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Visiting Orlando & Florida



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Perfect Florida
Villas

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www.perfectfloridavillas.com

Visiting Orlando

A truthful and informative guide to visiting Orlando and other parts of Florida.



This guide is primarily of use to visitors to Florida from the UK. Visitors from elsewhere will no doubt find a lot of the information of some use. The main differences are the flight information etc. Almost all of the information within this guide is based on my personal experiences however; some information has been added courtesy of Wikipedia.

About the Author:

Steve Sewell is a great lover of Florida and has been visiting Orlando and other Florida

destinations since 1990. He has created a number of websites and blogs on the subject of Florida such as www.floridalifeandleisure.com this is his latest website and is still being built up. Others include www.perfectfloridaguide.com a guide with information on all things to do with Florida. He is a partner with Guy Harwood in a villa rental website www.perfectfloridavillas.com after he became a villa owner and decided to improve the marketing of his vacation home.

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Before You Travel

Preparation

If you want things to run smoothly, well, as smoothly as possible it is best to know before you go so that you can be prepared for some of the things that you will face and hopefully make it a less stressful journey.

If you are an International traveller say, from the UK, the first thing to decide when planning your trip is whether or not to stay at the Airport the night before. This of course depends on how far away you live from the Airport. I live around 3-4 hours away from Gatwick and probably 3 hours from Manchester. I prefer to travel down to the airport the day before and enjoy a good night's rest at an airport hotel. Plus I think it adds an extra day to your trip! The thing you don't want especially if travelling with small children is to be leaving home in the middle of the night and arriving with not much time to spare at the airport. One great thing about Virgin Atlantic is that they have "Twilight Check-in" This means that you can check your luggage in after 12 noon up till 9pm the day before you fly. This is a great service and means that you don't have to cart your heavy suitcases with you to hotel rooms. If you do decide to drive down prior to your flight, make sure you leave yourself with more than enough time.

Consider whether you want to take your children's Pushchair/Stroller and Car Seat. It is compulsory for children under 4 years of age to have a child safety seat. It can cost around \$10 per day to hire one. With the pushchair, you may wish to leave yours behind and either buy one or hire them as you need them in the parks. I personally think it is best to buy one and dispose of it when you leave. You can get them from Wal-Mart for around \$15. If you are staying in a vacation villa it is highly likely that they will have one that you can use.

Decide whether or not you are going to hire a car or use public transport (very limited) or shuttle services and taxis. I **strongly** advise you to get a car. There is so much more that you could see and do with one. Plus you are not tied to shuttle bus timetables and forking out for taxis hand over fist.

Items to make sure you have with you prior to leaving home.

- Airline tickets
- Hotel Vouchers & Car Hire Voucher
- Passports (It is a good idea to photocopy & laminate your passport page and use it for id.
- Driving License (Both Parts)
- Attraction Tickets
- Foreign Currency and Travellers Cheques.
- Medications and tablets etc.

Chapter 2: Travelling to Florida

The Airport

When checking in at the airport make sure you have all your documents ready, passports for all travellers, flight tickets or eTickets etc. I always think it is a good idea to keep all of your documents in a handy sized wallet that contains all of the above along with Drivers Licence, any vouchers for Car Hire, Hotel rooms and so on. This then should be kept in your carry-on luggage. You will answer some security questions here. Once your bags are checked in, you may have time to do some duty free shopping. Just don't buy too much so that you have too much carry-on luggage. Remember that Airports no longer make flight announcements they will tell you on check –in your departure gate and to keep an eye on the monitors for flight information. If you have time it is a good idea to fill out the Green Visa Waiver forms (I-95W) that you were given at check-in. If you weren't given any or made a mistake don't worry they will give them to you on the flight. If you do make a mistake don't alter anything just get a new one. You will have probably already done the advanced passenger information, if not you do that here. This just has all your details and where you are staying in the US. This info is sent over prior to you leaving your home country. You can find out more about [Advanced Passenger Information and Visa Waiver forms](#) here.

Duty-Free Shopping

Duty Free shopping in the UK is only available for travel to non EU countries, so you are ok to buy what you like. When you go through the checkout you will be asked for a boarding card just to verify that. I would point out that things are not always cheaper in duty free than on board the aircraft or indeed in the USA! If you are a smoker, quite often the cigarettes are cheaper on the aircraft and if you don't mind smoking Marlboro and such like, they can be cheaper in the US depending on the exchange rate. The same goes with perfumes & men's cologne. Don't bother taking any alcohol with you, unless it is something that you don't think you will be able to buy over there as again it more than likely will be cheaper there. There is also the duty free shop in the Florida airport for when you return.

The Flight

Boarding the flight can take upwards of an hour and most airlines ask that you be at the gate an hour before departure. From the point of checking in your luggage to boarding you will pass through several security checks. The rules for what you can take onboard with you are constantly changing and it is advisable to check with the airline the current policy. If you are taking laptops with you you may well be asked to take them out of their case/bag and place them on the scanner, remove any coins and any other metal objects from your clothing and place them in the receptacle provided and put them through the scanner along with your entire carry-on luggage. You will have to dispose of cigarette lighters but you may have a box of matches?? You may be asked to remove your footwear and place them on the scanner. Once you pass through the detector you will be able to gather up all of your belongings and continue to the duty free shops. Before finally boarding the flight you may be pulled over yet again for a quick search.

There are, basically, two types of flights to the US, Chartered and Scheduled. Charter flights like Thompson fly (Formerly Britannia airways), My travel, Monarch Airlines etc. tend to be more for the

package holidaymaker and are not very flexible if you wanted say, 15 nights or more. They tend to offer 7, 14 and in some case 21 nights. They tend to give you less baggage allowance per person than the Scheduled flights and if you intend to do some serious shopping over there you will need as much as you can get! Leg room tends to be less and you have to pay for things on board the aircraft in most cases including meals on some and then pay for privilege of guaranteed seats together add another £15 for adults and £7 for kids! Add all this up and you will find it's not so much cheaper, if any cheaper, than scheduled flights. All Charter flights use Sanford Airport which is further out of Orlando. It will take around 40 minutes to get to where you're staying. We prefer Scheduled flights such as **Virgin Atlantic**, **British Airways** and almost all of the US airlines. With the US airlines though, it will almost inevitably include a stop and change of aircraft at one of their hubs. **Delta** use Atlanta, **Continental** use Newark for example. The UK Scheduled airlines do fly nonstop and fly to Orlando International Airport (MCO).

Virgin Atlantic

We always fly Virgin as that is our preference. They are very popular and do provide very good service. They fly 2 flights a day (3 in the summer months) from London Gatwick and 1 flight a day from Manchester. Their Aircraft are very new and they use the Boeing 747-400 on this route. The baggage allowance is 2 pieces of luggage not exceeding 23kg each per person. They also offer twilight check in where you can check in from 12 noon the day before you fly so if you are staying on or near the airport you can get rid of your luggage and have less hassle the day of the flight. Also on your return flight you can check in your luggage at Downtown Disney from 08:30 on the day of your flight saving you from going to the airport and giving you the rest of the day to do your own thing. The in flight entertainment is through seat back TV's and depending on the type of system your aircraft has, consists of:

5 movie channels

2 kids channels (featuring a combination of movies and TV programming)

2 TV channel which works on a cycle basis showing a selection of our current TV programming

14 audio channels ranging from soul music to Classical

Moving sky map display which plots the aircraft's flight path

Or

10 movie channels

2 kids channels (featuring a combination of movies and TV programming)

8 TV channels featuring music, sport & news, comedy and kids programming plus the exclusive Virgin Travel guide

14 audio channels ranging from soul to Classical music

A choice of 35 Nintendo Games

Moving Sky map display which plots the aircraft's flight path

Depending on the Aircraft some have the newer system some don't. Eventually they will all be fitted with V-port in flight entertainment system. Which is Video on demand you will be able to rewind, fast forward and choose what to watch and when.

British Airways

has done a lot to catch up with Virgin including seat back TV's etc. The aircraft used on this route is the Boeing 777 although not as big as the 747 it still is a wide bodied aircraft and does give decent legroom.

The other US airlines tend to come up cheaper on price but you will be faced with around a 13+ hour journey as opposed to 8-9 hour flight. The plus side is that you do your immigration at the port of entry so when you arrive at Orlando you just pick up your luggage and pick up your car and away you go. There are lot of people prefer the US carriers. For all carriers the return flight is always quicker as they catch the jet stream back which give them a high speed tail wind which can knock an hour off the flight.

The flight could be 9 + hours, so again if you have children, try and take something to keep them occupied. Some of the airlines have seatback TV's with some kids programming. When travelling with Virgin Atlantic kids get a rucksack type bag with lots of goodies in them, this helps to while away some time. By the time that you arrive at your Airport, be it Orlando International (MCO) or Sanford (SFD) or Miami (MIA) you will be feeling a little weary but will find renewed energy at the prospect of being in the Sun and fun of Orlando or wherever you have entered Florida! Except for small children, this has been a long tiring journey for them and they may start to resent the fact that they are not tucked up in bed!

Arriving in Florida

I am going to quote the procedure for Orlando International Airport & Sanford; there may not be similar procedures at other Florida Airports.

Immigration & Customs

Once you arrive at immigration, again get out your document wallet and produce your passports, your correctly completed visa waiver forms for all travellers. They can be quite strict here and they have a lot of power and can refuse you admission if they so wish. So be polite and don't argue with them over anything. You will have your picture taken and your index finger scanned.

Luggage:

Once through this part you pick up your bags from the carousel and proceed to Customs. Make sure you have not brought anything made from animal products, fruit etc. Though the airline should have advised you of this before you land in Florida. The amount of luggage you bring will no doubt be more than you need. It is something we all do, here though, it is even more so. You will bring stuff from the UK that will never see the light of day. Mainly because on your first shopping trip you will see such good bargains for shorts, t-shirts, swimming gear etc. You will like these much more than those you bought in the UK, so you will start to wear them there. So if you do intend to do some shopping try and think of this before you leave home. Many people take an empty suitcase with them or put one inside another one on the outward journey. I have done this many times and on occasion have still had to buy something else to bring the goods home! I will cover shopping a lot more in detail later in the book.

Car Hire Pick up or Transfer

Final stop, and the last time you will need your document wallet is to either pick up your rental car or get your airport transfer to where you are staying. You are finally on your way. Although it sounds like a lot of hassle it is not really and it is better to be safe than sorry. It is well worth it anyway! You can find more information about Car Rental pickup at [Driving in Orlando](#) and at [Orlando Car Hire](#)

When you arrive at the car rental desk, whether it be Dollar, Alamo or Budget, you will need to produce your UK driving licence, both parts, for all the drivers that are on your vehicle rental agreement. You will also need your rental voucher. You will have received this either with your travel documents if you have booked a package holiday or if you booked it direct from one of the many car rental suppliers on the net. Generally there is a queue/line here and you normally wait around 20 minutes. Sometimes if there are a group of people in your party it would be a good idea to get the driver/drivers to go straight to the rental desks whilst the rest of the group attend to the luggage. It is important that all drivers sign the rental agreement for insurance purposes. You will have to leave a credit card imprint at the desk and, depending what type of reservation you have, you have to pay for a tank of fuel at inflated prices, meaning you can bring the vehicle back empty. They may try to talk you into upgrading your vehicle, unless you really do want to, don't bother. It's more expensive to do it that way and also you will probably get the vehicle they are trying to get you to upgrade to anyway as they have run out of your type of vehicle. The latest thing now is to give

you the option of a daily fee to use the tolls free of charge. This may be of some benefit for those that have to pass through tolls quite regularly to get to and from the accommodation. I believe that you only get charged if you use it, so if you don't pass through a toll for 3 days then there is no charge. If you do pass through one 10 times one day you only pay the daily rate. Apart from that don't bother with any of the insurance top ups that they offer if you have purchased all inclusive from the UK.

Dollar Car Rental:

They will allocate a car for you based on the voucher you have they more than likely will try to talk you into an upgrade. One thing that may be of interest, if you decide to visit Florida on a regular basis, or every year, you can go to the dollar website and sign up for their "Dollar Express" card. Online you submit all your driving licence details etc. They are then stored on the system and they have a special express line at the desks which has hardly anyone in it, so this can really speed things up.

Alamo Car Rental:

They will allocate you a car based on your voucher and again will try to get you to upgrade and do all the things Dollar do. You then go to the garage and get to pick the car that you want from your category section of the garage. Nice if you don't like Red cars for example!

Budget Car Rental:

Much the same procedure as Dollar.

Vehicles get allocated to size of party if booked through a holiday company such as Virgin holidays etc. The thing to remember about US cars the boot/trunk is normally quite small.

For more information on Car Hire [visit](#).

Collecting your Car and Finding Your Way

This is probably the first time you have been outside since you landed and hopefully the warm/hot Florida air will greet you! Here at last!! Finding your vehicle, with Dollar, they will give you the agreement at the desk, you need to hand it over to the clerk in a hut inside the car park, across the way, where you will be given the keys to your car, they will also point you in the right direction to the numbered bay where your car is parked. With Alamo, you go find the car in your category and once you have settled on the one you want you drive off. The keys are inside the vehicle and as you leave the Alamo section of the car park there is a booth where you hand over your agreement and the operator lets you out. In all cases though, once you find your vehicle take a quick look around it and make sure there is no damage to it. Adjust the mirrors and seats (most are electric operated by a switch down the side of the seat). Turn the key in the ignition and start the engine, most cars run very quiet on tick over. If you have never driven an automatic before, put your right foot on the brake pedal and select the gear you want either "D" (Drive) to go forwards or "R" (Reverse) to go backwards, mostly the parking brake is not engaged but if it is release it. A lot of cars have a pedal that you push down to engage the parking brake and a pull out lever to release it just at the bottom of the dash, although one or two have a push on push off action. Once it is disengaged release your foot of the brake and the vehicle will move slowly back or forward whichever. Another thing for people new to automatics, forget about your left foot! It is surprising how many people try to use the left foot for braking which results in a classic display of kangaroo petrol!!

You then head out of the garage car park; this is probably the trickiest part of the journey. Depending on where you are staying, depends on which exit you need to take. Generally, if you are staying anywhere near Disney, Kissimmee, most of the villa communities or anywhere on the Hwy 192 then you would need the South Exit. If you are staying anywhere near International Drive, Universal or Sea World then you need the North Exit. The North exit leads to the Hwy 528 (Toll) (Beachline Expressway, used to be called the Beeline expressway) has the signs saying “Orlando West and Area Attractions and Tampa” The other one says “Cocoa Beach & Daytona” You don’t want this exit unless of course you are staying in Daytona or the Cocoa area. If you take the South Exit it leads to the 417 (Toll) This road takes you down to the Interstate 4 around the Disney 192 area. It is handy to take some small denomination Dollar bills with you for these tolls or if you have saved quarters from your previous trips don’t forget to bring them.

Sanford Airport.

Sanford is about 40 minutes from the Orlando area where you need to be. Once you have cleared immigration and customs and have left the building through the sliding doors. You cross the road and you will see the car hire building. There you pick up your keys and agreement and walk out to the car park and collect your car. There are basically 2 ways to get to Orlando and Kissimmee from here. First, as you leave the airport you will see a sign for the Hwy 417 (Toll). This is the same toll road that is near Orlando Airport and all you need to do is to stay on that road till you come to the 528 (Beachline Expressway) If you are on International drive area, just follow the signs for the Convention Center. If you are staying in a villa or Kissimmee then stay on the 417 till you get to the exit for the 192 or the Interstate 4 to get to the Villa accommodation. The second choice is more for seasoned US visitors and that is to go past the ramp for the 417 and keep on going till you reach the interstate 4. Then take the ramp for Tampa. Going this way is cheaper but is a lot busier as you drive through the city of Orlando, you will also see the turn offs for International Drive, Sea World, the 192 and the 27 where a lot of the villa accommodation is.

Driving in Florida.

Many people on their first visit to Orlando or other parts of Florida are filled with trepidation about driving there. It's not as bad as you think believe me. I would sooner drive there than round some of our major cities and towns any day.

Things to remember, obviously drive on the right (seems more natural anyway) but this is when you have to be extra careful, especially when tired after a long flight, first thing in the morning or turning out of a car park or petrol station for example. I tend to make more mistakes when I return home than I do there.

If you are the driver make sure you carry your driving licence and rental agreement with you in the vehicle. You could be asked to produce them if stopped by the Police and it is required by law.

Yellow school buses. These have a special rule that means if they stop to take on or let off passengers, traffic in both directions must stop too. If you are driving in the opposite direction on a dual carriageway then you need not stop.

Rain: If it rains in Florida it is compulsory to have your vehicle lights on. Rain can be pretty torrential in Florida and the wipers just don't cut it, if visibility is poor, pull over and wait for the rain to ease.

Stop Signs: It is important that when you come to a stop sign or you are turning right on Red that the wheels come to a full stop. It could save you getting a ticket.

Child Seats: Children under 4 years of age must be seated in a child seat by law. You can bring your own from the UK or hire one from the car rental desk. (Check Prices first) All drivers and adult passengers must wear seatbelts at all times whether in the front or back.

Drink Driving is very strict in Florida. It will also invalidate your rental agreement insurance. So if you drink please don't drive. It is also illegal to have alcohol in the car. It needs to be in the trunk (Boot).

Turning Right on Red: One good thing is that you can turn Right on a Red traffic light (Unless it says "No right turn on Red" above the lights.) Traffic lights tend to be over the centre of the junction rather than the start of it so remember to pull up shorter.

Overtaking (Passing) you can pass on either side of vehicles on 3 lane highways. However they do recommend that you return to the right lane after overtaking.

Giving way at Junctions with no priority: If you come to a crossroads that has no clear priority vehicles proceed in the order that they arrive at the stop sign. This works surprisingly well. There are not too many of these though, you will only find these on smaller roads such as housing communities and I think there is one at the North end of I Drive near the Prime one shopping mall.

Air Conditioning in Cars: All of the cars have Air conditioning and you need it too!! After the car being stood all day long at a theme park it resembles something like an oven. What I do is open the door and start the car, close the door and wait a couple of minutes while the air con blasts away to cool it down a bit.

Refuelling: This is a bit different to the UK. Some of the pumps work differently to the UK involving lifting the nozzle housing to start the fuel flow. Also many Gas Stations insist on pre payment of fuel. Gas prices are still higher than they were a few years ago but are still a lot cheaper than the UK. Just also bear in mind that something like a Dodge Durango, a lovely vehicle but will only give you something like 12-15 miles to the Gallon.

Road Signs: These tend to not give a lot of warning so keep your eyes peeled. Don't worry if you miss your exit as most places have gaps where you can u-turn, except the interstate where you will just have to go to the next exit. You will experience a lot of u-turns as this is quite the norm. It is the only way to access some places especially on International Drive. You can see where you want to be but there is a grass central reservation preventing you so what you do is go further down the road and do a u-turn at the lights (If permitted) or there will be a section cut out of the central reservation to allow for u-turns. The older section of I drive is not a problem as there is no reservation.

Speeding Tickets: Can be quite expensive in Florida and generally they do drive slower than we do in the UK so be aware of this. Also if there is an area where there are construction workers the fines are doubled.

Places to Stay

We have been travelling to Florida for the Last 16 years on trips lasting from 3 weeks to 12 weeks and over that time we have built up a wealth of knowledge which we can now share with you taking the time and guesswork out of your planning. The aim is to save you time and money. Why give a high street travel agent your hard earned cash? They have had it good for many years and now since the birth of the Internet they are really feeling the pinch. It is so easy now to plan and book your trip, using several different suppliers if you know where to look.

Choosing the type of accommodation you need is pretty much an individual choice. Some people prefer villa, condo or vacation home accommodation while others prefer hotel accommodation either on the ever popular International Drive or the Hwy 192 area in Kissimmee. Hotels come with either two double beds (Queen) or one King size. Both places have their merits but I always used to prefer the International Drive area. It never ceases to amaze me when I watch some of these satellite TV travel channels how they put up the price on screen of some hotel or other stating that the price is FROM £xxx BASED on 4 sharing the room. It's only when you start to add it up including the supplements as there are only 2 sharing and the tax and the fact that you are not in the "FROM" price range that it is not that cheap! You can do it on your own quite easily and save yourself a bundle in the process. I am now a little biased towards villa accommodation as this is what I have



come to prefer. If you would like to consider staying in rented villa accommodation feel free to visit our site at www.perfectfloridavillas.com there are many beautiful homes to choose from. Almost all the owners are frequent visitors to their home and to other parts of Florida and have all built up a great amount of knowledge, which they would be happy to share with you. And to answer any questions you may

have. The way www.perfectfloridavillas.com works is you visit the site and either enter your search requirements or browse the many villas on offer. Then contact the owners of the properties you are interested in. They will then email you back with a price for your stay, if they have the availability, giving the total cost with no hidden charges. You know no exactly where you are staying and what the accommodation is like. Unlike a tour operator, where you get your villa allocated on arrival. This can be a bit hit and miss. It could be in an area that you didn't want to be in, the villa pool may face north and you wanted the sun all day, the community may not be as close to the shops and attractions as other communities. However, having said all this, staying in a villa offers so much more freedom, privacy and flexibility than hotel rooms. So much more space, after all you don't live in just one room at home, why should you when on vacation? Most villas these days have games rooms with pool tables etc, high speed internet connections, some offer free long distance and international phone calls, many are situated on golf courses and one thing they all offer is all the comforts of home. Pools can be heated if you wish for an additional fee although, this is only really recommended between the months of November and April. If you wish to prepare any meals while you are there, there is always a fully equipped kitchen with all the mod cons, even if you used it for breakfast for the kids in the mornings. Or if you decide to order takeout food you could use the dining room. The other great plus, is that it needn't be any more expensive than hotel rooms, especially if travelling in larger groups.

I do appreciate that for people visiting Florida for the first time may want to get a package deal so that have nothing to worry about. I think though, that once they have done the first visit they would feel more confident to tackle a do-it-yourself holiday.

Hotels & Motels

There are some lovely hotels along international drive and it is packed with shops and restaurants. It is ideal for non drivers (though I do recommend having a car) as there are plenty of places within walking distance, including Point Orlando which is a shopping centre with multi screen cinema and lots of restaurants and designer shops. I-Drive is crossed by Sand Lake road. I-drive to the South of Sand Lake is the Plaza end with newer buildings and is a little more landscaped and pleasing to the eye. The north end is older and is a little more congested and has some of the cheaper hotels situated there. Hotels I can recommend on I-drive are ******Rosen Plaza** lovely hotel with an excellent pool. More suited to people without children, not that children aren't made welcome, just that the hotel is close to The Orange County Convention Centre and does attract a lot of business people who tend not to travel with their families. ******Rosen Center** the same applies to this hotel as with Rosen Plaza. The owner of these hotels has 5 properties on I-Drive and a golf course nearby. Another is *****Quality Inn Plaza** situated right next door to the Rosen Plaza. Clean rooms situated in 6 blocks with 3 swimming pools this is a cheaper hotel but still a nice place to stay. Right next door to an excellent, though pricey, Chinese restaurant called Ming Court. It is also close to Pizza Hut, Sizzlers and just across from Pointe Orlando. This hotel is the first of my recommendations that has outside landings on the floors. There is another Quality Inn just over Sand Lake road called Quality Inn International. This one, in our opinion, is not as nice as the aforementioned one. On the North Side of I-drive there is the *****Holiday Inn International**. If you choose to stay here make sure you stay in the main hotel tower block as this has one main block with internal landings and several out buildings with the motel type of rooms having external landings plus the rooms are bigger and better furnished in the tower.

For those of you that would prefer a suite, there are several along the drive. We have stayed in a couple of them one is the *****Homewood Suites**, a little more expensive and consists of a sitting area with TV and a kitchenette plus an en-suite bedroom with a King size bed and TV. The sofa in the sitting area converts to a Queen sized bed. The others, such as, Ameri-Suites, Hawthorn Suites and Embassy Suites all are pretty much the same as this. These have all been built in the last few years and are very modern. Most of these suites include a continental type breakfast in the morning. All of them offer complimentary coffee. When we stayed at the Homewood they also had a manager's buffet from around 5 till 7 where they served tit bits like chicken wings etc. For accommodation in and around this area we can recommend [Know before you go](http://www.knowbeforeugo.com/) <http://www.knowbeforeugo.com/> they did used to have an office on I-Drive and the corner of Sand Lake, park your car in Walgreen's car park and walk to a small group of shops on the corner. If you can leave your accommodation till nearer your departure date give them a call. The rates on their web page don't reflect the true price as they are always having special offers on. We have used them to book beach accommodation while we are there when we have popped to the beach at Fort Myers for a few days. They will save you money. The thing to remember is that as with all US accommodation the price is for the room not per person. Another link to try is expedia.co.uk although they are not always cheapest.

Close to I-Drive are Universal Studios, Sea World and Wet 'n' Wild. There is a bus called the I-Ride trolley that travels up and down I-Drive and it costs something like \$1 per trip no matter where you get off. Or you can buy a day pass for \$3.

Brand new to the International Drive area is Floridays Resort. These are privately owned condominiums that you can rent out. They are 2 or 3 Bedroom condos with kitchen, dining area and many nice facilities. The prices quoted start from \$170 per night for a 2 bedroom, which will sleep up to 6 people. Each condo boasts a 37inch High Definition Plasma TV and DVD player in the lounge and 27inch TV's in the other bedrooms. There washers and dryers in the condos and all have balconies. So sounds pretty good. If you divide the cost by those staying there it offers pretty good value.

Hwy 192

The 192 stretches for miles from Hwy 27 to the west and to the Florida Turnpike and beyond to the East. This road is older than I-Drive and was one of the first to develop when Walt Disney arrived in Florida. This area is closer to Disneyworld and is also good for the non driver as most hotels and motels provide complimentary shuttles to the Disney theme parks. There is a huge amount of hotels, flea markets, shops and restaurants along the 192. Most of the accommodation is budget hotels and motels most are clean and there are some good bargains to be had. Know before you go can provide accommodation there too. There are Ramada, Days Inns, Quality Inns and Holiday Inns to name just a few. The 192 is a very busy road as most people take this road into the Disney Theme Parks. It is also busy at night and sometimes, depending on the location of your hotel room you can hear the traffic at night. My advice would be to take a hotel that is set further back from the 192.

Lake Buena Vista

This area is close to Disney Property, in fact, some hotels are situated adjacent to Downtown Disney, Pleasure Island and Disney Market Place. Just down the road is Disney's Typhoon Lagoon (Water Park) these hotels are a bit more upmarket here are some examples, Hilton, Doubletree, Courtyard by Marriott, Grosvenor and Wyndham Palace resort and spa plus many more. These are all moderate hotels. Many are within walking distance to Disney's Marketplace, Pleasure Island and

Westside. This area is also known as the “Crossroads”. There are quite a few restaurants and shops close by including the Premium Outlets Shopping Mall.

Orlando

The City beautiful

The city is well known for the many tourist attractions in the area, in particular the nearby Walt Disney World Resort, which is located in Lake Buena Vista about 20 miles (32 km) south of Orlando via Interstate 4. Other famous area attractions include SeaWorld and Universal Orlando Resort.

The area sees an estimated 52 million tourists a year. Orlando has the second largest number of hotel rooms in the country, just beaten by Las Vegas. Building is still continuing at a terrific rate so it may not be the case soon! It is also one of the busiest American cities for conferences and conventions with the Orange County Convention Center, which is the country's second largest in square footage.

The biggest turning point for Orlando was the arrival of Walt Disney World in 1965. The purchase of the land that is now Walt Disney World was shrouded in secrecy. The land was bought by many small companies, showing no connection to Walt Disney. The speculation was rife as to who these companies were and what they were going to do with the land. Disney did this for a couple of reasons; one was after he built Disneyland in California, land was bought up around him by other companies and he was unable to expand. The other reason was that once a landowner got wind of who wanted to buy the land the price would sky rocket!

Walt Disney World as we know it today is the Size of San Francisco in area, with plenty of conservation area around all the theme parks and accommodation.

The Climate

Orlando has a warm and humid subtropical climate, and there are two major seasons each year. The summer season is hot and rainy, lasting from May until October. The winter is a cooler season November through to March that brings cooler temperatures and less frequent rainfall. During the height of Orlando's very humid summer season, temperatures rarely fall below 70 °F (21 °C), and daytime highs average in the 90s (32-37 °C). Although the city rarely records temperatures over 100 °F (38 °C), extreme humidity often pushes the heat index to over 110 °F (45 °C). The city's highest recorded temperature is 102 °F (39 °C), set in 1998. During these months, strong afternoon thunderstorms occur almost daily. These storms are caused by air masses from the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean colliding over Central Florida, and they often bring high wind, damaging hail, heavy rainfall, sometimes several inches per hour, and violent lightning.

The Dining

Eating out in the US is fun and very enjoyable. The meals are generally very good with portion size being much bigger than the UK. Almost always Tea, Coffee and Sodas are free refills. Most "service personnel" waiters & waitresses (Servers), bar staff etc work on a very low wage, much lower than the UK. They therefore rely on tips to make up their wages. Hence the service is generally very good if not a little over the top. As a Brit I tend to find this a bit strange as we are used to being served by people who get paid the same no matter how the service has been and whether or not the server can be bothered to be polite and give a smile. I like the way it is done in the US.

Tipping

When it comes to tipping, if you are happy with the service you should tip between 15% - 20% of the check (Bill) total, not including the tax. Unfortunately the Brits don't have a good reputation for tipping in Orlando. One other thing most places add the gratuity to the check for parties of 6 or more, even if one or more are infants. So always check to make sure that it hasn't already been added. Buffet type restaurants, you should tip around \$2-3. The thing is if the service was poor or the food was less than satisfactory then you do not need to tip these amounts. I have been in a restaurant with just my wife, and to my annoyance, I have been given the check with the tip already added. This I believed was just because I was a Brit and the waiter/server thought I might skimp on the tip! The reason I was annoyed was because I thought it was presumptuous of the guy to tar me with the same brush. Then after I had got him to remove the tip and had cooled down a bit, I suppose I did see his point. Where he should have been getting a tip of say \$12, he may have only got \$5 from the average Brit.

Around Orlando at most times of the year there are often long waits to get to the popular restaurants. So you will have to make sure that you either arrive early or late. Generally they get busy from 6pm to about 8pm. On a few menus the Entree (Main Course), includes a choice of soup or house salad. They serve the salad up as a starter. The desserts in the US tend to be quite big and sometimes very sweet but some are really delicious!! It is quite acceptable to order one sweet and more than one spoon.

Here are some recommended places to eat in the Orlando area.

Chilis Bar & Grill

Type of Food: Tex Mex, Ribs, Chicken, Burgers, Fajitas, Sandwiches etc.

Price Range: Low - Moderate

Chilis is a favourite of many who visit Orlando. The food is generally quite good and the portion sizes are quite big. First Course includes such dishes as

TRIPLE DIPPER, Pick three favourites! Served with dipping sauces. Boneless Shanghai Wings - Southwestern Eggrolls - Boneless Buffalo Wings - Wings Over Buffalo® - Chicken Crispers® - Hot Spinach & Artichoke Dip - Fried Cheese.

AWESOME BLOSSOM® they bring together their hand-battered and seasoned, fried colossal onion and their famous seasoned sauce for an awesome treat.

CLASSIC NACHOS Their nachos have beans, queso with a hint of seasoned beef, cheese and jalapenos on every chip. Served with pico de gallo and sour cream.

Main course examples are,

HONEY BBQ SIRLOIN 8 oz. sirloin grilled with a honey BBQ sauce. Served w/your choice of two sides and garlic toast,

CAJUN RIBEYE 12 oz. ribeye steak seasoned with Cajun spices and topped with roasted herb jus & spicy Cajun butter. Served with your choice of two sides and garlic toast,

MARGARITA GRILLED CHICKEN They start with tender, juicy chicken breast, marinate it with their classic Margarita flavouring and grill it to perfection. Served with rice, black beans, tortilla strips & pico de gallo,

CAJUN CHICKEN PASTA Sliced, Cajun-seasoned chicken breast on penne pasta with creamy Alfredo

sauce, seasoned tomatoes, Parmesan cheese and garlic toast.

I WANT MY...BABY BACK RIBS All of our ribs are smoked daily over mesquite wood and grilled to order. Served with your choice of two sides. Grilled Baby Back Ribs - A full rack of any one flavor.

CITRUS FIRE CHICKEN AND SHRIMP their citrus Margarita Grilled Chicken topped with spicy garlic & lime shrimp and pico de gallo. Served sizzling with onions, bell peppers and chimichurri (cilantro, garlic & lime) sauce.

Desserts include:

MOLTEN CHOCOLATE CAKE Warm chocolate cake with chocolate fudge filling. Topped with vanilla ice cream under a crunchy chocolate shell.

CHEESECAKE Rich, smooth and creamy cheesecake over strawberry sauce.

SWEET SHOTS Finish off the festivities with a sweet little ending! Pick your favorite or choose any three to create your own sampler. Seven Layers of Chocolate - Strawberry Wave Cheesecake - Dutch Apple Caramel Cheesecake.

There are quite a few of them around Orlando. The nearest to Villa and Hotel accommodation are listed below.

Champions Gate-Chili's

8180 Laura Lane
Davenport, FL 33896
407-396-2180

Kissimmee-Chili's

5340 W Irlo Bronson Mem Hwy 192
Kissimmee, FL 34746
407-396-4333

Lake Buena Vista-Chili's

12172 S Apopka-Vineland Rd
Orlando, FL 32836
407-239-6688

I Drive-Chili's

7021 International Dr
Orlando, FL 32819
407-352-7618

Tony Romas

Tony Roma's is one of our favourite places. There is only one now in and around the tourist areas and that is on I drive. They have the best Ribs in town and on Mondays they do the endless racks that cost \$4 more than usual but you can keep ordering them till you explode!

They serve up warm, freshly baked bread to either eat with your meal or to nibble on whilst you wait. The ice cold draught beers are so welcoming especially in the warm night air. We choose to sit outside if the weather permits.

You have to try the Baked Potato Soup as a starter it is great! It comes with all the dressings that a loaded baked potato does such as, grated cheese, bacon bits and chives and has real chunks of baked potato in it.

Needless to say the ribs take some beating there are several varieties not just the famous baby backs. You can have other ribs basted in your choice of sauce such as Carolina Honeys, Blue ridge Smokies and Tony Romas Red Hots. You could have a sampler which gives you a mixture of them.

Another favourite is the Onion Loaf that comes with Tony Romas BBQ dipping sauce. Excellent!

Orlando I-Drive
[8560 International Drive](#)
Orlando 32819
407-248-0094

Carrabbas

Yet another one of our favourite places to eat, there are so many! There are a couple of them in the area. One is located in the **Formosa Gardens** area on the 192 at 7890 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy. Kissimmee, FL 34747 (407) 390-9600. You need to get here early as it gets very busy and for good reason the food is excellent. As the name suggests it is Italian food but with a little difference. You can see the food being cooked and there is a large, brick, open flamed oven where they cook the wood fired pizzas.

There are lots of pictures on the wall showing early Italian immigrant life in the US with pictures of one of the founders, Damian Carrabba's family and Grand Parents, Vincent and Margaret Mandola, who immigrated to the US in the late 1800's. So the place does have a family atmosphere. The staff are very friendly and helpful. The menu has a very wide choice. They have Antipasti with such things as Calamari, Crab cakes and Shrimp Scampi but I always have to start Mama Mandola's Spicy Sicilian, Chicken Soup. You can get cup size or bowl size. I have to have the bowl size it is served in something resembling the size of a large salad serving bowl and is wonderful.

They make everything from scratch at Carrabbas. They bring out fresh baked warm bread. The cup size is a more regular soup serving and should leave you with plenty of room for the main course and possibly dessert. Dawn sometimes has the homemade Minestrone. For the main course they offer such things as Wood Fired Pizza's such as Margarita, Italian Chicken or you can create your own. They have grilled Salmon, Chicken (Dawn's Favourite) or Sirloin Marsala with a delightful Marsala wine sauce. Pasta dishes include Scampi Damian and Lobster Ravioli. Under the Italian specialties there is Lasagne, Spaghetti, served with Meat sauce, homemade meatballs or Italian sausage. I quite like the Chicken Parmesan you can have it with spaghetti or any of the veg of the day. I have it with garlic mashed potatoes.

They have something for everyone including the kids who have a "Bambini Menu" with such delights as Spaghetti and meatballs, Cheese or Pepperoni pizza, Ravioli, Chicken Fingers or Chicken breast. For dessert, if I have room I favour the Tiramisu. If you are at the other end of town i.e. near Universal Studios there is another one there not quite as busy as the 192 location. Here is the address Just off Kirkman Road. On Vineland Road, Orlando, FL 32819. (407) 355-7277 5701 if you are

around the Florida Mall area then give this a try 1001 Sandlake Rd. Orlando, FL 32809 (407) 888-2727.

Perkins Family Restaurants

Perkins Restaurants offer excellent value. They are very reasonably priced and serve American home style cooking. We especially like the breakfasts and some of the dinners that they do where they serve some nice vegetables.

Breakfasts: I normally have a Classic egg favourite that comes with 2 Eggs, Hash Browns or Breakfast potatoes, choose from: Smoked Bacon, Canadian Bacon, Sausage Links or Sausage Patties. Served with either Pancakes (4), Toast or Muffin. This normally costs around \$7. They are very flexible and can do most requests that you may ask for.

There are several in and around the Orlando Area. There is one on the Hwy 27 at the junction with the Interstate 4. So is within easy reach of a lot of Villa communities. There is one on the corner of Poinciana Boulevard and Hwy192 again handy for villa communities such as Eagle Point, Cumbrian Lakes, Terra Verde to name but a few. Another one can be found in the heart of International Drive on the corner with Sand Lake road. You can usually spot Perkins from a distance as they have a huge US flag flying high above their properties.

These restaurants offer excellent value for money and are ideal for those wanting to go a little cheaper on dining some days. They do the usual burgers etc, but also do dinners too with things like pot roast, and meat loaf etc. All sure to fill you and it won't break the bank.

Ponderosa

Ponderosa and others such as Sizzlers and Golden Corral are basically all you can eat joints. Though, Ponderosa call it "All you care to eat" in case anyone takes it as a challenge!

I personally am not that keen on these sorts of places. I mean, they do offer great value and the place is always very busy, mostly with Brits but the food is not the best in my opinion. Basically how it operates is, say you choose to go for dinner; the basic buffet costs something like \$7 - \$8 then you buy your drinks which could be another \$3. You can now help yourself as many times as you wish from the buffet containing things like chicken wings, pasta and meat sauce, mashed potatoes, chicken nuggets, tacos and chilli, huge variety of salad and fruit along with other stuff.

Or you can order an entrée (main course) which includes the buffet in with the price. Entrees start at around \$10 for something like a small steak with baked potato.

The breakfasts are again buffet style and this is something I am not keen on, I prefer to have fried eggs etc. This is scrambled eggs and bacon, sausage and the usual breakfast eats. There is plenty of fruit and cereals for the kids. I suppose it is a good deal at the price, which is around \$4 each excluding drinks. I know people on a budget do use places like this to fill up for the day and just grab a snack later, before having their evening meal.

There are many of these places around the area. With Ponderosa, there are 2 on I-Drive, I think there may be a couple on the 192 as well. If you visit the site on the net you can even get a 10% off coupon <http://www.ponderosaorlando.com/pages/coupons/Ponderosa%20Adult%20Coupon.pdf>

Cracker Barrel

“Cracker Barrel old country store, half restaurant, half store, all country” This is their slogan and it lives up to it, with the food, décor and right down to the rocking chairs on the porch. I love this restaurant the store part has many fascinating items that cannot be bought anywhere else other than Cracker Barrel. They are very popular with just about everyone as you will notice how full the car park is when you pass one.

The food is quite reasonably priced and does have a country theme to it. I love the Roast beef dinner, with baby carrots, mashed potato and green beans, you do get to choose your veg, but that is what I like. The beef is slow cooked for 14 hours and is very tender and tasty. They have a daily special which is not normally on the menu, on a Saturday, try the chicken & rice; Monday is fried pork chops and so on. I think Friday's is fish & chips. There is sure to be something on the menu that you like. Do a search for them on the net and take a look at the menus. Plus you can find one close to where you are staying. They are pretty much all over the place, especially close to the interstates.

Ming Court

If you like Chinese food you will love this place on International drive. You can hardly miss it with its authentic looking design. It is situated on the Plaza end of I Drive, towards the convention center. The restaurant itself is wonderfully designed and gives an authentic feel to the place. I always judge a restaurant like Chinese, Indian or Thai etc, by the number of their own countrymen dining there and this one has lots! There is a Sushi bar if the inclination takes you. I personally have never tried that. The cost to dine here is a bit more than average but well worth it. The portions are quite big and an entrée can easily be shared. They have Chinese musicians to entertain you too.

On the subject of Chinese food, there are a number of Chinese “all you can eat” buffets situated around the tourist areas of Orlando. I have yet to find one that I could honestly say is excellent. The food can be a bit tasteless and not presented well. It may be worth trying one you may feel different.

Siam Orchid

This restaurant serves Thai food and in my opinion it is very good. If you look in the coupon books there is always a discount coupon for 15% off the total bill. The owners grow a lot of the herbs themselves organically. The inside of the restaurant is cosy and fairly private.

This is just a small sample of some of the restaurants we have been to and either like or dislike in Orlando.

Chapter 6: Orlando Theme Parks

There is possibly nowhere on the planet with as many theme parks and water parks for visitors as there is in Orlando. There is of course the most famous and popular ones belonging to the Walt Disney empire, but the other ones offer just as much if not more fun for all the family.

Walt Disney World

These set of 4 theme parks and 2 water parks was all started back in 1965 when work began on The Magic Kingdom, it was a dream that Walt had but would never live to see it completed. He died during the construction of it. His brother took over and saw it through only to die himself a little more than 3 months after its completion.

The size of Walt Disney World is that of San Francisco, some 55 square miles. They were determined not to find themselves in the same situation as Disneyland California, with no room to expand.

The next park to be built was EPCOT, followed by the Disney MGM Studios and finally Animal Kingdom.

The Magic Kingdom

The Magic Kingdom is probably the most popular and most famous of all the **Orlando** theme parks. It has a magical attraction for both adults and children alike. It is situated about 15 minutes from International Drive and around the same time from most of the **Orlando Villa** communities. If you are driving it is very easy to find as it is well signposted. A lot of hotels and motels offer either a paid or free shuttle service to and from Disney parks. The only down fall is you are governed to their drop off and collection times. Getting to the actual Magic Kingdom involves arriving at the transportation and ticketing center car park. Then you have the choice of getting either the monorail or the ferry across the Seven Seas lagoon. Why not take the monorail one way then come back via ferry the other way? Make use of the free fast pass system. Fast passes work by inserting your Disney pass into the machine, it then prints out a ticket with two times on it these are the times you can return between to access the ride quicker.

TIP: Watch out for the "EMH" this is Disney's Extra Magic Hours these are days that participating parks open earlier and stay open later just for Disney hotel guests. So the parks will be fuller than if they were not EMH so try to avoid going on those days. It's a good idea to go the day after an EMH as then a lot of the Disney guests will have visited the day before and will probably be in another EMH park. Also when you do visit the park, try and get there early and head right into the park and do the attractions and rides furthest away from the entrance then work your way back. Have a good idea of the rides you want to do first.

The Magic Kingdom is divided up into 7 different "Lands" they are as follows:

- Main Street USA
- Adventureland
- Frontierland
- Liberty Square
- Fantasyland
- Mickey's Toon Town Fair
- Tomorrowland

Main Street USA

This area is full of Disney shops where you can buy souvenirs and all kinds of Disney merchandise. There are Ice Cream parlours and Candy Stores too. You can also board the Walt Disney Railroad which encircles the theme park, stopping at Toon Town and Frontier land. There is also the show "Cinderellabration" which takes place on the stage at the front of Cinderella's Castle.

Main Street is designed, through forced perspective, to look as if it's much longer than it is when you're walking towards the castle. In the mornings, you are all excited and have the energy to walk. When you're walking away from the castle towards the exit, it looks shorter. Also, it is believed that most people walk on the right side of the street, so, all the food shops are on the right as you enter for those wanting breakfast, when you are coming out, all the shops on your right have gifts and souvenirs.

Adventureland

Moving around the park we have Adventureland. Here you can find **Swiss Family Robinson Tree house** where you and your kids can climb over rope walkways and discover this huge tree house. **The Jungle cruise** is a boat ride through jungle areas of the world, such as those found near the Amazon River or Asia, featuring Audio-Animatronic animals. A little dated now though and not very convincing. The Gold Camel in front of the **Aladdin** ride in Adventureland is controlled by someone hidden nearby and shoots water at unknowing guests as they walk by.

The Pirates of the Caribbean a dark ride on a boat through pirate scenes using Audio-Animatronics. Now updated (2006) after the new film starring Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow.

Rumour has it that years ago, a maintenance worker or Imagineer named George was killed during the building of the Pirates ride. They say his ghost haunts the ride to this day. The workers have to say "goodnight George" before they shut down the ride each night, or there may be problems with the ride the next day. When asked if the attendant said goodnight to George, he replied of course! We don't want the ride to break down!

Frontierland

Country Bear Jamboree, Animatronic bears sing classic country songs. **Splash Mountain** is a very popular ride for all the family and one that is not over too quickly it is a log flume, based on the stories of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and other characters from the Disney movie Song of the South, ending with a 5 storey drop into the briar patch. **Big Thunder Mountain** a roller coaster, designed to look like a runaway mining train. This ride is right next to Splash Mountain and is also very popular.

TIP: it is an idea to wait in line for one of these rides and get a fast pass for the other. **Tom Sawyer Island**, a small island, reachable by raft, on which there are caves and a fort to explore.

Liberty Square

The Hall of Presidents, a show featuring an Audio-Animatronic version of every United States President. This may not be for the younger kids. **The Haunted Mansion**, a dark ride through a haunted house with some spooky special effects. At the haunted mansion, there is a wedding ring embedded in the concrete near the main gates. It was said to have been thrown there by the wife from the attic window and trampled into the ground by the invisible horse

Liberty Square Riverboat, Travel through the Rivers Of America on the **Liberty Belle**, a large riverboat that encircles **Tom Sawyer Island**.

Fantasyland

Those of you with small children will have a hard time leaving this area. **It's a small world** is a dark ride through colourful stylised representations of many countries you **will** be fed up with hearing that song by the end of the ride! **Peter Pan's Flight**, a dark ride in a pirate ship flying over London and through scenes from Peter Pan. **Mickey's PhilharMagic**, a 3-D movie experience, starring Mickey and Donald!

Cinderella's Golden Carrousel, the oldest ride in the park, a carousel built in New Jersey, later moved to Walt Disney World. Its theme was updated to be based on the Disney movie Cinderella. **Dumbo the Flying Elephant**, the prototypical Dumbo-style ride has elephant shaped vehicles, which rise off of the ground, supported by a rotating structure. **Snow White's Scary Adventures**, a dark ride through scenes from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. **The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh**, a dark ride through scenes from the Winnie the Pooh stories. Mad Tea Party, a ride in spinning teacups based on the Disney movie **Alice In Wonderland**. **Pooh's Playful Spot**, a children's play area designed as the Hundred-Acre Wood. **Cinderella's Castle**, walk through the icon of the park; contains mosaics telling the story of Cinderella.

Mickey's Toon Town Fair

The Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm. A small steel roller coaster, designed to look like a plane in the barnstorming era. Mickey's Country House, a walkthrough attraction, a humorous house and garden for Mickey Mouse, with many items for children to play with. **Minnie's Country House**, a walkthrough attraction, a humorous house and garden for Minnie Mouse, with many items for children to play with and some great photo backdrops. **Donald's Boat**, a children's play area, shaped like a boat for Donald Duck, with many sources of water. Toon Park, Kids can enjoy playing in this miniature playground **Toontown Hall Of Fame**, Meet classic Disney characters here today! Walt

Disney World Railroad- Toontown Fair Station, Ride around The Magic Kingdom on this railroad with stops in Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland and Mickey's Toontown Fair.

Tomorrowland

Tomorrowland Indy Speedway, a simulated racetrack with small gas/petrol-powered race cars.

Space Mountain, which includes 2 indoor roller coasters in the dark. Also known as the tallest mountain in Florida!! Can be long waits for this ride as it is very popular. **Astro Orbiter**, a raised Dumbo-style ride in rocket ships **Tomorrowland Transit Authority** (originally called the WEDway People Mover), a gentle people mover ride over Tomorrowland. You get to see what Space Mountain looks like on the inside. Nice to sit on this ride for a rest!

Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress, an audio-animatronic stage show about changing lifestyles, shown in a rotating building, which debuted at the 1964 New York World's Fair. It shows too, a bit boring and dated. **Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin**, a dark ride, based on Toy Story, with "laser guns" to shoot targets and score points. Good fun. **Stitch's Great Escape** in which Stitch from Lilo & Stitch escapes from a prisoner teleportation tube and wreaks comical chaos throughout the audience.

Strollers/Pushchairs can be hired for the day from the Guest services area at the entrance to MK as are wheel chairs and motorised chairs for people who can't walk far. **TIP:** With strollers though it is a good idea to buy one from **Wal*Mart** for around \$10-\$15 and then leave it behind when you leave Florida. Also a lot of **villa owners** provide them **free of charge** if you are staying a in a villa. Remember if you have a Disney Pass with park hopping you only need to pay car parking once per day.

EPCOT

Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow. This was the second of the theme parks to join Walt Disney World. The park opened on October 1, 1982, and was named **EPCOT** Center from 1982 to 1993. It was the largest Disney theme park in the world until 1998, when Disney's **Animal Kingdom** opened. The park consists of two sections, Future World and World Showcase. Epcot has become a permanent display of the world's nations. EPCOT combines education and entertainment both together very well.

Futureworld

Future World consists of a several areas called pavilions that explore innovative aspects and applications of technology. **Spaceship Earth.** The eighteen-story-tall sphere covered in over 11,000 triangular silver panels is the gateway to Future World. Situated inside is a slow-moving continual dark ride through the history of communication, focusing on the development of different cultures and the future of technology. On the top of the sphere, the Sorcerer Mickey's hand and wand point to the name Epcot. At 256 feet (78 m) high, the hand and wand is the tallest structure at any Walt Disney World park. This has just been remodelled and now contains the voice of Dame Judi Dench.

Innoventions, located in two pavilions (named **Innoventions East** and **Innoventions West**), houses hands-on exhibitions from various science and technology oriented companies such as IBM and Segway. There are the latest computer games and you can even send a themed E-mail to someone back home. Very good for all the family. **Universe of Energy.** Showing **Ellen's Energy Adventure**, a show starring Ellen DeGeneres, Bill Nye, Jamie Lee Curtis, Alex Trebek, and "Albert Einstein" in an episode of Jeopardy!. The categories are about energy and how we generate and harvest it. (Michael Richards, "Kramer" from Seinfeld, has a brief cameo in the show as a caveman who discovers fire.) The audience's seats are actually large vehicles which move slowly through the attraction and are partially powered by solar cells on the building's roof. **Mission: SPACE:** Simulates the training required to be member of the space program. **Gary Sinise** is the guide through a "mission to Mars" in a spinning centrifuge gravity simulator, which lets guests feel what it's like to blast off in a rocket. Can be a bit intense, though, they now have a version of the ride that doesn't use the centrifuge..

Test Track: Guests sit in six-seater cars and experience the wide range of testing that automobiles must go through before they are approved for mass production. Cars in the ride pass through extreme temperatures, over rough surfaces, and around high speed turns, exhilarating.

The Living Seas: One of the largest indoor aquariums in the world, setup to appear as the deep-sea research station Sea Base Alpha. You can view many different aquatic animals such as manatees while learning about the preservation of the Seas. For a fee, guests with certified diving credentials can join a group dive in the aquarium itself. The pavilion is also home to Turtle Talk with Crush, a show starring Crush, the Sea Turtle, from the film **Finding Nemo**. **The Land:** Contains various attractions dealing with human interaction with nature. **Living with the Land** takes you on a boat ride through a working greenhouse. **The Garden Grill Restaurant** slowly rotates, offering views of the **Living with the Land ride**, and serves meals containing food grown in **The Land**. **Soarin'**, a copy of Soarin' Over California from Disney's California Adventure, opened here in May 2005, along with a

remodelled pavilion. Be warned as this is a new attraction queues/lines for it are very long. Get there early for a fast pass. Also there is a showing of the movie called **The Circle Of Life**, starring the characters from **The Lion King**.

Imagination! Contains **Journey Into Imagination**, a light-hearted ride starring Eric Idle and the Epcot mascot Figment. It encourages guests to use their senses and their imagination. **Imagination!** also contains **Honey, I Shrunk the Audience**: a 3-D short film featuring Eric Idle, Rick Moranis, and the rest of the cast of the film **Honey, I Shrunk The Kids**. A demonstration of a new invention inadvertently shrinks the entire theater. It is a great attraction for all the family.

World Showcase

Consists of eleven pavilions, in clockwise order, Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, United States of America, Japan, Morocco, France, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Norway and Morocco were added after the parks opening. Each "Country" contains representative shops and restaurants and is staffed by people from these countries, many of them college students. Some also contain rides and shows. Each pavilion is paid for by the country it represents.

Disney opens World Showcase late (usually 11:00 AM) and closes Future World early (usually 7:00 PM, except for **Test Track, Mission: SPACE, Spaceship Earth, and Soarin'** which sometimes remain open until park closing). Unlike other Disney parks, which do not serve alcohol, restaurants and stores in the World Showcase do serve alcohol from their respective countries, and beer is also sold at refreshment stands throughout Epcot. Each Pavilion sells food from their homeland normally 3 or 4 choices of eating places from high priced gourmet food to quick snacks.

A thirteen-minute fireworks show takes place in the **World Showcase Lagoon** every night at the park's closing time; normally 9:00 PM. Fireworks and lasers fill the sky above Epcot while a stirring musical score plays over the loudspeakers. The current show is titled **IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth** and premiered as part of the park's millennium celebration in 2000. Reflections of Earth tells the story of the planet and is split into three movements titled "Chaos," "Order," and "Meaning." the lagoon is surrounded by twenty torches of fire signifying the past twenty centuries, and the show climaxes with the globe opening up like a lotus blossom to reveal a twenty-first torch, representing the new century. This really is excellent and should not be missed!!

TIP: Be prepared for a mass exodus from the park once the show is over. Although you can get a good view of the show all around the lagoon, it is easier to get out of the park when you are closer to the exit.

Disney Hollywood Studios

Hollywood Boulevard

is lined with shops where you can buy Disney merchandise and food. This is also where the "Disney Stars and Motor Cars Parade." starts.

The Great Movie Ride, a dark ride recreating scenes and insight to several classic films and is located at the end of **Hollywood Boulevard**. This ride takes you back through many of the classics. Whilst in line for the ride you can see the Carousel Horse that was used by Julie Andrews in the film "Mary Poppins" amongst others. Some of the animatronics are very convincing. This ride is due to be revamped.

Echo Lake

Star Tours, a motion simulator, identical to those at Disneyland, Tokyo Disneyland, and Disneyland Paris. **Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!**, a live-action performance showing how movie stunts are done. It is an audience participation show. The show re-enacts various scenes from the movie **Raiders of the Lost Ark**.

Sounds Dangerous, a show following Drew Carey as an undercover detective when his video camera fails and the audience is left in the dark wearing earphones, following his adventure through sound cues. Caution: it is very dark on this show.

Streets of America

Jim Henson's MuppetVision 3D, a 3-D movie experience similar to Epcot's "Honey, I Shrunk The Audience" Actually it's 4D now and is great fun for all.

Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show, a car & motorcycle stunt show. Quite new to the park. Well worth watching though a little long. See how some of the movie tricks are done. Also Herbie (The Love Bug) makes an appearance.

Meet the **Power Rangers** from five generations: Wild Force, Ninja Storm, Dino Thunder, S.P.D. and the newest series Mystic Force, making appearances throughout the day.

Mickey Avenue

The Disney-MGM Studios Back lot Tour, showing how movie special effects are done. Guests see a movie scene set on the Special Effects Water Tank filmed using volunteers from the audience and various special effects. The audience sees this final sequence edited all together in an action sequence called "Harbour Attack" This lasts around 10 - 15 minutes and afterwards, guests board trams and are taken through **Catastrophe Canyon**, to see fire and water effects and are driven past movie props such as the tram from "Who framed Roger Rabbit?"

Walt Disney: One Man's Dream, this is a museum-like walk through attraction that explores the life of Walt Disney and his legacy through photos, models, rare artefacts and a short film narrated by Walt Disney himself.

Journey Into Narnia: Creating the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, a walk through interactive attraction featuring props from the movie and an appearance from the White Witch.

Animation Courtyard

Voyage of the Little Mermaid, a live performance using puppets, lasers, movies, human actors, and water (mist). The show recreates the animated Little Mermaid movie, in a shortened show. This is always very popular and it is advisable to get a fast pass.

The Magic of Disney Animation, a short presentation showing how animated films are made.

Playhouse Disney Live on Stage!, a live performance featuring Disney children's television characters.

Sunset Boulevard

Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage, a simplified version of the film

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith, an indoor roller coaster in the dark with three inversions and a high-speed launch absolutely exhilarating!!

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, a thrill ride which drops guests in an elevator in a randomised set of 4 sequences each involving multiple high speed drops and ascents. In addition, special effects including smell, lighting and sound enhance the thrill. Not to be missed!!

Fantasmic!, a night time show with characters and fireworks held in the specifically built Hollywood Hills Amphitheatre off Sunset Boulevard

Each year, Star Wars Weekends bring Star Wars fans and celebrities for special park events. Star Wars Weekends are generally held for five consecutive weekends (including Fridays) through late May and early June; they feature the 501st (a worldwide Star Wars costuming group) parading through the park in Storm trooper costumes and Star Wars actors appearing each weekend for photos and autographs, Jedi Lightsaber Training classes for kids, and other assorted events.

Every Christmas season, Disney-MGM Studios features the "**Osborne Family Spectacle of Lights**", with five million Christmas lights on more than 350 miles of wire.

Animal Kingdom

Disney's **Animal Kingdom** opened on April 22, 1998. It is the largest Disney theme park in the world, covering more than 500 acres.

The park is made up of seven themed lands.

Oasis

Once you enter the park, you must walk through this area as it is the "gateway" to other lands in the park. There is a Rainforest Cafe is situated at the entrance of the Oasis.

Discovery Island

Discovery Island is the main land in the park and is home for the **The Tree of Life**. It is the centre island of the park and has paths leading off to the six other lands.

It's Tough to be a Bug - Built at the base of The Tree of Life, you can see what life is like as a bug as Flik from "A Bug's Life" shows a 3-D Film about bugs. It is similar to "Honey I shrunk the Audience" in Epcot.

Camp Minnie Mickey

This land has two shows and four character greeting spots where Guests can meet all the Disney Characters and others on a regular basis. Great for photo opportunities and autographs.

The Shows are: **Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends** - A children's show with live animals based on the film Pocahontas.

Festival of the Lion King - A fast paced musical with songs and characters from the popular film.

Africa

The Attractions are: **Kilimanjaro Safaris** - Where you climb aboard your open sided safari vehicle for an exciting journey. Animals from Africa freely roam through acres of savanna, rivers and undulating hills. Watch out for giraffes, rhinos, elephants, lions, hippos and you may even see the odd poacher too! It is quite a bumpy ride as you ride the trail and it is an art itself to hold your camera steady whilst on the move. The driver does stop frequently to allow photo opportunities.

Pangani Forest Exploration Trail - Here you trek into the lush forest in search of gorillas! Enjoy a walk at one with nature through an African valley filled with birds, Nile hippos and fish. There is also an underwater hippo viewing area, a savanna overlook, where you can watch the Meercats in their own environment and have a close encounter with gorillas.



Rafiki's Planet Watch

This used to be known as Conservation Station and you can still only get there by train, it contains a petting zoo with domesticated goats and other small animals and demonstrates conservation efforts. The veterinary hospital's viewing window allows guests to watch medical treatments conducted by the vets.

Wildlife Express Train - Here you can ride on this authentic African train that trundles through the savanna for a behind the scenes journey through several animal housing areas of Animal Kingdom. It takes around 5 minutes and your guided train ride takes you to the park's conservation centre. Nice to have a relaxing train ride to take a break from walking.

Asia

Some of the Attractions are: **Flights of Wonder** - Enter the Caravan Stage and join a trainee bird handler and a unpredictable tour guide who end up teaching each other about the frail state of nature. There are many types of birds to see close up such as vultures, hawks, macaws, and the American Bald Eagle.

Kali River Rapids - Race down the bubbling, turbulent waters of the Chakranadi River aboard your own 12-passenger raft travelling through an enchanting Asian rain forest. Watch out for the gushing geysers! Get ready to get wet, very wet!!

Expedition Everest - In this latest addition to Animal Kingdom you board a runaway-train roller coaster, it is a fact that Himalayan trekkers use refurbished steam trains to get to the base camp of Mount Everest, here though, we use a shortcut that passes through the "forbidden mountain" patrolled by the legendary Yeti. Excellent adventure ride Tip: This is one ride that you would be best getting a Fast Pass for.

Dinoland USA

The Boneyard - Explore your way through a play maze filled with fun fossils.

DINOSAUR (formerly Countdown to Extinction) - Whizz back to primeval times for a wild and riotous dangerous mission. The countdown clock is ticking on your Time Rover and you have just minutes to rescue a stray dinosaur.

Finding Nemo - The Musical - this original stage show developed by Walt Disney Creative Entertainment tells the story of Finding Nemo.

Dino-Sue - Dino-Sue is Disney's oldest "cast member", clocking in at 67 million years. Dino-Sue is a model of the largest, most complete T-Rex ever found and is available to pose for pictures with you.

DinoLand also contains **Chester and Hester's Dino-Rama**, an area made to resemble a old 1950s fairground built on an old car park.

Primeval Whirl - Like a spinning coaster.

Triceratop Spin - Take the family for a spin aboard this family friendly flying dinosaur.

Fossil Fun Games - these dinosaur-themed games provide a good time for all.

Universal Theme Parks

Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure make up their contribution to the theme park scene in Orlando. The parks are connected by City Walk, a venue with plenty of bars, restaurants and shops. There is also a multi screen cinema here too. See below for a list of places to visit.

Universal Studios

The park, which opened in 1990, is a park that lets visitors "Ride the Movies." It offers many shows and rides, along with countless other things for guests to see and do.

The park hosts many special events throughout the year, including the popular **Halloween Horror Nights** in October which is highly recommended and **Macy*s Parade** over the Christmas season.

The attractions at Universal Studios Florida are split into six different areas.

Production Central:

Shrek 4-D is a short film/ride. Participants are lead into a dungeon-like room with two giant television screens on either side. On the screen, Lord Farquaad announces that he has kidnapped the Three Little Pigs, Gingerbread man, and Pinocchio and is holding them hostage. The short film takes place right after the first Shrek film. In it, the spirit of Lord Farquaad returns from the dead to kidnap Princess Fiona. Therefore, it is up to Shrek and Donkey to rescue her.

Although the animation is 3-D , the ride is a 4-D film, which means it is designed to make viewers feel what they are watching. For example when Donkey spits, or sneezes, the front of the seats spray mist into viewers' faces. It also has moveable seats, air jets and rubber tubing, to simulate other effects such as air, "creepy crawlies" and other movements.

Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast

This ride has replaced the old Hanna Barbara ride and is a motion simulator type ride where you have to rescue Jimmy from Dastardly and Mutley. This area is also where the new Hollywood rip, ride roller coaster is to be built. Opening in 2009.

New York:

Revenge of the Mummy is a high speed indoor steel roller coaster modelled after the popular Mummy movies. The ride opened on May 21, 2004. The Revenge of the Mummy coasters use Linear Induction Motors, a technology used to launch riders from a complete standstill. The ride lasts 3 minutes and features a top speed of 45 mph. The track is 2200 ft long featuring no inversions and a 50 degree angle of descent.

Twister... Ride it out is based on the 1996 film starring Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton. The attraction takes you to a small mock-up of the Oklahoma town of Wakita. As you walk into the "Twister filming centre" Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt talk about filming the movie. Towards the end, guests walk into a scene, resembling the Drive-In scene in the movie. There is a gift shop at the end named Aftermath.

Hollywood:

Terminator 2 3-D: Battle Across Time

T2 3-D: Battle Across Time is a mini-sequel to Terminator 2: Judgment Day and reunites director James Cameron and the main cast of that movie, including Arnold Schwarzenegger as "T-800", Linda Hamilton as "Sarah Connor", Edward Furlong as "John Connor", and Robert Patrick as the "T-1000". The show is in two parts: a pre-show where a spokesperson talks about Cyberdyne and the main feature which has performers interacting with a 3-D movie.

Universal's Horror Make-Up Show

A make up showing you the tips and tricks of make in the movies.

Lucy - A Tribute

A tribute to Lucille Ball.

World Expo:

Men in Black: Alien Attack

A ride that allows you to shoot aliens as you travel around the track in your rotating vehicle.

Simpsons: The Ride

this is a new ride. It replaced the old back to the Future ride. Apparently you travel with The Simpsons™ as they visit Krustyland, the low-budget theme park created by famed TV personality Krusty the Clown!

Fear Factor Live!

Take part if you dare!

San Francisco & Amity

Jaws

Jaws is a slow-moving boat ride based upon the film Jaws. It simulates a shark attack in Amity Harbour. The boats rocks back and forth and riders are splashed with water. After the shark attacks portrayed in the 1974 film Jaws.

Tourists entering the ride will be taking one of Captain Jake's Amity Boat Tours out to see the sights from the film Jaws. The boats are piloted by one of Captain Jake's skippers, and all are protected by an army surplus 40 mm grenade launchers. However, Jake is confident that you'll never need to use the grenade launchers because the last great white shark anyone has seen was in 1974. What could possibly go wrong?

Beetlejuice's Rock and Roll Graveyard Revue

A musical revue from Beetlejuice, Frankenstein, Dracula etc.

Earthquake- and the Magic of Special Effects at the Movies

A bit dated now but still quite popular this ride starts off with a tour showing how special effects are done in the movies. It is presented by Charlton Heston. Finally you ride an underground train where you encounter an Earthquake.

Woody Woodpecker's KidZone

A Day in the Park with Barney

Fievel's Playground

Universal's Animal Actors

Curious George Goes to Town

Woody Woodpecker's Nuthouse Coaster

E.T. Adventure

The current ride, at Universal Studios Florida, has guests begin by entering a sound stage. Before going into the queue, Steven Spielberg tells us that E.T.'s teacher Botanicus needs E.T. to come to his home world, "The Green Planet" because the planet is dying. Only E.T.'s magical healing touch can save the planet, so it is up to the guests to bring him home. He also tells the guests that you make your journey on bikes, and that you need a "Interplanetary Passport" to get there.



The guest gives the assistant their name and the card is programmed with it, which is used later in the ride. You now enter the movie set which begins the adventure. The interior queue is a forest setting where it is established that police are looking for E.T. The guests then board the ride, a car suspended from the track. Each individual seat is a bicycle, whose handles come down as the safety belt. The car brings the riders through more of the forest where it is revealed that they are to save E.T. and bring him home. Guests ride past police officers who begin to chase them away from the restricted area. As they are about to be caught, the bicycles begin to fly over the city and into outer space. They fly past an alien space ship where they are told by an alien of the same species as E.T. to bring him home. The ride emerges on E.T.'s home planet, a world of exotic plants, animals, and many others of E.T.'s species. The ride continues through the alien world until the end of the ride. At the end, guests pass an animatronic E.T. who thanks them all by the name they gave to the travel agents.



Islands of Adventure

Universal's Islands of Adventure, opened in May 1999 as an expansion to the **Universal Orlando Resort** and **CityWalk** areas. The park, part of the Universal Orlando Resort, is composed of six distinct "islands", each having its own theme

Port of Entry

The Port of Entry is primarily a shopping center, and has the feel of an Arabian bazaar. Its main feature is the Confisco Grille restaurant.

Marvel Super Hero Island

Located next to the Port of Entry, **Marvel Super Hero Island** has rides in the theme of Marvel comic books. Its four main rides are:

The Incredible Hulk Coaster, it is a launched roller coaster. It is named after the popular comic book super hero character, the Hulk. It was voted the #1 roller coaster by Discovery Channel viewers in 1999, the roller coaster is one of a kind in the fact that it features a launch lift hill as opposed to conventional chain lifts. This means the train accelerates to 40 mph in a short time (approximately two seconds) before speeding through several inversions. The coaster is one of the top rated coasters in the US.

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, a simulator ride set in New York; is one of the most technologically advanced theme park rides in the world, it was built for the park's opening in 1999. The ride combines motion simulation with 3-D effects to give the rider the experience of travelling through a city.

The riders take a Daily Bugle vehicle known as the "Scoop" and soon learns that the evil Sinister Syndicate has captured the Statue of Liberty with an anti-gravity gun. This evil group is made up of many famous Spider-Man villains, including Doctor Octopus, Scream, Electro, Hydro-Man, and the Hobgoblin. **Spider-Man** pops up many times to warn riders of dangers. The ride moves into the streets of New York to cover the story before being kidnapped by the villains and their anti-gravity gun. After seeming to raise up in the air because of anti-gravity, Hobgoblin then takes over and drags the vehicle further into the air, where an aerial battle between Spider-Man and his foes is visible.

During the five minute ride, passengers experience the effects of a flamethrower, water spraying on

the vehicle, many shakes and spins, falling off a 100-story skyscraper into Spider-Man's web, and other simulated action.

Doctor Doom's Fearfall, a vertically launched ride (similar to Power Tower at Cedar Point in Ohio).

Storm Force Accelatron, which is a faster version of the traditional Teacup ride.



Toon Lagoon

Toon Lagoon is geared toward both kids and adults. The area includes **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls**, a traditional log flume advertised to have the steepest drop of any log flume in America (70° pitch), and **Popeye and Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges**, a river rapids ride. It also has a kids' playground, **Me Ship, the Olive**. This is the area that you **will** get wet!!

Jurassic Park

The Discovery Center at Jurassic Park. Set in the time of the Jurassic Park movie, the focal point of the area is the **Jurassic Park River Adventure**. The ride is meant to evoke the island environment featured in the Michael Crichton novel and Spielberg film. The concept is that Jurassic Park opened as planned; the river adventure is an actual attraction in the park itself. It begins as a jungle river cruise past huge dinosaurs. After encountering an Ultrasaurus, a pair of Stegosaurus, and Psittacosaurus, the raft begins heading toward a part of the park known as Hadrosaur Cove. The raft passes by a replica of the Raptor Pen from the film, and riders hear snarling Velociraptors coming from the undergrowth, while branches move to simulate the creatures attempting to escape. Around the corner, riders see one boat that appears to have been attacked. Two Compsognathus are seen eating a bloody shirt. The boat heads towards the pump station where riders see a Velociraptor run into a dark corner. Velociraptors jump out at the guests. Riders head up a hill. Silence is only heard. Several Dilophosaurus spits venom (water) at the guests. As the Raft follows a 180 degree turn, a Tyrannosaurus's head appears ominously in front of the riders to distract them from the 85 foot plunge below. The ride exits into a Jurassic Park-themed gift shop, where guests may purchase souvenir photographs of themselves in the ride during the drop.

Also in Jurassic Park is **Camp Jurassic**, a children's play area; the **Pteranodon Flyers** (a suspended two seater coaster-type attraction) and the Jurassic Park Discovery Centre, a replication (but not entirely duplicated) version of the Visitor Center from the film. Inside is a re-creation of the dinosaur skeletons seen in the movie centre's lobby.

The Lost Continent

This land is themed to ancient myths and legends. It features **Duelling Dragons** (a pair of duelling inverted roller coasters), The ride is the only duelling inverted roller-coaster in the world. The ride is two dragons, one side being Fire and the other Ice. It has a layout where the two trains share a common lift hill, but then traverse two completely different courses. The ride features three near misses between the two trains, two of which bring riders feet within several inches of riders on the other train. After walking through one of the longest and certainly most elaborately designed queues for any theme park ride, you come to a decision in the path you follow. At this intersection, riders will turn right to ride on the Ice Dragon and left for Fire Dragon. Merlin frequently taunts riders with some of the following lines.



"Turn right for Ice and left for Fire! Now, pick the dragon you desire."

"The left burns hot, the right turns cold, whichever you choose you best be bold."

"Past this point of no return, your only choice is freeze or burn."

"Turn left for Fire, turn right for Ice! I know not which is best advice."

Also, the ride attendants use several quotes when dispatching the trains:

"Battle Bravely."

"I bid thee farewell."

"May the fates be with you."

"May the dragons spare you."

"Ice/Fire Dragon, you are clear for battle."

"May the best dragon win."

"Keep your hands inside the dragon."

Also here are **Poseidon's Fury**, a type of show/presentation using some excellent special effects and **Flying Unicorn** (a Vekoma junior roller coaster).

Seuss Landing

Seuss Landing is the only themed area at **Islands of Adventure** specially geared towards small children and is based on the works of the author Dr. Seuss. It has several Seuss-themed rides, including the **Caro-Seuss-el**, **The Cat in the Hat Ride**, **The High-In-The-Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride**, **and If I Ran the Zoo**, an interactive play zone for kids. It also features a **One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish** ride and the Green Eggs and Ham Cafe. One thing you won't see in this area is a straight line....anywhere! It opened on June 22, 2006, Seuss Landing gained a brand new attraction, **The High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride**. The trolley ride uses two separate tracks, one of which runs through the **Circus McGurkus** restaurant.

City Walk

The Universal Citywalk in Orlando opened in 1999. It was built over the former Universal Studios parking lot and entrance. The entrance is now behind CityWalk and two parking garages across Universal Blvd. are connected to Citywalk by covered moving sidewalks. You have to pay to park during the day as city walk's car parks are also the same car parks for the theme parks. The current charge is \$10. After 6 parking is free.

City Walk is Universal Studios' response to Pleasure Island, with clubs and bars etc throughout. You can either pay single admission or you can get a pass that allows you to enter all the clubs. They also hold an annual beer festival here with entertainment on the main stage and beers from all over the world.

Dining

- **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville** Every corner of Margaritaville brings to life a different Jimmy Buffett classic. Its main dining room was inspired by one of Jimmy Buffett's favorite South Florida waterfront concerts, and its three bars — The Volcano Bar, Land Shark Bar, and 12 Volt Bar — were themed around Jimmy Buffett songs.
- Hard Rock Cafe (this is the second Hard Rock Cafe built on Universal property. The first cafe was built near the Psycho house, E.T. Adventure, and Fievel's Playground. Although the first cafe was considered to be one of the largest in the chain Hard Rock Cafe closed down the restaurant to reopen in an even bigger facility and alongside Hard Rock Live in the Citywalk section. The Old Hard Rock Cafe building still remains unoccupied. The Hard Rock Hotel was built near it.)
- Emeril's Restaurant Orlando
- NBA City
- Latin Quarter
- Pastamoré Ristoranté & Market
- Starbucks

- Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. "Run Forrest, Run!" The Bubba Gump Shrimp Co.™ Restaurant & Market is now open. This fun family restaurant features shrimp, shrimp and more shrimp – plus other menu selections, from great seafood and steaks to sandwiches, appetizers, and mouth-watering desserts – and a boatload of memorabilia from the Oscar®-winning film, Forrest Gump.
- Cinnabon
- NASCAR Sports Grille, formerly NASCAR Cafe Reopened on February 8th, 2007.
- Pat O'Brien's Bar - a franchise of the original bar/restarant in New Orleans.

Entertainment

- Cigarz at CityWalk
- AMC Universal Multi-screen Cinema
- Bob Marley - A Tribute to Freedom A one-of-a-kind celebration of music and culture, Bob Marley - A Tribute to Freedom is patterned after Marley's actual home in Kingston, Jamaica. It commemorates the international fame of the "King of Reggae", and takes guests on a musical journey of his life.
- Pat O'Brien's An authentic reproduction of New Orleans' favorite watering hole, Pat O'Brien's is the original home of duelling pianos, the "flaming fountain" patio, and the world-famous "Hurricane®" specialty drink. Cajun style appetizers, entrees, and desserts are served in the main bar, courtyard, and terrace level. Entrees include catfish fillets, jambalaya, shrimp Creole, and wings.
- CityJazz
- The Groove
- Hard Rock Live (Check to see who's on when you are here as they have some big name artists).
- Red Coconut Club (formerly Motown Cafe in 1999, and Decades Cafe in 2005)
- Blue Man Group LIVE at the Sharp Aquos Theatre (Opened June 6, 2007)

Shopping

- Tommy Bahama
- Cartooniversal
- Cigarz at CityWalk
- The Endangered Species Store
- Fossil, Inc.
- Fresh Produce
- Quiet Flight Surf Shop
- Universal Studios Store
- TCBY
- Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. Store
- Hart & Huntington Tattoo Company

Sea World Orlando

SeaWorld Orlando is one of my favourite parks it is a superb place to visit. It is set in 200 acres of beautiful gardens and exhibits. There are several lakes with flamingos and other wildlife species. We almost always visit this park on the first day as it is a more peaceful, tranquil introduction to the hectic pace that the other theme parks in Orlando can be. There are lots to see and do at SeaWorld. Many people enjoy the dolphin and killer whale (Shamu) shows. The food in both Busch Gardens, SeaWorld and now the new water park Aquatica, tends to be better than average as far as theme park food goes. There also a healthier choice should you want it.

Sea World Thrill Rides



Kraken is a steel roller coaster. Its name is taken from the Kraken, a mythological sea creature. It was the first floorless coaster in Florida. It boasts three tunnels. Features of this coaster include a loop, dive loop, zero-G roll, cobra roll, a second loop, and a corkscrew. The initial drop after climbing the height of the coaster is a very steep and fast decent.

Journey to Atlantis is a popular ride at SeaWorld theme park. The ride is a water thrill ride and some parts of it are a bit like a roller coaster.

It starts on a slow journey climbing the ride, taking you through the depths of the ocean and through the legendary city of Atlantis. Once at the top of the ride, you are are hurled down a steep drop of 60 foot, creating a huge wave of water. After the huge drop, when you think it is over it isn't. We will leave you to find out what happens next.



Wild Arctic is a flight simulator where visitors take a helicopter trip to a base station at the North Pole. When the ride is over you can visit the Polar bears in their area. Or if you do not wish to do the ride you can head straight to the exhibit.

Shows

Believe is the latest show at SeaWorld, showing an moving and thrilling performance of trainers and the Orca. SeaWorld Orlando is home to 8 whales: Katina, Tilikum, Kalina, Kayla, Taima, Takara, Trua and a calf born September 18th 2006. It involves audience participation and learning to believe you can do what you set your mind to.



There is A night time show, called Shamu Rocks America, and stars the famous killer whale performing tricks along with music and fireworks.

Odyssea features Acrobats on high-flying trapezes, dramatic music, and many special effects. The show is thirty minutes long.

Blue Horizons is the latest dolphin show at SeaWorld Orlando. It involves acrobatics, dolphins, Whales and Wild Birds in a thrilling show.

Pet's Ahoy! is a show using common cats, dogs and other animals. These animals were adopted from a shelter. These animals perform tricks and do humorous stunts.

The Sea Lion and Otter Show. Clyde and Seamore (A Sea Lion and Otter) lead you on a comical journey with their show Clyde and Seamore take Pirate Island. Probably the funniest part for me was whilst waiting for the show to start, they had a guy doing mime and pretending to show people to their seats.

All in all Sea World is an excellent park to visit for all the family.

Discovery Cove

Discovery Cove Orlando is a place where you can interact with a variety of marine animals, most notably bottlenose dolphins. The park is next to [SeaWorld](#) Orlando. As well as swimming with dolphins, at Discovery Cove you can interact with exotic birds, tropical fish, rays and animals.



This park is unlike any other theme park in Florida. Admission is much more, around \$280 per guest in the summer season (this price includes the Dolphin Swim) and admission can be reserved without this for a lower rate. Another way it differs is that you need to make reservations, as they limit it to around 1000 visitors a day.

Admission price to the park includes all you can eat and drink at the restaurants, snack bars, and even the alcoholic bar. All guests that enter the park have the option to get a wetsuit to use, and a snorkel and mask to keep. A Discovery Cove admission includes lunch, equipment rental and ticket to either [SeaWorld Orlando](#) or [Busch Gardens Tampa Bay](#). The park recently launched a program called "Twilight Discovery" that also includes a gourmet dinner and drinks. Park attractions range from a heated "river" that circles the park, although I found this cold, the large variety of plant life, a reef that allows guests to swim with thousands of different creatures, including 8-foot wide rays, an aviary, a large pool for the many dolphins. This is one of the smallest parks in Orlando, though due to its high quality entertainment and family enjoyment, it is one of the top-rated parks.

The park contains an aviary which contains parrots, toucans, and other exotic birds of different types. The "Lazy River" floats directly through the aviary, with waterfalls to keep the birds inside the aviary.

The park has restrictions on bringing your own sun screen. They provide you with their own "Environmentally Friendly" lotion. The water temperatures for the "Lazy River" and the reef vary quite a lot. The Lazy River can be quite cold but the reef is warmer.

There are no maps for this park, when I asked for one I was told to "Discover"

Discovery Cove is well worth a visit but it is one of those attractions that you wouldn't do every year or certainly every visit.

Busch Gardens

I have decided to include Busch Gardens in this section as it is only just over an hour away and thought it best to keep all the theme parks together.

Busch Gardens Africa

(formerly known as Busch Gardens Tampa Bay) is a 335-acre 19th century African-themed park located in Tampa, Florida. It opened on March 31, 1959 as an admission-free hospitality facility for the Tampa Anheuser-Busch brewery on the grounds of the manufacturing plant. Visitors could watch animal acts in a tropical setting and before leaving the grounds entered a beer garden offering free Busch beer to drink.

After the manufacturing plant closed down some years later, Busch Gardens focused progressively on its tropical landscape, exotic animals, and amusements to draw visitors. **Busch Gardens** began charging admission as the entertainment became more complex, with extra fees for the thrill rides, such as the roller coasters for which **Busch Gardens** is now known. It currently falls into the category of an amusement park and competes with other such parks in Florida and charges comparable fees.

The Serengeti Express (train) runs along the back end of the park and makes stops at the Nairobi, Congo and Stanleyville themed areas.

The Sky ride transports guests between Crown Colony and Stanleyville.

Morocco

The Park's main entrance is home to the Mystic Sheiks of Morocco brass and percussion ensemble. Treats can be purchased at the Sultan's Sweets and the Zagora Cafe. The Moroccan Palace is located here as well as the outdoor Marrakesh Theater.

Bird Gardens

Pink flamingos, parrots, black swans, and hundreds of rare birds live here among the foliage and waterways. In the Bird Theatre, guests can see the parrots as well as birds of prey.

Gwazi, a 90-foot, 50 mph duelling wooden roller coaster named after a mythological creature with the head of a tiger and the body of a lion.

Hospitality House offers free Budweiser beer samples for guests 21 and older and home to the Anheuser-Busch Beer School.

Land of the Dragons

A children's play area with a three-story-tall tree house, an enchanted forest, slides, a gentle waterfall, and smaller sized rides.

Stanleyville

This section of the park is home to the park's water rides and **SheiKra**, a roller coaster that holds numerous records.

SheiKra, a 200-foot roller coaster with a 90-degree vertical drop. The trains make their way out of



the station and begin the 45-degree lift hill to the ride's peak height of 200 feet. Trains make a turn and come onto a specially-designed holding brake which holds the trains for about 3-5 seconds. Riders are then taken down a 200-foot vertical drop and are quickly taken into an Immelmann inversion. An upwards turn brings riders to a block brake before riders take a second, nearly vertical, drop into a mist-filled tunnel. After the tunnel, trains manoeuvre a wide turn over the park's smoke house before coming to the finale,

when the train travels across the surface of a pool, soaking onlookers. After another turn, the trains come into the service brake and are slowed by magnetic brakes before returning to the station.

Stanley Falls Flume, a log flume with a 43-foot drop.

Tanganyika Tidal Wave, a 20 passenger water ride with a 55-foot drop.

Congo

This section contains two of the park's more popular rides. As of November 2006, the section is currently undergoing major renovation, which includes the removal of the park's classic Python roller coaster.

Kumba, is a 143-foot steel sit-down roller coaster with seven inversions. First built in 1993, it still remains a popular ride today. It stands 143 feet tall and has a top speed of 60 mph. Kumba is one of the first in a line of multi-inversion coasters.

"**Kumba**" means "Roar" in the African Congo language. The coaster itself mimics this definition with a distinctive roar that the train produces as it traverses the track.

Congo River Rapids, a water ride that simulates raging white-water rapids. The ride opened in 1982.

Ubanga Banga Bumper Cars, a bumper cars ride.

Timbuktu

A section themed after the malls and bazaars of Africa. This section opened up in May 1980. The Phoenix was built in 1984 and remains a popular ride to this day. The section was renovated in 2003. Important rides added during this facelift included the Timbuktu Theatre, which replaced the park's Dolphin Theatre with an indoor 4-D Movie theatre. In 2004, the park's family friendly Cheetah Chase roller coaster opened up, replacing the Crazy Camel flat ride.

Scorpion, a steel Schwarzkopf designed sit-down roller coaster with one vertical loop.

Cheetah Chase, a steel wild mouse roller coaster.

Phoenix, a looping Egyptian cargo vessel.

Pirates! 4-D, a "4-D" movie about pirates starring Leslie Nielsen. The show replaced the Haunted Lighthouse 4-D attraction written by R. L. Stine.

Sandstorm, an orbiter ride with three arms that spins riders around.

Nairobi

Alligators and crocodiles can be observed here up close. In Curiosity Cavern, guests can view mammal and reptile exhibits. Visitors to Nairobi can view injured or abandoned newborns at the Nairobi Field Station Animal Nursery. The area also contains Myombe Reserve, a tropical rainforest that is home to Western Lowland Gorillas and Common Chimpanzees. The major ride here is **Rhino Rally**, an unpredictable off-road safari that ends barreling its riders down a raging river.

Rhino Rally, a Vekoma River Adventure ride, Riders board inside modified Land Rovers through the park's Serengeti Plain habitat, interacting with animals and a raging river.

Egypt

Bedouin tents and authentic handicrafts and art create an Egyptian marketplace feel. Guests can visit a replica of King Tutankhamen's tomb with the excavation in progress. The primary attraction of the Egypt themed area is Montu, an inverted steel coaster.

Montu, is a 150-foot steel roller coaster with seven inversions. It is the park's second roller coaster after the success of Kumba. The ride opened on May 16, 1996, and at its opening was the world's tallest and fastest inverted roller coaster. The ride stands at 150 feet tall and goes 60 miles per hour. Montu still holds the record for the number of inversions on an inverted coaster (7).

Montu is named after the Egyptian god of war Menthu. The roller coaster is still the centerpiece of the park's Egypt section and the only major attraction in the section. Guests begin their experience on Montu entering through the park's Egypt section. A small midway of games on one end and a replica of Tut's Tomb on the other end greets guests entering through the area. On the horizon, Montu looms ahead, along with a fifty foot tall pylon that houses a gift shop and restrooms. The ride begins with a small dip turnaround out of the station, at one time, this section of the ride once had live Nile Crocodiles living below. Due to the fact that the animals eventually grew too large, they were moved to the park's animal habitat. After the dip comes the lift hill that takes riders 150 feet into the sky.

The drop then twists down 128 feet and into a 104 foot tall vertical loop. Following the vertical loop, an Immelmann loop comes next, and provides a 'foot chopper' element with the pylon. After completing the Immelmann, the train goes through a zero-G roll called the Camelback. Following the zero-G roll(Camelback), riders are then flipped upside down twice during the Batwing element (a rare element found on inverted roller coasters). Following the Batwing, the trains slow down on the block brake and it goes through a 60 foot tall vertical loop and then into sweeping arches finishing off with a corkscrew finale. After the corkscrew, the ride is over

Animal Exhibits

The Serengeti Plain

In 1965, the park opened its 29-acre Serengeti Plain animal habitat, the first of its kind to offer animals in a free-roaming environment. It is home to the grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, bongo, addax, addra gazelle, eland, impala ostrich, marabou stork, East African crowned crane and sacred ibis.

Myombe Reserve

Giraffes at the "Edge of Africa" attraction. A 3-acre home for six lowland gorillas and nine chimpanzees located in Nairobi, opened in 1992.

Edge of Africa

Opened in 1997, Edge of Africa is a walk-through attraction where guests can observe African animals. Among the exhibits are meerkats, a pride of lions, a pack of hyenas, a few hippos, and a troop of baboons.

Curiosity Caverns

This cavern attraction, formerly known as Nocturnal Mountain, contains animals such as bats.

Kennedy Space Center

Kennedy Space Center is situated on the East Coast of Central Florida about an Hour from Orlando.

Kennedy Space Center

The John F. Kennedy Space Center (KSC) is the NASA space vehicle launch facility (spaceport) on Merritt Island in Florida. The site is near Cape Canaveral, midway between Miami and Jacksonville, Florida. It is 34 miles long and around 6 miles wide, covering 219 square miles. Around 17,000 people work at the site.



Kennedy Space Center tour bus.

There is a visitor center and public tours and KSC is a major tourist destination for visitors to Florida. Because much of KSC is off limits to development, the site also serves as an important wildlife sanctuary, it's quite common to see Alligators and to be bitten by Mosquitoes Only 9% of the land is developed. Mosquito Lagoon, The Indian River, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore are also features of this area.

Shuttle launches

KSC is now the launch site for the Space Shuttle, reusing the Complex 39 Apollo infrastructure. The first launch was of Columbia on April 12, 1981. KSC also has a landing site for the orbiter, the 2.9 mile (4.6 km) Shuttle Landing Facility. However, the first end-of-mission Shuttle landing at KSC did not take place until February 11, 1984, when Challenger completed STS-41-B; the primary landing site had until that time been Edwards Air Force Base in California. Twenty-five flights had been completed by September 1988, with a large hiatus from January 28, 1986, to September 29, 1988, following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster (which was the first shuttle launch from Pad 39B).

The Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex is home to a number of museums, two IMAX theatres, and various bus tours allowing visitors a closer look at various restricted areas that would otherwise

not be possible. This works by running tour buses constantly around the center and you get off at each location and rejoin the tour at your leisure. Included in the base admission is tour-bus transportation into the restricted area to an observation gantry on the grounds of Launch complex 39, and to the Apollo-Saturn V Center. The observation gantry provides unobstructed views of both launch pads and all of Kennedy Space Center property. The Apollo-Saturn V Center is a large museum built around its centerpiece exhibit, a restored Saturn V launch vehicle, and features other space related exhibits, including an Apollo capsule. Two theaters allow the visitor to relive parts of the Apollo program. One simulates the environment inside an Apollo-era firing room during an Apollo launch, and another simulates the Apollo 11 landing. The tour also includes a visit to a building where modules for the International Space Station are tested.

The Visitor Complex also includes two facilities run by the Astronauts Memorial Foundation. The most visible of these is the Astronaut Memorial, also known as the Space Mirror, a huge black granite mirror



The Space Mirror at Kennedy Space center Florida

Engraved with the names of all astronauts who died in the line of duty. These names are constantly illuminated from behind, with natural light when possible, and artificial light when necessary. The glowing names seem to float in a reflection of the sky. The mirror moves with the seasons and illuminates the names of those that died on the anniversary of their deaths. Supplemental displays nearby give the details of the lives and deaths of the astronauts memorialised. Elsewhere on the Visitor Complex grounds is the Foundation's Center for Space Education, which includes a resource center for teachers, among other facilities

Orlando Water Parks

First came There was Wet N Wild, then Typhoon Lagoon, then came Blizzard Beach and now the latest attraction Aquatica from Sea World. Most of the Water Parks do not open until 10:00am

Typhoon Lagoon

The Ever popular Typhoon Lagoon is a water park located in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The water park opened on June 1, 1989 and is home to the world's largest outdoor wave pool. Legend has it that a typhoon wreaked havoc upon a beautiful tropical paradise. The centre piece of the park is "Miss Tilly," a shrimp boat impaled upon a mountain named "Mount Mayday" that erupts a 50-foot column of water every 30 minutes. Typhoon Lagoon's mascot is "Lagoona Gator" who is related to Blizzard Beach's mascot Ice Gator.

Mount Mayday Attractions:

Humunga Kowabunga: Three enclosed "speed slide" flumes that hurl riders' downward five stories in seconds (Height Restriction: 48" or taller).

Storm Slides: Three enclosed water slides called Jib Jammer, Stern Burner and Rudder Buster that send riders' through twists and turns from a height of three stories.

Gang Plank Falls: Family raft ride featuring large four-person inner tubes.

Mayday Falls: Tube slide that sends riders down rocky falls.

Keelhaul Falls: Tube slide that sends riders through caves and waterfalls.

Forgotten Grotto: A cave walkway through Mt. Mayday and over a rope bridge.

Hideaway Bay Attractions:

It is a sandy beach area located behind the changing rooms and lockers. It is in the most hidden part of the park and features the newest attraction at Typhoon Lagoon. **Crush 'n' Gusher:** Water "coaster" where two to three person rafts are propelled by water jets through sharp turns and drops. (Height Restriction: 48" or taller). **Sandy White Beach:** Beach area with Sun Loungers and chairs as well as a wading pool area next to **Crush 'n' Gusher.**

Typhoon Lagoon Attractions:

this is the largest section of the water park and home of the feature attraction the Tidal Wave, as well as many shaded, white sandy beaches to relax and sunbathe if you wish.

Typhoon Lagoon Surf Pool: Wave pool, which alternates on a 90-minute surf (6 foot high) waves and





a 30-minute bobbing waves cycle.

Bay Slides: Beginner slides situated in a corner of the Surf Pool designed to send toddlers down shallow slopes that end shallow water where mums and dads can catch them. Height restriction: 60" or under.

Blustery Bay: Zero depth entry tidal pool near the clock tower, adjacent to the "Surf Pool" and is surrounded by sandy beaches.

Whitecap Cove: Zero depth entry tidal pool near "Surf Doggies", adjacent to the "Surf Pool" and is surrounded by sandy beaches.

Learn to Surf: Hosted by "Craig Carroll's Cocoa Beach Surf School" a two and a half hour surf lesson before the park opens (additional cost). All needed surf gear provided.

Shark Reef Attractions:

Two saltwater reefs separated by a sunken upside down tanker.

Shark Reef: Snorkel through an unheated, saltwater reef populated with manta rays, bonnet head and leopard sharks (small ones!) and tropical fish. Snorkels, masks and lifejackets provided free of charge. An adult must accompany children under 10 years of age.

Sunken Tanker: Underwater viewing area of the reefs viewed through tankers portholes.

S.A.S Adventure: A 30-minute "Surface Air Snorkelling" experience. Using a "pony" tank, a small regulator, and a buoyancy vest experience the "Shark Reef" in a different way (additional cost). All participants must be at least 5 years of age.

Hammer Head Fred's Dive Shop: Snorkels, masks, lifejackets and unheated showers provided

TIP: As in Blizzard Beach you can buy the refillable Drink Mugs that cost \$10 and you can fill it all day from the soda fountains. If you return another day you can get a new sticker for your mug for \$7.

Blizzard Beach

Blizzard Beach Orlando is the second and most recent addition to **Disney's water parks** and is another great day out. This water park is geared up for the more energetic of us with all its slides and water attractions.

Blizzard Beach opened on April 1, 1995. The park's theme is that long ago, a unusual snowstorm hit the area, and so they decided to build a Ski Resort. Or course, the snow didn't last very long, and it left behind all of the ski jumps and so Blizzard Beach was born again, as a water park.

Most of the attractions at Blizzard Beach are on top of Mount Gushmore (The 5th highest point in Florida, with a total height of 220 feet.) Mount Gushmore is divided into three coloured slopes to help you navigate the park: Green, Red and Purple.

Green Slope

The Green Slope attractions are on Mount Gushmore. You can get there on foot, it can be tiring after a few times of climbing your way up though, or by the chairlift which is a lot slower.



Attractions

Slush Gusher it stands 90 ft tall, 250-foot mountain gully body slide attraction that reaches speeds up to 55 miles per hour and you have 3 "humps" to contend with.

Summit Plummet is the main attraction at Disney's Blizzard Beach water park. It is claimed to be the world's tallest and fastest free-fall body slide. It is 120 feet (36 m) tall and you can reach speeds of up to 60 miles per hour. The slide, which looks like a giant ski jump, is situated on top of Mount Gushmore. There is a minimum height requirement of 48 inches or 122 cm. This is not for the feint hearted!

Teamboat Springs is the world's longest "family raft ride" at 1,400 feet (426 m) long. You sit in large rafts, which can hold a minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 people, there are handles to hold on to (You'll need them) while the gushing water sends you down the slide. No infants allowed on this one.

Purple Slope

Attractions

Downhill Double Dipper are side-by-side racing slides. It is next to the Snow Stormers on Mount Gushmore. These slides are 50 feet high and are 230 feet long. You can travel at speeds of 25 mph on this twin tube run as they dash to the finish line. There are timers the time your descent. Minimum height requirement of 48" (122 cm).

Snow Stormers is a slide where you use a mat made up of three slides (350 ft long). The slide descends from the top of the mountain and follows a series of twists and turns through slalom gates. You lay on your stomach on the toboggan style mat as you ride down the slide. **Toboggan Racers** is an 8-lane, 250ft water slide right next to **Snow Stormers**. The slide descent sends you racing over exhilarating dips as you find your way to the bottom over slope. Guests lay on their stomach on the mat as they race to the finish line.

Red Slope

Attractions

The Red Slope is found at the back of of the park, there is only the one attraction here.

Runoff Rapids is a 600-foot tube run featuring two open and one enclosed tube slides. This attraction shoots guests down twisting, turning flumes, passing through tunneled areas. The open slides can carry 2 man tubes, whereas the enclosed slide is for single riders only.

Ground Level Attractions

The rest of the attraction areas are on this level with areas for the smaller children and access to the chairlift and steps. There is also **Melt Away Bay** which is a 1-acre bobbing wave pool next to the base of **Mount Gushmore**. The pool is continually fed by "melting snow" waterfalls which create the "bobbing" waves.

Cross Country Creek

Ski Patrol

Tike's Peak

Chairlift

Food & Drinks

Avalunch: Offers light snacks and refreshments, located next to the entrance of the Chairlift.

Lottawatta Lodge: Ski lodge providing outdoor covered seating and is the main restaurant serving fast food.

Polar Pub: Bar situated on the beach by the wave pool.

Sled Dogger: Offers deserts and refreshments.

The Cooling Hut: Offers light snacks and refreshments.

The Warming Hut: Offers snacks, lunch and dinner.

Coolers are allowed in the water parks. The only no no's are glass and alcohol. As in [Typhoon Lagoon](#) you can buy the refillable Drink Mugs that cost \$10 and you can fill it all day from the soda fountains. If you return another day you can get a new sticker for your mug for \$7.

Wet 'n' Wild

Some of the main attractions are listed below.

Wet 'n' Wild Orlando

Wet 'n' Wild was at one time the best and the one of Two major water parks in Orlando until the arrival of Disney's Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon. The other water park was Water Mania (Since Closed) Typhoon Lagoon was not a major threat to Wet 'n' Wild as it didn't really feature flumes and slides that much but once Blizzard Beach was built it took a lot of WW customers.

It still draws plenty of people though throughout the hot summer. It's location is ideal for people based on and around the I-Drive area.

The Rides

The Bomb Bay.

Individuals must be 48" in height or taller

Ranked as Florida's greatest thrill ride in Orlando Magazine, the Bomb Bay is designed to operate like the area in the fuselage of a military plane from which bombs are dropped. Enter a bomb-like capsule and feel the floor drop from beneath you as you take a heart-stopping plunge down a 76-foot high, nearly vertical slide.

Blue Niagara

Individuals must be 48" in height or taller. Discover the excitement of this slide as you race, turn and splash through 300-feet of intertwined looping tubes that twist from six stories above the park and conclude with a splash landing.

Der Stuka

Individuals must be 48" in height or taller.

Wet 'n Wild's first signature thrill ride, the Der Stuka, is a six-story speed slide which lets you "free fall" down a 250-foot slide, then coast to a stop along a 115-foot long water runway

Mach 5

Choose from three different flumes totalling 1,700 feet that twist and turn over different thrill courses ending in an exhilarating splash below.

Hydra Fighter

The Hydra Fighter is the first water ride in the Orlando area that allows guests to create their own unique water ride experience. Guests are seated in back-to-back swings equipped with water cannons. By regulating the water pressure, guests control how high and fast the swing goes.

There are several places to eat in Wet 'n' Wild all are of the fast food variety. There are also some shops for swim wear, gifts and souvenirs.

Aquatica

I have yet to visit this water park; however, I have published the parks press release to give some idea of what to expect.

Sea World Aquatica Press Release

Plenty of wide, sand beaches, refreshing lagoons and cool shade from towering oaks and exotic trees create the ultimate water park for guest comfort. Personal cabanas dot the shoreline for those who desire a private retreat. The entire park is designed to limit wait times and provide easy access to rides, attractions and even restaurants. Those who don't want to leave the comfort of their lounge chair can even enjoy beachside waiter service. All of this allows more time for carefree family fun. Aquatica will be the natural complement to a full day's adventure at SeaWorld Orlando, and create a trio of SeaWorld parks in Central Florida that collectively provide experiences found nowhere else in the world.

"In a destination famous for immersing families in fun, the SeaWorld parks offer the ultimate in family togetherness, connecting guests to the sea -- and with each other -- in three immersive, interactive, but very different, ways," said Joe Couceiro, corporate vice president of marketing. Guests amazed by the wonders of the sea at SeaWorld. They can then visit Aquatica to indulge in the playfulness of the sea, as they zoom, float and splash through amazing animal habitats. For the

ultimate in immersion, the company's Discovery Cove park offers a completely different experience: an exclusive tropical paradise, with limited attendance, where guests have up-close encounters with Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, rays and tropical fish. Whether making wondrous connections, having carefree fun, or enjoying up-close animal encounters, the SeaWorld parks offer guests an unmatched Orlando family vacation.

Natural, exotic, untamed, fun ... SeaWorld's new water park, Aquatica, has an attitude all its own. Offering fun as endless as the sea itself, it's not what you would expect from a water park, unless that park is created by SeaWorld.

The park's signature attraction plunges riders in clear tubes through a crystal-blue lagoon with black-and-white Commerson's dolphins. Guests feel as if they are flying beneath the sea among these beautiful animals. While similar in coloration to SeaWorld's icon, Shamu, these dolphins are also distinctly different. In addition to being much smaller, they are also fast, agile swimmers - making them the perfect inhabitants for this lively park.

Aquatica's attractions offer equal emphasis on high-energy thrill rides and immersive swimming experiences. A colorful mix of racing tunnels, raft rides and rivers offer crashing surf and high-speed thrills, while pools, lagoons and lazy rivers invite guests to enjoy slower pace.

Many of the park's attractions even offer dual experiences within the same ride. Two immense wave lagoons create the world's only side-by-side wave pools that can be operated independently or together. Though side-by-side, each lagoon offers a very different experience: one with crashing waves and 5-foot swells, the other with a gently rolling surf. Nine different wave patterns can be created throughout the two pools, with the ability to generate one immense wave, or even "dueling" waves.

Winding rivers throughout Aquatica also offer two different journeys from serene to extreme. One river carries guests through gentle waterfalls, past exotic birds and into an undersea grotto with thousands of colorful fish. An adjacent river offers pure thrill, jetting riders through rolling rapids, rushing geysers and racing waters.

Colorful eight-lane racing slides, triple-drop raft rides, double inner tubes, and a 6-story family ride round out the mix of thrills.

Even the littlest swimmers will enjoy one-of-a-kind attractions at Aquatica. One of the world's largest interactive water play areas includes a colorful rain fortress that towers 60 feet above a 15,000-square-foot pool. The entire family can zoom together on slides and blast water cannons. In a separate children's pool, even those Aquatica guests not old enough to walk can still slide down tubes with Mom and Dad in specially built rafts.

Chapter 7: Orlando Shopping

Florida in general and Orlando in particular are excellent for shopping. So much so that you may find yourself buying more suitcases when you come home!! Just remember the excess baggage charges though.

Designer Clothes.

If you are looking for designer clothing there is a huge choice. From **Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and DKNY to Guess, Hugo Boss, Versace, Giorgio Armani and Timberland** to name just a few.

Premium Outlets: This is a very good place to shop and one of my favourites. It has stores from a wide variety of designers including **Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Timberland, Osh Kosh, Versace, Giorgio Armani, Nike and Reebok** to name just a few. Most give good value for money but things get better around sale times like Thanksgiving etc. If you will be shopping in Reebok for sneakers or sports clothing, take a look in the many coupon books to be found in and around the Orlando area or even the local newspaper for a coupon they issue giving 10% or sometimes 15% off their products. This is additional to the offer they have on trainers/sneakers, which is, buy one pair get the second half price or buy 2 pairs get the third pair free. One thing to remember about Premium Outlets is that if you are over 50 they have a senior's day discount on a Tuesday where you can receive another 10% off your purchases.

The Mall of Millennia. This is one of the newest additions for shoppers in Orlando. It is a very modern, upmarket Mall with 2 floors, a food court and some beautiful architecture. Most of the other shops are aimed at the high income families. There is a Macy's, Bloomingdales, Gucci, Cartier, & Co, Burberry and Jimmy Choo to name just a few. Macy's is where you will find the bargains, look for the additional discounts. If you are looking for that something special and cost isn't really a problem then this is the place for you. Also in the same area are lots of other stores including, Linen 'n' things, (Great for villa owners) Home Depot, Marshalls, Golfsmiths (Great Golf shop) and a Super Target.

Marshalls & Ross Stores. You will see a lot of these stores dotted around the area and they are always worth a visit. You can pick up named, designer clothing at a fraction of the price. Be prepared to wade through rails and rails of stuff. Generally it is last season's clothing but the price is always very good. Some liken it to an organised Jumble sale. The main thing is they have a large turnover of stock and it changes all the time so visit regularly. You will find some bargains.

The Florida Mall

This is probably the largest Mall in the area. There several department Stores including **JC Penny, Sears, Dillard's, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom** the last two are quite upmarket. The best place for bargain clothing is Macy's there almost always seems to be a sale going on in there. There are over 200 speciality shops along with several sports shops including Footlocker, Team Choice and Oakley. There is a large food court offering a variety and a choice to suit everyone

Pointe Orlando

Pointe Orlando is situated on I Drive near the Wonder Works exhibition. It is quite a small Mall and has seen some changes since first opening in 1997. It has a Muvico IMAX theatre (Multi Screen) and several night time clubs and eating places. Pointe Orlando has been undergoing a major refurbishment over the last 12 months and is almost complete now. Shops include:

AIX Armani Exchange
Bimini Shoes
Boardwalk Surf & Sport
Foot Locker
Gray Fifth Avenue
Image Leather
Millennium
Players Golf
Tommy Bahama Tropical Emporium
Chico's
Everything But Water
Lady Foot Locker
Victoria's Secret/Victoria's Secret Beauty
Kids Foot Locker

Prime One Outlets: This used to be the site of the old Belz factory outlets and redevelopment is well under way now with phase one set to open in July. This place is set to give Premium Outlets a run for their money with many of the best and well loved stores getting on board. You can read more on our [Perfect Florida Villas Forum here](#). There is also an artist's impression of how it will look.

Orlando Outlet Stores

There are many outlet locations in Orlando and is a very popular way to shop as there are some big savings to be had. Some of the more popular locations are: Orlando Premium Outlets, Prime One Outlets, Lake Buena Vista Outlet Mall and Festival Bay.

Premium Outlets Mall - Vineland Road.

It is situated on Vineland Road you can get to it by going south on International Drive or by turning off the I4 at the Lake Buena Vista exit and turning onto Vineland road. The outlets are visible from the I4 itself. There are 110 stores, some better than others all with great savings. Some of the brands are Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Nike, Adidas, Puma, Calvin Klein, Hugo Boss, Versace and Armani plus many more.

The Ralph Lauren shop along with most of them, tend to sell last season's stock. The savings are very good but can still be pricey. The Timberland shop is great for shoes and boots, not so good for clothing. Nike have a large store here and it has 100's of styles of trainers/sneakers to choose from.

Though you can sometimes get a better deal with the Reebok shop who almost always have the offer of "Buy 2 pairs get the third pair free or buy one pair and get the second pair half price." Plus if you look out for a coupon you can get 10% or 15% off your entire purchase including the sale items. So you can save quite a bit. There are several shops with some wonderful kids clothing, such as Osh Kosh & Oililly where you can get some excellent bargains.

Another thing to think about is joining there "VIP Shopper Club" it's free to join and you can print more coupons for additional savings. The link is <http://www.premiumoutlets.com/vip/> Also if you are over 50 years of age, on Tuesdays you can show your passport or ID and receive an additional 10% off your purchases in participating stores.

There is a food court serving Pizza, Filled rolls from Subway, Chinese food, American Food and a Starbucks coffee shop. Restrooms/Toilets are situated in the food court and at various places around the shops.

Lake Buena Vista Outlet Mall - State Rd 535

This is a smaller shopping center but they still have one or two places to get some good bargains. They have a Gap outlet that has a plentiful choice of clothing at good prices. There is also Old Navy (Similar to Gap), Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren are two newcomers to the mall. There is also a Hard Rock Cafe outlet shop here now too.

There is a food court serving a variety of food from pizza's to burgers. There is also a phone card machine that gives great value when used to phone home.

Prime One - International Drive.

This used to be the old Belz Factory Outlets at the North end of International Drive and a lot of the old buildings have been demolished and new ones built in their place. Stores include Claire's, Ecco unlted. Fossil, Guess, Liz Claiborne Outlet, Movado Company Store, Off 5th Saks Fifth Avenue Outlet, PacSun, Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store, Sunglass Club, Tommy Hilfiger, Zales, Fine Jewelry Outlet. Many more will be joining once renovations are complete. There is also a food court area, serving the usual type of fayre other than Texas de Brazil which offer a little more.

Festival Bay - International Drive.

This is the only place still owned by Belz and is a new, modern looking mall situated just before you get to Prime One on International Drive. There are several different stores to what you would expect to see in and outlet mall. There is Ron Jon's Surf Shop with it own surf park where you can learn to surf. It will feature a football field-sized main wave pool capable of 4-8 ft. waves and rides of up to 100 yards, a training pool capable of 3-4 ft. waves and rides up to 35 yards, and a boogie pool that produces simple swells. Ron Jon Surfpark will host a surfing school, a pro shop (a satellite of the Surf Shop in the same mall), a restaurant and equipment rentals.

There is a movie theater from CineMark and an enormous outdoor pursuits store called Bass Pro Shop. You can get everything from four wheeler to a speedboat, fishing tackle to hunting gear, well worth a look around. Another store worth a look is Steve & Barry's where there are many things at around \$8, from polo shirts to jackets, mainly college gear.

There is a vans Skateboard park. Here too. There is also a food court.

The Florida Mall

The Florida Mall is a large upscale enclosed shopping mall in Orlando, Florida. It originally opened its doors in 1986. It is located on the southeast corner of Orange Blossom Trail and Sand Lake Road. The mall has over 250 stores, including its anchors Macy's, Dillard's, Sears, J.C. Penney, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom, and The Florida Mall Hotel makes it one of the largest single story malls in the US.

There are around 250 shops in this mall such as the anchor stores above and including, Oakley, Victoria's Secret, Mayors Jewellers, Champ Sports, Foot Locker and if you are a fan of M & M's there is a M & M's World. There is a large food court which can get very busy at weekend lunch times. They have Chick-fil-a, a couple of oriental foods, a Dairy Queen/Orange Julius, Natures Table for those wanting healthier food, Subway, Taco Bell, Sbarro for pizza etc. Starbucks and more. The Food Court is situated near the Main entrance.

A few of the stores do have more than one floor, such as, Macy*s, JC Penny and Sears. These are also handy places for a restroom stop as apart from the food court toilets are pretty sparse.

When you visit Macy's and if you are an international visitor to the US you can go to the gift wrap section on the top floor and pick up an international passport that gives you a further 11% off anything that you buy in the store with the exception of perfume and jewellery. This discount even applies on top of any other discounts on sale items that are in place. Macy's does have some real good bargains sometimes. If you are there when the sales are on, typically Labour day, Thanksgiving, New years etc. you will see some good savings for example, there may be a shirt you like that has already been reduced by 20%, there may well be another notice telling you to take off an additional 30-70%. Plus, you can use your passport discount too. So keep an eye out for those.

Best place to buy Levi 501's is JC Penney's along with some other bits and pieces. Such as kids clothing etc. Sears is handy for those DIY tools that you can't find anywhere else in the UK.

Saks Fifth Avenue is an up market store with some very expensive designer clothing and accessories. Most people in there tend to be browsing rather than buying.

Dillard's used to be one of my favourite stores. They have a great selection of designer clothing from Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger etc but they rarely seem to have any sales these days and you find that you can get the same item from Macy*s cheaper, still, a nice store to look around.

Car Parking is very busy during sale times and they open the doors really early at 7.00 am sometimes where they offer the early bird extra savings. Parking near the main entrance is quite hard too on a weekend unless you are there early. You can access the Mall from either Sand Lake road by turning right immediately after crossing the lights at Orange Blossom Trail or if you are coming up Orange Blossom Trail by turning Right prior to reaching the Sand Lake Road junction.

The Mall at Millennia

The Mall at Millennia. This is one of the newest additions for shoppers in Orlando. It is a very modern, upmarket Mall with 2 floors, a food court and some beautiful architecture. Most of the other shops are aimed at the high income families. There is a **Macy's, Bloomingdales, Gucci, Cartier, Tiffany & Co, Burberry and Jimmy Choo** to name just a few. Macy's is where you will find the bargains, look for the additional discounts. If you are looking for that something special and cost isn't really a problem then this is the place for you. Also in the same area are lots of other stores including, Linen 'n' things, (Great for villa owners) Home Depot, Marshalls, Golfsmiths (Great Golf shop) and a Super Target.

You can get your discount passport from guest services at Macy*s if you are a foreign visitor. Macy*s has a great selection of clothes here. Probably the best place for bargains in the Mall.

There is a nice Food Court here with the usual type of eateries plus there is a Johnny Rockets a California Grill and Cheesecake Factory. There is also a Starbucks coffee house close to the Food Court.

Chapter 8: Miami

Miami Beach is 235 miles from Orlando about 3.5 Hours drive. In 1979 **Miami Beach's** Art Deco Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Art Deco District is the largest collection of Art Deco architecture in the world and is comprised of hundreds of hotels, apartments and other structures erected between 1923 and 1943.

Many people know of Miami thanks to the hit TV shows, CSI: Miami, now and Miami Vice which gave the city much recognition in the '80s.

Miami Beach, particularly **Ocean Drive** of what is now the Art Deco District, was also featured prominently in the movie **Scarface**. Many famous people have homes in the Miami area. Lincoln Road is a nationally known spot for great outdoor dining, bike riding, and shopping. Miami Beach is home to many retired people and particularly snowbirds when the cold winter sets in to the north.

South Beach is the part of Miami Beach that covers the South part of the island separating the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. South Beach also known as SoBe or "The Beach" is one of the more popular areas of Miami Beach. Topless sunbathing is accepted on certain areas of the beach. Before the TV show Miami Vice helped make the area popular, SoBe was in bad repair with vacant buildings and now it is considered one of the richest commercial areas on the beach.

Ocean Drive is responsible for the South Beach inspired work that we expect to see when we visit. It is a popular Spring Break and tourist area, including the famous, Pearl and Nikki Beach night spots. It is also home to several prominent restaurants (including "News Cafe," "Mango's," and the MTV-popularized "Clevelander") and is the site of Gianni Versace's former ocean front mansion.

Lincoln Road is an open-air pedestrian mall, considered South Beach's premiere shopping area. It is home to many restaurants and several night clubs, such as Score and Funktion, as well as many retail outlets. While Lincoln Road was one time rather downtrodden, its unique boutique shops and restaurants have given it "an esoteric chic that maintains its trendy appeal." (ref. Ocean Drive Magazine) It is located in between 16th Street and 17th Street and spans the beach in an east-west direction

South Beach has a very active club and bar scene. It is host to over 150 clubs and other destinations, most of which close at 5 am. South Beach can be expensive, and access to nightclubs is often difficult for non-locals who do not have connections, or do not plan their evenings in advance. Access to the more popular nightspots can cost anywhere from \$20-60 for entry (depending on event and venue) and sometimes comes with a wait of several hours, in addition to evaluation by door staff.

Nightlife in **South Beach** is dynamic and ever-changing, although some watering holes like The Clevelander and "The Deuce" have remained steadfast tourist destinations on Ocean Drive for well over a decade. Clubs constantly change decor, name, and owner, so it is

difficult to state at any given time which clubs are popular. The average club is only open for about a season or less. Recently, the local government has been taking steps to prevent these short-lived venues from establishing themselves at all. South Beach is one of the world's foremost locations for fashion shoots, making the Miami area the model shoot capital of the United States. Approximately 1,500 models live in the area, with many more arriving during the prime fashion shooting season, running from October to March. Ocean Drive is the most popular place for shoots, but back streets are often used as well.

Manatees in the Wild -- You are likely to see wild manatees from the shore and along the harbours, canals, and inter-coastal waterways. One good place is in Coral Gables at the intersection of Old Cutler, Sunset, and Douglas Road. Other good locations are: Black Point Marina, Oleta Park, and Dante Fascell Visitor Center.

Miami Airport is the Third largest airport in the US with over 400,000 flights and over 30 million passengers a year. It is quite close to Miami Beach with a taxi ride costing around \$25 for the 20 minute trip. There many duty free shops and they are undergoing a a huge \$4 Billion modernisation program incorporating a new terminal, runway and roads.

To get to Miami from Orlando you need to take either the Interstate 95 or the Florida Turnpike (Toll) and take state road 112 continue on the 112 connector to the Airport.

Chapter 9: The Gulf Coast



The Gulf Coast of Florida contains hundreds of miles of magnificent, varied, award winning beaches. From vibrant commercialised fun places to quiet, conserved natural beauty.

Access to all the gulf coast resorts is very simple. All are connected by the Interstate 75 which runs down the coast.

Almost all of the coast resorts have areas of natural beauty. Especially down the Southwest coast with areas such Ft. Myers and Naples. Just a little further is the start of the Everglades. The

South of Florida is slightly more tropical than Central Florida. It has a more Caribbean feel to it.

The folks on the Coast are more laid back than their counterparts in the cities and the attraction areas and everything is at a little slower pace, which can be quite refreshing.

Also accommodation in the hotels is not always as modern and plush as in the cities of Tampa and Orlando and can be more expensive especially at weekends when the Floridians tend to visit the beaches at weekends. When the "Tampa Bay Buccs" play at home Clearwater Beach hotels fill up too with the opposition team supporters..

To get to the coast from Orlando you need to take the Interstate 4 west towards Tampa, before you get there you will come to the Interstate 75 intersection. Take the Naples ramp.

You could always drive the Scenic Route driving from Clearwater Beach along Gulf Boulevard. This will take you through all the coastal cities and towns, such as Treasure Island, Indian Shores and finally St Pete's. You can then head for the "Sunshine Skyway".

Sunshine Skyway Bridge is the world's longest cable-stayed concrete bridge, with a length of 29,040 feet (exactly 5.5 miles or approximately 8.85 km). It is part of I-275 (SR 93) and US 19 (SR 55), connecting St. Petersburg in Pinellas County, Florida and Palmetto in Manatee County, Florida, passing through Hillsborough County waters. Construction of the current bridge began in 1982 and was completed on February 7, 1987, at a cost of \$245 million. Sarasota is not too far from here. *(Photo Courtesy of Google)*

Heading south and passing through Sarasota, Venice and Port Charlotte we come to South West Florida and Fort Myers, Naples, Marco Island and the islands of Sanibel & Captiva.

Clearwater Beach

Some of the best and most beautiful beaches in the USA can be found on Florida's Gulf Coast. One of our favourite beaches is Clearwater. Close to Tampa on the West coast of Florida. Present-day Clearwater was originally the home of the Tocobagan Indian tribe. Modern day Clearwater offers a superb, award winning, spacious beach with powdery sugar like sand that stretches for miles. There are many fine dining places in Clearwater many along Gulfview Boulevard overlooking the beach.

Home to the largest fishing fleet on the West Coast of Florida, is the Clearwater Marina. Situated behind the main street of Clearwater, boats gain access to the sea via an inland water way. In the marina are boats that offer a wide choice of activities, including fishing, sightseeing, sailing, speed, dining and dancing, parasailing and more. Dolphin watching is very popular too. We love the Sea Screamer! World's largest speed boat and the Dolphins love to play in the boats wake. If you don't get to see any Dolphins the next trip is free.

Pier 60, Clearwater's famous 1050 ft. sightseeing and fishing pier, complete with bait hut where you can also hire fishing rods for around \$20 including bait, is the focal point of the beach. There is also Pier 60 Park, with a covered children's playground right on the sand. It has two play areas with age based equipment-one for infants and the other for 8-12 years olds. Pier 60 Park is also where to find "Sunsets at Pier 60", a nightly "street" festival celebrating the setting of the sun. With many craft stalls and entertainers etc.

Clearwater Marine Aquarium is one of eight facilities in the United States, and the only one on the west coast of Florida, authorised to rescue and rehabilitate marine mammals. This "hands on" attraction offers personal encounters with bottlenose dolphins, loggerhead sea turtles, Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, river otters, sting rays, coral reefs and local fish. Sick and injured marine mammals recover here until they can be returned to the sea. Clearwater marine aquarium is also home to a world renowned painter, Sunset Sam, a dolphin.

Visit the webcam for Clearwater beach by going here
<http://www.beachtourism.com/pier.htm>

The sunsets at Clearwater are phenomenal. So much so that it turns the beach areas to a festive gathering every night. Craft stalls, street performers and many other attractions take place during this time and well worth a visit.

Dining in Clearwater.

There are some lovely places to eat in Clearwater. Here are some of our favourites.

Reno's

at first sight it looks like a run down shack but the food served here is some of the best in Clearwater. They have an Italian based menu but use a lot of fresh seafood too. I love the Cajun Chicken Alfredo.

Gondoliers.

674 Gulfview Blvd.

Clearwater Beach, FL 33767

PH: (727) 441-3353

Again this is a restaurant with an Italian and Greek influence serving pizzas, pasta, chicken wings, Gyros and much more. The food has a distinct homemade feel to it. Some of the best fries I have tasted came from here. Although there are a few of these restaurants in the US this is the only one in Florida. The really good thing about it is the price. Very reasonable prices too.

Shepherds Restaurant.

Gulfview Blvd

Clearwater Beach, FL 33767

727-441-6875

This restaurant serves buffet food at a high standard take a look at their website for more information <http://www.shephards.com/restaurant.asp>

St Pete's Beach

There are two parts to St. Petersburg, the downtown cultural district and St. Pete's Beach. The beach is joined by causeways to Treasure Island and Madiera Beach. There is every type of water sport for you to enjoy from, Para-sailing, Dolphin sighting boat trips, wave runners and much more. This beach is another jewel in the crown of Gulf Coast beaches.

St Pete's is also home of the famous Don CeSar Beach Resort, also known as "The Pink Palace", a wonderfully designed hotel built in the 1920's. Once frequented by many famous people such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Al Capone. It is not difficult to miss being decorated in vivid Pink with White trim. This hotel separates St. Pete's Beach with Pass-a-Grille beach. This is where the intercostals' waterway becomes Pass-a-Grille inlet sweeping into the Gulf of Mexico. Adventurers used to fish the nearby offshore waters and grill their catch on the beach, just like the original Indians used to. Visit Pass-a-Grille Way, beside the intercostals' waterway, where families grill in the yards and there is a sculpture of children dancing.

Sarasota

is on the central west coast of Florida, Its official limits include Sarasota Bay and several barrier islands—some natural and some artificial—locally called keys, facing the Gulf of Mexico. The coast of the Sarasota area also is known for its beaches, the most famous being on Siesta Key, Lido Key, and Longboat Key.

Sarasota is steeped in history and there are many museums and art galleries. Sarasota began to acquire a reputation as an artists' colony in the early 1920s. In the years that followed, artists of many disciplines, including writers, performers, musicians, and architects, have been attracted to the community. Sarasota is the home of Florida West Coast Symphony, founded by Ruth Cotton Butler in 1949, and its famous Sarasota Music Festival which draws students, musicians, professors, and lovers of chamber music from around the world for a three-week event of international importance; Sarasota Ballet; Sarasota Opera; Florida Studio Theater, The Sarasota Players and numerous other musical, dance, artistic, and theatrical venues.

St Armands Circle. This is one of the few places you will see a roundabout in the US. It is a beautiful part of Sarasota on Lido key. There are shops and restaurants here and it's just a short walk to the beach.

Fort Myers

Established in 1886, Fort Myers is the historical and governmental hub of Lee County. It is the gateway to the Southwest Florida region, which is a major tourist destination in Florida, as well as being a popular place to live for retired folks. The winter homes of Thomas Edison (Seminole Lodge) and Henry Ford (The Mangoes), which are both primary tourist attractions in the region, are located on McGregor Boulevard in Fort Myers. Fort Myers Beach itself is a town located on Estero Island. Ft Myers is more tropical than Central Florida the vegetation looks more like the Caribbean with banana and coconut trees growing. In fact it seems to have a much more laid back style. The area is much more natural, less commercialised than Clearwater or St. Pete's. The unspoiled beaches are a pleasure to be on. Bonita Springs and The Lovers Key National Park are close by.

Estero Blvd. runs almost the entire length of Estero Island. There are plenty of shops and restaurants along the way. There is a Publix supermarket and also an awesome cinema where you can have a meal too. You go into a smallish room with about 8 tables and you sit down the server takes your order and brings your food. Once you have finished eating you can relax in the comfortable chairs and continue watching the film. Well worth trying. If you are staying at the South end of Estero Island it can take around 20 minutes to get to the Pier area as the speed limits are between 20 & 30 mph.



View from one of the balconies of Point Estero



There are a few hotels here but the majority are condos. You can rent them easily enough. We rent from a company in Orlando that get you a special rate which is cheaper than booking direct. You can usually get a 2 bedroom condo for around \$160 per night. There link is here. We stay at either Pointe Estero or their sister property the Gullwing. These properties are situated right on the beach and both have beach access through a private gate. The rooms are quite luxurious with a full kitchen, washer, dryer, lounge, with comfortable furniture and dining table. A master bedroom with a super king size bed and an en-suite bathroom with the biggest Jacuzzi I have ever seen.... you can get 4 people in it!! The other room is a twin bedroom. All rooms have TV's and they all have balcony access. They both have a private heated swimming pool and Hot Tub. There is also several gas grills for that ever important BBQ!!

There is a pier at Market Square and many more restaurants including a Pizza Hut. Most are privately owned places. To get to the pier from either the Pointe or the Gullwing you would

need a car as it's too far to walk. The road is quite narrow and the speed limit is only 20 mph and sometimes 15 mph along Estero Blvd. The area around the pier is a bit busier than further south along Estero Blvd. More people using the beach etc.



Fancy a great and fun way to get to Key west from here? Try the Key West express that leaves daily from Ft Myers at 9 am. It is a high speed catamaran that has a bar and galley aboard. The journey takes around 3.5 hours.

Shopping: There is a Mall at Naples called the Coastlands Mall and it has all the major department stores. To get there you need to follow Estero Blvd South to Hwy 41 (Tamiami Trail) then follow the 41 all the way to Naples and you will see the Mall on your left

Naples

Naples is home to parts of two major land reserves, the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and the Everglades National Park. The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is known not only for its 11,000 acres of landscape and wildlife, but for a two and a half mile length boardwalk spread throughout the sanctuary. The Naples area is also home to the Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, which dates back to 1919.

The city is served by the Naples Municipal Airport, whose only year-round commercial carrier is Delta Connection, which flies to Atlanta. Southwest Florida International Airport, in South Fort Myers, handles the vast majority of commercial air traffic in and out of the region, with 7.5 million passengers making their way through the airport in 2005.

Naples has a lot of wealthy people and is home to an estimated 250 Fortune 500 CEOs. It is home for Judge Judy and Steven Spielberg

Downtown Naples is home to the 5th Avenue South and 3rd Street South shopping districts, which feature a variety of antique shops. Gallery Row, also downtown, is a concentration among the numerous art galleries spread throughout the downtown area. The Philharmonic Center of the Arts, located in North Naples, has played host to celebrities including Bill Cosby, and musical talents from across the globe.

Naples is also the home to swamp buggy races, held three times each year at the Florida Sports Park.

With more than 80 championship golf courses in the Naples area, Naples is the self-titled "Golf Capitol of the World", claiming to have more holes per capita than any other community.

Sanibel & Captiva

Captiva Island is an island in Lee County in southwest Florida, located just offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. It was originally part of Sanibel Island. It was probably divided when a hurricane's storm surge created a new channel, called Blind Pass, which has now been filled in with sand.

Like Sanibel, Captiva is a barrier island to Pine Island (to the east of Captiva and north of Sanibel), however it is much narrower. The only automobile access to Captiva is via the Sanibel Causeway and Sanibel-Captiva Road.

North Captiva Island or Upper Captiva is another island, in turn severed from Captiva in a 1921 hurricane, creating Redfish Pass. North Captiva has power from lines that originate on the north end of Captiva, and is privately owned. With about 300 homes built and 300 vacant lots, the island is about half way to build out. Since the island can be accessed by boat or small plane only, North Captiva real estate values are generally lower than on Captiva.

These islands are a shell collector's paradise. The beaches are loaded with "live shells" therefore you are restricted to the amount you can take off the beaches. They really are well worth a visit it is a nature lovers paradise.

Sanibel Island on the Gulf coast of Florida, just offshore of Fort Myers, located within Lee County; Sanibel is a barrier island – a collection of sand on the leeward side of the Gulf Stream from the more solid coral-rock of Pine Island.

After the causeway (which carries a \$6 Toll) was built to replace the ferry in May 1963 the residents fought back against overdevelopment by incorporating the island as a city in 1974. It is home to a good variety of birds, including the Roseate Spoonbill and several nesting pairs of Bald Eagles. Birds can be seen on the beaches, the causeway islands, and the reserves, including J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Common sights include pelicans, herons, egrets, and Anhingas, as well as the more common birds like terns, sandpipers, and seagulls. There is a population of American Alligators, and a lone rare American Crocodile has been seen at the refuge as well. There are over 26 miles of bike trails and 17 miles of beautiful beaches.



The whole island has a tropical feel and appearance with its high vegetation. The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum is worth a visit and is located in the city of Sanibel, Florida on Sanibel Island. It opened to the public in 1995, and operates as an information and reference centre for national and international scientists, students, and shell enthusiasts who are interested in the marine, terrestrial, and land molluscs of the Gulf of Mexico and Florida.

Chapter 10: Atlantic Coast

Daytona Beach

Two of the most famous attractions on this Coast is of course the **Kennedy Space Center** followed by **Daytona Beach** known as “The World’s Most Famous Beach.” It is one of the few places in the world where a family car can be driven on a beach. The sand is packed down hard on the part you drive on.

Daytona and its beaches, is just up the coast from Cocoa Beach and is lined with hotels, motels, condominiums and houses, attract over 8,000,000 tourists each year. Hotel and motel rooms are typically plentiful except during special events.

During motorcycle events (Bike Week and Biketoberfest), several hundred thousand bikers from all over the world visit the greater Daytona Beach area. Everywhere you look you see hundreds of bikes and the air is filled with the roar of customised Harley’s.

Special events that draw visitors to Daytona Beach include:

Speedweeks (Daytona 500 NASCAR race, Rolex 24 sports car race, and others)
Pepsi 400 NASCAR race on or around July 4 (Traditionally called the Firecracker 400)
Daytona Beach Bike Week Daytona 200 motorcycle race in March
Biketoberfest in October
Turkey Run car show and events during Thanksgiving weekend (Traditionally called the Turkey Rod Run)
Black College Reunion (BCR) date varies
Spring break date varies
Daytona Beach is also home to the headquarters of the LPGA.

NASCAR has its headquarters at Daytona Beach. The International Speedway is well worth a visit especially if you are racing fans. There is also the Richard Petty driving experience here. It is pretty much the same as the one at Disney but hey, if you’re gonna get behind the wheel of a NASCAR then where better than Daytona!!

Museum of Arts & Sciences
Ponce de Leon Inlet Light, 2nd tallest in the U.S.
Southeast Museum of Photography
List of Registered Historic Buildings in Daytona Beach, Florida

The ocean is much more tidal than the Gulf and the waves are bigger hence the attraction for surfers. The hard compacted sand is an ideal driving surface and you will find many vehicles parked up with families having picnics etc. There is a fee to take your car on the beach.

Cocoa Beach

Cocoa Beach became world famous during the 1960s due to America's space program. NASA's John F. Kennedy Space Center is just 15 miles away. The town was home to many young families where one or both parents worked on some aspect of the space program. When many of the space missions returned the town would hold Astronaut Parades.

Cocoa Beach is classed as the closest beach to Orlando being just 40 minutes away. It is also minutes from Port Canaveral where you could get a 3 day cruise to the Bahamas. You can get an excellent view of any shuttle launches here too. There is a little known place near Port Canaveral called Jetty Park. They have food and refreshments there and an excellent view of the shuttle launch. They charge around 2 dollars to park your car. This place fills up early on the day of a launch, if you cannot get into the car park you can go further down and park your car and walk back on the beach to Jetty Park.

The beach itself is not as nice as some of the Gulf Coast beaches but still attracts a large amount of visitors.

That concludes the first part of this guide in the next version I will cover some areas not mentioned and elaborate more on some sections of this book.

Enjoy!

Steve Sewell

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www.floridavillaselite.com

The End
