

# Orlando & Walt Disney World

## Includes →

Orlando & Around . . .	229
Walt Disney World . . .	260
Universal Orlando Resort . . . . .	293

## Best Places to Eat

- Ravenous Pig (p252)
- Yellow Dog Eats (p254)
- Mama Della's Ristorante (p304)
- Jiko (p287)
- Prato (p255)

## Best Places to Stay

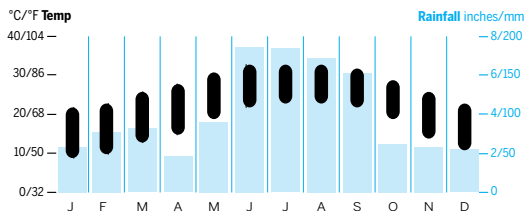
- Grande Lakes Orlando (p247)
- Bohemian Hotel Celebration (p250)
- Portofino Bay Hotel (p301)
- Alford Inn (p249)
- Park Plaza Hotel (p249)

## Why Go?

Play quidditch with Harry Potter, disappear into the Twilight Zone in a haunted elevator, whip through the air on a sea monster. In Orlando, the Theme Park Capital of the World, it's all about adrenaline-fueled fun wrapped up in the mystique of storytelling and fantasy. Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando Resort (including the Wizarding World of Harry Potter), SeaWorld and Discovery Cove cluster within 15 miles of one another, and Legoland is an hour's drive from downtown Orlando. These carefully constructed environments, dripping with illusion and magic, and filled with rides, shows and parades, promise escape from the everyday. Folks flock here by the thousands looking for just that. Sure, Orlando has a quieter side too, with world-class museums, excellent nature preserves and a burgeoning field-to-fork restaurant scene, but as wonderful as it may be, the city will always lie in the shadow of Cinderella's Castle and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft.

## When to Go

### Orlando



**Sep** Theme-park crowds thin, accommodations rates drop, summer sizzle fades.

**May** Lull between spring break and summer vacation peaks; warm, before the rains.

**Thanksgiving-mid-Dec** Enjoy seasonal festivities; try to avoid soaring prices.

## 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. Upon Florida's statehood in 1845, Mosquito County changed names to the far more alluring Orange County. Orlando grew and in 1875 the 2-sq-mile city (population 85) was officially incorporated. With the arrival of the railroad in 1880, the region became a popular orange-growing and tourist center. 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. Today, it is the USA's number-one travel destination, welcoming more than 57 million visitors in 2013 alone.

## State & Regional Parks

Hundreds of lakes, thousands of acres of protected woodlands, wetlands and waterways, and several excellent state and regional parks offer easily accessible hiking, boating, biking and other outdoor activities. You can rent kayaks and canoes at both Wekiwa Springs State Park (p244) and Lake Louisa State Park (p244), and Orlando Wetlands Park (p245) is an excellent place for birding. For horseback riding, head to Rock Springs Run State Reserve (p245), about a half hour north of downtown Orlando. You don't have to be a hard-core outdoor enthusiast or go very far to take a peak into Florida's wilder side – within an hour of Walt Disney World, you can be paddling the calm waters of the Wekiva River, past alligators, turtles and heron, or walking along marvelously peaceful wilderness trails.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Orlando International Airport** (MCO; www.orlandoairports.net) Orlando's primary airport. Serviced by Disney's Magical Express (p293).

**Orlando Sanford International Airport** (☎ 407-585-4000; www.orlandosanfordairport.com; 1200 Red Cleveland Blvd) Small airport 30 minutes north of downtown Orlando and 45 minutes north of Walt Disney World.

### BUS

A Greyhound bus originating in NYC, with stops including Washington, DC, and Daytona Beach, FL, terminates in Orlando (one way from \$80 to \$200, 24 hours).

### CAR

Orlando lies 285 miles from Miami; the fastest and most direct route is a 4½-hour road trip via Florida's Turnpike. From Tampa it is an easy 60 miles along I-4. Both the Beachline Expwy and Hwy 50 will take you east to beaches on the Space Coast in just under an hour.

### TRAIN

Amtrak's 97 *Silver Meteor* and 91 *Silver Star* from New York to Miami stop at Winter Park, downtown Orlando and Kissimmee. It's about a 22-hour ride from NYC (from \$140). The daily *Auto Train* from Lorton, VA, terminates at Sanford, 30 miles north of downtown Orlando.

## Getting Around

### TO & FROM THE AIRPORT

If you are flying into Orlando International Airport and are staying at a Walt Disney World resort, arrange in advance for complimentary luxury bus transportation to and from the airport through Disney's Magical Express (p293).

**Legacy Towncar of Orlando** (☎ 407-695-4413, 888-939-8227; www.legacytowncar.com) Prices include a 20-minute grocery-store stop. Round-trip to Universal, Walt Disney World or International Dr costs \$120 for a town car seating up to four people; \$155 for a five- to nine-person van.

**Orlando Airport Towncar** (☎ 407-754-8166; www.orlandoairporttowncar.com) Greets you at baggage claim at Orlando International and Orlando Sanford Airports. Transport to Walt Disney World costs one way/return \$60/120 for one to four people in a town car; \$85/170 for one to six people in an SUV. It's about \$20 less for transport to Universal Orlando Resort.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Hwy I-4 is the main north-south thoroughfare, though it's labeled east-west: to go north, take the I-4 east (toward Daytona Beach), and to go south, hop on the I-4 west (toward Tampa). Just about every place you'd want to go can be located through an I-4 exit number. From south to north, exits 62 through exit 87, you will find Walt Disney World, SeaWorld, Aquatica and Discovery Cove, Universal Orlando Resort, downtown Orlando and Thornton Park, Loch Haven Park and Winter Park.

Both Orlando International and Orlando Sanford International Airports, Walt Disney World and many hotels have car-rental agencies.

**Orlando Harley-Davidson** (☎ 407-423-0346; www.orlandoharley.com; per day \$120-200) You must have a motorcycle endorsement on your license or valid proof of a motorcycle license. Multiple locations.