exploring Walt Disney World

The minute someone even mentions Walt Disney World, most people's minds immediately conjure up visions of Cinderella Castle and the Magic Kingdom. That's unsurprising when you take into account that the park that started it all—it opened in 1971—is still the most widely recognized and the most popular Disney destination in the United States.

Today, however, The Walt Disney World stable has grown to include an array of themed resorts, hundreds of restaurants and shops, nightclub venues, smaller attractions, and four major theme parks: the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom. And with the economy showing signs of recovery, park attendance is once again on the rise. WDW attracted nearly 42 million paying customers in 2004, according to estimates by *Amusement Business* magazine. All four Disney parks make the country's top five in attendance (the remaining park on the list is Disneyland in California). But that should hardly surprise you—they offer a fanciful, self-sufficient vacation where wonderment, human progress, and old-fashioned family fun are the key themes. The Disney Imagineers show off their creative capabilities through spectacular parades and fireworks displays, 3-D and CircleVision films, nerve-racking thrill

rides, and adventurous journeys through time and space. Though they're expensive, you'll seldom hear people complain about failing to get their money's worth—an evening out at home, including the cost of a babysitter, can add up to almost as much without nearly the same return.

One reason people keep coming back for more is that rides and shows are periodically updated. And if something doesn't quite work, Disney usually fixes it. As part of this process, the company interviews some of its park-goers to decide how well, or poorly, things are working.

There have been changes and additions as Walt Disney World has matured, and new rides and attractions periodically enter the mix including: Epcot's **Soarin'**, where guests fly over the landscapes of California while surrounded by a gigantic projection screen; Disney-MGM Studios' **Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show**, featuring a behind-the-scenes look at stunts and special effects; and the Magic Kingdom's **Stitch's Great Escape**, where Stitch wreaks havoc as he escapes the grasp of the Galactic Confederation—and the audience.

But before I dive into the action, giving you details of these and other exciting experiences, let me take care of some basic business.

1 Essentials

GETTING INFORMATION IN ADVANCE

Before leaving home, call or write to the Walt Disney World Co., Box 10000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000 (☎ 407/934-7639) for a vacation video and the *Walt*

Disney World Vacations brochure; both are valuable planning aids. Both can also be ordered (and even viewed) online at www.disneyworld.com. When you call, also ask about special events that will be going on during your visit. While I list some of the annual events under “When to Go” in chapter 2, there are many other events that may be of interest to you.

Once you’ve arrived at your hotel, Guest Services and the concierge desks (especially at the Disney properties and “official” hotels) will have up-to-the-minute information about happenings in the parks. Stop by to ask questions and get literature, including a schedule of park hours and events. If you have questions your hotel’s personnel can’t answer, call Disney at ☎ **407/824-4321**.

There are also information areas at City Hall in the Magic Kingdom and Guest Relations at Epcot, Disney–MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom.

For Internet information, try www.disneyworld.com, which features entertaining and regularly updated information on the parks.

Also try the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau site (www.orlandoinfo.com). Once there, click on “Attractions” in the menu on the left, and then use the search function at the bottom of the next screen. Another good site, www.floridakiss.com, is sponsored by the Kissimmee–St. Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau. It, too, has an attractions link.

GETTING TO WDW BY CAR

The interstate exits to all Disney parks and resorts are well marked. Once you’re off I-4, there are signs directing you to individual destinations. If you miss your exit, *don’t panic*. Simply get off at the next one and turn around. It may take a little more time, but it’s safer than cutting across five lanes of traffic to make the offramp, or worse—to risk a fender bender. Drive with extra caution in the attractions area. Disney drivers are divided into two categories: workers in a hurry to make their shift and tourists in a hurry to get to the parks before anyone else (and trying to drive while looking at a map).

Upon entering WDW grounds, you can tune your radio to 1030 AM when you’re approaching the Magic Kingdom, or 850 AM when approaching Epcot, for park information. Tune to 1200 AM when departing the Magic Kingdom, or 910 AM when departing Epcot. TVs in all Disney resorts and “official” hotels also have park information channels.

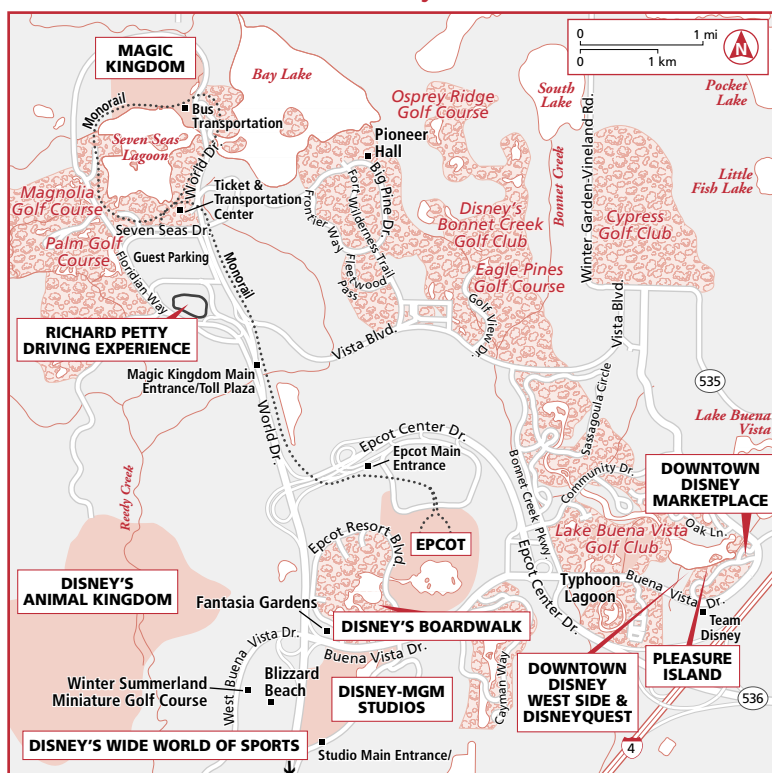
PARKING

All WDW lots are tightly controlled; the Disney folks have parking down to a science. You park where they tell you to park—and there’s no room for discussion. *Remember to write your parking place (lot and row number) on something so you can find your vehicle later.* Parking attendants won’t be there to direct you to it when you leave the park,

Tips Tighter Security

Guards at the gates at all Disney parks check a variety of carry-ins, including backpacks, diaper bags, and pocketbooks and purses. They also have been known to check guests’ IDs, so be sure to bring a government-issued photo identification card. All this, of course, means it make take a few extra minutes longer to get through the entrance and to your first ride of the day.

Walt Disney World Parks & Attractions



and, at the end of the day, you'd be surprised at how many cars look alike through tired eyes. And though you might think that catchy character name on the pole above your car will ring a bell when you return to your vehicle, what will really be ringing will be your ears with all of the names you've heard so many times throughout the day—was it Minnie . . . Donald . . . Goofy . . . Pluto?

Visitors should generally ride the free trams that travel the massive Magic Kingdom lots, but it's often easier to skip them and walk to the gates at Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios, and Animal Kingdom. You may not even have a choice. Disney has cut service to some parking areas near the entrances to its parks. Guests who can't make the hike have to park in handicapped areas or have a driver drop them at special unloading areas outside the entrances. If you're walking, *be careful!* These lots aren't designed for pedestrians, so if you hear a tram coming, then move out of the way—and quickly.

Parking costs \$8 at the four major WDW attractions (\$9 for RVs). There are special lots for travelers with disabilities; a valid disabled parking permit is required (call ☎ 407/824-4321 for details). Those who have booked their Disney vacation through AAA can access a special lot close to the entrance.

TICKETS

In January 2005, Disney revamped its entire ticketing structure (now called **Magic Your Way**), giving visitors who stay here for a few days far better deals than those who

come for just a day. Whereas before you had a limited number of ticket options (a 1-day, one-park ticket or a multiday, multipark pass), the new system allows guests to customize their tickets by first purchasing a base ticket for a set fee, and then allowing them to purchase add-ons, including a park-hopper option, a no-expiration option, and the option to include admission to some of Disney's smaller venues, such as Pleasure Island, the water parks, and DisneyQuest (the latter is known as the Magic Plus Pack option).

Tips Buy Ahead of Time

Purchasing your 5-, 6-, and 7-day Premium Tickets ahead of time (through www.disneyworld.com) can result in substantial savings (up to \$11 per adult and \$9 per child aged 3 to 9). The savings for a family of four can add up to \$40—that's worth a lunch (well, at least a snack in Mickeyville).

You can purchase your base tickets for durations running from a single day to several days, with the latter being the most cost effective; the longer you stay, the less you'll pay per day. If you crunch the numbers, tickets good for at least four days will cost almost \$10 less per day than a single-day ticket would; buy a 6-day ticket and your per-day price drops by almost 50%. Do note, how-

ever, that under the new system, tickets now expire 14 days from the first day of use unless you add on a no-expiration feature (you don't however have to use the tickets on consecutive days within that 14-day period).

The following don't include the 6 to 6.5% sales tax (Disney actually falls in two different counties) unless noted. **Note:** Price hikes are frequent occurrences, so call (☎ 407/824-4321) or visit WDW's website (www.disneyworld.com) for the most up-to-the-minute pricing.

Note: All tickets include unlimited use of the WDW transportation system. Bear in mind that Disney considers children 10 and older adults for pricing purposes, and children under 3 aren't charged admission.

One-day/one-park tickets, for admission to the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom, or Disney-MGM Studios, are \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for children ages 3 to 9. Ouch! **Four-day base tickets** (1 park per day) are \$185 adults, \$148 children ages 3 to 9. A **7-day base ticket** (1 park per day) costs \$199 for adults (about \$29 a day), \$160 for kids ages 3 to 9 (about \$23 a day).

Adding on a **Park Hopper** option to your ticket allows you unlimited admission to the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom, and Disney-MGM Studios for the duration of your base ticket. Pricing for the Park Hopper is the same for adults and

Tips Shorter Days, Fewer Shows

They may have started to rebound, but the theme parks are still feeling a bit of the crunch as attendance slowly climbs back to where it once was a few years ago. If you haven't been to Disney in several years you may notice that, in many cases, the parks **close earlier** than at similar times in previous years, and some areas **open later**. Additionally, select shows and parades are offered less often or only on certain days. The hours and shows listed in this chapter generally apply, but in order to avoid being disappointed, call (☎ 407/824-4321) or go to www.disneyworld.com for up-to-the-minute information.

Tips Price Alert

Single-day and multiday admission prices don't include Florida's 6% to 6.5% sales tax and are subject to change. Annual price increases are normal, so, although the prices listed on these pages were accurate when this book went to press, they may be higher at the time you actually visit.

children and costs \$35 above the price of your base ticket (no matter how many days that ticket is valid for). So if you purchase a single-day base ticket, adding the Park Hopper will cost an additional \$35 (for a total of \$94.75 for an adult—not very cost effective), but if you purchase a 7-day base ticket, the option will still only cost you \$35 (for a total of \$234—a very good deal).

If you add a **Magic Plus Pack** option to your base ticket, you'll get several admissions to some of WDW's smaller attractions: Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon, DisneyQuest, Pleasure Island, and Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex. The number of visits allowed depends on the number of days your base ticket is good for (2 visits for base tickets covering 1–3 days; 3 visits for 4- and 5-day tickets; 4 visits for 6-day tickets, and 5 visits for any base ticket over 7 days). This option adds an additional \$45 to the cost of your base ticket, and, like the Park Hopper, the longer you stay at Disney, the more cost-effective the option becomes. If you only plan on visiting one smaller attraction while at WDW, paying the separate admission fee is cheaper and smarter than opting for the Magic Plus Pack.

The **Premium Ticket** is a base ticket that comes with the Magic Plus Pack and Park Hopper options. The only way you'll save money by buying this ticket is if you do so in advance (see above).

A **1-day ticket to Typhoon Lagoon, Blizzard Beach, or DisneyQuest** is \$34 for adults, \$28 for children.

A **1-day ticket to Pleasure Island** is \$16.95. Because this is primarily an 18-and-over entertainment complex, there's no bargain price for children.

If you're planning an extended stay or going to visit Walt Disney World more than once during the year, **annual passes** (\$395–\$515 adults, \$336–\$438 children) are another great option.

OPERATING HOURS

Hours of operation vary throughout the year and are often influenced by special events, so it's a good idea to call to check opening/closing times.

The **Magic Kingdom** and **Disney-MGM Studios** are generally open from 9am to 6 or 7pm, with hours often extended to 9pm and sometimes as late as midnight during major holidays and summer. **Animal Kingdom** usually is open from 8 or 9am to 5 or 6pm but sometimes closes as late as 7pm.

Epcot's Future World is generally open from 9 or 10am to 7pm and occasionally later. **Epcot's World Showcase** usually opens at 11am or noon and closes at 9pm. Once again, there are extended holiday and summer hours.

Typhoon Lagoon and **Blizzard Beach** are open from 10am to 5pm most of the year (with slightly extended hours during summer and some holidays). Both are closed on a rotating basis during part of the winter for maintenance; be sure to check ahead if they're on your to-do list.

2 Making Your Visit More Enjoyable

HOW THIS CHAPTER IS USEFUL TO PARENTS

Before every listing in the major parks, you'll note the "**Recommended Ages**" entry that lists which ages will most appreciate that ride or show (though you should keep in mind your child's personality and maturity when evaluating these recommendations). Though most families want to do everything, these guidelines are helpful in planning your daily itinerary. In my ride ratings, I've indicated whether a ride will be more enjoyable for kids than for adults. Many, even a couple in the Magic Kingdom, are too intense for young kids; all it takes is one bad experience, and the rest of your day will be ruined. You'll also find any **height and health restrictions** noted in the listings.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT

Because of the large number of international visitors, there's really no "off season" at Disney, but during the winter months, usually mid-January through March, crowds are smaller (except weekends), and the weather can be mild. The crowds also thin from mid-September until the week before Thanksgiving, and in May, before Memorial Day weekend. (Again, weekends tend to be clogged with locals.) Summer is when the masses throng to the parks. It's also humid and hot, *Hot*, **HOT**. If you can skip a summer visit, you also won't have to worry much about the possibility of a hurricane (admittedly rare, but as the summer of 2004 proved, not unheard of) or an electrical storm (an almost daily occurrence).

BEST DAYS TO VISIT

The busiest days at all parks are generally Saturday and Sunday. Seven-day guests usually arrive and depart on one of these days, so fewer of them turn the turnstiles; but weekends are when locals and Florida commuters come to play. Beyond that: Monday, Thursday, and Saturday are pretty frantic in the Magic Kingdom; Tuesday and Friday are hectic at Epcot; Sunday and Wednesday are crazy at Disney-MGM Studios; and Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are a zoo (forgive the pun) at the Animal Kingdom. Periods around major holidays also attract throngs—mid-December through the first weekend in January is busy beyond belief. Crowds tend to thin later in the day, so if you're going to visit during the busy season and have included the Park Hopper option on your ticket, you'll bump into fewer guests the later you visit. This also applies to the water parks.

The big attractions at Animal Kingdom are, obviously, the animals, and the best time to see them is early in the day or late in the afternoon or evening, when things are cooler. You'll also get a decent midday glimpse of some of them during the cooler months.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

How you plan your time at Walt Disney World will depend on a number of factors. These include the ages of any children in your party, what, if anything, you've seen on previous visits, your interests, and whether you're traveling at peak time or off season. Preplanning is always essential. So is choosing age-appropriate activities.

Nothing can spoil a day in the parks more than a child devastated because he or she can't do something that was promised. Before you get to the park, review this book and the suggested ages for children, including *height restrictions*. The WDW staff won't

bend the rules despite the pitiful wails of your little ones. **Note:** Many rides that have minimum heights also have enough turbulence to make them unsuitable for folks with neck, back, or heart problems; those prone to motion sickness; or pregnant women.

Unless you're staying for more than a week or two, you won't be able to experience all of the rides, shows, or attractions included in this chapter. A ride may last only 5 minutes, but you may have to wait an hour or so, even with FASTPASS (detailed shortly). You'll wear yourself to a frazzle trying to hit everything. It's better to follow a relaxed itinerary, including leisurely meals and some recreational activities, than to make a demanding job out of trying to see everything. Your vacation is supposed to be fun, not frenzied.

FASTPASS

If lines aren't your thing—well . . . you had better turn back now. Lines are a part of the deal at Disney (and the other parks, too, for that matter). On the other hand, if you're savvy, you can usually avoid the worst of them if you take advantage of Disney's FASTPASS system. The free system allows you to wait on a far shorter line at some of the park's most popular attractions. Seems easy enough right? Well, it is. There is however a small price to be paid for skipping the big lines. Here's the drill:

Hang onto your ticket stub when you enter and head to the hottest ride on your list. If it's a FASTPASS attraction (they're noted in the guide map you get when you enter), you'll see a sign marking the FASTPASS kiosk just near the entrance. Feed your ticket into the ticket taker. **Note:** Every member of your group must get an individual FASTPASS. Retrieve both your ticket and your FASTPASS slip. Printed on the slip are two times. You can return any time during that 1-hour window and enter the ride (there's a much shorter and faster line for FASTPASS holders). Be sure to keep your slip handy as you'll need it to get in the right line.

Note II: Early in the day, your 1-hour window may begin as soon as 40 minutes after you feed the FASTPASS machine, but later in the day it may be hours later. Initially, Disney only allowed you to do this on one ride at a time. Now, your FASTPASS ticket has a time printed when you can get a second FASTPASS, usually about 2 hours after you got the first one, though it can sometimes be as soon as 45 minutes later, even if you haven't used the first pass yet.

Note III: Don't think you can fool Disney by feeding your ticket stub in multiple times, figuring you can hit the jackpot for multiple rides or help others in your group who lost their tickets. These "smart" stubs will reject your attempts by spitting out a coupon that says "Not A Valid FASTPASS."

Note IV: FASTPASS slips can run out. So if you have your heart set on a ride and it's the middle of the peak season, be sure to head to your chosen attraction's FASTPASS machine as soon as you can. Tickets for top rides often run out by the early afternoon, sometimes even earlier.

CREATE AN ITINERARY FOR EACH DAY

Read the previously mentioned *Walt Disney World Vacations* brochure and the detailed descriptions in this book, and then create your own “must see” list, including all the shows and attractions that you absolutely have to experience. After that, you can sort out just where to go, when to go, and what you would like to do while you’re there.

At the same time, consider your loyalties. My kids could spend all day in Tomorrowland spinning around like space rangers with Woody and Buzz Lightyear, but touring Toontown is of far less interest to them. Put the ride featuring your favorite character, or theirs, at the top of your list. Sketch out a daily itinerary that includes your must-see attractions and shows; it’s almost certain to change once you get to the parks, but will at least provide you with a good starting point. With a plan in mind and a map in hand (park maps can be found in this guide as well as on the Disney website), touring the parks will be that much easier. Understand that rides and exhibits nearest an entrance are usually the busiest when the gates open because a lot of people visit the first thing they see, even if the more popular attractions tend to be found deeper into the park.

I repeat this advice: Schedule sit-down shows, recreational activities (a boat ride or a refreshing swim late in the afternoon), and at least some unhurried meals where time permits. This will save you from exhaustion and aggravation. Our suggested itineraries (see below) allow you to see a great deal of the parks as efficiently as possible. If you have the luxury of a multiday pass, you can divide and conquer at a slower pace and can even repeat some favorites.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

Our suggested itineraries will allow you to cover most of the ground in each park in as efficient a manner as possible. Do note, though, that using FASTPASS may require you to double back to a land you’ve already covered.

There are a ton of ways to see the parks, and I feel, time and budget permitting, it’s often better to do it in limited doses—where you spend 2 or more days in a park at a casual pace. I’m offering suggested itineraries as options for those on a tighter schedule. The following itineraries are organized to get the most out of the least amount of time. Where appropriate, I break things into one game plan for families with kids and another for teenagers and adults. With few exceptions (I note them later), Disney World doesn’t have enough true stomach-turning thrill rides to warrant a special itinerary for teens or take-no-prisoners adults. Frankly, the only Orlando park in that class is Universal’s Islands of Adventure, which I tackle in chapter 8, “Exploring Beyond Disney: Universal Orlando, SeaWorld & Other Attractions.”

A Day in the Magic Kingdom with Kids

Consider making a Priority Seating dinner reservation at **Cinderella’s Royal Table** (☎ 407/939-3463), located inside Cinderella Castle.

If you have preschoolers, go right to the **Walt Disney World Railroad** station on Main Street and take the next train. Get off at **Mickey’s Toontown Fair**, where tots are wowed by Mickey, Minnie, and the gang. They can ride the **Barnstormer** at **Goofy’s Wiseacre**

Farm, a mini-roller coaster, and explore **Mickey’s & Minnie’s Country Houses**.

If your kids are 6 or older, start the day at **Tomorrowland** and brave **Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin**, and **Space Mountain**. (Little ones like the **Tomorrowland Indy Speedway**, but there’s not much else for them here, so skip it if you don’t have a lot of time.)

Most preteens will find something that’s fun in Fantasyland, including **Dumbo the Flying Elephant**,

Mickey's PhilharMagic, It's a Small World, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, and Cinderella's Golden Carousel.

Then grab lunch at Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café in **Tomorrowland** or the Columbia Harbour House in **Liberty Square**.

Next, head west to **Liberty Square**. Most kids 10 and older will like the animatronic history lesson in the **Hall of Presidents** show. Before leaving, visit the **Haunted Mansion**, and then move to **Frontierland**. **Splash Mountain** and **Big Thunder Mountain Railroad** are best suited for those 8 and older, while the **Country Bear Jamboree** and **Tom Sawyer Island** are fun for the younger set and parents looking to get off their feet.

Go to **Adventureland** next. Ride **The Magic Carpets of Aladdin**, **Pirates of the Caribbean**, and **Jungle Cruise**, and then let the kids burn some energy in the **Swiss Family Treehouse**. Younger kids (ages 4–8) will appreciate the **Enchanted Tiki Room**.

Consult the daily times guide, and if the **Wishes** fireworks display and **SpectroMagic** are scheduled, be sure to watch them.

A Day in the Magic Kingdom for Teenagers & Adults

Consider making a Priority Seating reservation at **Cinderella's Royal Table** (☎ 407/939-3463) if you want a sit-down dinner.

From Main Street, cut through the center of the park to **Frontierland** and challenge **Splash Mountain**, then ride **Big Thunder Mountain Railroad**. If you need to rest your feet or escape the heat, the **Country Bear Jamboree** is the place for it.

Next, go to **Liberty Square** and visit the **Haunted Mansion** and **Hall of Presidents**, then have lunch at the **Liberty Tree Tavern**.

Now cut diagonally through the park, past **Cinderella Castle**, and into **Tomorrowland** to **Space Mountain**, and **Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin**.

If time permits, head to **Adventureland** for the **Jungle Cruise** and **Pirates of the Caribbean**, then, if it's scheduled, end the day with the **Wishes** fireworks display.

If You Can Spend Only 1 Day at Epcot

Epcot deserves at least 2 days, so this is a barnstorming highlight tour. Remember to get a **Priority Seating** reservation if you want to eat in the park (call ☎ 407/939-3463 before you arrive). I suggest the **Coral Reef** restaurant in the **Living Seas** or the **San Angel Inn** in the **World Showcase's Mexico** exhibit for lunch, and **Marrakesh** in **Morocco** or **Akershus** in **Norway** for dinner. See other options in chapter 6, "Where to Dine."

This is the **least desirable of the parks for young kids**. Even some older ones and teens may not enjoy the heavy learning and technology themes, but there are a few fun rides and other attractions that will entertain the young set.

As you enter, go to any of your favorite rides that have **FASTPASS** (they're noted in the handout guide map). If the lines are short, don't bother with the pass. If the fast track isn't in your itinerary, take the *other* strategic approach:

Future World, near the front of the park, is the first of Epcot's two areas to open, so start there. Skip **Spaceship Earth**, at least for now. It's nearest the entrance, and that big golf ball and its boring show attract most guests as they enter. Go straight to **Body Wars**, which is in the **Wonders of Life** pavilion to the left of **Spaceship Earth**. Next up is **Mission: Space**, where you can

train as the astronauts do. Follow up with next-door-neighbor **Test Track**. Then cut to the west to **Imagination!** and its two great shows: **Journey into Imagination with Figment** and **Honey, I Shrunk the Audience**. Next up, is the **Living Seas**, for a quick conversation with Crush, before heading on to **The Land** for the newest ride in the park, **Soarin'**.

If time permits before a late lunch, visit **Innoventions**. On its East Side, all but the smallest kids will like seeing some of today's and tomorrow's high-tech gadgets. Over on the West Side, kids and adults find it hard to leave **Video Games of Tomorrow**.

Unless you're eager for the **Spaceship Earth** snoozer, proceed to the **World Showcase** in mid-afternoon. To us, this is the best part of Epcot—the pavilions of 11 nations surround a big lagoon that you can cross by boat. But, again, kids (especially small ones) and teens may get the itch to leave.

Norway delivers a history lesson and boat ride called **Maelstrom**, **China** and **Canada** have fabulous 360-degree movies, and **France** has a magnificent large-screen production. Don't leave without taking in the show and concerts at **U.S.A.—The American Adventure**. And don't miss the Taiko Drum show at **Japan**.

After dinner, be sure to watch **IllumiNations**.

If You Can Spend 2 Days at Epcot

Ignore the 1-day itinerary, but consider our earlier advice about Priority Seating reservations and choice of restaurants.

The basic plan of attack here is to hit Future World and all of its rides and exhibits on your first day, and then cruise the World Showcase the next day. (Because the showcase opens later, you can hit any missed areas or go back for seconds in Future World early on

Day 2.) Remember to go straight to FASTPASS rides that appeal to you (check your guide map).

Day 1 If you want to eat in the park, book **Priority Seating** for lunch and dinner if you haven't already. Skip **Spaceship Earth** because that's where a lot of the park's visitors go first. Instead, take a spin on **Test Track**, in the southeast corner of Future World. If it's crowded, use FASTPASS and come back later. Then blast off to train as the astronauts do on **Mission: Space**. Next, ride **Body Wars**, which is in the **Wonders of Life** pavilion to the left of Spaceship Earth, then visit the **Cranium Command** and **The Making of Me** shows in the same area. Then double back to **Ellen's Energy Adventure** in the Universe of Energy before grabbing lunch.

Next, spend time in **Innoventions East**, where most older kids and adults will love the household gizmos in the **House of Innoventions** and a look at tomorrow in **Future Cars**. At **Innoventions West**, try your luck at the **Video Games of Tomorrow** exhibit. Before you call it a day, enjoy the peaceful exhibits in the **Living Seas** and **The Land** (be sure to check out the new **Soarin'** attraction), then cut to **Imagination!** for the **Journey into Imagination with Figment** and **Honey, I Shrunk the Audience** shows.

Day 2 If you arrive when the park opens, go to any **Future World** rides or shows that you missed or want to repeat. Or sleep a little later and arrive for the opening of **World Showcase**.

Start in **Canada**, to the far right of the entrance. The movie there is uplifting and entertaining. Then continue counterclockwise to the **United Kingdom** for street shows, people-watching, and a real pub. **France** has a captivating film and a wonderful pastry shop; **Morocco** has a colorful casbah with

merchants, Moorish tile and art, and little passages that put you in Bogartville. (For some, this is better than the real Casablanca, which is actually dirty and run-down.)

Japan has a store packed with enticements and grand architecture, but move quickly to **U.S.A.—The American Adventure**, a patriotic triumph of audio-animated characters. This is a large theater, so waits are rarely long. Next, head to **Italy** and St. Mark's Square, which comes complete with a 105-foot bell tower.

Germany's Biergarten has oompah bands, beer, and wursts. Don't miss the model railway and the Bavarian-looking shops. Then steer yourself to **China**, which offers food, bargain buys, gardens and ponds, and a 360-degree movie. Continuing counterclockwise, **Norway** features the **Maelstrom** ride. **Mexico** completes the World Showcase semicircle with a boat ride into its history.

End things with the **IllumiNations** fireworks display.

A Day at Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park

Here's a park that's easier to manage in 1 day.

Remember my advice on making **Priority Seating** (☎ 407/939-3463) reservations in advance if you want to eat in the park. The **Hollywood Brown Derby** is a decent sit-down option (see chapter 6, "Where to Dine," for more information on dining options in the park).

Head directly to the **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror**. The high-voltage ride is not for the young or faint of heart. The same goes for the **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster**, which blends incredible take-off speed with three inversions.

The park is small, so backtracking isn't as much of a concern here. Consider passing up attractions that have

long lines, or use **FASTPASS** where you can. Lines also can be long at **Star Tours**, the **Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular**, and the new **Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show**.

Voyage of the Little Mermaid is a must for the young (in years or yearnings); the same goes for **Jim Henson's Muppet*Vision 3-D**, a truly fun show for all ages.

With luck, you'll make it through most of the above before a late lunch at the **50's Prime Time Café**, where the food is so-so, but the experience is . . . well, surreal.

Afterward, watch (and maybe get lucky enough to win at) **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It!** before going on to the ton-of-fun **Backlot Tour**.

Check your show schedule for favorites such as **Playhouse Disney—Live on Stage!** (which is great for little kids) and **Beauty and the Beast**, and, at night, *don't miss Fantasmic!*

A Day at Animal Kingdom

Be here when the gates open, usually around 8 or 9am. (Call Disney information at ☎ 407/824-4321 to check the time.) This will give you the best chance of seeing animals, because they're most active in the morning air (the next best is late in the afternoon, although some can be seen throughout the day in cooler months). If you want to eat at the **Rainforest Café**, make **Priority Seating** reservations by calling ☎ 407/939-3463.

The size of the park (500 acres) means a lot of travel once you pass through the gates. Don't linger in the **Oasis** area or around the **Tree of Life**; instead, head directly to the back of the park to be first in line for **Kilimanjaro Safaris**. This will allow you to see animals before it gets hot and the lines become monstrous. Work your way back through Africa, visiting **Pangani**

Forest Exploration Trail and its low-land gorillas. Then head to the **Tree of Life** on Discovery Island for **It's Tough to Be a Bug**. Older kids, teens, and adults can also ride **Dinosaur** and **Primeval Whirl** in Dinoland U.S.A.; both are good choices if you get there before lines form or if you use FAST-PASS. Younger kids deserve some time at the **Boneyard** and on **TriceraTop Spin** in Dinoland as well as **Camp Minnie-Mickey**, on the other side of the park.

Restaurantosaurus is a fair lunch stop in Dinoland.

Once you've refueled, be sure to see the park's two best shows, **Tarzan Rocks!** in Dinoland and **Festival of the Lion King** in Camp Minnie-Mickey. If your time allows only one, **Lion King** is the better choice.

If you want a bird-show fix, see **Flights of Wonder**, then go on the **Maharajah Jungle Trek**, both in Asia. Older kids and teens will love tackling **Kali River Rapids**, a great way to cool off at the end of the day (and you'll all get soaked).

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN THE PARKS

ATMs Money machines are available near the entrances to all parks and usually at least one other place inside (see the guide map as you enter the park). They honor cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems.

Baby Care All parks have a Baby Care Center that's equipped with private breast-feeding rooms and sells baby-care basics, which are also available at Guest Relations. All women's restrooms, and some men's, are equipped with changing tables.

Cameras & Film Film and Kodak disposable cameras are sold at various locations in all parks (at much higher prices than those in the free world).

Car Assistance If you need a battery jump or other assistance, raise the hood of your vehicle and wait for security to arrive. When necessary, AAA provides free towing from the parks during park operating hours.

First Aid All parks have stations marked on the handout guide maps.

Internet Access Disney has installed phones with large touch-screens and Internet access capabilities at several locations in the theme parks, resorts, and other locations (locations are marked on park guide maps). For 25¢ a minute, with a 4-minute minimum, you can access the Internet or check your e-mail.

Lost Children Every park has a designated spot for lost children to be reunited with their families. In the Magic Kingdom, it's City Hall or the Baby Care Center; in Epcot, the Earth Center or the Baby Care Center; in Disney-MGM Studios, Guest Relations; and in Animal Kingdom, Discovery Island. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing; older children and adults should have a prearranged meeting place in case your group gets separated.* If that happens, tell the first park employee you see—many wear the same type of clothing and all have special name-tags.

Package Pickup Nearly all WDW stores can arrange for packages to be sent to the front of the park. Allow at least 3 hours for delivery. If you're staying at a Disney resort, you can also have all packages purchased by 7pm sent to your hotel room (they will be delivered by noon the next day).

Parking At press time, Disney charged \$8 for car, light truck, and van parking, and \$9 for RVs.

Pets Don't leave yours in a parked car, even with a window cracked open. Cars become oven-like death traps in Florida's sun. Only service animals are permitted in the parks, but there are five kennels at WDW (☎ 407/824-6568; \$6 per day, \$9 overnight for resort guests; \$11 overnight for those staying elsewhere). The ones at the Transportation and Ticket Center in the Magic Kingdom and near the entrance to Fort Wilderness board animals overnight. Day accommodations are offered at kennels just outside the Entrance Plaza at Epcot and at the entrances to Disney-MGM Studios and Animal Kingdom. *Proof of vaccination is required.* For more information, see "Fast Facts" in chapter 4.

Shops In addition to the ones listed in the following pages, many of Disney's attractions feature a small gift shops filled with merchandise and souvenirs based on that attraction's theme.

Stroller Rental Strollers are available near all of the park entrances. The cost is \$8 for a single and \$15 for a double, including a \$1 Disney dollar refund on return.

Tip Boards Each park has a tip board that tells visitors the approximate waiting time at all of the major rides and attractions. In Magic Kingdom it's at the end of Main Street on the left as you face the castle; in Epcot, the digital board is in Innoventions Plaza; at MGM it's at the intersection of Hollywood and Sunset boulevards; inside Animal Kingdom, you'll find it just over the bridge to Discovery Island.

Wheelchair Rental A wheelchair is \$8 per day, including a \$1 deposit. Electric wheelchairs rent for \$40, including a \$10 deposit.

FOR TRAVELERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

WDW does a lot to assist guests with disabilities. Its services are detailed in the *Guidebook for Guests with Disabilities*. You can get one from Guest Relations in the parks,

Tips Smoking Alert

Disney prohibits smoking in its shops, attractions, restaurants, and ride lines. There are a few designated outdoor smoking areas in the park if you feel the urge to light up.

Moments All Aboard

If your kids appreciate experiences a bit out of the ordinary, ask if you can co-pilot the Disney monorail for a spin around the kingdom. Being a **monorail pilot** doesn't mean that you get to drive the train, but your family will get to ride up front with the *real* pilot. It requires a little patience, because no more than four or five people can do it per ride, so ask a cast member at the monorail stations at the Grand Floridian, Polynesian, or Contemporary resorts if there's room for you in the cockpit. You may not have much luck during peak seasons or busier times of the day (at park opening and closing), or if there's a pilot trainee on board. But at other times, especially if you're patient enough to wait for the next train, you may be treated to the best seats aboard. Best of all: It's free.

other information areas, at Disney resorts, or **online** at **www.disneyworld.com**. You can also call ☎ **407/824-4321** with questions regarding other special needs. Some examples of other services: Almost all Disney resorts have rooms for those with disabilities, and there are Braille directories inside the Magic Kingdom: in the front of the Main Street train station, and in a gazebo in front of the Crystal Palace restaurant. There are special parking lots at all parks. Complimentary guided-tour audiocassette tapes and players are available at Guest Relations to assist visually impaired guests, and personal translator units are available to amplify the audio at some Epcot Attractions (inquire at Earth Station). For information about Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs), call the number above or ☎ **407/827-5141 (TTY)**.

3 The Magic Kingdom

The Magic Kingdom still attracts millions from around the world, drawn here by the opportunity to experience the fun and fantasy that only Disney can deliver. While attendance was flat in 2004 at just over 14 million, this is still America's most popular theme park. The 107-acre Magic Kingdom is filled with over 40 attractions (with new experiences being added almost yearly), unique shops, and themed restaurants. Its most recognizable feature is Cinderella Castle, which will be decked out in gold accents, rose swags, and a bit of Pixie Dust for most of 2005 and 2006 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Disneyland. Surrounding this centerpiece (think of it as a hub in a giant wheel) are **seven themed lands**.

ARRIVING The parking lot is here is huge, so big in fact that it's necessary to take a tram just to get to the **Transportation and Ticket Center** (more commonly known as the TTC), where you can buy your park tickets. Each of the parking lot's sections is named for Disney characters (Goofy, Pluto, Minnie, and so on), and aisles are numbered. I can't stress enough just how important it is *to write down where you left your vehicle—you would be amazed at how many white mini-vans look just like yours!* Once you have your tickets in hand (or if you've arrived with them—the best route), you'll need to make your first decision of the day—do you take the ferry or the monorail to the park from the TTC? The ferry offers a more leisurely (and windy) ride, while the monorail is the speedier of the two.

Upon arriving at the park entrance you will have to pass through security and have your bags inspected. All told, the time it takes to get from your car to Main Street U.S.A. is somewhere around **35 to 45 minutes**, sometimes longer. And that total doesn't include the time spent in lines if you have to stop at Guest Relations or rent a stroller. You'll face the same agony (complicated by escaping crowds) on the way out, so relax. This is one of the most crowded parks, so plan to arrive an hour before the opening bell or an hour or two after.

The most important thing you can do upon arriving at the park is to pick up a copy (or two) of the Magic Kingdom **guide map** (if you can't find one at the turnstiles, stop at City Hall or the nearest shop). It provides an array of detailed information about available guest services, restaurants, and attractions. The Times Guide (separate from the guide map) will be your key to the daily schedules for show times, parades, fireworks, character meet-and-greets, and park hours.

If you have questions, all park employees are very knowledgeable, and City Hall, on your left as you enter, is an information center—and, like Mickey's Toontown Fair, a great place to meet costumed characters. Character greeting places are also featured on the map.

HOURS The park is usually open from at least 9am to 6 or 7pm, sometimes later—as late as midnight during major holidays and summer.

TICKET PRICES Ticket prices for adults are \$59.75, \$48 for children 3 to 9. Kids under 3 get in free. See “Tickets,” on p. 177, for information on the new Magic Your Way ticketing scheme.

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

Most of the following are noted on the handout guide maps in the park:

ATMs Machines inside the park honor cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems. They’re near the main entrance; in Frontierland, near the Shootin’ Gallery; and in Tomorrowland, next to Space Mountain.

Baby Care Located next to the Crystal Palace at the end of Main Street, the Baby Care Center is furnished with a nursing room with rocking chairs and toddler-size toilets. Disposable diapers, formula, baby food, and pacifiers are sold at a premium (Bring your own or pay the price). There are changing tables here as well as in all women’s restrooms and some men’s.

Cameras & Film Film and Kodak disposable cameras are available throughout the park, but digital camera equipment is in far shorter supply.

First Aid It’s located beside the Crystal Palace next to the Baby Care Center and staffed by registered nurses.

Lockers Lockers are located in the arcade below the Main Street Railroad Station. The cost is \$7, including a \$2 refundable deposit.

Lost Children Lost children in the Magic Kingdom are usually taken to City Hall or the Baby Care Center. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Package Pickup Any package can be sent by a shop clerk to Guest Relations in the Entrance Plaza; allow at least three hours for delivery. If you’re staying overnight at a Disney resort, you can also have all packages purchased by 7pm sent to your hotel room (they will be delivered by noon the next day).

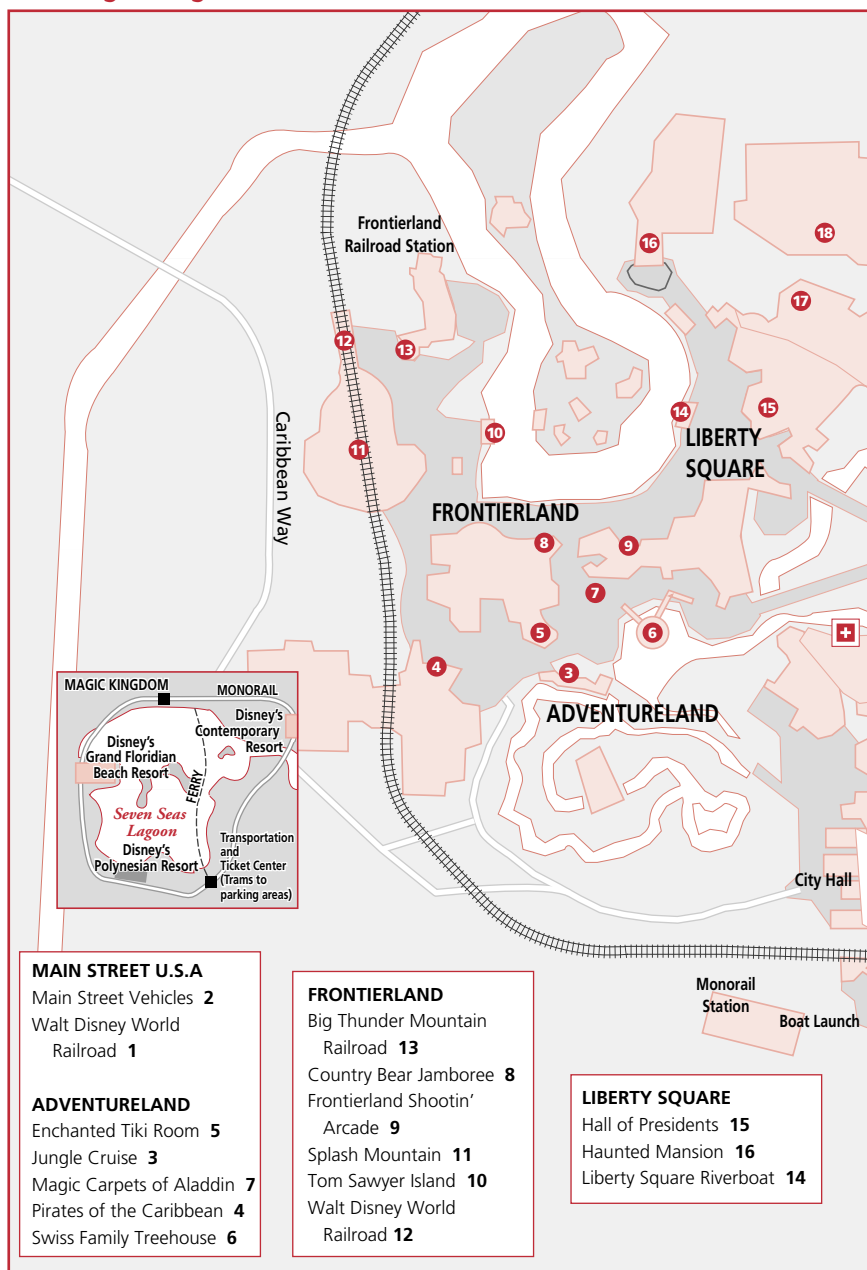
Frommer's Rates the Rides

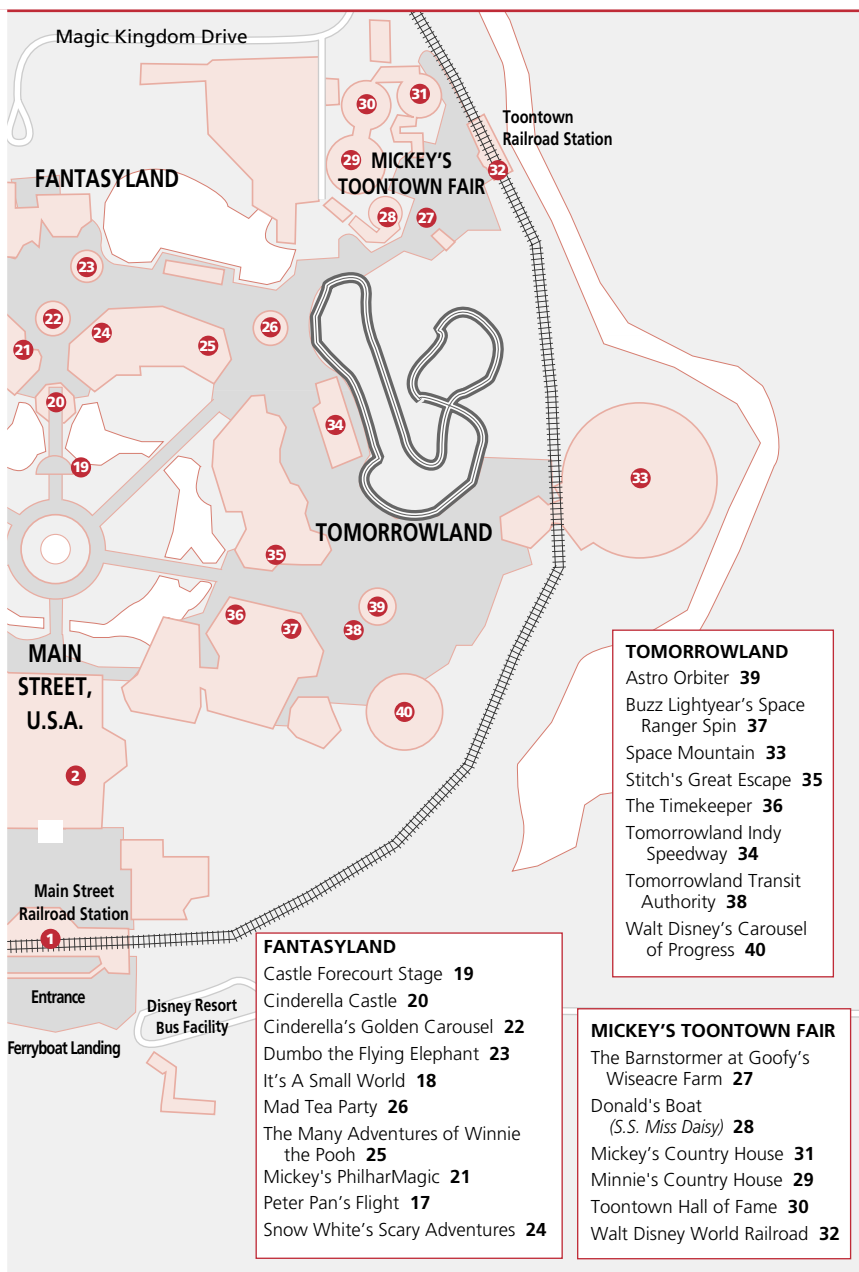
Because there’s so much to do, I’m shifting from the star-rating system used for rooms and restaurants to one that has a bit more range. You’ll notice most of the grades below are As, Bs, and Cs. That’s because Disney designers have done a reasonably good job on the attractions front. But occasionally our ratings show Ds for Duds.

Here’s what **Frommer’s Ratings** mean:

- A+** = Your trip wouldn’t be complete without it.
- A** = Put it at the top of your “to-do” list.
- B+** = Make a real effort to see or do it.
- B** = It’s fun but not a “must see.”
- C+** = A nice diversion; see it if you have time.
- C** = Go if there’s no wait and you can walk right in.
- D** = Don’t bother.

The Magic Kingdom





Tips A Cut Above

The Harmony Barber Shop on Main Street, its entrance marked by signature candy-striped poles, is a real working barber shop. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm, and gives hundreds of haircuts each week. If your child gets his or her first cut here, Disney throws in several extras—bubbles, stickers, and a special set of mouse ears—to mark the occasion. Kids 12 and under can get a cut for about \$14; cuts for adults cost around \$17. To jazz up the experience, kids and adults can add some color to their coif (thanks to a special colored hair gel) for just \$5.

Pet Care Day boarding is available at the Transportation and Ticket Center for \$6 (☎ 407/824-6568). The center also boards animals overnight (\$9 for hotel guests, \$11 for others). Proof of vaccination is required.

Strollers They can be rented at the Stroller Shop near the entrance to the Magic Kingdom. The cost is \$8 for a single and \$15 for a double, including a \$1 deposit.

Wheelchair Rental For wheelchairs, go to the gift shop to the left of the ticket booths at the Transportation and Ticket Center, or to the Stroller and Wheelchair Shop inside the main entrance to your right. The cost is \$8, including a \$1 deposit; \$40, including a \$10 deposit, for electric convenience vehicles.

MAIN STREET, U.S.A.

Designed to model a turn-of-the-20th-century American street (though it ends in a 13th-century European castle), this is the gateway to the Kingdom. Don't dawdle on Main Street (it's filled mostly with shops and restaurants) when you enter; leave it for the end of the day when you're heading back to your hotel.

Main Street Vehicles

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: Mainly nostalgic adults or toddlers

Ride a horse-drawn trolley, jitney, vintage fire engine, or horseless carriage *only* if you don't mind waiting around for a bit. While a nice little diversion, there are far more interesting things to see and do throughout the realm.

Walt Disney World Railroad

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: All ages

Climb aboard an authentic 1928 steam-powered train for a relaxing, 15-minute tour of the perimeter of the park. This is a great way to entertain the younger kids in your family while the older ones are off taking in some of Disney's more thrilling attractions. It's also a good way for kids and adults alike to rest for a brief moment while taking in the surrounding sights. There are a total of three stations: at the park entrance, at Frontierland, and at Mickey's Toontown Fair.

And while you're cruising down Main Street, be on the lookout for **The Dapper Dans**, a lively barbershop quartet that harmonizes its way up and down the boulevard.

SHOPPING ON MAIN STREET

Shopping at Disney has almost become a pastime in and of itself, and the largest collection of shops in the Kingdom is located right along Main Street U.S.A. If you find you've forgotten something or just need a present for the neighbor who's taking care

of your plants, you'll likely be able to find it here. The **Emporium**, in Town Square, has the park's largest selection of Disneyana, with everything from T-shirts and toys to picture frames and cookie jars. Stop by and pick up some of the more unique sweets and treats at the **Main Street Confectionary** or some shiny baubles at **Uptown Jewelers**. Many of the street's stores are interconnected, pretty much allowing you to shop from one end of Main Street to the other without ever having to walk outside.

ADVENTURELAND

Cross a bridge marked by Tikis and torches as the rhythm of beating drums sound in the distance. As you make your way through lush jungle foliage, trees hung with Spanish moss, dense vines, and stands of palm and bamboo, you are transported to an exotic locale where swashbuckling adventures await.

The Enchanted Tiki Room—Under New Management

Frommer's Rating: B for kids

Recommended Ages: 2–10 and older adults

The large, hexagonal Tiki Room serves up a Polynesian atmosphere, with its thatched roof, bamboo beams, tapa-bark murals, and torches. Inside guests are entertained by the likes of Iago (from *Aladdin*) and Zazu (from *The Lion King*) as well as an ensemble of boisterous tropical birds (over 200 of them in fact), along with chanting totem poles and singing flowers that whistle, warble, and tweet. Overall, it's good family fun, but be aware that it's rather loud, and a brief simulated tropical storm, with crackling thunder and flashes of lightning, combined with the multitude of audio and visual effects may be a bit too overwhelming for very young children.

Jungle Cruise

Frommer's Rating: C+ (B for the foot-weary)

Recommended Ages: 4–adult

This 10-minute ride's slower pace is a yawner for many older kids and teens, but it's a nice break from the madness if the line isn't long or you use FASTPASS. You'll sail through the African veldt in the Congo, an Amazon rainforest, and along the Nile in Egypt as your boat captain offers somewhat corny but humorous commentary on your travels. You'll encounter dozens of exotic animatronic animals, ranging from playful elephants to lions and tigers, as you sail through dense tropical and subtropical foliage (most of it is real). You'll pass a Cambodian temple guarded by snakes, a rhino chasing terrified African beaters as they clamor up a totem pole for safety and a jungle camp taken over by apes. While you're waiting to board, read the prop menu. It includes fricassee of giant stag beetle and barbecued three-toed skink.

Magic Carpets of Aladdin

Frommer's Rating: A for tykes and parents

Recommended Ages: 2–8

Younger kids will appreciate this ride's gentle ups and downs as they fly through the sky on the colorful magic carpets. The view of Agrabah from above is impressive, but be prepared as you make your way around the genie's giant bottle—the spitting camels have pretty good aim, making it likely that you'll get squirted with water (similar to One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish at Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure, see p. 273). There are only 16 four-passenger fiberglass carpets on the ride, which can make for extremely long lines (though not nearly as unbearable as some you'll encounter in Fantasyland).

Tips A (Baker's) Dozen Suggestions for Fewer Headaches

1. **Be A Leader not a Follower:** Try going against the grain and head left towards Adventureland to begin your day (most visitors sprint for Tomorrowland). If you have the time and aren't a slave to the compressed itinerary of a 1-day visit, make your way to one (maybe two) major attractions early on, then save the others for early on your second day, when crowds are lightest. Pick up a FASTPASS when and wherever you can. And try and make mealtimes a bit earlier or later than usual—11am or 2pm for lunch and 4 or 7pm for dinner. Even a few minutes can make all the difference in the restaurant lines.
2. **Note Your Car's Location:** That big red Hummer in the next space may not be there when you get out. Write your lot and row number on something with ink that won't run if it gets wet.
3. **Avoid The Rush:** I-4 can get horribly crowded at times, so be ready for bumper-to-bumper traffic from 7 to 9am, 4 to 7pm, and often in between. Check your map for secondary roads and alternate routes, and try to leave the parks a half hour before closing, when crowds disperse in droves.
4. **Be Realistic:** You aren't going to be able to do everything in every park (believe me, I've tried). As a group, list three or four "must-do" things each day. If you can, consider splitting up, with each adult taking one or more kids—one heading for the thrill rides, the other for the tamer, tot-friendly attractions. If time allows, you can always backtrack later, and this way no one really misses out on the fun.
5. **Timing is Everything:** I often laugh when I see people racing to make a tram, and then gunning for the turnstiles. Relax—the park isn't going anywhere. And rushing just to wait in line seems rather silly, doesn't it? Once inside the park, mix it up a bit; stagger the attraction lines with indoor shows or even breaks on a shady bench.
6. **Call Ahead:** If a sit-down dinner in a special restaurant is important to you, make sure to make Priority Seating reservations (☎ 407/939-3463) before your visit.
7. **Set a Spending Limit:** Kids should know they have a set amount to spend on take-home trinkets (if they do, they generally spend more wisely). You should, too. Sticking to your budget will be beneficial in

Pirates of the Caribbean

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

The recent release of the Oscar-nominated film revitalized the popularity of this oldie but goodie (alas, no Johnny Depp here, though your kids will have fun spotting the scenes appropriated by the movie). After making your way through dark and dank dungeons, guests board a boat and set sail for a small Caribbean town, its shores teeming with pillaging animatronic pirates who carouse, chase wenches, and wreak general

the end, but building in a small contingency “fun” fund for emergencies is still a good idea.

8. **Take a Break:** If you’re staying at a WDW property, spend the mid-afternoon napping (don’t laugh, you may need one) or unwinding in the pool. Return to the parks for a few more attractions and the closing shows. (Get your hand stamped when you leave, and you’ll be readmitted without charge.)
9. **Dress Comfortably:** This may seem like common sense, but judging by the limping, blistered crowds trudging the parks, most people don’t understand the immeasurable amount of walking they’ll be doing. Wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes or sneakers (you know, the ones that won’t give you blisters just because you put them on) and skip the sandals and mules that can fall off or cause you to trip.
10. **Don’t Skimp on the Sunscreen:** The Florida sun can be relentless, even in the shade, under the clouds, or in the cooler months. A bad first-day burn can ruin your trip, not to mention your skin. Dress appropriately—wear lightweight, light-colored clothing, and bring along hats (especially for toddlers and infants, even if they’ll be in a stroller). If you must show off your skin, slather it in sunscreen (with at least a 30 SPF). This is especially important for children. Make sure that you and your kids drink plenty of water in summer to avoid dehydration. Bringing a pair of sunglasses is a smart move, too.
11. **Travel Light:** Don’t carry large amounts of cash. The Pirates of the Caribbean aren’t the only thieves in WDW. There are ATMs in the parks and most resorts if you run short.
12. **Get a Little Goofy:** Relax, put on those mouse ears, eat that extra piece of fudge, and sing along at the shows. Don’t worry about what the staff thinks; they’ve seen it all (and they’re dressed pretty goofy, too).
13. **Take Measure of your Kids:** This guide, park maps, and information boards outside the more adventurous rides list minimum heights. If you know the restrictions early, you can avoid disappointment in the parks. Trust us—WDW won’t budge because of sad faces or temper tantrums when your safety is involved.

havoc. There’s plenty of gunfire and cannonballs flying through the air as the marauders battle each other, with you, of course, caught up in the middle. The effects are great, as is the yo-ho-ho music of “A Pirate’s Life for Me” that plays in the background (you won’t be able to stop yourself from humming along). The bonus here is an immense covered queue area that will protect you and your stroller-bound children from both sun and rain (this ride offers the only covered stroller parking in the park). **Tip:** Nod hello to the parrot (Peglegged Pete) above the entrance plaza and he may offer you his own greeting.

Swiss Family Treehouse

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 4–12

This attraction, based on the 1960 Disney movie version of *Swiss Family Robinson*, includes a few more comforts from home than did the original. After climbing its many, many steps, you'll finally reach the tree house, its rooms filled with mahogany furnishings, decorative accents, and running water. If you're nervous about heights, this one's not for you—visitors will find themselves walking along a rope-suspended bridge high above the ground, not to mention the climbing that's required to make it up and down all the stairs that lead around this 50-foot banyan tree. The "tree," designed by Disney Imagineers, has 330,000 polyethylene leaves sprouting from a 90-foot span of branches; although it isn't real, it's draped with actual Spanish moss. It's a good place for kids to work off some excess energy, though things can get crowded up there. **Note:** People with limited mobility beware—this attraction requires a lot of climbing.

SHOPPING IN ADVENTURELAND

Located at the Pirates of the Caribbean exit, **House of Treasure** is filled with everything a child needs to play pirate, from hats to hooks and everything in between. There are also muskets, toy swords, and loads of other pirate booty, as well as a small selection of island wear and costume jewels.

FRONTIERLAND

From Adventureland you'll step into the wild and woolly past of the American frontier, where the sidewalks are wooden; rough-and-tumble architecture runs to log cabins and rustic saloons; and the landscape is Southwestern scrubby with mesquite, cactus, yucca, and prickly pear.

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

This roller coaster earns high marks for what it is—a ride designed for those not quite up to the lunch-losing thrills of Rock 'n' Roller Coaster at Disney-MGM Studios (p. 233). Think of Big Thunder as *Roller Coasters 101*. (Survive and graduate to the

Tips Riding the Rails

Although it's an oldie, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad is still a magnet to the masses. If a FASTPASS isn't available (and that can happen), try riding it late in the day (coaster veterans swear the ride is even better after dark) or during one of the parades that draw visitors away from the attractions.

next level.) It sports fun hairpin turns and dark descents rather than sudden, steep drops and near collisions. Your runaway train covers 2,780 feet of track and careens through the ribs of a dinosaur, under a thundering waterfall, past spewing geysers, and over a bottomless volcanic pool. Animatronic characters (such as a long john-clad fellow in a bathtub) and critters (goats, chickens, donkeys) enhance the scenic backdrop, along with several hundred thousand dollars' worth of authentic antique mining equipment. **Note:** You

must be at least 40 inches tall to ride, and Disney discourages expectant mothers and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems from riding.

Country Bear Jamboree *(Finds)*

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 3–adult, though the younger the better

This is a foot-stomping hoot! It opened as one of the park's original attractions way back when in 1971, a time when entertainment was more low-tech but fun just the same. The 15-minute show stars a backwoods troupe of fiddlin', strummin', harmonica-playin' bears (all audio-animatronic, of course) belting out lively tunes and woeful love songs. The chubby Trixie, decked out in a satiny skirt, laments lost love as she sings "Tears Will Be the Chaser for Your Wine." Teddi Barra descends from the ceiling in a swing to perform "Heart, We Did All That We Could." Big Al moans "Blood in the Saddle." In the finale, the cast joins in a rousing sing-along. **Blue-light bonus:** The jamboree is a great summertime place to cool your heels in the A/C.

Frontierland Shootin' Arcade

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Combining state-of-the-art electronics with a traditional shooting-gallery format, this arcade presents an array of targets (slow-moving ore cars, buzzards, and gravediggers) in an 1850s boomtown scenario. Fog creeps across the graveyard, and the setting changes as a calm, starlit night turns stormy with flashes of lightning and claps of thunder. Coyotes howl, bridges creak, and skeletal arms reach out from the grave. If you hit a tombstone, it might spin around and mysteriously change its epitaph. To keep things authentic, newfangled electronic firing mechanisms loaded with infrared bullets are concealed in vintage buffalo rifles. Fifty cents buys you 25 shots. Though it's a pretty cool arcade, there are far better ways to spend your time in Magic Kingdom.

Splash Mountain

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

If you need a quick cooling off, this is the place to go—because you will get wet (soaked, is more like it)! Based on Disney's 1946 film *Song of the South*, Splash Mountain takes you flume-style down a flooded mountain, past 26 colorful scenes that include backwoods swamps, bayous, spooky caves, and waterfalls. Riders are caught in the bumbling schemes of Brer Fox and Brer Bear as they chase the ever-wily Brer Rabbit, who, against the advice of Mr. Bluebird, leaves his briar-patch home in search of fortune and the "laughing place." The music from the film forms a delightful audio backdrop. Your hollow-log vehicle twists, turns, and splashes, sometimes plummeting in darkness as the ride leads to a 52-foot, 45-degree, 40-mph splashdown in a briar-filled pond (you'll feel the drop!). And that's not the end. The ride keeps going until it's a Zip-A-Dee-Do-Dah kind of day. **Note:** You must be at least 40 inches tall to ride. Also, expectant mothers and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't climb aboard.

Tom Sawyer Island

Frommer's Rating: C for most, B+ for energetic kids who need a release **Recommended Ages:** 4–12

Huck Finn's raft will take you on a two-minute journey across the River of America to the densely forested Tom Sawyer Island, where kids can explore the narrow passages of Injun Joe's cave (complete with such scary sound effects as whistling wind), a walk-through windmill, a serpentine abandoned mine, and Fort Longhorn. The island's

Tips Parental Touring Tip

Many of the attractions at Walt Disney World offer a **Parent Switch program**, designed for parents traveling with small children. While one parent rides an attraction, the other stays with the kids not quite ready to handle the experience; then the adults switch places without having to stand in line again. The bonus (beyond the obvious) is that the kids able to ride the attraction will get to ride again, too. Notify a cast member if you wish to participate when you get in line. Most other Orlando theme parks offer this option, too.

two bridges—one a suspension bridge, the other made of barrels floating on top of the water—create quite a challenge for anyone trying to cross. Maintaining your balance is difficult at best if (or should I say when) the other guests are jumping up and down—but that’s half the fun. Narrow, winding dirt paths lined with oaks, pines, and sycamores create an authentic backwoods atmosphere. It’s easy to get briefly lost and stumble upon some unexpected adventure, but for younger children, the woods and caves can pose a real problem—toddlers who can’t easily find their way back to you or who may get scared by darkness and eerie noises should be watched very carefully. Aunt Polly’s Dockside Inn, which serves up sandwiches and such, and has outdoor tables on a porch overlooking the river is the perfect spot for a relaxing lunch after all that running around; as a bonus, it’s generally not as crowded as eateries on the mainland.

SHOPPING IN FRONTIERLAND

Mosey into the **Frontier Trading Post** for the latest and greatest in cowboy wear. **Big Al’s** is filled with Disney doo-dads, clothing, and candy. The **Prairie Outpost and Supply** is your best bet for sweets and treats.

LIBERTY SQUARE

Unlike the other lands in Magic Kingdom, Liberty Square doesn’t have clearly delineated boundaries. Pass through Frontierland into this small area, and you’ll suddenly find yourself in the middle of Colonial America. Before you can say “George Washington,” you’ll be standing in front of the Liberty Tree, an immense live oak decorated with thirteen lanterns symbolizing the first thirteen colonies. The entire area has an 18th-century, early American feel, complete with Federal and Georgian architecture, quaint shops, and flowerbeds bordering manicured lawns. You may even encounter a fife-and-drum corps marching along the cobblestone streets. The **Liberty Tree Tavern** (p. 141) is one of the better Magic Kingdom restaurants and offers a popular character meal.

Hall of Presidents

Frommer’s Rating: B+ for school age kids and adults

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

American presidents from George Washington to George W. Bush (who made his debut in the fall of 2001) are represented by lifelike audio-animatronic figures (arguably, the best in WDW). If you look closely, you’ll see them fidget and whisper during the performance. The show begins with a film projected on a 180-degree, 70mm screen. It talks about the importance of the Constitution, then the curtain rises on America’s leaders, and, as each comes into the spotlight, he nods or waves with

presidential dignity. Lincoln then rises and speaks, occasionally referring to his notes. In a tribute to Disney thoroughness, painstaking research was done in creating the figures and scenery, with each president's costume reflecting period fashion, fabrics, and tailoring techniques.

Haunted Mansion

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

What better way to show off Disney's eye for detailed special effects than through this ride, where "Grim Grinning Ghosts" come out to socialize—or so the ride's theme song goes. The queue here is one of the most amusing in the park as it winds through a graveyard filled with tombstones whose epitaphs are sure to make you chuckle. Upon entering you're greeted by a ghostly host, who encloses you in a windowless portrait gallery (Are those eyes following you?) where the floor seems to descend (actually, it's the ceiling that's rising) and the room goes dark (the only truly scary moment). Darkness, spooky music, eerie howling, and mysterious screams and rappings enhance its ambience. Your vehicle, err . . . Doom Buggy takes you past a ghostly banquet and ball, a graveyard band, a suit of armor that comes alive, cobweb-draped chandeliers, a ghostly talking head in a crystal ball, and more. Keep your eyes on the mirror you pass at the end of your ride, as you'll find another passenger in your buggy . . . Boo! The experience is more amusing than terrifying; most children 6 and older will be fine, but those younger (and even some of the older ones) may not be so amused.

Fun Fact It's a Dirty Job . . .

The Disney parks are usually fairly clean, but there's one notable spot in the Magic Kingdom that takes pride in its dreary image. In order to maintain the Haunted Mansion's weathered and worn appearance, employees spread large amounts of dust over the home's interior and also string up plenty of real-looking cobwebs. It takes a lot of effort to keep the place looking bedraggled, which may explain why your haunted hosts are only a handful of Disney cast members without smiles plastered on their faces.

Liberty Square Riverboat

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: all ages

The *Liberty Belle*, a grand steam-powered riverboat, offers lazy 17-minute cruises along the Rivers of America, allowing thrill-ride-weary passengers the chance to rest and relax. As you pass along the shores of Frontierland, the Indian camp, wildlife, and wilderness cabin will make it seem as if you're traveling through the wild and wooly West.

SHOPPING IN LIBERTY SQUARE

The **Heritage House** is filled with replicas of famous documents, including the Declaration of Independence; miniature models of the Statue of Liberty; and everything Americana, from souvenir spoons and campaign buttons to flags and red-white-and-blue T-shirts. **Ye Olde Christmas Shoppe**, filled with decorations and Disney ornaments galore, celebrates Christmas every day of the year.

FANTASYLAND

The most fanciful land in the park, Fantasyland features attractions that bring classic Disney characters to life. It is by far the most popular land in the park for young children, who can sail over Merry Ole' London and Never Never Land, ride in a honey pot through the Hundred-Acre Wood, and fly with Dumbo. If your kids are under 8, you'll find yourself spending a lot of your time here (and at Mickey's Toontown Fair, detailed later in this section).

Cinderella Castle

Frommer's Rating: A (for visuals)

Recommended Ages: All ages

There's actually not a lot to do here, but it's the Magic Kingdom's most widely recognized symbol, and I guarantee that you won't be able to pass it by without a look. It's not as if you could miss it anyway. The fairytale castle looms over Main Street U.S.A., its 189-foot-high Gothic spires taking center stage from the minute you enter the park. From mid-2005 through most of 2006, the castle will sport a new look in honor of Disneyland's fiftieth-anniversary celebration. Gold accents, rose swags, pixie dust, and gilded statues of classic Disney characters (from Alice in Wonderland's White Rabbit to Peter Pan's Tinker Bell) will decorate its spires and turrets.

One of the most popular restaurants in the park is set inside the castle, **Cinderella's Royal Table** (p. 140), along with a shop or two. Mosaic murals depict the Cinderella story, and Disney family coats of arms are displayed over a fireplace. An actress portraying Cinderella, dressed for the ball, often makes appearances in the lobby. The Castle Forecourt Stage features live shows daily so be sure to check the daily Times Guide's schedule for **Cinderella's Surprise Celebration** and **Cinderellabration**. The latter, a new show imported from Tokyo Disneyland, continues the story of Cinderella with her coronation and stars Cinderella, the Fairy Godmother, and several other members of the royal court.

Cinderella's Golden Carousel

Frommer's Rating: B+ for younger kids, A for carousel fans

Recommended Ages: All ages

One of the most beautiful attractions at Disney, the Golden Carousel is as enchanting to look at as it is to ride. Originally built by the Philadelphia Toboggan Co. in 1917, the carousel toured many an amusement park in the Midwest long before Walt Disney bought it and brought it to Orlando 5 years before the Magic Kingdom opened. Disney artisans meticulously refurbished it, adding 18 hand-painted scenes from Cinderella on a wooden canopy above the horses. Its organ plays Disney classics such as "When You Wish Upon a Star." Adults and children alike adore riding the ornate horses round and round; there are even a few benches for the littlest tykes in the family. The ride is longer than you might expect, but the lines can get lengthy as well, so check back a bit later if your timing is off the first time around.

Dumbo the Flying Elephant

Frommer's Rating: B+ for younger kids and parents

Recommended Ages: 2–6

This is a favorite of the preschool set, a fact that will quickly become apparent when you see the line wrapping around, and around, and around. Much like Magic Carpets of Aladdin (p. 193), the Dumbo vehicles fly around in a circle, gently rising and dipping as you control them from inside the elephant. If you can stand the brutal lines—

you'll have to wait out in the blazing sun—this ride is almost sure to make your little one's day.

It's a Small World

Frommer's Rating: B+ for youngsters and first-timers

Recommended Ages: 2–8

Recently refurbished to spruce up some of its older displays, It's a Small World is one of those rides that you just have to do because it's been there since the beginning—it's a classic (built for the 1964 World's Fair before being transplanted to Disney), and in this day and age it's nice to see that some things don't change (or at least not too much). Besides, it's a big favorite of younger kids. And as much as some adults pooh-pooh it, I'd take bets they come out smiling and singing right along with their kids. If you don't know the song, you will by the end of the ride (and probably ever after), as the hard part is trying to get it *out* of your head. As you sail along you'll pass through the countries of the world, each filled with appropriately costumed audio-animatronic dolls greeting you by singing "It's a Small World" in tiny Munchkin voices. The cast of thousands includes Chinese acrobats, Russian kazatski dancers, Indian snake charmers, French cancan girls, and, well, you get the picture. To truly experience everything Disney, this one's a must.

Mad Tea Party

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: 4–adult

Traditional amusement park ride it may be, but it's still a family favorite—maybe because it is so simple. The mad tea party scene in Alice in Wonderland was the inspiration for this one, and riders sit in giant pastel-colored teacups set on saucers that careen around a circular platform while the cup, saucer, and platform all spin round and round. Occasionally, the woozy Dormouse mouse pops out of a big central teapot to see just what's going on. Tame as it may appear, this can be a pretty active, even nauseating ride, depending on how much you spin your teacup's wheel. Adolescents seem to consider it a badge of honor if they can turn the unsuspecting adults in their cup green—you have been warned!

The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 2–8 and their parents

When this replaced Mr. Toad's Wild Ride in 1999, it drew a small storm of protest from Toad lovers, but things have quieted since then. This fun ride features the cute and cuddly little fellow along with Eeyore, Piglet, and Tigger. You board a golden honey pot and ride through a storybook version of the Hundred-Acre Wood, keeping

Fun Fact Behind the Scenes

You'll never catch a glimpse of, say, Mickey relaxing with his head off, or Pluto taking a candy bar break—that would ruin the entire illusion (and this is a world built on fantasy). The people inside the characters, and other cast members, take breaks as well as travel around the park through an intricate system of underground tunnels that are off-limits to the public, unless you pay a premium for a behind-the-scenes tour that I tell you about on p. 213.

an eye out for Heffalumps, Woozles, Blustery Days, and the Floody Place. Young kids absolutely love it, but be prepared to brave some *very* long lines if you don't use FASTPASS.

Mickey's PhilharMagic

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: All ages

This late 2003 arrival is by far the most amazing 3-D movie production I've ever laid eyes on and is a must-see for everyone. Popular Disney characters—including Ariel, Simba, and Aladdin—are brought to 3-D life on a 150-foot screen (the largest wrap-around screen on the planet) as they try to help (or in some cases hinder) the attempts of Donald Duck to retrieve Mickey's magical sorcerer's hat before the Mouse discovers it's missing. It's the first time the classic Disney characters have ever been rendered in 3-D. Even if you're not a big fan of shows, this is one you should see. Like (but far better than) the whimsical **Jim Henson's Muppet*Vision 3-D** (p. 232) at Disney-MGM Studios, the show combines music, animated film, puppetry, and special effects that tickle several of your senses. The kids will love the animation and effects and parents will enjoy the nostalgia factor.

Peter Pan's Flight

Frommer's Rating: A for kids and parents

Recommended Ages: 3–8

Another of Disney's simple pleasures, this is a classic ride that's fun for the whole family. You'll fly through the sky in your very own ship (much like that of Captain Hook's), gliding over familiar scenes from the adventures of Peter Pan. Your adventure begins in the Darlings' nursery and includes a flight over an elaborate nighttime cityscape of Merry Ole' London, before you move on to Never Land. There, you encounter mermaids, Indians, Tick Tock the Croc, the Lost Boys, Princess Tiger Lilly, Tinker Bell, Hook, and Smee, all while listening to the theme, "You Can Fly, You Can Fly, You Can Fly." It's *very* tame fun for the young and young at heart.

Snow White's Scary Adventures

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 4–8

While Disney has changed the ride a bit since its first debuted, attempting to make it less scary for the small children that it was intended for, it still features the wicked witch rather predominantly (though Snow White appears far more often than before). Many of the scenes are now more pleasant, including such happier moments from the movie as the scenes at the wishing well and Snow White riding away with the prince to live happily ever after. There are new audio-animatronic dwarfs, and the colors have been brightened and made less menacing. Even so, this ride still has plenty of scary moments if your child is under 5 (and those much older likely won't even want to ride), so if the lines are long think about passing this one up.

SHOPPING IN FANTASYLAND

Fantasy Faire is filled with plenty of items for your little prince or princess to play with, including costumes, swords, and much more. Little girls adore **Tinker Bell's Treasures**, its wares comprising Peter Pan merchandise, costumes (Tinker Bell, Snow White, Cinderella, Pocahontas, and others), and collector dolls. **Pooh's Thotful Shop** is filled with T-shirts and toys featuring those cuddly characters from the Hundred-Acre Wood for kids and adults alike.

Tips It Ain't Fair, But . . .

Disney rides sometimes break down or need routine maintenance that can take them out of commission for a few hours, a day, a week, or sometimes months. Test Track at Epcot, for example, occasionally experiences technical difficulties. And it's a Small World recently closed for a few months in 2004 for renovations.

Many, but not all, of the ride rehabs are listed on the Disney website (www.disneyworld.com). Deb's Unofficial Walt Disney World Information Guide site (www.allearsnet.com) lists most ride rehabs as well. The moral of the story: Err on the side of caution and don't make promises to kids about specific rides just in case something happens. Note that refurbishments and technical difficulties are unfortunate but part of the deal—neither Disney nor Universal will discount or refund any tickets when rehabs occur.

MICKEY'S TOONTOWN FAIR

Wondering where to find Mickey? Instead of walking about the park as he did many years ago, The Mouse now holds court in Toontown. The candy-striped **Judge's and Toontown Hall of Fame** tents inside this zone is where kids get a chance to meet many of their favorite Disney characters, including Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Goofy, and Pluto. The entire area (small as it may be) is filled with a whimsical collection of cartoonish attractions geared mostly to those under 6 (making it one of the more crowded spots in the park).

The Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm

Frommer's Rating: A for kids and parents

Recommended Ages: 4 and up

Designed to look and feel like a crop duster that flies slightly off course and right through the Goofmeister's barn, this mini-roller coaster is one of the more whimsically themed rides in the park. As coasters go, it offers very little in the dip-and-drop department, but there's plenty of zip on the spin-and-spiral front. It even gets squeals from some adults. The only ones likely to be disappointed are those who live for the thrills and spills of the bigger coasters. The Barnstormer is practically a twin of Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster (which it likely inspired) at Universal Studios Florida (p. 265). **Note:** The 60-second ride has a 35-inch height minimum and expectant mothers are warned not to ride it.

Donald's Boat (S.S. Miss Daisy)

Frommer's Rating: B+ for kids

Recommended Ages: 2–10

The good ship Miss Daisy offers plenty of interactive fun for kids who enjoy getting wet. Watch out as you make your way around the surrounding "waters" as the leaks squirting from the boat are practically unavoidable—but that's half the fun (you can tell by the little squeals of joy heard from those who've been doused). **Tip:** The nearby Toon Park (a 40-inch height *maximum*) is a small covered playground with slides and a small playhouse for dryer adventures. There are also a handful of covered benches for weary parents in need of a momentary break.

Mickey's & Minnie's Country Houses

Frommer's Rating: B for younger kids

Recommended Ages: 2–8

These separate cottages offer a lot of visual fun and a small bit of interactive play for youngsters, but they're usually crowded—the lines flow like molasses. Mickey's place is more for looking than touching, though it does feature a small garden and garage playground. Minnie's lets kids play in her kitchen, where popcorn goes wild in a microwave, a cake bakes and then deflates in the oven, and the utensils strike up a symphony of their own.

SHOPPING IN MICKEY'S TOONTOWN FAIR

The **Toontown Hall of Fame Tent** has continuous meetings with Disney characters as well as a large assortment of Disney souvenirs.

TOMORROWLAND

This land was originally designed to focus on the future, but in 1994, the WDW folks decided Tomorrowland (originally designed in the 1970s) was beginning to look a lot like “Yesteryear.” So it was revamped to show the future as envisioned in the '20s and '30s—a galactic, science fiction–inspired community inhabited by humans, aliens, and robots. A video-game arcade also was added.

Value Extra Magic—Extra Time

The free **Extra Magic Hour** program allows Disney resort guests (as well as those staying at the WDW Swan, the WDW Dolphin, and the Hilton at the Walt Disney World Resort) some extra playtime in the parks. Under the program, a select number of attractions, shops, and restaurants at one of the four major Disney parks open an hour early on scheduled mornings and those at another park remain open up to 3 hours after official closing on scheduled evenings. And because only resort guests can participate in the Extra Magic Hour, crowds are almost nonexistent, and lines are much shorter—not to mention that the temperatures are usually a lot more agreeable early in the morning and later in the evening.

To enter a park for the morning Extra Magic Hour, you must present your Disney resort room key and park ticket. For the evening Extra Magic Hour, your room key, park ticket, and a special wristband (for every member in your group) are required. You can obtain the wristband at the park scheduled to remain open that evening, but no earlier than 1 hour prior to park closing.

Warning: If you hold a ticket with a Park Hopper add-on (see p. 177, for information on Disney ticketing options), then you can attend any Extra Magic Hour at any park. But, if you hold a base ticket with no park-hopping privileges, then you can only attend the Extra Magic Hour at the park where you're spending your day. So, if you have only a base ticket and go to the morning Magic Hour at Epcot and spend the day there, you cannot head over to Magic Kingdom's evening Magic Hour on the same day. Call ☎ 407/824-4321 or visit www.disneyworld.com for details.

Astro Orbiter

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 4–10

While touted as a tame ride much like the ones you might have ridden when you were a child and the carnivals came to town, it does offer a bit of unexpected uneasiness. Its “rockets” are on arms attached to “the center of the galaxy,” and move up and down while orbiting the planets, but they also tilt to the side—and when you're on top of two-story tower, looking down from your perch can make you rather anxious. Because of its limited capacity the line tends to move at a snail's pace, so unless it's short, skip this one.

Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin

Frommer's Rating: A+ for kids and parents

Recommended Ages: 3 and up

Recruits stand ready as Buzz Lightyear briefs you on your mission. The evil emperor Zurg is once again up to no good, and Buzz needs your to help save the Universe. As you cruise through “space,” you'll pass through scenes filled with brightly colored aliens, most of whom are marked with a big “Z,” so you know where to shoot. Kids love using the dashboard-mounted laser cannons as they spin through the sky (filled with gigantic toys instead of stars). If they're good shots, they can set off sight and sound gags with a direct hit from their lasers (my three-year-old, however, aims just about everywhere but at the target and still has loads of fun). A display in the car keeps score, so take multiple cars if you have more than one child. This ride uses the same technology as Universal Studios Florida's Men in Black Alien Attack (p. 263), but it's aimed at a younger audience, and therefore, it's far tamer.

Space Mountain

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This cosmic roller coaster usually has *long* lines (but it has FASTPASS), and most guests find only marginal entertainment value in the pre-ride space-age music and exhibits (meteorites, shooting stars, and space debris whizzing past overhead). Once aboard your rocket, you'll climb and dive through the inky, starlit blackness of outer space. The hairpin turns and plunges make it seem as if you're going at breakneck speed, but your car doesn't go any faster than 28 mph. As on many coasters, the front seat of the train offers the biggest chills and is the best place to maintain the illusion of flying through space. It's a bit outdated when compared to the newer rides out there but is a good coming-of-age test for future thrill-ride junkies; so if your kids are just starting out on the coasters, and don't mind a spin in the dark, this is a good place to begin. **Note:** Riders must be at least 44 inches tall. Also, expectant moms and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't climb aboard.

Stitch's Great Escape

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 5–10

In 2003, the scarier **ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter** was closed permanently to make way for this newer, (allegedly) more family-friendly attraction. Unfortunately, Disney missed the mark a bit on this one. Even though it features the mischievous experiment 626, otherwise known as Stitch—a favorite of many younger kids—the ride isn't really that child-friendly (at least not for the young set). It's not particularly

exciting, either. Upon entering the attraction, guests are briefed on their responsibilities as newly recruited alien prison guards. Suddenly an alarm sounds—a new prisoner is arriving and the pandemonium begins. Stitch, after appearing by teleportation, is

Tips Snacking in the Parks

For our money, you can't beat the smoked turkey drumsticks sold for just over \$5 in WDW parks (they're called "Galactic Gobblers" at The Lunching Pad in Tomorrowland). How popular are they? Each year, Disney guests gobble-gobble 1.6 million of them.

confined in the middle of the room, but only momentarily—the ride isn't called Stitch's Great Escape for nothing. Guests are seated around the center stage, overhead restraints on their shoulders (which are slightly uncomfortable unless you were sitting straight up when they are lowered) allowing them to "feel" special sensory effects. It's the attraction's long periods of darkness and silence that make this one inappropriate for younger children—a fact made apparent by some of the screams you'll

hear from the audience. **Note:** There's a 38-inch height requirement to experience the attraction, though this may change—it's already been adjusted once since the ride first debuted.

The Timekeeper

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

This Jules Verne/H. G. Wells–inspired multimedia show combines CircleVision and IMAX footage with audio-animatronics. It's hosted by a robot/mad scientist (Robin Williams) and his assistant, 9-EYE, a flying, camera-headed 'droid that moonlights as a time-machine test pilot. In this escapade, the audience hears Mozart as a young prodigy playing for French royalty, visits medieval battlefields in Scotland, watches da Vinci work, and floats in a hot-air balloon over Moscow's Red Square. Voices include Jeremy Irons and Rhea Perlman. **Note:** You have to stand during the show (forget resting your feet), which is only open seasonally.

Tomorrowland Indy Speedway

Frommer's Rating: B+ for kids, D for tweens, teens, and childless adults

Recommended Ages: 4–10

Younger kids love this ride, especially if they get the chance to drive one of the gas-powered, mini sports cars—though they may need the help of a parent's foot to push down on the gas pedal—for a 4-minute spin around the track. Tweens and teens, however, hate it: Speeds reach a mere 7 mph, which for most is *incredibly* slow, and the steering is atrocious (even I can't control the cars without bumping the rail that it follows). The slow speed seems to work well for young kids (who also think the bumping around is fun). The long lines move even slower than the ride does, so be prepared to wait this one out. There's a 52-inch height minimum to take a lap without an older rider along with you. **Note:** It carries Disney's warning that expectant mothers and people with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't climb aboard, likely because of the potential for getting bumped as you try to board or disembark.

Tomorrowland Transit Authority

Frommer's Rating: C, B+ for tired adults and toddlers

Recommended Ages: All ages

After making your way up a moving walkway, you'll spot the futuristic train cars that will take you on a tour of Tomorrowland from high above the ground. The engineless train runs on a track and is powered by electromagnets, creating no pollution, little noise, and using little power. Narrated by a computer guide named Horack I, TTA offers an overhead view of Tomorrowland, including a brief interior look at Space Mountain. Lines are often nonexistent as most riders are parents awaiting the return of their children from Space Mountain, or those with tired toddlers in need of a brief respite from the activity below.

Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress *Overrated*

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 5–10

Only open seasonally, when the crowds are at their peak, the Carousel of Progress offers more of a respite from the hustle and bustle of the crowds than it does an interesting experience. It first debuted at the 1964 World's Fair before Disney decided to include it in his collection. The ride immigrated from Disneyland to Disney World in 1975 and was refurbished to its original state just over 10 years ago. The entire show rotates through scenes illustrating the state of technology from the 1900s to the 1940s. Most adults find it rather boring, but kids willing to sit still for a few minutes may actually learn a thing or two.

SHOPPING IN TOMORROWLAND

Mickey's Star Traders is a large shop filled from top to bottom with Disneyana; it's probably the best place to shop in Magic Kingdom after Main Street.

PARADES, FIREWORKS & MORE

Pick up a guide map (or two) and a Times Guide (or three) when you enter the park. The information includes the day's **entertainment schedule**, listing all the special goings-on for the day. Included are concerts, encounters with characters, holiday events, parades, fireworks, restaurant hours, and the major happenings listed next.

Tip: There's also an all-parks guide that includes much of the same information and is well worth picking up, too.

Moments Where to Find Characters

Mickey's Toontown Fair was designed as a place where kids can meet and mingle with their favorite characters all day at the Judge's Tent and Toontown Hall of Fame Tent. Mickey, Minnie, and others can be found in residence. In **Fantasyland**, look for Ariel's Grotto and the Fantasyland Character Festival for daily greetings. **Main Street** (Town Square), **Adventureland** (at Pirates of the Caribbean and near Magic Carpets of Aladdin), **Frontierland** (Goofy's Country Dancin' Jamboree), and **Tomorrowland** (near the Space Ranger Spin) are other hot spots. Be sure to have your camera ready and waiting if you want to capture the moment before it's gone.

Tip: If you're willing to spend money to avoid waiting in a line, character meals at restaurants such as the **Crystal Palace**, **The Liberty Tree Tavern**, and **Cinderella's Royal Table** all offer the opportunity to meet your favorite characters. Just don't forget to arrange Priority Seating if you go the dining route.

Wishes

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Wishes, Disney's breathtaking 12-minute fireworks display, replaced the old **Fantasy in the Sky** fireworks in October 2003. The show, narrated by Jiminy Cricket and with background music from several Disney classics, is the story of a wish coming true, and it borrows one element from the old one—Tinker Bell still flies overhead. The fireworks go off nightly during summer and holidays and on selected nights (usually Mon and Wed–Sat) the rest of the year. See your entertainment schedule for details. Numerous good views of the action are available, so long as you're standing on the front side of the castle—get too far off to the side or behind the display, and it loses much of its impressive and meticulously choreographed visual effect. Disney hotels close to the park (Grand Floridian, Polynesian, Contemporary, and Wilderness Lodge) also offer excellent views.

SpectroMagic (Moments)

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: All ages

In April 2001, this after-dark display returned for a second engagement at WDW, replacing the **Main Street Electrical Parade**, a Disney classic that ran from 1976 to 1991, and again from 1996 to 2001 at the Magic Kingdom. *SpectroMagic is only held on a limited number of nights*. The 20-minute production combines fiber optics, holographic images, clouds of liquid nitrogen, old-fashioned twinkling lights, and a soundtrack featuring classic Disney tunes. Mickey, dressed in an amber and purple grand magician's cape, makes an appearance in a confetti of light. You'll also see the SpectroMen atop the title float, and Chernabog, *Fantasia's* monstrous demon, who unfolds his 38-foot wingspan. It takes the electrical equivalent of seven lightning bolts (enough to power a fleet of 2,000 over-the-road trucks) to bring the show to life. See your entertainment schedule for availability.

Share a Dream Come True Parade

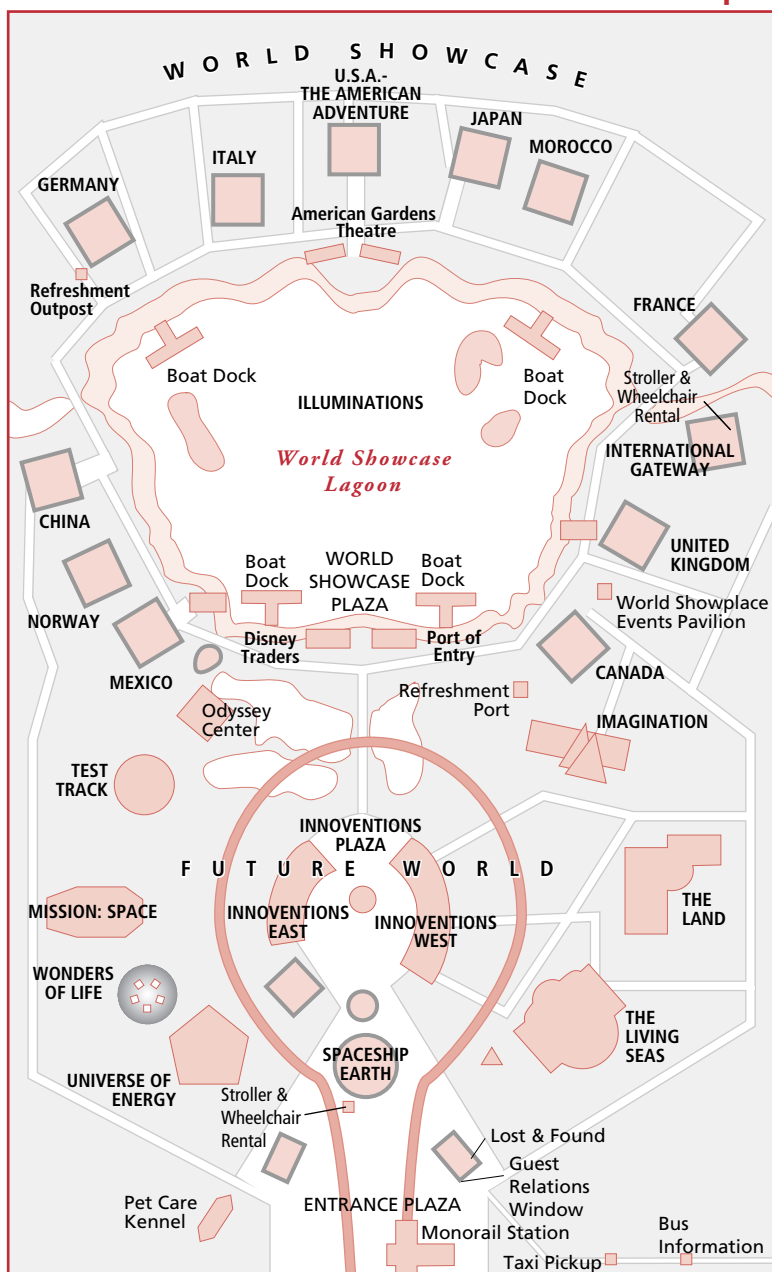
Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: All ages

Replacing Magical Moments, this is the Magic Kingdom's newest parade. Floats topped by gigantic snow globes with Disney characters inside them make their way through the park and up Main Street on a daily basis. Each globe features a different theme; the Wish Upon A Star float features Pinocchio, Snow White, and their pals; the Face the Darkest Fears float is filled with some of Disney's more sinister characters, including the evil queen, Maleficent, and Cruella De Vil.

4 Epcot

Epcot is an acronym for *Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow*, and it was Walt Disney's dream for a planned city. (For an idea of what he wanted, visit www.waltopia.com on the Internet.) Alas, after his death, it became a theme park—central Florida's second major one, which opened in 1982. Its aims are described in a dedication plaque: "May Epcot entertain, inform, and inspire. And, above all . . . instill a new sense of belief and pride in man's ability to shape a world that offers hope to people everywhere."



Ever growing and changing, Epcot occupies 300 vibrantly landscaped acres. If you can spare it, take a little time to stop and smell the roses on your way to and through the two major sections: **Future World** and **World Showcase**.

Epcot is so big that hiking the World Showcase end to end (1½ miles from the Canada pavilion on one side to Mexico on the other) can be an exhausting experience. That's why some folks are certain Epcot stands for "Every Person Comes Out Tired." Depending on how long you intend to linger at each country in World Showcase, this part of the park can be experienced in 1 day (though you can easily spend 2). Most visitors simply make a leisurely loop, working clockwise or counterclockwise from one side of the Showcase to the other.

Unlike Magic Kingdom, much of Epcot's parking lot is close to the gate. Parking sections are named for themes (Harvest, Energy, and so forth), and the aisles are numbered. While some guests are happy to walk to the gate from nearer areas, trams are available, but these days mainly to and from the outer areas.

Be sure to pick up a guide map and entertainment schedule as you enter the park. Folks with children can grab a copy of the *Epcot Kids' Guide*. (The regular guide uses a yellow K in a red square to note "Kidcot" stops.) These play and learning stations are for the younger set and allow them to stop at various World Showcase countries, do crafts, get autographs, have their Kidcot passports stamped (these are available for purchase in most Epcot stores and make a great souvenir), and chat with cast members native to those countries. They open at 1pm daily.

If you plan to eat lunch or dinner here and haven't already made Priority Seating reservations (☎ 407/939-3463), you can make them at the restaurants themselves. Many Epcot restaurants are described in chapter 6, "Where to Dine."

Before you get under way, check the Times Guide for show schedules and incorporate any shows you want to see into your itinerary.

HOURS Future World is usually open from 9 or 10am to 7pm but sometimes as late as midnight during major holidays and the summer. World Showcase doesn't open until 11am or noon, and it usually closes at 9pm but, like Future World, it sometimes has longer hours on holidays and in summer.

TICKET PRICES Ticket prices are \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9, free for children under 3. See "Tickets," earlier in this chapter, for the latest information on the new Magic Your Way ticketing system.

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN EPCOT

ATMs The machines here accept cards issued by banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems and are located at the front of the park, in Italy, and near the bridge between World Showcase and Future World.

Baby Care Epcot's Baby Care Center is by the First Aid station near the Odyssey Center in Future World. It's furnished with a nursing room with rocking chairs; disposable diapers, formula, baby food, and pacifiers are for sale. There are also changing tables in all women's restrooms as well as in some of the men's restrooms. Disposable diapers are also available at Guest Relations.

Cameras & Film Kodak disposable cameras are available throughout the park, including at the Kodak Camera Center at the Entrance Plaza, though digital supplies are very limited.

First Aid The First Aid Center, staffed by registered nurses, is located near the Odyssey Center in Future World.

Top 10 Orlando-Area Activities for Grown-Ups

1. **Spa Treatments** First-rate spas such as those at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, the Wyndham Palace Resort, Portofino Bay Hotel, and Gaylord Palms hotel provide heavenly pampering and relief for the sore muscles and tired feet caused by the parks (see chapters 1 and 5).
2. **World Showcase Pavilions** Experience a 'round-the-world journey, visiting 11 "nations" with authentically reproduced architectural highlights, restaurants, shops, and cultural performances (see later in this chapter).
3. **Cirque du Soleil** This no-animals circus (p. 321) is compelling for most anyone over the age of 6, but its intensity and choreography make it a real winner for adults.
4. **Pleasure Island and CityWalk** These entertainment and restaurant districts are located at WDW and Universal Orlando, respectively (see chapter 10). They provide nonstop fun for the wine-dine-and-dance set.
5. **A Romantic Dinner at Victoria & Albert's** Loving couples cherish the intimate evening and scrumptious seven-course dinner at the headline restaurant in Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa (p. 148).
6. **Discovery Cove** SeaWorld's sister park offers guests a chance to rest, relax, and swim with the dolphins in a remote island atmosphere. It's an expensive but ultimately satisfying retreat (see chapter 8).
7. **Richard Petty Driving Experience** *Vrrroooooommmmm!* If you're 18 or older and have the courage, try driving or at least riding in a real NASCAR rocket at speeds significantly above the legal limit (p. 251).
8. **The Grand 1** Take another break from the Mickey madness and cruise Disney's Seven Seas Lagoon (perhaps catching a glimpse of Wishes fireworks) aboard this vintage, 44-foot yacht (p. 95).
9. **Innoventions** Epcot is generally geared more to adults than the other WDW parks, and this display of future technologies is especially intriguing, providing a preview of life well into the 21st century (p. 214).
10. **Tee Time** Orlando is home to some of the country's best golf courses—Walt Disney World alone offers 99 holes, including one with a sand trap shaped like Mickey Mouse—so enthusiasts will find plenty of places to tee up (see "Hitting the Links" in chapter 8).

Lockers Attended lockers are to the west of Spaceship Earth as you enter the park; unattended lockers are located at the International Gateway. The cost is \$7 a day, including a \$2 deposit.

Lost Children Lost children in Epcot are usually taken to Earth Center or the Baby Care Center, where lost children logbooks are kept. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Package Pickup Any package you purchase can be sent by the shop clerk to Guest Relations in the Entrance Plaza. Allow at least 3 hours for delivery. There's also a package pickup location at the International Gateway entrance in the World Showcase. If

Moments Behind the Scenes: Special Tours in Walt Disney World

In addition to the greenhouse tour in Epcot's The Land pavilion (p. 215), the Disney parks offer a number of walking tours and learning programs. The tours are subject to change. These tours represent a sampling of the most recent ones available at press time. Times, days, and prices also change. It's best to call ahead to Disney's tour line, ☎ **407/939-8687**, to make reservations or get additional information. **Tip: Custom Guided Tours** (☎ **407/560-4033**) are available at \$125 per hour (\$95 per hour for WDW resort guests) with a 5-hour minimum.

- Epcot's **Aqua Seas Tour** lends you a wetsuit and then takes you on a 2½-hour journey that includes a 30-minute swim in the 5.7-million gallon Living Seas Aquarium, home to some 65 marine species. The tour includes a souvenir T-shirt and group photo. The cost is \$100, park admission is not required, and it's open to guests 8 and older (those under 16 must be accompanied by a participating adult). It's offered daily at 12:30pm.
- The **Family Magic Tour** explores the nooks and crannies of the Magic Kingdom in the form of a 2-hour scavenger hunt. You meet and greet characters at the end. Children (ages 3 and up) and adults are \$25 per person. You must also buy admission tickets to the park and book in advance. If you have young kids and want to do a special tour, this is the one to take. It begins daily at 11:30am outside City Hall. It's sometimes held at 9:30am, too.
- The 3-hour **Magic Behind Our Steam Trains** tour (ages 10 and up) is a fun one for locomotive buffs. A pair of veteran conductors gives you insight, which other guests don't get, into the history and present operations of the little engines that could. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 7:30am, \$40 per person, plus park admission.

The following tours are for those 16 and older:

- The 3½-hour **Hidden Treasures of World Showcase** explores the architectural and entertainment offerings of Epcot's 11 "nations." The \$59 tours (plus admission) are at 9:45am on Tuesday and Thursday.
- **Gardens of the World**, a 3-hour tour of the extraordinary landscaping at Epcot (with tips on improving your own), is held Tuesday and Thursday at

you're staying overnight at a Disney resort, you can also have all packages purchased by 7pm sent to your hotel room (they will be delivered by noon the next day).

Parking It's \$8 for cars, light trucks, and vans; \$9 for RVs.

Pet Care Day accommodations are offered at kennels just outside the Entrance Plaza at Epcot for \$6 (☎ **407/824-6568**). Proof of vaccination is required. This is the only kennel in WDW that features a dog walking service (\$2.50 per walk). There are also four other kennels in the WDW complex. (See "Fast Facts" in chapter 4 for more details.)

Strollers These can be rented from special stands on the east side of the Entrance Plaza and at World Showcase's International Gateway. The cost is \$8 for a single and

9:45am and is led by a Disney horticulturist (\$59 per person, again, plus admission).

- The 4½-hour **Keys to the Kingdom** tour provides an orientation to the Magic Kingdom and a glimpse into the high-tech systems behind the magic. It's \$58 (lunch is included, but mandatory park admission isn't) and is held daily at 8:30, 9:30, and 10am.
- At the top of the price chain (\$199 per person, including lunch) is **Backstage Magic**, a 7-hour, self-propelled bus tour through areas of Epcot, the Magic Kingdom, and Disney-MGM Studios that aren't seen by mainstream guests. The 10am tour (Mon–Fri only) is limited to 20 adults, and you might have trouble getting a date unless you book early. Some will find this one isn't worth the price, but if you have a brain that must know how things work or simply want to know more than your family or friends, you might find it's worth the cost. You'll see WDW mechanics and engineers repairing and building animatronic beings from "It's a Small World" and other attractions. You'll peek over the shoulders of cast members who watch close-circuit TVs to make sure other visitors are surviving the harrowing rides. And at the Magic Kingdom, you'll venture into the tunnels used for work areas as well as corridors for the cast to get from one area to the others without fighting tourist crowds. It's not unusual for tour takers to see Snow White enjoying a Snickers bar, find Cinderella having her locks touched up at an underground salon, or view woodworkers as they restore the hard maple muscles of the carousel horses. Park admission *isn't* required.
- **Backstage Safari** at Animal Kingdom (\$65 per person plus park admission) offers a 3-hour look at the park's veterinary hospital as well as lessons in conservation, animal nutrition, and medicine (Mon, Wed, Thurs, and Fri).
Note: You won't see many animals.
- **Yuletide Fantasy**, available November 30 to December 24 each year, gives visitors a front-row look at how Disney creates a winter wonderland to get visitors in the holiday spirit. It costs \$59 per person, and theme park admission *isn't* required.

\$15 for a double, including a \$1 refundable deposit. See p. 36 for tips on using a stroller at WDW.

Wheelchair Rental Rent wheelchairs inside the Entrance Plaza to your left, to the right of ticket booths at the Gift Shop, and at World Showcase's International Gateway. The cost for regular chairs is \$7, including a \$1 refundable deposit. Electric wheelchairs cost \$40 a day, including a \$10 refundable deposit.

FUTURE WORLD

Future World is in the northern section of Epcot, the first area mainstream guests see after entering the park. Its icon is a huge geosphere known as Spaceship Earth—aka,

that giant golf ball. Major corporations sponsor Future World's 10 themed areas (that means they're making pricey investments, such as the \$100 million that Hewlett Packard dropped on the Mission: Space ride you'll read about a little later in this chapter). The focus here is on discovery, scientific achievements, and tomorrow's technologies in areas running from energy to undersea exploration.

Here are the main attractions.

Imagination

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

In this pavilion, even the fountains are magical. “Water snakes” arc in the air, offering kids a chance to dare them to “bite.” This pavilion was upgraded in 2001 to include more high-tech gadgets, and a year later Figment, the pavilion's much-loved mascot, returned (see below).

The 3-D **Honey, I Shrunk the Audience** ride is the big attraction here, deserving an “A” rating by itself. Based on the Disney hit *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* film, you're terrorized by mice and, once you're shrunk, by a large cat; then you're given a good shaking by a gigantic 5-year-old. Vibrating seats and creepy tactile effects enhance dramatic 3-D action. Finally, everyone returns to proper size—except the family dog, which creates the final surprise.

Figment, the crazy-but-lovable dragon mascot of the park when it opened, was resurrected in a new **Journey into Your Imagination** ride in June 2002. Things begin with an open house at the Imagination Institute, with Dr. Nigel Channing taking you on a tour of labs that demonstrate how the five senses capture and control one's imagination, except you never get to touch and taste once Figment arrives to prove it's far, far better to set your imagination free. He invites you to his upside-down house, where a new perspective enhances your imagination. “One Little Spark,” an upbeat ditty that debuted when the attraction opened in 1983, has also been brought back.

Once you disembark from the ride, head for the “What If” labs, where your kids can burn lots of energy while exercising their imaginations at a number of interactive stations that allow them to conduct music, and experiment with video.

Innoventions East and West

Frommer's Rating: B+ for hungry minds and game junkies

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Innoventions East, behind Spaceship Earth and to the left as you enter the park, features the **House of Innoventions**. It's a preview of tomorrow's smart house, but many of its products are already on the market (at astronomical prices). Its refrigerator has an Internet-savvy computer that can make your grocery list and place the order. A smart picture frame can store and send photos to other smart frames. And its toilet has a seat warmer, automatic lid opener and closer, and a sprayer and blow dryer that eliminate the need for toilet paper if you're worldly. The **Internet Zone** profiles tomorrow's online games for kids, including laser tag with Disney characters. **Opportunity City** is the latest addition and features an online game, Hot Shot Business. Across the plaza at **Innoventions West**, crowds flock to **Video Games of Tomorrow**, which has nearly three-dozen game stations. **Where's the Fire**, geared to smaller kids, teaches the basics of fire safety and demonstrates how firefighters fight fires with the help of a pump truck.

Note: A new Underwriters Laboratories exhibit at Innoventions East, the **Test the Limits Lab**, has six kiosks that let kids and fun-loving adults try out a variety of

products. In one, you can pull a rope attached to a hammer that crashes into a TV screen to see if it's shatter resistant. In another, you can push a button that releases a magnet that falls onto a firefighter's helmet.

The Land

Frommer's Rating: B+ for environmentalists, gardeners; C+ for others

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

The largest of Future World's pavilions highlights food and nature.

Living with the Land is a 13-minute boat ride through three ecological environments (a rainforest, an African desert, and the windswept American plains), each populated by appropriate audio-animatronic denizens. New farming methods and experiments ranging from hydroponics to plants growing in simulated Martian soil are showcased in real gardens. If you'd like a more serious overview, take the 45-minute **Behind the Seeds** guided walking tour of the growing areas, offered daily. Sign up at the Green Thumb Emporium shop on the ground floor near the Sunshine Season Food Festival. The cost is \$8 for adults, \$6 for children 3 to 9. **Note:** It's really geared to children.

Circle of Life combines spectacular live-action footage with animation in a 15-minute motion picture based on *The Lion King*. In this cautionary environmental tale, Timon and Pumbaa are building a monument to the good life called Hakuna Matata Lakeside Village, but their project, as Simba points out, is damaging the savanna for other animals. The message: Everything is connected in the great circle of life.

Note: Longtime pavilion favorite **Food Rocks**, an entertaining audio-animatronic rock performance on nutrition closed in January 2004 to make way for an exceptional new attraction, **Soarin'**, a copy of a popular attraction at Disney's California Adventure theme park. Guests are seated in a giant projection-screen dome and then allowed to fly through the sky, 40 feet into the air, over the landscapes of California. This amazing adventure is enhanced by sensory effects as guests are treated to the sights, sounds . . . and smells (think orange blossoms and pine trees) of a dozen locations in California, including the Golden Gate Bridge, the redwood forests, Napa Valley, Yosemite, and more. You really will feel almost as if you're flying through the sky. The ride opened in spring 2005 and carries a 40-inch height minimum. For the best experience, try to get seated in the first row; if you're not sanguine about heights, the third row works best.

The Living Seas

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 3–adult

This pavilion contains a 5.7-million-gallon saltwater aquarium including coral reefs inhabited by some 4,000 sharks, barracudas, parrotfish, rays, dolphins, and other critters. While waiting in line, visitors pass exhibits tracing the history of undersea exploration, including a diving barrel used by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. and Sir Edmund Halley's first diving bell (1697).

A 2½-minute multimedia preshow about today's ocean technology is followed by a 7-minute film demonstrating the formation of the earth and seas as a means to support life.

After the films, you enter “hydrolators” for a hokey “descent” to the simulated ocean floor. Upon arrival, you can journey through rooms and more rooms for close-up views through acrylic windows of the denizens, including manatees and other marine life. Be sure to check out the adorable **Turtle Talk with Crush**, which debuted in late 2004. Crush (from *Finding Nemo*), chitchats with passersby from behind his undersea movie

screen, engaging them in conversation and telling a joke or two. This is a first-of-its-kind attraction using digital projection and voice-activated animation to create a real-time experience. Your kids will get a huge kick out of it; you will, too.

Note: The **Epcot DiveQuest** enables certified divers (ages 10–14 must have an adult accompany them) to participate in a 3-hour program that includes a 40-minute dive in the Living Seas aquarium. The program costs \$140. Call ☎ 407/939-8687 for more information. Keep in mind, however, that you get far more for your money at Discovery Cove (p. 289) if you want to swim with the dolphins.

Mission: Space

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This brand new, \$100 million attraction, developed in partnership with Hewlett Packard and NASA, seats up to four riders at a time in a simulated flight to the Red Planet. You'll assume the role of commander, pilot, navigator, or engineer, depending on where you sit, and must complete related jobs vital to the mission (don't worry if you miss your cue, you won't crash). The ride uses a combination of visuals, sound, and centrifugal force to create the illusion of a launch and trip to Mars. Even veteran roller-coaster riders who tried the simulator said the sensation mimics a liftoff, as riders are pressed into their seats and the roar and vibration tricks the brain during the launch portion of the 4-minute adventure. As a new ride, this one is likely to have incredibly long lines, so get here early or FASTPASS it. **Note:** Riders must be at least 44 inches tall. If you're claustrophobic, have a low tolerance for loud noises, or stuffy sinuses, then you should avoid the ride. If spinning causes you to get dizzy or motion sick, this isn't the ride for you either, though you can reduce the effects by focusing straight ahead. Speaking from experience, taller guests may have difficulties seeing the screen the way it was meant to be viewed—and shorter guests may have trouble reaching some of the gear.

Spaceship Earth *Overrated*

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: All ages

This massive, silvery geosphere symbolizes Epcot, and is probably the most recognizable Disney icon next to Cinderella's Castle (and those mouse ears, of course). That makes it a must-do for many, though it's something of a yawner—another slow-track

journey back in time to trace the progress of communications. Long lines can be avoided by saving it until late in the day when you might be able to just walk in. The 15-minute show/ride takes visitors to the distant past where an audio-animatronic Cro-Magnon shaman recounts the story of a hunt while others record it on cave walls. You advance thousands of years to ancient Egypt, where hieroglyphics adorn temple walls and writing is recorded on papyrus

Tips Stay Tuned

Local media scuttlebutt says Spaceship Earth will be shut down in 2005 so a new moving ride can be built in time for Epcot's 25th anniversary in 2007. At publication time, Disney wasn't commenting.

scrolls. You'll progress through the Phoenician and Greek alphabets, the Gutenberg printing press, and the Renaissance. Technologies develop at a rapid pace, through the telegraph, telephone, radio, movies, and TV. It's but a short step to the age of

Moments Water Fountain Conversations

Many an ordinary item at Disney World has hidden entertainment value. Take a drink at the water fountain in Innoventions Plaza (the one right next to Mouse Gear) and it may beg you not to drink it dry. No, you haven't gotten too much sun—the fountain actually talks (much to the delight of kids and the surprise of unsuspecting adults). A few more talking fountains are scattered around Epcot. The fountains aren't the only items at WDW that talk. I've kibitzed with a walking and talking garbage can (named PUSH) in Magic Kingdom, and a personable palm tree (who goes by Wes Palm) at Animal Kingdom. Ask a Disney employee to direct you if you want to meet one of these chatty contraptions.

electronic communications. You're catapulted into outer space to see Spaceship Earth from a new perspective, returning for a finale that places the audience amid interactive global networks.

Test Track

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Test Track is a \$60-million (the figure once raised eyebrows but is considered mere peanuts now that HP's doled out \$100 million for Mission: Space) marvel that combines GM engineering and Disney Imagineering. Most of you will have a blast. The line can be more than an hour long in peak periods, so consider the FASTPASS option (but remember to get one early before they run out). The last part of the line snakes through displays about corrosion, crash tests, and other things from the GM proving grounds (you can linger long enough to see them even with FASTPASS). The 5-minute ride follows what looks to be an actual highway. It includes braking tests, a hill climb, and tight S-curves in a 6-passenger convertible. The left front seat offers the most thrills as the vehicle moves through the curves. There's also a 12-second burst of speed that reaches 65 mph on the straightaway (no traffic!). **Note:** Riders must be at least 40 inches tall. Also, expectant mothers and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't test the track.

Note II: This is the only attraction in Epcot that has a single-rider line, which allows singles to fill in vacant spots in select cars. If you're part of a party that doesn't mind splitting up and riding in singles, you can shave off some serious waiting time by taking advantage of this option. FASTPASS offers the same time savings without the break up, but Test Track is often in such demand that the last FASTPASS for the *day* is often gone by 11am, so if you don't catch it early enough, the single rider line is the only option you'll have.

Note III: Test Track often experiences technical difficulties and, to add insult to injury, it's one of the few rides in Epcot that closes due to inclement weather. If you know a storm's brewing in the afternoon, be sure to head here early in the day.

Universe of Energy

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Sponsored by Exxon, this pavilion has a roof full of solar panels and a goal of bettering your understanding of America's energy problems and potential solutions. Its 32-minute ride, **Ellen's Energy Adventure**, features comedian Ellen DeGeneres being

tutored (by Bill Nye the Science Guy) to be a *Jeopardy!* contestant. On a massive screen in Theater I, an animated motion picture depicts the Earth's molten beginnings, its cooling process, and the formation of fossil fuels. You move back in time 275 million years into an eerie, storm-wracked landscape of the Mesozoic Era, a time of violent geological activity. Here, giant audio-animatronic dragonflies, earthquakes, and streams of molten lava threaten you before you enter a steam-filled tunnel deep in the bowels of a volcano. When you emerge, you're in Theater II and the present. In this new setting, which looks like a NASA Mission Control room, a 70mm film projected on a massive 210-foot wraparound screen depicts the challenges of the world's increasing energy demands and the emerging technologies that will help meet them. Your moving seats now return to Theater I, where swirling special effects herald a film about how energy impacts our lives. It ends on an upbeat note, with a vision of an energy-abundant future, and Ellen as a new *Jeopardy!* champion. **Note:** I've taken kids as young as 2 on this ride with no problems, but I recommend children be at least 6 or they won't get much out of the experience beyond flashing lights and sounds.

Wonders of Life

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

Housed in a vast geodesic dome fronted by a 75-foot replica of a DNA strand, this pavilion offers some of Future World's most engaging shows and attractions. **Note:** This pavilion operates seasonally, so call ahead to find out if it will be open when you're at the park.

The ***Making of Me***, starring Martin Short, is a captivating 15-minute motion picture combining live action with animation and spectacular *in utero* photography to create a sweet introduction to the facts of life. It may, however, prompt a few questions from younger children, so unless you're prepared to answer, save this one for kids 10 and older. Short travels back in time to witness his parents as children, their meeting at a college dance, their wedding, and their decision to have a baby. Along with him, you'll view his development inside his mother's womb and witness his birth.

During the very popular **Body Wars** ride, you're reduced to the size of a cell for a medical rescue mission inside the immune system of a human body. Your objective: Save a miniaturized immunologist who has been accidentally swept into the bloodstream. This motion-simulator ride takes you on a wild journey through gale-force winds in the lungs and pounding heart chambers. Engineers designed this ride from the last row of a car, so that's where to sit to get the most bang for your buck. Although you know they're part of the Disney show, it's a little eerie passing through dermatopic purification stations in order to undergo miniaturization. It's not as good as the similarly built **Star Tours** at Disney–MGM studios, but it definitely has its moments. This one isn't a smart choice for those prone to motion sickness or who generally prefer to be stirred rather than shaken. **Note:** Riders must be at least 40 inches tall. Also, steer clear if you're an expectant mother, or have heart, neck, or back problems.

In the hilarious, multimedia **Cranium Command**, Buzzy, an audio-animatronic brain-pilot-in-training, is charged with the seemingly impossible task of controlling the brain of an average 12-year-old boy. The boy's body parts are played by Charles Grodin, Jon Lovitz, Bob Goldthwait, George Wendt, and Kevin Nealon and Dana Carvey (as Hans and Franz). It's another must-see attraction (recommended for ages 8 and up) and has a loyal following among Disney veterans. The audience is seemingly seated inside Bobby's head as Buzzy guides him through a day of typical preadolescent

traumas such as running for the school bus, meeting a girl, fighting bullies, and a run-in with the school principal.

There are other large areas filled with fitness-related shows and participatory activities, including a film called *Goofy About Health*, and a hands-on exhibit that tests your senses.

SHOPPING IN FUTURE WORLD

Most of Epcot's more unique shopping lies just ahead in World Showcase, but there are a few places in this part of the park that offer special souvenirs. You can browse through cels and other collectibles at the **Art of Disney** in Innoventions West (how about an \$8,800, 5-ft. wooden Mickey watch?), purchase almost anything imaginable at **MouseGear** (one of the best and most comprehensive shops in all of WDW) in Innoventions East, and find gardening and other gifts in **The Land**.

WORLD SHOWCASE

You can tour the world in a day at this community of 11 miniaturized nations, which line the 40-acre World Showcase Lagoon on the park's southern side. All of the showcase's countries have authentically indigenous architecture, landscaping, background music, restaurants, and shops. The nations' cultural facets are explored in art exhibits, song and dance performances, and innovative rides, films, and attractions. And all of the employees in each pavilion are natives of the country represented.

All pavilions offer some kind of live entertainment throughout the day. Times and performances change, but they're listed in the guide map and on the Times Guide. World Showcase opens between 11am and noon daily, so there's time for a Future World excursion if you arrive earlier. **Note:** There are **regular appearances by characters** at Showcase Plaza (consult the daily schedule for times).

Canada

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Our neighbors to the north are represented by architecture ranging from a mansard-roofed replica of Ottawa's 19th-century French-style Château Laurier (here called Hôtel du Canada) to a British-influenced stone building modeled after a famous landmark near Niagara Falls.

Fun Fact Eat, Drink, and Be Merry

In early October, Epcot's 6-week-long **International Food & Wine Festival** adds 25 booths to the park's 1½-mile World Showcase promenade. Here's your chance to walk off some calories while you sip and savor the food and beverages of several of the world's cultures. On the food front, the appetizer-size temptations might include burgundy escargot, seared alligator medallions, green mussels, shrimp on the barbie, octopus on purple potato salad, chicken sha cha, and much more (\$1–\$5). You can also sample wine and beer from more than 100 wineries and breweries. Tickets for the dinner-and-concert series or a special wine tasting are \$79 to \$125 including tip, but you can cruise the festival for standard park admission (\$59.75 adults, \$48 kids 3–9). Call ☎ **407/939-3378** for details or on the Internet go to **www.disneyworld.com**.

An Indian village complete with a rough-hewn log trading post and 30-foot replicas of Ojibwa totem poles signifies the culture of the Northwest. The Canadian wilderness is reflected by a rocky mountain; a waterfall cascading into a whitewater stream; and a mini-forest of evergreens, stately cedars, maples, and birch trees. Don't miss the stunning floral displays of azaleas, roses, zinnias, chrysanthemums, petunias, and patches of wildflowers inspired by the Butchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia.

The pavilion's highlight attraction is **O Canada!**—a dazzling 18-minute, 360-degree CircleVision film that shows Canada's scenic splendor, from a dogsled race to the thundering flight of thousands of snow geese departing an autumn stopover near the St. Lawrence River. If you're looking for foot-tapping live entertainment, **Off Kilter** raises the roof with New Age Celtic music as well as some get-down country music. Days and times vary.

Northwest Mercantile carries sandstone and soapstone carvings, fringed leather vests, duck decoys, moccasins, an array of stuffed animals, Native American dolls, Native American spirit stones, rabbit-skin caps, heavy knitted sweaters, and, of course, maple syrup.

China

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

Bounded by a serpentine wall that snakes around its perimeter, the China pavilion is entered via a triple-arched ceremonial gate inspired by the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, a summer retreat for Chinese emperors. Passing through the gate, you'll see a half-size replica of this ornately embellished red-and-gold circular temple, built in 1420 during the Ming dynasty. Gardens simulate those in Suzhou, with miniature waterfalls, fragrant lotus ponds, and groves of bamboo, corkscrew willows, and weeping mulberry trees.

Reflections of China ★★ is a 20-minute movie that explores the culture and landscapes in and around seven Chinese cities. Shot over a 2-month period in 2002, it visits Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, and the Great Wall (begun 24 c. ago!), among other places. **Land of Many Faces** is an exhibit that introduces China's ethnic peoples, and entertainment is provided daily by the amazing **Dragon Legend Acrobats** ★★.

The **Yong Feng Shangdian Shopping Gallery** features silk robes, lacquer and inlaid mother-of-pearl furniture, jade figures, cloisonné vases, Yixing teapots, brocade pajamas, silk rugs and embroideries, wind chimes, and Chinese clothing. Artisans occasionally demonstrate calligraphy.

France

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

This pavilion focuses on La Belle Epoque, a period from 1870 to 1910 in which French art, literature, and architecture flourished. It's entered via a replica of the beautiful cast-iron Pont des Arts footbridge over the Seine. It leads to a park with bleached sycamores, Bradford pear trees, flowering crape myrtle, and sculptured parterre flower gardens inspired by Seurat's painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. A one-tenth-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower constructed from Gustave Eiffel's original blueprints looms above *les grands boulevards*.

The highlight is **Impressions de France**. Shown in a palatial sit-down theater à la Fontainebleau, this 18-minute film is a scenic journey through diverse French landscapes

projected on a vast 200-degree wraparound screen and enhanced by the music of French composers. The antics of **Serveur Amusant**, a comedic waiter; and the visual comedy of **Le Mime Roland** delights both children and adults, as do the yummy pastries at *Boulangerie Patisserie*.

The covered arcade has shops selling French prints and original art, cookbooks, wines (there's a tasting counter), French food, Babar books, perfumes, and original letters of famous Frenchmen ranging from Jean Cocteau to Napoleon. Another marketplace/tourism center revives the defunct Les Halles, where Parisians used to sip onion soup in the wee hours.

Germany

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Enclosed by castle walls and towers, this festive pavilion is centered on a cobblestone *platz* (square) with pots of colorful flowers girding a fountain statue of St. George and the Dragon. An adjacent clock tower is embellished with whimsical glockenspiel figures that herald each hour with quaint melodies. The pavilion's **Biergarten** (p. 138) was inspired by medieval Rothenberg and features a year-round Oktoberfest and its music. And 16th-century facades replicate a merchant's hall in the Black Forest and the town hall in Römerberg Square.

The shops here carry Hummel figurines, crystal, glassware, cookware, Anton Schneider cuckoos, cowbells, Alpine hats, German wines (there's a tasting counter), specialty foods, toys (German Disneyana, teddy bears, dolls, and puppets), and books. An artisan demonstrates molding and painting Hummel figures; another paints detailed scenes on eggs. Background music runs from oompah bands to Mozart symphonies.

Model train enthusiasts and kids enjoy the exquisitely detailed miniature version of a small Bavarian town, complete with working train station.

Italy

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

One of the prettiest World Showcase pavilions, Italy lures visitors over an arched stone footbridge to a replica of Venice's intricately ornamented pink-and-white Doge's Palace. Other architectural highlights include the 83-foot Campanile (bell tower) of St. Mark's Square, Venetian bridges, and a piazza enclosing a version of Bernini's Neptune Fountain. A garden wall suggests a backdrop of provincial countryside, and citrus, cypress, pine, and olive trees frame a formal garden. Gondolas are moored on the lagoon.

Shops carry cameo and filigree jewelry, Armani figurines, kitchenware, Italian wines and foods, Murano and other Venetian glass, alabaster figurines, and inlaid wooden music boxes.

In the street entertainment department, the seemingly lifeless forms of **Imaginum**, **A Statue Act**, fascinate visitors young and old daily, and the **Character Masquerade** featuring traditional Carnevale masks and costumes will generate enthusiasm as well.

Japan

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

A flaming red *torii* (gate of honor) on the banks of the lagoon and the graceful blue-roofed Goju No To pagoda, inspired by a shrine built at Nara in A.D. 700, welcome you to this pavilion, which focuses on Japan's ancient culture. In a traditional Japanese garden, cedars, yews, bamboo, "cloud-pruned" evergreens, willows, and flowering

Finds **Great Things to Buy at Epcot**

Sure, *you* want to be educated about the cultures of the world, but for most, the two big attractions at the World Showcase are eating and shopping. Dining options are explained in chapter 6. This list gives you an idea of additional items available for purchase.

If you'd like to check out the amazing scope of Disney merchandise at home, everything from furniture to bath toys, you can order a catalog by calling ☎ **800/237-5751** or surfing the Web to **www.disneystore.com**.

- The silver jewelry at the Mexico pavilion is beautiful. Choose from a range of merchandise that goes from a simple flowered hair clip to a kidney-shaped stone and silver bracelet.
- There are lots of great sweaters available in the shops of Norway, and it's really tough to resist the Scandinavian trolls. They're so ugly, you have to love them.
- Forget about all those knock-off products stamped "Made in China." The merchandise in this country is among the more expensive to be found in Epcot, from jade teardrop earrings to multicolored bracelets to Disney art.
- Porcelain and cuckoo clocks are the things to look at in Germany. You might find a Goebel Collectible Winnie the Pooh or a handcrafted Pooh cuckoo clock. Of course, Hummel figurines are big sellers, too.
- In Italy, look for 100% silk scarves in a variety of patterns as well as fine silk ties and crystal.
- Your funky teenager might like the Taquia knit cap, a colorful fezlke chapeau, that's available in Morocco. There's also a variety of celestial-patterned pottery available in vases and platters.
- Tennis fans may be interested in the Wimbledon shirts, shorts, and skirts available in the United Kingdom. There's also a nice assortment of rose-patterned tea accessories, Shetland sweaters, tartans, pub accessories, and loads of other stuff from the U.K.

shrubs frame a contemplative setting of pebbled footpaths, rustic bridges, waterfalls, exquisite rock landscaping, and a pond of golden koi. It's a haven of tranquillity in a park that's anything but. The **Yakitori House** is based on the renowned 16th-century Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto, designed as a royal summer residence and considered by many to be the crowning achievement of Japanese architecture. Exhibits ranging from 18th-century Bunraki puppets to samurai armor take place in the moated **White Heron Castle**, a replica of the Shirasagi-Jo, a 17th-century fortress overlooking the city of Himeji. There's also a gallery exhibit on **Japanese baseball**.

The drums of **Matsuriza**—one of the best performances in the World Showcase—entertain guests daily, and the **Mitsukoshi Department Store** (Japan's answer to Macy's) is housed in a replica of the Shishinden (Hall of Ceremonies) of the Goshō Imperial Palace, built in Kyoto in A.D. 794. It sells lacquerware, kimonos, kites, fans, dolls in traditional costumes, origami books, samurai swords, Japanese Disneyana, bonsai trees, Japanese foods, Netsuke carvings, pottery, and modern electronics.

Mexico

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

You'll hear the music of marimbas and mariachi bands as you approach the festive showcase of Mexico, fronted by a towering Mayan pyramid modeled on the Aztec temple of Quetzalcoatl (God of Life) and surrounded by dense Yucatán jungle landscaping. Upon entering the pavilion, you'll be in a museum of pre-Columbian art and artifacts.

Down a ramp, a small lagoon is the setting for **El Río del Tiempo** (River of Time), where visitors board boats for an 8-minute cruise through Mexico's past and present. Passengers get a close-up look at the Mayan pyramid. **Mariachi Cobre**, a 12-piece band, plays Tuesday to Saturday.

Shops in and around the **Plaza de Los Amigos** (a "moonlit" Mexican *mercado* [market] with a tiered fountain and street lamps) display an array of leather goods, baskets, sombreros, piñatas, pottery, embroidered dresses and blouses, maracas, jewelry, serapes, colorful papier-mâché birds, and blown-glass objects (an artisan occasionally gives demonstrations). The Mexican Tourist Office also provides travel information.

Morocco

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This exotic pavilion has architecture embellished with geometrically patterned tile work, minarets, hand-painted wood ceilings, and brass lighting fixtures. It's headlined by a replica of the Koutoubia Minaret, the prayer tower of a 12th-century mosque in Marrakesh. Note the imperfections in each mosaic tile; they were put there on purpose in accordance with the Muslim belief that only Allah is perfect. The Medina (old city), entered via a replica of an arched gateway in Fez, leads to **Fez House** (a traditional Moroccan home) and the narrow, winding streets of the **souk**, a bustling marketplace where all manner of authentic handcrafted merchandise is on display. Here, you can browse or purchase pottery, brassware, hand-knotted Berber or colorful Rabat carpets, ornate silver and camel-bone boxes, straw baskets, and prayer rugs. There are weaving demonstrations in the souk periodically during the day. The Medina's rectangular courtyard centers on a replica of the ornately tiled Najjarine Fountain in Fez, the setting for musical entertainment.

Treasures of Morocco is a three-times-per-day 35-minute guided tour (1–5pm) that highlights this country's culture, architecture, and history. The pavilion's **Gallery of Arts and History** contains an ever-changing exhibit of Moroccan art, and the Center of Tourism offers a continuous three-screen slide show. Morocco's landscaping includes a formal garden, citrus and olive trees, date palms, and banana plants. On the

Tips Stay Tuned

Disney hasn't added a new "nation" to World Showcase since Norway became the 11th country in 1988. But the latest buzz has Spain possibly becoming the 12th, with a pavilion that would blend the city of Toledo with some architectural highlights of Madrid and Barcelona. Call it another (potential) cash cow: Disney didn't pay to build the other countries (it charged the sponsoring companies and countries \$50 million and up). Disney also doesn't pay any of the operating costs. But the Mouse collects the rent and a share of all merchandise sales.

entertainment side, **Mo'Rockin'** plays Arabian rock music on traditional instruments Tuesday through Saturday.

Norway

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This pavilion is centered on a picturesque cobblestone courtyard. A *stavekirke* (stave church), styled after the 13th-century Gol Church of Hallingdal, has changing exhibits. A replica of Oslo's 14th-century **Akershus Castle**, next to a cascading woodland waterfall, is the setting for the featured restaurant (p. 137). Other buildings simulate the red-roofed cottages of Bergen and the timber-sided farm buildings of the Nordic woodlands.

There's a two-part attraction here. **Maelstrom**, a boat ride in a dragon-headed Viking vessel, traverses Norway's fjords and mythical forests to the music of Peer Gynt. (It's the only attraction in World Showcase that offers FASTPASS.) Along the way, you'll see images of polar bears prowling the shore, then trolls cast a spell on the boat. The watercraft crashes through a narrow gorge and spins into the North Sea, where a storm is in progress. (This is a relatively calm ride, though it's not recommended for expectant mothers or folks with heart, neck, or back problems.) The storm abates, and passengers disembark safely to a 10th-century Viking village to view the 5-minute 70mm film *Norway*, which documents 1,000 years of history. **Spelmanns Gledje** entertains with Norwegian folk music.

Shops sell hand-knit wool hats and authentic (and expensive) Scandinavian sweaters, troll dolls, toys (there's a Lego table where kids can play), woodcarvings, Scandinavian foods, pewterware, and jewelry.

United Kingdom

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

The U.K. pavilion takes you to Merry Olde England through **Britannia Square**, a formal London-style park complete with a copper-roof gazebo bandstand, a stereotypical red phone booth, and a statue of the Bard. Four centuries of architecture are represented along quaint cobblestone streets; there's a traditional British pub; and a formal garden with low box hedges in geometric patterns, flagstone paths, and a stone fountain that replicates the landscaping of 16th- and 17th-century palaces.

The **British Invasion**, a group that impersonates the Beatles daily except Sunday; pub pianist **Pam Brody** (Tues, Thurs, Fri, and Sun); and the comedic acting troupe, the **World Showcase Players** (daily), provide entertainment. High Street and Tudor Lane shops display a broad sampling of British merchandise, including toy soldiers, Paddington bears, personalized coats of arms, Scottish clothing (cashmere and Shetland sweaters, golf wear, tams, and tartans), English china, Waterford crystal, and pub items such as tankards, dartboards, and the like. A tea shop occupies a replica of Anne Hathaway's thatched-roof 16th-century cottage in Stratford-on-Avon. Other emporia represent the Georgian, Victorian, Queen Anne, and Tudor periods. Background music ranges from "Greensleeves" to the Beatles.

U.S.A.—The American Adventure

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Housed in a vast Georgian-style structure, **The American Adventure** is a 29-minute dramatization of U.S. history, utilizing a 72-foot rear-projection screen, rousing

Tips Cruise Control

Watching Epcot's IllumiNations fireworks display (below) from World Showcase Lagoon can make for a magical evening. You can charter the 1930s vintage speedboat *Breathless* (\$180, up to seven people) or catch the show aboard a less romantic but also less expensive pontoon boat (\$142, up to 12 people). Both last 45 to 50 minutes and you must rent the entire boat for your family or find your own boat mates. For information or to reserve a boat, call ☎ 407/939-7529. You can make arrangements of snacks and beverages to be served on your cruise, though only through Disney, by calling ☎ 407/934-3160.

music, and a large cast of lifelike audio-animatronic figures, including narrators Mark Twain and Ben Franklin. The adventure begins with the voyage of the *Mayflower* and encompasses major historic events. You'll view Jefferson writing the Declaration of Independence, Matthew Brady photographing a family about to be divided by the Civil War, the stock market crash of 1929 (but not the crash of Disney stock in 1999 and 2000), Pearl Harbor, and the *Eagle* heading toward the moon. Teddy Roosevelt discusses the need for national parks. Susan B. Anthony speaks out on women's rights; Frederick Douglass, on slavery; and Chief Joseph, on the plight of Native Americans. It's one of Disney's best historical productions. Entertainment includes the **Spirit of America Fife & Drum Corps** and **Voices of Liberty**, an a cappella group that sings patriotic songs, and **AMERICAN VYBE**, featuring the sounds of swing, jazz, and gospel.

The "Echoes of Africa" exhibit in the **American Heritage Gallery** showcases between 15 and 20 pieces of the Walt Disney-Tishman African Art collection, the largest privately owned significant collection of African art in the world. The pieces displayed will rotate throughout the exhibit's 3-year run.

Formal gardens shaded by live oaks, sycamores, elms, and holly complement the 18th-century architecture. **Heritage Manor Gifts** sells autographed presidential photographs, needlepoint samplers, quilts, pottery, candles, Davy Crockett hats, books on American history, historically costumed dolls, classic political campaign buttons, and vintage newspapers with banner headlines such as "Nixon Resigns!"

OTHER SHOWS

IllumiNations **Moments**

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 3–adult

Little has changed since Epcot's millennium version of IllumiNations ended on January 1, 2001. This 13-minute grand nightcap continues to be a blend of fireworks, lasers, and fountains in a display that's signature Disney. The show is worth the crowds that flock to the parking lot when it's over (just be sure to keep a firm grip on young kids). **Tip:** Stake your claim to your favorite viewing area a half-hour before show time (listed in your entertainment schedule). The ones near Showcase Plaza have a head start for the exits. Another good place for viewing the show is the terrace at the Rose & Crown Pub in the United Kingdom (p. 138).

5 Disney-MGM Studios

You'll probably see the Tower of Terror and the Earrfel Tower, a water tank with mouse ears, even before you enter this park, which Disney bills as "the Hollywood that never was and always will be." Once inside, you'll find pulse-quickenning rides such as **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster**, movie- and TV-themed shows such as **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It!**, and a spectacular laser-light show called **Fantasmic!** The main streets include Hollywood and Sunset boulevards, where Art Deco movie sets remember the golden age of Hollywood. The Streets of America sets include New York, lined with miniature renditions of Gotham's landmarks (the Empire State, Flatiron, and Chrysler buildings); as well as San Francisco, Chinatown, and others. You'll find some of the best street performing in the Disney parks here. More importantly, it's a working movie and TV studio where shows are occasionally in production.

Arrive at the park early. Unlike Epcot, MGM's 154 acres of attractions can pretty much be seen in 1 day. The parking lot reaches to the gate, but trams serve the outlying areas. Pay attention to your parking location; this lot isn't as well marked as the Magic Kingdom's. Again, write your lot and row number on something you'll be able to find at the end of the day.

If you don't get a *Disney-MGM Studios Guide Map* and entertainment schedule as you enter the park, you can pick one up at Guest Relations or most shops. First things first—check show times and then sketch out a plan for your day because the majority of the park's offerings are its shows. Schedule your rides around the shows that interest you most and go from there. Our favorite MGM restaurants are described in chapter 6, "Where to Dine."

There's a Tip Board listing the day's shows, ride closings, and other information at the corner of Hollywood and Sunset boulevards.

HOURS The park is usually open from 9am to at least 6 or 7pm, with extended hours sometimes as late as midnight during holidays and summer.

TICKET PRICES A 1-day park ticket is \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9. Kids under 3 get in free.

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN DISNEY-MGM STUDIOS

ATMs ATMs accepting cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems are located on the right side of the main entrance and near Toy Story Pizza Planet.

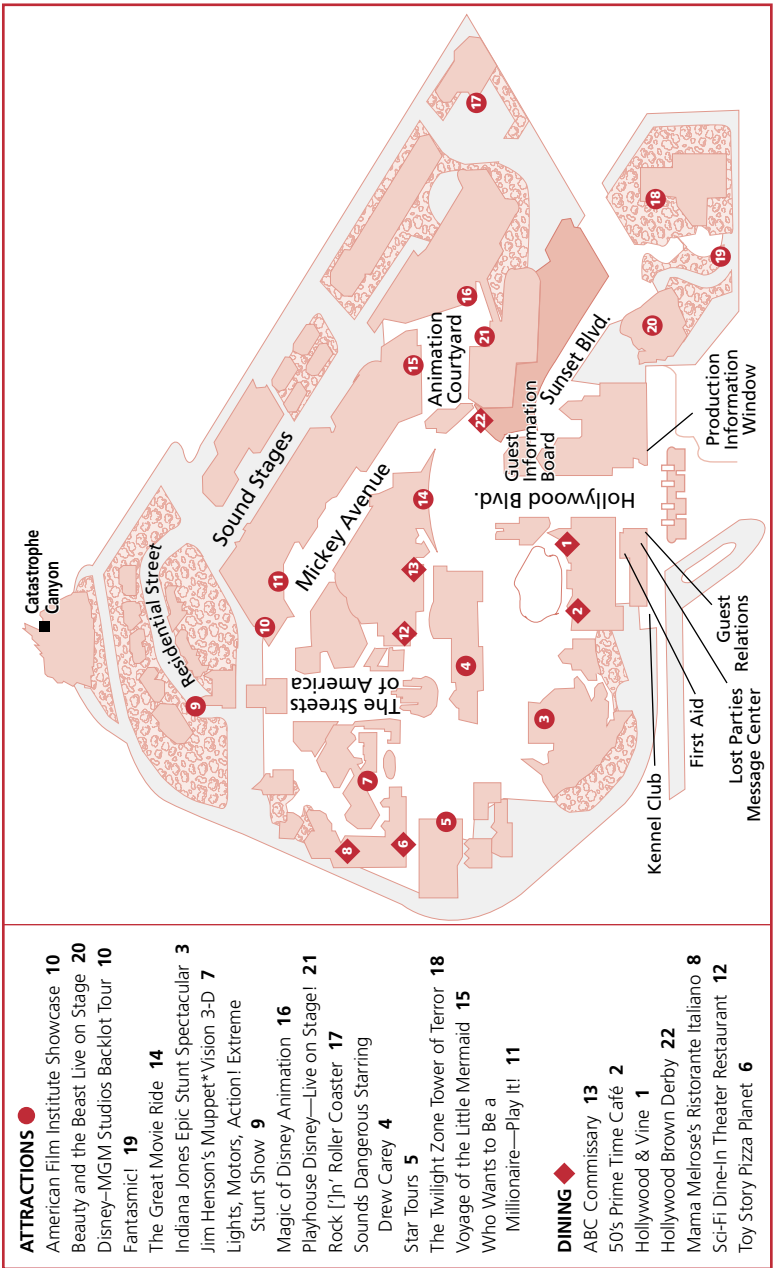
Baby Care MGM has a small Baby Care Center to the left of the main entrance where you'll find facilities for nursing and changing. Disposable diapers, formula, baby food, and pacifiers are for sale. Changing tables are also in all women's restrooms and some men's restrooms.

Cameras & Film Film and Kodak disposable cameras are available throughout the park. Digital supplies, however, are very limited.

First Aid The First Aid Center, staffed by registered nurses, is in the Entrance Plaza adjoining Guest Relations and the Baby Care Center.

Lockers Lockers are located alongside Oscar's Classic Car Souvenirs, to the right of the Entrance Plaza after you pass through the turnstiles. The cost is \$7, including a \$2 deposit.

Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park



Lost Children Lost children at Disney–MGM Studios are taken to Guest Relations, where lost children logbooks are kept. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothes.*

Package Pickup Any purchase can be sent to Guest Relations in the Entrance Plaza; allow at least 3 hours for delivery. If you're staying overnight at a Disney resort, you can also have all packages purchased by 7pm sent to your hotel room (they will be delivered by noon the next day).

Parking It's \$8 a day for cars, light trucks, and vans; \$9 for RVs.

Pet Care Day accommodations for \$6 are offered at kennels to the left and just outside the entrance (☎ 407/824-6568). There are also four other kennels in the WDW complex. (See “Fast Facts” in chapter 4 for more details.) Proof of vaccinations is required.

Strollers Strollers can be rented at Oscar's Super Service, inside the main entrance, for \$8 for a single and \$15 for a double, including a \$1 deposit.

Wheelchair Rental Wheelchairs are rented at Oscar's Super Service inside the main entrance. The cost for regular chairs is \$7 a day, including a \$1 deposit. Electric wheelchairs rent for \$40 including a \$10 refundable deposit.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS & SHOWS

American Film Institute Showcase

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This shop and exhibit area is the final stop on the Backlot Tour (see below) and looks at the efforts of the editors, cinematographers, producers, and directors whose names roll by in the blur of credits. It also showcases the work of the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award winners, including Bette Davis, Jack Nicholson, and Elizabeth Taylor. A special exhibit here, “**Villains: Movie Characters You Love to Hate**,” features the costumes and props of several notable bad guys, including Darth Vader.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show, MGM's newest addition, debuted in mid-2005—and it's a biggie. Taking its cue from the original show at Disneyland Resort Paris, this stunt show features high-flying high-speed movie stunts full of pyrotechnic effects and more. Like the **Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular** (p. 232), the storyline has the audience following the filming of an action-packed movie (in this case, a spy thriller set in a Mediterranean village). Over 40 vehicles are used in the show including cars, motorcycles, and watercraft—each modified to perform the rather spectacular stunts. It's entertaining and certainly offers its share of thrills, but it's not as engaging as the Indiana Jones production unless you're a car buff. The show is part of the redevelopment of the MGM backlot area that's also seen the addition of new cityscapes of San Francisco and Chicago, among others. Check the entertainment schedule for show times.

Tips Dinner and a Show

At press time, Disney was offering preferred seating at the end-of-the-day spectacular, **Fantasmic!**, along with a fixed-price dinner at one of Disney-MGM's sit-down restaurants. All you need to do is make Priority Seating arrangements (☎ 407/939-3463) and request the Fantasmic! package for the Hollywood Brown Derby (\$36.99 adults, \$9.99 kids 3–11), Mama Melrose's Ristorante Italiano (\$28.99 adults, \$9.99 kids 3–11), or Hollywood & Vine (\$21.99 adults, \$9.99 kids 3–11). You'll get your line pass at the restaurant and instructions on getting to the special entrance to the preferred seating area of the show.

Note: The prices above are for a fixed-price meal and do not include sales tax, tip, or alcoholic beverages; if you order off the menu, you'll pay more. The prices also don't include a reserved seat at Fantasmic!, only a pass that will get you into the preferred seating area (you must arrive at least 30 min. in advance—a much shorter wait than usual).

Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

A 1,500-seat covered amphitheater is the home of this 30-minute live Broadway-style production of *Beauty and the Beast* that's adapted from the movie. Musical highlights from the show include the rousing "Be Our Guest" opening number and the poignant title song featured in the romantic waltz scene finale. The sets and costumes are lavish, and the production numbers are pretty spectacular. There are usually four or five shows a day.

Disney-MGM Studios Backlot Tour

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

This 35-minute tram tour takes you behind the scenes for a close-up look at the vehicles, props, costumes, sets, and special effects used in your favorite movies and TV shows. On many days, you'll see costume makers at work in the wardrobe department (Disney has around 2 million garments here). But the real fun begins when the tram heads for **Catastrophe Canyon**, where an earthquake in the heart of oil country causes canyon walls to rumble. A raging oil fire, massive explosions, torrents of rain, and flash floods threaten you and other riders before you're taken behind the scenes to see how filmmakers use special effects to make such disasters. The preshow is almost as interesting. While waiting in line, you can watch entertaining videos hosted by several TV and movie stars. The Backlot Tour is a solid ride that's of the same type as Universal Studios Florida's Earthquake—The Big One (p. 262).

Fantasmic! **Moments**

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Disney mixes heroes, villains, stunt performers, choreography, laser lights, and fireworks into a spectacular end-of-the-day extravaganza. This is a 25-minute visual feast where the Magic Mickey comes to life in a show featuring shooting comets, great balls of fire (our apologies to Jerry Lee), and animated fountains that really charge the audience. The cast includes 50 performers, a giant dragon, a king cobra, and 1 million gallons of water, just

Find the Hidden Mickeys

Hidden Mickeys started as an inside joke among early Disney Imagineers and soon became a park tradition (I'm not kidding—the entire Disney-MGM Studios layout when viewed from the sky is one giant Hidden Mickey!). Today, dozens of subtle Mickey images—usually silhouettes of his world-famous ears, profile, or full figure—are hidden (more or less) in attractions and resorts throughout the Walt Disney empire. No one knows how many, because sometimes they exist only in the eye of the beholder. But there's a semiofficial, maybe-you-agree-maybe-you-don't list. See how many HMs (Hidden Mickeys) you can locate during your visit. And be sharp-eyed about it. Those bubbles on your souvenir mug might be forming one. Here are a few to get you started:

IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

- In the Haunted Mansion banquet scene, check out the arrangement of the plate and adjoining saucers on the table.
- In the Africa scene of It's a Small World, note the purple flowers on a vine on the elephant's left side.
- While riding Splash Mountain, look for Mickey lying on his back in the pink clouds to the right of the *Zip-A-Dee Lady* paddle-wheeler.

AT EPCOT

- In Imagination!, check out the little girl's dress in the lobby film of *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*, one of five HMs in this pavilion.
- In The Land pavilion, don't miss the small stones in front of the Native American man on a horse and the baseball cap of the man driving a harvester in the *Circle of Life* film.
- As you cruise through the Mexico pavilion on El Rio del Tiempo, notice the arrangement of three clay pots in the marketplace scene.
- In Maelstrom in the Norway pavilion, a Viking wears Mickey ears in the wall mural facing the loading dock.

about all of which are orchestrated by a sorcerer mouse that looks more than remotely familiar. You'll probably recognize other characters as well as musical scores from Disney movie classics such as *Fantasia*, *Pinocchio*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Lion King*. You'll also shudder at the animated villainy of Jafar, Cruella De Vil, and Maleficent in the battle of good versus evil, part of which is projected onto huge, water-mist screens. The amphitheater holds 9,000 souls including standing room, and during busy periods (holidays and summers) it's often standing-room-only, so arrive early. (There is sometimes an additional show earlier in the evening.) **Note:** The show's loud pyrotechnics may frighten younger children, and earplugs aren't a bad idea for anyone with ears sensitive to very loud noises.

- There are four HMs inside Spaceship Earth, one of them in the Renaissance scene, on the page of a book behind the sleeping monk. Try to find the other three.

AT DISNEY-MGM STUDIOS

- On the Great Movie Ride, there's an HM on the window above the bank in the gangster scene.
- At Jim Henson's Muppet*Vision 3-D, take a good look at the top of the sign listing five reasons for turning in your 3-D glasses, and note the balloons in the film's final scene.
- In the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, note the bell for the elevator behind Rod Serling in the film. There are more than 8 HMs in this attraction.
- Outside Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, look for two HMs in the rotunda area's tile floor. (Reportedly, the entire coaster is one giant HM.)
- By the way, the park's least Hidden Mickey is what's called the Earrfel Tower, Disney-MGM Studios' tall water tower, which is fitted with a huge pair of Mouseket-EARS.

IN ANIMAL KINGDOM

- Look at The Boneyard in Dinoland U.S.A., where a fan and two hard hats form an HM.
- There are 25 Hidden Mickeys at Rafiki's Planet Watch, where Mickey lurks in the murals, tree trunks, and paintings of animals.

IN THE RESORT AREAS

- HMs are on the weather vane atop the Grand Floridian Resort & Spa's convention center, in the interactive fountains at the entrance to Downtown Disney Marketplace, and one forms a giant sand trap next to the green at the Magnolia Golf Course's 6th hole.

For more information on the plethora of HMs at WDW, check out www.hiddenmickeys.org.

The Great Movie Ride

Frommer's Rating: C for most, B+ for adults who love classics

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Film footage and 50 audio-animatronic replicas of movie stars are used to re-create some of the most famous scenes in filmdom on this 22-minute ride through movie history. You'll relive magic moments from the 1930s through the present: the classic airport farewell scene by Bergman and Bogart in *Casablanca*; Brando bellowing "Stellaaaaa"; Harrison Ford in full Indiana Jones mode while facing all of those snakes; Sigourney Weaver fending off slimy aliens; Gene Kelly singin' in the rain; and arguably the best Tarzan, Johnny Weissmuller, giving his trademark yell while swinging across

the jungle. The action is enhanced by special effects, and outlaws hijack your tram en route. So pay attention when the conductor warns, “Fasten your seat belts. It’s going to be a bumpy night.” The setting is a full-scale reproduction of Hollywood’s famous Mann’s Chinese Theatre, complete with handprints of the stars out front.

Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular

Frommer’s Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Visitors get a peek into the world of movie stunts in this dramatic 30-minute show, which re-creates major scenes from the Indiana Jones series. The show opens on an elaborate Mayan temple backdrop. Indy crashes onto the set via a rope, and, as he searches with a torch for the golden idol, he encounters booby traps, fire, and steam. Then a boulder straight out of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* chases him! The set is dismantled to reveal a colorful Cairo marketplace where a sword fight ensues, and the action includes virtuoso bullwhip maneuvers, gunfire, and a truck bursting into flames. An explosive finale takes place in a desert scenario. Theme music and an entertaining narrative enhance the action. Throughout this, guests get to see how elaborate stunts are pulled off. Arrive early and sit near the stage if you want a shot at being picked as an audience participant. Alas, it’s a job for adults only. Younger kids may prefer a seat a bit further away from all the action, and I’ve found that the mid- to upper rows offer the best views.

Jim Henson’s Muppet*Vision 3-D

Frommer’s Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: All ages

This must-see film stars Kermit and Miss Piggy in a delightful marriage of Jim Henson’s puppets and Disney audio-animatronics, special-effects wizardry, 70mm film, and cutting-edge 3-D technology. The coming-right-at-you action includes flying Muppets, cream pies, and cannonballs, plus high winds, fiber-optic fireworks, bubble showers, even an actual spray of water. Kermit is the host; Miss Piggy sings “Dream a Little Dream of Me”; Statler and Waldorf critique the action (which includes numerous mishaps and disasters) from a balcony; and Nicki Napoleon and his Emperor Penguins (a full Muppet orchestra) provide music from the pit. In the preshow area, guests view an entertaining Muppet video on overhead monitors. Note the cute Muppet fountain out front and the Muppet version of a Rousseau painting inside. The 25-minute show (including the 12-min. video preshow) runs continuously.

Tip: Sweetums, the giant but friendly Muppet monster, usually interacts with a few kids sitting in the front rows during the show.

Magic of Disney Animation

Frommer’s Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Once hosted by Walter Cronkite and Robin Williams, the new version of **Magic of Disney Animation** features Mushu the dragon from Disney’s *Mulan* as he co-hosts a

Fun Fact **Water World**

The large moat surrounding the “Fantasmic!” stage at Disney–MGM Studios contains 1.9 million gallons of water. More than 80,000 gallons of that is needed every minute to create the three mist screens used to project video portions of the show.

theater presentation where some of Disney's animation secrets are revealed. The Q & A session that follows allows guests to ask questions about the animation process before attempting their own Disney character drawings while under the supervision of a working animator. Joining in on the fun for a meet-and-greet opportunity are the stars of *The Incredibles*, including Elastigirl, Frozone, and Mr. Incredible.

Playhouse Disney—Live on Stage!

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 2–5

Younger audiences love this 20-minute show where they meet characters from Bear in the Big Blue House, The Book of Pooh, and other kid-favorite cartoons. The show encourages preschoolers to dance, sing, and play along with the cast. The action happens several times a day. Check your show schedule.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster *(Moments)*

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

Some say this is one of Disney's attempts to go head to head with Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure. True or not, this inverted roller coaster is the best thrill ride WDW has to offer. It's a fast-and-furious indoor ride in semidarkness. You sit in a 24-passenger "stretch limo" outfitted with 120 speakers that blare Aerosmith at 32,000 watts! Flashing lights deliver a variety of messages and warnings, including "prepare to merge as you've never merged before." Then, faster than you can scream "I want to live!" (around 2.8 sec., actually), you shoot from 0 to 60 mph and into the first gut-tightening inversion at 5Gs. It's a real launch (sometimes of lunch) followed by a wild ride through a make-believe California freeway system. One of three inversions cuts through an "O" in the Hollywood sign, but you don't feel you're going to be thrown out. It's too fast for that. So fast, the Disney hype says, it's similar to sitting atop an F-14 Tomcat. (I've never been in an F-14, so I can't argue.) The ride lasts 3 minutes, 12 seconds, the running time of Aerosmith's hit, "Sweet Emotion." Like Space Mountain, all of the ride action takes place indoors, but this one kicks it up a few notches. **Note:** Riders must be at least 48 inches tall, and expectant moms and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't try to tackle this ride.

Tips Tune Time

Weekdays from noon to 4pm, you can watch BB Good broadcast her Radio Disney show live from a studio next to Sounds Dangerous Starring Drew Carey. You can tune into the show and others on Radio Disney at 990 on your AM dial.

Sounds Dangerous Starring Drew Carey

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Drew Carey provides laughs while dual audio technology provides some hair-raising effects during this 12-minute show at ABC Sound Studios. You'll feel like you're right in the middle of the action of a TV pilot featuring undercover police work and plenty of mishaps. Even when the picture disappears and the theater is plunged into darkness, you continue on Detective Charlie Foster's chase via headphones that show off "3-D" sound effects.

Tip: After the show is over, check out **Sound Works**, which offers interactive activities that allows you to experiment with different sound effects.

Star Tours

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Cutting-edge when it opened, **Star Tours**, based on the original *Star Wars* trilogy (George Lucas collaborated on the ride), is now a couple of rungs below the latest technology but is still fun. The pre-show, which will eventually be updated with characters from *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, now has R2-D2 and C-3PO running an intergalactic travel agency (it offers some of the best detailing of any pre-show at Disney World). After boarding a 40-seat “spacecraft” you’re off with a whoosh on a journey that takes you through some of the more famous scenes from the movies, full of sudden drops, crashes, and oncoming laser blasts as you seemingly careen out of control. **Note:** The virtual-simulator may go nowhere at all, but it sure feels like you do. Riders must be at least 40 inches tall. Also, expectant mothers and people with neck, back, and heart problems or those prone to motion sickness shouldn’t ride. There are, however, plenty of places to focus your vision other than the screen (unlike some of the newer simulator rides) if you begin to feel a bit green.

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (Moments)

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This is a truly stomach-lifting (and dropping) ride, and Disney continues to fine-tune it to make it even better. The legend says that during a violent storm on Halloween night 1939, lightning struck the Hollywood Tower Hotel, causing an entire wing and an elevator full of people to disappear. And you’re about to meet them as you become the star in a special episode of . . . *The Twilight Zone*. En route to this formerly grand hotel, guests walk past overgrown landscaping and faded signs that once pointed the way to stables and tennis courts; the vines over the entrance trellis are dead; and the hotel is a crumbling ruin. Eerie corridors lead to a dimly lit library, where you can hear a storm raging outside. After various spooky adventures, the ride ends in a dramatic climax: a 13-story free-fall in stages. The ride now features random drop sequences, allowing for a real sense of unknown (and a different experience every time you ride), and new visual, audio, and olfactory effects have also been added to make the experience even more frightening. Because it’s a different experience every time you dare to ride, it’s far better than any other ride of its kind. Some believe this rivals (even exceeds) Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster in the thrill department (one of the Imagineers who designed the tower admitted to me that he’s too scared to ride his own creation). At 199 feet, it’s the tallest ride in WDW, and it’s a grade above Dr. Doom’s Fearfall at Islands of Adventure (and has far better atmosphere—it’s one of Walt Disney World’s best attractions in the theme department). **Note:** You must be at least 40 inches tall to ride, and expectant moms and people prone to motion sickness or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn’t try to tackle it. Your stomach may need a few minutes to find its way back to where it belongs after it’s all over.

Voyage of the Little Mermaid

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 4–adult

Hazy lighting creates an underwater effect in a reef-walled theater and helps set the mood for this charming musical based on the Disney feature film. The show combines live performers with more than 100 puppets, movie clips, and innovative special

Tips Call Ahead

Disney-MGM's is home to some of Disney World's most unique restaurants (see chapter 6 for more details). If you plan to dine in any of them, be sure to make Priority Seating arrangements (preferably before you arrive, but if not, then minute you arrive at your hotel or in the park). Waiting until lunch or dinner-time will almost assure that you'll miss out, especially at the Sci-Fi Dinner Theater and The Prime Time Cafe.

effects. Sebastian sings the movie's Academy Award-winning song, "Under the Sea"; the ethereal Ariel shares her dream of becoming human in a live performance of "Part of Your World"; and the evil Ursula, 12 feet tall and 10 feet wide, belts out "Poor Unfortunate Soul." It has a happy ending, as most of the young audience knows it will; they've seen the movie. This 17-minute show is a great place to rest your feet on a hot day, and you get misted inside the theater to further cool you off.

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—Play It!

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Contestants can't win \$1 million, but they can win points used to buy prizes ranging from collectible pins to a leather jacket or a 3-night cruise on one of Disney's cruise ships. Based on Disney-owned ABC TV's game show, replicating even its dramatic music and lighting, the theme-park version has a few twists. Lifelines include asking the audience for help or calling a stranger on two phones set up in the park. Audience members play along on keypads, with the fastest to answer qualifying to become contestants in the hot seat themselves. It's amusing when you realize just how difficult it can be to try to answer when the pressure's on. Games run continuously, but the 600-seat studio fills up quickly, so be prepared for a wait.

PARADES, PLAYGROUNDS & MORE

Disney Stars and Motor Cars is MGM's parade celebrating the 100th anniversary of Uncle Walt's birth in Chicago. The motorcade includes a fun, highly recognizable procession of Disney characters and their chariots. The parade is popular enough that if you decide to skip it, you'll find shorter lines at the park's primo rides (check the parade schedule in your park map).

Discover the Stories Behind the Magic is an exhibit under the giant sorcerer's hat at the end of Hollywood Boulevard. Its interactive kiosks let you explore the magic inspirations of the chapters in Disney's life.

Aside from the parades, there are character-greeting hot spots at **Toy Story Friends**, near Mama Melrose's Ristorante Italiano; on **Commissary Lane**; on **Mickey Avenue** near the Backlot Tour, at the **Magic of Disney Imagination**. See the handout Times Guide for the schedule.

SHOPPING AT DISNEY-MGM STUDIOS

The **Animation Courtyard Shops** carry collectible cels, costumes from Disney classic films, and pins.

Sid Cahuenga's One-of-a-Kind sells autographed photos of the stars, original movie posters, and star-touched items such as canceled checks signed by Judy Garland and others.

Celebrity 5 & 10, modeled after a 1940s Woolworth's, has movie-related merchandise: *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia, MGM Studios T-shirts, movie posters, Elvis mugs, and more.

The major park attractions also have their own shops selling Indiana Jones adventure clothing, Little Mermaid stuffed characters, *Star Wars* souvenirs, and so on.

6 Animal Kingdom

Disney's fourth major park opened in 1998 and combines exotic animals, the elaborate landscapes of Asia and Africa, and the prehistoric lands of the dinosaur. Animals, architecture, and lush surroundings take center stage here, with a handful of rides thrown in for good measure.

This 500-acre park is the smallest of all the Disney theme parks and can easily be toured in a single day, usually less. A conservation venue as much as an attraction, you won't find animals displayed throughout the park as in other venues such as **Busch Gardens** (p. 333). Animal habitats at Animal Kingdom are recreated in a natural manner, which unfortunately means that, at times, you'll have to search a bit to find them. Most of the animals can be found around the Kilimanjaro Safari and the Pangani Forest Expedition Trail. The animal theme does however carry throughout the park in its rides, shows, and architecture. Plus, one of the best shows in all of Disney can be found here, the **Festival of the Lion King**, so be sure to put it on your to-do list.

Animal Kingdom is divided into the **Oasis**, a shopping area near the entrance that has limited animal viewing; **Discovery Island**, home of the Tree of Life, which is the park's icon; **Camp Minnie-Mickey**, the Animal Kingdom equivalent of Mickey's Toontown Fair in the Magic Kingdom; **Africa**, the main animal-viewing area, which is dedicated to the wildlife in Africa today; **Asia**, which has a river raft ride, animal exhibits (including Bengal tigers and giant fruit bats), and a bird show; and **Dinoland U.S.A.**, which has rides, games, and the show, *Tarzan Rocks!*

Tip: Asia will soon play host to Animal Kingdom's long-awaited new thrill ride "**Expedition Everest**." Expected to debut sometime in 2006, this ride will be a high-speed, coaster-like train ride that moves forward and backward through glaciers, waterfalls and canyons, climaxing with an encounter with a yeti.

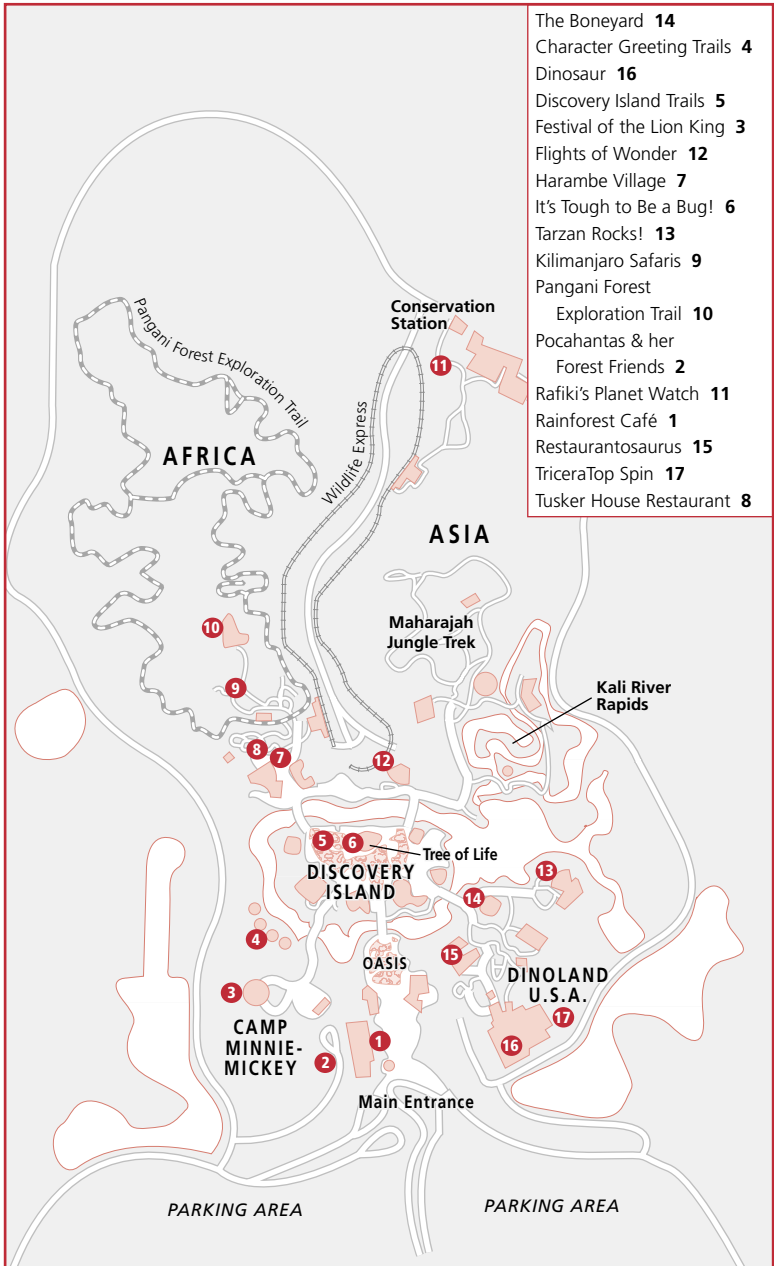
The park covers more than 500 acres, and your feet will tell you that you've covered the territory at the end of the day.

Most of the rides are accessible to guests with disabilities, but the hilly terrain, large crowds, narrow passages, and long hikes can make for a strenuous day if there's a wheelchair-bound person in your party. Anyone with neck or back problems as well as pregnant women may not be able to enjoy rides such as **Kali River Rapids** and **Dinosaur**.

Tips Dehydration Alert!

Animal Kingdom (and the other parks, too) can get very hot, especially during summer. Bring bottled water (freeze it the night before to keep it cold), refilling at the fountains inside the park. Remember to bring sunscreen and wide-brimmed hats *for the whole family*, and plan to ride Kali River Rapids during the hottest part of the day (be sure to bring a change of clothes—you will get soaked).

Animal Kingdom



The 145-foot-tall **Tree of Life** is in the center of the park. It's an intricately carved free-form representation of animals, handcrafted by a team of artists over the period of a year. It's not nearly as tall or imposing as the silver golf ball–like dome, also known as Spaceship Earth, which has come to symbolize Epcot, or Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom. The tree is impressive, though, with 8,000 limbs, 103,000 leaves, and 325 mammals, reptiles, bugs, birds, dinosaurs, and Mickeys in its trunk, limbs, and roots. For more on the tree, see “Discovery Island,” below.

ARRIVING From the parking lot, walk or (where available) ride one of the trams to the entrance. If you do walk, watch out for the trams and autos, because the lot isn't designed for pedestrians. Also, make certain to note where you parked (section and row). Lot signs aren't as prominent as in the Magic Kingdom, and the rows look alike when you come back out. Upon entering the park, consult the handout guide map for special events or entertainment. If you have questions, ask park staffers.

HOURS Animal Kingdom is open at least from 8 or 9am to 5pm, but it sometimes stays open an hour or so later.

TICKET PRICES The ticket prices are \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9. See “Tickets,” earlier in this chapter, for information on the new Magic Your Way ticketing system.

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN ANIMAL KINGDOM

ATMs Animal Kingdom has an ATM near Garden Gate Gifts to the right of the entrance. It accepts cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems.

Baby Care The Baby Care Center is located near Creature Comforts gift shop on the west side of the Tree of Life, but as in the other Disney parks, you'll find changing tables in both restrooms, and you can buy disposable diapers at Guest Relations.

Cameras & Film You can drop film off for same-day developing at the Kodak Kiosk in Africa and Garden Gate Gifts near the park entrances. Cameras and film are available in Disney Outfitters in Safari Village; at the Kodak Kiosk in Africa, near the entrance to the Kilimanjaro Safari; and in Garden Gate Gifts.

First Aid The First Aid Center, which is staffed by registered nurses, is located near Creature Comforts gift shop on the west side of the Tree of Life.

Lockers Lockers (\$7, including a \$2 deposit) are located in Garden Gate Gifts to your right as you enter the park. They're also located to the left, near Rainforest Cafe.

Lost Children A center for lost children is located near Creature Comforts at the Baby Care Center on the west side of the Tree of Life. This is also the site of same-day lost and found. At the risk of rehash, *make your younger kids wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Package Pickup Any packages can be sent to the front of the park at Garden Gate Gifts. Allow at least 3 hours for delivery. WDW resort guests can have their purchases delivered directly to their hotel room; if purchased by 7pm, the item will be delivered by noon the next day.

Parking The cost is \$8 a day for cars, light trucks, and vans; \$9 for RVs.

Pet Care Pet facilities are located just outside the park entrance (\$6 per day; ☎ 407/824-6568). There are four other kennels located in the WDW complex. (See “Fast Facts” in chapter 4 for more information.) Proof of vaccinations is required.

Tips Animal Kingdom Tip Sheet

1. Arrive at opening or stay until near closing for the best view of the animals.
2. **Kilimanjaro Safaris** is one of the most popular rides and the best place to see a lot of animals in one sitting. But in summer, the animals can be scarce during the mid-day heat. If you can hoof it there first thing, do it. If not, try late in the day. The same applies to viewing the gorillas on the **Pangani Forest Exploration Trail**.
3. The **Festival of the Lion King** show is a must.
4. Looking for Disney characters? Go to the Character Greeting Trails in **Camp Minnie-Mickey**.

Strollers Stroller rentals are available at Garden Gate Gifts to the right as you enter the park (\$8 for a single, \$15 for a double, including a \$1 refundable deposit). There are also satellite locations throughout the park. Ask a Disney employee to steer you.

Wheelchair Rental You can rent wheelchairs at Garden Gate Gifts to the right as you enter the park. Rentals are \$7, including a \$1 deposit for a standard wheelchair; \$40 for an electric wheelchair plus a \$10 deposit (both deposits are refundable). Ask Disney employees for other locations throughout the park.

THE OASIS

This painstakingly designed landscape of streams, grottoes, and mini-waterfalls sets the tone for the rest of the park. This is a good place to see wallabies, tiny deer, giant anteaters, sloths, iguanas, tree kangaroos, otters, and macaws (*if*, I remind you *ad nauseum*, you get here early or stay late). But thick cover provides a jungle tone and makes seeing the animals sometimes difficult. There are no rides in this area, and, aside from the animals, it's mainly a pass-through zone. Those guests traveling with eager children will probably have more time to enjoy these exhibits on the way out.

DISCOVERY ISLAND

Like Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom and Spaceship Earth in Epcot, the 14-story **Tree of Life** located here has been designed to be the park's central landmark. The manmade tree and its carved animals are the work of Disney artists. Teams of them worked for 1 year creating the various sculptures, and it's worth a stroll on the walks around its roots, but most folks are smart to save it for the end of the day. (Much of it can be seen while you're in line for **It's Tough to Be a Bug!** or on the **Discovery Island Trails**.) The intricate design makes it seem as if a different animal appears from every angle. One of the creators says he expects it to become one of the most photographed works of art in the world. (He's probably a Disney shareholder.) There's a wading pond directly in front of the tree that often features flamingos.

Discovery Island Trails

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: All ages

The old, pre-FASTPASS queue for **It's Tough to Be a Bug!** provides a leisurely path through the root system of the Tree of Life and a chance to see real, not-so-rare critters,

such as axis deer, red kangaroos, otters, flamingos, lemurs, Galápagos tortoises, ducks, storks, and cockatoos. Again, the best viewing times are early or late in the day.

It's Tough to Be a Bug!

Frommer's Rating: A, C for young ones scared silly from sensory effects

Recommended Ages: 5–adult

This show's cuteness quotient is enough to earn it a B+. But it goes a rung higher thanks to the preshow: To get to the theater, you have to wind around the Tree of Life's

Fun Fact It Costs to Recycle

The animals here deposit more than 1,600 tons of dung a year. Disney pays a company to haul it away and then buys some of it back as compost for landscaping.

50-foot base, giving you a front-row look at this manmade marvel. After you've passed that, grab your 3-D glasses and settle into a sometimes creepy-crawly seat. Based on the film *A Bug's Life*, the special effects in this multimedia show are pretty impressive. It's not a good one for very young kids (it's dark and loud) or bug haters, but for others it's a fun, sometimes poignant look at

life from a smaller perspective. Flick, Hopper, and the rest of the cast—ants, beetles, spiders, and, ugh, a stink bug—awaken your senses with, literally, some in-your-face action. And the show's finale always leaves the crowd buzzing.

DINOLAND U.S.A.

Enter by passing under Olden Gate Bridge, a 40-foot Brachiosaurus reassembled from excavated fossils. Speaking of which, until late summer 1999, this land had three paleontologists working on the very real skeleton of Sue, a monstrously big *Tyrannosaurus rex* unearthed 9 years earlier in the Black Hills of South Dakota. They patched and assembled the bones here because Disney helped pay for the work. Alas, Sue's permanent home is at Chicago's Field Museum, but Dinoland U.S.A. has a replica cast from her 67 million-year-old bones. It's marked as **Dino-Sue** on park guide maps.

The Boneyard

Frommer's Rating: B+ for children, B for parents who need to rest their feet

Recommended Ages: 3–12

Kids love the chance to slip, slither, slide, and slink through this giant playground and dig site where they can discover the real-looking remains of triceratops, *T. rex*, and other vanished giants. Contained within a latticework of metal bars and netting, this area is popular, but not as inviting as the *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* play area in Disney-MGM Studios.

Dinosaur

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

This ride hurls you through the darkness in CTX Rover “time machines” back to the time when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. The expedition takes you past an array of snarling and particularly ferocious looking dinosaurs, one of whom decides you would make a great munchie. What started out as a journey back through time becomes a race to escape the jaws of an irritated and rather ugly Carnotaurus. Young children may find the large lizards and the darkness a bit frightening, and the ride a bit jarring. But until Expedition Everest opens in 2006, this motion simulator/track ride combo is as close as Animal Kingdom gets to a thrill ride. **Note:** You must be 40 inches or

Moments Talk to the Animals?

Fresh from previews at Disney's California Adventure park, **Lucky the Dinosaur** will make limited appearances at Animal Kingdom in 2005 as part of Disney's "Happiest Celebration on Earth" event. This gigantic, audio-animatronic dinosaur walks freely about Dinoland U.S.A., pulling his cart of flowers behind him and interacting with guests—even signing autographs (in his own special way that is). Named one of the top inventions of 2003 by *Time* magazine, he's incredibly lifelike (he even sneezes), so if he's in the park while you're there, don't pass him by without saying hello.

taller to climb aboard. Also, expectant mothers and people with neck, back, and heart problems or those prone to motion sickness shouldn't ride.

Primeval Whirl

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Disney introduced this spinning, free-style twin roller coaster in 2002 in an effort to broaden the park's appeal to young kids (odd, as this ride has a pretty tall height minimum). You control the action through its wacky maze of curves, peaks, and dippity-do-dahs, encountering faux asteroids and hokey cutouts of dinosaurs. This is a cross between those old carnival coasters of the '50s and '60s and an expanded version of the Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm (p. 203). **Note:** The ride carries a 48-inch height minimum, and expectant moms as well as those with neck, back, or heart problems and folks prone to motion sickness should stay planted on firm ground.

TriceraTop Spin

Frommer's Rating: B+ for tykes and parents

Recommended Ages: 2–7

Cut from the same cloth as The Magic Carpets of Aladdin at WDW's Magic Kingdom, this is another mini-thrill for youngsters. In this case the cars look like cartoon dinosaurs. They circle the hub while gently moving up and down and all around. This ride, Primeval Whirl, and an arcade-game area make up the Dinoland U.S.A. mini-land called Chester & Hester's Dino-Rama.

Tarzan Rocks!

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

This 28-minute show pulses with music and occasional aerial theatrics. Phil Collins's movie soundtrack supports a cast of 27, including tumblers, dancers, and in-line skating daredevils who really get the audience into the act. Costumes and music are pretty spectacular, second in Animal Kingdom only to Festival of the Lion King in Camp Minnie-Mickey (see below). The show is held in the 1,500-seat Theater in the Wild.

Tip: The show will temporarily close sometime in 2006 for refurbishment, so do check in advance to make sure it's operating when you're in town.

CAMP MINNIE-MICKEY

Disney characters are the main attraction in this land designed in the same vein as an Adirondack resort. Aside from those characters, however, this zone for the younger set isn't nearly as kid-friendly as rivals Mickey's Toontown Fair in the Magic Kingdom

Tips Pin Mania

Pin buying, collecting, and trading can reach frenzied proportions among Disney fans, including many cast members. All of the theme parks have special locations set aside for the fun, which are marked on the handout guide maps. There are however a few rules of pin trading etiquette that must be followed. You can learn more about the madness on the Internet at www.dizpins.com and www.officialdisneypintrading.com.

(reviewed earlier in this chapter) or Woody Woodpecker's KidZone in Universal Studios Florida (see "Universal Studios Florida," in chapter 8).

Character Greeting Trails *(Moments)*

Frommer's Rating: A for kids, D for waiting parents

Recommended Ages: 2–12

Some say this is a must-do for people traveling with children; I say run the other way—quickly. If, however, your kids are hooked on getting every character autograph possible, this is the place to go. A variety of Disney characters, from Winnie the Pooh and Pocahontas to Timon and Baloo, have separate trails where you can meet and mingle, snap photos and get those autographs. Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, and Pluto even make periodic appearances. Be aware, however, that the lines for these meet-and-greet opportunities are at times excruciatingly long, so unless your kids are really gung ho on collecting the characters' signatures, don't even think of coming here.

Festival of the Lion King *(Finds)*

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Almost everyone in the audience comes alive when the music starts in this rousing 28-minute show in the Lion King Theater. It's one of the top three theme-park shows in central Florida. The production celebrates nature's diversity with a talented, colorfully attired cast of singers, dancers, and life-size critters leading the way to an inspiring sing-along that gets the entire audience caught up in the fun. Based loosely on the animated film, this stage show blends the pageantry of a parade with a tribal celebration. The action is on stage as well as moving around the audience. Even though the pavilion has 1,000 seats, it's best to arrive at least 20 minutes early.

Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: All ages

The wait can be nightmarish, and this 15-minute show isn't close to the caliber of Festival of the Lion King and Tarzan Rocks! In this one, Pocahontas, Grandmother Willow, and some friendly forest creatures relay the importance of treating nature with respect. If you must, go early. The theater only has 350 seats, but they allow standing-room crowds.

AFRICA

Enter through the town of Harambe, a run-down representation of an African coastal village poised on the edge of the 21st century. Costumed employees will greet you as you enter the buildings. The whitewashed structures, built of coral stone and thatched with reed by African craftspeople, surround a central marketplace rich with local wares and colors.

Kilimanjaro Safaris

Frommer's Rating: A+ early or late, B+ other times

Recommended Ages: All ages

Animal Kingdom doesn't have many rides, but the animals you'll see on this one make it a winner as long as your timing is right. They're scarce at midday during most times of year (cooler months the exception), so I recommend you ride it as close to park opening or closing as possible. If you don't make it in time for one of the first or last journeys, the lines can be horrific, so a FASTPASS may be in order.

A large rugged truck takes you through the African landscape (though just a few years ago it was a cow pasture). The animals usually seen along the way include giraffe, black rhinos, hippos, antelopes, Nile crocodiles, zebras, wildebeests, cheetahs, and a pair of lions that may offer half-hearted roars toward some gazelles that are safely out of reach. Early on, a shifting bridge gives riders a brief thrill; later, a bit of drama (a la Disney) as you help catch some poachers. While everyone has a good view, photographers may get a few more shots when sitting on the left side of their row.

Pangani Forest Exploration Trail *(Finds)*

Frommer's Rating: B+, A if you're lucky enough to see the gorillas

Recommended Ages: All ages

The hippos put on quite a display (and draw a riotous crowd reaction) when they do what comes naturally and use their tails to scatter it over everything above and below the surface. There are other animals here, including ever-active mole rats, but the **lowland gorillas** are the main event. The trail has two gorilla-viewing areas: One sports a family, including a 500-pound silverback, his ladies, and his children; the other has bachelors. Guests who are unaware of the treasures that lie herein often skip or rush through it, missing a chance to see some magnificent creatures. That said, they're not always cooperative, especially in hot weather, when they spend most of the day in shady areas out of view. There's also a new Endangered Animal Rehabilitation Centre with Colobus and Mona monkeys. *Tip:* The playful meerkats are usually a big hit with kids.

Rafiki's Planet Watch *(Overrated)*

Frommer's Rating: C

Recommended Ages: All ages

Board an open-sided train (the Wildlife Express) near Pangani Forest Exploration Trail for a trip to the back edge of the park, which has three attractions. **Conservation Station** offers a behind-the-scenes look at how Disney cares for animals (and the entrance mural is loaded with Hidden Mickeys). You'll pass nurseries and veterinarian stations. But these facilities need to be staffed to be interesting, and that's not always the case. **Habitat Habit!** is a trail with small animals such as cotton-top tamarins. The **Affection Section's** petting zoo has rare goats and potbelly pigs.

Fun Fact Did You Know?

Tobacco products aren't the only things unavailable in the theme parks. You can't buy chewing or bubble gum either. It seems too many guests stuck it under tables, benches, and chairs—or tossed it on sidewalks, where it often hitched a ride on the soles of the unsuspecting.

ASIA

Disney's Imagineers have outdone themselves in creating the kingdom of **Anandapur**. The intricately painted artwork at the front is appealing, and it also seems to make the lines move a tad faster.

Flights of Wonder

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: All ages

This live-animal action show has undergone several transformations since the park opened. It's a low-key break from the madness and has a few laughs, including Groucho the African yellow-nape, who entertains the audience with his *op-parrot-ic* a cappella solos, and the just-above-your-head soaring of a Harris hawk and a Eurasian eagle owl.

Kali River Rapids

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Its churning water mimics real rapids, and optical illusions have you wondering if you're about to go over the falls. The ride begins with a peaceful tour of lush foliage, but soon you're dipping and dripping as your tiny craft is tossed and turned. If the rapids themselves don't drench you, the kids manning water cannons along the route will ensure you get soaked. (Bring a plastic bag for your valuables. The rafts' center storage areas alone likely won't keep them dry.) The lines can be long, but keep your head up and enjoy the marvelous art overhead and

Fun Fact Cool Trivia

Two things you might hear during your day in the park: Bugs make up 80% of the real animal kingdom, and cheetahs are the only great cats that purr. Both are true.

on beautiful murals. **Note:** There's a 38-inch height minimum, and expectant moms and people with neck, back, and heart problems or those prone to motion sickness shouldn't ride it.

Maharajah Jungle Trek

Frommer's Rating: B

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Disney keeps its promise to provide up-close views of animals with this exhibit. If you don't show up in the midday heat, you may see Bengal tigers through a wall of thick glass, while nothing but air separates you from dozens of giant fruit bats hanging in what appears to be a courtyard. Some have wingspans of 6 feet. (If you have a phobia, you can bypass this, though the bats are harmless.) Guides are on hand to answer questions, and you can also check a brochure that lists the animals you may spot; it's available on your right as you enter. You'll be asked to "recycle" it as you exit.

PARADES

Mickey's Jammin' Jungle Parade at Animal Kingdom is an interactive street party featuring whimsical colorful animals and characters on expedition. The music and overall atmosphere are lively and the one-of-a-kind visuals are some the best in all the parks.

Tips Coming Soon

If there's a knock against Animal Kingdom, it's that it doesn't pack a lot of punch in the adrenaline department due to its lack of thrill rides. But nay-sayers will be quieted in 2006 by the debut of **Expedition Everest**, Animal Kingdom's first true thrill ride. You'll begin on a seemingly casual trek to the snowcapped peak of Mt. Everest, passing through an Asian mountain range, dense bamboo forests, and moving past glacier fields and pounding waterfalls. But your journey will quickly get off track and become a high-speed train ride that sends you careening along rough and rugged terrain, moving backwards and forwards, along icy mountain ledges and through darkened caves—only to end up confronting the abominable snowman. My adrenaline is running already.

7 Disney Water Parks

Note: All of the attractions mentioned in this section can be found on the “Walt Disney World Parks & Attractions” map on p. 177.

TYPHOON LAGOON

*Ahoy swimmers, floaters, run-aground boaters!
A furious storm once roared 'cross the sea
Catching ships in its path, helpless to flee . . .
Instead of a certain and watery doom
The winds swept them here to TYPHOON LAGOON.*

Such is the Disney legend relating to **Typhoon Lagoon** ★★, which you'll see posted on consecutive signs as you enter the park. Located off Buena Vista Drive between the Downtown Disney Marketplace and Disney-MGM Studios, this is the ultimate in water-theme parks. Its fantasy setting is a palm-fringed island village of ramshackle, tin-roofed structures, strewn with cargo, surfboards, and other marine wreckage left by the “great typhoon.” A storm-stranded fishing boat (the *Miss Tilly*) dangles precariously atop 95-foot Mount Mayday, the steep setting for several attractions. Every half-hour, the boat's smokestack erupts, shooting a 50-foot geyser of water into the air.

ESSENTIALS

HOURS The park is open from at least 10am to 5pm, with extended hours during some holiday periods and summer (☎ 407/560-4141; www.disneyworld.com).

ENTRANCE FEES A 1-day ticket (without 6.5% tax) to Typhoon Lagoon is \$34 for adults, \$28 for kids 3 to 9.

HELPFUL HINTS In summer, arrive no later than 9am to avoid long lines. The park is often filled to capacity by 10am and then closed to later arrivals. Beach towels (\$2.50 per towel) and lockers (\$5 and \$7) can be rented, and beachwear can be purchased at **Singapore Sal's**. Light fare is available at two eateries, **Leaning Palms** and **Typhoon Tillie's**. A beach bar called **Let's Go Slurpin'** sells beer and soft drinks and **Lowtide Lou's** sells ice cream and soft drinks. There are picnic tables (consider bringing picnic fare; you can keep it in your locker until lunch). Guests aren't permitted to bring their own flotation devices, and glass bottles are prohibited.

 **Tips Closed for the Winter**

Both Disney water parks are refurbished annually. That means if you're traveling in fall or winter, it is likely that one of the parks will be closed for a month or more. So if a water park is on your itinerary, ask in advance about closings.

ATTRACTIONS IN THE PARK**Castaway Creek**

Hop onto a raft or an inner tube and meander along this 2,100-foot lazy river that circles most of the park. It tumbles through a misty rainforest, then by caves and secluded grottoes and on into the sunshine all the while passing along some of Disney's meticulously maintained tropical foliage. Tubes are included in the admission price.

Crush 'n' Gusher

The newest thrill to splash onto the scene is a first-of-its-kind water coaster featuring three separate experiences to choose from. The **Banana Blaster**, **Coconut Crusher**, and **Pineapple Plunger** each offer steep drops, twists and turns of varying degrees as your sent careening through an old, rusted-out fruit factory. Intense jets of water actually propel riders back uphill at one point.

Ketchakiddie Creek

Many of the park's other attractions require guests to be older children, teens, or adults, but this section is a **kiddie area** exclusively for 2- to 5-year-olds. An innovative water playground, it has bubbling fountains to frolic in, mini-water slides, a pint-size "white-water" tubing run, spouting whales and squirting seals, rubbery crocodiles to climb on, grottoes to explore, and waterfalls to loll under. It's also small enough for you to take good home videos or photographs.

Shark Reef

Guests are given free equipment (and instruction) for a 15-minute swim through this very small snorkeling area that includes a simulated coral reef populated by about 4,000 parrotfish, angelfish, yellowtail damselfish, and other cuties including small rays and sharks. If you don't want to get in, you can observe the fish via portholes in a walk-through viewing area.

Typhoon Lagoon Surf Pool

This large (2.75 million gal.) and lovely lagoon is the size of two football fields and is surrounded by a white sandy beach. It's the park's main swimming area. The chlorinated water has a turquoise hue much like the Caribbean. **Large waves** roll through the deeper areas every 90 seconds. A foghorn sounds to warn you when one is coming. Young children can wade in the lagoon's more peaceful tidal pools—**Blustery Bay** or **Whitecap Cove**. The lagoon also is home to a **special weekly surfing program** (see "Staying Active" in chapter 8).

Water Slides

Humunga Kowabunga consists of three 214-foot Mount Mayday slides that propel you down the mountain on a serpentine route through waterfalls and bat caves and past nautical wreckage before depositing you into a bubbling catch pool; each offers slightly different views and 30-mph thrills. There's seating for non-Kowabunga folks whose kids have commissioned them to "watch me." Women should wear a one-piece swimsuit on the slides (except those who don't mind putting on a show for gawkers).

Note: You must be 48 inches or taller to ride this. **Storm Slides** offer a tamer course through the park's manmade caves.

White-Water Rides

Mount Mayday is the setting for three white-water rafting adventures—**Keelhaul Falls**, **Mayday Falls**, and **Gangplank Falls**—all offering steep drops coursing through caves and passing lush scenery. Keelhaul Falls has the most winding route, Mayday Falls has the steepest drops and fastest water, and the slightly tamer Gangplank Falls uses large tubes so that the whole family can pile on.

BLIZZARD BEACH

Blizzard Beach ★★ is the younger of Disney's water parks, a 66-acre "ski resort" in the midst of a tropical lagoon centering on the 90-foot, uh-oh, Mount Gushmore. There's a legend for this one as well. Apparently a freak snowstorm dumped tons of snow on Walt Disney World, leading to the creation of Florida's first—and, so far, only—mountain ski resort (complete with Ice Gator, the park's mascot). Naturally, when temperatures returned to their normal broiling range, the snow bunnies prepared to close up shop, when they realized—this is Disney, happy endings are a must—that what remained of their snow resort could be turned into a water park featuring the fastest and tallest waterlogged "ski" runs in the country. The base of Mount Gushmore has a sand beach with several other attractions, including a wave pool and a smaller version of the mount for younger children. The park is located off World Drive, just north of the All-Star Movie, Music, and Sports resorts.

ESSENTIALS

HOURS It's open from at least 10am to 5pm, with extended hours during holiday periods and summer (☎ 407/560-3400; www.disneyworld.com).

Tips Water Park Dos & Don'ts

1. Go in the afternoons, about 2pm, even in summer, if you can stand the heat that long and want to avoid crowds. The early birds usually are gone by then.
2. Go early in the week when most of the week-long guests are filling the lines at the theme parks.
3. Kids can get lost just as easily at a water park as at the other parks, and the consequences can be tragic. All Disney parks have lifeguards, usually wearing bright red suits, but, to be safe, make yourself the first line of safety for the kids in your crew.
4. Women should remember the one-piece bathing suit rule I mentioned earlier under "Water Slides." And all bathers should remember the **"wedgie" rule** on the more extreme rides, such as Summit Plummet (at Blizzard Beach, below). What's the "wedgie" rule? It's a principle of physics that causes you to start out wearing baggies and end up in a thong.
5. Use a waterproof sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 and drink plenty of fluids. Despite all that water, it's easy to get dehydrated in summer.

Fun Fact **Did You Know?**

- Walt Disney World sprawls across 47 square miles, which makes it the size of San Francisco or twice that of Manhattan.
- Mickey Mouse has more than 175 outfits, ranging from scuba gear to formal wear. But he's second banana to Minnie, who has a mere 200.
- The number of Disney T-shirts sold by the parks each year could plaster the image of Mickey Mouse on the chest of every Chicagoan.
- The DNA Tower at the entrance to the Epcot Wonders of Life pavilion is 5.5 billion times the actual size—just the right size for a human 6 million miles tall.
- Mowing the lawn at WDW is no joke. The staff mows 450,000 miles each year—the equivalent of 18 trips around the Earth's equator.
- The WDW Laundry handles 260,000 pounds of laundry *a day!* To get the equivalent, you'd have to wash and dry a load every day for 44 years.
- More than a million pounds of watermelon are served every year at Walt Disney World Resort (watch out for flying seeds!).
- Walt Disney World gift shops sell about 500,000 character watches annually. Not surprisingly, most of them are Mickey's.
- According to Kodak estimates, about 4% of the amateur photographs snapped in the U.S. are taken at Walt Disney World.

ENTRANCE FEES A 1-day ticket to Blizzard Beach is \$34 (without 6% tax) for adults, \$28 for children 3 to 9.

HELPFUL HINTS Arrive at or before opening to avoid long lines and to be sure you get in. Beach towels (\$2.50 per towel) and lockers (\$5 and \$7) are available, and you can buy the beachwear you forgot to bring at the **Beach Haus**. You can grab something to eat at **Avalunch** and **The Warming Hut**, and **Lattawatta Lodge** (burgers, hot dogs, nachos, pizza, and sandwiches).

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS IN THE PARK

Cross Country Creek

Inner-tubers can float lazily along this park-circling 2,900-foot creek, but beware of the mysterious Polar Caves where you'll get splashed with melting ice.

Melt-Away Bay

This 1-acre bobbing wave pool is fed by waterfalls of melting "snow" and features relatively calm waves.

Runoff Rapids

Another tube job, this one lets you careen down any of three twisting-turning runs, one of which sends you through darkness.

Ski-Patrol Training Camp

Designed for 'tweens and teens, it features a rope swing, a T-bar drop over water, slides like the wet and slippery **Mogul Mania** from the Mount, and a challenging ice-floe walk along slippery floating icebergs.

Slush Gusher

This superspeed slide travels along a snow-banked gully. **Note:** It has a 48-inch height minimum.

Snow Stormers

These three flumes descend from the top of Mount Gushmore and follow a switch-back course through ski-type slalom gates.

Summit Plummet

Read *every* speed, motion, vertical-dip, wedgie, and hold-onto-your-breast-plate warning in this guide. Then, test your bravado in a bull ring, a space shuttle, or dozens of other death-defying hobbies as a warm-up. This puppy starts pretty slow, with a lift ride to the 120-foot summit. Then . . . well . . . kiss any kids or religious medal you may be carrying. Because, if you board, you *will enter* the world's fastest body slide, a test of your courage and swimsuit that virtually goes straight down and has you moving *sans* vehicle at 60 mph by the catch pool (aka, stop zone). Even the hardest rider may find this one hard to handle; a veteran thrill-seeker described the experience to me as "15 seconds of paralyzing fear." **Note:** It has a 48-inch height minimum. Also, expectant mothers and people with neck, back, and heart problems shouldn't ride.

Teamboat Springs

On the World's longest white-water raft ride, your six-passenger raft twists down a 1,200-foot series of rushing waterfalls.

Tike's Peak

This kid-size version of Mount Gushmore offers short water slides, rideable animals, a snow castle, a squirting ice pond, and a fountain play area for young guests.

Toboggan Racers

Here's an eight-lane slide that sends you racing head first over exhilarating dips into a "snowy slope." (If you've ever been on one of those tall super slides at amusement parks, imagine doing it headfirst, on your belly, on a raft. This baby can pack a lot of zip by the end.)

8 Other WDW Attractions

Note: All of the attractions mentioned in this section can be found on the "Walt Disney World Parks & Attractions" map on p. 177.

FANTASIA GARDENS & WINTER SUMMERLAND

Fantasia Gardens Miniature Golf ★★, located off Buena Vista Drive across from Disney-MGM Studios, offers two 18-hole miniature courses drawing inspiration from the Walt Disney classic cartoon of the same name. You'll find hippos, ostriches, and alligators on the **Fantasia Gardens** course, where the Sorcerer's Apprentice presides over the final hole. It's a good bet for beginners and kids. Seasoned minigolfers probably will prefer **Fantasia Fairways**, which is a scaled-down golf course complete with sand traps, water hazards, tricky putting greens, and holes ranging from 40 to 75 feet.

Santa Claus and his elves provide the theme for **Winter Summerland** ★★, which has two 18-hole miniature golf courses across from Blizzard Beach on Buena Vista Drive. The **Winter** course takes you from an ice castle to a snowman to the North Pole. The **Summer** course is pure Florida, from sandcastles to surfboards to a visit with Santa on the "Winternet."

DisneyQuest

The reaction that visitors have upon experiencing this popular attraction is often the same. No matter if it's from kids just reaching the video-game age, teens who are firmly hooked, or adults who never outgrew *Pong*, they leave saying: "Awesome!"


This five-level virtual-video arcade has everything from nearly old-fashioned pinball to virtual games and rides. Want appetizers?

Aladdin's Magic Carpet Ride puts you astride a motorcyclelike seat and flies through the 3-D Cave of Wonders. **Invasion! An ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter** has the same kind of intensity. Your mission is to save colonists from intergalactic bad guys. One player flies the virtual module while others fire weapons.


Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Buccaneer Gold puts you and three mates in 3-D helmets so that you can battle pirate ships virtual-reality style. One plays captain, steering your ship, while the others assume positions behind cannons to blast the black hearts into oblivion. Each time you do, you're rewarded with some doubloons, but beware of the sea monsters that can gobble you and your treasure. In the final moments, you come face to face with a ghost ship, which can send you to Davy Jones's Locker.



Songmaker has short lines, perhaps for a reason. It involves karaoke. Step into a phone booth-size recording studio to make your own CD and buy it for \$10.

Try the **Mighty Ducks Pinball Slam** if you're a pinball fan. It's an interactive life-size game where you ride platforms and use body English to score points.

If you have an inventive mind, stop in at **CyberSpace Mountain** , where Bill Nye the Science-Turned-Roller-Coaster Guy helps you create the ultimate loop-and-dipster, which you can then ride in a simulator. It's a major hit with the coaster-crazy crowd.

Finally, if you need some quiet time, sign up at **Animation Academy** for a mini-course in Disney cartooning. There are also snack and food areas for those who need something more tangible than virtual refreshment.

DisneyQuest ( **407/828-4600**; www.disneyquest.com) is located in Downtown Disney West Side on Buena Vista Drive. The admission (\$34 for adults, \$28 for kids 3–9; prices don't include 6% sales tax) allows you unlimited play from 11:30am to 11pm (until midnight Fri–Sat). Unfortunately, heavy crowds tend to gather here after 1pm, which can cut into your fun and patience.

Tickets at both venues are \$10 for adults and \$8 for children 3 to 9. Both are open from 10am to 10 or 11pm daily. For information about Fantasia Gardens, call  **407/560-4582**. For information about Winter Summerland, call  **407/560-3000**. You can find both on the Internet at **www.disneyworld.com**.

DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

The 200-acre Disney's Wide World of Sports complex has a 7,500-seat professional baseball stadium, 10 other baseball and softball fields, six basketball courts, 12 lighted tennis courts, a track-and-field complex, a golf driving range, and six sand volleyball courts. It's a haven for sports fans and wannabe athletes.

Note: The **Hess Sports Field North** is due to open in the spring of 2005, the first expansion of the Wide World of Sports venue since its opening in 1997. The addition will feature 20 acres of playing fields, with space for four football/soccer fields and four baseball-softball diamonds.

The complex is located on Victory Way, just north of U.S. 192 (west of I-4; ☎ 407/939-1500; www.disneyworldsports.com). It's open daily from 10am to 5pm; the cost is \$10.05 adults, \$7.48 kids 3 to 9. Organized programs and events include:

- The **Multi-Sports Experience**, which challenges guests with a variety of activities, covering many sports: football, baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, and volleyball. It's open on select days.
- The **Atlanta Braves** play 16 spring-training games during a 1-month season that begins in early March. Tickets cost \$13 to \$21. For tickets call Ticketmaster (☎ 407/939-4263). In addition to the Braves, the facility also hosts the **Tampa Bay Buccaneers'** spring training camp.
- The **NFL, NBA, NCAA, PGA**, and **Harlem Globetrotters** also host events, sometimes annually and sometimes more frequently, at the complex. Admission varies by event.

RICHARD PETTY DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Test Track is for sissies. The **Richard Petty Driving Experience** at WDW gives you a chance to do the real thing in a 600-horsepower Winston Cup car. How real is it? Expect to sign a two-page waiver that features words like **DANGEROUS** and **CALCULATED RISK** before you climb in. At one end of the spectrum, you can ride shotgun for a couple of laps at 145 mph (\$105, including tax). At the other, spend from 3 hours to 2 days learning how to drive the car yourself and race fellow daredevils in 8 to 30 laps of excitement (\$403–\$1,330, including tax). **Note:** You must be 18 years old to do this. Hours and seasons vary. For reservations call ☎ 800/237-3889; or head on the Web to www.1800bepetty.com.

Exploring Beyond Disney: Universal Orlando, SeaWorld & Other Attractions

“**A**nanything-you-can-do-we-can-do-better.” This seems to be the Orlando motto. Every time one park adds an attraction, the next park feels the need to add two attractions, and so on, and so, and so on. This has been going on since Mickey first arrived in town. The battle between Disney and its top-ranked challenger Universal Orlando, which each year since 1999 has chipped away at what once was WDW’s virtual monopoly, however, is a good thing—at least for you and me. Each time one park tries to outdo the other, we reap the benefits of their additions. Still, make no mistake: Disney is king, leading in theme parks (4–2) and smaller attractions (9–1). It has a 2-to-1 edge in nightclub venues, a huge lead in restaurants, and, when it comes to hotel rooms, its lead is insurmountable.

Nevertheless, Universal is trying. It had a substantial growth spurt in 1999, bolstering its original park, **Universal Studios Florida**, with a second theme park, **Islands of Adventure**; a nightclub and restaurant complex, **CityWalk**; and its first resort, **Portofino Bay**, a 750-room Loews hotel. In January 2001, it opened a second resort, the **Hard Rock Hotel**, and, in 2002, its third, the **Royal Pacific Resort**. Universal Orlando has more than 2,000 adjoining acres on which to expand, and, while the company’s lips are sealed, it’s known there are plans for at

least two more hotels, a golf course, and possibly 300 acres of additional rides and attractions.

A few miles south, **SeaWorld** and its sister park, **Discovery Cove**, also grab a share of the Orlando action. In 2004, SeaWorld added a 5-acre shopping and dining area, appropriately named the Waterfront.

Aside from greater variety, these players mean more multiday packages and special deals for you. To compete with Disney, SeaWorld and Universal Orlando teamed up on multiday pass options a few years back. They offer a **FlexTicket** that also includes admission to **Wet ’n Wild** (a Universal-owned water park) and has an option to include **Busch Gardens** in Tampa.

While the wars rage on in the traditional tourist areas, it has finally dawned on the rest of Orlando that Central Florida is one of the world’s favorite vacation destinations.

Since the early 1990s, downtown Orlando has gotten a makeover that woos hundreds of thousands to its attractions, nightclubs, and restaurants. Recent expansions at the Orlando Museum of Art and the Orlando Science Center show the city is trying to grab its share as well. This expansion means visitors can enjoy the spoils: more variety, greater opportunities, and a world beyond the theme parks.

THE FLEXTICKET The most economical way to see the various “other-than-Disney” parks is with these passes, which counter Disney’s Park Hopper add-on. With the **FlexTicket**, you pay one price to visit any of the participating parks as many times as you want during a 14-day period. A four-park pass to Universal Studios Florida, Islands of Adventure, Wet ‘n Wild, and SeaWorld is \$184.95 for adults and \$150.95 for children 3 to 9. A five-park pass, which adds Busch Gardens in Tampa, is \$224.95 for adults and \$189.95 for kids. Both passes also include entrance to Universal CityWalk. The **FlexTicket** can be ordered through Universal (☎ 407/363-8000; www.universalorlando.com); SeaWorld (☎ 407/351-3600; www.seaworld.com); or Wet ‘n Wild (☎ 800/992-9453 or 407/351-1800; www.wetnwild.com). **Note:** There’s a round-trip shuttle available to Busch Gardens (p. 77) that’s free for FlexTicket buyers (it’s \$10 for other guests).

UNIVERSAL EXPRESS This is Universal’s answer to Disney’s FASTPASS. Universal Express has three tiers. Guests of the Portofino Bay, Hard Rock, and Royal Pacific hotels (see chapter 5, “Where to Stay”) only need to show their room keys to get at or near the front of the line for most rides. Single-day and multiday ticket buyers who don’t stay at a Universal resort can obtain one express pass at a time. Waits are usually 15 minutes or less. Guests can return for more once their pass is used or has expired. Guests can also purchase a pass, the **Universal Express Plus Pass**, which allows them to use the express lines at rides all day long. Pass prices vary, depending on the time of year, and have ranged from \$15 to \$39 per pass in the past. While the system is available throughout the day, passes (even the Plus passes) are not unlimited and can run out during busier times. Call ☎ 407/363-8000, or go to www.universalorlando.com for more information.

1 Universal Studios Florida

Even with fast-paced grown-up rides based on blockbusters such as *Twister*, *Terminator*, and *Men in Black*, Universal Studios Florida is a ton of fun for kids. And, as an added plus, it’s a working motion picture and TV production studio, so occasionally there’s some live filming done at Nickelodeon’s sound stages or elsewhere in the park. Even if there isn’t a film or show in production, you can see reel history displayed in the form of some 40 actual sets exhibited along Hollywood Boulevard and Rodeo Drive. And there are plenty of action shows and rides including **Twister . . . Ride It Out**, **Earthquake—The Big One**, **Back to the Future . . . The Ride**, **Jaws**, **Terminator**, and the just-opened **Revenge of the Mummy**.

After a period of quiet on the expansion front, 2003 saw Universal add two new attractions—**Jimmy Neutron’s Nicktoon Blast**, and **Shrek 4-D**—and 2004 saw the debut of **Revenge of the Mummy**, a ride based on the hit film, *The Mummy*.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING TO UNIVERSAL BY CAR Universal Orlando is a half-mile north of I-4 Exit 75B, Kirkman Road/Highway 435. There may be construction in the area, so follow the signs directing you to the parks.

PARKING If you park in the multilevel garages, remember the theme and row in your area to help you find your car later. Or, do it the old-fashioned way: Write it down. Parking costs \$9 for cars, light trucks, and vans. Valet parking is \$16. Universal’s garages are connected to its parks and have moving sidewalks, but it’s still a long walk.

Tips Shorter Days

Like Disney, Universal juggles park hours to adjust for varying attendance due to seasonal shifts and holidays. The hours listed in this chapter are generally accurate, but sometimes the parks close earlier, or some rides or shows open later. To avoid disappointment, check the park's website at www.universalorlando.com or call ☎ 407/363-8000 for up-to-the-minute schedules.

TICKET PRICES A **1-day ticket** costs \$59.75 (plus 6.5% sales tax) for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9. At press time, Universal was also offering a 5-day/2-park pass for \$99.95. The price (a true bargain) is the same for both kids and adults and is good for consecutive days only. All multiday passes let you move between Universal Studios Florida and Islands of Adventure. *Multiday passes also give you free access to the CityWalk clubs at night.* Because the parks are within walking distance of each other, you won't lose much time jockeying back and forth, which is not the case at Disney. Nevertheless, it's a long walk for tykes and people with limited mobility, so consider a stroller or wheelchair.

Note: Word has it that Universal may completely overhaul their ticketing system and pricing schemes in the near future. Though the information in this chapter was correct at press time, be sure to confirm all ticket information before you arrive in town.

See the beginning of this chapter for information on the **FlexTicket**, which provides multiday admission to Universal Studios Florida, Islands of Adventure, SeaWorld, and Wet 'n Wild.

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 \$100 per person. A 6-hour, two-park VIP tour covers both parks and costs \$125 per person. Prices for both tours do not include 6.5% tax and *do not cover admission to the parks!* For more information on the VIP tour, call ☎ 407/363-8295 or send an e-mail to viptours@universalorlando.com. Tours start at 10am and noon daily. If you plan on visiting during peak season, money isn't an issue, and you aren't staying at one of the Universal resorts, this is a good way to experience the best of the park without having to spend most of your day in lines.

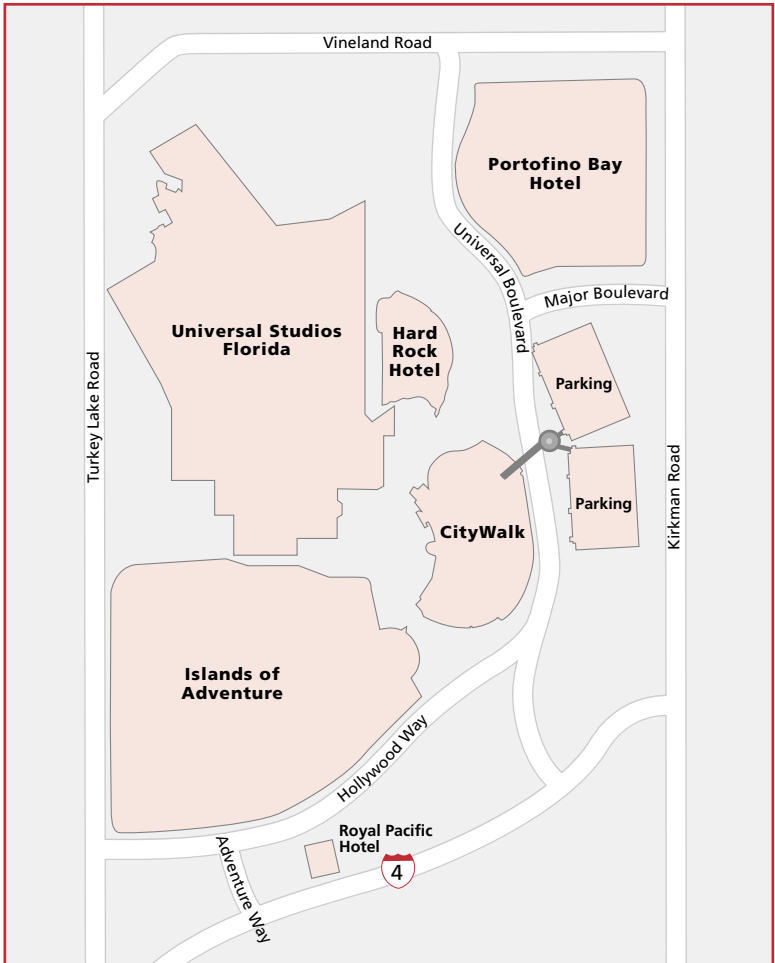
HOURS The park is open 365 days a year, usually at least from 9am to 6pm, though it's open as late as 8 or 9pm in summer and around holidays. The best bet is to call before you go so that you're not caught by surprise.

MAKING YOUR VISIT MORE ENJOYABLE

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

You can get information before you leave home by calling **Universal Orlando Guest Services** at ☎ 800/711-0080, 407/224-4233, or 407/363-8000. Ask about travel packages as well as theme-park information. Universal sometimes offers a promotion that adds a second day free or at a deeply discounted price. You can also write to Guest Services, 1000 Universal Studios Plaza, Orlando, FL 32819-7601.

ONLINE Find information about Universal Orlando at www.universalorlando.com. Orlando's daily newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*, also produces Orlando Sentinel Online at www.orlandosentinel.com. Additionally, there's a lot of information about the parks,

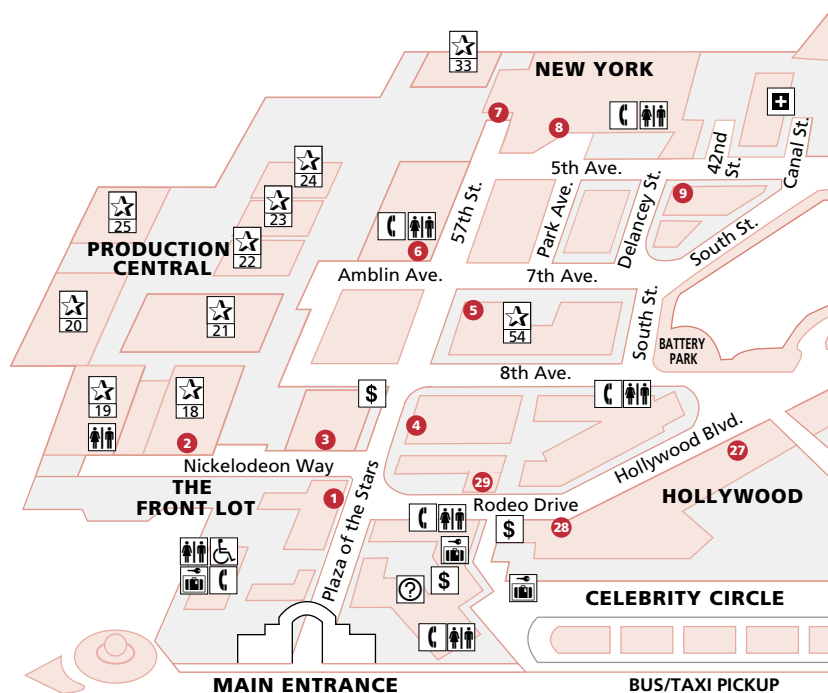


hotels, restaurants, and more at the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau site: www.orlandoinfo.com.

INFORMATION FOR VISITORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Guests with disabilities should go to **Guest Services**, located just inside the main entrance, for a *Rider's Guide for Rider Safety & Guests with Disabilities*, a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), or other special assistance. You can rent a standard wheelchair for \$8 or an electric one for \$40 (both require a credit card imprint, a driver's license, or \$50 as a deposit). You can reserve them 24 hours or more in advance by calling ☎ **407/224-6350**. You can arrange for sign language interpreting services at no charge by calling ☎ **888/519-4899** (toll-free TDD), 407/224-4414 (local TDD), or 407/224-5929 (voice). Make arrangements for an appointment with an interpreter 1 to 2 weeks in advance. Information is also available at www.universalorlando.com.

Universal Studios Florida



← Exit to Turkey Lake Road

↙ **CityWalk** See CityWalk Map in Chapter 10

PRODUCTION CENTRAL

Classic Monster Cafe **5**
 Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast **3**
 Nickelodeon Studios **2**
 Shrek 4-D **4**

NEW YORK

Blues Brothers **9**
 Extreme Ghostbusters **7**
 Revenge of the Mummy **8**
 Twister...Ride it Out **6**

THE FRONT LOT

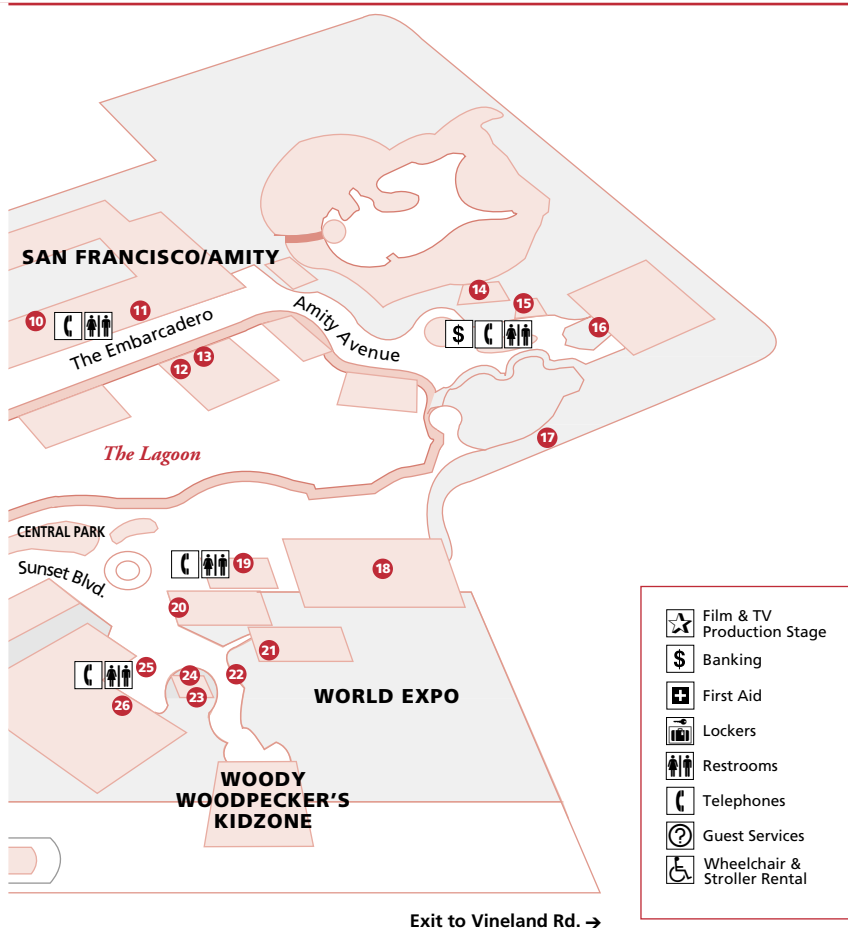
Universal Studios Store **1**

HOLLYWOOD

Lucy, A Tribute **29**
 Terminator 2: 3-D Battle Across Time **28**
 Universal Horror Make-Up Show **27**

WORLD EXPO

Back to the Future: The Ride **18**
 International Food and Film Festival **19**
 Men in Black Alien Attack **17**



WOODY WOODPECKER'S KIDZONE

Animal Planet Live! **20**
 Curious George Goes to Town **22**
 A Day in the Park with Barney **21**
 E.T. Adventure **26**
 Fievel's Playland **24**
 KidZone Characters Meet & Greet **25**
 Woody Woodpecker's
 Nuthouse Coaster **23**

SAN FRANCISCO/AMITY

Beetlejuice's Rock 'n Roll
 Graveyard Revue **10**
 Brody's Ice Cream Shoppe **15**
 Earthquake—The Big One **11**
 Fear Factor Live **16**
 Jaws **14**
 Lombard's Landing Restaurant **12**
 San Francisco Pastry Company **13**

Tip: The *Rider's Guide* is also a great tool for parents, as it describes in great detail the various rides' special effects, warnings, height requirements, and general guest services information at both Universal parks.

PETS You can board your small animals at the shelter located inside the parking garages for \$10 a day (no overnight stays), but you have to return to feed and walk Fido. Ask the attendant when you pay for parking to direct you to the kennel.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT

As with Walt Disney World, there's really no off season for Universal, but the week after Labor Day until mid-December (excluding Thanksgiving week) and January to mid-May (excluding spring break) are known for smaller crowds, cooler weather, and less humid air. The summer months, when the masses throng to the parks, are the worst time for crowds and hot, sticky, humid days. During cooler months, you also won't have to worry about daily thunderstorms.

Some of the park's best rides are action-based thrill rides, which means your options are limited if you're pregnant, are prone to motion sickness, or have heart, neck, or back problems. The same applies to smaller children. Review the rides and restrictions on the following pages or when you enter the park so that you don't stand in line for something you're unable to enjoy. (There are stationary areas available at some moving rides. Check your park guide under "expectant mothers," as well as the boards in front of each ride and then ask the attendants for help as you enter.) A child-swap program (allowing parents to switch off on rides without having to stand in line twice) is available at the rides as well.

THE BEST DAYS TO VISIT

Go near the end of the week, on a Thursday or Friday. The pace is somewhat fast Monday through Wednesday, with the heaviest crowds on weekends and during summers and holidays.

CREATE AN ITINERARY

Pick three or four things that you must see or do and plan your day along a rough geographical guide. Universal Studios Florida and Islands of Adventure are both relatively small, so walking from one end of the park to the other isn't as daunting as it is in some of the Disney parks.

CHOOSE AGE-APPROPRIATE RIDES/SHOWS

Here, as in Walt Disney World, height and age restrictions aren't bent to accommodate a screaming child. Even where restrictions don't exist, some shows have loud music and pyrotechnics that can scare young kids. Check the attraction descriptions that follow to make sure your child won't be unduly disappointed or frightened.

Moments Universal Has a Few 'Toons, Too

While the options pale in comparison to Disney, Universal has character meet-and-greets on a rotating basis. At **Universal Studios Florida**, you may run into Woody Woodpecker, SpongeBob SquarePants, Scooby Doo, Jimmy Neutron, and others. At **Islands of Adventure**, the cast may include Spider-Man, Popeye & Olive Oyl, Beetle Bailey, the Cat in the Hat, Betty Boop, or Boris & Natasha.

Tips Universal Characters & Shows, Too

Universal Studios Florida has a host of street characters and shows to entertain the crowds that flock here. The lineup includes: **Extreme Ghostbusters: The Great Fright Way**, a revised show that has Beetlejuice and The Ghostbusters singing and dancing to hits from the '60s through the '90s; **Lucy and Ricky**, in which Lucy pulls guests into an impromptu conga line; **Sarita and Rico**, two Latin characters who get guests singing and dancing to high-energy tunes such as "Hot, Hot, Hot" and "Mambo #5"; and the **Men in Black** show, in which the agents know there are a lot of aliens in the park, and they must put unsuspecting guests through a humorous screening test. **Note:** Characters rotate or appear seasonally.

Overall, Universal Studios does a much better job in the way of entertaining their guests while they wait in line for the attractions. Many have preshows or TV screens with previews or introductions to the attractions. They also have got it all over the House of Mouse when it comes to beating the sun—many of the attractions here have waiting areas under some sort of cover or, in some cases, indoors (unless the line is so long that it extends beyond these areas, which it sometimes does in the busiest seasons). It is also exponentially easier to get from your car (or resort) to the parks. From the parking lot, if you have kids and all of the gear that comes with them, pack your stroller and bring it along—you will be able to walk directly to the parks, but it can be a long haul for small feet (and there are no trams from the parking decks to the theme parks). Elevators, moving sidewalks, and covered walkways will take you up to the entrance of CityWalk. And, if you're staying at a Universal resort, you'll be glad to know that all three resorts are relatively close by and are serviced by a water taxi (and the Hard Rock is within walking distance) that'll drop you off in CityWalk. I am not saying that you will not have to wait at all—it can take several minutes—but not nearly as long as some trips at Disney can.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

A Suggested Itinerary for Families with Young Children

Waste no time: Hoof it to **Woody Woodpecker's KidZone**, where you and your kids can spend most of the day. If they're 36 inches or taller, don't miss multiple rides on **Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster**. Try to make an early pit stop at **Fievel's Playland** (especially its water slide, which is slow-moving and has longer lines after 10:30am). Then take a leisurely pace to see **E.T. Adventure**, **A Day in the Park with Barney**, and **Animal Planet Live!**

If you stick around long enough for lunch, get a hoagie or hot dog at **Animal Crackers** and don't leave before visiting the wet-and-wild **Curious George Goes to Town**. Round out the day with a stop at **Nickelodeon Studios**.

A Suggested Itinerary for Older Children, Teens & Adults

A single day is usually sufficient to see the park if you arrive early and keep a fairly brisk pace. Skip the city sidewalks of the main gate and **Terminator 2: 3-D Battle Across Time** until later. Go to the right and tackle **Men in**

Black Alien Attack and **Back to the Future . . . The Ride**. Then make a counterclockwise loop, catch **Fear Factor Live**, visit **Jaws**, **Earthquake—The Big One**, **Revenge of the Mummy**, and **Twister . . . Ride It Out**. Break for lunch somewhere in that quartet, then tackle the 'toons at **Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast** and the **Shrek 4-D** adventure, before catching the fun in **Terminator 2: 3-D Battle Across Time**. If your kids are young enough to

appreciate the TV channel, catch the 45-minute **Nickelodeon Studios** tour and show (4- to 14-year-olds love it).

A second day lets you revisit some of your favorites or see those you missed. With the pressure to hit all the major rides lessened, you can delay your **Nickelodeon Studios** visit until day 2 (the first tour usually isn't until 10:30am or so). You can also visit the **Universal Horror Makeup Show** and **Beetlejuice's Rock 'n Roll Graveyard Revue**.

SERVICES & FACILITIES IN UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA

ATMs Machines accepting cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems are to the right of the main entrance (outside and inside the park) and in San Francisco/Amity near Lombard's Landing restaurant.

Baby Care Changing tables are in men's and women's restrooms; there are nursing facilities at Family Services, just inside the main entrance and to the right. Diapers and baby supplies aren't sold on the premises, so come prepared if you have little ones.

Cameras & Film Film and disposable cameras are available at the On Location shop in the Front Lot, just inside the main entrance. One-hour photo developing is available, though we don't recommend paying park prices.

Car Assistance Battery jumps are provided. If you need assistance with your car, raise the hood and use the call boxes located throughout the garage to call for security.

First Aid The First Aid Center is located between New York and San Francisco, next to Louie's Italian Restaurant on Canal Street. There's also one just inside the main entrance next to Guest Services.

Lockers Lockers are across from Guest Services near the main entrance and cost \$8 and \$10 a day, plus a \$2 refundable deposit.

Lost Children If you lose a child, go to Guest Services near the main entrance or contact any park employee for assistance. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Pet Care A kennel is available (\$10 a day) near the newest parking lot. Ask the parking attendant for directions upon entering the toll plaza. Overnight boarding is not permitted. Owners are responsible for walking and feeding their animals during their stay.

Stroller Rental Strollers can be rented in Amity and at Guest Services just inside the entrance to the right. The cost (including tax) is \$10 for a single, \$16 for a double.

Wheelchair Rental Regular wheelchairs can be rented for \$12 in Amity and at Guest Services just inside the main gate. Electric wheelchairs are \$40. Both require a \$50 deposit and a signed rental contract.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA

Rides and attractions use cutting-edge technology, including an OMNIMAX 70mm film projected on seven-story screens and a magnetic propulsion system to create terrific special effects. While waiting in line, you'll be entertained by excellent preshows—far better than those at the Disney parks (some are as entertaining as the attractions

Value Money Saver

You can save 10% off your purchase at many Universal Orlando gift shops or eateries by showing your AAA (American Automobile Association) card. This discount isn't available at food and merchandise carts or on tobacco, candy, film, collectibles, and sundry items.

themselves). Universal, as a whole, takes itself less seriously than the Mouse, and the atmosphere is peppered by subtle reminders that in the competitive theme-park industry, it's really not such a small world after all.

Animal Planet Live!

Frommer's Rating: B+ for young kids and parents

Recommended Ages: All ages

Get a behind-the-scenes look at the Animal Planet television network through a multimedia show that combines video clips and live action. The stars can include Meesha the fox, Sniffles the raccoon, and Spooner the Australian shepherd.

Back to the Future . . . The Ride

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Blast through the space-time continuum in one of 24 flight simulators built to look like the movie's famous DeLorean. Along the way, you'll dive into blazing volcanic tunnels, collide with Ice Age glaciers, thunder through caves and canyons, and briefly get swallowed by a dinosaur in an eye-crossing multi-sensory adventure. You twist, you turn, you dip, you dive—all the while feeling like you're really flying. Sit in one of the car's back seats to avoid ruining the illusion (in the front seat you can lean forward and see your neighbors careening hydraulically in the next bay). This is similar to, *but much more intense than*, the Body Wars ride at Epcot (p. 218). It's bumpy and might not be a good idea if you're prone to dizziness or motion sickness. **Note:** Heed the health warnings displayed at the ride, which has a 40-inch height minimum. Also, Universal recommends that expectant mothers skip this ride.

Beetlejuice's Rock 'n Roll Graveyard Revue

Frommer's Rating: C+ for classic rock fans, C for others

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

Universal, in 2002, added some new steps and tunes to this rock musical that stars Dracula, Wolfman, the Phantom of the Opera, Frankenstein and his bride, and Beetlejuice. The fun includes pyrotechnic special effects, some adult jokes, and MTV-style choreography. It's loud and lively enough to scare some small children and frazzle some older adults. It carries Universal's PG-13 rating, meaning it may not be suitable for preteens.

A Day in the Park with Barney

Frommer's Rating: A+ for tiny tots and parents, D for almost everyone else

Recommended Ages: 2–6

Set in a park-like theater-in-the-round, this 25-minute musical stars the Purple One, Baby Bop, and BJ. It uses song, dance, and interactive play to entertain the kids. This could be the highlight of the day for preschoolers (parents can console themselves with

their kids' happiness). The playground adjacent to the theater has chimes to ring, tree houses to explore, and lots to intrigue wee ones. The theater is air-conditioned, so if you must endure this one, you'll at least be comfortable.

Earthquake—The Big One

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

You climb on a BART train in San Francisco for a peaceful subway ride, but just as you pull into the Embarcadero Station, there's an earthquake—a big one, 8.3 on the Richter scale! As you sit helplessly trapped, slabs of concrete collapse around you, a propane truck bursts into flames, a runaway train hurtles your way, and the station floods (65,000 gal. of water cascade down the steps). **Note:** Universal says expectant moms should skip this one.

E.T. Adventure

Frommer's Rating: B for preteens and their families

Recommended Ages: All ages

You'll soar with E.T. on a mission to save his ailing planet, through the forest and into space aboard a bicycle. Along the way, you'll also meet some of the characters created by Steven Spielberg for the ride, including Botanicus, Tickli Moot Moot, Horn Flowers, and Tympani Tremblies. This family favorite is definitely a charmer. If there is a knock, it's that there are two waiting areas—inside and outside. And wait you will.

Jaws

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

As your boat heads into the 7-acre, 5-million-gallon lagoon, a dorsal fin appears on the surface. Then, what goes with the fin—a 3-ton, 32-foot, mechanical great white shark—tries to sink its urethane teeth into your hide (or at least your boat's). A 30-foot wall of flame that surrounds the vessel truly causes you to feel the heat in this \$45 million attraction. We won't tell you exactly how it ends, but in spite of a captain who

Frommer's Rates the Rides

As we do for the Disney parks in chapter 7, "Exploring Walt Disney World," we're using a grading system to score the Universal Orlando and SeaWorld rides in this chapter. (We'll return to the star-rating system toward the end of the chapter, when we explore some of Orlando's smaller attractions.) Most of the grades below are As, Bs, and Cs. That's because the major parks' designers have done a pretty good job on the attractions. But you'll also find a few Ds for Duds. Here's what the Frommer's ratings mean:

- A+** = Your trip wouldn't be complete without it.
- A** = Put it at the top of your "to-do" list.
- B+** = Make a real effort to see or do it.
- B** = It's fun but not a "must see."
- C+** = A nice diversion; see it if you have time.
- C** = Go if it appeals to you but not if there's a wait.
- D** = Don't waste your time.

Tips Quiet on the Set

The latest addition to USF's spectacular shows is **Fear Factor Live**. Having debuted in the spring of 2005, it's the first reality show (based on NBC's blockbuster hit *Fear Factor*) to become a theme park attraction. Audience members perform stunts that test their courage, strength, and at times their stomach—similar to the stuff seen on the hit TV show, but live in Orlando. You can catch the show in the venue set between *Jaws* and *Men in Black*, where the park's Wild Wild West Stunt Show once reigned supreme.

can't hit the broad side of a dock with his grenade launcher, some lucky Orlando restaurant will be serving blackened shark tonight. (**Tip:** The effects of this ride are far more spectacular after dark.) **Note:** While it lacks a height requirement, the shark may be too intense for some kids younger than 6, and Universal recommends that expectant mothers avoid it.

Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Buckle up for one of the park's latest additions. In this one, you climb aboard Jimmy's Rocket Pod, which hurtles you through hyperspace thanks to a motion simulator, sophisticated computer graphics, state-of-the-art ride technology, animation, and programmable motion-based seats. Your task: Defeat the evil Yokians—egg-shaped aliens bent on taking over our world if you lose. The attraction also features Jimmy's robot dog, Goddard, his nemesis, Cindy Vortex, and popular characters from several other cartoons, including *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Rugrats*, *Wild Thornberrys*, and *Fairly Odd Parents*. **Note:** Strange for a ride aimed at the kid set, this attraction carries a 40-inch height requirement.

Men in Black Alien Attack

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Armageddon may be upon us unless you and your mates fly to the rescue and destroy the alien menace. Once on board your six-passenger cruiser, you'll buzz the streets of New York, using your "zapper" to splatter up to 120 bug-eyed targets. You have to contend with return fire and distractions such as light, noise, and clouds of liquid nitrogen (aka fog), any of which can spin you out of control. Your laser tag-style gun fires infrared bullets. Earn a bonus by hitting Frank the Pug (to the right, just past the alien shipwreck). The 4-minute ride relies on 360-degree spins rather than speed for its thrill factor. At the conclusion, you're swallowed by a giant roach (it's 30 ft. tall with 8-ft. fangs and 20-ft. claws) that explodes, spraying you with bug guts—okay, it's just warm water—as you blast your way to safety and into the pest-control hall of fame—maybe. When you exit, Will Smith rates you anywhere from galaxy defender to bug bait. (There are 38 possible scores; those assigned to less than full cars suffer the scoring consequences.) Guests must be at least 42 inches tall to climb aboard this \$70 million ride.

Note: *Men in Black* often has a *much* shorter line for single riders. Even if you're not alone but are willing to be split up, get in this line and hop right on a vehicle that has less than six passengers.

Nickelodeon Studios

Frommer's Rating: B for Nick fans, C+ for others

Recommended Ages: 4–14

You'll tour the sound stages where Nick shows are produced, view concept pilots, and visit the kitchen where Gak and green slime are made. This 45-minute behind-the-scenes walking tour is a fun escape from the hustle of the midway, and there's plenty of audience participation. A child volunteer gets slimed, but it's only dessert-food slime, so even if yours is the lucky victim and swallows, green applesauce is as bad as it gets. At the Game Lab, you can experience Nick-style stunts and games.

Revenge of the Mummy

Frommer's Ratings: A+

Recommended Ages: 10 and up

Ten years in the making, the \$40-million *Revenge of the Mummy* made its debut in 2004. The indoor roller coaster uses a sophisticated propulsion system to hurtle riders through the shadowy, darkened tombs of ancient Egypt (all spectacularly recreated) while trying to escape the curse of the Mummy. The sound system (enhanced by 200 speakers and surround-sound technology in the coaster cars) will spook you, too. Highly advanced robotics are used to bring to life some pretty scary-looking skeletal warriors, one of whom jumps aboard your car; even Imhotep himself makes an appearance. Overhead flames, fireballs, and creepy creatures all combine with surprising twists, turns, stops and starts to make for a thrill like no other in the park. And just when you think its over . . . well, we have to leave some surprises for you.

Shrek 4-D

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Universal Studios' other new ride is a 20-minute show that can be seen, heard, felt, and smelled thanks to film, motion simulators, *OgreVision* glasses, and other special effects, such as water spritzers. The attraction picks up where the movie left off—allowing you to join Shrek and Princess Fiona on their honeymoon (at least the G-rated portions of it). After one of the most amusing pre-shows in the park (featuring a ghostly Lord Farquaad, the Three Little Pigs, Pinocchio, and the Magic Mirror), you're settled in specially designed seats in the main auditorium and then transported to the fairy-tale realm of Duloc as the screen comes alive. The theater's seats are pneumatic air propulsion nodules that are capable of turning and tilting (though not dramatically). Again, if your kids don't like touchy feely special effects, they may get upset at certain points while experiencing this attraction.

Terminator 2: 3-D Battle Across Time

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

This is billed as “the quintessential sight and sound experience for the 21st century!” The same director who made the movie, Jim Cameron, supervised this \$60 million production. After a slow start, it builds into an impressive experience featuring the Governor (on film), along with other original cast members. It combines 70mm 3-D film (utilizing three 23-x-50-foot screens) with thrilling technical effects and live stage action that includes a custom-built Harley Davidson “Fat Boy” and six 8-foot-tall cyberbots. **Note:** The crisp 3-D effects are among the best in any Orlando park, but Universal has given this show a PG-13 rating, meaning the violence and loud

noise may be too intense for preteens. That may be a little too cautious, but some kids under 10 may be frightened.

Twister . . . Ride It Out

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

Visitors from the twister-prone Midwest may find this re-creation a little too close to the real thing. An ominous funnel cloud, five stories tall, is created by swirling 2 million cubic feet of air per minute (that's enough to fill four full-size blimps), and the sound of a freight train fills the theater at rock-concert level as cars, trucks, and a cow fly about while the audience stands just 20 feet away. It's the windy version of *Earthquake* and packs quite a wallop. Crowds have been known to applaud when it's over.

Note: This show, too, comes with a PG-13 rating. Its loudness and intensity certainly can be too much for children under 8. Also, readers who have visited Universal Studios Hollywood in California will find Twister similar in theme to that park's Backdraft attraction, although (sacrilege!) I think the one in California offers a better overall experience.

Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster *(Kids)*

Frommer's Rating: A+ for kids and parents, B+ for others

Recommended Ages: 5–adult

This is the top attraction in Woody Woodpecker's KidZone, an 8-acre concession Universal Studios made a while back after being criticized for having too little for young visitors. This ride is a kiddie coaster that will thrill some moms and dads, too. While only 30 feet at its peak, it offers quick, spiraling turns while you sit in a miniature steam train. The ride lasts only 55 seconds and waits can be 30 minutes or more, but few kids will want to miss it. It's very much like the Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm in the Magic Kingdom (p. 203). **Note:** Its height minimum is 36 inches.

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS

The somewhat corny **Universal Horror Make-Up Show** gives behind-the-scene looks at what goes into (and oozes out of) some of Hollywood's most frightening monsters (PG-13, shows from 11am). **Lucy, A Tribute** is a remembrance of America's queen of comedy, and the **Blues Brothers** launch their foot-stomping revue several times a day on Delancy Street.

Back at Woody Woodpecker's KidZone, **Fievel's Playland** is a wet, western-themed playground with a house to climb and a water slide for small fry. **Curious George Goes to Town** is filled with whimsical watery fun, from fountains to ball-shooting cannons—bring a change of clothes.

SHOPPING AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA

Every major attraction has a theme store attached, many of them selling some rather unique merchandise. Although the prices are high when you consider you're just buying a souvenir, the **Hard Rock Cafe** shop in adjacent CityWalk is extremely popular and has a small but diverse selection of Hard Rock everything (including memorabilia with astronomical sticker prices). For just about everything else a la Universal, the **Universal Studios Store** carries a rather decent selection of toys, T-shirts, and souvenirs.

More than two dozen other shops in the park sell collectibles. Be warned, though, that unlike Walt Disney World, where Mickey is everywhere, Universal's shops are specific to individual attractions. If you see something you like, buy it; you probably won't find it in another store. If you did forget to pick something up, there's a shop-by-phone

service—call ☎ 407/224-5800, describe the item and where you think you saw it, and the likelihood is they'll be able to help you out. There is a Universal store at Orlando International Airport, but it mainly carries the usual souvenirs.

Note: Universal has a service similar to Disney's in which you can have your purchases delivered to the Universal Studios Store at the front of the park. Allow 3 hours.

GREAT BUYS AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA

Here's a sampling of the more unusual gifts available at some of the Universal stores. Of course, in addition to these options, you can find the standard tourist fare with a staggering array of mugs, key chains, T-shirts, and the like. We've tried to include things you wouldn't find (or consider buying) anywhere else.

- **Back to the Future—The Store** Real fans of the movie series will find lots of intriguing stuff here, but one of the more interesting items is a miniature version of a DeLorean.
- **E.T.'s Toy Closet and Photo Spot** This is the place for plush stuffed animals including a replica of the alien namesake.
- **MIB Gear** If you find yourself in need of a ray gun or alien blaster, this is the place to buy everything out of this world.
- **Quint's Nautical Treasures** This is the place to go for a different kind of T-shirt. Tropical colors, with subtle Universal logos, are the thing here.
- **Silver Screen Collectibles** Fans of *I Love Lucy* will adore the small variety of collectible dolls. There's also a Betty Boop line. For an interesting, practical, and inexpensive little something to take home, check out the Woody Woodpecker back-scratcher.

Universal Cuisine

The best restaurants here are just outside the main gates at CityWalk, Universal's restaurant and nightclub venue. But there are more than a dozen places to eat inside the park. Here are our favorites:

Best Sit-Down Meal: **Lombard's Seafood Grille** has a hearty fried clam basket, as well as lobster, fish, steak, pasta, and burgers (\$11–\$35). It's located across from Earthquake—The Big One.

Best Counter Service: **Universal Studio's Classic Monster Cafe** is one of the newer park eateries. It serves salads, pizza, pasta, and rotisserie chicken (\$6–\$15). It's off 7th Avenue near the Shrek 4-D.

Best Place for Hungry Families: Similar to a mall food court, the **International Food and Film Festival** offers a variety of food in one location. With options ranging from stir-fry to fajitas, it's a place where a family can split up and still eat under one roof. There are kids' meals for under \$6 at most locations. The food is far from gourmet but a cut above regular fast food (\$6–\$12). It's located near the back of Animal Planet Live! and the entrance to Back to the Future . . . The Ride.

Best Snack: The floats (\$3–\$6) at **Brody's Ice Cream Shoppe** are just the thing to refresh you on a hot summer afternoon. Brody's is located near Jaws.

- **Universal Studios Store** This store, near the entrance, sells just about everything when it comes to Universal apparel, and there are plenty of toys as well.

2 Islands of Adventure

Universal's second theme park opened in 1999 with a vibrantly colored, cleverly themed collection of fast and sometimes furious rides. At 110 acres, it's the same size as its big brother, Universal Studios Florida, but it seems larger and it's definitely *the* Orlando park for thrill-ride junkies. Roller coasters roar above pedestrian walkways, and water rides slice through the park. The trade-off: Far fewer shows.

Expect total immersion in the park's various "island" sights, sounds, and surroundings. From the wobbly angles and Day-Glo colors in **Seuss Landing** to the lush foliage of **Jurassic Park**, Universal has done an amazing job of differentiating the various sections of this \$1 billion park (unlike Universal Studios Florida, where you ease into the next area and all of a sudden you realize that you're in San Francisco, not New York any more). It's also done an outstanding job of differentiating Islands from Disney or any other Orlando park. The closest competitor in Florida is Busch Gardens in Tampa, but this park clearly has the edge on the ride front—and in the atmosphere department as well.

The adventure is spread across six very different islands: the **Port of Entry**, a pass-through zone that has a collection of shops and restaurants, and five themed areas—**Seuss Landing**, **The Lost Continent**, **Jurassic Park**, **Toon Lagoon**, and **Marvel Super Hero Island**. The park offers a concentration of thrill rides and coasters, but there are plenty of places to play for young kids, too.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING TO UNIVERSAL BY CAR Universal Orlando is a half-mile north of I-4 Exit 75B, Kirkman Road/Highway 435. There may be construction in the area, so follow the signs directing you to the park.

PARKING If you park in the multilevel garage, make a note of the row and theme in your area to help you find your car later. Parking costs \$9 for cars, light trucks, and vans. Valet parking is available for \$16.

TICKET PRICES A **1-day ticket** costs \$59.75 (plus 6.5% sales tax) for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9. A 2-day two-park pass is \$104.95 for adults, \$94.95 for children 3 to 9. All multiday passes let you move between Universal Studios Florida and Islands of Adventure. *Multiday passes also give you free access to the CityWalk clubs at night.* Because the parks are within walking distance of each other, you won't lose much time jockeying back and forth, unlike the situation at Disney. Nevertheless, it's a long walk for tykes and people with limited mobility, so consider a stroller or wheelchair.

See the beginning of this chapter for information on the **FlexTicket**, which provides multiday admission to Universal Studios Florida, Islands of Adventure, SeaWorld, and Wet 'n Wild.

For detail on VIP tours at Islands of Adventure, see "Ticket Prices" in the "Universal Studios Florida" section.

HOURS The park is open 365 days a year, generally from 9am to 6pm, though often later, especially in summer and around holidays, when it's sometimes open until 9pm. Also, during Halloween Horror Nights, the park closes around 5pm, reopens at 7pm (with a new admission), and remains open until at least midnight. The best bet is to call before you go so that you're not caught by surprise.

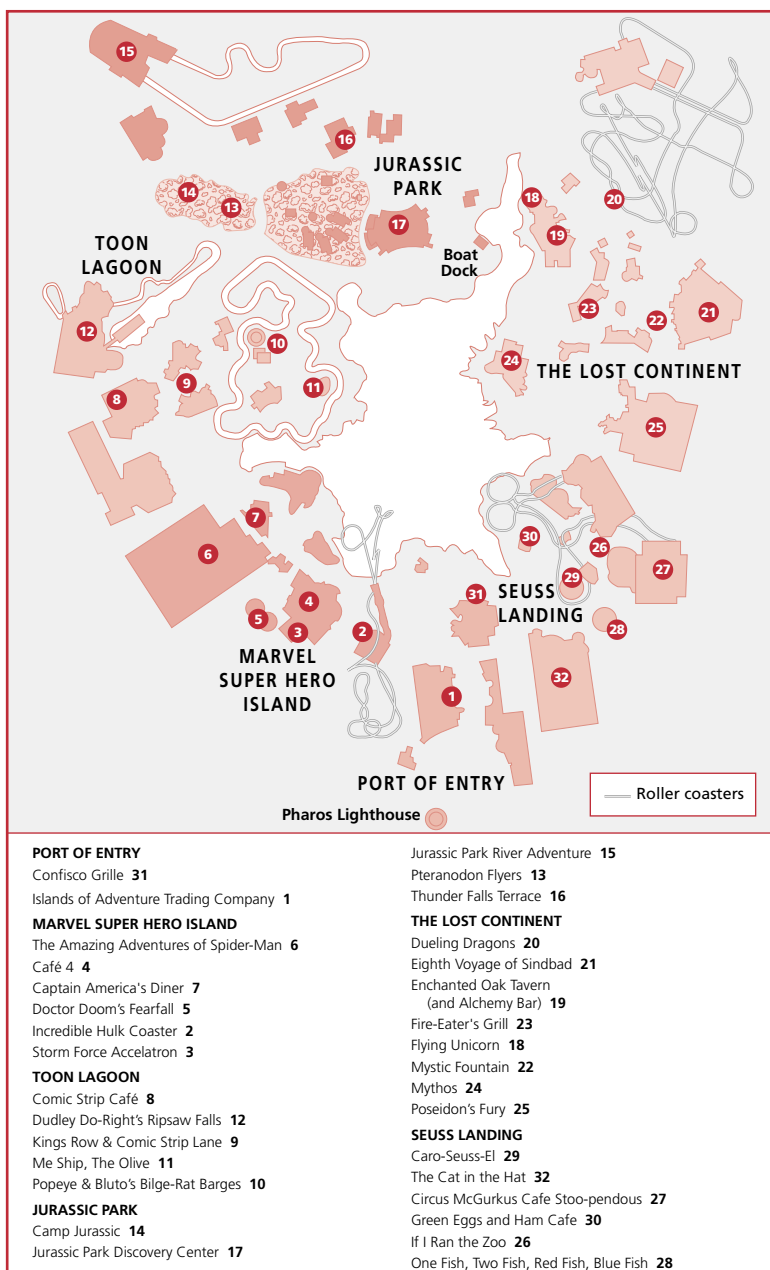
Tips **Some Practical Advice for Island Adventurers**

1. **The Shorter They Are . . .** Thirteen of the 14 major rides at Islands of Adventure have height restrictions. Dueling Dragons and the Incredible Hulk Coaster, for instance, deny access to anyone under 54 inches. For those who want to ride but come with kids, there's a baby or child swap at all of the major attractions, allowing one parent to ride while the other watches the tykes. But sitting in a waiting room isn't much fun for the little ones. So take your child's height into consideration before coming to the park or at least some of the islands. Think about splitting up for a while, then meeting up again a bit later.
2. **Cruising the Islands** If you hauled your stroller with you on your vacation, bring it with you to the park. It's a very long walk from your car, through the massive parking garage and the nighttime entertainment district, CityWalk, (Universal, however, does a good job of disguising just how long it is with all of the covered walkways near the parking area, and the sights and sounds of CityWalk are entertaining in their own right) before you get to the fun. Carrying a young child and the accompanying paraphernalia, even with a series of moving sidewalks, can make the long trek seem even longer—especially at the end of the day.
3. **The Faint of Heart** Even if you don't have children, make sure you consider all of the ride restrictions. Expectant mothers; guests prone to motion sickness; and those with heart, neck, or back trouble will be discouraged—with good reason—from riding most primo attractions. There's still plenty to see and do, but without the roller coasters, Islands of Adventure is far less adventurous.
4. **Beat the Heat** Some rides require that you wait outside without any cover to protect you from the sizzling Florida sun, so bring some bottled water (freeze it the night before) with you for the long waits (a 50¢ free-world bottle costs \$2.50 or more if you buy it here) or take a sip or two from the fountains placed in the waiting areas. Also, beer, wine, and liquor are more available at the Universal parks than the Disney ones, but booze, roller coasters, and hot weather can make for a messy mix.
5. **Cash in on Your Card** You can save 10% on your purchases at any gift shop or on a meal at Islands of Adventure by showing your AAA (American Automobile Association) card. This discount isn't available at food or merchandise carts. And tobacco, candy, film, collectibles, and sundry items aren't included.

INFORMATION FOR VISITORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Guests with disabilities should go to **Guest Services**, located just inside the main entrance, for a *Rider's Guide for Rider Safety & Guests with Disabilities*, a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), or other special assistance. You can rent a standard wheelchair for \$12 or an electric one for \$40 (both require a \$50 deposit and a

Islands of Adventure



signed rental contract). You can reserve them 24 hours or more in advance by calling ☎ **407/224-6350**. You can arrange for sign language interpreting services at no charge by calling ☎ **888/519-4899** (toll-free TDD), 407/224-4414 (local TDD), or 407/224-5929 (voice). Make arrangements for an appointment with an interpreter 1 to 2 weeks in advance. Check **www.universalorlando.com** for more information.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

You can get information before you leave by calling ☎ **800/711-0080**, 407/224-4233, or 407/363-8000. Ask for information about travel packages, as well as theme-park information. Universal sometimes offers a second day's ticket free or at a deeply discounted price. You can also write to Guest Services, 1000 Universal Studios Plaza, Orlando, FL 32819-7601.

ONLINE Find information about Universal at **www.universalorlando.com**. Orlando's daily newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*, also produces Orlando Sentinel Online at **www.orlandosentinel.com**. Additionally, there's a lot of information about the parks, hotels, restaurants, and more at the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau's website, **www.orlandoinfo.com**.

THE BEST DAYS TO VISIT

Like Universal Studios Florida, it's best to visit Islands near the end of the week, on a Thursday or Friday. The pace is somewhat fast Monday to Wednesday, with the heaviest crowds on weekends and during summer and holidays.

SERVICES & FACILITIES AT ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

ATMs Machines accepting cards from banks using the Cirrus, Honor, and PLUS systems are located outside and to the right of the main entrance and in the Lost Continent near the bridge to Jurassic Park.

Baby Care There are baby-swap stations at all of the major attractions. This allows one parent to wait while the other rides. Nursing facilities are located in the Guest Services building in the Port of Entry. Look for the FAMILY SERVICES sign. There are no infant supplies sold anywhere in the park, so come prepared with diapers, food, and other necessities.

Cameras & Film Film and disposable cameras are available at De Foto's Expedition Photography, to the right just inside the main entrance.

Car Assistance Battery jumps are provided. If you need assistance with your car, raise the hood and use the call boxes located throughout the garage to call for security.

First Aid There's one just inside and to the right of the main entrance and another in the Lost Continent, across from Oasis Coolers.

Lockers Lockers are across from Guest Services near the main entrance and cost \$8 and \$10 a day, plus a \$2 refundable deposit. There are also lockers near the Incredible Hulk Coaster in Marvel Super Hero Island, the Jurassic Park River Adventure in Jurassic Park, and Dueling Dragons in the Lost Continent. The lockers at Dueling Dragons and the Incredible Hulk Coaster are free for the first 45 minutes. Thereafter, and at the Jurassic Park River Adventure, they're \$2 per hour to a maximum of \$14 per day. You're not supposed to—and shouldn't—take things on these rides, so put them in a locker or give them to a nonrider.

Lost Children If you lose a child, go to Guest Services near the main entrance or go to the first park employee you see. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Pet Care You can board your small animals at the shelter in the parking garages for \$10 a day (no overnight stays), but you'll have to feed and walk them. Ask the attendant where you pay for parking to direct you to the kennel.

Ride Restrictions Many of the park's attractions have minimum height requirements (see the listings that follow). Universal also recommends that expectant mothers steer clear of some rides (also noted in the listings).

Stroller Rental Look to the left as you enter through the turnstiles. The cost (including tax) is \$10 for a single, \$16 for a double.

Wheelchair Rental Regular wheelchairs can be rented for \$12 in the center concourse of the parking garage or to your left as you enter the turnstiles of the main entrance. Electric wheelchairs are \$40. Both require a \$50 deposit and a rental contract.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

For Children & Families

If you have kids 8 and under, enter and go to the right to **Seuss Landing**, an island where everything is geared to the young and young at heart. You'll easily spend the morning or longer exploring real-life interpretations of the wacky, colorful world of Dr. Seuss. (The wild colors make for some good photographs.) Be sure to ride **The Cat in the Hat**; **One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish**; and **Caro-Seuss-El**. After all that waiting in line, let the little ones burn some energy playing in **If I Ran the Zoo**. Grab lunch at the **Green Eggs and Ham Cafe**. Next, head to the **Lost Continent** to ride the **Flying Unicorn** (36-in. height minimum) and talk to the **Mystic Fountain**, then let them play in **Camp Jurassic** (many could stay here for hours if you let them) or watch a "hatching" at the **Discovery Center** in **Jurassic Park**. They can have some more interactive fun in **Toon Lagoon** aboard **Me Ship**, **The Olive** and grab autographs at the **King's Row** and **Comic Strip Lane**.

Those 40 inches or taller—and a bit braver—can end the day in **Marvel Super Hero Island** by riding the **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man**.

For Teens & Adults

Head left from Port of Entry to **Marvel Super Hero Island** and ride the **Incredible Hulk Coaster**, **The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man**, and **Doctor Doom's Fearfall**. (If you arrive early, the line will be short for your first choice, but you'll have to wait or use Universal Express for the others.) There should be time to squeeze in **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls** in **Toon Lagoon** before you break for lunch at **Comic Strip Café** or **Blondie's: Home of the Dagwood**. Now that you're fully refueled, ride **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges**, then move to **Jurassic Park**, where you can ride **Jurassic Park River Adventure** and visit the **Discovery Center**. End your day in the **Lost Continent**, where you can catch the show in **Poseidon's Fury**, then test your courage aboard **Dueling Dragons**.

Tips Finding Your Way

Other-than-English park maps are available at Guest Services in the Port of Entry in French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish.

PORT OF ENTRY

This marketplace of sorts is filled with six shops and four different places to grab a bite, as well as many of the park's more mundane but necessary guest services (mostly near the very front of the Port). If you plan to save shopping for the end of the day, return to **Islands of Adventure Trading Company**, which offers a variety of merchandise linked to attractions throughout the park—from Jurassic T-shirts to stuffed Cat in the Hat dolls.

SEUSS LANDING

This 10-acre island, inspired by the works of the late Theodore Seuss Geisel, is awash in Day-Glo colors, whimsical architecture, and curved trees (the latter were downed and bent by Hurricane Andrew before the park acquired them). Needless to say, the main attractions here are aimed at the younger set, though anyone who loved the good Doctor as a child will enjoy some nostalgic fun on these rides. And those who aren't familiar with his work will enjoy the visuals—Seussian art is like Dalí for kids.

Caro-Seuss-El

Frommer's Rating: A+ for young kids, parents, and carousel lovers

Recommended Ages: All ages

Forget tradition. This not-so-average carousel gives you a chance to ride seven whimsical characters of Dr. Seuss (a total of 54 mounts), including cowfish, elephant birds, and mulligatawnies. They move up and down as well as in and out. Their eyes blink and heads bob as you twirl through the riot of color surrounding the ride. **Note:** A special ride platform lets guests in wheelchairs experience the up-and-down motion of the ride, making this a great stop for visitors with disabilities.

The Cat in the Hat

Frommer's Rating: A for preteens, C+ for teens and adults

Recommended Ages: All ages

Any Seuss fan will recognize the giant candy-striped hat looming over the entrance to this ride and probably the chaotic journey. Comparable to, but spunkier than, It's a Small World at Magic Kingdom (p. 201), The Cat in the Hat is among the signature children's experiences at Islands of Adventure. Love or hate the idea, *do it* and earn your stripes. Your couch travels through 18 scenes retelling *The Cat in the Hat's* tale of a day gone very much awry. You, meanwhile, spin about and meet Thing 1 and Thing 2 in addition to other characters. The highlight is a revolving 24-foot tunnel that alters your perceptions and leaves your head with a feeling oddly reminiscent of a hangover. **Note:** Pop-up characters may be scary for riders under 5, and expectant moms are discouraged from riding The Cat.

If I Ran the Zoo *(Kids)*

Frommer's Rating: A for the very young

Recommended Ages: 2–6

This 19-station interactive play land features flying water snakes and a chance to tickle the toes of a Seussian animal. Kids also can spin wheels, explore caves, fire water cannons, climb, slide, and otherwise burn off some excited energy.

One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish

Frommer's Rating: B+ for kids and parents

Recommended Ages: 2–7

This kiddie charmer is similar to the Dumbo and Magic Carpets rides at Magic Kingdom (including the ridiculously long line, though this ride's waiting area is covered), although this one has a few added features. Your controls allow you to move your funky fish up or down 15 feet as you spin around on an arm attached to a hub. All the while, a song belts out rhyming flight instructions. Watch out for "squirt posts," which spray unsuspecting riders who don't follow the rhyme. Actually, even the most careful driver is likely to get wet.

MARVEL SUPER HERO ISLAND

Thrill junkies love the twisting, turning, stomach-churning rides on this island filled with building-tall murals of Marvel Super Heroes. Fans can **Meet the Marvel Super Heroes** in front of The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man (check your adventure map, handed out when you enter, or grab a copy at Guest Services, for times). And the munch crowd can dig into sandwiches and burgers at **Captain America's Diner** (in the \$6–\$10 range) and **Café 4** for pizza, pasta, and sandwiches (around \$4–\$12).

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man *(Finds)*

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

The original Web Master stars in this exceptional show/ride (arguably, the best in town), which features 3-D action and special effects. The story line: You're on a tour of the *Daily Bugle* when—yikes!—something goes horribly wrong. Peter Parker suddenly encounters evil villains and becomes Spider-Man. This high-tech ride isn't stationary like the Back to the Future ride at Universal Studios Florida (p. 261). Cars twist and spin, plunge and soar through a comic-book universe. Passengers wearing 3-D glasses squeal as computer-generated objects fly at their 12-person cars. There's a simulated 400-foot drop that feels an awful lot like the real thing. If you want the biggest thrills, try to get a seat in the front row of your vehicle. **Note:** Expectant mothers or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride. There's a 40-inch height minimum.

Tip: Waits can be 45 minutes even on an off day, so use Universal Express if necessary. The ride also offers a single-rider line that can drastically reduce waiting times. So if it's an option on the day you're here and your party doesn't mind splitting up, take advantage of it.

Doctor Doom's Fearfall

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane . . . uh, it's you falling 150 feet, if you're courageous enough to climb aboard this towering metal skeleton. The screams that can be heard at the ride's entrance add to the anticipation of a big plunge followed by smaller ones. The plot? You're touring a lab when—are you sensing a recurring theme here?—something goes wrong as Doctor Doom tries to cure you of fear. You're fired to the top, with feet dangling, and dropped in intervals, feet first, leaving your stomach at several levels. The thrills and the atmosphere aren't nearly as good as those of the Tower of Terror (p. 234), but it's still frightful (and you do get a neat view of the entire park). **Note:** Expectant mothers or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride. Minimum height is 52 inches.

Incredible Hulk Coaster *(Finds)***Frommer's Rating:** A+**Recommended Ages:** 10–adult

Bruce Banner is working in his lab when—yes, again—something goes wrong. But this rocking rocket of a ride makes everything oh, so right, except maybe your heartbeat and stomach. From a dark tunnel, you burst into the sunlight, while accelerating from 0 to 40 mph in 2 seconds. While that's only two-thirds the speed of Disney–MGM's Rock 'n' Roller Coaster (p. 233), this is in broad daylight, there's a lot more motion still to come, and you can *see* the asphalt! From there you spin upside down 128 feet from the ground, feel weightless, and careen through the center of the park over the heads of other visitors. Coaster-lovers will be pleased to know that this ride, which lasts 2 minutes and 15 seconds, includes seven inversions and two steep drops. The ride, however, is extremely smooth, making it one of the better coaster experiences for all types of riders. Sunglasses, change, and an occasional set of car keys lie in a mesh net beneath the ride—proof of its motion and the fact that most folks don't heed the warnings to stash their stuff in the nearby lockers. As a nice touch, the 32-passenger metal coaster glows green at night (riders who ignore all the warnings occasionally turn green as well). **Note:** Expectant mothers or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride it. Riders must be at least 54 inches tall.

Storm Force Acceleratron**Frommer's Rating:** C+**Recommended Ages:** 4–adult

Despite the exotic name, this ride is little more than a spin-off of the Magic Kingdom's Mad Tea Party (p. 201)—spinning teacups that, in this case, have a 22nd-century design. While aboard, you and the X-Men's superheroine, Storm, try to defeat the evil Magneto by converting human energy into electrical forces. To do that, you need to spin faster and faster. In addition to some upset stomachs, the spiraling creates a thunderstorm of sound and light that gives Storm all the power she needs to blast Magneto into the ever-after (or until the next riders arrive). This ride is sometimes closed during off-peak periods. **Note:** Expectant moms are advised not to ride this ride.

TOON LAGOON

More than 150 life-size sculpted cartoon images—characters range from Betty Boop and Flash Gordon to Bullwinkle and Cathy—let you know you've entered an island dedicated to your favorites from the Sunday funnies.

Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls**Frommer's Rating:** A**Recommended Ages:** 8–adult

The setting and effects at WDW's Splash Mountain are better, but the adrenaline rush here is higher. The staid red hat of the heroic Dudley can be deceiving: The ride that

Fun Fact Score One for the Park

Music at Universal's Islands of Adventure was composed specifically for the theme park, much like a score for a movie. It's the first time such a large-scale musical effort has been mounted for a theme park, and it truly adds to the feeling of total immersion in whatever land you happen to be in at the time.

lies under it has a lot more speed and drop than onlookers suspect. Six-passenger logs (they're pretty uncomfortable, especially if you have long legs) take you around a 400,000-gallon lagoon before launching you into a 75-foot drop at 50 mph. At one point, you're 15 feet below the surface. Though the water is contained on either side of you, you *will* get wet. **Note:** Once again, expectant mothers or folks with heart, neck, or back problems should do something else. Riders must be at least 44 inches tall.

Me Ship, The Olive

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 4–adult

This three-story boat is a family-friendly play land with dozens of interactive activities from bow to stern. Kids can toot whistles, clang bells, or play the organ. Sweet Pea's Playpen is a favorite of younger guests. Kids 6 and up as well as adults will love Cargo Crane, where they can drench riders on Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges (see below). **Note:** The second and third deck of the good ship offer **great views and photo ops** of the Incredible Hulk Coaster and some of the rest of Islands of Adventure.

Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

This is the same kind of ride with the same kind of raft as Kali River Rapids at WDW's Animal Kingdom, but it's a bit faster and bouncier. You'll be squirted by mechanical devices as well as the water cannons fired by guests at Me Ship, The Olive (see above), and the water is *c-c-cold*, a blessing on hot summer days but less so in January. The 12-passenger rafts bump, churn, and dip (14 ft. at one point) along a white-water course lined with Bluto, Sea Hag, and other villains. You will get *s-s-soaked*. **Note:** Yes, once again, expectant mothers or people with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride this one. Riders must be at least 42 inches tall.

Kings Row & Comic Strip Lane

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Dudley Do-Right, Woody Woodpecker, Popeye and other favorites from the Sunday comics will have you rockin' and rollin' in the streets as they sing and make you laugh during this several-times-a-day show. It's one to skip if you're on a tight schedule, but it's a nice respite from the madness.

JURASSIC PARK

All of the basics and some of the high-tech wizardry from Steven Spielberg's wildly successful films are incorporated in this lushly landscaped tropical locale that includes a replica of the visitor's center from the movie. Expect long lines at the River Adventure and pleasant surprises at the Discovery Center.

Camp Jurassic *(Kids)*

Frommer's Rating: A+ for young children

Recommended Ages: 2–10

This play area, similar in theme to the Boneyard at Animal Kingdom (p. 240), has everything from lava pits with dinosaur bones to a rainforest. Watch out for the spitters that lurk in dark caves. The multilevel play area has plenty of places for kids to crawl, explore, and spend energy. Young kids need close supervision, though. It's easy to get turned around inside the caverns, and some of the areas enhanced with sound effects may be a bit too frightening for the very young.

Tips Up, Up, and Away

Strength and fitness folks can get a little extra workout at the small rock-climbing venue (\$5 per person) outside the Thunder Falls Terrace restaurant in Jurassic Park. If you or the kids are looking for a more economical and less strenuous option, try walking the elevated trails and climbing the net ladders beneath the Pteranodon Flyers attraction, also in Jurassic Park.

Jurassic Park Discovery Center

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Here's an amusing, educational pit stop that has life-size dinosaur replicas and some interactive games, including a sequencer that pretends to combine your DNA with a dinosaur's. The "Beasaur" exhibit allows you to see and hear as the huge reptiles did. You can play the game show *You Bet Jurassic* (grin) and scan the walls for fossils. The highlight is watching a velociraptor "hatch" in the lab. Because there are a limited number of interactive stations, this can consume a lot of time on busy days.

Jurassic Park River Adventure

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

A leisurely raft tour along a river is interrupted when some raptors, who could hop aboard your boat at any moment, escape. The ride lets you literally come face-to-face with "breathing" inhabitants of Jurassic Park. At one point, a *Tyrannosaurus rex* decides you look like a tasty morsel, and at another point, spitters launch venomous saliva your way. The only way out: an 85-foot plunge in your log-style life raft. It's steep and quick enough to lift your fanny out of the seat. (When Spielberg rode it, he made them stop the ride and let him out before the plunge.) Expect to get wet. If your stomach can take only one flume ride, this one's a lot more comfortable than Dudley Do-Right (see earlier), and the atmosphere is better. **Note:** Expectant mothers or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride. Guests must be at least 42 inches tall.

Pteranodon Flyers *(Kids)*

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: All ages

The 10-foot metal frames and simple seats are flimsy, but this quick spin around Jurassic Park offers a great bird's-eye view. The landing is bumpy and you'll swing side to side throughout, which makes some riders queasy. Unlike the traditional gondolas in sky rides, on this one your feet hang free from the two-seat skeletal flyer, and there's little but a restraining belt between you and the ground. **Note:** That said, this is a child's ride—single passengers must be between 36 and 56 inches tall; adults can climb aboard *only* when accompanying someone that size. And, because this ride launches only two passengers every 30 to 40 seconds, it can consume an hour of your day, even in the off season. So, although it is nice, pass it up if you're pressed for time.

THE LOST CONTINENT

Although they've mixed their millennia—ancient Greece with a medieval forest—Universal has done a good job creating a foreboding mood in this section of the park, whose entrance is marked by menacing stone griffins.

Dueling Dragons *(Finds)***Frommer's Rating:** A+**Recommended Ages:** 10–adult

Maniacal minds created this thrill ride—sending two roller coasters right at each other at high speeds. True coaster crazies will love the intertwined set of leg-dangling racers that climb to 125 feet, invert five times, and three times come within 12 inches of each other as the two dragons battle, and you prove your bravery by tagging along. This coaster sports a tighter track with quick banking turns and sharp twists, making the ride somewhat jerky—far from the smooth and fluid experience of the Hulk. But the roughness may be part of its charm—a couple of thrill junkies (after riding this one for the third time in a day) revealed to us that this is where they head when they want the city's ultimate adrenaline rush. For

the best ride, try to get one of the two outside seats in each of the eight rows. If you want to get into the front seat, there's a special (yes, longer!) line near the loading dock so that daredevils can claim the first car. **Note:** Expectant mothers or those with heart, neck, or back problems shouldn't ride. (Why aren't you surprised?) Riders must be at least 54 inches tall.

Fun Fact Coaster Tidbit

One Dueling Dragon coaster seems to have an obvious advantage over the other. The Fire Dragon can reach speeds up to 60 mph, while the Ice Dragon has a top end of only 55 mph.

Eighth Voyage of Sindbad *(Overrated)***Frommer's Rating:** C+**Recommended Ages:** 6–adult

The mythical sailor is the star of a stunt demonstration that takes place in a 1,700-seat theater decorated with blue stalagmites and eerie, gloomy shipwrecks. The show has water explosions and dozens of pyrotechnic effects including a 10-foot circle of flames. While it offers a rest for park-weary feet, it doesn't come close to the quality of the Indiana Jones stunt show in Disney-MGM Studios (p. 232).

Flying Unicorn**Frommer's Rating:** A for kids and parents**Recommended Ages:** 5–adult

The Flying Unicorn is a small roller coaster that travels through a mythical forest on the Lost Continent, next to Dueling Dragons. It's very much like Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster (p. 265) and the Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm (p. 203). That means a fast corkscrew run that is sure to earn squeals, but probably not at the risk of someone losing their lunch. **Note:** Here's another one expectant moms are warned not to ride. The Unicorn has a 36-inch height minimum.

Mystic Fountain *(Kids)***Frommer's Rating:** B+ for kids**Recommended Ages:** 3–8

Located just outside Sindbad's theater, this interactive "smart" fountain delights younger guests. It can see and hear, leading to a lot of kibitzing with those who stand before it. But if you want to stay dry, don't get too close when it starts "spouting" its wet wisdom. On the other hand, if you need a quick cool-off—go for it.

Poseidon's Fury

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: 6–adult

Clearly, this is the park's best show—though with a lack of competition (there are only two productions at Islands), that's something of a backhanded compliment. The story line revolves around a battle between the Poseidon, god of the sea, and the evil Dark-enon. The highlight is when you pass through a small room with a 42-foot vortex where 17,500 gallons of water swirl around you, barrel-roll style. (If you wear glasses, note that they will fog up completely when passing through the vortex—take them off if you can.) In the battle royale, the gods hurl 25-foot fireballs at each other. It's more interesting than frightening, but it's not worth the long lines that often plague it, so if you're on a tight schedule, use Universal Express or skip it. **Note:** The fireballs, explosive sounds, and rushing water (not to mention the dark and eerie passageways of the queue area) may be too intense for children under 6.

SHOPPING AT ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

There are more than 20 shops within the park, offering a variety of theme merchandise. You may want to check out **Cats, Hats & Things** and **Dr. Seuss' All the Books You Can Read** for special Seussian souvenirs, books, and T-shirts. **Jurassic Outfitters** and **Dinostore** feature a variety of stuffed and plastic dinosaurs, plus safari-themed clothing. Superhero fans should check out **The Marvel Alterniverse Store** and the **Spider-Man Shop**. **Toon Extra** has the largest selection of souvenirs in Toon Lagoon. **Islands of Adventure Trading Company** is a good stop on the way out if you're still searching for something that will help you or the folks back home remember your visit.

Note: Universal has a service similar to Disney's in which you can have your purchases delivered to the front of the park. Allow 3 hours. Universal also has a shop by phone service—call ☎ 407/224-5800, describe the item and where you think you saw it, and the likelihood is they'll be able to help you out and have it shipped to you.

DINING AT ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

The Islands offers some of the best theme park dining in town, with a number of stands where you can get a quick bite to eat, and a handful of full-service restaurants. The park's creators have taken some extra care to tie in restaurant offerings with the

Fun Fact Food for Thought

Those green eggs get their color from a variety of spices, not food dye.

theme. The **Green Eggs and Ham Cafe** may be one of the few places on earth where you'd be willing to eat tinted huevos. (They sell as an egg-and-ham sandwich for about \$7.) No matter which Island you're on, each offers a selection of sit-down restaurants, eateries, and snack carts. To save money, look for the kiddie menus, offering a children's meal and a small beverage for \$6. Also consider combo meals, which usually offer a slight price break. **Thunder Falls Terrace** in Jurassic Park, for instance, offers a rib-and-chicken combo as well as other options in the \$8 to \$13 range.

Here are some of our other favorites at Islands:

- **Best Sit-Down Restaurant** At **Mythos** on the Lost Continent, choose from selections such as cedar-planked salmon, lobster and corn bisque, a wrap of the day, or wood-fired pizzas. The atmospheric cavelike setting is pleasant. This is a

Tips **Great Things to Buy at Islands of Adventure**

Here's a sampling of some of the more unusual wares available at Islands of Adventure. It represents a cross section of tastes.

Jurassic Outfitters There are plenty of T-shirts with slogans like "I Survived (the whatever ride)."

Spider-Man Shop This stop specializes in its namesake's paraphernalia, including red Spidey caps covered with black webs and denim jackets with logos.

Toon Extra Where else can you buy a miniature stuffed Mr. Peanut bean bag, an Olive Oyl and Popeye frame, or a stuffed Beetle Bailey? Life doesn't get any better for some of us.

Treasures of Poseidon Located in the Lost Continent, it carries an array of blue glassware including tumblers, shot glasses, and oversize mugs as well as brass sculptures.

grown-up dining affair, best suited to adults and children over age 10. Entrees cost \$10 to \$23, and Mythos is usually open from 11:30am to 3:30pm daily.

- **Best Atmosphere for Adults** The **Enchanted Oak Tavern (and Alchemy Bar)**, also in the Lost Continent, also has a cavelike interior, which from the outside looks like a mammoth tree, and is brightened by an azure blue skylight with a celestial theme. The tables and chairs are thick planks, and the servers are clad in "wench wear." Try the chicken/rib combo with waffle fries for around \$13. The menu offers 45 types of beer.
- **Best Atmosphere for Kids** The fun never stops under the big top at **Circus McGurkus Cafe Stoo-pondous** in Seuss Landing, where animated trapeze artists swing from the ceiling. Kids' meals, including a souvenir cup, are \$6 to \$7. The adult menu features fried chicken, lasagna, spaghetti, and pizza. Try the fried chicken platter for \$8 or the lasagna for \$7.
- **Best Vegetarian Fare** **Fire-Eater's Grill**, located in the Lost Continent, is a fast-food stand that offers a tasty veggie falafel for \$6. You can also get a tossed salad for around \$3.
- **Best Diversity** **Comic Strip Café**, located in Toon Lagoon, is a four-in-one counter service-style eatery offering burgers, Chinese food, Mexican food, and pizza and pasta (\$6–\$9).

There are also several restaurants (see chapter 6, "Where to Dine") and clubs (see chapter 10, "Walt Disney World & Orlando After Dark") that are just a short walk from the park in Universal's entertainment complex, CityWalk.

3 SeaWorld

Cleverly disguised as a theme park—or as SeaWorld likes to call it, an adventure park—this popular 200-acre marine park lets guests explore the mysteries of the deep and learn about the oceans and their inhabitants, all while having tons of fun. SeaWorld

combines wildlife conservation awareness (otherwise known as edutainment), actual marine life care, along with plain old fun all in one fell swoop. While that's what Disney is attempting with its latest park, Animal Kingdom, the message here is subtle and a more inherent part of the experience.

SeaWorld's beautifully landscaped grounds center on a 17-acre lagoon and include flamingo and pelican ponds and a lush tropical rainforest. Shamu, a killer whale, is the star of the park along with his expanding family, which includes baby whales. The pace is much more laid-back than at either Universal or Disney, and it's a good way to break up a long week trudging through the other parks. Close encounters at feeding pools are among the real attractions (so be sure to budget a few extra dollars to buy fishy handouts for the sea lions and dolphins, which make begging an art form).

SeaWorld manages a few thrills and chills. **Journey to Atlantis** is a high-tech water ride similar to Splash Mountain at Disney's Magic Kingdom. **Kraken** is a floorless roller coaster that sports seven inversions, much like coasters such as Montu and Kumba at SeaWorld's sister, Busch Gardens in Tampa (p. 333). But this park doesn't try to compete with the wonders of WDW or Universal. Instead it lets you discover the crushed-velvet texture of a stingray or the song of the seals.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING TO SEAWORLD BY CAR The marine park is south of Orlando and Universal, north of Disney. From I-4, take Exit 72, Beeline Expressway/Highway 528, and follow the signs.

PARKING Parking costs \$8 for cars, light trucks, and vans; \$10 for preferred parking closer to the park entrance. The lots aren't huge, and most folks can walk to the entrance. Trams also run. Note the location of your car. SeaWorld characters such as Wally Walrus mark sections, but at the end of a long day it's easy to forget where you parked.

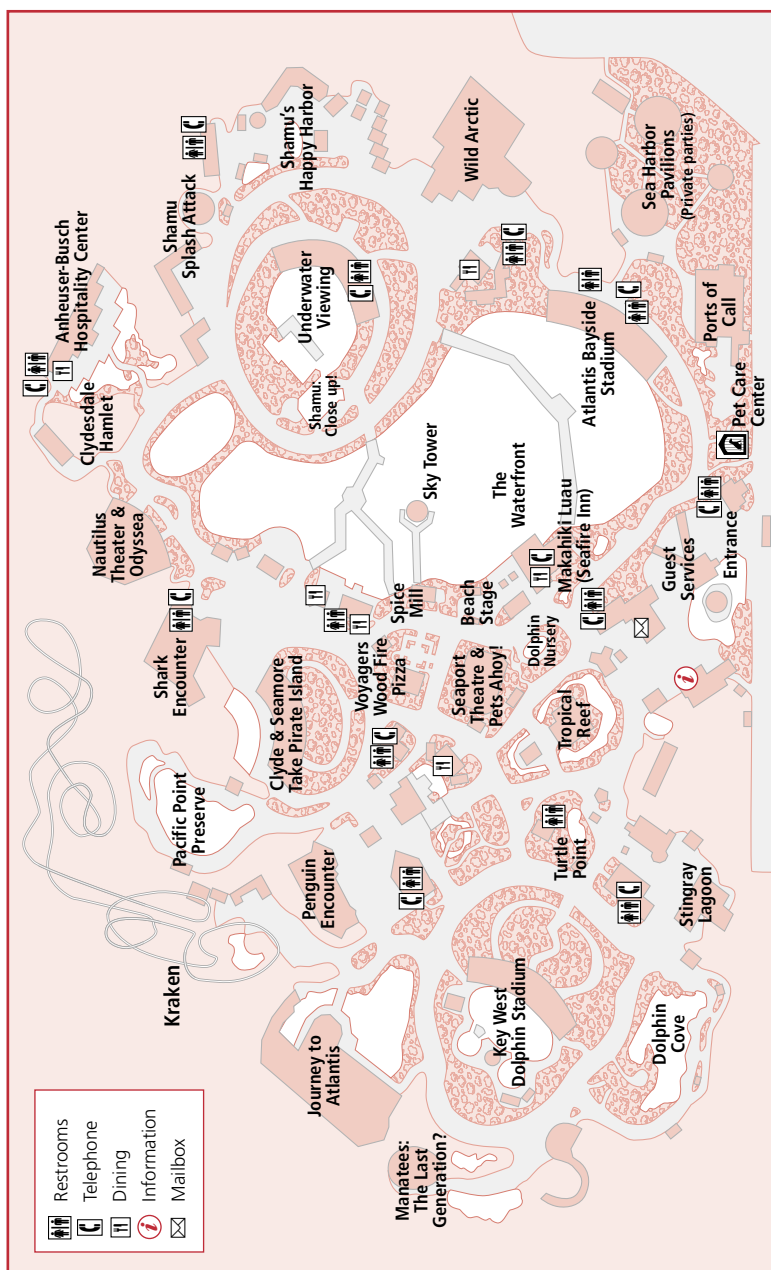
TICKET PRICES A **1-day ticket** costs \$59.75 for adults, \$48 for children 3 to 9, plus 6.5% sales tax. The park's new online ticketing allows you to go to its website, **www.seaworld.com**, buy your ticket over the Internet, then print it out and take the printout right to the turnstiles. **Note:** SeaWorld sometimes offers a second day free as a promotion, so be sure to check online for the most up to date offers.

See the ticket information for Universal Orlando at the beginning of this chapter for information on the **FlexTicket**, multiday admission tickets for SeaWorld, Universal Orlando, Wet 'n Wild, and Busch Gardens.

SeaWorld's **Adventure Express Tour** (\$89 adults, \$79 kids 3–9, *plus mandatory park admission*) is a 6-hour guided excursion that includes front-of-the-line access to Journey to Atlantis, Kraken, and Wild Arctic; reserved seating at two animal shows;

Tips Shuttle Service

SeaWorld and Busch Gardens in Tampa, both owned by Anheuser-Busch, have a shuttle service that offers \$10 round-trip tickets to get you from Orlando to Tampa and back. The 1½- to 2-hour one-way shuttle runs daily and has five pick-up locations in Orlando, including at Universal and on I-Drive (☎ 800/221-1339). The schedule allows about 7 hours at Busch Gardens. The service is free if you have a FlexTicket.



lunch; and a chance to touch or feed penguins, dolphins, stingrays, and sea lions (☎ 800/406-2244 or 407/363-2380). It's the only way to dodge park lines, which aren't as long as Disney's or Universal's.

HOURS The park is usually open from 9am to 6pm and sometimes later, 365 days a year. Call ☎ 800/327-2424 or 407/351-3600 for more information.

TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR VISIT MORE ENJOYABLE

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Get information before you leave by writing to **SeaWorld Guest Services** at 7007 SeaWorld Dr., Orlando, FL 32801, or call ☎ 407/351-3600.

ONLINE SeaWorld information is available at www.seaworldorlando.com. The *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper produces *Orlando Sentinel Online* at www.orlandosentinel.com. You can get a ton of information from the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau website, www.orlandoinfo.com.

INFORMATION FOR VISITORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The park publishes an accessibility guide for guests with disabilities, although most of its attractions are easily accessible to those in wheelchairs. SeaWorld also provides a Braille guide for the visually impaired. For the hearing impaired, there's a very brief synopsis of shows. Sign language interpreting services are available at no charge but must be reserved by calling ☎ 407/363-2414 at least a week in advance of your visit. Assisted listening devices are available at select attractions for a \$20 refundable deposit. For a complete rundown on all of your options, head to *Guest Services* when you enter the park; you can also call ☎ 407/351-3600 for more information.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT

Because this is a mostly outdoor, water-related park, you may want to keep in mind that even Florida gets a tad nippy during January and February. SeaWorld has smaller crowds from January through April.

BEST DAYS TO VISIT

Weekends, Thursday, and Friday are busy days at this park. Monday through Wednesday are usually better days to visit because tourists coming for a week go to the Disney and Universal parks early in their stays, saving SeaWorld for the end, if at all.

CHOOSE AGE-APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Because it has few thrill rides, SeaWorld has few restrictions, but you may want to check out the special tour programs offered through the education department. SeaWorld lives up to its reputation for making education fun. There are three 1-hour options: **Polar Expedition Tour** (touch a penguin), **Predators** (touch a shark), and **Saving a Species** (see manatees and sea turtles). All cost \$16 for adults and \$12 for children 3 to 9, plus park admission. Call ☎ 407/363-2380 for information or ☎ 800/406-2244 for reservations.

BUDGET YOUR TIME

SeaWorld has a leisurely pace, in part because its biggest attractions are up-close encounters with the animals. Don't be in a rush (you won't have to hurry everywhere for a change). This park can easily be enjoyed in a day. Its layout, lush landscaping, and many outdoor exhibits give it an open feel. Because of the large capacity and walk-through nature of many of the attractions, crowds generally aren't a concern except at

Tips New Dining Programs

SeaWorld is diving deeper into the restaurant game with **Dine with Shamu** (☎ 800/327-2420 or 407/351-3600 for information and reservations; www.seaworldorlando.com), a reservations-only poolside dining experience with Shamu as a special guest. While eating, guests can mingle and question SeaWorld trainers. The menu includes Cajun Creole, boeuf bourguignon, sides, rolls, and dessert. The cost is \$34 for adults and \$18 for kids 3 to 9, in addition to park admission. Reserving a spot 2 to 3 weeks in advance is usually more than enough unless you're coming in one of the crunch periods (summer, holidays). Last fall, the park also opened **Sharks Underwater Grill** (☎ 407/351-3600 for reservations), where diners can dig into Floridian and Caribbean treats while watching denizens swim by in the Terrors of the Deep exhibit. Menu prices are \$16 to \$26 for adults and \$6 to \$11 for kids 3 to 9 (pasta, hot dogs, chicken breast, steak, and popcorn shrimp), and theme-park admission is required.

Journey to Atlantis and Kraken. You also need to be in Shamu Stadium in plenty of time for the show. Wild Arctic can, at times, draw a sizable crowd, but the lines here don't come close to reaching Disney's proportions, so relax. Isn't that what a vacation is supposed to be about?

SERVICES & FACILITIES AT SEAWORLD

ATMs An ATM machine is located at the front of the park. It accepts Cirrus-, Honor-, and PLUS-affiliated cards.

Baby Care Changing tables are in or near most women's restrooms, and in the men's restroom at the front entrance near Shamu's Emporium. You can buy diapers in machines located near changing areas and at Shamu's Emporium. There's a special area for nursing mothers near the women's restroom at Friends of the Wild gift shop, near the center of the park.

Cameras & Film Film and disposable cameras are available at stores throughout the park.

First Aid First Aid Centers staffed with registered nurses are behind Stingray Lagoon and near Shamu's Happy Harbour.

Lockers Lockers are located next to Shamu's Emporium, just inside the park entrance. The cost is \$8 a day, plus a \$2 deposit.

Lost Children Lost children are taken to the Information Center. A park-wide paging system helps reunite guests. *Children under 7 should wear name-tags inside their clothing.*

Pet Care A kennel is available between the parking lot and the main gate. The cost is \$6 a day (no overnight stays). Owners are responsible for walking and feeding their pets.

Strollers Dolphin-shaped strollers can be rented at the Information Center near the entrance. The cost is \$10 for a single, \$17 for a double.

Wheelchair Rental Regular wheelchairs are available at the Information Center for \$8; electric chairs are \$35.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

Clyde & Seamore Take Pirate Island

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: All ages

A lovable sea lion and otter, with a supporting cast of walruses and harbor seals, and a few quick-witted trainers appear in this fish-breath comedy with a swashbuckling conservation theme. It's corny, but don't hold it against the animal stars. With all those high-tech rides at the other parks, you need a break, and this one delivers some laughs. Watch out if you enter late—the mime entertaining the audience may make you part of the pre-show.

Clydesdale Hamlet

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: All

Here is where you will find all of the famous Clydesdale Horses. Guests can walk through and see the grand beasts and in some instances watch them being hitched up for the occasional parade through the park. You can even have a photo taken with them (if you choose to keep the photo there is a charge of course). The **Busch Hospitality Center** is located just next door, offering beer samples, and a place to sit and have a light lunch or just relax for a bit.

Journey to Atlantis

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 8–adult

Taking a cue from Disney Imagineers, SeaWorld has created a story line to go with this \$30 million water coaster. It has to do with a Greek fisherman and ancient Sirens in a battle between good and evil. But what really matters is the drop—a wild plunge from an altitude of 60 feet, in addition to luge-like curves and a shorter drop. Journey to Atlantis breaks from SeaWorld's edutainment formula and offers good old-fashioned fun. There's no hidden lesson, just a splashy thrill when you least expect it. It's nearly as good as Jurassic Park River Adventure at Islands of Adventure (p. 276). **Note:** Riders must be at least 42 inches tall. Expectant moms, as well as folks with heart, neck, or back problems, should find some other way to pass the time.

Kat 'N' Kaboodle

Frommer's Rating: C+

Recommended Ages: All

This street show, located at the new Waterfront area, features 16 exotic breeds of furry felines, including Bengals, Persians, Sphynxes, and Siamese. They entertain the crowds with acrobatics and amazing feats as well as interact with the audience.

Key West at SeaWorld

Frommer's Rating: A+ for kids, B+ for adults

Recommended Ages: All ages

This Caribbean-style village has island food, entertainers, and street vendors. But the big attractions are the hands-on encounters with harmless Southern diamond and cownose rays at Stingray Lagoon; Sea Turtle Point, the home of threatened and endangered species; and Dolphin Cove, where you can feed smelt to the namesakes. **Warning:** If you have a soft heart, it's easy to spend \$20 feeding them.

Key West Dolphin Fest

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

At the partially covered, open-air Key West Dolphin Stadium, Atlantic bottlenose dolphins perform flips and high jumps, twirl, swim on their backs, and give rides to trainers. There's also an appearance by some false killer whales or *Pseudorca crassidens*. The tricks are impressive, but it's like any other dolphin show. If you go, see this before Shamu. He puts these little mammals to shame.

Kraken

Frommer's Rating: A+

Recommended Ages: 10–adult

SeaWorld's deepest venture onto the field of thrill-ride battle starts slow, like many coasters, but it ends with pure speed. Kraken is named for a massive, mythological, underwater beast kept caged by Poseidon. This 21st-century version offers floorless and open-sided 32-passenger trains that plant you on a pedestal high above the track. When the monster breaks loose, you climb 151 feet, fall 144 feet, hit speeds of 65 mph, go underground three times (spraying bystanders with water), and make seven loops during a 4,177-foot course. It may be the longest 3 minutes, 39 seconds of your life. **Note:** Kraken carries a 54-inch height minimum. Expectant moms as well as folks with heart, neck, or back problems should skip this one.

Manatees: The Last Generation?

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

Today, the West Indian manatee is an endangered species. There are as few as 3,200 remaining in the wild. Underwater viewing stations, innovative cinema techniques, and interactive displays combine here for a tribute to these gentle marine mammals. While this isn't as good as seeing them in the great outdoors, it's as close as most folks get, and it's a much roomier habitat than the tight quarters their kin have at the Living Seas in Epcot.

Marine Mammal Keeper Experience

Frommer's Rating: A for trainer wannabes

Recommended Ages: 13–adult

This 9-hour program (starting bright and early at 6:30 am) allows guests to work side-by-side with a trainer, preparing meals and feeding the animals, and learning how to care for and interact with dolphins, beluga whales, sea lions, and walrus. The cost is \$399 (with tax), which includes 7 days of consecutive park admission, lunch, a career book, and a T-shirt. **Note:** You must be at least 13 years old and able to climb, as well as able to lift and carry 15 pounds of critter cuisine. Call ☎ 800/432-1178 (hit "5," when prompted) for reservations.

Odyssey

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages

This 30-minute, Cirque du Soleil–style stage show opened at SeaWorld's Nautilus Theater in July 2003. The show combines circus acrobatics, comedy, colorful costumes, music, and special effects, to create a mythical underwater atmosphere. The special effects are good, and the aerial stunts even better.

Penguin Encounter *(Overrated)***Frommer's Rating:** C; B for young kids**Recommended Ages:** All ages

Here you are transported by moving sidewalk through Arctic and Antarctic displays. You'll get a glimpse of penguins as they preen, socialize, and swim at bullet speed in their 22°F (−5°C) habitat. You'll also see puffins and murres in a similar, separate area. While it gives you a nice view of the penguins (and they are always a hit with the kids), the surroundings about the viewing area leave a bit to be desired, especially among so many other elaborate and well-done exhibits.

Pets Ahoy!**Frommer's Rating:** B**Recommended Ages:** All ages

Eighteen cats, 12 dogs, three pot-bellied pigs, and a horse are joined by birds and rats to perform comic relief in a 25-minute show held several times a day. Almost all of the stars were rescued from animal shelters.

Rico & Roza's Musical Feast**Frommer's Rating:** C**Recommended Ages:** All

This amusing 25-minute show takes place several times a day at the Waterfront's Seafire Inn. The review celebrates family, food, and fun as proprietors Rico and Roza entertain guests with many a merry musical tune, a dash of comedy, a tall tale or two, and a little interaction with the audience. Though you can see the show without eating at the inn, I think it makes for a very entertaining dining experience, especially with younger children, who at times require a diversion to make it through a meal.

Shamu Adventure *(Moments)***Frommer's Rating:** A+**Recommended Ages:** All ages

Everyone comes to SeaWorld to see the big guy. The featured event is a well-choreographed show planned and carried out by very good trainers and very smart orcas. The whales (reaching 25 ft. and 10,000 lb.) really dive into their work. The fun builds until the video monitor flashes an urgent Weather Watch and one of the trainers utters the fateful warning: "Uh-oh!" Hurricane Shamu is ready to make landfall. At this point, a lot of folks remember the warnings posted throughout the grandstand: *If you want to stay dry, don't sit in the first 14 rows.* Those who didn't pay attention get one last chance to flee. Then the orcas race around the edge of the pool, creating huge

Shows At SeaWorld

Debuting just as this book went to press, **Blue Horizons** combines action both above and below the water, featuring everything from divers to aerial acrobatics. Dolphins, whales, and exotic birds all star in the show, touted as a Broadway-style production filled with colorful costumes and performances.

In addition to its regular productions, SeaWorld stages a few shows only seasonally, including **Mistify**, a nighttime spectacular combining fireworks and fountains on the lagoon. During summer months, guests are treated to the special-effects extravaganza nightly. If you're dining at the Spice Mill restaurant in the Waterfront, you can even enjoy dinner with the show.

Moments **Swimming with the Sharks**

In addition to the all-day (9-hr.) **Marine Mammal Keeper Experience** (see above), SeaWorld offers one other interactive program. **Sharks Deep Dive** gives snorkelers and divers a chance to have limited, hands-off contact with the 58 sharks, including a near 9-foot sand tiger, in the Shark Encounter area. Two at a time, guests don wetsuits for a 30-minute encounter inside a cage that rides a 125-foot track. Part of the cage is above water, but participants can dive up to 8 feet underwater for a close-up look at the denizens. The cost is \$150 for certified divers, \$125 for snorkelers (minimum age 10). The price includes a souvenir booklet, T-shirt, and snorkel gear but does not include the required park admission fee.

The program is not open to expectant mothers. Call ☎ **800/432-1178**, 800/406-2244 or 407/ 363-2380, or visit www.seaworldorlando.com to make mandatory reservations or for more information.

waves of icy water and profoundly soaking anything in range. Veteran animal handler Jack Hanna also makes a video appearance on the huge overhead monitors, compliments of ShamuVision. **Note:** Arrive 30 minutes early for a good seat. The stadium is large, but it fills quickly.

Shamu Underwater Viewing is an adjoining exhibit that lets you get close to killer whales and learn about breeding programs. The underwater viewing area allows a great close up look at the tremendous creatures. You may even get to see a mother with her baby (the newest calf made his debut in February 2004).

A nighttime version of this show, **Shamu Rocks America**, offers more of a party atmosphere and less of an educational experience. The whales perform to the beat of the somewhat loud rock and roll music, and special effects are more predominant. All of it adds up to a very entertaining show for all ages.

Shamu's Happy Harbor

Frommer's Rating: A for kids

Recommended Ages: 3–12

This 3-acre play area has a four-story net tower with a 35-foot crow's-nest lookout, water cannons, remote-controlled vehicles, nine slides, a submarine, and a water maze. It's one of the most extensive play areas at any park and a great place for kids to unwind. Bring extra clothes for the kids (and maybe for yourself, too) because it's not designed to keep you dry. Smaller kids will require close supervision, however, as they can easily get lost in all the action—and unlike many other play areas in other parks, there are several escape routes here.

Shark Encounter

Frommer's Rating: A

Recommended Ages: 3–adult

Remember Shark Encounter? SeaWorld has added other species—about 220 specimens in all. Pools out front have small sharks and rays (feeding isn't allowed here). The interior aquariums have big eels, beautiful but poisonous lionfish, hauntingly still barracudas, and bug-eyed pufferfish. This isn't a tour for the claustrophobic because you

have to walk through an acrylic tube, beneath hundreds of millions of gallons of water. Also, small fry may find the swimming sharks a little too much to handle. **Note:** Part of this exhibit has given way to a new restaurant, Sharks Underwater Grill.

Wild Arctic

Frommer's Rating: B+

Recommended Ages: All ages for exhibit; 6–adult for ride

Enveloping guests in the beauty, exhilaration, and danger of a polar expedition, Wild Arctic combines a high-definition adventure film with flight-simulator technology to display breathtaking Arctic panoramas. After a hazardous faux flight over the frozen north, you emerge into an exhibit where you can see a playful polar bear or two, beautiful beluga whales, and walruses performing aquatic ballets (on different levels, you can see them both above and below the surface). Kids and those prone to motion sickness may find the ride bumpy. There's a separate line if you want to skip the flight and just see the critters.

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS

The park's other attractions include **Pacific Point Preserve**, a 2½-acre natural setting that duplicates the rocky home of California sea lions and harbor seals. Tropical fish and sea creatures, at the **Tidepool** offer a hands-on experience for all ages. The **Tropical Reef** surrounds guests with aquariums filled with a variety of sea creatures to look at. Here you can touch the sea urchins, starfish, and anemones. **Tropical Rain Forest**, a bamboo and banyan tree habitat, is the home of cockatoos and other birds. And **Turtle Point** showcases sea turtles swimming in the lagoon or lounging on the beach and sand dunes. The **Anheuser-Busch Hospitality Center** lets you indulge in free samples of Anheuser-Busch beers, then stroll through the stables to watch the famous Budweiser Clydesdale horses being groomed. The **Extreme Zone** tests your climbing and jumping skills with a rock wall and trampoline jump (both for an additional fee). Even shopping is an experience at SeaWorld; at **Oysters Secret**, guests can watch as pearl divers dive in search of just the right oyster, which will be pried open for the pearl inside. Guests can have the pearls made into jewelry.

The **Makahiki Luau** is a full-scale dinner show featuring South Seas–style food (fish, chicken, and pork) while you're entertained by music and dance of the Pacific Islands. It's hardly haute cuisine or Broadway but is very much on par with Disney's Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show (p. 315). It's held daily at 6:30pm. Park admission is not required. The cost is \$42.95 for adults, \$27.95 for children 3 to 9. Reservations are

Tips On the Water

SeaWorld's new 5-acre Waterfront area, which debuted in late spring 2003, added a seaport-themed village to the park's landscape. On High Street, look for a blend of shops; **Kat 'N' Kaboodle** (p. 284), a purebred cat show; and the Seafire Inn restaurant, where lunch includes a musical revue called **Rico and Roza's Musical Feast** (p. 286). At Harbor Square, the funny Seaport Symphony orchestra has chefs making music with pots and pans. The park also is adding street performers, including a crusty old captain who tells fish tales and makes music with bottles and brandy glasses. Also at the Waterfront is an array of eateries, including the Spice Mill, Voyagers Wood Fire Pizza, and the Seafire Inn.

required and can be made by calling ☎ 800/327-2420 or online at www.seaworldorlando.com.

SHOPPING AT SEAWORLD

SeaWorld doesn't have nearly as many shops as Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, but with the opening of the Waterfront has added some rather unique boutiques, including **Allura's Treasures** featuring fanciful dolls, mermaids, and fairies, jewelry, and more. The **Tropical Traders** is filled with handcrafted gifts made by artisans from exotic ports all over the world. There are, of course, also lots of cuddly toys for sale around the park. Where else can you get a stuffed manatee but at **Manatee Cove**? The **Friends of the Wild** gift shop (it's near Penguin Encounter) has one of the larger and more varied selections in the park. The shop attached to **Wild Arctic** is a good for plush toys as well. **Shamu's Emporium** near the entrance is one of the largest stores in the park featuring an array of souvenirs, ranging from T-shirts to toys.

And, because of the Anheuser-Busch connection, the gift shop outside the entrance to the park offers a staggering array of Budweiser-related items.

DISCOVERY COVE: A DOLPHIN ENCOUNTER

Anheuser-Busch spent \$100 million building SeaWorld's sister park, which debuted in 2000. Prices run from \$229 to \$259 per person (plus the 6.5% sales tax) for ages 6 and up if you want to swim with the dolphins. They run \$129 to \$159 if you just want to enjoy the fishes and other sea-life without having the dolphin experience. The prices vary seasonally so double check when you make your reservations (which are a requirement to enter this park). In order to make the experience a bit more tolerable in the price department, admission includes a 7-day consecutive pass to either SeaWorld or Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. You can upgrade this feature to a 14-day combination pass for both parks for an additional \$30.

If you've never gone for a dip with a dolphin, words hardly do it justice. It's exhilarating and exciting—exactly the kind of thing that can make for a most memorable vacation.

The actual dolphin encounter deserves an **"A+" rating**. It's open only to those ages 6 and older (younger guests or those who don't want to participate in the dolphin swim can take part in the other activities).

The park has a cast of more than two-dozen dolphins, and each of them works from 2 to 4 hours a day. Many of them are mature critters that have spent their lives in captivity, around people. They love having their bellies, flukes, and backs rubbed. They also have an impressive bag of tricks. Given the proper hand signals, they can make sounds much like a human passing gas, chatter in dolphin talk, and do seemingly effortless 1½ gainers in 12 feet of water. They take willing guests for rides in the piggyback or missionary position. They also wave "hello" and "goodbye" with their flippers and take great pleasure in roaring by guests at top speed, creating waves that drench them.

The dolphin experience lasts 90 minutes, about 35 to 40 minutes of which is spent in the lagoon with one of them. Trainers use the rest of the time to teach visitors about these remarkable mammals.

The rest of the day isn't nearly as exciting, but it is wonderfully relaxing. Discovery Cove doesn't deliver thrill rides, water slides, or acrobatic animal shows; that's what SeaWorld, Disney, and Universal are for. This is where you come to get away from all that.

Here's what you get for your money, with or without the dolphin encounter:

- A limit of *no more than 1,000 other guests a day*. (The average daily attendance at Disney's Magic Kingdom is 41,000.) This ensures your experience will be more relaxing and private, which is really part of what you are paying for in the first place anyway.
- Lunch, a towel, locker, sunscreen, snorkeling gear including a flotation vest, a souvenir photo, and free parking are also part of the deal.
- Other 9am-to-5:30pm activities include a chance to swim near (but on the other side of the Plexiglas from) **barracudas and black-tip sharks**. There are no barriers between you and the gentle rays and brightly colored tropical fish in a new 12,000-square-foot lagoon where some of the rays are 4 feet in diameter. The 3,300-foot Tropical River is a great place to swim or float in a mild current—it goes through a cave, two waterfalls, and a large aviary where you can also take a stroll, becoming a human perch for some of the 30 exotic bird species. There are also beach areas for catching a tan.
- As mentioned above, 7 days of **unlimited admission** to SeaWorld and/or Busch Gardens Tampa Bay (park admission normally costs \$59.75 a day for adults, \$48 for children 3–9).

One other option is Discovery Cove's trainer for a day ticket, which for \$399 to \$459 (prices change seasonally) allows guests 6 and older to also have a dolphin training encounter, participate in guided snorkeling tours, feed fish, and interact with other critters, including rays. A paying adult must accompany guests ages 6 to 12.

You can drive to Discovery Cove by following the above directions to SeaWorld, then follow the signs. Unlike other parks, Discovery Cove doesn't have a parking charge. For up-to-the-minute information, call ☎ 877/434-7268, or on the Internet go to **www.discoverycove.com**.

If you're headed for this adventure, we recommend making a reservation far, far in advance. With the limited number of guests admitted and the number of people who want a chance to swim with the fishes, this park gets booked very quickly. **Note:** There is an ever so small chance of getting in as a walk-up customer. The park reserves a small number of tickets daily for folks whose earlier dolphin sessions were canceled due to bad weather. The best chance for last-minute guests comes during any extended period of good weather.

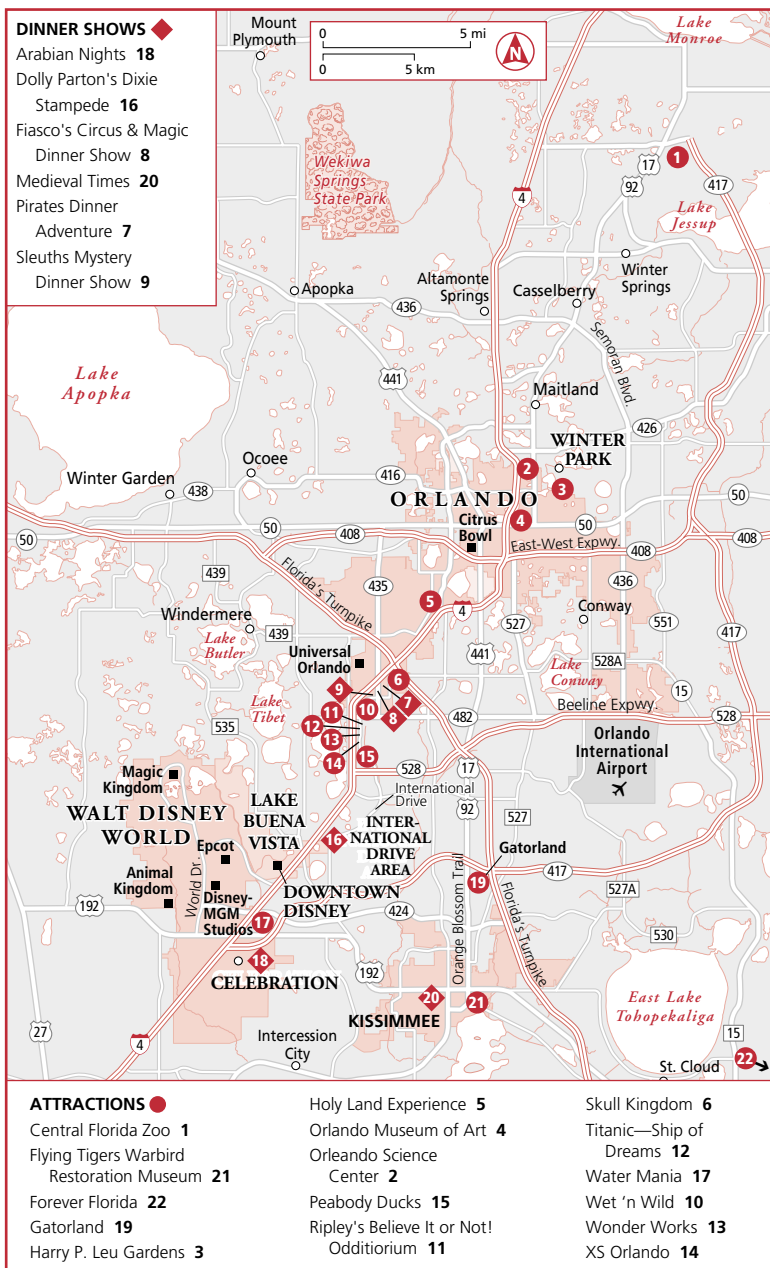
4 Other Area Attractions

There are—surprise!—a number of cool things in Orlando that don't revolve around Mickey, the Hulk, or Shamu. Now that we've covered the monster parks, we're going to explore some of central Florida's best smaller attractions.

IN KISSIMMEE

Kissimmee's main tourist strip is on Walt Disney World's southern border and extends about 2 miles west and 8 to 10 miles east. Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway/U.S. 192 is the highway that links the town to WDW and points west. Because it is so full of eateries and hotels, it can be hard to see some of the smaller destinations, though the roadway's guide markers can be quite helpful, as is the U.S. 192 map that you can pick up at any hotel lobby. Check with your hotel's front desk or the attractions for detailed directions or short cuts that might make finding them a little easier.

Orlando Area Attractions



Note: The following prices don't include the 6.5% to 7% sales tax unless otherwise noted.

Flying Tigers Warbird Restoration Museum If you're a fan of vintage flying machines and their restoration, this working museum displays and restores aircraft from the World War II through Vietnam eras. Owner Tom Reilly offers guided tours through a museum full of hands-on exhibits. The outdoor showroom includes changing exhibits of birds that have been or are being restored, such as a 1909 Martin M-1, a 1944 B-17 Flying Fortress, a 1944 P-38 Lightning, and a 1965 MIG 21. Plan on spending 2 hours. It's interesting and a must for aviation buffs, but the show here is almost entirely visual. **Note:** The museum sustained hurricane damage in the summer of 2004 and is currently in the midst of rebuilding. At press time, they weren't running actual tours yet, but the museum is open and is currently accepting donations in lieu of an admission fee for those who would like to take a look around.

231 N. Hoagland Blvd. (south of U.S. 192). ☎ 407/933-1942. www.warbirdmuseum.com. Currently accepting donations for rebuilding. Daily 9am–5pm. Free parking. From I-4, take Exit 64A/U.S. 192 east of Disney to Kissimmee, then turn right on Hoagland.

Gatorland ★ *Finds* Founded in 1949 with only a handful of alligators living in huts and pens, Gatorland now houses thousands of alligators (including a rare blue one) and crocodiles on its 70-acre spread. Breeding pens, nurseries, and rearing ponds are situated throughout the park, which also displays snakes, toads, insects, turtles, and a Galápagos tortoise. Its 2,000-foot boardwalk winds through a cypress swamp and breeding marsh. There are four shows. **Gator Wrestlin'** uses the old "put-them-to-sleep" trick, but it's more of an environmental awareness program. The **Gator Jumparoo** is a crowd-pleaser in which the big reptiles lunge 4 or 5 feet out of the water to snatch a hunk of meat from a trainer's hand. **Up Close Encounters** is a new show that features a variety of wildlife, including some venomous snakes. And **Jungle Crocs of the World** showcases some of the world's toothiest carnivores. Younger kids will enjoy the new **train ride** through the park; **Lilly's Pad**, a wet and dry play area; and **Allie's Barnyard**, a small petting zoo. While you're here, try the smoked gator ribs or nuggets in the open-air restaurant, or grab a gator-skin souvenir in the gift shop. Allow 4 to 5 hours. **Tip:** Look for additional parking, a whole new facade, and additional landscaping to be added as the park undergoes an extensive million-dollar renovation in 2005—its largest in over 10 years.

Note: Gatorland's new **Trainer for a Day** program lets up to five guests get up close and personal with the gators for a day (or two hours in this case). The \$100, 2-hour experience puts you side by side with trainers and includes a chance to wrangle some

Tips High-Flying Fun

If you want to taste the real deal, **Warbird Adventures**, 233 N. Hoagland Blvd., Kissimmee, FL (☎ 800/386-1593 or 407/870-7366; www.warbirdadventures.com), will take you skyward in a World War II fighter-trainer for sightseeing or aerobatic flights. The adventures last 15 to 60 minutes and range in price from \$170 to \$520. Aerobatic moves and in-flight videos or stills are also available (\$20–\$50). They are open 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm. Training courses are also available, with prices ranging from \$580 by the hour to full courses costing up to \$5300.

alligators (minimum age 12). Advance reservations are required, and admission to the park is included.

Tip: Printable discount coupons and special Internet ticket prices are available at the park's website. Be sure to check it out before you leave home.

14501 S. Orange Blossom Trail (U.S. 441; between Osceola Pkwy. and Hunter's Creek Blvd.). ☎ 800/393-5297 or 407/855-5496. www.gatorland.com. Admission \$20 adults, \$9.95 children 3–12. Daily 9am–5 or 6pm usually, but closing times vary by season. Free parking. From I-4, take Exit 65/Osceola Pkwy. east to U.S. 17/92/441 and go left/north. Gatorland is 1½ miles on the right.

Water Mania You'll find a variety of aquatic attractions in this 36-acre water park. You can boogie board or body surf in the wave pools, float lazily along an 850-foot river, enjoy a white-water tube run on **Riptide**, and spiral down the **Twin Tornadoes** water slide. If you dare, ride **The Screamer**, a 72-foot freefall speed slide, or the **Abyss**, an enclosed tube slide that corkscrews through 380 feet of darkness, exiting into a splash pool. You can climb the all new **Rainrock Mountain** (at an extra charge). There's a rainforest-themed water playground for kids; a miniature golf course; and a picnic area with arcade games, volleyball, and a beach. **Note:** This park has fewer thrill rides than Disney's Typhoon Lagoon (p. 245) and Blizzard Beach (p. 247) or Wet 'n Wild (listed a bit later), so it has fewer teens and young adults, making it more attractive to older adults or families with younger kids. Allow 4 to 5 hours. Tubes, towels, and lockers are all available for rent for a small fee and a deposit (\$2 for a towel; \$5–\$6.50 plus \$1 deposit for a tube; \$4.25–\$6.50 plus \$5 deposit for a locker). A child-size life vest can be rented at no charge. A cabana with 4 towels, 2 chairs, 2 lounges, 2 tubes, a table, and 1 locker can be rented for \$55 with a \$10 deposit.

6073 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy./U.S. 192 (just east of I-4). ☎ 800/527-3092 or 407/396-2626. www.watermania-florida.com. Admission \$27 adults, \$21 kids 3–9; season pass \$50, \$60 including parking. Mar–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct Thurs–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Nov–Mar. Parking \$6. From I-4, take Exit 64A/U.S. 192 east about ½ mile.

A World of Orchids *Value* Lovers of horticulture will enjoy touring this conservatory and showroom filled with thousands of orchids—many of them rare—that are magnificently in bloom at all times and on display as well as for sale (shipping is available). Streams, waterfalls, koi ponds, and birds enhance the grounds. Also on the premises: a nature walk through a wooded area, aquariums of exotic fish, and a small aviary. Allow 1 hour, more if you're gaga over orchids.

2501 Old Lake Wilson Rd./Hwy. 545 (off U.S. 192). ☎ 407/396-1881. www.aworldoforchids.com. Free admission. Tues–Sun 9:30am–4:30pm. Free parking. From I-4, take Exit 64B/U.S. 192 West 2 miles, turn left on Old Lake Wilson Rd. (CR 545). The conservatory is 1 mile ahead on the left.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AREA

These attractions are a 10- to 15-minute drive from the Disney area and 5 to 10 minutes from Universal Orlando. Most appeal to special interests, but one is free (the Peabody Ducks' show) and another, Wet 'n Wild, is in a class that includes WDW's top two water parks: Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach.

Holy Land Experience Battles to get tax-exempt church status and smaller-than-expected attendance caused this tourist attraction to add a parking fee and boost rates by \$13 in its first 2 years. But backers still believe Jesus Christ and John the Baptist can go head to head with (or at least play second harp to) Mickey Mouse and Woody Woodpecker. This \$20 million, 15-acre attraction near Universal Orlando is trying to court more believers by offering exhibits focusing on Jerusalem between the years 1450 B.C. and A.D. 66. Instead of thrill rides, visitors get lessons about Noah's Ark, the

Tips Back in Action

After closing its doors in 2003, **Cypress Gardens Adventure Park** (☎ 863/324-2111; www.cypressgardens.com) has reopened and now features 38 thrill rides, an all-new water ski show, and the beautiful botanical gardens that started it all. A soon-to-be-opened water park will feature plenty of wild raft rides, a children's play area, and other aquatic fun. Call or visit the website for up-to-date details.

limestone caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, 1st-century Jerusalem, and Jesus' tomb. The trimmings include a display of old Bibles and manuscripts, a Bedouin tent where biblical personalities tell Old and New Testament stories, and a cafe serving Middle Eastern food. New additions include a multimedia production of music and art giving an overview of worship through the ages; a small play area for kids; and the Oasis Outpost, which features a rock wall and archaeological dig, misting station, and a small refreshment spot. The attraction has caused some controversy: Orlando-area rabbis, among others, say they believe it's a ploy to convert Jews to Christianity. Allow 3 to 4 hours.

4655 Vineland Rd. ☎ 866/872-4659 or 407/367-2065. www.theholylandexperience.com. Admission \$30 adults, \$20 children 6–12. Mon–Fri 10am–6pm; Sat 9am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. Hours can vary by season, call before coming. Parking \$5. From I-4, take Exit 78/Conroy Rd. west to Vineland Rd. It's on Vineland at Conroy.

Peabody Ducks ★ *Moments* One of the best shows in town is short but sweet, and, more importantly, *free*. The Peabody Orlando's five mallards march into the lobby each morning, accompanied by John Philip Sousa's "King Cotton March" and their own red-coated duck master. They get to spend the day splashing in a marble fountain. Then, in the afternoon, they march back to the elevator and up to their 4th-floor "penthouse." Donald Duck never had it this good. Allow 1 hour.

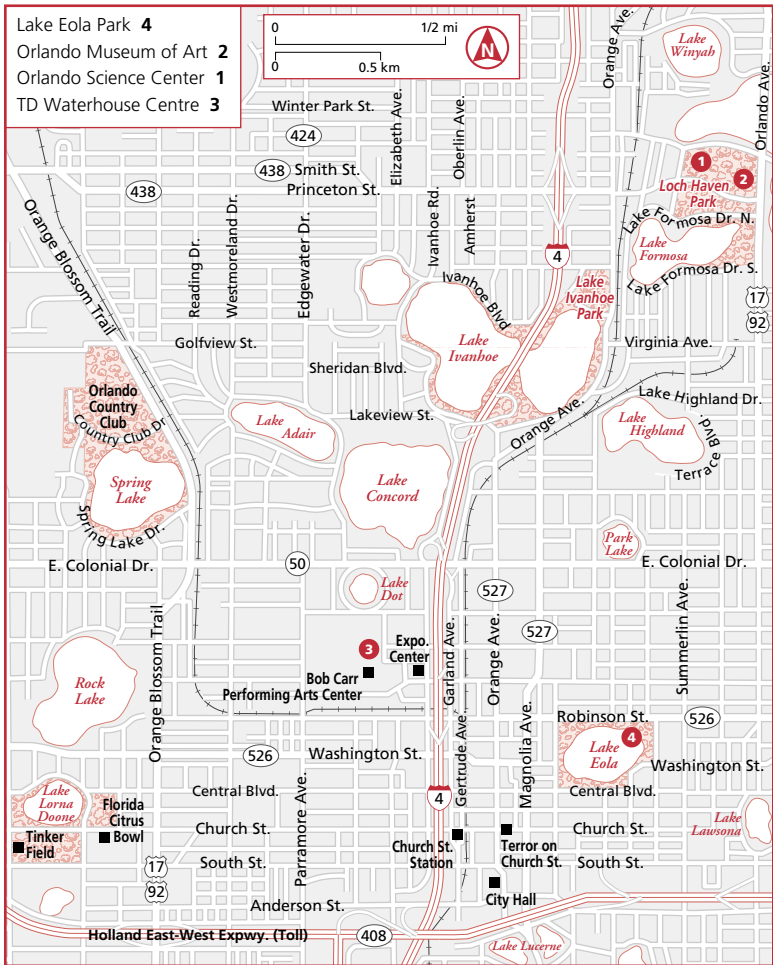
9801 International Dr. (between the Bee Line Expressway and Sand Lake Rd.). ☎ 800/732-2639 or 407/352-4000. Free admission. Daily at 11am and 5pm. Free self-parking, valet parking \$14. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr., then south. Hotel is on the left across from the Convention Center.

Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium Do you crave weird science? If you're a fan of the bizarre, here's where you'll find lots of oddities. Among the hundreds of exhibits: a two-headed kitten, a five-legged cow, a three-quarter-scale model of a 1907 Rolls-Royce made of 1 million matchsticks, a mosaic of the *Mona Lisa* created from toast, torture devices from the Spanish Inquisition, a Tibetan flute made of human bones, and Ubangi women with wooden plates in their lips. There are exhibits on Houdini and films of people swallowing coat hangers. Visitors are greeted by a hologram of Robert Ripley. Allow 2 hours.

8201 International Dr. (1½ blocks south of Sand Lake Rd.). ☎ 407/345-0501. www.ripleys.com/orlando2.htm. Admission \$17 adults, \$12 children 4–12. Daily 9am–1am. Free parking. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, and turn right on International Dr.

Skull Kingdom As you wander the stone halls inside the Skull Castle, you'll be taunted and terrified by a cast of ghoulish characters second in central Florida only to the crew at Universal Orlando's Halloween Horror Nights, but this show runs year-round. The night show (after 5pm) on weekends is far more intense than the day show. In any case, it's not for children under 8. Allow about 30 minutes to walk

Central Orlando



through the castle. The **Chamber of Magic** dinner show (all-you-can-eat pizza and drinks) can also be combined with the haunted tour.

5933 American Way (just off the intersection of International Dr. and Universal Blvd., 3 blocks east of Universal Orlando). ☎ 407/354-1564. www.skullkingdom.com. Admission day show \$9 per person, night show \$14 per person; magic dinner show \$20 adult, \$16 kids under 7; magic show, dinner, and the haunted tour \$28 adults, \$24 kids under 7. Free parking. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 6pm–midnight. From I-4, take Exit 75A/Hwy. 435 south to American Way and look for the giant skull castle.

Titanic—Ship of Dreams *Overrated* If you didn't get enough of the movie, news clips, and expedition, you will get that *no-more* feeling in this 25,000-square-foot attraction. It has some 200 artifacts (a deck chair, life jacket, stationery, and so on), movie memorabilia, actors, and even a replica of the great ship's grand staircase and re-created rooms. This one is strictly for ardent fans. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

8445 International Dr. (3 blocks south of Sand Lake Rd.). ☎ 407/248-1166. www.titanicshipofdreams.com. Admission \$18 adults, \$13 children 6–11. Free parking. Daily 10am–8pm. Take I-4 Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, turn left on International Dr., and go $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. It's in the Mercado.

Wet 'n Wild 🌟 Who knew people came in so many shapes and sizes? Stacked or stubby, terribly tan or not, all kinds come here, so there's no reason to be bashful about squeezing into a bathing suit and going out in public. The 25-acre Wet 'n Wild is America's third most popular water park (behind Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon, respectively). **Disco H2O**, the park's newest addition, debuted in 2005; it's an enclosed flume ride where a four-passenger raft sends you flying through the sights and sounds of the '70s, complete with mirrored lights and disco tunes blasting in the background. Other options include **The Flyer**, a six-story four-passenger toboggan run through 450 feet of banked curves; the **Surge**, which is one of the longest (580 ft. of curves) and fastest multipassenger tube rides in the Southeast; and **Black Hole**, a two-person spaceship-style raft that makes a 500-foot twisting, turning voyage through darkness (all three rides require that children 36–48 in. be accompanied by an adult). You can also ride **Raging Rapids**, a simulated white-water run with a water-fall plunge; **Blue Niagara**, a 300-foot six-story loop-and-dipster that also has a plunge (48-in. height minimum); **Knee Ski**, a cable-operated half-mile knee-boarding course that's open in warm-weather months only (56-in. height minimum); **Der Stuka**, a six-story, free-fall speed slide; and **Mach 5**, which has a trio of twisting, turning flumes. The park also has a large kids' area with mini-versions of the big rides. If you enjoy the water, plan on spending a full day here.

Note: In addition to the admission prices below, Wet 'n Wild is part of the multi-day **FlexTicket package** that includes admission to Universal Orlando (which owns this attraction), SeaWorld, and Busch Gardens in Tampa (see the beginning of this chapter for more information).

6200 International Dr. (at Universal Blvd.). ☎ 800/992-9453 or 407/351-1800. www.wetnwild.com. Admission \$34 adults, \$28 children 3–9. Hours vary seasonally, but the park usually is open at least 10am–5pm daily weather permitting (it's one of the few water parks open year-round). You can rent tubes (\$4), towels (\$2), and lockers (\$5); all require a \$2 deposit. Parking is \$6 for cars, light trucks, and vans. From I-4, take Exit 75A/Hwy. 435 South, and follow the signs.

XS Orlando As the owners say, you can “dine, dance, and defend the world” in this summer 2001 arrival. The attraction's 110 simulators—featuring golf, thoroughbred racing, and NASCAR driving, among others—are the primary calling cards for some.

Have Some Extra Time?

Wonder Works is just the spot to spend a couple of hours (less than two) if you're in need of a less intense evening or rainy afternoon activity. This upside-down building's exterior catches the eye, and it's just as interesting on the inside, with an array of unique hands-on exhibits that include the bed of nails, the bridge of fire, the WonderCoaster, and more. There's plenty to do for kids ages 4 to 12, who (among other options) can stomp on giant piano keys to make music or create sheets of bubbles with bubble machines. Call ☎ 407/351-8800 or surf the Internet to www.wonderworksonline.com for more information.

You can win prizes (T-shirts and more) that also are sold in the gift shop. You can buy game cards by time (\$20 an hour, \$25 for two), though not all games are included under this payment scheme; or you can get a pay-for-play card that's good for all games. There's also a DJ and restaurant (serving seafood, steaks, pizzas, pastas, salads, and sandwiches, with entrees running \$6–\$19; kids meals \$4.95).

9101 International Dr., in Pointe Orlando. ☎ **407/226-8922**. www.xsorlando.com, www.pacmancafe.com/main.asp. Free admission. Sun–Thurs noon–midnight; Fri–Sat noon–2am. From I-4, take Exit 74A, Sand Lake Rd./Hwy. 528, east to International Dr.; turn south. Pointe Orlando is on the left.

ELSEWHERE IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

The listings that follow are out of the mainstream tourist areas, meaning you won't have to battle heavy crowds. The Central Florida Zoo, Orlando Museum of Art, and Orlando Science Center are close enough to incorporate a visit to Winter Park if you choose to make a day of it.

Central Florida Zoo *(Finds)* This community zoo has come a long way since it was born in 1923 when a circus came to town, leaving a monkey and a goat behind. The monkey rode the goat in the earliest show. Today, the animal collection includes beautiful clouded leopards, cheetahs, and black-footed cats, all of which are endangered. You'll also meet a ham of a hippo named Geraldine as well as black howler monkeys, siamangs, American crocodiles, a banded Egyptian cobra, a Gila monster, hyacinth macaws, barred owls, bald eagles, and dozens of other species. The zoo has half-price admission for everyone Thursdays from 9 to 10am and all day Tuesdays for seniors 60 and over. Allow 2 to 3 hours. **Tip:** One-year memberships that include additional perks and free admission to this and 100 other participating zoos and aquariums across the country are available. A family membership is \$50, which, depending on your family's size, may be more economical than purchasing individual tickets.

3755 NW U.S. 17/92, Sanford. ☎ **407/323-4450**. www.centralfloridazoo.org. Admission \$8.95 adults, \$6.95 seniors, \$4.95 children 3–12. Daily 9am–5pm. Free parking. Take I-4 Exit 104 right onto Orange Ave., turn left at the traffic light on Lake Monroe Rd., then right on U.S. 17/92. The zoo is on the right.

Forever Florida The 4,700-acre Crescent J Ranch is a nature preserve that offers a chance to see native wildlife, Florida flora, and a working cattle ranch by guided tour. Options include touring by horseback (must reserve at least 24 hours in advance) or by Safari coach, a funky buggy that puts riders on a perch 10 feet above sea level. Allow a half-day or longer to get here, take the tour, and see the grounds, which also include a pony riding ring, hiking trails, and a petting zoo.

4755 N. Kenansville Rd., St. Cloud (southeast of Kissimmee). ☎ **866/854-3837**. www.foreverflorida.com. Tours and rides from \$20 adult, \$15 kids on up to \$89 per person, higher for overnights. Sun–Thurs 9am–5pm; Fri–Sat 9am–8pm; first tours at 10am. Free parking. Take I-4 Exit 64A/U.S. 192 east about 15 miles to U.S. 441, then go south 7½ miles to Forever Florida on the left.

Harry P. Leu Gardens ★ *(Value)* This 50-acre botanical garden on the shores of Lake Rowena offers a serene respite from the theme-park razzle-dazzle. Paths lead through giant camphors, moss-draped oaks, palms, cicadas, and camellias—the latter represented by one of the world's largest collections: 50 species and some 2,000 plants that bloom from October through March. There are 75 varieties of roses in the site's formal gardens, as well as orchids, azaleas, desert plants, and colorful annuals and perennials. The attraction also has palm, bamboo, and butterfly gardens. Businessman Harry P. Leu, who donated his 49-acre estate to the city in the 1960s, created the gardens. There

are \$7 guided tours of his house, built in 1888, on the hour and half-hour (advance reservations suggested). The interior has Victorian, Chippendale, and Empire furnishings and pieces of art. Admission is free Mondays from 9am to noon. It takes about 2 hours to see the house and gardens.

1920 N. Forest Ave. (between Nebraska St. and Corrine Dr.). ☎ 407/246-2620. www.leugardens.org. Admission \$5 adults, \$1 children grades K–12; Mon 9am–12pm free. Gardens daily 9am–5pm; house daily 10am–4pm, (closed during July). Free parking. Take I-4 Exit 85/Princeton St. and go east, then right on Mills Ave. and left on Virginia Dr. Look for the gardens on your left, just after you go around a curve.

Orlando Museum of Art ★ This local heavyweight handles some of the most prestigious traveling exhibits in the nation. The museum, founded in 1924, hosts special exhibits throughout the year, but even if you miss one, it's worth a stop to see its rotating permanent collection of 19th- and 20th-century American art, pre-Columbian art dating from 1200 B.C. to A.D. 1500, and African art. Allow 2 to 3 hours.

2416 N. Mills Ave. (in Loch Haven Park). ☎ 407/896-4231. www.omart.org. Admission \$8 adults, \$7 seniors and students, \$5 children 6–18; local residents free Thurs 1–4pm. Tues–Fri 10am–4pm; Sat–Sun noon–4pm; closed Mon and legal holidays. Free parking. Take I-4 Exit 85/Princeton St. east and follow signs to Loch Haven Park.

Orlando Science Center ★★ *Finds* The four-story center, the largest of its kind in the Southeast, provides 10 exhibit halls that allow visitors to explore everything from Florida swamps to the arid plains of Mars to the human body. One of the big attractions is the **Dr. Phillips CineDome**, a 310-seat theater that presents large-format films, planetarium shows, and laser-light extravaganzas. In **KidsTown**, little folks wander in exhibits representing a miniature version of the big world around them. In one section, there's a pint-size community that includes a construction site, park, and wellness center. **Science City**, located nearby, includes physics lessons and a power plant, and **123 Math Avenue** uses puzzles and other things to make learning math fun. Allow 3 to 4 hours, more if you have an inquiring mind.

777 E. Princeton St. (between Orange and Mills aves., in Loch Haven Park). ☎ 888/672-4386 or 407/514-2000. www.osc.org. Admission (includes exhibits, CineDome film, and planetarium show) \$15 adults, \$14 seniors 55 and older, \$9.95 children 3–11. Tues–Thurs 9am–5pm; Fri–Sat 9am–9pm; Sun noon–5pm. Parking available in a garage across the street for \$3.50. Take I-4 Exit 85/Princeton St. east and cross Orange Ave.

5 Staying Active

You will most likely burn more calories than you ever thought possible by simply strolling through the theme parks. Nevertheless, if you want some exercise other than walking the parks, Walt Disney World and the surrounding areas have plenty of recreational options. Most of the following are open to everyone, no matter where you're staying (we note the exceptions below). For further information about WDW recreational facilities, call ☎ 407/939-7529, or on the Internet go to www.disneyworld.com and click the “recreation” link.

AIRBOATING

You can giddy-up-and-glide across the surface of local waters at **Boggy Creek Airboat Rides** in Kissimmee (☎ 407/344-9550; www.bcairboats.com), where you'll pay \$19 per adult and \$15 per child for half-hour tours; night tours are available as well. Another choice is **Old Fashioned Airboat Rides** in Christmas, east of Orlando (☎ 407/568-4307; www.airboatrides.com), which charges \$37 per adult and \$20 per child age 12 and under for 90 minutes.

BALLOONING

There are several places in the area to experience an early-morning hot-air balloon flight, including **Orange Blossom Balloons** in Lake Buena Vista (☎ 407/239-7677; www.orangeblossomballoons.com) and **Blue Water Balloons** in Orlando (☎ 800/586-1884 or 407/894-5040; www.bluewaterballoons.com). Rates run about \$175 adults, \$95 children ages 10 to 15, and include a champagne toast (for those old enough) at the conclusion of the flight and a breakfast buffet or picnic afterward.

BICYCLING

Bike rentals (single and multispeed bikes for adults, tandems, baby seats, and children's bikes including those equipped with training wheels) are available from the **Bike Barn** (☎ 407/824-2742) at Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground. Rates are \$8 per hour, \$22 per day (including tax). Fort Wilderness offers good bike trails.

BOATING

With a ton of manmade lakes and lagoons, WDW owns a navy of pleasure boats. **Capt. Jack's** at Downtown Disney rents Water Sprites and canopy boats (\$27–\$42 per half-hour). For information call ☎ 407/828-2204.

The **Bike Barn** at Fort Wilderness (☎ 407/824-2742) rents canoes and paddleboats (\$6.50 per half-hour, \$12 per hour).

Be sure to see the Grand Floridian, Yacht Club, and Beach Club listings in chapter 5, "Where to Stay," for information on some special cruises.

FISHING

Disney offers a variety of fishing excursions on the various Disney lakes, including Bay Lake and Seven Seas Lagoon. The lakes are stocked, so you may catch something, but true anglers probably won't find it much of a challenge. The excursions can be arranged 2 to 90 days in advance by calling ☎ 407/939-2277. A license isn't required. The fee is \$200 to \$395 for up to five adults for 2 or 4 hours (\$90 for each additional hour), including refreshments, gear, guide, and tax. Bait is purchased separately for \$15. An hour-long excursion for kids ages 6 to 12 is available for \$30.

A less-expensive alternative: Rent fishing poles at the **Bike Barn** (☎ 407/824-2742) to fish in the Fort Wilderness canals. Pole rentals cost \$6 per half hour, \$10 per day. Bait is \$3.50. A license isn't necessary.

Outside the realm, **A Pro Bass Guide Service** (☎ 800/771-9676 or 407/877-9676; www.probassguideservice.com) offers guided bass fishing trips along some of central Florida's most picturesque rivers and lakes. Hotel pickup is available; the cost is \$260 for 2 people per half-day, \$360 for a full day, a license is \$17.

HAYRIDES

The hay wagon departs **Pioneer Hall** at Disney's Fort Wilderness nightly at 7 and 9:30pm for 45-minute old-fashioned hayrides with singing, jokes, and games. The cost is \$8 for adults, \$4 for children ages 3 to 9. An adult must accompany children under 12. No reservations; it's first-come, first-served. Call ☎ 407/824-2832.

HIKING

The **Nature Conservancy's Disney Wilderness Preserve**, 2700 Scrub Jay Trail (☎ 407/682-3664 or 407/935-0002; www.nature.org/florida) is a 12,000-acre, little discovered getaway from the theme-park madness. It has 7 miles of trails at the headwaters

Hitting the Links

Walt Disney World operates five 18-hole, par-72 golf courses and one 9-hole, par-36 walking course. All are open to the public and offer pro shops, equipment rentals, and instruction. The rates are \$99 to \$159 per 18-hole round for resort guests (\$10 more if you're not staying at a WDW property). Twilight specials are available for \$60 to \$80 per person. For tee times and information, call ☎ **407/939-4653** up to 7 days in advance (up to 30 days for Disney resort and "official" property guests). Call ☎ **407/934-7639** for information about golf packages.

Beyond Mickey's shadow, try **Celebration Golf Club**, which has an 18-hole regulation course (greens fees change depending on the month, but generally run \$65–\$129) and a 3-hole junior course for 5 to 9 year olds (☎ **888/275-2918** or 407/566-4653; www.celebrationgolf.com). **Champions Gate** offers 36 holes designed by Greg Norman (☎ **407/787-4653**; www.championsgategolf.com), where greens fees will set you back \$55 to \$170. **Orange County National** has 36 Phil Ritson–designed holes (☎ **407/656-2626**; www.orangecountynationalgolf.com); greens fees run \$50 to \$150.

Golf magazine recognized the 45 holes designed by Jack Nicklaus at the **Villas of Grand Cypress** ★★☆☆ resort as among the best in the nation. Tee times begin at 8am daily. Special rates are available for children under 18. For information call ☎ **407/239-1909**. The courses are open to guests only and greens fees run \$120 to \$180 for guests, \$180 to \$250 for nonguests, depending on the season. Golf packages are available.

Also consider **Golfpac** (☎ **888/848-8941** or 407/260-2288; www.golfpacinc.com), an organization that packages golf vacations with accommodations and other features and prearranges tee times at more than 40 Orlando-area courses. The earlier you call (months, if possible), the better your options. **Tee Times USA** (☎ **888/465-3356**; www.teetimesusa.com) is another reservation service that also offers package and course information.

of the Everglades ecosystem, just south of Orlando. Self-guided trails range from a half-mile interpretive trail to a 4.5-mile hiking trail. Picnic facilities are available along the trails. Admission costs \$3 adults, and \$2 for kids ages 6 to 17 and Nature Conservancy members. It's open Monday through Friday in summer from 9am to 5pm; it's open daily from 9am to 5pm the rest of the year. The preserve also features Sunday afternoon **buggy rides** (\$12 adults, \$6 kids).

HORSEBACK RIDING

Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground offers 45-minute guided trail rides several times a day. The cost is \$32 per person. Children must be at least 9 years old. Maximum rider weight is 250 pounds. For information and reservations up to 30 days in advance, call ☎ **407/824-2832**.

The **Villas of Grand Cypress's Equestrian Center** offers 45-minute walk-trot trail rides for \$45. A 30-minute private lesson is \$55; an hour lesson is \$100. A host of

other package options are offered. For more information, call ☎ 800/835-7377 or 407/239-1938 or go online to <http://grandcypress.com>.

HORSEDRAWN CARRIAGE RIDES

In 2002, Disney added carriage rides at two locations around the World, **Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground** and the **Port Orleans Resort** (☎ 407/824-2832). The 30-minute rides cost \$30 for up to four people.

JOGGING

Many of the Disney resorts have scenic jogging trails. For instance, the **Yacht and Beach Club** resorts share a 2-mile trail; the **Caribbean Beach Resort's** 1½-mile promenade circles a lake; **Port Orleans** has a 1¼-mile riverfront trail; and **Fort Wilderness's** tree-shaded 2¼-mile jogging path has exercise stations about every quarter mile. Pick up a jogging trail map at any Disney property's Guest Services desk.

PARASAILING

The **Sammy Duvall Watersports Centre** (☎ 407/939-0754; www.sammyduvall.com) at Disney's Contemporary Resort will take you up to 600 feet above Seven Seas Lagoon and Bay Lake on a flight that lasts 8 to 12 minutes. The cost ranges from \$90 (single rider) to \$140 (two riders).

SURFING

It's true. The creative minds at Disney have added a way for you to learn how to catch a wave and "hang ten" at the Typhoon Lagoon water park (p. 245). Tuesdays and Fridays, instructors from **Carroll's Cocoa Beach Surfing School** show up for an early-bird session in the namesake lagoon, which has a wave machine capable of 8-footers. The 2½-hour sessions are held before the park opens to the general public. They're limited to 14 people. Minimum age is 8. The \$135 per person cost (including tax) doesn't include park admission, which you'll have to pay if you want to hang around after the lesson (☎ 407/939-7529). You'll also need alternative transportation to get here if you're staying in Walt's World because the Disney transportation system doesn't service Typhoon Lagoon until official park opening time.

SWIMMING

The **YMCA Aquatic Center**, 8422 International Dr. (☎ 407/363-1911), has a full fitness center, racquetball courts, and an indoor Olympic-size pool. Admission is \$10 per person, \$25 for families.

TENNIS

There are 26 tennis courts scattered throughout the Disney properties and the Disney Wide World of Sports complex. Most are free and open to resort guests only on a first-come, first-served basis. The Racquet Club at the Contemporary Resort has six clay courts (reservations are mandatory and play time costs \$8 an hour), all lighted for evening play, and offers lessons (\$40–\$50, depending on duration of lesson). For court reservations, call ☎ 407/939-7529.

WATER-SKIING & WAKEBOARDING

Water-skiing trips (including boats, drivers, equipment, and instruction) can be arranged Tuesday through Saturday at **Walt Disney World** by calling ☎ 407/824-2621 or 407/939-7529. Make reservations up to 14 days in advance. The cost for skiing is

\$140 per hour for up to five people. Wakeboarding is \$140 for up to four people. You also can wakeboard and ski at the **Sammy Duvall Watersports Centre** at Disney's Contemporary Resort (☎ 407/939-0754; www.sammyduvall.com); it costs \$80 for 30 minutes, \$140 for 60 minutes.

Outside Disney, you can get some time behind a boat or at the end of an overhead cable at the **Orlando Watersports Complex**, 8615 Florida Rock Rd. (☎ 407/251-3100; www.orlandowatersports.com), which has lights for nighttime thrill seekers. Prices for skiing, including lessons, begin at about \$21 an hour for a cable and \$35 a half-hour behind a boat. The complex is located close to Orlando International Airport.

By the time this book hits the shelves, the indoor surf park, **Ron Jon Surf Park** (☎ 321/799-8880; www.ronjons.com), will have opened at the Festival Bay shopping center on International Drive. It features pools for intermediate- and pro-level surfers and bodyboarders, as well as pools for novice wave riders. Lessons and clinics are available.

6 Spectator Sports

Disney doesn't want to give the competition a sporting chance. In May 1997, it branched out with the multimillion-dollar **Wide World of Sports Complex**, a 200-acre facility. The Mouse hit a home run with a 7,500-seat baseball stadium—dubbed Cracker Jack Stadium in 2002—that's the spring training home of the Atlanta Braves. In addition, there's a 5,000-seat field house featuring six basketball courts, a fitness center, and training rooms; major-league practice fields and pitching mounds; 4 softball fields; 12 tennis courts, including a 2,000-seat stadium center court; a track-and-field complex; a golf driving range; and more. The newest addition, the Hess Sports Fields, includes baseball, soccer, lacrosse, and football fields. A variety of events, from tennis tournaments to band competitions, have been held here since the center opened. For information about events taking place during your stay, call ☎ 407/939-1500 or visit www.disneyworldsports.com.

Even taking the above into account, Disney isn't the only show in town.

ARENA FOOTBALL

The **Orlando Predators** play from February through mid-May. For the uninitiated, arena football is a wide-open sport played by eight-man teams on a much-abbreviated field. You don't necessarily need to know the rules to enjoy the up-close crunching and beer-fest atmosphere. The Predators have a loyal and rowdy following, not to mention a few championships under their belts. Sold-out games are common, but single tickets (\$6–\$50) are often available the day of the game at the **TD Waterhouse Centre**, formerly the Orlando Arena. Call ☎ 407/447-7337 or surf the Web to www.orlandopredators.com.

BASEBALL

The **Atlanta Braves** (☎ 407/828-3267; www.atlantabrades.com) began spring training at Disney's Wide World of Sports in 1998. There are 18 games during a 1-month season that begins in March. Tickets are \$13 to \$21. You can get tickets through **Ticketmaster** (☎ 407/839-3900).

From April to September, the **Orlando Rays**, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays' Class AA Southern League affiliate, play their 70 home games at Disney's Wide World of Sports (☎ 407/939-4263). You can get tickets through **Ticketmaster** (☎ 407/839-3900). They sell for \$5 to \$8.

Moments The Multisports Experience

In 2002, Disney replaced its NFL Experience at the Wide World of Sports complex with an expanded multisports venue that not only lets you test your skills at football but also at baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, and volleyball. Admission is \$11 for adults and \$7.75 for kids 3 to 9. It's open on select days. For information call ☎ **407/939-1500**.

If you're a true sports fan, your best bet is to write in advance for a package of information about the facilities and a calendar of events at Wide World of Sports. Write to **Disney's Wide World of Sports**, P.O. Box 10,000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-1000, or call ☎ **407/939-1500**.

BASKETBALL

The 17,500-seat TD Waterhouse Centre—known in a prior life as the Orlando Arena—is the home court of the NBA's **Orlando Magic** (☎ **407/896-2442**; www.nba.com/magic), which plays 41 of its regular-season games here from October to April. Single-game tickets (approximately \$25–\$175) can be hard to acquire. To get there, take I-4 east to Exit 83B, Hwy. 50/U.S. 17/92 (Amelia St.), turn left at the traffic light at the bottom of the off-ramp, and follow the signs. For up-to-the-minute parking information, turn your car radio to 1620 AM.

Shopping

Whether you're looking for mouse ears and souvenirs or the latest and greatest in designer labels, you'll find it in Orlando. Walt Disney World itself is home to an almost endless array of shops spread throughout its parks, resorts, and Downtown Disney. The House of Mouse, however, is not the only game in town. If you venture beyond its boundaries you'll discover first-rate shopping malls, outlet centers, and charming boutiques. There are two distinctively different options for shopping in Orlando: The local malls, which are home to an excellent and varied selection of retailers, and the outlet shopping centers.

But before you break out your credit cards, do remember to keep your shopping wits about you. The malls and their upscale stores can, at times, charge extremely outrageous prices that you'll easily better at home. And the outlets, once offering tremendous bargains, now

discount at times only marginally. The key to getting the best possible deals is to know what is *and isn't* a bargain.

And now, a note on souvenir shopping. If, after exercising your credit cards elsewhere, you've still got energy (and money) to burn, the parks and entertainment districts at Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld feature some of the most distinctive souvenir shopping you'll find anywhere. Sure, many of the stores are filled with trinkets and T-shirts, but some offer far more unique merchandise that you won't be able to find anywhere else—Orlando or otherwise. Besides the listings in this chapter, be sure to check out some unique shopping opportunities mentioned in Chapter 7, "Exploring Walt Disney World," and chapter 8, "Exploring Beyond Disney: Universal Orlando, SeaWorld & Other Attractions."

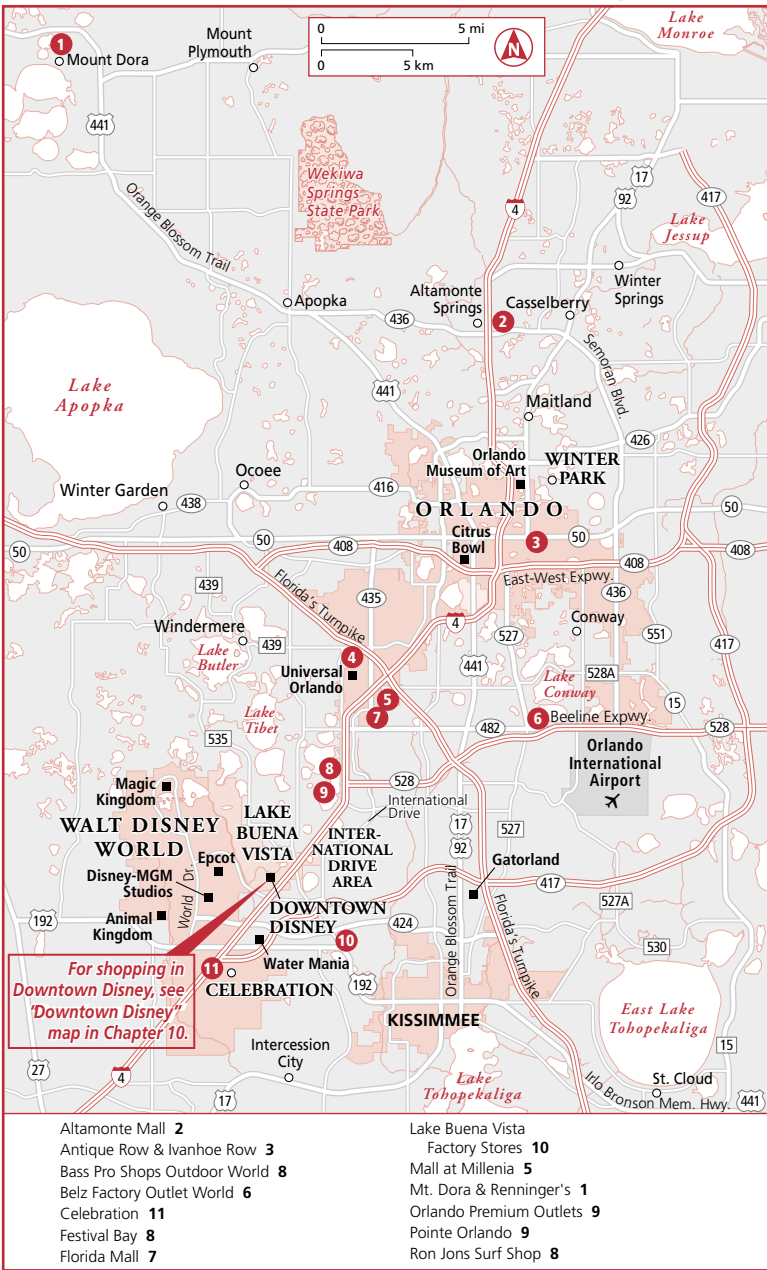
1 The Shopping Scene

The hottest spots for tourists to shop are at Downtown Disney, CityWalk, and the larger themed shopping centers scattered along International Drive. Kissimmee, though a very busy area, has little to offer shoppers other than seashells and T-shirts that, at 3 for \$10, are a good example of the old saying "you get what you pay for." There are, of course, more than just a few of the same tourist traps located along I-Drive (mostly at the northern end) as well as along S.R. 535 in Lake Buena Vista. But don't despair; if you stick to

the places listed in this chapter, you'll find plenty of quality merchandise.

If you're looking for a quieter, out-of-the-way shopping experience, the quaint tree-lined streets of Winter Park—Park Avenue in particular—are filled with one-of-a-kind boutiques, well-known shops, and antiques stores. Closer to the action, yet still far enough off the beaten path to remain quaint and quiet is Market Street in Celebration, which is home to a small collection of tiny shops. Downtown Orlando has its own collection of unique

Shopping in Orlando



Tips Ship It

Because Orlando is geared to travelers, many retailers offer to ship packages home for a few dollars more (Disney definitely does). So, if you're pondering an extra-large purchase, or even just one you would rather not have to carry, ask. If a retailer doesn't offer such a service, check with your hotel. Many a concierge or business center staffer can arrange a pickup by United Parcel Service, the U.S. Postal Service, or another carrier. Anything's better than dragging that 6-foot stuffed Pluto through the friendly skies.

shopping spots, with Antique Row (along Orange Avenue) and nearby Ivanhoe featuring antiques dealers, collectible shops, and better gift stores. If you're in search of a quiet retreat or an afternoon of simple indulgence, these shopping side trips should provide just the sort of peaceful experience you're seeking (you won't even mind coming away empty-handed).

Many Orlando area stores, particularly those in malls or other shopping centers, are usually open from 9 or 10am until 9 or 10pm Monday through Saturday, and from noon to 6pm on Sunday. It is always best to check before you go as hours, like those at the parks, can change during the holidays as well as seasonally. Sales tax in Osceola County, which includes Kissimmee, the U.S. 192 corridor, and *all of Disney's All-Star resorts* is 7%. In Orange County, which includes the International Drive area, Sea-World, Universal Orlando, most (but not all) of Disney World, and most of the lesser attractions, it's 6.5%. In Seminole County, about 40 miles north of Walt Disney World, the rate is 7%. No matter where you are, plan on adding a few extra dollars in taxes to your bill when you get to the cash register.

One thing that's no different here than the rest of the country: If you're headed down during the holiday season, from the end of November to January 1, it's best to avoid local shopping malls, especially on weekends. They're just as crazy and crowded as those back home—maybe even worse. And no matter what time of year it is, don't leave your good judgment at the door when you're shopping the outlet malls. Although there are some good bargains to be found, the prices on many items aren't really much better than you can find at home in many cases. The selection, however, may be much larger than you're used to—especially if you're from outside the United States. Remember, though, that you still have to get it home with you somehow, so if you can buy the same item at home, do you really want to have to carry it all the way from Florida?

GREAT SHOPPING AREAS

CELEBRATION Though not the best place to head if you're the shop-'til-you-drop type, this is a rather pleasant spot to stroll leisurely along quaint streets filled with upscale shops, coffee houses, and restaurants. Celebration, after all, is a Disney-designed community, making it practically the perfect little town. It's a throwback to mid-20th-century mainstream America, when main street shopping was in style. Market Street and the area just surrounding it are home to a dozen or so shops, a couple of art galleries, a handful of restaurants, and a three-screen theater. The storefronts, especially the galleries and gift shops, offer interesting and unique merchandise, though you'll find that there's a price to pay for perfection. Stores here include the Market Street Gallery (Swarovski crystal, Disney collectibles, and more), Sherlock's of

Celebration (a shop that sells wine and English tearoom goods), an art gallery, a grocer, a post office, a perfumery, and a jeweler. The real attraction here is the relaxing, picture-perfect atmosphere. The high prices, however, may make for more window-shopping than actual spending. If, by chance, Celebration reminds you of the movie *The Truman Show*, you're not alone. The movie was filmed in Seaside, a Florida pan-handle community that inspired the builders of this burg (☎ 407/566-2200).

DOWNTOWN DISNEY With three distinct areas—West Side, Pleasure Island, and the Marketplace—Downtown Disney (☎ 407/939-2648; www.downtowndisney.com) is chock full of some of the most unique shops in Orlando, as well as many restaurants and entertainment venues.

The best shops in the Marketplace include the 50,000-square-foot **World of Disney**, the largest store in Downtown Disney. There are rooms and more rooms filled with everything Disney, from toys and trading pins to clothes and collectibles—and everything (and I mean everything) in between. I always stop in at the **Lego Imagination Center** when I'm in town. The shop, currently undergoing renovations, is filled with Lego blocks designed for everyone from toddlers to tweens, Bionicles, T-shirts, and trinkets. **Once Upon A Toy** is one of the best stores in the Marketplace, and the best toy store I've ever been in. It's stocked from floor to ceiling with games and toys, many of them classics—you know, the ones you played with while growing up. Its 16,000 square feet of space is divided into three separate sections: the first is filled with board games; the second is loaded with stuffed animals, building sets, and Playskool toys; the third features action figures, vehicles, and videos. **Team Mickey's Athletic Club** is filled with character clothing with a sporty spin. Other smaller, but similarly interesting shops include **Summer Sands**, featuring the hottest in beachwear from top names such as Quicksilver and Calvin Klein; **Pooh Corner**, which offers everything Pooh that you can think of; and **The Art of Disney**, where you can buy limited edition animation cels and other Disney collectibles.

Heading up the West Side is **Guitar Gallery**, a music store extraordinaire. Alongside the sheet music you'll find some rare one-of-a-kind custom and collector guitars—some were once played by the biggest stars in the music business, with price tags to match. There are plenty of accessories, T-shirts, and trinkets for those of us not nearly as musically (or financially) inclined. The 49,000-square-foot **Virgin Megastore** is the biggest store on the block, with two levels of music, videos, books, and more. You can preview your chosen song or movie before you purchase at one of the

Tips Getting Your Fill

The neatest new way to buy toys at several Downtown Disney stores (especially Once Upon a Toy) is in bulk . . . sort of. Toys such as Lincoln Logs and Mr. Potato Head, as well as a few others, can be purchased by the piece. Here's how it works: You pick out a box (there are two sizes to choose from) and fill it up with as many (or few) pieces as you can fit inside. The only stipulation—you have to be able to close the lid properly. No matter how many pieces you've stuffed inside, the price of the box remains the same. If you've got good space-saving skills, buying your toys this way may net you a very good deal. (Here's a hint to get you started—Mr. Potato Head has a hole in his back, so fill it up and you'll fit more pieces in your box.)

300 audio and video stations. Other notable stores at West Side include **Magic Masters**, where you can load up on magic tricks for your budding Harry Houdini; **Magnetron**, which sells a huge variety of magnets (though, strangely enough, no Disney ones); and **Celebrity Eyeworks Studio**, where you can pick up a copy of those cool shades your favorite star was sporting in his or her last film.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AREA (*Note:* Locally, this road is always referred to as **I-Drive**.) Extending 8 or so miles northeast of Disney between Highway 535 and the Florida Turnpike, this busy thoroughfare is one of the most popular tourist districts in the area, in part because it is filled with so many restaurants, shops, hotels, and attractions. From indoor surfing and glow-in-the-dark golf to dozens of themed restaurants, and shopping spots, this is *the* tourist strip in central Florida. Its main shopping draw is the **Orlando Premium Outlets**, just off south I-Drive (see below). Another I-Drive shopping spot, **Pointe Orlando** (☎ 407/248-2838; www.pointe-orlando.com), features a collection of restaurants, clubs, and specialty shops. A major renovation, currently in the works, will add even more retailers to this outdoor complex, as well as brand new landscaping and lighting in order to create a more inviting atmosphere. **The Mercado** (☎ 407/345-9337; www.themercado.com) is a Mediterranean-style marketplace on I-Drive that's filled with specialty shops, restaurants, and attractions; there's often live entertainment featured here in the evenings.

KISSIMMEE Skirting the south side of Walt Disney World, Kissimmee centers on U.S. 192/Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway, as archetypal of modern American cities as Disney's Main Street is of America's yesteryear. U.S. 192 is lined end to end with budget motels, smaller attractions, and almost every fast-food restaurant known to humankind (though a handful of good eateries can be found here as well). Kissimmee does not offer the fabulous array of shopping options found elsewhere in Orlando. The shopping here is notable for the quantity, not necessarily the quality, but it's a

Value A Disney Bargain? The World's Best-Kept Secret

From a pink Cadillac to a 4-foot beer stein, tons of wacky treasures are regularly put on the auction block at Walt Disney World.

In addition to castoffs from the theme parks and WDW resorts, there are more routine items available, from over-the-hill lawn maintenance gear to never-been-used stainless-steel pots and pans. If you're looking for a unique piece of Disney, the auctions are held six times a year. Some of the more unusual items sold in the past include furniture from Miss Piggy's dressing room and a motorized surfboard. The auction takes place on Disney's back lots. Call property control (☎ 407/824-6878; www.auctionweb.com/disney) for information, dates, and directions.

Bigger yet are trinkets sold by gavel at www.disneyauctions.com on eBay. The mainstream includes stuffed animals, Winnie the Pooh watches, and other modest merchandise. But sometimes things go big time. A dress Glenn Close wore as Cruella De Vil in *102 Dalmatians* sold for \$5,000, a Dumbo car from the ride at WDW earned \$9,000, and the Porsche from the Disney movie *The Kid* fetched \$77,100.

good place to pick up some knickknacks, white elephant gifts, or those seashells I mentioned earlier.

WINTER PARK Just north of downtown Orlando, Winter Park (☎ 407/644-8281) is the place many of central Florida's old-money families call home. It began as a haven for Yankees trying to escape the cold. Today, its centerpiece is Park Avenue, which has quite a collection of upscale retail shops—Ann Taylor, Restoration Hardware, Bath & Body Works, Crabtree & Evelyn, and Williams-Sonoma—along its cobblestone route. No matter which end of Park Avenue you start at, there are more shops than most can survive, but you're bound to find something here you'll not find anywhere else. Park Avenue is also home to a handful of unique restaurants and art galleries. To get here, take I-4 Exit 87, Fairbanks Avenue/Highway 426, east past U.S. 17/92 to Park Avenue and turn left.

2 Orlando Area Outlets & Malls

FACTORY OUTLETS

Belz Factory Outlet World This is the largest of the Orlando factory outlet centers. It has 170 stores in two enclosed malls and four shopping annexes. It offers a wide range of merchandise, and in a few cases the savings can be 75% off retail prices, but, as is the case with most outlets, *most buys here are no better than what you'll find in discount houses in your town*. There are more than a dozen shoe stores (Bass, Nike, Rockport, and so on); nearly as many housewares shops (Fitz & Floyd, Oneida, and more); a Universal Studios Outlet; and 60-some clothing shops for men, women, and children (Gap, Levi's, Van Heusen, OshKosh B'Gosh, Izod, Guess Jeans, and others). You can also shop for books, records, electronics, sporting goods, health and beauty aids, jewelry, toys, gifts, accessories, lingerie, and hosiery.

It goes on forever, but don't kill yourself trying to get to every building. Many of the manufacturers have more than one location here, with much the same selections. Also, unless you're from out of the country, most of the brand-name shoe stores don't offer much of a deal. The drawback here is the difficulty getting from building to building: Unless every store you are interested in is in only one of the many buildings, you have to get in and out of your car several times over just to shop here. It's also a bit off the beaten path unless you're staying closer to Universal Orlando, making some of the other outlet options a much better choice. 5401 W. Oak Ridge Rd. ☎ 407/352-9611. www.belz.com.

Lake Buena Vista Factory Stores The three dozen or so outlets here include Big Dog Sportswear, Carters, Casuals (Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger), Liz Claiborne, Fossil, OshKosh, Reebok, Gap Outlet, and the only Old Navy Outlet in the area. Savings can reach 75%, but most deals are much more modest. The plaza itself is very tasteful and inviting, and the location, just between the I-Drive and U.S. 192 areas on the lower end of Apopka-Vineland, means you can easily get here without having to face too much traffic. This outlet center is a bit quieter and more relaxed than the Premium Outlets (see below), however its selection of shops is far smaller. It does, however, have a nicely done food court area for a quick bite, and even a salon if you are in need of a new do or a manicure. 15591 S. Apopka-Vineland Rd. ☎ 407/238-9301. www.lbvfs.com.

Orlando Premium Outlets ★★ *Finds* Opened in June 2000, this 440,000-square-foot outlet center offers shoppers the atmosphere of a beautiful outdoor shopping mall filled with landscaping and natural lighting. It's inviting instead of outlet-ish. It's billed as Orlando's only upscale outlet and is by far the best choice for a great shopping

Tips Homegrown Souvenirs

Oranges, grapefruit, and other citrus fruits rank high on the list of Florida's top local products. **Orange Blossom Indian River Citrus**, 5151 S. Orange Blossom Trail, Orlando (☎ **800/624-8835** or 407/855-2837; www.orange-blossom.com), is one of the top sellers during the late-fall-to-late-spring season.

experience in Orlando. It has 110 tenants, including Disney and Universal outlets, Coach, Donna Karan, Kenneth Cole, Nike, Polo/Ralph Lauren, Timberland, and Tommy Hilfiger. Others include DKNY, Fendi, Hugo Boss, Nautica, Salvatore Ferragamo, and Versace. Some of the best buys are at Banana Republic, and the selection at all the stores is fabulous. Set just between S.R. 535 and I-Drive, it's easily accessible from either location. 8200 Vineland Ave. ☎ **407/238-7787**. www.PremiumOutlets.com.

THE MALLS

Altamonte Mall As surely as Disney brought new life to Orlando, this mall—the second largest in the area behind the Florida Mall (see below)—brought new life (and a ton of traffic) to the then-one-stoplight town of Altamonte Springs, north of Orlando. Currently in the midst of a major renovation, the mall has a food court; a new indoor play area for kids; a new 18-screen AMC movie theater with stadium seating; anchor stores Burdines, Dillard's, JCPenney, and Sears; and 175 other specialty stores. 451 E. Altamonte Dr. ☎ **407/830-4422**. www.altamontemall.com.

Florida Mall The exciting news at this popular shopping spot is the arrival of Nordstrom to combat the opening of Mall at Millenia (see below). Other anchors include Burdines, Dillard's, JCPenney, Sears, and Saks to go along with an Adam's Mark Hotel and more than 250 specialty stores, restaurants (Buca di Beppo, Le Jardin, and Ruby Tuesday), a food court, and entertainment venues. 8001 S. Orange Blossom Trail. ☎ **407/851-6255**. www.shopsimon.com.

Mall at Millenia This 1.3-million-square-foot upscale center made quite a splash on the mall scene when it debuted in October 2002 with anchors that include Bloomingdale's, Macy's, and Neiman Marcus. In addition to the heavyweight anchors, Millenia offers 200 specialty stores that include Cartier, Chanel, Crabtree & Evelyn, Giorgio's of Palm Beach, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Swarovski, and Tiffany & Co. It also features some of the better dining options around with restaurants ranging from fine dining to fast food; in January 2005, it opened the Blue Martini, an upscale martini lounge featuring regular live entertainment. The mall is 5 miles from downtown Orlando. 4200 Conroy Rd. (at I-4 near Universal Orlando). ☎ **407/363-3555**. www.mallatmillenia.com.

3 Other Shopping in Orlando

IN DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

If you can think of nothing better than a relaxing afternoon of bargain hunting or scouring thrift and antiques shops, check out **Antique Row** and **Ivanhoe Row** on North Orange Avenue (stretching from Colonial Dr./Hwy. 50 to Lake Ivanhoe) in downtown Orlando. This collection is a long way from the manufactured fun of Disney. The shops are an interesting assortment of the old, the new, and the unusual. **Flo's Attic**, 1800 N. Orange Ave. (☎ **407/895-1800**), and **A.J. Lillun**, 1913 N. Orange Ave. (☎ **407/895-6111**), sell traditional antiques.

Down the road, a handful of places offer less conventional items. **Wildlife Gallery**, 1219 N. Orange Ave. (☎ 407/898-4544), sells pricey, original works of wildlife art, including sculpture. And the **Fly Fisherman**, 1213 N. Orange Ave. (☎ 407/898-1989), sells—no surprise here—fly-fishing gear. Sometimes you can spot people taking casting lessons in the park across the street.

Most of these downtown shops are open from 9 or 10am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday; the owners usually run them, so hours can vary. All are spread over 3 miles along Orange Avenue. The heaviest concentration of shops lies between Princeton Street and New Hampshire Avenue, although a few are scattered between New Hampshire and Virginia avenues. The more upscale shops extend a few blocks beyond Virginia. To get there, take I-4 Exit 85/Princeton St. and turn right on Orange Avenue. Parking is limited, so stop wherever you find a space along the street.

Additionally, you can shop for fresh produce, plants, baked goods, and crafts every Saturday from 8am to 2:30pm at a downtown **farmer's market**. It's located at the intersection of North Magnolia and East Central. Get more information at www.downtownorlando.com.

A HOMESPUN ALTERNATIVE

Mount Dora *Finds* This haven for artists (and retirees) is also an enjoyable day trip, not to mention a wonderful alternative to all that is Disney. The town, established in 1874, has the genuine feel of old Florida, with an authentic Main Street, far less crowded than the one Disney has re-created. The 19th-century buildings lining the streets are picture-perfect, leading to the calm, dark green waters of Lake Dora. Unlike most of Florida, this town actually has rolling hills, adding to the charm. Highlights include **Renninger's Antique Center and Farmer's Market** (☎ 352/383-8393 for the antique center or 352/383-3141 for the farmer's market; www.renningers.com). The hundreds of shops and booths are open Saturday and Sunday. Up to 1,000 dealers attend Renninger's 3-day antique extravaganzas held the third weekends of January, February, and November. After you've worked up an appetite, take a lunch break at the Beaulaire Dining Room at the historic **Lakeside Inn**, 221 E. 4th Ave. (☎ 800/556-5016 or 352/383-4101; www.lakeside-inn.com). Enjoy lemonade and cookies while rocking on the front porch overlooking the lake. **Mount Dora**. ☎ 352/383-2165. www.mountdora.com. Take I-4 Exit 92, Hwy. 436, go west to U.S. 441, then north and follow the signs to Mount Dora and its "business district."

SPECIALTY STORES

Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World If you're looking for the retail version of fishing and hunting (including archery) heaven, schedule a visit to this store in Belz's Festival Bay shopping center. The store also features areas for watersports equipment, camping gear, and outdoor apparel as well as a golf pro shop and an aquarium. The store is open daily, usually from 9am to 6pm (closed Christmas). 5156 International Dr. ☎ 407/563-5200. www.basspro.com.

Ron Jons Surf Shop This chain retailer (see p. 350 for details on the original store in Cocoa Beach) opened in 2003 at Festival Bay on the upper north end of International Drive. The 15,000-square-foot beach shop sports an island flair and offers a huge selection of its world famous surfer wear and beach gear, among its other unique (and occasionally offbeat) surfing-themed merchandise. Complementing the store is the new indoor Ron Jon Surf Park, also at Festival Bay, which splashed onto the scene late in 2005. 5156 International Dr. ☎ 407/481-2555. www.ronjons.com.

Walt Disney World & Orlando After Dark

For those of you who actually have the energy after a day at the parks, and simply can't call it quits, Orlando has plenty of after-dark venues suitable for a night out on the town. That said, even if you're Orlando veterans, and not first-timers (the ones most likely to overdo it), if you try to go-go-go from morning till night, you *will* be completely exhausted after only a few days, and will end up needing a vacation after your vacation.

Admit it, some of you know the feeling. You're hardcore partiers who aren't willing to give it up after a long day in the parks. You want the after-hours adventure as well. The good news: Orlando's certainly willing to accommodate you, offering a wide array of entertainment options to satisfy your cravings.

The success of Universal's **CityWalk**, a district filled with a variety of clubs, shops, and themed restaurants, shows that

many visitors have the pizzazz to withstand life after a day of schlepping around the House of Mouse. But don't think **Downtown Disney West Side** and **Pleasure Island** are hurting for business. The clubs, shops, and restaurants found there are typically filled to capacity as well.

Check the "Calendar" section of Friday's *Orlando Sentinel* for up-to-the-minute details on local clubs, visiting performers, concerts, and events. It has hundreds of listings, many of which are online at www.orlandosentinel.com. The *Orlando Weekly* is a free magazine found in red boxes throughout central Florida. It highlights the more offbeat and often more spur-of-the-moment performances. You can see it online at www.orlandoweekly.com. Another good source on the Internet is www.orlandoinfo.com, operated by the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

1 The Performing Arts

While Disney occasionally hosts classical music acts, you'll usually have to go downtown to get a taste of the traditional arts.

CONCERT HALLS & AUDITORIUMS

The city continues to dream of getting financing for a multimillion-dollar world-class performing arts center. While you're holding your breath, there are two existing facilities, both of which fall under the wand of Orlando Centroplex.

Florida Citrus Bowl With 70,000 seats, the bowl is the largest venue in the area for rock concerts, which in the past has featured such heavyweights as Elton John and the Rolling Stones. 1610 W. Church St. (at Tampa St.). ☎ 407/849-2001 for event information, 407/849-2020 to get box office information, ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900 to charge tickets via Ticketmaster. www.orlandocentroplex.com. Parking \$5–\$6.

TD Waterhouse Centre Formerly the Orlando Arena, this 17,500-seat venue has a resume that includes the NBA's Orlando Magic (see "Spectator Sports" in chapter 8), the Orlando Predators Arena Football, the Orlando Seals Atlantic Coast Hockey Team, as well as big-name concert performers such as Garth Brooks, Elton John, and Bruce Springsteen. It also features family-oriented entertainment including the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus in January and a slate of cultural offerings such as Broadway-style shows, ballets, plays, and symphony performances. 600 W. Amelia St. (between I-4 and Parramore Ave.). ☎ 407/849-2001 for event information, 407/849-2020 to get box office information, ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900 for tickets through Ticketmaster. www.orlando-centroplex.com. Parking \$5–\$6.

THEATER

Orlando–UCF Shakespeare Festival *Finds* The company is known for placing traditional plays in contemporary settings and offers special programs throughout the year geared towards students. Shows currently scheduled range from *A Twelfth Night* to *The Jungle Book*. Performances are held in three venues: The Ken and Trisha Mergerson Theater, which has 300 seats wrapped around three sides of the stage; the Marilyn and Sig Goldman Theater, an intimate 120-seater; and the Lake Eola Amphitheater, where the 936 seats give a view of Shakespeare under the stars. 812 E. Rollins St. ☎ 407/447-1700. www.shakespearefest.org. Tickets \$10–\$35. Call ahead for reservations. Free parking for indoor season; metered parking in fall.

OPERA

Orlando Opera Company Local professionals, joined by guest artists from around the country, perform a repertoire of traditional fare. In 2005, its well-received productions included *Aida* and *The Mikado*, among others. Shows held in the October-to-May season seldom sell out. Performances are staged at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre. 401 W. Livingston St. ☎ 800/336-7372 or 407/426-1700. www.orlandoopera.org. Tickets \$20–\$120. Parking \$5–\$6.

DANCE

Orlando Ballet Formerly called Southern Ballet Theatre, and celebrating their 31st year, this troupe stages traditional shows such as *The Nutcracker*, *Cinderella*, and *Camelot* among others using guest artists to augment local talent. There has been a resurgence of interest in the ballet here in recent years, but performances rarely sell out. The season runs from October to May. Performances feature the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra (see below) and are staged at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre. 401 W. Livingston St. ☎ 407/426-1733 for information, ☎ 877/803-7073 or 407/839-3900 to get tickets via Ticketmaster. www.orlandoballet.org. Tickets \$10–\$65. Parking \$5–\$6.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Florida Symphony Youth Orchestra Kids get into the main event again in a program with roots reaching to 1956 (yes—when President Eisenhower was in office). Its musicians, from a radius reaching 40 or so miles from Orlando, play at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre and include joint performances with the Orlando Philharmonic (see below), Orlando Opera (above), and Orlando Ballet (also above). 401 W. Livingston St. ☎ 407/999-7800. www.fsyo.org. Tickets \$9–\$36. Parking \$5–\$6.

Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra The orchestra offers a varied schedule of classics and pop-influenced concerts throughout the year at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre. The musicians also accompany the Orlando Ballet (see above). Some performances

First-Run Films

Orlando has a number of multitheater movie houses in the mainstream tourist areas. Most theaters offer discounted ticket pricing for children under 12 and discounted matinees (though, really, who's going to sit in a movie theater instead of the theme parks?); some also offer discounts to students and seniors (bring ID).

Some of the top draws include: **AMC 24** at Pleasure Island (☎ 407/298-4488); **Cinemark 16 Festival Bay** on North International Drive (☎ 407/351-3117; www.cinemark.com); **Muvico Pointe 21 Theatres** at Pointe Orlando on International Drive (☎ 407/926-6843; www.muvico.com), which also sports an IMAX screen; and **Universal Cineplex 16** (☎ 407/354-5998; www.enjoytheshow.com).

are aimed solely at families (in 2004, one set classical music to a host of kids' cartoons). 401 W. Livingston St. ☎ 407/896-6700. www.orlandophil.org. Tickets begin at \$12 (\$8 for students) and climb to \$60 or more depending on seating and the scheduled performance. Parking \$5–\$6.

2 Dinner Theater

IN WALT DISNEY WORLD

Disney's magic continues well into the evenings, offering plenty of nighttime entertainment, including laser-light shows, fireworks, and IllumiNations (p. 225). There are also two distinctly different dinner shows worthy of special note, the Hoop-Dee-Doo Musical Revue and the Polynesian Luau Dinner Show, and a third show that's an occasional player.

Note: While they offer family-friendly entertainment, don't expect haute cuisine. The food, though good, takes a back seat to the show.

Hoop-Dee-Doo Musical Revue ★★☆☆ *Moments* This is Disney's most popular show, so make reservations *early*. The reward: You feast on a down-home, all-you-can-eat barbecue (fried chicken, smoked ribs, salad, corn on the cob, baked beans, bread, salad, strawberry shortcake—all of it quite good, by the way—and your choice of coffee, tea, beer, wine, sangria, or soda). And while you stuff yourself silly in Pioneer Hall, performers in 1890s garb lead you in a foot-stomping, hand-clapping, high-energy show that includes a lot of jokes you haven't heard since second grade. **Note:** Be prepared to join in on the fun or the singers and dancers along with the rest of the crowd will humiliate you until you do. This is entertaining for the entire family. Even my husband gave it a good grade, which is really saying something.

Reservations should be made at least 60 if not 90 days in advance (they can be made up to 2 years in advance for this show, which should tell you something), especially during peak periods such as summer and holidays. Show times are 5, 7:15, and 9:30pm daily (the show lasts about 2 hours). If you catch one of the early shows, consider sticking around for the Electrical Water Pageant at 9:45pm, which can be viewed from the Fort Wilderness Beach. 3520 N. Fort Wilderness Trail (at Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground). ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Reservations required. Adults \$50.22, kids 3–11 \$25.43, including tax and tip. Free parking.

Disney's Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show ★☆☆☆ *Moments* While not quite as much in demand as the Hoop-Dee-Doo, the Polynesian Resort's delightful (and new) 2-hour

show is like a big neighborhood party. Disney's Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show features Tahitian, Samoan, Hawaiian, and Polynesian singers, drummers, and dancers who entertain you while you feast on a menu that includes tropical appetizers, lanai roasted chicken, Polynesian wild rice, South Seas vegetables, dessert, wine, beer, and other beverages. It all takes place 5 nights a week in an open-air theater (dress for nighttime weather and bring the sweaters) with candlelit tables, red-flame lanterns, and tapa-bark paintings on the walls. Reservations should be made 60 to 90 days in advance (but can be made up to 2 years in advance), especially during peak periods such as summer and holidays. Show times are 5:15 and 8pm Tuesday through Saturday. 1600 Seven Seas Dr. (at Disney's Polynesian Resort). ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Reservations required. Adults \$50.22, kids 3–11 \$25.43, including tax. Free parking.

ELSEWHERE IN ORLANDO

Outside the Disney zone, Orlando has an active dinner theater scene, but keep in mind that the city is a family destination—and the dinner shows are very reflective of that. You won't find sophisticated offerings like those in major cultural centers such as New York, London, or Paris. Most of the local dinner shows focus on pleasing the kids, so if you're looking for fun, you'll find it; but if you want critically acclaimed entertainment, look elsewhere. You also won't find four-star food; but dinners are certainly palatable enough, with some a bit better than others. Attending a show is considered by many to be a quintessential Orlando experience, and if you arrive with the right attitude, you'll most likely have an enjoyable evening. Your children certainly will.

Note: Discount coupons to the dinner shows below can often be found inside the tourist magazines that are distributed in gas stations and tourist information centers; you'll also find them in many non-Disney hotel lobbies and sometimes on the listed websites.

Arabian Nights If you're a horse fancier, this one's a must. One of the classier dinner-show experiences, it stars many of the most popular breeds, from chiseled Arabians to hard-driving Andalusians to beefcake Belgians. They giddy-up through performances that include Wild West trick riding, chariot races, slapstick comedy, and bareback bravado. Locals rate it No. 1 among Orlando dinner shows; however, my kids much preferred the action of some of the other shows in town. On most nights, the performance opens with a ground trainer working one-on-one with a black stallion. The dinner, served during the 2-hour show, includes salad; a choice of prime rib,

Tips If You're Lucky . . .

Mickey's Backyard BBQ (☎ 407/939-3463; www.disneyworld.com) is a seasonal offering at Pioneer Hall at Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground, where Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn allow you onto their home turf to have a thigh-slapping time and a feast in a covered, outdoor pavilion. Expect Mickey and his pals to join you for a meal that includes barbecued pork ribs, baked chicken, hot dogs, corn on the cob, baked beans, macaroni and cheese, watermelon, beer, wine, lemonade, ice tea, and dessert. Meals are served at 6:30pm and cost \$39 for adults, \$25 for kids 3 to 9, including tax and tip. It happens only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, generally from March through November and select days in December. So call.

chop steak, chicken or lasagna; vegetables; potatoes; dessert; wine; and beer. Special diets can be accommodated with advance notice. Show times vary, but there is at least one show nightly. **Tip:** Book your tickets online, and you'll save about \$10 to \$15 per person off the regular admission price. 6225 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee. ☎ **800/553-6116** or 407/239-9223. www.arabian-nights.com. Reservations recommended. \$40-\$50 adults, \$20-\$31 children 3–11. Free parking.

Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede This fun show came to town in June of 2003, bringing with it the rivalry of the North and the South. The audience, split into the North and the South, participates in (or roots for competitors in) different competitions held throughout the show to determine a final winner. Elaborately costumed Cowboys, settlers, Native Americans, and southern belles sing and dance; and you also get stampeding horses and buffalo, and ostrich racing. The stunt riders are duly amazing, and selected members of the audience will have you in stitches during audience-participation moments. The evening is capped off with a patriotic song from Dolly herself (on video of course). While you watch the show, you'll chow down on a four-course dinner that includes rotisserie chicken, barbecue pork, vegetable soup, corn on the cob, a biscuit, an herb-basted potato, and an apple turnover for dessert (lasagna and fruit are available for vegetarians). **Note:** Alcoholic beverages are not available—and neither are utensils, so if you aren't into messy eating, bring plastic utensils with you. It is an entertaining evening, though if there's a knock against it, it's that it's really a bunch of jumbled individual performances rather than a continuous show that carries through a single theme. Show times vary, but there's usually at least one show nightly. 8251 Vineland Avenue. ☎ **866/443-4943** or 407/238-4455. www.dixiestampede.com. Reservations recommended. \$47 adult, \$20 kids 3–11. Free parking.

Fiasco's Circus & Magic Dinner Show Guests at Orlando's newest dinner show laugh their way through dinner as circus-style performers entertain with magic tricks and acts that are really more comedic in nature than magical—the entire evening is filled with mishaps and mayhem. The menu, representing dishes from all over the world, is the largest around, offering over 100 items (a nice departure from the fixed meals offered at other dinner theaters). When purchasing your tickets, you can choose between the interactive or the “safe” zone seating, so be sure to specify your preference or you may find yourself part of the show. 7430 Universal Blvd. ☎ **866-GO-FIASCO** or 407/226-7220. www.fiascosdinnershow.com. Reservations recommended. \$45 adults, \$25 kids 3–9 (on Thursday, one child enters free per paying adult). Free parking.

Medieval Times Orlando has one of the eight Medieval Times shows in the North America, and this is the show my kids rate No. 1 in town. Inside, guests gorge themselves on barbecued spare ribs, herb-roasted chicken, soup, appetizer, potatoes, dessert, and beverages including beer. But because this is the 11th century, you eat with your fingers from metal plates while knights mounted on Andalusian horses run around the arena, jousting and clanging to please the fair ladies. Arrive 90 minutes early for good seats and to see the Medieval Village, a re-created Middle Ages settlement, and the Museum of Torture. A new storyline, “Knights of the Realm,” introduced in 2004 adds a touch of romance between one of the knights and the princess to the action. Show times vary, but there is at least one performance nightly. 4510 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy. (U.S. 192), Kissimmee. ☎ **800/229-8300** or 407/396-1518. www.medievaltimes.com. Reservations recommended. \$49 adults, \$33 children 3–11. Free parking.

Moments Prime Rib and a Side of Murder

Ever dream about being Sherlock Holmes? **Sleuths Mystery Dinner Show** ★★, 7508 Universal Blvd. (☎ **800/393-1985** or 407/363-1985; www.sleuths.com), is an interactive dinner show staged in an intimate theater setting where guests play detective and try to solve a whodunit murder mystery.

A roster of suspects and impending victims (ok, they're really actors) interact with guests throughout the experience, which includes a preshow where you're introduced to the characters and served appetizers and a salad. When the actual performance begins, the actors both entrance and, at times, reduce you to hysterical laughter. Then it's time for dinner, which includes a choice of a Cornish game hen, prime rib (for \$3 more), or lasagna. While eating, you discuss clues with the other detectives at your table (the round tables seat 8). Each table is given the opportunity to interrogate the suspects (which can get quite hilarious, depending on the amount of alcohol—you get unlimited wine and beer—people have consumed before they get to ask their questions). The suspects duly questioned, a mystery dessert is served, and then the murderer is revealed. It makes for a very entertaining yet relaxing evening out.

Eleven different productions (each is about 2–2½ hr. long) are offered throughout the year so you can keep coming back for more. There are even two mystery shows designed specifically for kids. Admission costs \$47 adults, \$24 kids 3 to 11. For kids' performances, the cost is \$28 adults, \$16 kids 3 to 11. Reservations are recommended.

To get here, from I-4 West take exit 75A, go right onto Universal Blvd., and follow through two lights to the Republic Square Plaza. Parking is free.

Pirates Dinner Adventure The special-effects show at this theater includes a full-size ship in a 300,000-gallon lagoon, circus-style aerial acts, a lot of music, and a little drama. Your kids may even get a chance to participate. Dinner includes an appetizer buffet with the preshow, followed by roast chicken and beef, rice, vegetables, dessert, and coffee. After the show, you're invited to the Buccaneer Bash dance party where you can mingle with cast members. This is a smaller production than the above-mentioned shows, but it is nicely done, and the stadium and crowds are not as large and overwhelming. Show times vary, but there is at least one show nightly. 6400 Carrier Dr. ☎ **800/866-2469** or 407/248-0590. www.orlandopirates.com. Reservations recommended. \$50 adults, \$30 children 3–11. Free parking.

3 At Walt Disney World

The places described here can be located on the map “Downtown Disney” on p. 319. For information about nighttime activities throughout Downtown Disney, call ☎ **407/939-2648**.

PLEASURE ISLAND

This 6-acre complex of nightclubs, restaurants, and shops, not to mention a multi screen movie-theater, will not disappoint those in search of an exciting night on the

town surely won't be disappointed. Guests can walk the grounds and enjoy the sights, sounds, and surroundings free of charge, but, if you want to enter the clubs, admission is required. A single admission price, \$20.95 plus tax, allows you to club hop and celebrate New Year's Eve into the wee hours every night of the week. If you prefer to head to a single club (though it may be difficult to stick to just one), admission is \$10.60 (though the Comedy Club and the Adventurers Club don't offer single-club admission prices, so it's all or nothing if you want to hang at either of them). If you have a Premium or Magic Plus Pack admission ticket (see p. 177 for more on Disney's ticket options), you can use one of your Plus options for a 1-night admission to all clubs on Pleasure Island. Pay special attention to **Mannequins** (listed a little later). This club is the cream of Pleasure Island's crop and fills quickly, so late arrivals may be left at the door.

Pleasure Island is designed to look like an abandoned waterfront industrial district with clubs in its lofts and warehouses. But the streets are decorated with brightly colored lights and balloons. Dozens of searchlights play overhead, and rock music emanates from the bushes. You'll be given a map and show schedule when you enter the park. Take a look at it and plan your evening around the shows that interest you. The mood is always festive, especially at midnight, which is celebrated with a high-energy street party, live entertainment, a barrage of fireworks, and showers of confetti.

Although this is Disney, it's essentially a bar district where liquor is served, so if you're sending your older children, use the same rules you use at home. Also note that they must be 18 to get in unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

Pleasure Island has seven regular clubs, plus BET Soundstage, which is included in the ticket on nights it doesn't have a special concert going. In addition to the clubs, there are shops and eateries (with outdoor umbrella tables) on the island. **Planet Hollywood** (p. 154) is adjacent. (You don't need an admission ticket to eat at any of the Pleasure Island restaurants.)

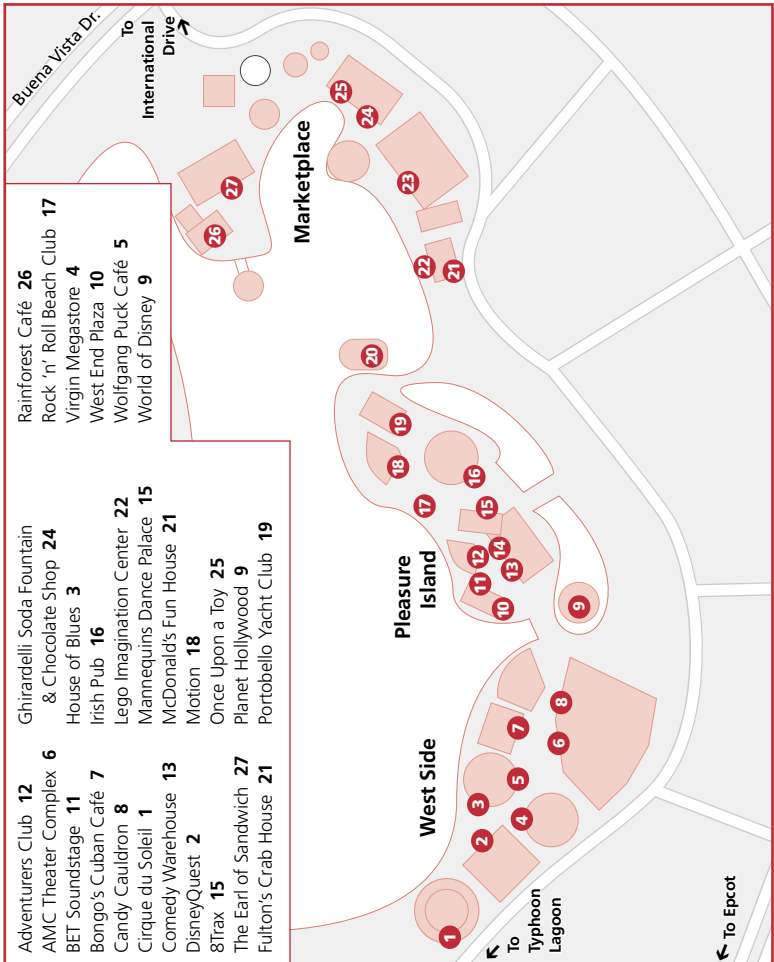
For more information on Pleasure Island's clubs and events, call ☎ 407/939-2648 or surf over to www.disneyworld.com. Clubs are open daily from 7pm to 2am; shops open at 11am, and some are open till midnight or later. There's free self-parking, but as the night wears on spots can become very hard to find.

Here's the club lineup:

Adventurers Club The most unique of Pleasure Island's clubs occupies a multi-story building that, according to legend, was designed to house the library and archaeological trophy collection of island founder and compulsive explorer, Merriweather Adam Treasure, a figment of Disney's imagination. It's also the global headquarters for the Adventurers Club, which Pleasure headed until he vanished at sea in 1941. The plush club is chock-full of artifacts: early aviation photos, hunting trophies, shrunken heads, Buddhas, goddesses, and a mounted "yakoose," a half yak, half moose that occasionally speaks, whether you've been drinking or not. In the eerie Mask Room, more strange sounds are heard and the 100 or so masks move their eyes, jeer, and make odd pronouncements. Also on hand are Pleasure's zany band of globetrotting friends and servants, played by skilled actors who interact with guests while staying in character. Comedy, cabaret, and other shows run in various rooms within the club. I could easily hang out here all night, sipping potent tropical drinks in the library or the bar, where elephant-foot bar stools rise and sink mysteriously.

BET Soundstage This club grooves—loudly—to the sounds of reggae, the smooth moves of traditional R&B, and the rhyme of hip-hop. If you like the BET Cable

Downtown Disney



Network, you'll love it. You can boogie on an expansive dance floor or kick back on an outdoor terrace. The club also serves Caribbean-style finger food and periodically has concerts for a separate charge (☎ 407/934-7666). You must be 21 to enter Thursday through Saturday nights.

Comedy Warehouse Housed in the island's former power plant, the Comedy Warehouse has a rustic interior with tiered seating. A troupe of comics—the Who, What and Warehouse Players—perform 45-minute improvisational comedy shows based on audience suggestions. This is Disney, so the shows are neither as risqué as those at other improv clubs nor candidates for anyone's top 10. There are several shows nightly and drinks are served. Arrive early.

8Trax Disco and bell bottoms rule in this 1970s-style club, where some 50 TV monitors air diverse shows and videos over the dance floor. A DJ plays everything

from “YMCA” to “The Hustle” while the disco ball spins. All you need to bring is your polyester and patent leather.

Mannequins Dance Palace Housed in a vast dance hall with a small-town, movie-house facade, Mannequins is supposed to be a converted mannequin warehouse (remember, you’re still in Disney World). This high-energy club has a big rotating dance floor, and it’s a local favorite—so much so that it’s one of the toughest clubs in Orlando to get into—so arrive early, especially on weekends. Those who get in find three levels of bars and hangout space that are festooned with elaborately costumed mannequins and moving scenery suspended from the overhead rigging. A DJ plays contemporary tunes filtered through speakers powerful enough to wake Sleeping Beauty, and there are high-tech lighting effects. You must be 21 to get in, and they’re very serious about it. Have your ID ready, even if you learned to dance to the Beatles.

Rock ‘n’ Roll Beach Club Once the laboratory in which Pleasure developed a unique flying machine, this three-story structure today houses an always-crowded dance club where live bands play classic rock from the ‘60s through the ‘90s. There are bars on all three floors, including one that serves international brews. The first level contains the dance floor. The second and third levels offer air hockey, pool tables, basketball machines, pinball, video games, darts, and a pizza and beer stand.

Motion Pleasure Island’s newest dance club is a hyperactive joint that features Top-40 tunes appealing to younger or young-at-heart partiers. The club uses moody blue lighting to halfway convey the sensation that you’re dancing the night away in space.

DISNEY’S WEST SIDE

This area adjoins Pleasure Island and offers additional shops, restaurants, and a 24-screen AMC Theater. But the two most popular entries are:

Bongo’s Cuban Café *Overrated* Created by Cuban-American singer Gloria Estefan and her husband, Emilio, the cafe is Downtown Disney’s version of old Havana. There are leopard spotted chairs and mosaic bar stools shaped like bongo drums. There’s no dance floor to speak of, though you can cha-cha on the patio, an upstairs number that overlooks the rest of West Side. It’s a great place to sit back and bask in the Latin rhythms. But, while the mood is good, the food is a little lacking. Open daily from 11am to 2am, though it sometimes closes earlier. ☎ 407/828-0999. www.bongoscubancafe.com. No cover charge. Free self-parking.

House of Blues Several well-known artists have performed here, including Jethro Tull, Blue Oyster Cult, Quiet Riot, Duran Duran, and others. The barn-like building,

Tips The Luck of the Irish

The Great Irish Pubs of Florida, Inc. (the company that created the Nine Fine Irishmen pub in Las Vegas’s New York–New York Hotel & Casino) plans on bringing the luck of the Irish to Downtown Disney. Scheduled to open on the former site of the Pleasure Island Jazz Company in the summer of 2005 is a yet-to-be-named **Irish pub**. The pub will immerse guests in a wholly Irish environment that will include custom-made furnishings direct from the Emerald Isles. Entertainment will include Irish storytelling, dance, and music. Guests will also be able to dine on a menu of traditional Irish fare, created by well-known Irish chef Kevin Dundon.

Not Your Ordinary Circus

Lions and tigers and bears?

Oh, no. But you won't feel cheated.

This Disney partnership with the famed no-animals circus is located in Downtown Disney West Side. **Cirque du Soleil**, which translates to "circus of the sun" and flutters off the tongue as "*SAIRK doo so-LAY*," is nonstop energy. At times it seems all 64 performers are on stage simultaneously, especially during the intricately choreographed trampoline routine. Trapeze artists, high-wire walkers, an airborne gymnast, a posing strongman, mimes, and two zany clowns cement a show called **La Nouba** (it means "live it up") into a five-star performance.

Of all the Cirque du Soleil shows, I think this one may be second only to *Mystère* in Las Vegas. That said, though *La Nouba* is a ton of fun, it's also one of the priciest shows in town. If you're on a tight or even modest budget, it may be gut-check time: Can you blow your entertainment allowance for a day or two on 90 minutes of fun? There are three ticket categories: \$87 for adults and \$65 for kids 3 to 9 (plus tax) for center of the theater seats; \$75 and \$56, respectively, for seats to the right and left of the stage; and \$59 and \$44 for the very upper levels to the left and right, and far left and right of the stage. Shows are at 6 and 9pm, five nights a week, but times and nights rotate (the show was dark Sun and Mon at press time) and sometimes there's a matinee, so call ahead (☎ 407/939-7600) or check the show's website (www.cirquedusoleil.com) for information and tickets.

with three tiers, may be a little difficult for those with disabilities to maneuver, but there really isn't a bad seat in the house. The atmosphere is dark and boozy, perfect for the bluesy sounds that raise the rafters. The dance floor is big enough to boogie without doing the bump with a stranger. You can dine in the adjoining restaurant on baby back ribs, Louisiana crawfish, jambalaya, New Orleans-style shrimp, and Cajun meatloaf. There's also a Sunday gospel brunch (see p. 155 for more about the menu).

☎ 407/934-2583. www.hob.com. Cover charges vary by event/artist. Free self-parking.

4 CityWalk

Located between the Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios Florida theme parks, this nightclub, restaurant, and shopping district had its coming-out party in 1999 and competes head-to-head with Disney's Pleasure Island. It opens daily at 11am, but the hours of many clubs and restaurants vary, so call in advance if you're interested in a specific venue. Most clubs stay open until 2am.

At 30 acres, CityWalk (☎ 407/363-8000; www.citywalk.com) is five times larger than Pleasure Island. Alcohol is prominently featured here as it's geared to an adult crowd; younger members of the family should always be accompanied by an adult if allowed to tag along. The nights can get pretty wild. (**Note:** Some clubs here won't allow anyone under 21 inside after a certain hour—see the listings below for details.)

Tips Chilling Out

You can grab a margarita to go and “chill” in the brightly colored wooden chairs (think of the Adirondacks) outside Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville. It’s a perfect spot to watch the crowds scurrying to and from the theme parks.

Just like Pleasure Island, you can walk this district for free at night or visit individual clubs and pay an individual cover charge. CityWalk also offers two **party passes**. A pass to all clubs costs \$9.95 plus tax. For \$13 plus tax, you get a club pass and a movie at Universal Cineplex (☎ 407/354-5998). Universal also offers free club access to those who buy select multiday theme-park tickets (see chapter 8, “Exploring Beyond Disney: Universal Orlando, SeaWorld & Other Attractions”). There’s also a “Dinner and a Movie” option; for \$19.95 you can get entrance to a movie at the Cineplex and dinner at one of the CityWalk restaurants (select menu items apply—see www.citywalk.com for complete details).

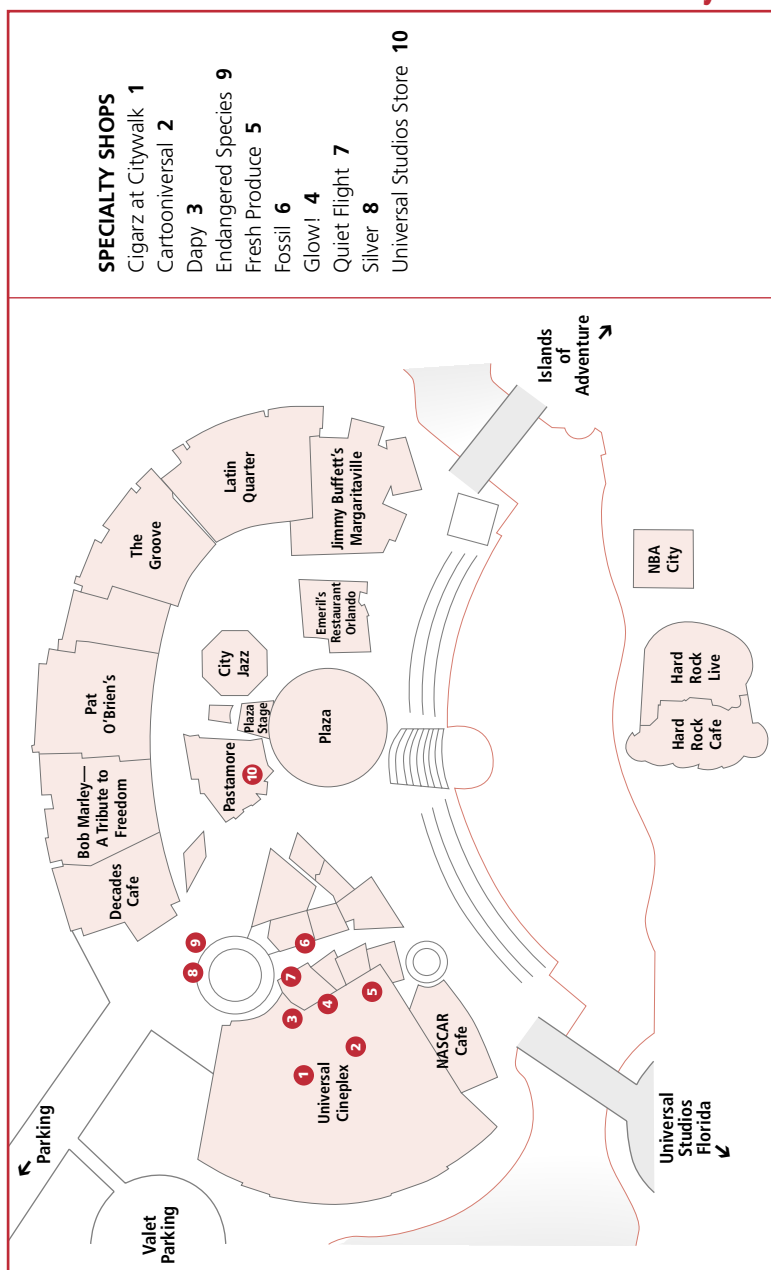
Daytime parking in the Universal Orlando garages costs \$9, but self-parking is free after 6pm. To get to CityWalk, take I-4 Exit 74B (westbound) or 75A (eastbound) and follow the signs to the parks.

Bob Marley—A Tribute to Freedom This hybrid bar/restaurant has a party atmosphere that will make the food more appealing as the night wears on. The clapboard building is said to be a replica of Marley’s home in Kingston. Jamaican vittles—such as meat patties, jerk snapper, and, the brew of champions, Red Stripe Beer—are served under patio umbrellas amid portraits of the original Rastamon. If you try an Extreme Measure, have a designated driver. Local and national reggae bands perform on a microdot stage. Open daily 4pm to 2am. ☎ 407/224-3663. Cover charge \$5 after 8pm, more for special acts. Must be 21 or older after 10pm.

CityJazz The cover charge at this club includes the **Downbeat Jazz Hall of Fame** (with memorabilia from Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and other greats) as well as the **Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz**, a performance venue that’s also the site of jazz workshops. The two-story, 10,500-square-foot building houses more than 500 pieces of memorabilia representing Dixieland, swing, bebop, and modern jazz. It also has a state-of-the-art sound system and stage. Graphic murals and oversize black-and-white photographs set the mood. Acts of national renown perform frequently. It’s a real treat for true jazz fans, who can sip cocktails while browsing. On the food side of the equation, expect tapas, sushi, escargot, and such. Thursday through Saturday nights the theme gives way to comedy as BONKERZ Comedy Club invites you in for a good laugh with nationally recognized comics. Open Sunday through Thursday 8pm to 1am, Friday and Saturday from 7 pm to 2am. ☎ 407/224-2189. Cover charge \$5 (more for special events). Must be 18 to enter.

Decades Cafe This theme joint serves steak, ribs, and barbecue in a setting filled with music and movie memorabilia from the past 40 years. On Friday and Saturday nights there’s a DJ. Open weekdays from 4pm until closing; weekends from 11:30 am. ☎ 407/224-3663. Cover charge \$5 on weekends.

the groove This often-crowded multilevel club features a huge dance floor, a number of bars, and a handful of lounges for just hanging out. Three unique lounges are outfitted in blue, green, and red—each features its own decor, music, bar, and specialty



drink. The high-tech sound system will blow your hair back; if you need a sound check try the upper level patio for a brief reprieve. A deejay plays tunes most nights, featuring the latest in hip-hop, retro hits, techno, and alternative music. Bands occasionally play the house too. Open daily from 9pm to 2am. ☎ 407/363-8000. Cover charge \$5. Must be 21 to get in.

Hard Rock Live The first concert hall to bear the Hard Rock name is next door to the largest Hard Rock Cafe in the world (p. 161). This building, fashioned to look like an ancient coliseum, has a 2,500-seat concert venue. The sightlines and the sound system are great. Call ahead to find out what acts will be featured during your visit. Tickets for big-name performers sell fast. Concerts generally begin about 8pm. ☎ 407/351-7655. www.hardrocklive.com. Tickets \$6–\$150, depending on concert.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Flip-flops and flowered shirts are the proper apparel here. Music from the maestro is piped throughout the building, with live music performed on a small stage inside later in the evening. A Jimmy sound-alike strums on the spacious back porch. True Parrot Heads know the lyrics at least as well as the singers. Bar-wise, there are three options. The Volcano erupts margarita mix; the Land

Tips Lounging Around

Some of Orlando's most unique nightlife is located in its hotels. Even locals head to some of these after dark. Consider any of the following and their parent hotels, all of which are listed in chapter 5:

Todd English's BlueZoo Lounge at the Walt Disney World Dolphin (☎ 407/934-1111; www.thebluezoo.com) serves up classic cocktails in a hip and chic atmosphere. At Disney's Grand Floridian (☎ 407/824-3000), a pianist and band alternate playing time from 3 to 9:45pm in the lobby. **Outer Rim** at the Contemporary Resort (☎ 407/824-1000) is a trendy nightspot and close to the monorail. **Kimono's** sushi bar in the Walt Disney World Swan (☎ 407/934-3000) offers karaoke after 8:30pm, while the entertainment is purely visual at the **Dolphin Lobby Bar** in the Renaissance Orlando Resort at Sea-World (☎ 407/351-5555), which overlooks the huge atrium, glass elevators, and koi pond.

The **Laughing Kookaburra Good Time Bar** in the Wyndham Palace Resort (☎ 407/827-2727) is open from 7pm to 2am and features dancing and live music or a DJ most nights. The **Top of the Palace Lounge** outside the Wyndham's signature restaurant, Arthur's 27 (☎ 407/827-2727), has a great view of Disney's fireworks. **Baskerville's** in the Grosvenor (☎ 407/827-6534) offers a solve-it-yourself mystery dinner show on Saturdays at 6 and 9pm (\$40 adults, \$11 kids 3–9). Nearby, **Moriarty's Pub** features English ales to go along with darts or billiards. And **Auggie's Jammin' Piano Bar** offers dueling pianos at 9pm nightly at the Gaylord Palms (☎ 407/586-0000). Sit back and relax (in velvet chairs, I might add), at the **Velvet Lounge** at the Hard Rock Hotel (☎ 407/503-3700), where you can down cocktails while surrounded by rock-'n'-roll memorabilia and music.

Tips Free Ride

A free public transportation system called **Lymmo** (☎ 407/841-2279; www.golynx.com) runs in a designated lane through the downtown area. But because Lymmo stops running at 10pm (midnight on Fri and Sat), it may stop moving before you do. So stash enough cash for a taxi if you're going to party late into the night.

Shark has fins hanging from the ceiling; and the 12 Volt, is, well, a little electrifying—we'll leave it at that. If you opt for dinner among the palm trees, go for the true Key West experience. Early in the day that means a cheeseburger (in paradise); later it's conch fritters, one of many kinds of fish (pompano, sea bass, dolphin fish), and Key lime pie. Open daily from 11:30am to 2am. (See p. 161 for more on the food here.) ☎ 407/224-2155. www.margaritavilleorlando.com. Cover \$5 after 10pm (waived if you come only to dine on the deck).

Latin Quarter This two-level restaurant/nightclub offers you a chance to absorb the salsa-and-samba culture of 21 Latin nations. It's filled with the music of the merengue, the mambo, and the tango, along with a bit of Latin rock thrown in for good measure—be prepared to move your hips. The surprisingly intimate atmosphere features mountainous architecture and waterfalls surrounding the dance floor; you'll feel like you're dancing in a Mayan temple. The sound system is loud enough to blow you into the next county, but before that happens you can check out the club's Latin American art gallery. Open Monday through Friday, 11:30am until 10pm, Saturday and Sunday noon to 2am. ☎ 407/224-3663.

NASCAR Café This one-of-a-kind NASCAR-licensed eatery is a must for gearheads, though its basic vittles (so-so steaks, chicken, pork chops, shrimp, and sandwiches, most under \$8) won't win any culinary awards. Race-related souvenirs and video games fill the first floor. Open daily from 11am to 11pm or later. ☎ 407/224-3663.

NBA City If you're a fan of the NBA, then this one's a must. Hoops and memorabilia hang from the walls, and TV monitors play seemingly every game on the airwaves. The mixed menu (\$5–\$20) ranges from steaks and chicken to fish, pasta, and sandwiches. Fans will love it, but if you're looking for better-than-average food and aren't a basketball junkie, look elsewhere. Open daily from 11am to midnight, later on Friday and Saturday. ☎ 407/363-5919.

Pat O'Brien's Just like the French Quarter, which is home to the original Patty O's, drinking, drinking, and more drinking are the highlights here. Creole treats and sandwiches (most \$8–\$10) take up only a page or two of the menu—the rest is filled with wild alcoholic libations. Enjoy the piano bar or the flame-throwing fountain while you suck down the drink of the Big Easy, a Hurricane. Although you can order a soft drink, Pat O'Brien's primarily promotes the hard stuff. If your plans for the evening fall anything short of full intoxication (unless you're the designated driver for the aforementioned planners), this may not be the place for you. Open daily from 4pm to 2am. ☎ 407/363-8000. www.patobriens.com. Cover charge \$5 after 9pm. You must be 21 to enter after 9pm.

5 Hot Spots in Orlando

Pleasure Island, Downtown Disney, and CityWalk are the biggest nighttime draws for most tourists and some locals. However, the dozens of clubs and bars on International Drive, along Orange Avenue, and in the rest of downtown Orlando attract most home-grown night owls, business travelers who want to stay as far as possible from the Mickey madness, and a small number of enterprising tourists who venture north at night. These places can be located on the map “Orlando Nightlife” on p. 327.

Cricketers Arms Pub Regardless of whether you're British or just a sympathizer, this pub is a fun place to party. As the name implies, cricket (and soccer) matches are featured on the telly. Nightly entertainment ranges from karaoke to live bands (usually blues or soft rock). The revelry offers a good excuse to try a pint or two of any of the 17 beers and ales on tap, such as Boddingtons, Fullers ESB, and Old Speckled Hen. There's also a fun menu that offers English standards such as cottage pie and fish-and-chips, among others (\$3.50–\$14). Open daily from noon to 2am. 8445 International Dr. ☎ 407/354-0686. www.cricketersarmspub.com. Free parking.

Metropolis and Matrix Located close to all the action of the tourist district in Pointe Orlando along I-Drive, these sister clubs offer a sophisticated after-dark experience for night owls. The Matrix features a futuristic atmosphere with a multimillion-dollar light show, a large dance floor, and a modern-flavored decor scheme featuring lip-shaped loveseats and platform-shoe chairs. Techno, Eurotrance, Breakout, and top-40 music play on the sound system. Next door at Metropolis, a 13-foot video wall and 15 TV-screens surround the dance floor, and pool sharks can rack up games at one of several billiards tables. The Victorian decor is right out of the Moulin Rouge. The Matrix is open Wednesday through Sunday from 9pm to 2am; Metropolis is open Thursday through Sunday 9pm to 2am. 9101 International Drive. ☎ 407/370-3700. www.metropolismatrix.com. Cover varies nightly. “Stylish dress” required. Parking (next door at the garage) \$2–\$5. Must be 18 to enter; men need to be 21 on Sat and Sun.

Sak Comedy Lab Locals perform at a 200-seat club that has performances several nights of the week. Favorites include the Duel of Fools, where two teams face off in improvised scenes based on suggestions from the audience, and Lab Rats, where students play in improv formats. Shows are usually Tuesday through Wednesday at 9pm, Thursday through Saturday at 8 and 10pm. 380 W. Amelia St. ☎ 407/648-0001. www.sak.com. Admission \$5–\$13. Parking \$5.

Tabu Inside a renovated theater, this downtown club holds a special appeal for members of the under-30 crowd who are on the prowl or older cruisers who want to relive their glory days. DJs spinning techno, top-40, hip-hop, dance, R&B, and Latin's

Tips Ghostly Experience

Orlando Ghost Tours (☎ 407/423-5600; www.hauntedorlando.com) puts a different spin on the city's nightlife with 2-hour walking tours that explore the downtown's spookier side. The tours include narratives (some funnier than others) on Florida history and folklore followed by a chance to use “ghost-finding” equipment in a haunted building. It's good fun for those into the supernatural and ghost stories. The cost is \$25 adults, \$20 for college students, and \$15 kids 7 to 12. Tours run Wednesday through Saturday at 8pm.

Orlando Nightlife



hottest hits are the featured attraction on various theme nights. The club has a “styl-ish dress” requirement; leave the denim and tank tops at home. Open Tuesday through Sunday from 10pm to 2am. 46 N. Orange Ave., Orlando. ☎ 407/648-8363. www.tabunightclub.com. Cover \$5–\$12 most nights. Parking \$6. Must be 18 to enter.

6 Gay & Lesbian Nightspots

You can get all sorts of useful information on events from **Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Community Services of Central Florida**, 946 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, FL 32803 (☎ 407/228-8272; www.glbcc.org). **GayOrlando Network** (www.gayorlando.com) and the **Gay Guide to Florida** (<http://gay-guide.com>) also feature a lot of nightlife entries. Travelers interested in sampling some of the city’s gay and lesbian hot spots can check out the following places:

The Club at Firestone Go-go boys and drag queens turn Saturday nights into a raucous party. The rest of the week, theme nights (Latin, hip-hop, and a crowd both gay and straight), and other shows keep the dance floor busy. This is a serious club with dark lighting, cavernous rooms, and a high-energy sound. Well-known DJs are sometimes featured. Upstairs, the View Bar offers a good look at the dance floor below. Open daily until 2am; show times vary. 578 N. Orange Ave. (at Concord St. in a

Other Places to Party

In addition to the other clubs listed in this section, other Downtown hot spots include **Chillers**, the **Big Belly Brewery**, and **Lattitudes**, 33 W. Church St. (☎ 407/939-4270)—three separate clubs located in a single tri-level building that are all geared to the young adult crowd with an atmosphere that's very casual. Another nighttime complex lined with clubs and bars is **Wall Street Plaza** (www.wallstplaza.net), a "meet market" on Wall Street that's home to **The Globe** (☎ 407/849-9904), a European patio cafe; **Slingapours** (☎ 407/849-9904), a dance club with an indoor and outdoor patio for relaxing; **Wait-iki** (☎ 407/849-0471), a retro Tiki lounge and restaurant; the **Monkey Bar** (☎ 407/849-0471), a hip martini lounge and cocktail bar; **One Eyed Jacks** (☎ 407/648-2050) and the **Loaded Hog** (☎ 407/649-1918), both party bars; the **Tuk Tuk Room** (☎ 407/849-9904), a cocktail and sushi lounge; and the **Wall Street Cantina** (☎ 407/420-1515), a bar that serves mean margaritas.

converted garage that still bears a Firestone sign). ☎ 407/872-0066. www.clubatfirestone.com. Cover charge varies, usually from \$6–\$10. Limited lot parking available for \$3–\$5.

Full Moon Saloon DJs keep things hopping most nights, but the Moon sometimes offers live entertainment including bands. This club stakes a rightful claim to being Orlando's oldest gay bar. Expect a lot of leather and cowboy duds. The interior is big, but much of the fun happens on the patio and in the expanding backyard. Open daily from noon to 2am; show times vary. 500 N. Orange Blossom Trail (just west of downtown). ☎ 407/648-8725. www.fullmoonsaloon.com. Fri–Sat, \$3 Sun. Free parking.

Parliament House Attached to an aging hotel, this is one of Orlando's wilder, and most popular, gay spots. Not a fancy place, the Parliament House has had years of hard partying and shows it. This is a place to drink, dance, and watch shows that include female impersonators and male revues. There are also DJs. The dance floor is relatively large, but it gets small quickly as the crowd swells. The Parliament has five bars scattered throughout the premises and a newly renovated 130-room hotel. Open daily from 4pm to 2am; show times vary. 410 N. Orange Blossom Trail (just west of downtown). ☎ 407/425-7571. www.parliamenthouse.com. Cover \$5–\$10 Fri–Sat, \$3 Sun. Free parking.

Southern Nights Orlando's "Best Gay Bar" (according to the readers of a local alternative weekly paper) for the past eight years running has been closed down temporarily for a top-to-bottom makeover. Scheduled improvements will include a new sound system, lighting, special effects, and more. A grand re-opening date hadn't been set as this book went to press; check the website for updates and to see if the club will be up and running when you're in town. 375 S. Bumby Ave. (between Anderson St. and Colonial Dr.). ☎ 407/898-0424. www.southern-nights.com.

7 Sports Bars

Champions The interior is chock-a-block with signed photos, posters, and artifacts. Entertainment includes pool tables, video games, Foosball, darts, and coin-op football and basketball. In addition, sporting events are aired on large-screen TVs and

on smaller monitors around the room (a calendar at the entrance lists all game times). Champions offers a fairly extensive bar-food menu.

Note to single women: Men outnumber women about five to one, so this is a good place to meet guys if you don't mind the odds. Open daily from 4pm to 2am. In Marriott's Orlando World Center, 8701 World Center Dr. ☎ 407/239-4200. Free self-parking; valet parking \$15.

ESPN Sports If you're dying for a sports fix, this is it. Ninety monitors—there are even a few in the bathrooms—broadcast sporting events from around the world. Need we say more? There's a full-service bar, but there's also a restaurant and a small arcade, so you have an excuse to drag your family along. Open daily from 11:30am to 1am. In Walt Disney World at Disney's BoardWalk Resort. ☎ 407/939-3463. www.disneyworld.com. Free parking.

Official All-Star Café This small chain entry opened at Disney in late 1998. It's just a line drive away from the entrance to the stadium where the Atlanta Braves play their spring training games (see "Spectator Sports" in chapter 8). The interior is dotted with sports memorabilia from Andre Agassi, Wayne Gretzky, Joe Montana, Shaquille O'Neal, and Tiger Woods. There are also a ton of televisions playing your favorite games. Open daily from 11:30am to 9pm (though hours can vary according to scheduled events at Wide World of Sports). At Walt Disney World's Wide World of Sports Complex. ☎ 407/939-3463. No cover. Free parking.

Tips Unsportsmanlike Options

Disney's BoardWalk has a few options for folks searching for off-the-field nightlife. Street performers sing, dance, and do a little juggling and magic most evenings on the outdoor promenade.

Atlantic Dance (☎ 407/939-2444 for limited recorded information) features top-40 and '80s dance hits Tuesday through Saturday. It's open to everyone 21 and over. Hours are from 9pm to 2am, and admission is free.

The rustic saloon-style **Jellyrolls** (☎ 407/939-5100) offers dueling pianos and a boisterous crowd. Strictly for the over-21 set, it's open daily from 7pm to 2am. There's an \$8 cover.

If you're looking to hoist a pint, the **Big River Grill & Brewing Works** (☎ 407/939-5100) serves micro-brewed beer as well as steaks, ribs, chicken, fish, sandwiches, and salads. Prices range from \$9 to \$29. It's open Monday through Thursday from 11:30am to 1am; Friday through Sunday from 11:30am to 2am. It's near Atlantic Dance.

Disney's BoardWalk can be a cheap night out if you enjoy strolling and people-watching (and if you stay out of the restaurants and clubs). It has something of a midway atmosphere reminiscent of Atlantic City's heyday.

Side Trips from Orlando

Although many visitors to Orlando never venture outside the city while on vacation, an excursion away from the hub-bub of the theme parks can allow you time to recharge your batteries, while still offering plenty of fun and enjoyment. One destination that many families will drive some distance to see is Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, another major area kiddie attraction an hour west of Orlando on I-4. But don't stop there: The city of Tampa is an exciting destination on its own.

Florida's very own city by the bay, Tampa is the commercial center of Florida's west coast—a major seaport and

a center of banking, high-tech manufacturing, and cigar making (half a billion drugstore stogies a year). Downtown Tampa may roll up its sidewalks after dark, but a short ride will take you to Ybor City, the historic Cuban enclave, now an exciting entertainment and dining venue.

Visitors who opt to head southeast to the Space Coast may find themselves privy to the eye-popping spectacle of rockets blasting off from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. Nearby in Cocoa Beach, they can catch a wave with the surfing crowd.

1 Tampa

84 miles W of Orlando

Even if you stay on the beaches 20 miles to the west, you should consider driving into Tampa for a mild taste of metropolis. If you have children in tow, they may *demand* that you go into the city so they can ride the rides and see the animals at Busch Gardens (and if you have purchased the FlexTicket, see p. 253, you'll get free admission and shuttle service from Orlando to the park). Once there, you can also educate them (and yourself) at the Florida Aquarium and the city's other fine museums. Additionally, historic Ybor City has the bay area's newest and most contemporary nightlife.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Tampa International Airport** (☎ 813/870-8770; www.tampaairport.com), 5 miles northwest of downtown Tampa, is the major air gateway to this area. Most major and many no-frills airlines serve Tampa International, and all the major U.S. rental-car agencies have operations there (see appendix B, "Useful Toll-Free Numbers and Websites," for the major airlines' and car-rental agencies' contact details).

The Limo/SuperShuttle (☎ 800/282-6817 or 727/527-1111; www.supershuttle.com) operates van services between the airport and hotels throughout the Tampa Bay area. Fares for one person range from \$28 to \$46 round-trip, depending on your destination. **Taxis** are plentiful at the airport; the ride to downtown Tampa takes about 15 minutes and costs \$15 to \$20.

Amtrak trains arrive downtown at the **Tampa Amtrak Station**, 601 Nebraska Ave. N. (☎ 800/872-7245; www.amtrak.com).

VISITOR INFORMATION Contact the **Tampa Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 400 N. Tampa St., Tampa, FL 33602-4706 (☎ 800/448-2672, 800/368-2672, or 813/223-2752; www.visittampabay.com), for advance information. Once you're downtown, head to the bureau's **visitor information center** at 400 N. Tampa St. (Channelside), Suite 2800 (☎ 813/223-1111). It's open Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 5:30pm.

Operated by the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce, the **Centro Ybor Museum and Visitor Information Center**, in Centro Ybor, 1514½ E. 8th Ave. (between 15th and 16th sts. E.), Tampa, FL 33605 (☎ 813/248-3712; www.ybor.org), distributes information and has exhibits about the area's history. A 7-minute video will help get you oriented with this 8-block stretch of Seventh Avenue. The center is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm, Sunday from noon to 6pm.

GETTING AROUND Like most other Florida destinations, it's virtually impossible to see Tampa's major sights and enjoy its best restaurants without a car. You can get around downtown via the free **Uptown-Downtown Connector Trolley** (☎ 813/254-4278; www.hartline.org), which runs north-south between Harbor Island and the city's North Terminal bus station on Marion Street at I-275. The trolleys run every 10 minutes from 6am to 6pm Monday through Friday. Pick up a route map at the visitor information center (see above).

The transportation situation has gotten somewhat better, not to mention nostalgic, with the **TECO Line Street Car System**, a 2½-mile old-fashioned streetcar system, complete with overhead power lines, that hauls passengers between downtown and Ybor City via the St. Pete Times Forum, Channelside, Garrison Seaport, and the Florida Aquarium. The cars run every 30 minutes, and one-way fares are \$1.25. Check with the visitor center or call HARTline for schedules.

Taxis in Tampa don't normally cruise the streets for fares, but they do line up at public places, such as hotels, the performing-arts center, and bus and train depots. If you need a taxi, call **Tampa Bay Cab** (☎ 813/251-5555), **Yellow Cab** (☎ 813/253-0121), or **United Cab** (☎ 813/253-2424). Fares are \$1 at flag fall, plus \$1.50 for each mile.

EXPLORING THE THEME & ANIMAL PARKS

Adventure Island *Kids* If the summer heat gets to you before one of Tampa's famous thunderstorms brings late-afternoon relief, you can take a waterlogged break at this 25-acre outdoor water theme park near Busch Gardens Tampa Bay (see below). You can also frolic here during the cooler days of spring and fall, when the water is heated. The Key West Rapids, Tampa Typhoon, Gulf Scream, and other exciting water rides will drench the teens, while other, calmer rides are geared toward younger kids. Wahoo Run plunges up to five riders more than 15 feet per second as the half-enclosed tunnel corkscrews more than 600 feet to a waiting splash pool. There are also places to picnic and sunbathe, an arcade, a volleyball complex, and an outdoor cafe. Although some people go barefoot here, I suggest you wear shoes at all times—it gets kind of nasty after a while.

10001 Malcolm McKinley Dr. (between Busch Blvd. and Bougainvillea Ave.). ☎ 813/987-5600. www.4adventure.com. Admission at least \$33 adults, \$31 children 3–9, plus tax; free for children 2 and under. Combination tickets with Busch Gardens Tampa Bay (1 day each) \$100 adults, \$90 children 3–9, free for children under 3. Website sometimes offers discounts. Parking \$5. Mid-Mar to Labor Day daily 10am–5pm; Sept–Oct Fri–Sun 10am–5pm (extended hours

in summer and on holidays). Closed Nov to late Feb. Take Exit 50 off I-275 and go east on Busch Blvd. for 2 miles. Turn left onto McKinley Dr. (N. 40th St.), and entry is on right.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay ★★ *Kids* Although its heart-stopping thrill rides get much of the ink, this venerable theme park (it predates Disney World) ranks among the largest zoos in the country. It's a don't-miss attraction for children and adults, who can see, in person, all those wild beasts they've watched on *Animal Planet*—and they'll get better views of them here than at Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando (see chapter 7). Busch Gardens has several thousand animals living in naturalistic environments that help carry out the park's overall African theme. Most authentic is the 80-acre plain, strongly reminiscent of the real Serengeti of Tanzania and Kenya, upon which zebras, giraffes, and other animals graze. Unlike the animals on the real Serengeti, however, the grazing animals have nothing to fear from lions, hyenas, crocodiles, and other predators, which are confined to enclosures—as are hippos and elephants.

The park has eight areas, each of which has its own theme, animals, live entertainment, thrill rides, kiddie attractions, dining, and shopping. A Skyride cable car soars over the park, offering a bird's-eye view of it all. Turn left after the main gate and head to **Morocco**, a walled city with exotic architecture, craft demonstrations, a sultan's tent with snake charmers, and an exhibit featuring alligators and turtles. The Moorish-style Moroccan Palace Theater features an ice show, which many families consider to be the park's best entertainment for both adults and children. You can also attend a song-and-dance show in the Marrakech Theater. Overlooking it all is the Crown Colony Restaurant, the park's largest.

After watching the snake charmers, walk eastward past Anheuser-Busch's fabled Clydesdale horses to **Egypt**, where you can visit King Tut's tomb with its replicas of the real treasures and listen to comedian Martin Short narrate "Akbar's Adventure Tours," a wacky simulator that "transports" one and all across Egypt via camel, biplane, and mine car. The whole room moves on this ride, which lasts only 5 minutes—much less time than the usual wait to get inside. Youngsters can dig for their own ancient treasures in a sand area. Adults and kids 54 inches or taller can ride **Montu**, the tallest and longest inverted roller coaster in the world with seven upside-down loops. Your feet dangle loose on Montu, so make sure your shoes are tied tightly and your lunch has had time to digest.

From Egypt, walk to the **Edge of Africa**, the most unique of the park's eight areas, and the home of most of the large animals. Go immediately to the Expedition Africa Gift Shop and see if you can get on one of the park's zoologist-led wildlife tours (see "How to See Busch Gardens," below).

Tips If You Need Another Day

Once you're inside Busch Gardens Tampa Bay and decide you really need more time to see the park, the park frequently offers a **Next-Day Ticket**, which lets you back in the next day for about \$16 per person.

Also, if you're going to Orlando, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is included in the five-park version of the **FlexTicket**, a 14-day pass which also gives admission to Universal Studios Florida, SeaWorld, Islands of Adventure, and Wet 'n Wild for \$224.95 for adults and \$189.95 for children 3 to 9. For more information on this pass, see p. 253.

Next stop is **Nairobi**, the most beautiful part of the park, where you can see gorillas and chimpanzees in the Myombe Reserve in a lush area that replicates their natural rainforest habitat. Nairobi also has a baby animal nursery, a petting zoo, turtle and reptile displays, an elephant exhibit (alas, the magnificent creatures seem to be bored to the point of madness), and Curiosity Caverns, where bats, reptiles, and small mammals that are active in the dark are kept in cages (it's the most traditional zoolike area here). The entry to Rhino Rally, the park's safari adventure, is at the western end of Nairobi.

Now head to **The Congo**, where the highlights are the rare white Bengal tigers that live on Claw Island. The Congo is also home to two roller coasters: **Kumba**, the largest and fastest roller coaster in the southeastern United States (54-in. minimum height); and **The Python** (48-in. minimum), which twists and turns for 1,200 feet. You will get drenched—and refreshed on a hot day—by riding the Congo River Rapids, where you're turned loose in round boats that float down the swiftly flowing "river" (42-in. minimum). There are bumper cars and kiddie rides here, too.

From The Congo, walk south into **Stanleyville**, a prototype African village, with a shopping bazaar, orangutans living on an island, and the Stanleyville Theater, usually featuring shows for children. The centerpiece of Stanleyville, though, is **SheiKra**, the park's newest ride and nation's first dive coaster that carries riders up 200 feet at 45 degrees and then hurtles them 70 mph back at a 45-degree angle. Yikes. Two more water rides are here: the Tanganyika Tidal Wave (48-in. minimum height), where you'll come to a very damp end, and the Stanley Falls Flume (an aqua version of a roller coaster). Serving ribs and chicken, the picnic-style Stanleyville Smokehouse has some of the best chow in the park.

Up next is **Land of the Dragons**, the most entertaining area for small children. They can spend an entire day enjoying a variety of play elements in a fairy-tale setting, plus just-for-kids rides. The area is dominated by Dumphrey, a whimsical dragon who interacts with visitors and guides children around a three-story treehouse with winding stairways, tall towers, stepping stones, illuminated water geysers, and an echo chamber.

The next stop is **Bird Gardens**, the park's original core, offering rich foliage, lagoons, and a free-flight aviary for hundreds of exotic birds, including golden and American bald eagles. Be sure to see the Florida flamingos and Australian koalas while you're here.

Then you're off to take a break at the **Hospitality House**, which offers piano entertainment and free samples of Anheuser-Busch's famous beers. You must be 21 to imbibe (there's a limit of two free mugs per seating), but soft drinks are also available.

If your stomach can take another hair-raising ride, climb aboard **Gwazi** (48-in. minimum), an adrenaline-pumping attraction where a pair of old-fashioned wooden roller coasters (named the Lion and the Tiger) start simultaneously and whiz within a few feet of each other six times as they roar along at 50 mph and rise to 90 feet. In Gwazi's "Water Wars," participants shoot water-filled balloons at each other with big slingshots. It's a soaking way to end your visit.

To experience the park's sixth and final roller coaster, head to **Timbuktu** and climb aboard the **Scorpion**, a high-speed number with a 60-foot drop and 360-degree loop (42-in. height minimum).

Added attractions include a \$325, 6-hour zookeeper-for-a-day program, the devotion of 26 acres of its 65-acre Serengeti Plain to free-roaming white rhinos, and a 4-D multisensory R. L. Stine (of *Goosebumps* fame) film.

Tampa

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Tips How to See Busch Gardens

You can save a few dollars and avoid waiting in long lines by buying your tickets to Busch Gardens Tampa Bay at the privately owned **Tampa Bay Visitor Information Center**, opposite the park at 3601 E. Busch Blvd., at North Ednam Place (☎ 813/985-3601). Owner Jim Boggs worked for the park for 13 years and gives expert advice on how to get the most out of your visit. He sells slightly discounted tickets to Busch Gardens, Adventure Island, and other attractions, and he will book hotel rooms and car rentals for you, often at a discount. The center is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 5:30pm, Sunday from 10am to 2pm (closed Christmas).

Arrive early and allow at least a day to see the park. Try not to come when it's raining, because some rides may not operate. Bring comfortable shoes, and, remember, you will get wet on some of the rides, so wear or bring appropriate clothing (shops near the rides sell plastic ponchos for \$5 or \$6, but they're cheaper in the outside world). There are lockers throughout the park where you can stash your gear.

As soon as you're through the turnstiles, pick up a copy of a park map and the day's activity schedule, which tells what's showing and when at the 14 entertainment venues in the park. Then take a few minutes to carefully plan your time—it's a big park with lots to see and do.

Although you'll get close to Busch Garden's predators, hippos, and elephants in their glass-walled enclosures, the only way to mingle with the grazers is on a tour. The best is the **VIP Elite Adventure Tour**, which lets you roam the plains in the company of a zoologist. These 8-hour excursions cost \$60 per person, \$55 for kids (in addition to the park's entry fee). You won't have to wait in lines, and you'll receive a complimentary continental breakfast and lunch at the park's Crown Colony restaurant. The tours can fill up fast, and you can't call ahead for reservations, so as soon as you enter the park, go to the Expedition Africa Gift Shop, opposite the Crown Colony Restaurant in the Edge of Africa, to reserve a spot. Another (though less attractive) alternative is the 30-minute, zoologist-led **Serengeti Safari Special Tours**, in which you ride out among the grazers on the back of a flatbed truck. These are worth the extra \$30 per person regardless of age. You can make reservations for the morning tour at the Expedition Africa Gift Shop, but the midday and afternoon tours are first-come, first-served. Note that children under 5 are not allowed on either tour.

You can exchange foreign currency in the park, and interpreters are available.

Note: You can get to Busch Gardens from Orlando via shuttle buses, which pick up at area hotels between 8 and 10:15am for the 1½- to 2-hour ride, with return trips starting at 5pm and continuing until the park closes. Round-trip fares are \$5 per person. Call ☎ 800/511-2450 for schedules, pickup locations, and reservations.

3000 E. Busch Blvd. (at McKinley Dr./N. 40th St.). ☎ 888/800-5447 or 813/987-5283. www.buschgardens.com.

Note: Admission and hours vary so call ahead, check the website, or get a brochure at visitor centers. Admission at least \$56 adults, \$46 children 3–9, plus tax; free for children 2 and under. Daily 10am–6pm (extended hours to 7 and

8pm in summer and on holidays). Parking \$7; \$11 for trucks and campers. Take I-275 north of downtown to Busch Blvd. (Exit 50) and go east 2 miles. From I-75, take Fowler Ave. (Exit 54) and follow the signs west.

Florida Aquarium ★★ *Kids* See more than 5,000 aquatic animals and plants that call Florida home at this entertaining and informative attraction. The exhibits follow a drop of water from the pristine springs of the Florida Wetlands Gallery, through a mangrove forest in the Bays and Beaches Gallery, and out onto the Coral Reefs, where an impressive 43-foot-wide, 14-foot-tall panoramic window lets you look out to schools of fish and lots of sharks and stingrays. Also worth visiting are the “Explore a Shore” playground to educate the kids, a deep-water exhibit, and a tank housing moray eels. You can look for birds and sea life on 90-minute Eco Tour cruises in the *Bay Spirit*, a 64-foot catamaran. The aquarium also has added a **Dive with the Sharks** program (☎ 813/367-4005) that gives certified scuba divers the chance to swim with sharks for 30 minutes. The \$150 price tag includes a souvenir photo and T-shirt.

701 Channelside Dr. ☎ 813/273-4000. www.flaquarium.org. Admission \$18 adults, \$15 seniors, \$12 children 3–11, free for children under 3. Eco Tour \$19 adults, \$18 seniors, \$14 children 3–11, free for children under 3. Combination aquarium admission and Eco Tour \$30 adults, \$27 seniors, \$20 children 3–11, free for children under 3. Website sometimes offers discounts. Parking \$5. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Call or check website for Eco Tour schedules. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas.

Lowry Park Zoo ★ *Kids* The opportunity to watch 3,000-pound manatees, komodo dragons, Persian leopards, and rare red pandas makes this a worthwhile excursion after the kids have seen the plains of Africa at Busch Gardens. With lots of greenery, bubbling brooks, and cascading waterfalls, this 24-acre zoo displays animals in settings similar to their natural habitats. Other major exhibits include a Florida wildlife display, an Asian Domain, a Primate World, an Aquatic Center, a free-flight aviary with a birds-of-prey show, a hands-on Discovery Center, and an endangered-species carousel ride. The Walaroo Station has kids’ rides, a small water park, a kangaroo walk-about, and a petting zoo. Lowry Park has one of Florida’s three manatee hospitals and rehabilitation centers. It’s also a sanctuary for Florida panthers and red wolves. The **Eco Tour** is very popular, featuring a cruise on the Hillsborough River where you’ll see turtles, herons, and manatees. The cost is \$10 for adults, \$9 for seniors, and \$7 for children 3 to 11.

1101 W. Sligh Ave. ☎ 813/935-8552 or 813/932-0245 for recorded information. www.lowryparkzoo.com. Admission \$15 adults, \$14 seniors, \$7.95 children 3–11, free for children under 3. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas. Take I-275 to Sligh Ave. (Exit 48) and follow the signs.

YBOR CITY

Northeast of downtown, the city’s historic Latin district takes its name from Don Vicente Martinez Ybor (*Eeee-bore*), a Spanish cigar maker who arrived here in 1886 via Cuba and Key West. Soon his and other Tampa factories were producing more than 300,000 hand-rolled stogies a day.

It may not be the cigar capital of the world anymore, but Ybor is the happening part of Tampa, and it’s one of the best places in Florida to buy hand-rolled cigars. It’s not on a par with New Orleans’s Bourbon Street, Washington’s Georgetown, or Miami’s South Beach, but good food and great music dominate the scene, especially on weekends when the streets bustle until 4am. Live-music offerings run the gamut from jazz and blues to rock.

At the heart of it all is **Centro Ybor**, a sprawling dining-shopping-entertainment complex between 7th and 8th avenues and 16th and 17th streets (☎ 813/242-4660; www.thecentroybor.com). Here you’ll find a multiscreen cinema, a comedy club, several restaurants, and a large open-air bar.

Even if you're not a cigar smoker, you'll enjoy a stroll through the **Ybor City State Museum** 📍, 1818 9th Ave., between 18th and 19th streets (☎ 813/247-6323; www.ybormuseum.org), housed in the former Ferlita Bakery (1896–1973). You can take a self-guided tour around the museum to see a collection of cigar labels, cigar memorabilia, and works by local artisans. Admission is \$3 per person. The museum is open daily from 9am to 5pm, but the prime time to visit is between 10am and 3pm, when you have the best chance to catch the cigar-rolling demonstrations (ongoing; no specific schedule) held Friday through Sunday from 10am to 3pm.

Housed in a 100-year-old, three-story former cigar factory, **Ybor City Brewing Company**, 2205 N. 20th St., facing Palm Avenue, produces Ybor Gold and other brews, none with preservatives.

GOLF

Tampa has three municipal golf courses where you can play for about \$30 to \$35, a relative pittance when compared with fees at the privately owned courses here and elsewhere in Florida. The **Babe Zaharias Municipal Golf Course**, 11412 Forest Hills Dr., north of Lowry Park (☎ 813/631-4374), is an 18-hole, par-70 course with a pro shop, putting greens, and a driving range. It is the shortest of the municipal courses, but its small greens and narrow fairways present ample challenges. Water provides obstacles on 12 of the 18 holes at **Rocky Point Golf Course**, 4151 Dana Shores Dr. (☎ 813/673-4316), located between the airport and the bay. It's a par-71 course with a pro shop, a practice range, and putting greens. On the Hillsborough River in north Tampa, the **Rogers Park Golf Course**, 7910 N. 30th St. (☎ 813/673-4396), is an 18-hole, par-72 championship course with a lighted driving and practice range. All the courses are open daily from 7am to dusk, and lessons and club rentals are available.

You can book starting times and get information about these and the area's other courses by calling **Tee Times USA** (☎ 800/374-8633; www.teetimesusa.com). For course information online, go to www.golf.com or www.floridagolfing.com, or call the **Florida Sports Foundation** (☎ 850/488-8347) or **Florida Golfing** (☎ 866/833-2663).

If you want to do some serious work on your game, the **Arnold Palmer Golf Academy World Headquarters** is at Saddlebrook Resort, 5700 Saddlebrook Way, Wesley Chapel, 12 miles north of Tampa (☎ 800/729-8383 or 813/973-1111; www.saddlebrookresort.com). Half-day and hourly instruction are available as well as 2-, 3-, and 5-day programs for adults and juniors. You have to stay at the resort or enroll in the

Tips Puffing Away

Ybor City no longer is a major producer of hand-rolled cigars, but you can still watch artisans making stogies at the **Gonzalez y Martinez Cigar Factory**, 2025 7th Ave., in the Columbia Restaurant building (☎ 813/247-2469). Gonzalez and Martinez are recent arrivals from Cuba and don't speak English, but the staff does at the adjoining **Columbia Cigar Store** (it's best to enter here). Rollers are on duty Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm.

You can stock up on fine domestic and imported cigars at **El Sol**, 1728 E. 7th Ave. (☎ 813/247-5554), the city's oldest cigar store; **King Corona Cigar Factory**, 1523 E. 7th Ave. (☎ 813/241-9109); and **Metropolitan Cigars & Wine**, 2014 E. 7th Ave. (☎ 813/248-3304).

golf program to play at Saddlebrook. See “Where to Stay,” below, for more information about the resort.

WHERE TO STAY

We’ve organized the accommodations listings below into two geographic areas: near Busch Gardens and downtown. If you’re going to Busch Gardens, Adventure Island, or the Lowry Park Zoo, the motels near Busch Gardens are much more convenient than those downtown, about 7 miles to the south. The downtown hotels are geared to business travelers, but staying there will put you near the Florida Aquarium, the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, and scenic Bayshore Boulevard.


Room rates at most hotels in Tampa vary little from season to season. This is especially true downtown, where the hotels do a brisk convention business year-round. Hillsborough County adds 12% tax to your hotel room bill.

NEAR BUSCH GARDENS



The nearest chain motel to the park is a former Howard Johnson’s that’s now **Safari Lodge at Busch Gardens Maingate**, 4139 E. Busch Blvd. (☎ 813/988-9191), a motor lodge with very cheap rooms. It’s 1½ blocks east of the main entrance. A bit farther away, the 500-room **Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center**, 3705 Spectrum Blvd., facing Fowler Avenue (☎ 800/362-2779 or 813/977-7066; www.embassysuites.com), is the plushest and most expensive establishment near the park.

Value Discount Packages

Many Tampa hotels combine tickets to major attractions such as Busch Gardens in their packages, so always ask about special deals.

Baymont Inn & Suites  Fake banana trees and a parrot cage welcome guests to the terra-cotta-floored lobby of this comfortable and convenient member of the small chain of cost-conscious but amenity-rich motels. All rooms are spacious and have ceiling fans and desks. Rooms with king beds also have recliners, business rooms sport dataport phones and extra-large desks, and the suites have refrigerators and microwave ovens. Outside, a courtyard with an unheated swimming pool has plenty of space for sunning. There’s no restaurant on the premises, but plenty are within walking distance.

9202 N. 30th St. (at Busch Blvd.), Tampa, FL 33612. ☎ 800/428-3438 or 813/930-6900. Fax 813/930-0563. www.baymontinns.com. 146 units. Winter \$89–\$119 double; off season \$79–\$99 double. Rates include continental breakfast and local phone calls. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; game room; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Best Western All Suites Hotel   This three-story all-suites hotel is the most beachlike vacation venue you’ll find close to the park. Whimsical signs lead you around a lush tropical courtyard with heated pool, hot tub, and a lively, sports-oriented Tiki bar. The bar can get noisy before closing at 9pm, and ground-level units are musty, so ask for an upstairs suite away from the action. Suite living rooms are well equipped, and separate bedrooms have narrow screened patios or balconies. The 11 “family suites” with bunk beds are great for those with kids.

Behind Busch Gardens, 3001 University Center Dr. (faces N. 30th St. between Busch Blvd. and Fowler Ave.), Tampa, FL 33612. ☎ 800/786-7446 or 813/971-8930. Fax 813/971-8935. www.thatparrotplace.com. 150 units. Winter \$99–\$159 suite for 2; off season \$79–\$99 suite for 2. Rates include hot and cold breakfast buffet. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (breakfast and dinner only); bar; heated outdoor pool; access to nearby health club; Jacuzzi;

game room; limited room service; laundry service; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffemaker, hair dryer, iron.

DOWNTOWN TAMPA

Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel and Marina ★★ This luxurious 22-story hotel occupies downtown's most strategic location—beside the river and between the Tampa Convention Center and the St. Pete Times Forum. Opening onto a riverfront promenade, the towering, three-story lobby is large enough to accommodate the many conventioners drawn to the two neighboring venues and the hotel's own 50,000 square feet of meeting space. The third floor has a fully equipped spa, modern exercise facility, and outdoor heated pool. About half of the guest quarters have balconies overlooking the bay or city (choice views are high up on the south side). Although spacious, the regular rooms are dwarfed by the 720-square-foot suites. The Marriott also has a 32-slip marina.

700 S. Florida Ave. (at St. Pete Times Forum Dr.), Tampa, FL 33602. ☎ 800/228-9290 or 813/221-4900. Fax 813/221-0923. www.marriott.com. 717 units. \$229–\$254 double; \$369–\$550 suite; off season \$189–214 double; \$329–\$510 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Weekend rates available. Valet parking \$14; no self-parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; heated outdoor pool; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; concierge; activities desk; car-rental desk; business center; salon; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; coin-op washers and dryers; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport (with high-speed Internet), fridge, coffemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Wyndham Harbour Island ★★ Close enough to downtown but still worlds away on its own 177-acre island, this tropical-flaired Wyndham insists that you're here on vacation and not stuck in some insipid downtown convention hotel. Rooms overlook the harbor and are hyper-comfortable with pillowtop mattresses and large bathrooms with Golden Door products. Luna di Mare is the hotel's exquisite Italian restaurant, overlooking the water and offering an extensive wine list, seafood, and chops. Guest privileges at the Harbour Island Athletic Club include full workout facilities, tennis courts, racquetball courts, and a full-service spa. Stroll the boardwalk to fully appreciate your surroundings.

725 S. Harbour Island Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602. ☎ 877/999-3223 or 813/229-5000. Fax 813/229-5322. www.wyndham.com/hotels/TPAHI/main.wnt. 299 units. \$199–\$289 double, \$495–\$895 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Weekend rates available. Valet parking \$12; no self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; heated outdoor pool; access to nearby health club; access to spa; Jacuzzi; concierge; activities desk; car-rental desk; business center; salon; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, high-speed Internet, coffemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

The restaurants that follow are organized by geographic area: near Busch Gardens, in or near Hyde Park (across the Hillsborough River from downtown), and in Ybor City. Although Ybor City is better known, Tampa's trendiest dining scene is along South Howard Avenue—"SoHo" to the locals—between West Kennedy Boulevard and the bay in affluent Hyde Park.

NEAR BUSCH GARDENS

You'll find the national fast-food and family restaurants east of I-275 on Busch Boulevard and Fowler Avenue.

Moderate

Cafe Don José SPANISH/AMERICAN It's not nearly on a par with the Columbia in Ybor City (see below), but this Spanish-themed restaurant is among the best there is within a short drive of Busch Gardens. High-back chairs, dark wood floors, and Spanish posters and paintings set an appropriate scene for the house specialties of


traditional paella (allow 30 min. for preparation) and Valencia-style rice dishes. Don José also offers non-Spanish fare such as red snapper baked in parchment.

11009 N. 56th St. (in Sherwood Forest Shopping Center, ¼ mile south of Fowler Ave.). ☎ **813/985-2392**. www.cafe-donjose.com. Main courses \$13–\$59. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–4:30pm and 5–9pm; Sat 5–10pm.

Ristorante Francesco ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN This landmark Italian eatery has been kept just as it was, thanks to the fact that new owner Jay Lanier was original owner Frankie's right-hand man in the kitchen. There's still the delicious *cernia portofino* (grouper in a brandy sauce with shrimp) and other Northern Italian dishes. The pasta is still homemade and shows up in more traditional fare such as seafood over linguini with a choice of marinara or white-wine sauce. The Tris di Pasta is a carbo loader's delight, offering homemade gnocchi, tortellini, and ravioli in three different sauces. Yum.

In La Place Village Shopping Center, 1441 E. Fletcher Ave. (between 14th and 15th sts.). ☎ **813/971-3649**. www.ristorantefrancesco.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Sat 5:30–10pm; Sun 5–9pm.

Inexpensive

Mel's Hot Dogs  AMERICAN Catering to everyone from businesspeople on a lunch break to hungry families craving inexpensive all-beef hot dogs, Mel Lohn's red-and-white cottage offers everything from "bagel-dogs" to bacon/cheddar Reuben-style hot dogs. All choices are served on a poppy seed bun and can be ordered with fries and a choice of coleslaw or baked beans. Even the decor is dedicated to wieners: The walls and windows are lined with hot-dog memorabilia, and there's usually a wiener-mobile parked out front. And just in case hot-dog mania hasn't won you over, there are a few alternative choices (chicken, beef and veggie burgers, and terrific onion rings).

4136 E. Busch Blvd., at 42nd St. ☎ **813/985-8000**. Most items \$4–\$9. No credit cards (but there's an ATM on the premises). Sun–Thurs 11am–8pm; Fri–Sat 11am–9pm.

HYDE PARK

Expensive

Bern's Steak House ★★ STEAKHOUSE The exterior of this famous steakhouse looks like a factory. Inside, however, some say it looks like a brothel with eight ornate dining rooms, with themes such as Rhône, Burgundy, and Irish Rebellion. However you perceive the decor, this is a carnivore's paradise. At Bern's, you order and pay for expertly charcoal-grilled steaks of perfectly aged beef according to the thickness and weight (the 60-oz., 3-in.-thick Porterhouse can feed four adults). The phone book-size wine list—one of the restaurant's most famous attributes—offers more than 7,000 selections, many available by the glass. Ask your server for a sampling before you purchase a bottle.

Upstairs, the restaurant's other most famous attribute—the dessert quarters—has 50 romantic booths paneled in aged California redwood; each can privately seat from 2 to 12 guests. All of these little chambers are equipped with phones for placing your order and closed-circuit TVs for watching and listening to a resident pianist. The dessert menu offers almost 100 selections, plus some 1,400 after-dinner drinks. It's possible to reserve a booth for dessert only, but preference is given to those who dine.

The big secret here is that steak sandwiches are available at the bar but are not mentioned on the menu. Smaller versions of the chargrilled steaks served in the dining rooms, they come with a choice of french fries or crispy onion rings. Add a salad and you have a terrific meal for about half the price of the least-expensive main course.

1208 S. Howard Ave. (at Marjory Ave.). ☎ **813/251-2421**. www.bernssteakhouse.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$17–\$59; sandwiches \$9–\$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Closed Christmas. Valet parking \$5.

Moderate

Castaway ★ SEAFOOD Gorgeous ocean views trump the inconsistent seafood at Castaway, where crab legs, coconut shrimp, and fresh daily catches reel in a steady crowd of locals and visitors alike. Insist on sitting out on the deck and try to time your meal around sundown; the vantage point for sunsets here is the kind that makes developers drool and diners delight in the fact that this Castaway isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

7720 Courtney Campbell Causeway. ☎ **813/281-0770**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$40 AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–10:30pm, Sun brunch 10:30am–2:30pm, Sun dinner 4–10pm.

Mise en Place ★★ ECLECTIC Look around at all those happy, stylish people soaking up the trendy ambience, and you'll know why chef Marty Blitz and his wife, Maryann, have been among the culinary darlings of Tampa since 1986. They present the freshest of ingredients in a creative, award-winning menu that changes weekly. Main courses often include fascinating choices such as Creole-style mahimahi served with chili cheese grits and a ragout of black-eyed peas, andouille sausage, and rock shrimp.

In Grand Central Place, 442 W. Kennedy Blvd. (at S. Magnolia Ave., opposite the University of Tampa). ☎ **813/254-5373**. www.miseonline.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$29; tasting menu \$51 with wine, \$36 without. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Thurs 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–11pm; Sat 5–11pm.

Wine Exchange ★★ MEDITERRANEAN This Tampa hot spot is an oenophile's dream come true, in which each dish is paired with a particular wine available by the bottle or the glass. Although the menu is rather simple, featuring pizzas, pastas, salads, and sandwiches, the daily specials are more elaborate, including the likes of grilled Delmonico steak, blackened pork tenderloin, or Dijon-crusted salmon. The outdoor patio is a great place to sit—that is, if there's room. There's almost always a wait at this buzz-worthy eatery.

1611 W. Swan Ave. ☎ **813/254-9463**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$10–\$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–10pm; Sat 11am–11pm, Sun 11am–9pm; brunch Sat–Sun 11am–3pm.

Inexpensive

Bella's Italian Cafe ★ *Value* ITALIAN Creative dishes and very reasonable prices make this sophisticated yet informal cafe one of SoHo's most popular neighborhood hangouts. Although you can go for wood-fired pizzas or homemade pasta under traditional Bolognese or Alfredo sauces, the stars here feature the tasty likes of blackened chicken in a creamy tomato sauce over fettuccine, or shrimp and scallops in a roasted tomato sauce over bow-tie pasta. Finish with the house version of tiramisu. Local professionals flock to the friendly bar during two-for-one happy hours, nightly from 4 to 7pm and from 11pm until closing. After 11pm, the open kitchen provides only appetizers, salads, pizzas, and desserts.

1413 S. Howard Ave. (at Mississippi Ave.). ☎ **813/254-3355**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$11–\$17; pizza \$7–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Tues 11:30am–11:30pm; Wed–Thurs 11:30am–12:30am; Fri 11am–1:30am; Sat 4pm–1:30am; Sun 4–11:30pm.

YBOR CITY**Moderate**

Big City Tavern ★ NEW AMERICAN Although this restaurant is a chain, with additional locations in West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, Ybor City's Big City Tavern take the prize for best decor: It's housed in a converted ballroom and features columns, floor-to-ceiling windows, and wrought-iron balconies. The food's pretty

good, too, especially the roasted duck with mango and basil risotto, and the bar scene is a people-watching paradise as a youngish, well-heeled, hip clientele gathers to trade tales of life in the big city.

1600 E. 8th Ave. (C) 813/247-3000. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$20. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–1am; Fri–Sat 11:30am–2am.

Columbia ★★☆☆ SPANISH Celebrating 100 years in 2005, this tile building occupies an entire city block in the heart of Ybor City. Tourists flock here to soak up the ambience, and so do the locals because it's so much fun to clap along during fire-belching Spanish flamenco floor shows Monday through Saturday evenings (\$6 per person additional charge). You can't help coming back time after time for the famous Spanish bean soup and original "1905" salad. The *paella a la valenciana* is outstanding, with more than a dozen ingredients ranging from Gulf grouper and Gulf pink shrimp to calamari, mussels, clams, chicken, and pork. All entrees come with a crispy hunk of Cuban bread with butter. Lighter appetites can choose from a limited menu of tapas, including "Cuban caviar" (actually a spicy black-bean dip). The decor throughout is graced with hand-painted tiles, wrought-iron chandeliers, dark woods, rich red fabrics, and stained-glass windows.

2117 E. 7th Ave. (between 21st and 22nd sts.). (C) 813/248-4961. www.columbiarestaurant.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$14–\$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–9pm.

Inexpensive

Carmine's Restaurant & Bar ★ CUBAN/ITALIAN/AMERICAN Bright blue poles hold up an ancient pressed-tin ceiling above this noisy corner cafe. It's not the cleanest joint in town, but a great variety of loyal local patrons gather here for genuine Cuban sandwiches—smoked ham, roast pork, Genoa salami, Swiss cheese, pickles, salad dressing, mustard, lettuce, and tomato on crispy Cuban bread. There's a vegetarian version, too, and the combination half-sandwich and choice of black beans and rice or a bowl of Spanish soup made with sausages, potatoes, and garbanzo beans all make a hearty meal for just \$7 at lunch, \$8 at dinner. Main courses are led by Cuban-style roast pork, spaghetti with a blue-crab tomato sauce, and a few seafood and chicken platters.

1802 E. 7th Ave. (at 18th St.). (C) 813/248-3834. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7–\$17; sandwiches \$4–\$8. No credit cards. Mon–Tues 11am–11pm; Wed–Thurs 11am–1am; Fri–Sat 11am–3am; Sun 11am–6pm.

TAMPA AFTER DARK

The Tampa/Hillsborough Arts Council maintains an **Artsline** ((C) 813/229-2787), a 24-hour information service providing the latest on current and upcoming cultural events. Racks in many restaurants and bars have copies of *Weekly Planet* (www.weeklyplanet.com), *Focus*, and *Accent on Tampa Bay*, three free publications detailing what's going on in the entire bay area. And you can also check the "BayLife" and "Friday

The Hub of Tampa's Bar Scene

Ybor City and Bern's Steak House are command central for the boozy sophisticates of Tampa, but if you go downtown, you'll find the true hub of Tampa's bar scene in the form of, well, **The Hub**, 719 N. Franklin St. ((C) 813/229-1553), a classic dive bar in which judges, lawyers, and the over-21 set shake and stir over stiff libations and a fabulous jukebox.

Tips Careful Where You Park

Parking can be scarce at night in Ybor City, and the area has seen an occasional robbery in the late hours. Play it safe and use the municipal parking lots behind the shops on 8th Avenue East or the new parking garages near Centro Ybor, on 7th Avenue East at 16th Street.

Extra” sections of the *Tampa Tribune* (www.tampatrib.com) and the Thursday “Weekend” section of the *St. Petersburg Times* (www.sptimes.com). The visitor center usually has copies of the week’s newspaper sections (see “Essentials,” earlier in this chapter).

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE Ybor City is Tampa’s favorite nighttime venue by far. All you have to do is stroll along 7th Avenue East between 15th and 20th streets, and you’ll hear music blaring out of the clubs. On Friday and Saturday from 9pm to 3am, the avenue is packed with people, a majority of them high-schoolers and early 20-somethings; but you’ll also find something going on Tuesday through Thursday, and even on Sunday. The clubs change names and characters frequently, so you don’t need names, addresses, or phone numbers; your ears will guide you along 7th Avenue East. With all of the sidewalk seating, it’s easy to judge what the clientele is like in any given place and make your choice from there.

The center of the action these days is **Centro Ybor**, on 7th Avenue East at 16th Street (☎ **813/242-4660**; www.centroybor.com), the district’s large dining-and-entertainment complex. The restaurants and pubs in this family-oriented center tend to be considerably tamer than many of those along 7th Avenue, at least on nonweekend nights. You don’t have to pay to listen to live music in the center’s patio on weekend afternoons.

THE PERFORMING ARTS With a prime downtown location on 9 acres along the east bank of the Hillsborough River, the huge **Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center** ★, 1010 N. MacInnes Place, next to the Tampa Museum of Art (☎ **800/955-1045** or **813/229-7827**; www.tampacenter.com), is the largest performing-arts venue south of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Accordingly, this four-theater complex is the focal point of Tampa’s performing-arts scene, presenting a wide range of Broadway plays, classical and pop concerts, operas, cabarets, improv, and special events.

A sightseeing attraction in its own right, the restored **Tampa Theatre**, 711 Franklin St., between Zack and Polk streets (☎ **813/274-8286**; www.tampatheatre.org), dates from 1926 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It presents a varied program of classic, foreign, and alternative films, as well as concerts and special events. (And it’s said to be haunted!)

Bars featuring live music include **Whiskey Joe’s**, 2500 N. Rocky Point Dr. (☎ **813/281-0557**), a bayfront shack with plenty of visual and audible color; Ybor City’s **Twilight**, 1507 E. 7th Ave. (☎ **813/247-4225**), an industrial-chic soundstage for local bands and national acts; and **Skipper’s Smokehouse**, 910 Skipper Rd. (☎ **813/971-0666**), a Key West-style former smokehouse turned blues, jazz, zydeco, ska, and reggae hot spot.

2 Cocoa Beach, Cape Canaveral & the Space Coast ★

46 miles SE of Orlando

The “Space Coast,” the area around Cape Canaveral, was once a sleepy place where city dwellers escaped the crowds from the exploding urban centers of Miami and Jacksonville. But then came the NASA space program. Today, the region produces and accommodates its own crowds, particularly the hordes of tourists who come to visit the Kennedy Space Center and enjoy the area’s 72 miles of beaches (this is, after all, the closest beach to Orlando’s mega-attractions) and excellent fishing, surfing, and golfing.

Thanks to NASA, this is also a prime destination for nature lovers. The space agency originally took over much more land than it needed to launch rockets. Rather than sell off the unused portions, it turned them over to the Canaveral National Seashore and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (www.nbbd.com/godo/minwr), which have preserved these areas in their pristine natural states.

A handful of Caribbean-bound cruise ships depart from the man-made Port Canaveral. The south side of the port is lined with seafood restaurants and marinas, which serve as home base for gambling ships and the area’s deep-sea charter and group fishing boats.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The nearest airport is **Melbourne International Airport** (☎ 321/723-6227; www.mlbair.com), 22 miles south of Cocoa Beach, which is served by **Continental** (☎ 800/525-0280; www.continental.com) and **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com). **Orlando International Airport** (p. 41), about 35 miles to the west, is a much larger hub with many more flight options and generally less expensive fares. It’s an easy 45-minute drive from the Orlando airport to the beaches via the Bee Line Expressway (Fla. 528, a toll road)—it can take almost that long from the Melbourne airport, where **Avis**, **Budget**, **Hertz**, and **National** have car-rental desks. **The Melbourne Airport Shuttle** (☎ 321/ 724-1600) will take you from the Melbourne airport to most local destinations for about \$10 to \$20 per person.

VISITOR INFORMATION For information on the area, contact the **Florida Space Coast Office of Tourism/Brevard County Tourist Development Council**, 8810 Astronaut Blvd., Suite 102, Cape Canaveral, FL 32920 (☎ 800/872-1969 or 321/868-1126; www.space-coast.com). The office is in the Sheldon Cove building, on Fla. A1A a block north of Central Boulevard and is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. It also operates an information booth at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex (p. 346).

GETTING AROUND A car is essential in this area. If you’re not coming by car, you can rent one at the airport.

SEEING THE SPACE CENTER

In addition to the attraction below, Brevard College’s **Astronaut Memorial Planetarium and Observatory**, 1519 Clearlake Rd., Cocoa Beach (☎ 321/634-3732; www.brevard.cc.fl.us/planet), south of Fla. 528, has its own International Hall of Space Explorers, but its big attractions are sound-and-light shows in the planetarium. Call or check the website for schedules and prices.

John F. Kennedy Space Center ★★ ★ Whether or not you’re a space buff, you’ll appreciate the sheer grandeur of the facilities and technological achievements displayed

at NASA's primary space-launch facility. Astronauts departed Earth at this site in 1969 en route to the most famous "small step" in history—humankind's first walk on the moon—and today's space shuttles still regularly lift off from here on their latest missions.

Since all roads other than Fla. 405 and Fla. 3 are closed to the public in the space center, you must begin your visit at the **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex**. A bit like a themed amusement park, this privately operated complex has received a \$130-million renovation and expansion, so check beforehand to see if tours and exhibits have changed since press time. Call ahead to see what's happening on the day you intend to be here, and arrive early to plan your visit. You'll need at least 2 hours to see the highlights on the bus tour through the space center, up to 5 hours if you linger at the stops along the way, and a full day to see and do everything here. Buy a copy of the *Official Tour Book*; it's easier to use than the rental cassette tapes, and you can take it home as a colorful souvenir (though some readers think you probably don't need the extra information, as the bus tours are narrated and the exhibits have good descriptions).

The visitor complex has real NASA rockets and the actual Mercury Mission Control Room from the 1960s. Exhibits look at early space exploration and where it's going in the new millennium. There are space-related hands-on activities aimed at kids, a daily "Encounter" with a real astronaut, several dining venues, and a shop selling a variety of space memorabilia and souvenirs. IMAX movies shown on 5½-story-high screens are both informative and entertaining.

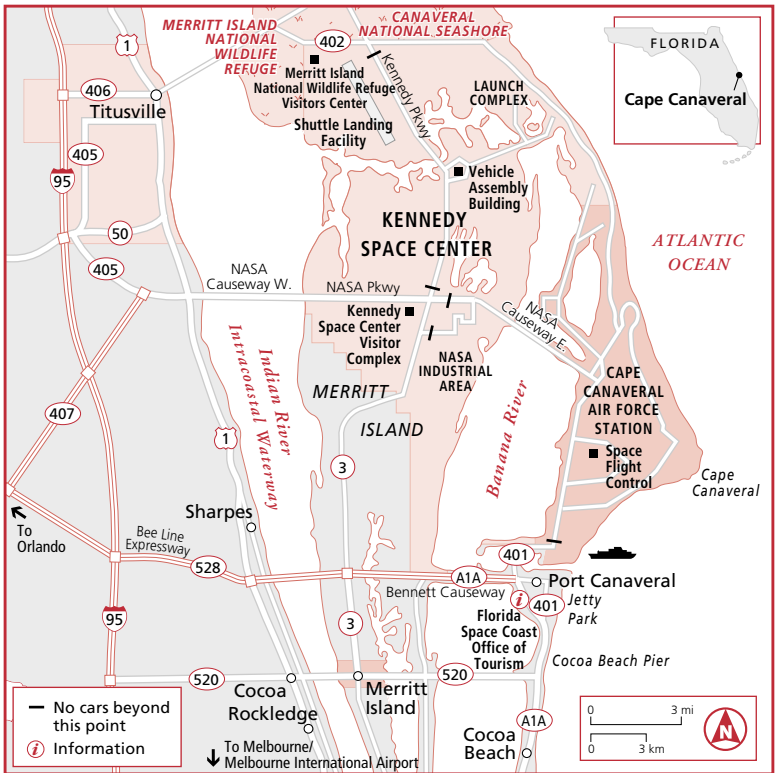
While you could spend an entire day at the visitor complex, you must take a **KSC Tour** to see the actual space center where rockets and shuttles are prepared and launched. Plan to take the bus tour early in your visit (the lines for these are brutal) and be sure to hit the restrooms before boarding the bus—there's only one out on the tour. The buses depart every 10 minutes or so, and you can reboard as you wish. They stop at the LC-39 Observation Gantry, with a dramatic 360-degree view over launch pads where space shuttles blast off; the International Space Station Center, where scientists and engineers prepare additions to the space station now in orbit; and the Apollo/Saturn V Center, which includes artifacts, photos, films, interactive exhibits,

Tips Out to Launch

If you'd like to see a shuttle launch at the **Kennedy Space Center**, first call ☎ **321/867-5000** or check NASA's official website (www.ksc.nasa.gov) for a schedule of upcoming takeoffs. You can buy launch tickets at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex (☎ **321/449-4444**) or online at www.ksctickets.com. **A word of caution:** Shuttle launches are frequently delayed due to weather, equipment malfunctions, or other factors, so you might have to make multiple visits to see one. If you don't have that flexibility, the launch window may be delayed beyond your going-home date.

If you can't get into the space center, other good viewing spots are on the causeways leading to the islands and on U.S. 1 as it skirts the waterfront in Titusville. The **Holiday Inn Riverside-Kennedy Space Center**, on Washington Avenue (U.S. 1) in Titusville (☎ **800/465-4329** or 321/269-2121; www.holidayinnksc.com), also has a clear view of the launch pads across the Indian River. Note that area motels raise their rates and often book up during launch periods.

Cape Canaveral



and the 363-foot-tall Saturn V, the most powerful rocket ever launched by the United States. Unfortunately, the bus tour was the low point of my recent visit. Though the commentary on the bus itself was interesting, the stops themselves were relatively dull, and waiting to board and reboard buses was more than frustrating (though touching a moon rock at the Apollo/Saturn V Center was pretty cool). If you're short on time, I suggest sticking around the visitor center.

Don't miss the Astronaut Memorial, a moving black-granite monument that has the names of the U.S. astronauts who have died on missions or while in training. The 60-ton structure rotates on a track that follows the movement of the sun (on clear days, of course), causing the names to stand out above a brilliant reflection of the sky.

On launch days, the center is closed at least part of the day. These aren't good days to see the center, but they're great days to observe history in the making. For \$38 per adult and \$28 per child 3 through 11, you get a **combined ticket** that entitles you to admission to the center for the shortened operating hours, plus at least a 2-hour excursion to NASA Parkway to see the liftoff. You must pick up tickets, available 5 days before the launch, on site.

An out-of-this-world experience is to do lunch with an astronaut, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that is available every day during lunch hours (\$20 adults, \$10 kids 3–11). Astronauts who have participated in the past include some of the greatest, such

as John Glenn, Jim Lovell, Walt Cunningham, Story Musgrave, and Jon McBride. Seating is limited; call ☎ **321/449-4400** to make a reservation.

Note: The financially troubled **Astronaut Hall of Fame** in Titusville closed its doors in fall 2002. Kennedy Space Center acquired many of its exhibits and added them as a separate attraction at the KSC visitor center (\$17 adults, \$13 kids 3–11, or \$37 adults and \$27 kids for a 2-day Maximum Access Admission to the Center and the Hall of Fame). The new attraction includes displays, exhibits, and tributes to the heroes of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo space programs. There's also a collection of spacecraft, including a Mercury 7 capsule, a Gemini training capsule, and an Apollo 14 command module. And in "Simulator Station," guests can experience the pressure of four times the force of gravity, ride a rover across Mars, and land a Space Shuttle.

NASA Pkwy. (Fla. 405), 6 miles east of Titusville, ½ mile west of Fla. 3. ☎ **321/449-4444** for general information, or 321/449-4444 for guided bus tours and launch reservations. www.kennedyspacecenter.com. Admission \$37 adults, \$30 children 3–11. Annual passes \$46 adults, \$30 children 3–11. Audio tours \$5 per person. All tours and movies free for children under 3. Daily 9am–5:30pm. Shuttle-bus tours daily 9:45am–2:15pm. Closed Christmas and some launch days.

BEACHES & WILDLIFE REFUGES

To the north of the Kennedy Space Center, **Canaveral National Seashore** ★★ is a protected 13-mile stretch of barrier-island beach backed by cabbage palms, sea grapes, palmettos, marshes, and Mosquito Lagoon. This is a great area for watching herons, egrets, ibises, willets, sanderlings, turnstones, terns, and other birds. You might also glimpse dolphins and manatees in Mosquito Lagoon. Canoeists can paddle along a marked trail through the marshes of Shipyard Island, and backcountry camping is possible November through April (permits required; see below).

The main **visitor center** is at 7611 S. Atlantic Ave., New Smyrna Beach, FL 32169 (☎ **321/867-4077**, or 321/867-0677 for recorded information; www.nps.gov/cana), on Apollo Beach, at the north end of the island. The southern access gate to the island is 8 miles east of Titusville on Fla. 402, just east of Fla. 3. A paved road leads from the gate to undeveloped **Playalinda Beach** ★★, one of Florida's most beautiful. While it's illegal, nude sunbathing has long been a tradition here (at least for those willing to walk a few miles to the more deserted areas). The beach has toilets but no running water or other amenities, so bring everything you'll need. The seashore is open daily from 6am to 8pm during daylight saving time, daily from 6am to 6pm during standard time. Entry fees are \$5 per motor vehicle, \$3 for pedestrians or bicyclists. National Park Service passports are accepted. Backcountry camping permits cost \$10 for up to six people and must be obtained from the New Smyrna Beach visitor center. For advance information, contact the seashore headquarters at 308 Julia St., Titusville, FL 32796 (☎ **321/867-4077** or 321/267-1110; www.nps.gov/cana).

Canaveral National Seashore's neighbor to the south and west is the 140,000-acre **Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge** ★★, home to hundreds of species of shorebirds, waterfowl, reptiles, alligators, and mammals, many of them endangered. Stop and pick up a map and other information at the visitor center, on Fla. 402 about 4 miles east of Titusville (it's on the way to Playalinda Beach). The center has a quarter-mile-long boardwalk along the edge of the marsh and displays showing the animals you may see here. You can spot them from the 6-mile-long Black Point Wildlife Drive or from one of the nature trails through the hammocks and marshes. The visitor center is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4:30pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm (closed Sun Apr–Oct). Entry is free. For more information and a schedule of

interpretive programs, contact the refuge at P.O. Box 6504, Titusville, FL 32782 (☎ 321/861-0667; www.nbbd.com/godo/minwr).

Note: Those parts of the national seashore near the Kennedy Space Center and all of the refuge close 4 days before a shuttle launch and usually reopen the day after a launch. (To find out when the next launch is scheduled, check out www.kennedy.spacecenter.com.)

The beach at **Cocoa Beach Pier**, on Meade Avenue east of Fla. A1A (☎ 321/783-7549), is a popular spot—especially with surfers, who consider it the East Coast’s surfing capital. The rustic pier was built in 1962 and has 842 feet of fishing, shopping, and food and drinks overlooking a wide, sandy beach (see “Where to Dine,” below). Because this is not a public park, there are no restrooms other than the ones in the restaurants on the pier.

Jetty Park, 400 E. Jetty Rd., at the south entry to Port Canaveral (☎ 321/783-7111; www.portcanaveral.org/funport/parks.htm), has lifeguards, a fishing pier with bait shop, a playground, a volleyball court, a horseshoe pit, picnic tables, a snack bar, a grocery store, restrooms and changing facilities, and the area’s only campground. From here, you can watch the big cruise ships as they enter and leave the port’s narrow passage. The park is open daily from 7am to 10pm; the pier is open 24 hours for fishing. Admission is \$5 per car, \$7 for RVs. The 150 tent and RV campsites (some of them shady, most with hookups) cost \$18 to \$31 a night, depending on location and time of year. No pets are allowed.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

ECOTOURS **Funday Discovery Tours** (☎ 321/725-0796; www.fundaytours.com) offers a variety of day trips, including dinner and sunset cruises, airboat and swamp-buggy rides, dolphin-watching cruises, bird-watching expeditions, and personalized tours of the Kennedy Space Center and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Reservations are required.

FISHING Head to Port Canaveral for catches such as snapper and grouper. **Jetty Park** (☎ 321/783-7111), at the south entry to the port, has a fishing pier equipped with a bait shop (see “Beaches & Wildlife Refuges,” above). The south bank of the port is lined with charter boats. You can go deep-sea fishing on the *Miss Cape Canaveral* (☎ 321/783-5274, or 321/648-2211 in Orlando; www.misscape.com), one of the party boats based here. All-day voyages departing daily at 8am cost \$45 to \$60 for adults, \$40 to \$55 for seniors, \$35 to \$50 for students 11 to 17, and \$25 to \$40 for kids 6 to 10.

GOLF You can read about Northeast Florida’s best courses in the free *Golfer’s Guide*, available at the tourist information offices and in many hotel lobbies.

In Cocoa Beach, the municipal **Cocoa Beach Country Club**, 500 Tom Warringer Blvd. (☎ 321/868-3351), has 27 holes of golf and 10 lighted tennis courts set on acres of natural woodland, rivers, and lakes. Greens fees (including cart) are about \$40 in winter, dropping to about \$35 in summer.

On Merritt Island south of the Kennedy Space Center, the **Savannahs at Sykes Creek**, 3915 Savannahs Trail (☎ 321/455-1377), has 18 holes over 6,636 yards bordered by hardwood forests, lakes, and savannahs inhabited by a host of wildlife. Fees with cart are about \$40 in winter, lower in summer.

The best nearby course is the Gary Player–designed **Baytree National Golf Club**, 8010 N. Wickham Rd., ½ mile east of I-95 in Melbourne (☎ 321/259-9060), where

challenging marshy holes are flanked by towering palms. This par-72 course has 7,043 yards with a unique red-shale waste area. Fees are about \$90 in winter, dropping to about \$50 in summer, including cart.

For course information, go to www.golf.com or www.floridagolfing.com, or call the **Florida Sports Foundation** (☎ 850/488-8347) or **Florida Golfing** (☎ 866/833-2663).

SURFING Rip through some occasionally awesome waves (by Florida's standards, not California's or Hawaii's) at the **Cocoa Beach Pier** area or down south at **Sebastian Inlet**. Get outfitted at **Ron Jon Surf Shop**, 4151 N. Atlantic Ave. (☎ 321/799-8888; www.ronjons.com), or learn how to hang 5 or 10 with the **Cocoa Beach Surfing School** ★, 150 E. Columbia Lane (☎ 321/868-1980; www.cocoa beachesurfing school.com). It offers equipment and lessons for beginners and pros at area beaches. Be sure to bring along a towel, flip-flops, sunscreen, and a lot of nerve.

WHERE TO STAY

The hotels listed below are all in Cocoa Beach, the closest resort area to the Kennedy Space Center, about a 30-minute drive to the north. Closest to the space center and Port Canaveral is the **Radisson Resort at the Port**, 8701 Astronaut Blvd. (Fla. A1A), in Cape Canaveral (☎ 800/333-3333 or 321/784-0000; www.radisson.com). It isn't on the beach, but you can relax in its landscaped courtyard with a waterfall cascading over fake rocks into a heated pool. This comfortable, well-equipped hotel caters to business travelers and passengers waiting to board cruise ships (with free transportation to the port and free parking while you cruise); it also has a great complimentary breakfast.

The **Florida Space Coast Office of Tourism**, 8810 Astronaut Blvd. #102, Cape Canaveral, FL 32920 (☎ 800/93-OCEAN or 321/868-1126; www.space-coast.com), publishes a booklet of the area's Superior Small Lodgings.

Given the proximity of Orlando, the generally warm weather year-round, and the business travelers visiting the space complex, there is little if any seasonal fluctuation in room rates here. They are highest on weekends, holidays, and during special events, such as space-shuttle launches.

Tent and RV camping are available at **Jetty Park**, in Port Canaveral (see "Beaches & Wildlife Refuges," above).

You'll pay a 4% hotel tax on top of the Florida 6% sales tax here.

DoubleTree Hotel Cocoa Beach Oceanfront ★ Although not as upscale as the Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront (see below), it's the pick of the full-service beachside hotels here, having undergone an extensive renovation in late 2004 after suffering some damage from Hurricane Frances. All rooms have balconies with ocean views, and 10 suites have living rooms with sleeper sofas and separate bedrooms. A charming dining room serves decent Mediterranean fare; it faces the beach and opens onto a brick patio with water cascading between two heated pools. Conference facilities draw groups.

2080 N. Atlantic Ave., Cocoa Beach, FL 32931. ☎ 800/552-3224 or 321/783-9222. Fax 321/799-3234. www.cocoa beachdoubletree.com. 148 units. \$125–\$179 double; \$185–\$275 suite. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 heated outdoor pools; exercise room; game room; limited room service; laundry service; coin-op washers and dryers; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Also damaged by Hurricane Frances, the Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront reopened in early 2005 with renovated guest rooms, pool area, restaurant, and lounge. The rooms at this seven-story Hilton lack balconies

or patios; instead, they have smallish, sealed-shut windows, and only 16 of them actually face the beach. That and other architectural features make this seem more like a downtown commercial hotel transplanted to a beachside location. Nevertheless, it's one of the few upscale beachfront properties here. No doubt you'll run into a crew of name-tagged conventioners, since it's especially popular with groups. Despite their lack of fresh air, the rooms are spacious and comfortable, especially since the renovations.

1550 N. Atlantic Ave., Cocoa Beach, FL 32931. ☎ 800/445-8667 or 321/799-0003. Fax 321/799-0344. www.hilton.com. 296 units. \$89–\$199 double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; heated outdoor pool; exercise room; game room; watersports equipment rentals; business center; limited room service; laundry service; coin-op washers and dryers; concierge-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

The Inn at Cocoa Beach ★★☆☆ Despite having 50 units, an intimate B&B ambience prevails at this seaside inn, far and away the most romantic place in the area. The inn began as a beachfront motel but underwent a transformation under owner Karen Simpler, a skilled interior decorator. She has furnished each unit with an elegant mix of pine, tropical, and French country pieces. Rooms in the three- and four-story buildings are much more spacious and have better sea views from their balconies than the “standard” units in the original two-story motel wing (all but six units here have balconies or patios). The older units open onto a courtyard with a pool tucked behind the dunes. Highest on the romance scale are the two rooms with Jacuzzi tubs and easy chairs facing gas fireplaces. Guests are treated to continental breakfast, evening wine and cheese, and afternoon tea. There's also an honor bar where you can pour your own drinks and a library from which to feed your head.

4300 Ocean Blvd., Cocoa Beach, FL 32932. ☎ 800/343-5307 or 321/799-3460. Fax 321/784-8632. www.theinnatcocoa.com. 50 units. \$135–\$295 double. Rates include continental breakfast and afternoon tea. AE, DISC, MC, V. No children under 12 accepted. **Amenities:** Bar (guests only); heated outdoor pool; sauna; massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport.

Riverview Hotel ★★☆☆ Located right on the Intracoastal Waterway in New Smyrna Beach, the Riverview Hotel, a former fishing and hunting shack for sportsmen scoping the Indian River Lagoon, is a spectacularly restored hotel featuring a 5,000-foot spa complete with mineral pool. There's jazz on the deck every night and a fabulous restaurant to boot (some consider Riverview Charlie's to be one of the state's best seafood spots). Some rooms have private patios or porches; all are immaculate, charming in a *Little House on the Prairie* way, and stocked with modern amenities such as cable TV. If I had a choice, however, I'd go for the two-bedroom cottage or house with private pool, which are bargains at \$175 to \$210!

103 Flagler Ave., New Smyrna Beach 32169. ☎ 800/945-7416 or 386/428-5858. Fax 321/423-8927. www.riverviewhotel.com. 18 units. \$100–\$120 double. Rates include expanded continental breakfast. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant, heated pool; spa; sauna; massage. *In room:* A/C, TV.

WHERE TO DINE

On the **Cocoa Beach Pier**, at the beach end of Meade Avenue, you'll get a fine view down the coast to accompany the seafood offerings at **Atlantic Ocean Grill** (☎ 321/783-7549) and the mediocre pub fare at adjacent **Marlins Good Times Bar & Grill** (same phone). The restaurants may not justify spending an entire evening on the pier, but the outdoor, tin-roofed **Boardwalk Tiki Bar** ★, where live music plays most nights, is a prime spot to have a cold one while watching the surfers or a sunset.

Bernard's Surf/Fischer's Seafood Bar & Grill ★ SEAFOOD/STEAKS Photos on the walls testify that many astronauts come to these adjoining establishments to

celebrate their landings. It started as Bernard's Surf, serving standard steak-and-seafood fare in a nautical setting since 1948. Bernard's offers house specials such as stone crab claws, chargrilled red snapper, and a belly-busting platter of shrimp, scallops, grouper, crab cakes, lobster, and oysters. You can even get some Russian Beluga or Sevruga caviar if you so desire. The fresh seafood also finds its way into Fischer's Seafood Bar & Grill, a *Cheers*-like lounge popular with locals. The menu here features worthy selections such as fried combo platters and mussels with a wine sauce over pasta, as well as burgers and other pub fare. It has the same 25¢ happy-hour oysters and spicy wings as a branch of **Rusty's Seafood & Oyster Bar** (see below), also part of this complex.

2 S. Atlantic Ave. (at Minuteman Causeway Rd.), Cocoa Beach. ☎ 321/783-2401. Reservations recommended in Bernard's, not accepted in Fischer's. Bernard's main courses \$14–\$55. Fischer's main courses \$9–\$16; sandwiches and salads \$4–\$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Bernard's Mon–Fri 4–10pm; Sat 4–11pm. Fischer's Mon–Fri 11am–10pm; Sat 11am–11pm. Closed Christmas.

The Mango Tree ★★ CONTINENTAL Gourmet seafood, pastas, and chicken are served in a plantation-home atmosphere with elegant furnishings in this stucco house, the finest dining venue around. Although the ambience borders on Tavern on the Green touristy tacky, the restaurant is still rather picturesque. Goldfish ponds inside and a waterfall splashing into a koi pond out in the gardens provide pleasing backdrops. Start with finely seasoned Indian River crab cakes, then go on to the chef's expert spin on roast Long Island duckling, beef tips with peppercorn-mushroom sauce, and other excellent dishes drawing their inspiration from the Continent.

118 N. Atlantic Ave. (Fla. A1A, between N. 1st and N. 2nd sts.), Cocoa Beach. ☎ 321/799-0513. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$39. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–10pm.

Rusty's Seafood & Oyster Bar *Value* SEAFOOD This lively sports bar beside Port Canaveral's man-made harbor offers inexpensive chow ranging from spicy seafood gumbo to a pot of seafood that will give two people their fill of steamed oysters, clams, shrimp, crab legs, potatoes, and corn on the cob. Raw or steamed fresh oysters and clams from the raw bar are first rate and a very good value, as is a lunch buffet on weekdays. Seating is available indoors or out, but the inside tables have the best view of the fishing boats and cruise liners going in and out of the port. Daily happy hour from 3 to 6pm sees beers drafted at 60¢ a mug, and tons of raw or steamed oysters and spicy Buffalo wings go for 25¢ each. It's a busy and sometimes noisy joint, especially on weekend afternoons, but the clientele tends to be somewhat older and better behaved than at some other pubs along the banks of Port Canaveral. There's another **Rusty's** in the Bernard's Surf/Fischer's Seafood Bar & Grill restaurant complex in Cocoa Beach (see above).

628 Glen Cheek Dr. (south side of the harbor), Port Canaveral. ☎ 321/783-2033. Main courses \$7–\$25; sandwiches and salads \$4–\$7; lunch buffet \$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 11am–12:30am (lunch buffet Mon–Fri 11am–2pm).

THE SPACE COAST AFTER DARK

For a rundown of current performances and exhibits, call the **Brevard Cultural Alliance's Arts Line** (☎ 321/690-6819). For live music, walk out on the **Cocoa Beach Pier**, on Meade Avenue at the beach, where **Oh Shuck's Seafood Bar & Grill** (☎ 321/783-7549), **Marlins Good Times Bar & Grill** (☎ 321/783-7549), and the alfresco **Boardwalk Tiki Bar** ★ (same phone as Marlins) have bands on weekends, more often during the summer season. The Tiki Bar is a great place to hang out over a cold beer all afternoon and evening.

Appendix A:

Orlando in Depth

1 Orlando History 101, or How a Mouse Changed a Southern Town

Orlando may have begun life as a sleepy little southern town, but it sure didn't stay that way for long. Over the years, the city has dramatically transformed itself into an international vacation destination and the theme park capital of the world. Orlando welcomes over 44 million visitors annually from all over the globe. What began with plantations, cattle ranches, and orange groves now boasts the world's greatest collection of thrill rides, fine dining, luxury accommodations, and superior shopping—not to mention an array of cultural and natural attractions. This, however, did not all happen overnight. Over the years, Orlando has felt its fair share of growing pains, even during its earliest days.

SETTLERS VERSUS SEMINOLES: THE ROAD TO STATEHOOD

Florida history dates to 1513—more than a century before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock—when Ponce de León, a sometimes misguided explorer, spied the shoreline and lush greenery of Florida's Atlantic coast while he was looking for “the fountain of youth.” He named it *La Florida*—“the place of flowers.” After years of alternating Spanish, French, and British rule, the territory was ceded (by Spain) to the United States in 1821. Lost in the international shuffle were the Seminole Indians. After migrating from Georgia and the Carolinas in the late 18th century to some of Florida's richest farmlands, they were viewed by the *new* Americans as an obstacle to white settlement. A series of compromise

treaties and violent clashes between settlers and the Seminoles continued through 1832, when a young warrior named Osceola strode up to the bargaining table, slammed his knife into the papers on it, and, pointing to the quivering blade, proclaimed, “The only treaty I will ever make is this!”

With that dramatic statement, the hostilities worsened. The Seminoles' guerrilla-style warfare thwarted the U.S. Army's attempt to remove them for almost 8 years, during which time many of the resisters drifted south into the interior of central Florida. In what is today the Orlando area, the white settlers built Fort Gatlin in 1838 to offer protection to pioneer homesteaders. The Seminoles kept up a fierce rebellion until 1842, when, undefeated, they accepted a treaty whereby their remaining numbers (about 300) were given land and promised peace. The same year, the Armed Occupation Act offered 160 acres to any pioneer willing to settle in the area for a minimum of 5 years. The land was fertile: Wild turkeys and deer abounded in the woods, grazing land for cattle was equally plentiful, and dozens of lakes provided fish for settlers and water for livestock. In 1843, what had been Mosquito County was more invitingly renamed Orange County. And with the Seminoles more or less out of the picture (though sporadic uprisings still occurred), the Territorial General Legislature petitioned Congress for statehood. On March 3, 1845, President John Tyler signed a bill making Florida the 27th state.

Settlements and statehood notwithstanding, at the middle of the 19th century, the Orlando area (then named Jernigan for one of its first settlers) consisted largely of pristine lakes and pine-forested wilderness. There were no roads, and you could ride all day (if you could find a trail) without meeting a soul. The Jernigans successfully raised cattle, and their homestead was given a post office in 1850. It became a way stop for travelers and the seat of future development. In 1856, the boundaries of Orange County were revised, and, thanks to the manipulations of resident James Gamble Speer, a member of the Indian Removal Commission, Fort Gatlin (Jernigan) became its official seat.

How the fledgling town came to be named Orlando is a matter of some speculation. Some say Speer renamed the town after a dearly loved friend, whereas other sources say it was named after a Shakespearean character in *As You Like It*. But the most accepted version is that the town was named for plantation owner Orlando Reeves (or Rees), whose homestead had been burned out in a skirmish. For years, it was thought a marker discovered near the shores of Lake Eola, in what is now downtown, marked his grave. But Reeves died later, in South Carolina. It's assumed the name carved in the tree was a marker for others who were on the Indians' trail.

Whatever the origin, Orlando was officially recognized by the U.S. Postmaster in 1857.

THE 1860s: CIVIL WAR/CATTLE

WARS Throughout the early 1860s, cotton plantations and cattle ranches became the hallmarks of central Florida. A cotton empire ringed Orlando. Log cabins went up along the lakes and the pioneers eked out a somewhat lonely existence, separated from each other by miles of farmland. But there were troubles brewing in the 31-state nation that soon devastated Orlando's planters. By 1859, it was obvious that only a war would resolve the slavery issue. In 1861, Florida became the third state to secede from the Union, and the modest progress it had achieved came to a standstill. The Stars and Bars flew from every flagpole, and local men enlisted in the Confederate army, leaving the fledgling town in poverty. A federal blockade made it difficult to obtain necessities and many slaves fled. In 1866, the Confederate troops of Florida surrendered, the remaining slaves were freed, and a ragtag group of defeated soldiers returned to Orlando. They found a dying cotton industry, unable to function without slave labor. In 1868, Florida was readmitted to the Union.

Its untended cotton fields having gone to seed, Orlando concentrated on cattle ranching, a business heavily taxed by the

Dateline

- **1843** Mosquito County in central Florida is renamed Orange County.
- **1856** Orlando becomes the seat of Orange County.
- **1875** Orlando is incorporated as a municipality.
- **1880** The South Florida Railroad paves the way for the expansion of Orlando's agricultural markets. Swamp

- cabbage hits an all-time high on the commodities market.
- **1884** Fire destroys much of Orlando's fledgling business district.
- **1894–95** Freezing temperatures destroy the citrus crops, wreaking havoc on the groves and causing many growers to lose everything.
- **1910–25** A land boom hits Florida. Fortunes are made overnight.

- **1926** The land boom goes bust. Fortunes are lost overnight.
- **1929** An invasion of Mediterranean fruit flies devastates Orlando's citrus industry. But, who cares? Here comes the stock market crash.
- **1939–45** World War II revives Orlando's ailing economy.

Fun Fact A Fountain of Fruit

Legend has it that Florida's citrus industry has its roots in seeds spit onto the ground by Ponce de León and his followers as they traversed the state searching for the fountain of youth. The seeds supposedly germinated in the rich Florida soil.

government, and one that ushered in an era of lawlessness and violence. A famous battle involving two families, the Barbers and the Mizells, left at least nine men dead in 2 months in a Florida version of the Hatfields and McCoys.

Like frontier cattle towns out West, post-Civil War Orlando was short on civilized behavior. Gunfights, brawls, and murders were commonplace. But as the 1860s came to an end, large-herd owners from other parts of the state moved into the area and began organizing the industry in a less chaotic fashion. Branding and penning greatly reduced rustling, though they didn't totally eliminate the problem. Even a century later—as recently as 1973—soaring beef prices caused a rash of cattle thievery. Some traditions die hard. Even today, there are a number of rustling complaints each year.

AN ORANGE TREE GROWS IN ORLANDO In the 1870s, articles in national magazines began luring large

numbers of Americans to central Florida with promises of fertile land and a warm climate. In Orlando, public roads, schools, and churches sprang up to serve the newcomers, many of whom replanted defunct cotton fields with citrus groves. Orlando was incorporated under state law in 1875, and boundaries and a city government were established.

New settlers poured in from all over the country, businesses flourished, and by the end of the year the town had its first newspaper, the *Orange County Reporter*. The first locomotive of the South Florida Railroad chugged into town in 1880, sparking a building and land boom—the first of many. Orlando got sidewalks and its first bank in 1883, the same year the town voted itself “dry” in hopes of averting the fist fights and brawls that ensued when cowboys crowded into local saloons every Saturday night for some rowdy R&R. For many years, the city continued to vote itself alternately wet and dry, but

- **1964** Walt Disney begins surreptitiously buying central Florida farmland, purchasing more than 28,000 acres for nearly \$5.5 million.
- **1965** Disney announces his plan to build the world's most spectacular theme park, in Orlando.
- **1966** Walt Disney dies of lung cancer.
- **1971** The Magic Kingdom opens its gates for the first time.
- **1972** A new 1-day attendance mark is set December 27, when 72,328 people visit the Magic Kingdom. It will be broken almost every year thereafter.
- **1973** SeaWorld opens with a splash in Orlando.
- **1979** Mickey Mouse welcomes the Magic Kingdom's 100 millionth visitor, 8-year-old Kurt Miller from Kingsville, Maryland.
- **1982** Epcot opens with vast hoopla. Participating celebrities include former president Richard Nixon and New York Yankees president George Steinbrenner.
- **1989** WDW launches Disney-MGM Studios (offering a behind-the-scenes look at Tinseltown), Typhoon Lagoon

continues

Fun Fact **Liquor Ain't Quicker**

The “Wet/Dry” battle in Orlando continued until 1998, when the city removed “Blue Laws” that restricted the sale of liquor on Sunday within the city limits.

it made little difference. Legal or not, liquor was always readily available.

FIRE & ICE In January 1884, a grocery fire that started at 4am wiped out blocks of businesses, including the *Orange County Reporter*. But 19th-century Orlando was a bit like a Frank Capra movie. The town rallied around, providing a new location for the paper and presenting its publisher, Mahlon Gore, with \$1,200 in cash to help defray losses, and \$300 in new subscriptions. The paper not only survived, it flourished. And the city, realizing the need, created its first fire brigade. By August 1884, a census revealed a population of 1,666. That same year, 600,000 boxes of oranges were shipped from Florida to points north—most of those boxes originating in Orlando. By 1885, Orlando was a viable town, boasting as many as 50 businesses. This isn't to say it was New York. Razorback hogs roamed the streets and alligator wrestling was major entertainment.

Disaster struck a week after Christmas in 1894, when the temperature plummeted to an unseasonable 24°F (−4°C).

Water pipes burst and orange blossoms froze, blackened, and died. The freeze continued for 3 days, wrecking the citrus crop for the year.

Many grove owners went bust, and those who remained were hit with a second devastating freeze the following year. Tens of thousands of trees died in the killing frost. Small growers were wiped out, but large conglomerates that could afford to buy up the small growers' properties at bargain prices and wait for new groves to mature assured the survival of the industry.

SPECULATION FEVER: GOOD DEALS, BAD DEALS . . .

As Orlando entered the 20th century, citrus and agriculture surpassed cattle ranching as the mainstays of the local economy. Stray cows no longer had to be shooed from the railway tracks. Streets were being paved and electricity and telephone service installed. The population at the turn of the 20th century was 2,481. In 1902, the city passed its first automobile laws, which included an in-town speed limit of 5mph. In 1904, the city flooded.

(a 56-acre water theme park), and Pleasure Island (a nightclub district for adults).

- **1990** Universal Studios Florida opens, bringing the movies to life for all who enter its gates.
- **1993** SeaWorld expands, and Universal Studios unleashes the fearsome *Jaws*.
- **1998** Disney starts its own cruise line and opens most of Animal Kingdom. Universal

opens CityWalk, a vast new entertainment complex. Disney's West Side, Pleasure Island, and Disney Village Marketplace become known as Downtown Disney.

- **1999** Islands of Adventure, Universal Orlando's second theme park, opens, featuring stomach-churning thrill rides. The final section of Animal Kingdom, Asia, opens. The

Disney Cruise Line launches Good Ship No. 2, the *Wonder*.

- **2000** SeaWorld opens its second park, Discovery Cove, offering a chance to swim with the fishes, er, dolphins. SeaWorld also delivers its first roller coaster, Kraken. In December, Universal opens its second resort, the Hard Rock Hotel.
- **2001** Church Street Station closes its doors for good. The

And in 1905, it suffered a drought that ended—miraculously or coincidentally—on a day when all faiths united at the local First Baptist Church to pray for rain. By 1910, prosperity returned, and Orlando, with a population of nearly 4,000, was in a small way becoming a tourism and convention center. World War I brought further industrial growth and a real-estate boom, not just to Orlando, but to all of Florida. Millions of immigrants, speculators, and builders descended on the state in search of a quick buck. As land speculation reached a fever pitch and property was bought and resold almost overnight, many citrus groves gave way to urbanization. Preeminent Orlando builder and promoter Carl Dann described the action: “It finally became nothing more than a gambling machine, each man buying on a shoe-string, betting dollars a bigger fool would come along and buy his option.”

Quite suddenly, the bubble burst. A July 1926 issue of the *Nation* provided the obituary for the Florida land boom: “The world’s greatest poker game, played with lots instead of chips, is over. And the players are now . . . paying up.” Construction slowed to a trickle, and many newcomers who came to Florida to jump on the bandwagon fled to their homes in the North. Though Orlando wasn’t quite

as hard hit as Miami—scene of the greediest land grabs—some belt-tightening was in order. Nevertheless, the city managed to build a municipal airport in 1928. Then came a Mediterranean fruit-fly infestation that crippled the citrus industry. Hundreds of thousands of acres of land in quarantined areas had to be cleared of fruit, and vast quantities of boxed fruit were destroyed. The 1929 stock market crash that precipitated the Great Depression added an exclamation point to Florida’s ruined economy.

. . . & NEW DEALS President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal helped the state climb back on its feet. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) put 40,000 unemployed Floridians back to work—work that included hundreds of public projects in Orlando. Of these, the most important was the expansion and resurfacing of the city’s airport. By 1936, the tourist trade had revived somewhat, construction was up once again, and the state began attracting a broader range of visitors. But the event that finally lifted Florida—and the nation—out of the Depression was World War II.

Orlando had weathered the Great Depression. Now it prepared for war with the construction of army bases, housing for servicemen, and training facilities. Enlisted men poured into the city. The

tourist industry takes a blow due to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

- **2002–03** Universal opens its third resort, the Royal Pacific.
- **2003** Disney’s Pop Century Resort opens its first phase. The Waterfront entertainment district makes a splashy debut at SeaWorld.
- **2004** Cypress Gardens reopens as Cypress Gardens Adventure Park featuring

new thrill rides, water shows, concerts, and its famous botanical gardens.

- **2005** The Ron Jon Surf Park opens allowing surfers and bodyboarders a chance to ride the waves indoors at Festival Bay. The first ever Nickelodeon resort, a cooperative effort between Holiday Inn and Nickelodeon, opens.

airport was again enlarged and equipped with barracks, a military hospital, administration buildings, and mess halls. By 1944, Orlando had a second airport and was known as “Florida’s Air Capital,” home to major aircraft and aviation-parts manufacturers. Thousands of servicemen did part of their hitch in Orlando, and, when the war ended, many returned to settle here.

POSTWAR PROSPERITY By 1950, Orlando, with a population of 51,826, was the financial and transportation hub of central Florida. The city shared the bullish economy of the 1950s with the rest of the nation. In the face of the Cold War, the Orlando air base remained and grew, funneling millions of dollars into the local economy. Florida’s population increased by a whopping 78.7% during the decade—making it America’s 10th most populated state—and tourists came in droves, nearly 4.5 million in 1950.

One reason for the influx was the advent of the air conditioner, which made life in Florida *infinitely* more pleasant. Also fueling Orlando’s economy was a brand-new industry arriving in nearby Cape Canaveral in 1955—the government-run space program. Cape Canaveral became NASA’s headquarters, including the Apollo rocket program that eventually blasted Neil Armstrong toward his “giant leap for mankind.” During the same decade, the Glenn L. Martin Company (later Martin Marietta), builder of the Matador Missile, purchased 10 square miles for a plant 4 miles south of Orlando. Its advent sparked further industrial growth and property values soared. More than 60 new industries moved to the area

in 1959. But even the most optimistic Orlando boosters couldn’t foresee the glorious future that was the city’s ultimate destiny.

THE DISNEY DECADES In 1964, Walt Disney began secretly buying millions of dollars worth of central Florida farmland. As vast areas of land were purchased in lots of 5,000 acres here, 20,000 there—at remarkably high prices—rumors flew as to who needed so much land and had the money to acquire it. Some thought it was Howard Hughes; others, the space program. Speculation was rife almost to the very day, November 15, 1965 (“D” Day for Orlando), when Uncle Walt arrived in town and announced his plans to build the world’s most spectacular theme park (“bigger and better than Disneyland”). In a 2-year construction effort, Disney employed 9,000 people. Land speculation reached unprecedented heights, as hotel chains and restaurateurs grabbed up property near the proposed park. Mere swampland sold for millions. The total cost of the project by its October 1971 opening was \$400 million. Mickey Mouse escorted the first visitor into the Magic Kingdom, and numerous celebrities, from Bob Hope to Julie Andrews, took part in the opening ceremonies. In Walt Disney World’s first 2 years, the attraction drew 20 million visitors and employed 13,000 people. The sleepy citrus-growing town of Orlando had become the “Action Center of Florida,” and the fastest-growing city in the state.

Additional attractions multiplied faster than fruit flies, and hundreds of firms relocated their businesses to the area.

Fun Fact In the Words of Walt Disney

Why be a governor or a senator when you can be king of Disneyland?

You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world . . . but it requires people to make the dream a reality.

SeaWorld, a major theme park, came to town in 1973. All the while, Walt Disney World continued to grow and expand, adding Epcot in 1982 and Disney-MGM Studios in 1989, along with water parks, more than a dozen "official" resorts, a shopping/restaurant village, campgrounds, a vast array of recreational facilities, and several other adjuncts that are thoroughly described in this book. In 1998, Disney opened yet another theme park, this one dedicated to zoological entertainment and aptly called Animal Kingdom.

Universal Orlando, whose Universal Studios Florida park opened in 1990, continues to expand and keep the stakes high. In late 1998, it unveiled a new entertainment district, CityWalk, and in 1999, it opened Islands of Adventure, a second theme park including attractions dedicated to Dr. Seuss, Marvel Comics, and Jurassic Park. Also in 1999, it opened the Portofino Bay Hotel, a 750-room Loews property. In 2001, the curtain went up on the Hard Rock Hotel, and in summer 2002, the Royal Pacific resort opened as Universal announced plans to add two more hotels to the property in the next decade.

SeaWorld, too, got in on the action when it opened its \$100-million sister park, Discover Cove, in 2000. Now, visitors have the chance to swim with dolphins even in landlocked Orlando.

While the tourist economy suffered for almost 2 years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the industry has regained much of its strength as the years have passed. Indeed, one unfortunate

casualty of the economic slowdown following the attacks, Cypress Gardens, closed its doors in the spring of 2003, but has since reopened with a new name, Cypress Gardens Adventure Park, and a new line-up of attractions. Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld, are, as usual, in a building mode, albeit not as enthusiastically as they were during the late 1990s. All the parks have added new attractions, ranging from Mission: Space at Disney's Epcot, to Universal's new *Revenge of the Mummy*, to SeaWorld's new entertainment and dining district, the Waterfront. In 2005, in honor of California sibling Disneyland's 50th anniversary, Disney World unveiled new shows, services, rides, and attractions.

In the resort department, Disney's opened up the first phase of its Pop Century Resort in 2003 and its new Saratoga Springs Resort in mid-2004, and construction continues on both resorts. And Disney's not the only one in a building frame of mind. Springing up and spreading out to untapped areas just south of Disney are new luxury destination resorts, further expanding the city's tourist district and Mickey's reach. Recent newcomers include the country's first ever Nickelodeon resort, as well as the multimillion-dollar Reunion Resort and Club. And those are just a taste of what will likely be many new debuts throughout the city over the next few years. Given the pace of progress in this ever-changing city, it's a sure bet they'll be joined by new resorts, rides, and shopping and dining experiences.

Appendix B:

Useful Toll-Free Numbers & Websites

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus

☎ 800/474-7424 in the U.S.

☎ 01/886-8888 in Ireland

www.aerlingus.com

Air Canada

☎ 888/247-2262

www.aircanada.ca

Air New Zealand

☎ 800/262-1234 or 800/262-2468
in the U.S.

☎ 800/663-5494 in Canada

☎ 0800/737-767 in New Zealand
www.airnewzealand.com

AirTran Airlines

☎ 800/247-8726

www.airtran.com

Alaska Airlines

☎ 800/426-0333

www.alaskaair.com

American Airlines

☎ 800/433-7300

www.aa.com

American Trans Air

☎ 800/225-2995

www.ata.com

America West Airlines

☎ 800/235-9292

www.americawest.com

British Airways

☎ 800/247-9297

☎ 0345/222-111 or 0845/77-333-77
in Britain

www.british-airways.com

Continental Airlines

☎ 800/525-0280

www.continental.com

Delta Air Lines

☎ 800/221-1212

www.delta.com

Frontier Airlines

☎ 800/432-1359

www.frontierairlines.com

JetBlue Airways

☎ 800/538-2583

www.jetblue.com

Midwest Express

☎ 800/452-2022

www.midwestexpress.com

Northwest Airlines

☎ 800/225-2525

www.nwa.com

Qantas

☎ 800/227-4500 in the U.S.

☎ 612/9691-3636 in Australia

www.qantas.com

Spirit Airlines

☎ 800/772-7117

www.spiritair.com

Southwest Airlines

☎ 800/435-9792

www.southwest.com

Song

☎ 800/359-7664

www.flysong.com

United Airlines

☎ 800/241-6522

www.united.com**US Airways**

☎ 800/428-4322

www.usairways.com**CAR-RENTAL AGENCIES****Alamo**

☎ 800/327-9633

www.goalamo.com**Avis**

☎ 800/331-1212 in continental U.S.

☎ 800/TRY-AVIS in Canada

www.avis.com**Budget**

☎ 800/527-0700

www.budget.com**Dollar**

☎ 800/800-4000

www.dollar.com**Enterprise**

☎ 800/325-8007

www.enterprise.com**Virgin Atlantic Airways**

☎ 800/862-8621 in continental U.S.

☎ 0293/747-747 in Britain

www.virgin-atlantic.com**Hertz**

☎ 800/654-3131

www.hertz.com**Luxury Rental Cars of Orlando**

☎ 888/641-9211

www.luxrentals.com**National**

☎ 800/CAR-RENT

www.nationalcar.com**Payless**

☎ 800/PAYLESS

www.paylesscarrental.com**Thrifty**

☎ 800/367-2277

www.thrifty.com**MAJOR HOTEL & MOTEL CHAINS****AmeriSuites**

☎ 800/833-1516

www.amerisuites.com**Baymont Inns & Suites**

☎ 800/301-0200

www.baymontinns.com**Best Western International**

☎ 800/528-1234

www.bestwestern.com**Clarion Hotels**

☎ 800/CLARION

www.clarionhotel.com orwww.hotelchoice.com**Comfort Inns**

☎ 800/228-5150

www.hotelchoice.com**Crowne Plaza**

☎ 877/239-1222

www.crowneplaza.com**Days Inn**

☎ 800/325-2525

www.daysinn.com**Doubletree Hotels**

☎ 800/222-TREE

www.doubletree.com**Econo Lodges**

☎ 800/55-ECONO

www.hotelchoice.com**Embassy Suites**

☎ 800/362-2779

www.embassy-suites.com**Hampton Inn**

☎ 800/HAMPTON

www.hampton-inn.com**Hawthorn Suites**

☎ 800/527-1133

www.hawthorn.com

Hilton Hotels

☎ 800/HILTONS

www.hilton.com

Holiday Inn

☎ 800/HOLIDAY

www.basshotels.com

Homewood Suites

☎ 800/225-5466

www.Homewood-suites.com

Howard Johnson

☎ 800/654-2000

www.hojo.com

Hyatt Hotels & Resorts

☎ 800/228-9000

www.hyatt.com

Inter-Continental Hotels & Resorts

☎ 888/567-8725

www.interconti.com

ITT Sheraton

☎ 800/325-3535

www.starwood.com

La Quinta Motor Inns

☎ 800/531-5900

www.laquinta.com

Loews Hotels

☎ 800/23-loews

www.loewshotels.com

Marriott Hotels

☎ 800/228-9290

www.marriott.com

Motel 6

☎ 800/4-MOTEL6 (800/466-8356)

www.motel6.com

Quality Inns

☎ 800/228-5151

www.hotelchoice.com

Radisson Hotels International

☎ 800/333-3333

www.radisson.com

Ramada Inns

☎ 800/2-RAMADA

www.ramada.com

Red Roof Inns

☎ 800/843-7663

www.redroof.com

Renaissance Hotels

☎ 800/228-9290

www.renaissancehotels.com

Ritz Carlton

☎ 800/241-3333

www.ritzcarlton.com

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts

☎ 800/325-3535

www.sheraton.com

Sleep Inn

☎ 800/753-3746

www.sleepinn.com

Springhill Suites

☎ 888/287-9400

www.springhillsuites.com

Staybridge Suites

☎ 800/238-8000

www.staybridge.com

Super 8 Motels

☎ 800/800-8000

www.super8.com

Travelodge

☎ 800/255-3050

www.travelodge.com

Westin Hotels & Resorts

☎ 800/937-8461

www.westin.com

Wyndham Hotels and Resorts

☎ 800/822-4200 in continental

U.S. and Canada

www.wyndham.com

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