



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Thomas Jung

Orlando Off the Beaten Track

Orlando, 4 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: There is so much more to Orlando besides theme parks. Take a trip off the beaten path and you'll discover an artsy, outdoorsy, and delicious side to Orlando plus you'll probably save a wad of cash. From sunrise balloon flights to historic 'Do-It-Yourself' pancake locales, you'll be amazed at all the ways this city delivers memorable moments. When you're ready for a theme-park-free getaway, Orlando will deliver an unforgettable getaway.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Orlando

DAY NOTE: Check into your B&B located in downtown's Thornton Park district. Here you'll find lots of boutiques, cafes, and a handful of great restaurants, most with fabulous outdoor patios where a well-healed crowd soaks up the sunshine. After lunch and a stroll around Lake Eola (maybe even a swan boat ride across the lake) make your way to I-Drive to experience the thrill of indoor sky diving. Later, dinner and entertainment go hand in hand at Medieval Times. The day's finale is a boogie down at Wall Street where a bevy of bars and lounges rock out every night.



Hue

Sophisticated downtown eatery with a fab patio



SkyVenture Orlando

Indoor sky diving without the jump from the plane



Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament

A live dinner show with lots of crowd participation



Waitiki Retro Tiki Lounge

Secrets of the South Pacific await



The Veranda Bed & Breakfast



SkyScapes Balloon Tours

Set flight above the Orlando landscape at sunrise



Coq Au Vin (Le)

A romantic little French place



Sak Comedy Lab

Laugh The Night Away



The Veranda Bed & Breakfast

Day 3 - Orlando

DAY NOTE: Few visitors venture beyond I-Drive, Disney area, and downtown Orlando, but those that do will find several hidden gems like Wekiwa Springs State Park. Here visitors can take a dip in the spring, always a refreshing 72 degrees, or paddle down river in a canoe and kayak. Plenty of local wildlife can be viewed from the river or along the park's hiking trails. After a full day spent in the sun, Enzo's Restaurant on the Lake is only a twenty minute drive east on 434 (take a right on 17/92). Make sure you have a reservation and try to arrive a little early to enjoy a cocktail on the dock overlooking the picturesque lake. Later you can catch an independent or foreign film at The Enzian, where the kitchen serves everything from gourmet pizzas to fresh baked cookies and delivers them right to your table in the theater.



Wekiwa Springs State Park

Hike, kayak, or simply snorkel in the warm spring



Enzo's Restaurant On The Lake

Dine with a view



Enzian Theater

Dinner and a flick



Back Booth

Music lovers night out



The Veranda Bed & Breakfast

Day 2 - Orlando

DAY NOTE: Balloon tours take flight at the crack of dawn so plan for an afternoon siesta later in the day. While you may feel a little sleep deprived, this sunrise experience is certainly worth it. Keep in mind that unless you book a private flight, your basket will be filled with other tourists. These early morning balloon flights usually wrap up around eleven, leaving you time to explore a little on your way back downtown to the B&B. I'd suggest heading to the little town of Celebration for lunch and a stroll. Or stop into the Gaylord Palms Hotel and hang at this magnificent resort for a few hours. This resort boasts a gigantic indoor atrium that showcases key West, the Everglades, and St. Augustine. There are also several options for lunch. For dinner, Le Coq Au Vin consistently wins Orlando's most coveted dining awards and is a local favorite. Draw the day closed with belly laughs at SAK Comedy Lab, Orlando's finest improv comedy show.

Day 4 - Orlando

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

DAY NOTE: Arrive at De Leon State Park hungry and head straight to the Old Spanish Sugar Mill for DIY pancakes. On your own personal grill, you'll be whipping up fluffy pancakes accompanied by the Mill's famous toppings. Afterwards, explore the park on land and in water before heading to College Park, another of Orlando's quaint downtown neighborhoods. With a Starbucks in hand, traverse through eclectic boutiques before settling in for a variety of small plates at Taste, College Park's artsy eatery. If the timing is right, you may even be able to take part in a cooking class at Truffles and Truffles next door. If not, head over to Harmoni Market for a glass of wine in a Tuscan setting.



Taste Restaurant

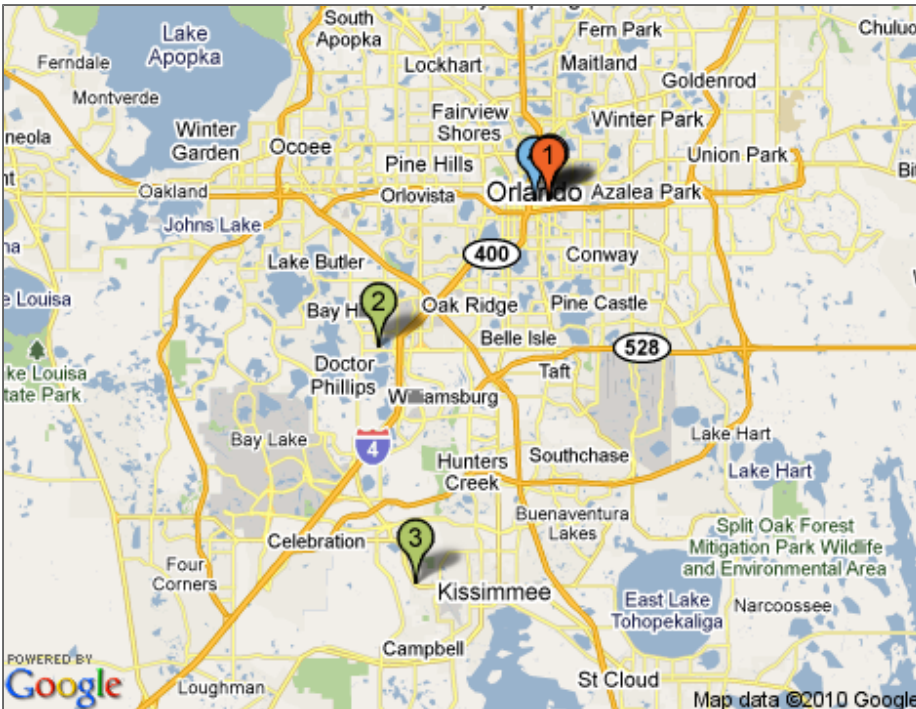
Taste food and art



De Leon Springs Hiking Trails

Beautiful hot springs

Day 1 - Orlando



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contact:

tel: 407 849 1800

fax: 407 872 3348

<http://www.huerestaurant.com>

/

location:

629 East Central Blvd
Orlando FL 32801-2916

hours:

Mo to We from 11:30 AM to
11:00 PM, Th to Fr from 11:30
AM to 12:00 AM, Su from
11:00 AM to 11:00 PM

1 Hue

DESCRIPTION: The trendy decor with warm hues and shimmering lights adds to the unique dining experience at this upscale restaurant. The menu features an innovative mix of American cuisine with highlights, such as Seared Tuna, Wood-grilled meats and fish dishes. The happy hour definitely brings a smile to every diner's face as the rates are highly discounted. Participate in the 'Disco brunch' that's held every third Sunday of the month, where you can groove to the music and have an enormous platter to dine on. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Hue

contact:

tel: +1 407 903 1370
fax: +1 407 903 1371
<http://www.skyventure.com/>

location:

7600 Dr. Phillips Boulevard,
Suite 58
Orlando FL 32819

2 SkyVenture Orlando

DESCRIPTION: Located near International Drive, this is the closest you can get to skydiving while still on the ground. Inside a huge simulator that looks more like a spacecraft than a building, visitors of all ages can experience skydiving in a wind tunnel or opt for the free-fall simulator. Either way, there's an experienced staff on hand to help calm your nerves, and there's plenty of padding in case you take a fall during your free-fall! © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of SkyVenture Orlando

contact:

tel: +1 407 396 2900
fax: +1 407 396 2167
<http://www.medievaltimes.com/>

location:

4510 West Irlo Bronson
Memorial Highway
Kissimmee FL 34746

hours:

Call for details

3 Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament

DESCRIPTION: It's the 11th century. King Don Alfonso and Queen Inez would like to invite you to attend a tournament royal. If you're fond of medieval legend, you're invited to become part of one at this intriguing dinner theater that brings days of yore to life. Seated in a castle (of modern construction), you'll dine on a medieval banquet that includes roast chicken and spare ribs. Knights and ladies of the realm entertain their sovereign and you as you dine with six knights jousting and competing in hand-to-hand combat and other medieval games of skill. Come a little early and investigate the Medieval Life museum, 12 cottages showing what life was like back in the Middle Ages. Call for details regarding admission. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: 407 481 1199
fax: 407 999 7856
<http://www.wallstplaza.net/waitiki/>

location:

26 Wall Street Plaza
Orlando FL 32801

hours:

Daily 11a–2a

4 Waitiki Retro Tiki Lounge

DESCRIPTION: Waitiki Retro Tiki Lounge is located in the Wall Street Plaza in the heart of downtown Orlando. They are open for lunch and dinner or drinks all day long and have a daily Happy Hour from 4p to 7p. The decor sets the mood with plenty of bamboo, unique woodcarvings, teak flooring, straw thatches, artwork from contemporary tiki artists and an old-fashioned ironwood bar. There is live music from Wednesday through Saturday featuring surf-rock, lounge and reggae sounds, and hula dancers can be seen during special events. The outdoor balconies offer a great view of the surrounding area and the food and drink selections include tropical delights and plenty of specials. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Waitiki Retro Tiki Lounge

contact:

tel: 800/420-6822

fax: 407/849-0321, ext. 24

www.theverandabandb.com

location:

115 N. Summerlin Ave

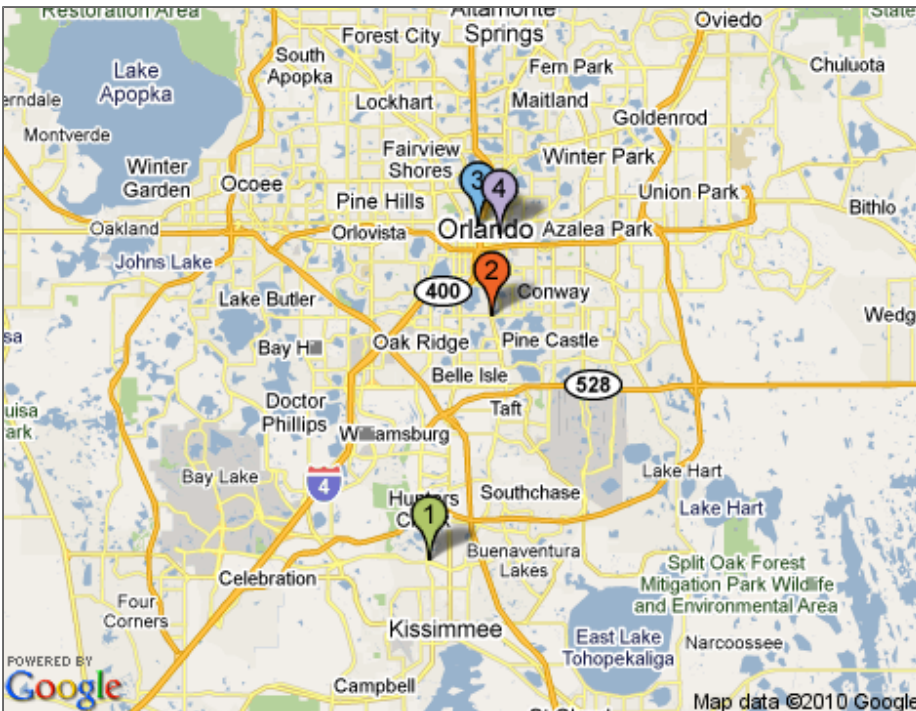
Orlando FL 32801

5 The Veranda Bed & Breakfast

DESCRIPTION: Located in Thornton Park, this inn near scenic Lake Eola is another option if you want to stay near downtown. Its four buildings date back to the early 1900s. All units (studios to suites) include private bathrooms and entrances; some have garden tubs, balconies, kitchenettes, and four-poster beds. A few of the nicer options include the Washington Suite, which sports a four-poster bed and a Jacuzzi, and the romantic Carriage Suite, which has a four-poster bed and antique claw-foot tub. The two-bedroom, two-bathroom Keylime Cottage (\$169) sleeps four and has a full kitchen. © Frommer's



Day 2 - Orlando



QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: +1 407 421 9322
<http://www.skyscapesballoontours.com>

location:
5755 Cove Drive
Kissimmee FL 34745

1 SkyScapes Balloon Tours

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

If you really want to make this a romantic experience, consider splurging for a private flight. It's pricey, but worth it.

DESCRIPTION: Going up in the world gives you a whole new perspective, and this company is here to help you do that! Rising in a hot-air balloon, you float over glittering lakes and pine forests, the Magic Kingdom and roller coasters, tiny villages, and the vast megalopolis of Orlando. From your perch, you'll get a new look at this vast development that has sprouted from the pastureland of central Florida, a man made maze that hides much of the region's original beauty. When your flight is over, you celebrate in the traditional balloonist's way with a bottle of champagne, a picnic, and a flight certificate. Check the website for information on tours. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: 1 407 851 6980
fax: +1 407 248 0658
<http://www.lecoqauvinrestaurant.com>

location:

4800 South Orange Avenue
Orlando FL 32806

hours:

Tu-Sa 5:30p-10p, Su 5p-9p

2 Coq Au Vin (Le)

DESCRIPTION: This fine French restaurant is located on a nondescript stretch of Orange Avenue better known for convenience stores than gourmet eateries. Inside, guests enter a world of romantic lighting, starched white tablecloths and excellent cuisine. You might begin with Onion Soup, topped with Gruyere cheese or an appetizer of phyllo dough stuffed with vegetables and cheese, and follow that with a grouper filet or a Black Angus steak. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Coq Au Vin (Le)

contact:

tel: 407/648-0001
fax: +1 407 648 1333
<http://www.sak.com>

location:

29 S. Orange Ave.
Orlando FL 32801

3 Sak Comedy Lab

DESCRIPTION: Locals perform at a 200-seat club (which launched the career of national improv artist Wayne Brady -- who occasionally shows up) that has performances several nights of the week. Favorites include the Duel of Fools, where two teams face off in improvised scenes based on suggestions from the audience, and Lab Rats, where students play in improv formats. Shows usually take place Tuesday and Wednesday at 9pm, Thursday at 8pm, Friday at 8 and 10pm, and Saturday at 6, 8, and 10pm. © Frommer's



contact:

tel: 800/420-6822
fax: 407/849-0321, ext. 24
www.theverandabandb.com

location:

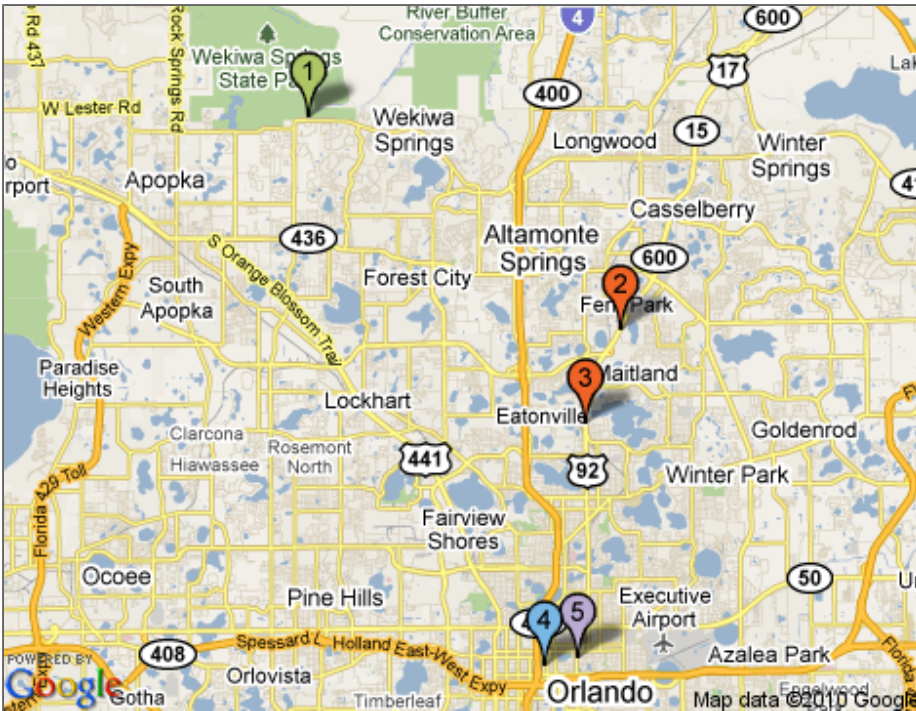
115 N. Summerlin Ave
Orlando FL 32801

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Day 3 - Orlando



QUICK NOTE

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contact:

tel: +1 407 884 2008

fax: +1 407 884 2039

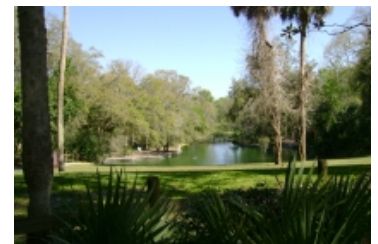
<http://www.floridastateparks.org/wekiwasprings/default.cfm>

location:

1800 Wekiwa Circle
Apopka FL 32712

1 Wekiwa Springs State Park

DESCRIPTION: Florida's fresh water comes from underground springs that rush through the state's underlying limestone base, known as an aquifer. Often, those springs bubble to the surface. You can see how that works at this 7,000-acre park where the waters are crystal - clear and stay at a comfortable 72 degrees all year. At this scenic spot, the headwaters of the Wekiwa (pronounced Wahk-EYE-vah) River, you can hike, camp, fish, go canoeing and, if you're lucky, spot some wildlife.
© wcities.com



contact:

tel: 1 407 834 9872
fax: 1 407 834 6647
<http://www.enzos.com>

location:

1130 South U.S. Highway
17-92
Longwood FL 32750

hours:

M-Th, Sa 6p-10p, F 6p-10p,
11a-2:30p

2 Enzo's Restaurant On The Lake

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Reservations are a must!

DESCRIPTION: More than 25 years ago, this enchanting Italian villa on the shores of Lake Fairy was converted into an outstanding family run restaurant. The old house was divided into several dining rooms, creating an ambiance of time-honored elegance and homespun grace. Come early to grab a glass of wine and enjoy it in their sculpture garden overlooking Lake Fairy. If you've timed it right, you might even be able to find a seat on the deck and watch the sun go down. This quiet and pretty area has been the site for many weddings and private parties. The food is simple, traditional, flavorful and homemade with only the freshest of ingredients. Start your meal with their famous Antipasti platter, a variety of house specialties. Then choose from pastas, seafood, meats, and poultry. Some dishes of note are The Dover Sole, the Spaghetti Alla Carbonara and the Penne Alla Vodka. Chances are, you won't be disappointed by anything you order here.

If you've saved room for dessert, you can enjoy conventional favorites such as tiramisu or Crème Brule, which is almost as smooth as the professional, polished service you'll be given by your server. The dining pace is slow and easy, leaving you lots of time to enjoy the cozy atmosphere. Valet parking is mandatory on busy nights and reservations are strongly recommended.

© NileGuide



citysearch

contact:

tel: 407 629 0054
<http://www.enzian.org>

location:

1300 South Orlando Avenue
Maitland FL 32751

hours:

Show times vary; Call for
details

3 Enzian Theater

DESCRIPTION: This theater/restaurant gives Central Florida perhaps its only opportunity to dine and watch a film at the same time. While watching a movie, usually a small art film or foreign film, you can feast on such Continental fare as chicken-topped pasta or whole snapper. You'll also find a variety of snack foods on the menu, with chicken wings a favorite. The café only serves food during show times, which vary, and it also hosts an annual film festival. © wcities.com



Enzian Theater

contact:

tel: 407 999 2570
<http://www.backbooth.com/>

location:

37 West Pine Street
Orlando FL 32801

4 Back Booth

DESCRIPTION: There something for everyone at Back Booth. This place is known for its musical performances and events, which range from theme nights and karaoke nights to performances by live bands. The music played spans various genres including alternative rock, funk, soul, R & B, jazz, punk, and much more. The bar features a variety of wines, liquors and beers, including Maudite beer, a rare speciality. The



citysearch

bartenders are friendly as well as efficient. The ambience is vivacious and very conducive for making friends. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 800/420-6822
fax: 407/849-0321, ext. 24
www.theverandabandb.com

location:

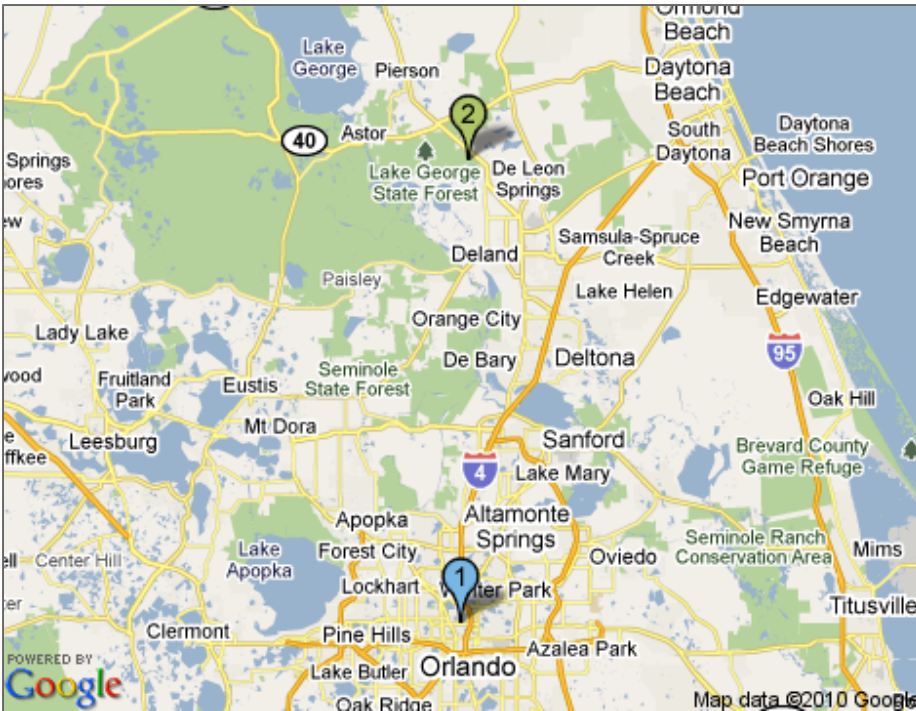
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Orlando FL 32801

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Day 4 - Orlando



QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Arrive at De Leon State Park hungry and head straight to the Old Spanish Sugar Mill for DIY pancakes. On your own personal grill, you'll be whipping up fluffy pancakes accompanied by the Mill's famous toppings. Afterwards, explore the park on land and in water before heading to College Park, another of Orlando's quaint downtown neighborhoods. With a Starbucks in hand, traverse through eclectic boutiques before settling in for a variety of small plates at Taste, College Park's artsy eatery. If the timing is right, you may even be able to take part in a cooking class at Truffles and Trifles next door. If not, head over to Harmoni Market for a glass of wine in a Tuscan setting.

contact:

tel: 407 835 0646

<http://www.tastecp.com/>

location:

717 West Smith Street in
College Park
Orlando FL 32804

hours:

M 11:30a-2:30p & 5:30p-10p,
Tu-F 11:30a-2:30p &
5:30p-2a, Sa 5:30p-2a

1 Taste Restaurant

DESCRIPTION: Spicy and juicy Grilled Chicken Swords or Jumbo Shrimp Swords are lip smacking varieties offered here. Just when you're thinking what to ask for and what not, here's a suggestion—ask for the Small Plate Menu. It's an assortment of a variety of dishes that they offer, a good way to have the most of it all. Wines and beers are stocked in plenty. Art lovers have something to watch out for too. Every Tuesday, there is an exhibition of local artists and there's complimentary wine served as well! © wcities.com



citysearch

contact:

fax: 904-985-4212

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/deleonsprings/>

location:

FL 32130

2 De Leon Springs Hiking Trails

DESCRIPTION: Beginning on the north side of the park along an old road, visitors will find two trails through diverse woodland of elm, live oak, sweet gum, and pignut hickory. As a gateway to the hiking trails, an ancient bald cypress is just a short distance off the old road. The park entrance station offers a trail map detailing the two routes, which provide over six miles of pathway where visitors can see a variety of plant life including saw palmettos and huge ferns. Visitors to the area are mostly attracted to the fabulous 72-degree springs, the large picnic and play areas, the tranquil Spring Garden, and even the pancake restaurant. Fishing, diving and paddleboating are additional recreations. A small visitor center has limited hours. Directions to Se Deon State Park: Take US Hwy 17 North from Deland for approximately six miles, following the State Park signs. Turn left onto Ponce DeLeon Blvd and you will travel approximately one mile to the entrance to DeLeon Springs State Park.



by Kristen Manieri

Orlando Snapshot

Local Info

Think of Orlando and the picture of an iconic, cheerful mouse is sure to come to mind. Disney World not only sprawls across hundreds of acres of land in Lake Buena Vista, located in Orlando's southwest, its impact on Orlando tourism has been even more sweeping. If not for the explosion of Disney World, perhaps neighboring mega-parks like Universal Studios and SeaWorld may never have been born.

No doubt, most vacationers come to Orlando for the theme parks, and for good reason. There is more family fun packed into every square inch of Orlando than possibly anywhere else on the planet. From heart-dropping roller coasters to unforgettable live shows, Orlando's expansive parks are worth every penny of their admission price. Orlando offers an easy vacation for families- it's easy to get around, easy to find something to do, and easy to fly in and out of.

The standard week-long vacation is not even close to enough time that to truly experience Orlando. A family could spend their entire stay within Disney World and still would only uncover a fraction of the delightful diversions available. Besides days spent inside Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom and the recently renamed Hollywood Studios (formerly MGM Studios), visitors can also book themed dinners with beloved character, rent watercrafts for traversing Disney's inner waterways, visit two Disney water parks, and take behind-the-scene tours... and this still would only scratch Disney's surface. You wouldn't want to miss shopping and dining at Downtown Disney, as well as shows like Cirque du Soleil's La Nouba and the House of Blues' Gospel Brunch.

Those who manage to break from Disney's tender grip are quickly swallowed up at Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure. These two parks are packed with spectacular rides as well as a huge entertainment, shopping and dining complex known as CityWalk. And the fun doesn't stop there.

Yet, there is life beyond the theme parks. While it's difficult to compete with the color and gusto of Disney and its neighbors, there's actually a lot happening outside of the theme park zone. Downtown's walkable

streets offer a robust dining and nightlife scene as well as some unique boutiques and a handful of theaters and museums.

When the locals grow weary of the theme parks, which they quickly do, they're more likely to be found strolling around Lake Eola Park that boasts the famed fountain and amphitheater. Here you'll find a few popular eateries hugging its shores, a place to rent swan boats, and an awesome Sunday farmer's market crowded with downtown hipsters enjoying its beer garden and live bands.

Winter Park, with its posh boutiques, million-dollar homes, and chic cafes and restaurants is also a superb spot for an afternoon of strolling, shopping and snacking. Even non-shoppers love Winter Park thanks to its museums, scenic boat tours, and well-manicured park spaces.

Wherever you spend your time during your Orlando visit, you'll likely describe Orlando locals as 'friendly' and 'unpretentious.' Orlando isn't a big city like New York or LA, and it knows it. Sure, Orlando people glam it up at nightclubs and can spend wads of cash like any big city slicker, but they're not a snobby bunch. They're used to sharing their space with visitors and can be amiable and obliging if you're ever in need of a local tip.

Besides theme parks, I-Drive, and a handful of quaint urban corridors, the beach is just over an hour away. Cocoa and New Smyrna are closest and both are great for families, couples, and singles. Drive an extra hour west and you'll be at the Gulf. In fact, Orlando is one of the best starting off points for any Florida-exploring vacation. The airport is a direct flight from every major city in North America and there is so much more to see within a two to three hour drive of this great city.

© NileGuide

History

Until the 1970's, Central Florida was known mainly for agriculture. A hot spot for the cattle and citrus industry, the area consisted of hundreds of acres of farmland surrounding a tiny downtown.

All that changed in 1971 when Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom was born. In 1973, SeaWorld came on the scene and in 1990,

Universal flung open its gates. These three theme parks helped put Orlando on the map as the premier vacation destination for families. Nearly four decades later, Orlando now boasts over a hundred attractions, 5,300 restaurants and 112,000 hotel rooms.

© NileGuide

Hotel Insights

There are more than 1120,000 hotel rooms and suites in Orlando just waiting to provide you with everything from a comfy bed to your own personal butler... depending on your price range. Hundreds of efficiency condos, villas, palatial resorts, boutique inns and high-rise hotels provide ample hospitality for every type of traveler on any sort of budget.

Walt Disney World

Disney offers a wide range of room options which makes it easy for all families to stay close to the number one reason most people visit Orlando in the first place... the Disney theme parks. You can camp at the Fort Wilderness Campground or really luxe it up at the ultra-opulent Disney's Coronado Springs Resort.

Of course, you don't have to stay at a Disney resort to get close to the parks. Located inside Disney but technically not a 'Disney' hotel, the Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort is just a five-minute walk from Downtown Disney. Nearby, the Fairfield Inn Orlando Lake Buena Vista in the Marriott Village is an Official Walt Disney World Good Neighbor hotel.

Kissimmee

Kissimmee hotels tend to be much cheaper than Disney hotels and are conveniently located close to Disney World and a bevy of other tourist attractions and dinner shows. The Comfort Suites Kissimmee has two nice pools and Old Town, an easy attraction to hit on a relaxing day, is right next door.

International Drive

I-Drive caters to budget-minded families as well as budget-busting executives attending conferences at the nearby Orange County Convention Center. Those with money to burn will love the JW Marriott Orlando Grande Lakes and the Rosen Centre Hotel. Rather spend your cash at the theme parks? Check out Embassy Suites Orlando

Orlando Snapshot continued

International Drive Convention Center where you'll get a lot of space for not a lot of money.

Downtown

Downtown you'll find a handful of quaint urban inns such as the EO Inn and The Veranda Bed and Breakfast. Of course, there are also a couple of chain hotels such as Marriott Orlando Downtown. The downtown favorite is definitely the Grand Bohemian, an ultra-chic Kessler property, that is the hotel of choice for visiting NBA players hoping to successfully challenge the Orlando Magic.

© NileGuide

Restaurants Insights

Orlando is delicious! At first glance, Orlando might appear to be a fairly homogeneous foodie town... but don't let its fast food facade fool you. Beyond its golden arches and cheap and cheerful chain restaurants, there lies a fair amount of edible sophistication found in unique and independent eateries all over the Orlando area. From hot dog stands with two dozen different tube steaks to chic downtown diners with artful bites, Orlando's restaurant landscape truly has something for every picky palate.

Walt Disney World

The sprawling Walt Disney World complex is an eating extravaganza owing to the dozens of eateries it's tucked into hotels, theme parks, and entertainment districts throughout the 7,100 acres it occupies in Lake Buena Vista. Memorable meals that bring kiddies face to face with their favorite characters are plentiful (Cinderella's Royal Table) as are more intimate 'adult' spots like Todd English's Blue Zoo and Victoria and Albert's.

There are several delectable restaurants housed inside some of Disney's favorite hotels such as Jiko at the Animal Kingdom Lodge and California Grill inside the Contemporary Resort. You'll definitely want to make a reservation if you plan to eat at any of the sit-down restaurants inside any of the four theme parks. Rainforest Café, for example, is a fabulous choice for dinner when visiting Animal Kingdom as it'll be the ideal pit stop as you depart the park after a long day of animal encounters. Coral Reef

inside Epcot's Living Seas Pavilion is also a trendy pick.

Disney's Boardwalk and Downtown Disney, two entertainment districts located inside the complex but outside the theme parks, also offer a handful of great eateries each. Flying Fish Café on the Boardwalk and House of Blues at Downtown Disney are definitely crowd favorites. Whatever you choose – fancy or unfussy – Disney dining options are seemingly endless.

Universal Studios

You're not likely to find much other than quick eats inside Universal Studios or Islands of Adventure... but never fear... that's why CityWalk was created. This 30 acre mega-plex of bars, boutiques, and restaurants caters to every appetite day or night. Restaurants here all sport groovy themes like NBA City for sports fans, Hard Rock Cafe and Bob Marley: A Tribute to Freedom for music fans, and Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. for movie fans. Make sure to sample the Volcano Nachos at Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville and the Bloody Mary wings at Pat O'Brien's.

Downtown Orlando

It's worth the trek away from the tourist areas to visit Downtown Orlando, even if you only plan on grabbing a quick bite. Downtown Orlando is almost entirely chain restaurant-free which means the two dozen+ restaurants that dot the landscape around Lake Eola Park are all unique and exciting each in their own right. In Thornton Park, on the east side of Lake Eola, you'll find award-winning favorites like Hue and Dexter's.

On the opposite side of the park, Wall Street Plaza houses a handful of good spots (The Globe's fusion menu is delish) best enjoyed before this party-zone comes to life each night around 10pm. Just beyond Wall Street you'll find Church Street Station, home to popular haunts like Ceviche and the Dessert Lady. All located within an easy five or ten minute walk from each other, park your car anywhere around Lake Eola Park and ask a local to point you to their favorite downtown eatery... it won't disappoint.

Winter Park

North Orlando has a lot of fantastic dining destinations but most notable is Park Avenue in Winter Park. This posh, brick-lined street is where you'll find chic eateries

that pride themselves on catering to a well-heeled crowd. Amidst the more luxe locations like Luma on Park and 310 Park South, you'll also find a handful of more humble haunts such as Briar Patch and Bosphorous Turkish Cuisine. Much like downtown, you just need to park the car and ask a local where to eat – you can't go wrong on Park Avenue.

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Nightlife Insights

If you're looking for amusement in Orlando, the fun doesn't stop when the sun goes down. From sipping martinis at swanky nightclubs, to listening to live bands at world-class venues, to spectacular fireworks shows, Orlando offers non-stop activity for those visitors still raring to go in the evening.

Bars and Nightclubs

There are four areas in Orlando that house a great selection of bars and nightclubs making it ideal to park your car at one and enjoy an assortment of various watering holes. Starting from the north, there are a couple dozen hot spots located in downtown Orlando that locals love. Upscale chill-out haunts include Ceviche (at Church Street Station) and Ember.

Clubby types will love places like Tabu and the bars of Wall Street Plaza will surely please. And for casual, beer-on-a-patio type of bars, both 310 Lakeside and Eola Wine Company offer an easy vibe. There are about 7,000 parking spots on streets and in garages all charging around \$10-\$15. Look for valet services too which charge around \$20. There is absolutely no overnight parking in downtown Orlando so make sure someone can be the DD.

Your next two stops are International Drive where you'll find favorites like Howl at the Moon, and Universal's CityWalk for dance clubs like Red Coconut Lounge and karaoke bars like Rising Star. Parking rates vary on I-Drive and will be about \$6 at CityWalk (evening rate). Lastly, you've got Downtown Disney which is home to House of Blues, and the bars of Pleasure Island. Parking at Downtown Disney is free.

Live Music

On any night of the week, you can listen to big-name bands rock out in huge venues like Hard Rock Live or acoustic guitar

Orlando Snapshot continued

players gently strumming away on patios at places like 310 Park South. Martini bars, such as the Bosendorfer Lounge usually have live acts seven nights a week.

Amusement Parks

Unquestionably, one of the best places to be at night is still inside the theme parks which never cease to amaze visitors with spectacular fireworks shows seven nights a week. Favorites include the IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth show at Epcot, Fantasmic at Hollywood Studios, and the Wishes Nighttime Spectacular at Magic Kingdom.

Performing Arts

Beyond spectacular shows such as Cirque du Soleil- La Nouba and The Blue Man Group, Orlando also offers fabulous movie theaters (read all about them here), live comedy at Sak Comedy Lab, live theater at places like the Theater Downtown, and an ever-changing selection of Broadway, ballet, and instrumental performances at the Bob Carr Center for Performing Arts.

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Things to Do Insights

There is so much to do in Orlando. In fact, visitors are challenged less by finding things to do and more by narrowing down the hundreds of choices to a handful of activities manageable in a week or two. On initial visits, nearly every vacationer opts for at least a few days at Walt Disney World. Its magical theme parks and entertainment districts like Downtown Disney never

cease to amaze. Nearby Universal Studios and SeaWorld are pretty darn awesome too.

Beyond the theme parks and tourist attractions on I-Drive, Orlando has become an epicenter of amusement thanks to family-friendly hotspots like the Orlando Science Center and Kissimmee's Old Town. Orlando's beauty is exemplified at Harry P. Leu Gardens and downtown's Lake Eola Park. Its culture oozes through at the Orlando Museum of Art and Albion Polasek Museum Sculpture Garden and. Its sense of adventure is unmistakable thanks to Orange Blossom Balloons and Boggy Creek Airboat & Swamp Buggy Rides.

Everything you could ever hope to do is within a 90-minute drive of this all-inclusive city. Spend the day in the sand at Cocoa Beach, bargain hunt at the outlet malls, lounge at your resort pool, golf, water-ski, or swim with a dolphin. It's simply impossible to run out of things to do in Orlando.

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Fun Facts

Top 12 Orlando Facts

1. There are so many awesome attractions in Orlando that it is estimated that it would take the average traveler 67 full days to experience every one.
2. Each year, 150,000 gallons of slime and 10,000 cream pies are dumped on guests at The Nickelodeon Family Suites.
3. Orlando is home to the first water park ever... Wet'n Wild opened in 1977 and it's still one of the only water parks that stays open 365 days a year.

4. You'll find the biggest collection of Tiffany glass anywhere in the world at the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art in Winter Park.

5. Walt Disney World Resort is so huge that you could fit two Manhattans or one San Francisco in it.

6.. Trainers at SeaWorld Orlando feed Shamu 230 lbs of food every day... wow, what a whale!

7. If you ate breakfast, lunch and dinner at a different Orlando restaurant every day, it would still take you five years to eat at all 5,300 of them.

8. The famous lines "I am not a crook" were spoken by Richard Nixon on Nov. 17, 1973 at the Disney's Contemporary Resort.

9. Marriott chose Orlando to be the city where they built the world's largest Marriott, a 2,000-room mega-resort called the Orlando World Center Marriott Resort and Convention Center.

10. The oldest and biggest bald cypress tree in the world grows in Central Florida- "The Senator" is more than 138 ft tall.

11. Lots of famous faces started off in Orlando... Rob Thomas and Mandy Moore grew up in Orlando; JC Chasez and Joey Fatone used to work at Universal Orlando; and Howie Dorough of the Backstreet Boys was born in Orlando.

12. Blue Man Group uses the equivalent of 56,000 rolls of paper during the show each night. Don't worry... they recycle.

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Orlando Snapshot continued

Weather

Statistics	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature C												
Average High	22	23	26	28	31	33	33	33	32	29	26	23
Average Mean	15	16	19	21	25	27	28	28	27	24	20	17
Average Low	9	10	13	15	19	22	23	23	22	18	14	11
Temperature F												
Average High	72	74	79	83	88	91	92	92	90	85	79	73
Average Mean	61	62	67	71	77	81	82	82	81	75	69	63
Average Low	50	51	56	60	66	71	73	73	72	65	59	53
Rainy Days	6	7	8	6	9	14	17	16	14	9	6	6
Rain Fall (cm)	6.2	6.0	9.0	6.2	9.5	18.7	18.2	15.9	14.6	6.9	5.9	5.9
Rain Fall (in)	2.4	2.4	3.5	2.4	3.7	7.4	7.2	6.2	5.8	2.7	2.3	2.3

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