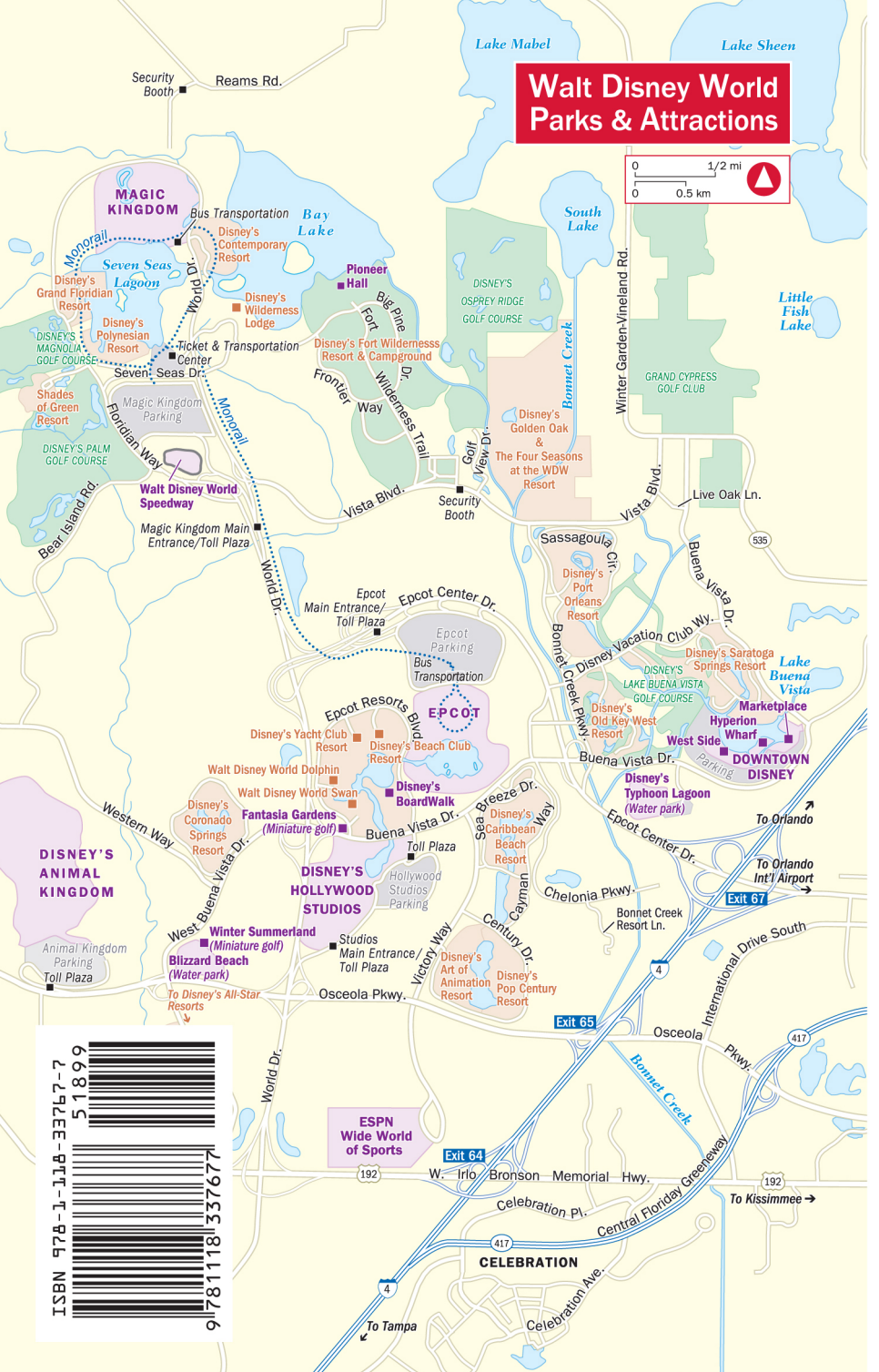
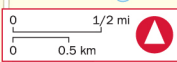


# Frommer's Walt Disney World<sup>®</sup> & Orlando



# Walt Disney World Parks & Attractions



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**Frommer's®**

# Walt Disney World® & Orlando

*14th Edition*

by Laura Miller



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Laura Miller** is a freelance writer based out of Orchard Park, New York. She's spent countless hours scouring Central Florida's various theme parks, hotels, resorts, and restaurants over the years (too many to count)—both with and without her five children. A family-travel expert who religiously travels to the Land the Mouse Built several times a year, she also operates **mouseearsandmore.com**, a website dedicated to Central Florida and the art of family travel.

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—Laura Miller

## HOW TO CONTACT US

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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## ADVISORY & DISCLAIMER

Travel information can change quickly and unexpectedly, and we strongly advise you to confirm important details locally before traveling, including information on visas, health and safety, traffic and transport, accommodations, shopping, and eating out. We also encourage you to stay alert while traveling and to remain aware of your surroundings. Avoid civil disturbances, and keep a close eye on cameras, purses, wallets, and other valuables.








While we have endeavored to ensure that the information contained within this guide is accurate and up-to-date at the time of publication, we make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. We accept no responsibility or liability for any inaccuracy or errors or omissions, or for any inconvenience, loss, damage, costs, or expenses of any nature whatsoever incurred or suffered by anyone as a result of any advice or information contained in this guide.

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## 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:

-  **special finds**—those places only insiders know about
-  **fun facts**—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **kids**—best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
-  **special moments**—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **overrated**—places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **insider tips**—great ways to save time and money
-  **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

## TRAVEL RESOURCES AT FROMMERS.COM

Frommer's travel resources don't end with this guide. Frommer's website, **www.frommers.com**, has travel information on more than 4,000 destinations. We update features regularly, giving you access to the most current trip-planning information and the best airfare, lodging, and car-rental bargains. You can also listen to podcasts, connect with other Frommers.com members through our active-reader forums, share your travel photos, read blogs from guidebook editors and fellow travelers, and much more.



# THE BEST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD & ORLANDO

1

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 50 million people from all parts of the world make their way to this city each year to sample its unending array of exciting, unique, and diverse activities. Those of us who continue to return year after year can count on each visit to provide a host of new experiences and memories.

---

**Things to Do** Disney boasts four major theme parks, two water parks, and a shopping/dining/entertainment district. But the Mouse's House is not the only game in town. Take in the action-packed thrills of **Universal Studios Florida** and **Islands of Adventure** (the latter home to the wildly popular **Wizarding World of Harry Potter**), as well as the excitement of Universal's nightclub/restaurant district, **CityWalk**. If you prefer a bit less hustle and bustle, the eco-adventure parks at **SeaWorld**, **Discovery Cove**, and **Aquatica** feature a more laid-back experience. **Gatorland**, a throwback attraction, lets you take in the beauty of the natural surroundings at a leisurely pace. And the new **LEGOLAND Florida** immerses visitors in everything LEGO. Orlando also offers recreational activities galore, among them golf (with some of the country's top courses right nearby), indoor surfing, and zipline adventures.

**Shopping** High-end malls such as the **Mall at Millenia** feature a dizzying array of designer boutiques, while architecturally inviting open-air outlet malls (most notably the **Premium Outlets** at Vineland and at International Dr.) and an eclectic array of theme-park shops will all give your wallet a workout.

**Restaurants & Dining** Celebrity chefs and themed restaurants ensure that dining out is an experience in itself. Sit back and sip a signature



## By the Numbers

While attendance levels continue to remain relatively steady at Disney, and attendance at Universal Orlando has increased exponentially (thanks to the addition of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter), SeaWorld hasn't been so lucky. Across the board, Orlando's theme parks (including Disney, and even Universal to some extent) continue to feel the effects of the economic downturn. Though predictions state that attendance levels will continue to rise over the next few years, they will likely do so at a much slower pace (with Universal's wildly high attendance figures likely to drop as the newness of the Wizarding World begins to wear off). The parks, however, continue to entice visitors to return and to stay longer by offering special deals, discounts, and the addition of wild and wonderfully

new attractions. Here are the 2011 attendance estimates (and their national rankings) for all of the major Orlando parks according to TEA, Inc., and Economic Research Associates:

- No. 1: Magic Kingdom, 17 million (-1.5%)
- No. 3: Epcot, 11 million (-1.5%)
- No. 4: Disney's Animal Kingdom, 9.7 million (+1%)
- No. 5: Disney's Hollywood Studios, 9.6 million (-.1%)
- No. 7: Islands of Adventure, 5.9 million (+30.2%)
- No. 8: Universal Studios Florida, 5.9 million (+6.1%)
- No. 9: SeaWorld, 5.1 million (-12%)

(Disneyland and Disney's California Adventure rank 2nd and 6th, respectively.)

martini, soak up sounds of Sinatra, and sink your teeth into a melt-in-your-mouth filet at **Ocean Prime** (located along the famed **Restaurant Row** on Sand Lake Rd.), or experience the exotic Asian-inspired surroundings of **Emeril's Tchoup Chop**, at Universal's Royal Pacific.

**Nightlife & Entertainment** Hang out at the clubs at Universal's **CityWalk** (including **Latin Quarter**, **Red Coconut Club**, and **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville**), the lounges at Disney (such as **Rix** and the **Outer Rim**), or even as far out as downtown Orlando, where bars and dance clubs can be found along Wall Street and Church Street Station. Comedy clubs (**Fat Fish Blue**, **Sak Comedy Club**, and even the theatrical antics at **Sleuths Mystery Dinner Show**) will keep you laughing well into the night.

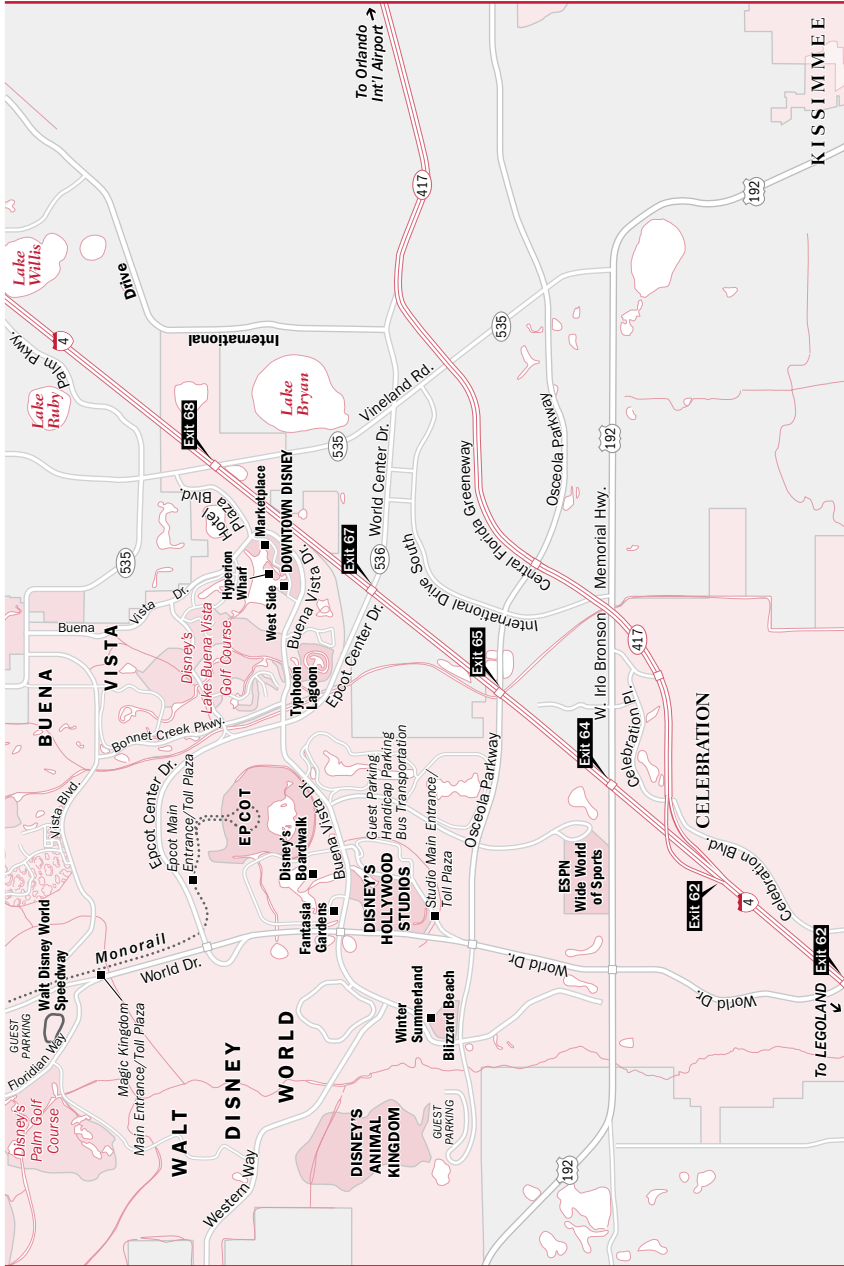
## THE most unforgettable ORLANDO EXPERIENCES

- **Explore Disney's Animal Kingdom:** Explore Disney's most spectacular and wildest Imagineering to date. Trek through the jungles of Africa along the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail or set out on safari across the savanna with Kilimanjaro Safaris. Journey through the exotic lands of Asia and embark on an expedition to the peaks of Expedition Everest; then explore the mysteries of Anandapur while wandering the Maharajah Jungle Trek. Be sure not to miss Finding Nemo—The Musical or the Festival of the Lion King, absolutely the best shows in all of WDW. See p. 105.

- **Go Globe-Trotting at Epcot:** You can travel around the world in only an afternoon at the World Showcase pavilions, rocket through space on a thrilling mission to Mars at Mission: Space, travel back in time to the age of the dinosaurs at the Universe of Energy, and dive deep below the sea to explore the ocean's inhabitants at the Seas with Nemo & Friends. And there's no better way to cap your day off than watching Epcot's IllumiNations, a spectacular show of fireworks, laser lights, and fountains. See p. 75.
- **Take Center Stage at Disney's Hollywood Studios:** Though it is more grown-up than the Magic Kingdom, it has plenty of great shows to entertain the kids and attractions to thrill movie buffs. Don't miss Toy Story Mania, the American Idol Experience, Star Tours (overhauled in 2011), Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, and Fantasmic!—an innovative, after-dark mix of live action, waterworks, fireworks, and laser lights that rivals IllumiNations. See p. 93.
- **Escape to the Magic Kingdom:** It may seem an obvious choice, but Disney's oldest is still the most magical of Orlando's theme parks. Speed through the universe on Space Mountain, watch Donald's antics at Mickey's PhilharMagic, laugh out loud at the Monsters, Inc. Laugh Floor, or wave hello to the ghouls of the Haunted Mansion. Cap your day with the impressive Wishes fireworks display. There's plenty here to entertain all ages. **Note:** At press time, the Magic Kingdom was in the midst of an extensive 3-year expansion, a completion date set for late 2014 (though a substantial portion of the expansion will be up and running by the end of 2012). See p. 51.
- **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 (including the Wizarding World of Harry Potter—with an expansion on the horizon) and you'll see what I mean. For thrill seekers, not-to-be-missed attractions include Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit, Revenge of the Mummy, Men in Black Alien Attack, the Dragon Challenge, the Forbidden Journey, the Incredible Hulk Coaster, the Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, and Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls. See chapter 4.
- **Dive into the Eco-Edutainment of SeaWorld, Discovery Cove, and Aquatica:** Your kids may never realize just how much they're learning as they explore these theme parks' eco-exhibits and experiences (including Turtle Trek, a 360-degree virtual undersea experience that debuted in the spring of 2012). Thanks to Manta, Journey to Atlantis, and Kraken, **SeaWorld** (p. 158) has a bit of zip and zing in its lineup, ensuring that those in need of an adrenaline rush aren't left out in the cold (or over at the other parks). But it's still the hands-on encounters, such as touching silky rays as they glide by you in droves, and up-close views of animals ranging from polar bears and penguins to killer whales, that draw the crowds. **Discovery Cove** (p. 169) is more of an island retreat than a theme park, where the big draw is the chance to take a dip with the dolphins. Rest and relax on the beach, swim along with the fishes, or explore the Grand Reef (the park's latest addition, slated to make its debut just as this book goes to print). **Aquatica** (p. 171) combines high-speed thrills (with raft rides and racing tunnels), up-close animal encounters (with Commerson's dolphins, colorful fish, brilliant macaws, and more), and a whimsical South Pacific atmosphere to create a unique eco-themed water park.







- **Go Wild at Gatorland:** Located between Orlando and Kissimmee, this throwback park is a great way to spend a half-day (an especially good choice for that extra time on your day of arrival) and costs less than a third of the price of some of the major theme parks. In addition to the animal exhibits, Gator Jumparoo, a signature show since the park opened in 1949, and Gator Wrestlin' are worth a look. Thrill seekers with a bit of extra cash can even zip along high above the crocs and gators (and lush grounds) below—the park's zipline adventure made its debut in summer 2011. Other options include a train ride, water playground, and aviary. If you have some extra spending money for a once-in-a-lifetime experience, consider becoming a Trainer for a Day. See p. 173.
- **Pamper Yourself with a Spa Treatment:** Rest, relax, and rejuvenate—you may very well need to if you intend on surviving all of the fast-paced activities you've planned. After a few days at the parks, it should almost be a requirement. **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-3000), the **Mandara Spa** at Universal's Portofino Bay Hotel (☎ 888/322-5541 or 407/503-1000) and at the WDW Dolphin (☎ 407/934-4000), the **Spa by Guerlain** at the Waldorf Astoria (☎ 407/597-5360 or 407/352-4000), the **Neu Lotus Spa** at the Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld (☎ 407/351-5555), and the **Spa at the Peabody** (☎ 407/345-4431 or 407/586-0000) all offer an array of fabulous treatments, some with salon services to boot. See p. 292 for additional details.

## THE best THRILL RIDES

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

- **Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey** (Islands of Adventure): The queue, as much a part of the experience as the ride itself, is signature Universal—and, like the ride, simply brilliant. The thrills, however, come once you board: Your “bench” swings and swirls, whooshes and whirls past the gigantic spherical screen, is immersed in spectacular special effects, and brings riders face to face with some of the Wizarding World's scariest characters. It's by far the best ride in Orlando. See p. 154.
- **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 the second-best ride in Orlando (just behind the Forbidden Journey). Your vehicle spins, twists, pitches, and dives through elaborate sets as Spider-Man tries to save the world (and you) from total annihilation. The chase ends in a dramatic, simulated 400-foot drop that feels an awful lot like the real thing. It doesn't offer the same type of thrills as a coaster, but it's sure to get your Spidey senses tingling. See p. 148.
- **Manta** (SeaWorld): Gliding, swooping, and diving (this one's a very smooth ride) at speeds of up to 56 mph, you'll fly face-down and headfirst (yikes!) along some 3,359 feet of twisted steel track. You'll spin through four inversions (including inline spins, flat spins, and a pretzel loop) and drop a heart-pounding 113 feet to within feet of



## ORLANDO'S BEST websites

1

THE BEST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD & ORLANDO

The Best Thrill Rides

Considering that Orlando welcomes over 50 million visitors each year, it should come as no surprise that 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 is all about **Hidden Mickeys** ([www.hiddenmickeys.org](http://www.hiddenmickeys.org)), a park tradition (see "Find the Hidden Mickeys," p. 98). These subtle Disney images can be found scattered throughout the realm, though they sometimes are in the eye, or imagination, of the beholder. **Deb's Unofficial Walt Disney World Information Guide** ([www.allears.net](http://www.allears.net)) is the best around, loaded with great tips and information on everything Disney, from the parks and resorts to the restaurants, nightlife, and much more. It now includes information on Universal Orlando as well.

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

available on the Disney site, allows you to plan your entire Disney vacation from start to finish—you can even create your very own customized theme-park maps to mirror the itinerary you've planned out online.

If you're looking to save cash, try **Mousesavers** ([www.mousesavers.com](http://www.mousesavers.com)), which features insider Disney tips and 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](http://www.universalorlando.com). You can order tickets (including exclusive Internet-only deals), make resort reservations, and find out about special events, among other things. Fish fans can get in the know about SeaWorld at [www.seaworld.com](http://www.seaworld.com) and Discovery Cove at [www.discoverycove.com](http://www.discoverycove.com).

Though a relative newcomer, [www.mouseearsandmore.com](http://www.mouseearsandmore.com) is filled with travel tips, in-depth reviews, and information on Disney, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld. Also included are reviews of the area's kid-friendliest restaurants and resorts, a boon for parents.

For general information about the city, accommodations, dining, nightlife, or special events, head to the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau site at [www.visitorlando.com](http://www.visitorlando.com). The *Orlando Weekly* ([www.orlandoweekly.com](http://www.orlandoweekly.com)) offers reviews and recommendations for arts, movies, music, restaurants, and more. The *Orlando Sentinel* ([www.orlandosentinel.com](http://www.orlandosentinel.com)) features Go2Orlando, a section loaded with information on the area's dining, attractions, shopping, and more.

the water below before it's over (which is in just under 3 min.)—in the end throwing out a spray of water some 14 feet high and some 60 feet long. See p. 164.

- **Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit** (Universal Studios Florida): You're the star as this high-speed, musically themed multisensory thriller has riders rocking out (while being recorded by a sophisticated on- and off-board video system) at speeds of up to 65 mph, twisting and turning, dipping and diving along the intertwining track set some 17 stories above the walkways of Universal Studios and the CityWalk lagoon. And did I mention the record-breaking noninverted loop? It's the world's largest. So crank up the tunes (you get to pick 'em ahead of time) and enjoy the ride; after it's over, you can pick up a copy (for a fee) of your ride—think music video with a high-tech twist. See p. 135.
- **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. 148.
- **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** (Disney's Hollywood Studios): You'll launch from 0 to 60 mph in 2.8 seconds, heading straight into the first of several inversions as 120 speakers in your "stretch limo" blast Aerosmith at (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. 100.
- **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** (Disney's Hollywood Studios): The name says it all. The ride transports guests into the Twilight Zone as a haunted hotel's service elevator slowly rises—only to plummet 13 stories, terrifying those inside. But the free-fall fun doesn't end there. The tower's computer program randomly alternates drop sequences to make sure you never experience the same ride twice. When you get off and your legs finally stop shaking, *some* of you will want to ride again. See p. 103.
- **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. 164.

## THE best WATER RIDES

- **Splash Mountain** (Magic Kingdom): You'll follow the adventure of Brer Rabbit and his friends, based on the 1946 movie *The Song of the South*, before taking a 52-foot vertical plunge straight down to the water below. See p. 60.
- **Summit Plummet** (Disney's Blizzard Beach): This one starts slow, with a lift ride (even in Florida's 100°F/38°C dog days) to the 120-foot summit. But it finishes with the (self-proclaimed) world's fastest body slide—a test of your courage and swimsuit—as it goes virtually straight down and has you moving sans vehicle at 60 mph by the end. See p. 118.
- **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. 149.
- **Jurassic Park River Adventure** (Islands of Adventure): A seemingly calm tour through the age of the dinosaurs suddenly takes a turn for the worse. Before you

know it, your only escape route involves a dramatic 85-foot drop almost straight down—it's touted as the "longest, steepest, fastest water descent ever built." See p. 151.

- **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges** (Islands of Adventure): Up to 12 riders splash and churn through a wacky series of twists and turns and dips and drops (some pretty intense) in order to help Popeye save his sweetie, Olive Oyl, from the dastardly clutches of Bluto. No one will walk away from this one without getting completely soaked—it's the wettest and wildest raft ride in town. See p. 150.
- **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. 164.

## THE best OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- **Catch a Wave at Disney's Typhoon Lagoon** (Walt Disney World; ☎ 407/939-7529): Learn how to "hang ten" from the pros—instructors from the Ron Jon Surf School (based in Cocoa Beach) head inland to landlocked Orlando twice a week (Tues and Fri) so that visitors can learn to surf without even making their way to the coast. The 2½-hour sessions take place before the park opens to the public (each is limited to just 14 people). See p. 115.
- **Clip in and Zip off Along Florida's Wilder Side** (Kissimmee; ☎ 800/393-5297): High above the crocs and gators (and lush grounds) below, Gatorland's Screamin' Zip Line adventure takes adventurous visitors on a high-flying heart-pounding ride of a lifetime, zipping from tower to tower (with multiple levels to launch off from) at speeds of up to 30 mph and heights upwards of some 65 feet above the critters below. See p. 173.
- **Hit the Links and Fairways as You Follow in the Footsteps of Big-Name Golfers** (Orlando; ☎ 407/260-2288 or 800/486-0948): Central Florida lays claim to an unrivaled number of championship golf courses. Many have either been played and/or designed by some of the biggest heavyweights in the world of the little white ball (Arnold Palmer, Greg Norman, Jack Nicklaus, and Reese Jones—just to name a few). Tom Fazio's Osprey Ridge course is located in the Bonnet Creek area, a Jack Nicklaus–designed course can be found at the Grand Cypress Resort, and Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club is one of the most well-known courses in the area. See p. 183.
- **Go on an Eco Safari at Forever Florida** (Orlando; ☎ 407/957-9794): Explore the real Florida at this 4,700-acre wildlife conservation area where alligators, black bears, white-tailed deer, and the endangered Florida panther all cohabitate. Adventure options here include horseback rides, zip line rides, a canopy cycle adventure (think zip line, but with a cycle-inspired twist), or a swamp buggy ride. See p. 178.
- **Make Your Way Through Marshes on a Boggy Creek Airboat** (Orlando; ☎ 407/344-9550): Lurking throughout the unspoiled wetlands of Boggy Creek, among the reeds and cattails, are an abundance of water birds, turtles, and alligators. Adventurous visitors (who aren't afraid to head out after dark) will find the nighttime airboat rides through the region even more exciting than the daytime outings. See p. 181.

# 1 THE best FAMILY EXPERIENCES

- **Take a Surrey Ride Along the BoardWalk** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/934-7639 or 407/824-3000): Rent an old-fashioned 4-passenger surrey (complete with colorful fringe on top) and ride past Disney's turn-of-the-20th-century BoardWalk (its sherbet-colored storefronts and striped awnings reminiscent of Coney Island), the Swan & Dolphin, and the Beach & Yacht Club resorts—all of them centered on the shimmering waters of Crescent Lake. Some of the carriages are equipped for tinier tots, with special seats set up in the front making the sights easy to see. **Note:** The experience is particularly good at night, when the BoardWalk comes alive with street performers, carnival-style games, and entertainment—the lights and fireworks from Epcot's IllumiNations are often visible in the background. See p. 283.
- **Raise the Flag at Disney's Wilderness Resort** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/939-7429 or 407/824-3200): Sitting high atop Disney's Wilderness Lodge are several flags—and each and every morning a family is picked to participate in the resort's flag-raising ceremony (only those staying at the lodge are eligible). Here's how: When checking into the resort, simply request to be part of the ceremony—depending on how many families are ahead of you, you may be picked the very next morning (or a few days later). See p. 290.
- **Sing-A-Longs Around a Roaring Campfire at Fort Wilderness** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/939-7429 or 407/239-1234): Any Disney resort guest can join in the fun at the free campfire program at Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground. Activities include a sing-a-long and marshmallow roast (with appearances by Chip and Dale), followed by a Disney movie shown right in the great outdoors. See p. 296.
- **Ride Along with the Kids** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/939-7529): At select Disney resorts, guests can take a 25-minute carriage ride through the grounds for around \$45. Usually offered nightly between 6 and 9:30pm, the carriages can accommodate up to 4 adults, or 2 adults and 3 children (under age 10). Participating resorts include Disney's Port Orleans Riverside, Disney's Wilderness Lodge, and Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort. At Disney's Fort Wilderness Campground, guests can hitch up the horses for a 45-minute wagon ride around the campgrounds (\$8 per adult, \$5 per child). Wagon rides depart from Pioneer Hall nightly at 7 and 9:30pm. See p. 184.
- **Play a Round (or Maybe Two) at Universal's Hollywood Drive-In Golf** (Orlando; ☎ 407/363-8000): Putt your way through haunted graveyards and past familiar flying saucers at this wildly amusing '50s-inspired mini-golf course (18 of its 36 holes dedicated to sci-fi flicks, the remaining 18 taken straight out of hokey horror movies). Not nearly as edgy as the park's main attractions, the course is appropriate for the entire family (just keep in mind that the later in the day you play, the more likely you'll be playing alongside a few late-night rabble-rousers heading home from the CityWalk clubs). See p. 131.

## THE best FREE & INEXPENSIVE EXPERIENCES

- **Stroll Through Thousands of Beautiful Blooms at the Harry P. Leu Gardens** (Orlando; ☎ 407/246-2620): For a mere \$7 entry fee you can explore 50 acres of

blooming botanical gardens (as well as a meticulously restored 19th-c. home). This peaceful retreat features flora ranging from azaleas to annuals, and Camphor trees to camellias, the tropical gardens bursting with color and creativity. See p. 179.

- **Play at Downtown Disney's LEGO Store:** Kids won't even notice the spectacular over-the-top attractions located right nearby once they become engrossed in showing off their creative capabilities as they build with the famous blocks. Building sites and bins filled with LEGOs of every shape, size, and color are scattered throughout the store's extensive covered play areas (located just outside the shop, with smaller play spaces located inside). Spectacular larger-than life-size LEGO models will provide plenty of inspiration. See p. 249.
- **Relax Around One of Orlando's Incredible Pools:** Orlando boasts some of the most impressive themed pool and play areas anywhere around (ranging from meticulously landscaped lagoon-style pools lined with towering palm trees and posh cabanas, to pools created around entire water parks—climbing nets, splash zones, and slides galore among the watery attractions). Top hotel pool picks include the Hyatt Grand Cypress, Universal's Hard Rock Hotel, Universal's Royal Pacific Resort, Disney's Yacht Club and Beach Club, and the Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld. Kids (and parents who can stand the action) will especially love the pool at the Nickelodeon Hotel. See p. 277.
- **Take a Walk on the Wild Side at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/939-7429 or 407/938-4799): Go on an African safari in Orlando. At Disney's Animal Kingdom, over 200 mammals and birds roam free on the resort's three savannas (separated from guests and onlookers by barriers lining the winding walkways—without obstructing the view). Safari guides are on hand along the trail to answer your questions, some of them carrying night-vision binoculars that allow an illuminated view. The best time to catch the animals is at dusk, though guests of the hotel may find early mornings an optimal time to view as well. There's no cost to visit the resort (if you're not already a guest) and self-parking is free. See p. 289.

## THE best FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

You can get haute cuisine in Orlando and there's plenty of fine dining to choose from, but most of the city's best dining experiences are just that—experiences. The food is almost beside the point, though the cuisine is often quite good (and aficionados rightly swear that Butterbeer is a culinary marvel).

- **Eat Your Way Around the World at Epcot's World Showcase Restaurants** (Epcot; ☎ 407/939-3463): Epcot's World Showcase is home to Orlando's best collection of theme restaurants in a single 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 spot you choose. See p. 190.
- **Catch a Dinner and a Movie at the Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant** (Disney's Hollywood Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463): Your table is set inside a 1950s-era convertible, your carhop (umm . . . waitress) serves you popcorn as an appetizer, and you can zone out on sci-fi flicks on a giant movie screen while you eat. It's an out-of-this-world experience. See p. 203.
- **Travel Back to a Time When Manners Were a Must at the 50's Prime Time Café** (Disney's Hollywood Studios; ☎ 407/939-3463): Ozzie and Harriet would feel right at home inside this replica of Mom's kitchen (ca. 1950), where classic TV

shows play on black-and-white screens. Servers may threaten to withhold dessert (choices include s'mores) if you don't finish your meatloaf, so clean that plate. And no elbows on the table! See p. 202.

- **Dine with Your Favorite Disney Character** (Walt Disney World; ☎ 407/939-3463): Kids under the age of 10 will be delighted to dine with Mickey, Donald, Cinderella, Winnie the Pooh (the Crystal Palace), among a slew of others, at one of Disney World's popular character dining experiences. Offered both at the theme parks as well as at select Disney resort hotels, character dining experiences are generally buffet-style meals (though a few offer family-style or preplated meals) where throughout your meal, characters will visit each table and interact with your party. It's not an inexpensive option, but its popularity is justifiably earned.
- **Down a Pint of Butterbeer** (Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure; ☎ 407/363-8000): It's not quite a pint (really more of a cup), but regardless of its size, Butterbeer might be the smoothest and most satisfying drink that will ever reach your lips. Taken straight from the pages of the wildly popular Harry Potter books, this once fictitious drink (a decadent and delicious cross between root beer and cream soda—a description that doesn't really do it justice) is served up cold or frozen at locations throughout the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

## THE best EXPERIENCES FOR ADULTS

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

- **Visit Epcot:** Of all the major theme parks in Orlando, this one, thanks to its scientific and cultural themes, is the most adult-oriented of the bunch. Shop, stroll, and dine your way through the nations of the World Showcase; take a behind-the-scenes tour of the park's horticulture or architecture; or explore the technological- and scientific-themed attractions of Future World. See p. 75.
- **Swim with Dolphins at Discovery Cove:** It's popular with families, but thanks to the park's 1,000-guest limit on daily entry, adults won't get overwhelmed by kids at SeaWorld's sister park. There are plenty of places to catch rays in relative serenity, and the dolphin swim's a thrill at any age. See p. 169.
- **Explore Winter Park:** This upscale town north of Orlando oozes old money and Southern charm. And the pace here is decidedly slower than the mad rush of the theme parks (adults usually love it; kids get bored). Stroll Park Avenue's shops and restaurants, or take a boat tour along the lake. See p. 251.
- **Party the Night Away at Universal CityWalk:** Until Disney finishes "re-imagining" Pleasure Island as Hyperion Wharf, Universal's nighttime entertainment district is now the place to hang for the 21-and-older set. Top clubs include **the groove**, **Rising Star**, **Pat O'Brien's**, and the **Red Coconut Club**. See the "At CityWalk" section in chapter 7, "Walt Disney World & Orlando Entertainment & Nightlife."



Over at the resorts, in this case Disney's Coronado Springs, **Rix** (p. 266) is the hottest place to party the night away for a 30-something crowd and visiting celebs and VIPs.

- **Head for the Circus:** Cirque du Soleil, that is. Forget about finding any animals, though. Cirque's stylish La Nouba combines theatrics, acrobatics, and the incredible style for which the Montreal-based troupe is known. It's an incredible (albeit pricey) way to spend an evening in Orlando. See p. 262.
- **Rev Your Engines at the Richard Petty Driving Experience and the Exotic Car Experience:** If you've ever watched the Daytona 500 or the Indy 500 race and imagined yourself at the wheel, this attraction is for you. Ride shotgun in a real NASCAR race car (or European sports car), or drive yourself (after a crash classroom course—no pun intended). It's an adrenaline-pumper you won't find in a theme park, and nobody under 18 is allowed (height and weight restrictions apply). See p. 121.

# 2

# WALT DISNEY WORLD & ORLANDO IN DEPTH

It's hard to believe that Walt Disney World first opened its gates some 40 years ago. When Disney World first opened its gates to the public, one doubts if anyone but Walt Disney, the original Imagineer, could have predicted what lay ahead. Disney's legacy, while commercialized over the years, has practically become a rite of passage, not to mention a national shrine to which visitors flock by the millions. And if you have kids, a visit here is almost a requirement.

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The opening of Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom in 1971 started a tourist boom in Central Florida the likes of which has never been seen elsewhere. Today, the Kingdom That Walt Built entices visitors with four theme parks; a dozen smaller attractions; a shopping, dining, and entertainment district; tens of thousands of hotel rooms; a vacation club (otherwise known as timeshares); scores of restaurants; and even three cruise ships (soon to be four). Universal Orlando adds to the dizzying array with two theme parks, three luxury resorts, and an entertainment complex that's home to several unique restaurants, clubs, shops, and entertainment venues. SeaWorld tosses in three theme parks and a small entertainment, dining, and shopping district of its own. And those are just the major players. All in all, there are just shy of 100 attractions, both large and small, that will keep you coming back for more. There are also plenty of restaurants, ranging from fine dining to on-the-fly fast food; many of the more casual restaurants are as themed as the parks themselves. And the city doesn't lack for hotels and resorts either, with roughly 119,000 rooms, villas, and suites to go around by the end of 2012. 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. More than 300 lakes, springs, and rivers are here 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.

## ORLANDO TODAY

Visitors may flock to the theme parks and Orlando does rely rather heavily upon tourism dollars to maintain (and grow) its economy, but there is more to this city than Mickey. Today, the Orlando area is one of the top 10 locations in the country for business. The city is home to an array of corporate and regional headquarters as well as regional distribution centers for a diverse spectrum of industries (ranging from product manufacturing to high-tech research for aerospace, biotechnology, digital media, and many more), greatly broadening the city’s economic spectrum. Among the powerhouse companies you’ll find here are Tupperware Corporation, Siemens Energy, Lockheed Martin, and Electronic Arts.

While maintaining a heavy dependence on travel and tourism (the industry accounting for just shy of 25% of the area’s private labor force, not to mention an economic impact of over \$28 billion in visitor spending alone), the city continues to expand and grow, focusing on up-and-coming areas of industry including, but certainly not limited to, the medical and health service industry. An emerging “medical city” at Lake Nona (in conjunction with the University of Central Florida College of Medicine) and a University of Florida research center are among the many projects that will potentially have an economic impact of over \$7 billion. Statistics indicate that the Orlando area economy has shown continual growth—albeit more slowly than in the past—that exceeds precession levels.

Of course, any discussion regarding Orlando’s current economic or political state almost always goes back to the Mouse having a hand (or a big white glove as it were) in just about everything that goes on in O-Town. Disney makes sure that it has a say when it comes to the area’s interests and investments and let there be no doubt that Mickey carries quite a bit of political clout. Currently hanging in the balance is a major multi-million dollar expansion at the Orlando International Airport, renovations to the Citrus Bowl (that would help the venue to compete for more high-profile events), and the completion of the Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts (not to mention projects related to the recently approved SunRail, a 61-mile commuter train scheduled to launch in 2014). As all of the proposed projects have the potential to impact the travel and tourism industry, there’s no doubt that Disney will have some say in the way it all plays out.

That said, as a visitor, you’re likely most concerned about the theme parks. The recession hit the area pretty hard, taking a huge toll on tourism and leaving the city’s hotels, restaurants, and parks scrambling for business. Though some major new projects opened during the slump (the eco-themed water park Aquatica and the immensely popular Wizarding World of Harry Potter come to mind), for a long while the mantra in Orlando was “refurbish and maintain.” Things have evened out and improved economically over the last 2 years or so, and Disney, Universal, and Sea-World are once again in building mode, albeit not quite as enthusiastically as they were during the late 1990s.

In 2012, new hotels (such as Disney’s Art of Animation Resort) began to open their doors; Disney embarked on a major expansion and renovation of Fantasyland; Universal added a number of attractions, including Hollywood Drive-In Golf; and

SeaWorld's Turtle Trek splashed on to the scene. And there's no sign the current construction boom is over: Universal has announced plans to add on to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Disney is plotting the reopening (reimagining) of Pleasure Island as Hyperion Wharf and a major expansion of Animal Kingdom, and SeaWorld is planning on tacking on an entire area devoted to Antarctica. It's a sure bet that these newcomers will be joined by even newer rides, resorts, and shopping and dining experiences in the future.

All that building, however, costs money and the parks continue to raise prices (the cost of a single day at one of the major parks was raised in the spring of 2012 to \$89 for an adult) even amid the current uncertain economic climate. But people continue to display a willingness to pay the price (2012 is shaping up to be a banner year in terms of visitors), leading one to wonder if there really is a limit to the amount visitors will spend to consort with Mickey, Harry Potter, and Shamu. Time will tell, but the pace of progress in Orlando shows no sign of stopping anytime soon.

## ORLANDO 101: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE MOUSE MOVED IN

You can't truly understand Orlando without finding out how it came to be a tourism behemoth in the first place. 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 50 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.

### 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.

**SETTLERS VS. 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 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 today is 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

**1939–45** World War II revives Orlando’s ailing economy.

**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.

**1982** Epcot opens with vast hoopla.

**1989** WDW launches Disney–MGM Studios (offering a behind-the-scenes look at Tinseltown), Typhoon Lagoon (a 56-acre water theme park), and Pleasure Island (a nightclub district for adults).

continues

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 of Orlando 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.

**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, featuring stomach-churning thrill rides, opens. 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.

**2001** Church Street Station closes its doors for good. The tourist industry takes a blow due to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.