

Orlando & Walt Disney World

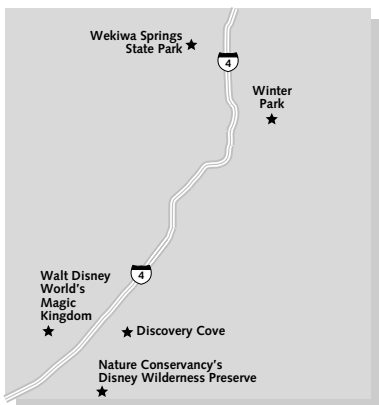
As neon lights lure sleepy travelers to diners and roadside motels, so Disney draws world-weary folks to Orlando. Come, it says: we promise you magic. Transformation. Regeneration. Let us take you away from deadlines and soccer matches, traffic jams and mortgages. Come into Walt Disney World, a better world. And folks come. By the thousands and millions, folks come to Orlando for Disney. Again and again, year after year, from all over the world. The city has grown to meet their needs, with endless chain motels, fast-food joints and shops with Mickey T-shirts, Mickey mugs, Mickey key chains.

Once here, however, some realize that maybe the flash and pizzazz of the happiest place on earth is not the elixir they're looking for. Sure, Disney is great, Universal Studios is pure unabashed fun, and animal shows at SeaWorld dazzle the spirit. But those who venture beyond Disney's gates discover that maybe Orlando's lakes, museums, sidewalk cafés and dripping cypress trees are as much a part of the magic as Cinderella's Castle. Orlando doesn't come prepackaged, and it doesn't always go down easy. It's a real city with ugly strips, seemingly endless road construction and an odd sense of incompleteness, as if it hasn't yet figured out who it is. It lives, quite literally, under the shadow of its theme parks – you can hear Disney's fireworks boom-boom-booming from miles away.

But Orlando has a raw spirit and a lovely demeanor quite distinct from its tourist face. So come for Disney. Come for Universal Orlando. But once here, take a few days to see Orlando's other side. Perhaps next time you'll come for Orlando.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swimming with dolphins, snorkeling among tropical fish and floating on the lazy river through the bird aviary at **Discovery Cove** (p332)
- Hiking through **Nature's Conservancy's Disney's Wilderness Preserve** (p274) for a picnic on Lake Russell
- Paddling quietly past alligators and blue herons on Wekiwa River, **Wekiwa Springs State Park** (p274)
- Watching the elaborate twinkling floats and dancing Disney characters of Magic Kingdom's **SpectraMagic parade** and sticking around for Jiminy Cricket's **Wishes fireworks display** (p300) over Cinderella's Castle
- Strolling around the shops, poking through the art museums and lingering over wine at a sidewalk café in old Florida's **Winter Park** (p284)



History

In 1824, three years after Florida became a US territory, swampy Mosquito County was established. The first US settlers arrived in 1837, and in 1838 the US military built Fort Gatlin as a base for the Seminole Indian Wars (p29). Upon Florida statehood in 1845, Mosquito County changed to the far more alluring Orange County. Orlando grew as a cow town, with lots of gamblin', fightin', and womanizin', and in 1875 the two-square-mile city (population 85) was officially incorporated. With the arrival of the railroad in 1880, Indian fighting and cows gave way to orange-growing and tourists. WWII brought air bases and missile building, but it was the 1971 opening of Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom that paved the way to the city's contemporary reputation as the theme-park capital of the US.

Climate

Orlando's landlocked position makes for a warm city all year round. From October to May is generally the coolest time, while summers can be downright unbearable with temperatures nearing 100°F. June to September are the wettest months, hurricane season is from August through October, and thunderstorms with frequent lightning strikes are common all year. Hurricane season runs from May to October.

National, State & Regional Parks

State parks within easy driving distance from the city include **Lake Louisa State Park** (off Map p262; ☎ 352-394-3969; 7305 US Hwy 27, Clermont 34714; \$4 per vehicle), **Rock Springs Run State Preserve** (Map p262; ☎ 407-884-2008; pedestrian/vehicle \$1/2), three miles west of the Wekiva River bridge on SR 46, and **Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park** (Map p262; ☎ 407-884-2008), whose southern entrance is nine miles west of Sanford on SR 46. For more information, go to www.floridastateparks.org.

See also boxed text *Beyond the Pavement*, p274.

Information

Official Orlando Visitors Center (☎ 407-363-5872; www.orlandoinfo.com)

Orlando Weekly (www.orlandoweekly.com)

Universal Studios (☎ 407-363-8000; www.universalorlando.com)

Walt Disney World (☎ 407-824-8000, 407-824-4321; www.waltdisneyworld.com)

Getting There & Away

Orlando lies 285 miles from Miami; the fastest and most direct route is a 4½-hour road trip via the Florida Turnpike (toll). From Tampa it is an easy 62 miles along I-4. Both the Beachline Expressway and Hwy 50 will take you to the Space Coast; the expressway has frequent tolls, but is about an hour faster than Hwy 50. Orlando, serviced by Greyhound, Amtrak and hosts of domestic and international air carriers, is the region's transportation hub.

Getting Around

BUS

Lynx (☎ 407-841-8240 route info; www.golynx.com; single ride/day pass \$1.75/4, transfers free) covers all of Orlando, with some buses running until the wee hours of the morning – timetables vary by route, so be sure to check before you hop on a bus that you can catch a return service. Lymmo is Lynx's free bus service, which circles downtown Orlando.

You can buy tickets, and get maps and specific route information from the information booth at the **Lynx Central Station** (Map p268; ☎ 407-841-2279; www.golynx.com; 455 Garland Ave; ☎ 6:30am-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5:30pm Sat & Sun).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The major car rental companies (see p520) have offices at the airport, within Walt Disney World and at many hotels. If you have a motorcycle endorsement on your license or valid proof of a motorcycle license, you can rent a Harley from **Orlando Harley-Davidson** (Map pp264-5; ☎ 877-740-3770; www.orlandoharley.com; 3770 37th St; \$100-140/day).

SHUTTLE

The biggest shuttle-bus service in the area is **Mears Transportation** (☎ 407-423-5566; www.mearstransportation.com; prices vary). Also try sedan and nine-passenger minivan shuttles at **Legacy Towncar of Orlando** (☎ 888-939-8227; www.legacytowncar.com; prices vary), whose prices include a convenient grocery-store stop on the way from the airport. Walt Disney World offers free regular shuttles to hotels and attractions within the resort, and from the airport to Walt Disney World hotels (see Walt Disney World, Getting There & Around, p318).

TAXI

Fares are \$3.85 for the first mile plus \$2.20 for each additional mile – and those miles can add