

Walt Disney World Visitor's Guide



Walt Disney World, located in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, on the southwest side of Orlando, is the flagship of Disney's worldwide theme park empire. It is, by far, the most popular theme park resort in the world. Visitors describe it as a place of magic, wonder, fantasy, fun, excitement, and relaxation.

The centerpieces of Walt Disney World are the four theme parks: The Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center, Disney's Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom. Walt Disney World also has two of the world's three most popular water parks - Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach, both heavily themed. Two shopping and entertainment districts, Downtown Disney and Disney's Boardwalk, provide extensive shopping, dining, and entertainment options. If none of that strikes your fancy, check out some of the lesser-known activities: golf, tennis, boating, race car driving, spas and health clubs, backstage tours, sporting events, character dining, and much more.

Simply put, if you can't find something fun to do at Walt Disney World, you just aren't trying hard enough.

Districts

Walt Disney World can be divided into five distinct areas—one for each of the four theme parks, plus Downtown Disney. The various resort hotels, and the attractions and restaurants found within, are grouped with the nearest park.

Magic Kingdom — Based on the original Disneyland in California, this is the oldest and most popular park of the complex. In fact, with over 17 million visitors annually, it's the most-visited single theme park in the world. This is the park people think of first when they think of Walt Disney World, a place where adventure meets fantasy and history meets the future. The Magic Kingdom has the most kid-friendly attractions and most of the classic rides beloved by kids-at-heart.



Epcot Center — A sort of "permanent World's Fair", Epcot is dedicated to both international culture and technological innovation. World Showcase takes you on a trip around the world as you visit themed pavilions filled with the art, architecture, people, and products of eleven different countries. Future World explores human achievements in pavilions dedicated to communication, imagination, conservation, and more. Not far from Epcot is Disney's Boardwalk, a collection of restaurants, gift shops, and nightlife spots themed as a 1920's Eastern Seaboard boardwalk.

Disney's Hollywood Studios — This park represents the "Hollywood that never was," with attractions themed around movies and television. You'll find a variety of live shows and attractions based on Disney, Pixar, and Lucas Film productions. The ESPN Wide World of Sports complex is nearby.



Disney's Animal Kingdom — Something of a mix between a zoo and a theme park, Animal Kingdom features a naturalistic live animal african safari, alongside more

traditional Disney amusement rides. Blizzard Beach, a water park themed as a melting ski resort, is nearby.

Downtown Disney — For more "grown-up" activities, Downtown Disney has shopping, nightclubs, restaurants, and unique entertainment. This is where the most action is after dark. Downtown Disney is divided into three sections. Downtown Disney Marketplace has several shopping and eating establishments and is tailored towards a family setting. Pleasure Island is a more adult oriented section, with upscale restaurants and bars. Finally, Downtown Disney West Side is home to AMC Theatres, House of Blues, and the exclusive Cirque du Soleil show La Nouba. Typhoon Lagoon water park is nearby.

Understand

"I do not make films primarily for children. I make them for the child in all of us, whether we be six or sixty. Call the child 'innocence'. The worst of us is not without innocence, although buried deeply it might be. In my work I try to reach and speak to that innocence, showing it the fun and joy of living; showing it that laughter is healthy; showing it that the human species, although happily ridiculous at times, is still reaching for the stars." — Walt Disney

The most important thing to understand about the Walt Disney World Resort is that it was designed to be fun for everyone. Don't make the mistake of staying away just because you don't have kids. Singles and couples without children who think a Walt Disney World vacation is just for kids ignore the many "adult" entertainments available throughout the resort. Gourmands, sun-worshippers, world travelers, thrill-seekers, comedy-lovers, film devotees, sports fans, club-hoppers, and history buffs will all find plenty of ways to have a great time.

Of course, if you do have kids, the best part of your Walt Disney World vacation is in experiencing the parks through their eyes. That is when you really understand Walt Disney's vision of a place where kids and parents can have fun together. Walt Disney World is enormous, a multi-day resort destination. Each of its four theme parks is big enough to occupy visitors for a full day (and often two, depending on crowds). Unless you live nearby, four days is considered the bare minimum length of visit to even begin to experience the resort; some people stay as long as two weeks and still bypass some attractions.

Traveling to Walt Disney World represents a major pilgrimage for many families. The "typical" visit involves flying into Orlando International Airport, busing to an on-site Disney hotel, spending about a week without leaving Disney property, and returning home. There are infinite variations possible, but this remains what most people mean when they talk of "going to Disney World".

Everything at Walt Disney World is carefully constructed and choreographed to maintain your perceptions of visiting an idealized world. Company jargon frames every aspect of customer service as part of the "show": employees are "cast members", visitors are "guests", and every prop and costume must be completely "in-character" while "on-stage" (visible to guests).

Disney prides themselves on customer service and friendliness. You will never find garbage lying in the streets or bathrooms that are too dirty, and anything that is damaged is either removed or fixed immediately. The streets are almost sparkling and the buildings look brand new no matter what time of the day or year you are there. While some people find this attention to detail cloying and artificial, the vast majority of visitors are happy to immerse themselves in this relaxing, carefree environment. And customer service is almost universally impeccable, even (or perhaps especially) when things go wrong.



Many first-time visitors try to do too much during their stay. Unless crowds are unusually small, this is a sure-fire recipe for burnout and exhaustion. You need to have a basic schedule in mind, but you should remain flexible in order to account for closed rides, full restaurants, special events, and just changing your mind. If the crowds get too heavy or the weather gets too hot, smart guests staying on-site head back to their hotels to relax, grab a snack, or take a swim, then return later in the day. Trying to adhere to a rigid schedule will only frustrate you and your family - and you're not going to Walt Disney World to get frustrated, are you?

With some careful basic planning, an open mind, and a cheerful attitude, a visit to Walt Disney World can be whatever you want it to be - fulfilling, exciting, relaxing, enlightening, or just plain fun. Whatever you chose to do, your visit is guaranteed to be an experience, in every sense of the word—one you'll never forget.

History

Disneyland was an unmitigated success. Walt Disney had created not just an amusement park, where children could ride kiddie rides while their parents watched

from a bench, but the world's first theme park, a place where children and grown-ups could both have fun, together.

But it was not long after Disneyland's 1955 opening that Walt realized that the available space in Anaheim was too small. He had his park, but he and his Imagineers were constantly coming up with new ideas, ideas that just weren't going to fit inside Disneyland. In the sixties, Walt began looking to the east coast, for a place with enough space to hold all of the ideas his team could dream up. He found such a place in Central Florida, southwest of the sleepy city of Orlando. Here, along the new Interstate 4, there was plenty of space, far more than would be needed for just a single theme park. Walt had grander ideas in mind for this "Florida Project" of his.



After buying up over 27,000 acres (11,000 ha) of land on the sly, Walt announced his ambitious Disney World plans to the world. A theme park would be built, of course—a Magic Kingdom on the north end of the property. But to get there from I-4, guests would need to pass through the true centerpiece of the project: EPCOT, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow.

EPCOT was Walt Disney's largest, most revolutionary idea yet—a real city, with 20,000 real people living and working within, making use of the most advanced technologies to grow food, provide transport, and enhance quality of life. Much of the technology was already in use at Disneyland—PeopleMovers and monorails, for instance—but these would not be amusement rides. EPCOT was to be a place where the Imagineers' ideas were put to practical use, for the betterment of all mankind.

Alas, it was not to be. Walt died in December 1966, just as the Florida Project was coming to fruition. Without Walt to drive the project, the company board refused to undertake the ambitious EPCOT plans. But Walt's brother Roy Disney insisted the project as a whole go forward, starting with the Magic Kingdom. Roy changed the project's name to Walt Disney World. This new resort would be a tribute to Walt's vision, but would never really be the fulfillment of it.

The Magic Kingdom opened on October 1, 1971, with two hotels, a campground, and two golf courses nearby. It was an immediate success, single-handedly sparking the development of the Orlando area as one of the country's busiest vacation destinations.

Though Roy died before the year ended, he had succeeded in getting his brother's final project off the ground.

Walt Disney World's first decade passed quickly, and by the time of its "Tencennial" celebration in 1981, a new theme park was being built in the space Walt had envisioned for EPCOT. The new park would be called EPCOT Center, though it bore little resemblance to Walt's original plans. Instead, EPCOT would be a sort of "permanent world's fair", combining Future World, made up of grand pavilions devoted to human progress, with a World Showcase of meticulously detailed recreations of foreign lands. EPCOT opened in 1982, and was followed by a combination theme park and movie studio called Disney MGM Studios (later renamed Disney's Hollywood Studios) in 1989, and then by Disney's Animal Kingdom, a zoological theme park, in 1998.

Over the years, numerous resort hotels and recreational activities were added to support the increased attendance at the multi-park resort. Two large water parks were added in 1989 and in 1995. In addition, a remote area of the property that started as Lake Buena Vista Shopping Village evolved into the Disney Village Marketplace, and eventually expanded to become Downtown Disney, an adult-oriented shopping and entertainment district.



Walt Disney never would have imagined what Walt Disney World has become, and it is far removed from his original vision. But one of his guiding principles was to "keep moving forward", and Disney World has done just that, becoming the largest and most popular theme park resort complex in the world.

Watch

The Walt Disney Company is a multinational media conglomerate, so video productions featuring Walt Disney World are ubiquitous. Several television programs have filmed on-location at the resort. The 1990s-era revival of *The Mickey Mouse Club* (the one that gave Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake their starts) was filmed entirely at the production facilities inside Disney-MGM Studios (now Hollywood Studios). *Full House*, *Roseanne*, *Family Matters*, and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* are among the sitcoms

(mostly on Disney-owned ABC) with episodes showing the characters visiting Walt Disney World. Another fun option, if you can find it, is 1990's *The Muppets at Walt Disney World*, which was intended as a precursor to Disney's purchase of the Muppets (which finally happened in 2004).

Those shows only used the park as a backdrop, though, so they have limited "tourist" value. For meatier fare, there's always the yearly Walt Disney World Christmas Day Parade, which often includes segments showing the latest and greatest attractions around the World. If you're going to watch the parade just to get planning information, though, you might as well just call Disney at +1 407 W-DISNEY and ask for their free vacation planning video. As expected, you won't find much official material that addresses the problems you might encounter at Walt Disney World, but they do offer a good introduction to the resort for first-timers who are trying to get a feel for the place before they go. Another good source of information is the official YouTube channel of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts.



Disney has also made a few full-length features based on various rides in the parks—the four *Pirates of the Caribbean* films being by far the best—but don't expect the rides to have much of anything to do with the films. Okay, yes, Jack Sparrow can now be spotted inside the *Pirates* ride, but it's just a cameo appearance. Last but not least, Walt Disney World is featured in three "Disney Sing Along Songs" titles. *Campout at Walt Disney World* is set at Fort Wilderness Campground, *Beach Party at Walt Disney World* covers a wide range of activities including the two water parks, and *Flik's Musical Adventure* is set at Disney's Animal Kingdom.

Climate

Like all of Central Florida, the climate at Walt Disney World is humid and subtropical. Summer (May–October) is hot and sticky and winter (November–April) is mild and drier. Visitors from higher latitudes are often surprised by the sheer intensity of the summer sun in Florida, which can rise to within a few degrees of straight overhead in June and July. In June through September, late afternoon thundershowers are very common; plan accordingly.

That said, climate problems are well known at Walt Disney World and there are several means to cope. Inclement weather can often lead to the temporary closure of outdoor rides and live performances. In the case of rides, they will re-open after the weather improves, and FastPass tickets will continue to be accepted, even if the printed time interval has expired. Live performances may be either delayed or canceled outright. On the other hand, inclement weather could work to your advantage, as it drives some visitors away from outdoor areas, or out of the parks entirely.

When to Visit

There used to be some times of year when the parks were relatively deserted, but not so much anymore. Now they just vary from "moderately busy" to "completely insane". Still, deciding when to go remains a game of trade-offs: you must decide whether to favor lower crowds or longer park hours, and decide whether you prefer scorching days or chilly nights.

The peak periods for attendance are late December, mid-June to mid-August, and mid-February to mid-April. Why? That's when kids are on break from school. If you have kids, you may have no choice but to go during these peak times. On the bright side, though, you'll have plenty of company, the parks are guaranteed to be open late, and as many rides as possible will be up and running. If your schedule allows any flexibility at all, you should avoid these peak periods. Attendance is lowest in October, November (pre-Thanksgiving), December (pre-Christmas), and January. These can be very good times to go. Crowds are low and prices are too, but keep in mind that you may find that several rides are shut down for maintenance, and the parks have shorter operating hours. In the winter, it's often too cold to go to the water parks, and you may need a jacket at night.

The weeks between Easter and Memorial Day are another slow period, as well as the months of August and September; both periods provide a good balance of price, crowds, temperature, and operating hours, but you may need to take the kids out of school if you're bringing them along.

Of course, you may want to coordinate your trip with a special event. (It's no coincidence that these events are scheduled during otherwise-slow periods for the parks.) Epcot has two months-long events - the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival runs from March to mid-May, and the Epcot International Food & Wine Festival runs from October through mid-November. Hollywood Studios is the location for Star Wars Weekends in May and June.

The Magic Kingdom hosts two special hard-ticket holiday events, Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party in September and October, and Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party in November and December. These events, which let you stay in the park past the

normal closing time, cost more than \$50 per person, but tickets are limited so the crowds stay small.

Timing

If your vacation dates are flexible, plan to arrive to the Orlando area on Thursday. Both Friday and Saturday are transition days for park visitors, especially in the summer months. Saturdays do draw in more Annual Pass holders to the park, but that is the major day that people either arrive or leave the area. This causes attendance figures to be down, making it a perfect day to visit the parks.

If you are planning to have a day of rest in your vacation, by arriving on Thursday you can enjoy two days of parks with reduced crowds and then use Sunday to rest. If during those first two days you are planning to visit the Magic Kingdom, plan to do it on Friday. Attendance figures pick up for that park on Saturday. You will be able to do more attractions in the first two days while you are revved up, and then it will allow you to relax and enjoy the park on the more crowded days.

Talk

As in most places in the United States, English is the default language throughout the Walt Disney World Resort. The cast members at World Showcase in Epcot are largely citizens of the featured countries, and so will be fluent in their native tongues as well as English. Other cast members throughout the property may also be bi-lingual or tri-lingual. Any such cast members can be identified by language signs on their name tags, representing the languages they speak. Spanish is also very common in Florida, and the US as a whole. Spanish speakers will not have any problems navigating the resort. All four theme parks have an information center known as Guest Relations, near the main entrance. Cast members, who usually are multilingual, will be available here to answer any questions you may have.

Disney's Ears to the World is an audio headset that provides foreign-language translations of the dialogues of selected attractions in French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, or Spanish. It may be rented at Guest Relations, but there are a limited number of them available; a \$25 deposit will be collected and refunded upon return. For guests with visual disabilities, linguistic services are in the form of audiocassette tour guides and Braille guidebooks, also available for rent at Guest Relations. For hearing-impaired guests, assistive listening devices and captioning (handheld, reflective, or video) are available for selected attractions. Cast Members with knowledge of American Sign Language can be identified by the appropriate symbol on their name tags, and interpreters are available by appointment.

Get in

"A person should set his goals as early as he can and devote all his energy and talent to getting there. With enough effort, he may achieve it. Or he may find something that is even more rewarding. But in the end, no matter what the outcome, he will know he has been alive." — Walt Disney

By Plane

Why is it MCO and not ORL? If you're booking air travel to Orlando, you'll need to remember that MCO airport code. The tourist-humor explanation is that MCO stands for "Mickey and COmpany", but the abbreviation actually comes from the airport's original name, McCoy Air Force Base. The expected ORL code is assigned to the Orlando Executive Airport, a general-aviation facility located several miles north of Orlando International.

Most visitors fly into Orlando International Airport. It is served by nearly all major US airlines and a wide range of international carriers. From there, you can rent a car, take a taxi, order a limo or town car, or take Disney's Magical Express. A free bus service goes from the airport to the Disney-owned resort hotels (prior reservations required, call 1-407-WDISNEY). Florida State Roads 528 (to the north) and 417 (to the south) link the airport with Interstate 4, which leads directly into Walt Disney World.

Orlando-Sanford International Airport is a bit farther away from Walt Disney World than Orlando International. Aside from domestic flights on Allegiant Air, the airport primarily handles flights from the United Kingdom and Iceland. Disney's Magical Express is not available here. Florida State Road 417 connects the airport to Interstate 4.

By Car

Interstate 4 is the most direct driving route into Walt Disney World. Depending on your point of origin, the Florida Turnpike can be quite useful. This is particularly true when you might be arriving from Miami or other points south. If you will be arriving from a cruise at Port Canaveral, Florida State Road 528 gets you to I-4, with Orlando International Airport and the Turnpike en route.

By Train

Amtrak's Silver Service Miami-New York City routes serve Orlando and Kissimmee. Service is four times daily, with two trains in either direction. The Auto Train, which can carry both passengers and automobiles, serves nearby Sanford non-stop from Lorton, Virginia (near Washington, D.C.).

By Bus

Disney's Magical Express has proven to be a very popular option for guests staying at Disney resort hotels; it provides free transportation to and from the airport. Be sure to book service ahead of time, though!

The Disney Cruise Line provides a similar bus service for their passengers, between the Walt Disney World resort hotels and their terminal at Port Canaveral. The one-way fare is \$35 per person, although it's included in the price if you book a land-and-sea vacation package.



If you're not staying at a Disney resort, or aren't coming in via Orlando International or Disney Cruise Line, you do have some other choices. Mears Transportation is the big dog in the area; in fact, Disney contracts with them to run the Magical Express and the Disney Cruise Line buses. But they also run their own shuttle buses and town cars that can take you to any of the local attractions or hotels.

Long-distance bus company Greyhound serves both Orlando and Kissimmee, with the latter being closer to Walt Disney World.

Tickets

Many tickets sold online through auction websites such as eBay or Craigslist are partially used multi-day park-hopper tickets. While this is a very common activity, it is prohibited by Disney. The tickets are non-transferable. There is also an inherent risk to you as a buyer, because you don't know for certain how many days remain on the ticket. If you are purchasing tickets online, only purchase from authorized brokers. Resold tickets are subject to rejection at the gate.

Visiting Walt Disney World is a very expensive affair. Tickets are sold at several levels. The Magic Your Way base tickets cover the cost of visiting one of the four theme parks a day for each day of the ticket. On top of this, you can add the Park Hopper option, which allows you to enter multiple theme parks on the same day as many times as you like. You can also add the Water Park Fun & More option, which grants admission to the two Disney water parks as well as other attractions.

The Park Hopper option in particular is often overlooked, but it's strongly recommended because of the flexibility it offers. Without it, you could be stuck with nowhere else to go

after doing everything you want to do at one park, or you could run out of time to do one last attraction and be unable to come back another day to pick it up. The value of being able to visit one park in the morning and another in the evening should not be underestimated.

With the Water Park Fun & More option, you receive a number of admissions to attractions outside the four main parks. The number is equal to the number of days on your Magic Your Way ticket (or two admissions for one-day tickets), though they can be used anytime. You can use these admissions at Typhoon Lagoon, Blizzard Beach, DisneyQuest, ESPN Wide World of Sports, and the nine-hole Oak Trail golf course. You can also use an admission for a round of golf at the Fantasia Gardens or Winter Summerland miniature golf courses, but only before 4PM. Depending on which attractions you visit, the cost of the option may be covered by the money you save on admission after just two visits.



Multi-day tickets do not have to be used on consecutive days. However, these tickets may expire 14 days after they are first used, so be sure to use all the days purchased prior to that. A no-expiration option can be added to any multi-day ticket with at least one day remaining. With this option, the ticket expires when the last purchased day is used, which can be months or even years after the initial use. A side benefit of this option is locking in your admission price for your next visit(s). The price for this option is variable, based on the number of days purchased.

Too good to be true?

Billboards along interstate highways in Florida and even southern Georgia promote the availability of cut-rate admission tickets for Walt Disney World and other central Florida theme parks. While these offers are genuine, there is often a catch. Many of these promotions require the buyer to tour a time-share resort and sit through a high-pressure sales pitch for the property prior to getting the tickets.

Children under age three are admitted for free.

There are Magic Your Way Premium and Magic Your Way Platinum packages available as well. They add some interesting luxury options to your vacation package. They both include the Deluxe Dining Plan, preferred fireworks viewing, unlimited access to select recreational activities, tours, and a portrait session. The Platinum package adds to that a spa treatment, a fireworks cruise, and more. If you're sure you're going to use the

benefits these packages provide, they may just be worth the extra cost. Purchasing these packages does require booking and staying at a Disney owned resort hotel.

Disney resort guests (those staying on-site at Disney hotels) are usually best served by getting package deals that include both lodging and admission.

Get around

Getting around Walt Disney World is easy and often fun. You may walk, drive, or ride public transit (in this case, buses, monorails, or ferryboats). In most cases, the service is direct and non-stop. All Walt Disney World transit vehicles are wheelchair-accessible, and there is no additional fee to use any of them. If you are traveling with a stroller, you must take your child out of the stroller, then fold it and hand-carry it onto the vehicle.

By Foot

Walt Disney World and Google Earth have teamed up to create a comprehensive, state-of-the-art 3-D virtual tour of the resort. All four theme parks and over 20 Disney resort hotels are rendered as fully textured 3-D buildings in a special layer in Google Earth. It's a great way to get a feel for the lay of the land, or just to reminisce about a previous trip.

In some places, walking is the most convenient way to travel from one area to another. Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios, and the five resorts in between (Swan & Dolphin, Yacht & Beach Clubs, and Boardwalk) are connected by walkways, as is Downtown Disney to Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort. If you are staying at Disney's Contemporary Resort, you will find it quicker to walk to the Magic Kingdom than to take the ferry or monorail. From Shades of Green (a military-only resort) it's a five-minute walk to Disney's Polynesian Resort, to take the monorail or ferry to the Magic Kingdom; and from the Polynesian Resort it's another five-minute walk to the Transportation and Ticket Center, to take the monorail to Epcot.

Keep in mind, though, that you'll be doing a lot of walking within the parks, especially at Epcot and Animal Kingdom, so don't tire yourself out early! Strollers, wheelchairs, and electric convenience vehicles (ECVs) are readily available to rent at the entrance to each park. If you have a problem standing too long, or if walking on the hot pavement makes your feet ache, renting a wheelchair or ECV can make a big difference. Wheelchairs can be brought up to the loading area of most rides, where you'll usually need to transfer to the ride vehicle. Both wheelchairs and ECVs are accommodated in most theater and stage attractions. Strollers will usually need to be left outside; most attractions have a designated stroller parking area.

By Bus

Learn to love the ubiquitous Walt Disney World bus system. You'll be using it a lot, especially if you didn't bring a car. The bus routes are set up to facilitate travel from a resort to a park, but not from one resort to another or from one park to another. Most

resorts have five bus routes originating from them, providing direct service to all four theme parks and Downtown Disney. Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach are served by the Downtown Disney and Animal Kingdom routes respectively.

Disney's Boardwalk is actually part of a resort, so visitors from other resorts (except Swan/Dolphin or Yacht/Beach Clubs) will have to travel there via one of the parks. The most convenient option is Disney's Hollywood Studios, which has two connections to the Boardwalk: walking or ferry. (Although Epcot is the closest park to the Boardwalk, using it as an interchange is not recommended, as it would require entering through the main entrance and exiting out the back entrance, thereby costing the admission fee.) Note that there is no bus service to the Magic Kingdom or Epcot from the Magic Kingdom-area resorts; they are served by the monorail system. Likewise, service to Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios from the Epcot-area resorts is by ferry or walking. There is also no direct bus service between the theme parks and Downtown Disney. To travel to Downtown Disney from a theme park, or vice versa, you must travel to any resort and change buses. The most convenient resort for this purpose is Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort, which is right next door to Downtown Disney; you can get there via a pedestrian bridge, bus, or ferry.

The buses are reliable, fairly efficient, and reasonably comfortable, but they can be slow and inconvenient if, for example, you are traveling with young children or strollers. Expect to wait up to fifteen minutes for a bus to your destination, and another ten to thirty minutes to get there—possibly longer during the busy season. Also keep in mind that guests in wheelchairs have first priority when boarding.

By Monorail

Walt Disney World's monorail system is one of its signature attractions, and it's not even inside one of the parks. They do a great job of getting large numbers of guests from place to place, but they're also quite comfortable and fun to ride. The monorail service is limited and only goes to certain areas, all originating from the Transportation and Ticket Center (TTC). There are three monorail lines. (1)Express: This route travels from the Transportation and Ticket Center (adjacent to the Magic Kingdom parking lot) to the Magic Kingdom gates and back, without stopping at the resorts. This is primarily used by Magic Kingdom guests who parked in the lot or are coming from Epcot. This route runs on the outer rail, counter-clockwise around Seven Seas Lagoon. (2)Resort: This route runs parallel to the Express route, clockwise on the inner rail, and stops at all the resorts it passes. The stops are, in order: Transportation and Ticket Center, Polynesian, Grand Floridian, Magic Kingdom, and Contemporary. This route is used by resort guests to get to the Magic Kingdom or Epcot, and by guests visiting one of the resorts. (3)Epcot: This route travels between the Transportation and Ticket Center and the Epcot gates. When entering Epcot this way, the monorail makes a nice loop in the park before arriving at the station, giving a great aerial view of Future World and the World Showcase.



If you are going to Epcot from the Polynesian Resort, you may walk to the Transportation and Ticket Center to get to the Epcot monorail; it's usually faster than taking the Resort monorail completely through the loop. It is also possible to walk to the TTC from Disney's Wilderness Lodge, which is not connected to the monorail. The distance is about ½ mile (800 m), and takes around 10 minutes.

By Boat

Walt Disney World also has several waterways which are used by ferryboats to transport guests. From the Magic Kingdom, large ferries transport guests to the Transportation and Ticket Center, adjacent to the parking lot. Smaller ferries travel to the Contemporary, Grand Floridian, Polynesian, Fort Wilderness Campground, and Wilderness Lodge. From Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios, service is to the Swan/Dolphin, Yacht/Beach Club, and Boardwalk. From Downtown Disney, service is to Saratoga Springs, Old Key West, and the two Port Orleans resorts.

By Car

If you are staying on-site, a car is not necessary, unless you wish to travel off-property during your stay. Some people purchase groceries to use during their stay. While there are a couple of places on the property to buy them, better selection and prices are found off property. Other people use a car to avoid the delays that can sometimes affect the public transportation options. If you are staying at a hotel off Disney property, on the other hand, a car is strongly recommended. Many off-resort hotels offer shuttle service to the parks, but the schedules may not be convenient.

Getting around Walt Disney World by car is not much of a problem. All you need to do is follow the purple directional signs with black Mickey Mouse ears to your destination. Your WDW resort will also provide a map of the complex. If you run into problems, just drop by the Walt Disney World Car Care Center on World Drive, near the Magic Kingdom toll plaza.

Fuel

There are three Hess gas stations within the resort - at the Car Care Center on World Drive, on Buena Vista Drive near the entrance to Hollywood Studios, and on Buena Vista Drive across from Downtown Disney. The Hess stations on Disney property do charge market rate for their fuel, unlike a few Orlando gas stations where the cost of fuel is still outrageous despite the recent drop in gas prices. Gas stations along State

Road 535 (Apopka-Vineland Road) near the Downtown Disney Hotel Plaza are notorious for pricing well above the market rate for fuel.

Parking

The parking fee at the four theme park lots is \$14 for most vehicles (campers and trailers are \$15; buses and tractor trailers are \$18). Parking is free, though, for guests staying at any of the on-site Disney Resorts (your Key to the World card serves as your parking ticket), or who have a valid Annual Pass. The four theme park lots are huge, and are divided into subsections; this is to enable you to remember your car's location. To save you from having to walk the long distances, there are trams that will shuttle you from the parking lot to the park gates and back (except in the case of the Magic Kingdom, where the tram will take you to the Transportation and Ticket Center, from which you may take the ferry or the monorail to the park). Parking at the two water parks or Downtown Disney is free. However, there are no parking lot trams available, so be prepared to walk. Valet parking is available at Deluxe resorts

See and Do

"Here in Florida, we have something special we never enjoyed at Disneyland — the blessing of size. There's enough land here to hold all the ideas and plans we can possibly imagine." — Walt Disney

Theme Parks

The four theme parks are Walt Disney World's bread and butter. These are not traditional amusement parks, where age is a hindrance to full enjoyment. The Disney parks have rides, sure, but many of them are quite sedate and can be enjoyed by everyone, not just those with a high tolerance for thrills. And even beyond the rides, there are stage shows to watch, shops to browse, characters to meet, and atmosphere to soak in.

Most importantly, though, none of these rides, shows, and stores just "sits there". Each one tells a story, in much the same way that Disney's animated films do, and each is crafted with the utmost care and attention to detail. There are also the bigger stories to be found in each themed land, and in the park as a whole. When you enter the Magic Kingdom, and the entrance tunnels give way to the vista of Main Street, with Cinderella Castle at the far end, you're raising the curtain on a new production—and you're the featured player.



You won't find dirt or peeling paint or run-down mechanics at a Disney Park, not even at the oldest attractions. Disney takes quality very seriously, and if anything intrudes on your perception of the "show", it gets fixed quickly. It's all about suspension of disbelief: total immersion into worlds of imagination, art, and history.

The sheer number of attractions—including rides, stage shows, parades, and fireworks displays—at Walt Disney World's four theme parks can be intimidating to guests. It's usually best to have a plan going in. Check the guide map for the park you plan to visit and decide which attractions will be your highest priorities before you leave for the park. Keep in mind that parades and some shows occur only at specific times, and plan your route to put you nearby in time to get a seat. Be flexible, though—once you've hit your priority attractions, you can go back and pick up more if you have time remaining. The traditional amusement park advice of arriving early and heading to the back of the park first tends to work well, although more and more guests are starting to catch on, so the benefit may be reduced.

Be aware that during the busiest times of year, lines can be up to two hours long for the most popular attractions. One option for avoiding these lines is the free service known as FastPass, available only at select attractions. Simply insert your park ticket into the machine, and you'll get a FastPass ticket with a time interval stamped on it. At any time during that interval, you may enter the attraction using a separate, shorter queue. You can only have one FastPass at a time, so you won't avoid every line, but it can still be a great time-saver. Note that the FastPass queues may bypass some or all of the scenery and theming found in the longer lines, which for some guests is a significant part of the Disney experience. Consider what you may be missing if you choose to get a FastPass.

The Magic Kingdom

The Magic Kingdom is the main park, based on the original Disneyland in Anaheim, California. It is organized around the central landmark of Cinderella Castle, with various "lands" arrayed around a central hub. The lands are, starting from the main entrance and going clockwise around Cinderella Castle: Main Street USA, Adventureland, Frontierland, Liberty Square, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland.

The park is the oldest, most popular, and the most child-friendly, although many adults love it as well. Adult visitors who do not enjoy rides such as it's a small world, where you sit in vehicles that take you in a circle through a tunnel as animatronic figures sing

children's songs to the riders, may want to visit Epcot or Hollywood Studios instead. On the other hand, roller coasters like Space Mountain and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad provide plenty of thrills, and dark rides like the Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean are classics that only the most curmudgeonly would dismiss.



The lines at the Magic Kingdom can be endless, but they always keep moving. Though the FastPass system works well, it is not available for all attractions. Even just walking around, you will likely encounter bottlenecks where there are huge masses of people, and they all seem to be going to the same place you are. Then there's the food and the merchandise, which can be pricey, but not too bad considering where you are. Despite it all, most people would agree that the lines, the crowds, and the prices are worth it for the experience.

Epcot

Epcot is an "educational park." It is divided into two distinct areas, Future World and World Showcase. Future World features eight indoor pavilions, each one focused on a specific area of human achievement or endeavor. World Showcase replicates, on a small scale but with great attention to detail, eleven of the world's nations, complete with authentic food and merchandise.

Don't miss the cheesy but fun Gran Fiesta Tour Starring The Three Caballeros ride in the Mexico pavilion, or the extravagant Maelstrom ride in the Norway pavilion. In Future World, the Test Track, a recent addition in which visitors go through the motions of tests for new cars, is probably the most fun, and the most traditionally theme-park-y, of the Epcot rides. Recent additions to the park include Soarin', a ride where visitors "hang-glide" through many landscapes, and Mission: SPACE, a centrifugal spaceflight simulator.

Epcot has a bit of a reputation as a more "grown-up" park. While some of the slower, more intellectual attractions may be over the heads of the youngest visitors, the park still has plenty to keep them entertained. Of course there are character greetings, especially at World Showcase, but there are also Kidcot Fun Stops, which encourage children to work on a craft and interact with cast members who are representing their home countries. The Seas with Nemo & Friends is great fun for fans of Finding Nemo, too.

Epcot may also be considered a little bit of a "grown up" park because of the "Food and Wine Festival". The Food and Wine Festival is a time where they celebrate food around the world and have samples of foods from around the world. Booths set up around the counties of Epcot feature great foods that you may have never experienced before. Not only are there booths of food, but celebrity chefs come down for the event, there are night time performances throughout the countries, wine tastings and the Party of the Senses, which is where famous chefs make one dish that is paired up with a fantastic wine. The Food and Wine Festival is only held in September, October and November.

Disney's Hollywood Studios

Disney's Hollywood Studios (formerly Disney-MGM Studios) opened in May 1989 as the third theme park of Walt Disney World. The park is themed around film and television, and features a variety of live shows and attractions based on some of the most iconic productions in Hollywood history.

Among the attractions are a few exceptional thrill rides, most notably The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (which drops you 13 stories) and the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith (which launches you 0–60 in 2.8 seconds). The 3-D shooting gallery Toy Story Mania! also grabs big crowds, as does the Star Wars-based simulator ride Star Tours: The Adventures Continue.

Disney's Animal Kingdom

Disney's Animal Kingdom, a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, is a wildlife discovery park, a mix between a zoo and a theme park. Naturalistic animal exhibitions are interspersed, and sometimes integrated, with typical Disney rides. Among these are Kilimanjaro Safaris, a jeep safari past live animal enclosures; Kali River Rapids, a raft ride through the deforestation of a tropical rainforest; Dinosaur, a time travel ride which includes close encounters with dinosaurs; and the newest and most popular ride, Expedition Everest, a roller coaster that includes an encounter with the Yeti.

The park is organized in a Magic Kingdom-like format, with different continents revolving around the central Tree of Life. While light on rides, there are also shows and plenty of animals to view (though the variety of species seems a bit sparse when compared to many larger city zoos). Animal Kingdom is more of a kid-friendly theme park with many animals that would attract the attention of younger generations as well as Camp Minnie-Mickey, a special space for youngsters where they can meet all of their favorite characters.

Meet the Characters

Especially for kids, character greetings are one of the most exciting reasons to visit Disney World. Kids and adults alike can give hugs to, take a photo with, or get autographs from many of their favorite Disney characters. Some kids like to bring or purchase a special autograph book in which the characters can inscribe their names.

Character appearances tend to be surprises (to avoid huge lines), so keep a close eye out. If there's a character your child really wants to see, you can ask at Guest Relations if they know of any upcoming appearances, but nothing is ever guaranteed. And remember that it's hot inside those character costumes; sometimes the character has to leave even if there are people still waiting to say hello. It's disappointing but necessary for safety.

Most often, character greetings will happen in the parks, in particular the Magic Kingdom, but they can happen just about anywhere! The Magic Kingdom does have the widest variety of characters, though; everyone from Mickey Mouse to Captain Jack Sparrow. Disney's "Big Six" (Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Daisy, Goofy, and Pluto) might be found anywhere in the park—for example, you might see Donald Duck in a Davy Crockett-like outfit in Frontierland. Other characters stick to the themed land most appropriate for their genre: Jack Sparrow in Adventureland, Buzz Lightyear in Tomorrowland, and so on.

At the other parks, character appearances are somewhat rarer. At Epcot, for instance, you'll generally only find characters who hail from one of the themed foreign lands of World Showcase—Mulan in the China pavilion, for example. Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom tend to have more structured greetings, where characters will make scheduled appearances at designated locations, but stay out of sight of most of the park. Kids looking for autographs won't want to miss Camp Minnie-Mickey at Animal Kingdom, though. There are always at least a few characters there happy to meet some young guests.



If you miss out on random encounters with the characters, be sure to look into character dining options. While restaurants that offer character dining are extremely popular, if you can get a table, you're virtually guaranteed a few minutes of face time with the characters. See Character Dining in the Eat section, below.

Pin Trading

The trading of commemorative pins has been popular at Olympic Games for decades. At the turn of the millennium, Disney decided to get in on the act and began creating metallic lapel pins specifically for trading. The monster they created has endured for

over a decade, and it has grown to mythic proportions. More than 60,000 different pin designs have been produced since the beginning.

Getting started is easy. Most every store has pins for sale, along with lanyards on which to display them. These pins are not very valuable, so you'll need to trade up to get the more interesting (and much more rare) pins. The most reliable way to do so is to keep an eye out for Cast Members wearing pin lanyards. Cast Members are required to trade one-for-one if asked (up to two per guest per day) and can't refuse a trade based on pin rarity or design (although they can refuse to accept another copy of a pin they already have displayed). Cast Members with green lanyards will trade only to kids under 13. You can also trade with your fellow guests, and here things can get interesting. You may need to offer several more common pins to get your hands on a single rare pin.

Dedicated traders carry a supply of common pins for just this purpose. Your best way to find people willing to trade is to head to a dedicated pin kiosk or store, such as the one underneath the Sorcerer's Hat at Hollywood Studios, but there is also ample opportunity for trading while waiting in lines or while riding the monorail or bus.

Some tours and special events have unique pins that can only be obtained by participants. These pins are thus very rare and highly coveted. Make sure you (and especially your kids) don't trade these pins away without getting something really nice in return—but even then, think very carefully. Many people treat these more as souvenirs than commodities.

Tours

Each of the theme parks offers at least one tour, some of which are very popular. For an extra fee, a cast member will take you and a small group and introduce you to some of the "secrets" behind Disney operations. Many of these tours go into backstage areas where guests are not normally allowed, although children may be restricted from these to avoid spoiling the "magic".

The gold standard among the tours is the Keys to the Kingdom tour at the Magic Kingdom a five-hour tour that includes a peek into the park's Utilidors. At Epcot the Around the World at Epcot tour is a great chance to try out Segway vehicles, and there are several tours at The Seas with Nemo & Friends that take you into the huge aquarium to get up close to the animals who live there. The newest tour offering is the Wild Africa Trek at Animal Kingdom, which will let you go on-foot into some remote areas of the park's African savanna and forest.

Water Parks

Walt Disney World's two water parks, Blizzard Beach near Animal Kingdom and Typhoon Lagoon near Downtown Disney, are the most-visited water parks in the country (for Typhoon Lagoon, in the world), with a combined total yearly attendance of almost 4 million. Unlike most ordinary water parks, each has a unique central theme. Blizzard

Beach brings to life the absurdity of what would happen if a ski resort suddenly melted, while Typhoon Lagoon makes use of the runoff from a tropical storm for sliding and floating fun.



Both parks are big enough to spend several hours sliding, floating, or just soaking up the sun. Counter-service restaurants provide for a hearty lunch. If you have an extra \$250 to spend, consider renting a private cabana for the day; they come with towels, lockers, a cabana attendant, and all the bottled water you can drink.

Shopping, Dining, and Nightlife

Sometimes you just want to get away from the theme parks for a while. Maybe do some shopping, have a quiet meal, or get away from the kids and go out dancing.

Downtown Disney is just what the doctor ordered: an outdoor shopping, dining, and entertainment paradise, geared primarily toward adults. Most of the entertainment activities are found on Downtown Disney West Side; the featured attraction is the Cirque du Soleil show La Nouba. DisneyQuest, a five-story indoor theme park focusing on interactive "virtual" rides and featuring some of the most innovative technology at Disney World, is also on the West Side. The east side, known as Downtown Disney Marketplace, is made up largely of shops and family restaurants.

Disney's BoardWalk, located next to Epcot, is a smaller collection of nightlife themed as a 1920's Eastern Seaboard boardwalk. The Boardwalk is also home to carnival midway games, tandem bike rentals, the Atlantic Dance Hall, and the ESPN Club.

Sporting activities

Often overlooked during a Walt Disney World vacation—whether due to time constraints or just lack of knowledge—are several recreational activities that have nothing to do with theme parks and rides.

Golf

Walt Disney World is home to four 18-hole championship golf courses, plus a nine-hole walking course and two different miniature golf experiences.

The Lake Buena Vista and Osprey Ridge Golf Courses are in the Downtown Disney area. The Magnolia and Palm courses, which host the PGA Tour's Children's Miracle

Network Classic, are in the Magic Kingdom area, adjacent to the Shades of Green Resort. The four championship courses require standard golf attire, and metal cleats are not allowed. Golf clubs are available for rent. A golf cart must be used, but it is included in your greens fee.

The Oak Trail Golf Course, in the Magic Kingdom area next to the Magnolia and Palm courses, is a nine-hole walking course. It's designed for less-experienced golfers and older children. The same rules and regulations apply here as at the championship courses, except golf carts are prohibited.



The five golf courses can be reached only via car or, in some limited cases, walking. The Disney-owned resorts offer complimentary taxi vouchers for their guests traveling to the golf courses. For more information or assistance, or to reserve a tee time, call +1 407 WDW-GOLF (939-4653). Tee times can be reserved up to 90 days in advance if you're staying at a Disney hotel (up to 60 days in advance otherwise).

The miniature golf courses are Fantasia Gardens, across the street from the Walt Disney World Swan Hotel in the Epcot resort area, and Winter Summerland, right next to Blizzard Beach. Each has two 18-hole layouts, with whimsical, kid-friendly holes and decor.

Watersports

Walt Disney World boasts a number of expansive waterways, and that means boating and other watersports can be a great way to spend a few hours away from the parks.

The Magic Kingdom-area resorts each have a small marina with a selection of recreational boats, but it's the Contemporary Resort that boasts Sammy Duvall's Watersports. You don't have to be staying at the Contemporary to enjoy the marina's offerings; you might try waterskiing, wakeboarding, or even parasailing!

At the Yacht Club Resort (adjacent to the Boardwalk), Bayside Marina offers SeaRaycers, pontoon boats, and a variety of chartered cruises, including an IllumiNations fireworks cruise to Epcot. At Downtown Disney, Captain Jack's Marina will rent you a "water mouse" or canopy boat, or take you out for a bass fishing excursion.

Other

The Walt Disney World Speedway is located south of the Magic Kingdom and offers both Indy car and NASCAR-style racing experiences, although neither is cheap.

On the other hand, if spectator sports are more your speed, you may want to check out the ESPN Wide World of Sports, a state-of-the-art sports complex near Hollywood Studios. The biggest event there is in March, when the Atlanta Braves host spring training baseball games, but there are events all year, especially high school and collegiate-level sports.

Spas and Health Clubs

If you feel the need for a bit of pampering, Walt Disney World's spa facilities offer a full array of massage, skin, and nail treatments. The Spa at Disney's Saratoga Springs near Downtown Disney recalls the heyday of Saratoga Springs, New York, with its healing mineral baths.

The Grand Floridian Spa & Health Club, which closed in September 2011 for refurbishment, has been remodeled into Senses: A Disney Spa. Scheduled to open in December 2013, it will be fully owned and operated by Disney.

Mandara Spa has a facility at the Walt Disney World Dolphin near Epcot, and there's also the Buena Vista Palace Hotel & Spa at the Downtown Disney Hotel Plaza.

Buy

"I like to dive around in my money like a porpoise! And burrow through it like a gopher! And toss it up and let it hit me on the head!" — Scrooge McDuck

Finding souvenirs is one of the easiest things to do at Walt Disney World; avoiding the expense is considerably harder. Many attractions, especially the most popular ones, route their exit queues directly into a merchandise store, usually one themed to the attraction. (In fact, several rides even take your picture, which will be available for purchase in the shop.) On the bright side, this does make it easier to find merchandise with a particular theme. Disney's Hollywood Studios is a particularly rich source of themed merchandise, especially for fans of Indiana Jones, Star Wars, and the Muppets.

Sometimes overlooked by shoppers are the various resorts. All of the resorts have a gift shop of some sort, but many go further. The Grand Canyon Concourse on the fourth floor of Disney's Contemporary Resort, underneath the monorail platform, has several specialty shops selling merchandise such as jewelry, sundries, and housewares. Zawadi Marketplace at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge has unique African merchandise not available elsewhere. At Disney's Boardwalk, look for the Wyland Galleries, with underwater-themed prints and paintings, featuring the work of the artist Wyland. In fact, each of the resorts has something a little different that you won't find elsewhere on the property, and it can be fun to look for those little hidden gems.

Realizing that many of its souvenirs such as the giant Mickey dolls simply aren't made to be lugged around a theme park all day, Disney will save the day with its package pickup and package delivery services, available at all Disney-run stores. Guests staying at an on-site resort hotel can have their purchases delivered to their hotel gift shop, while everyone else can have their purchases held at the Package Pick-Up window at the front gate of each theme park. The service is free of charge, but be sure to factor in delivery times—allow 24 hours for a package to be delivered to your hotel, or about three hours for it to reach the front gate of the park.

Eat

"Hot dogs! Hot dogs!" — Mickey Mouse, from *The Karnival Kid* (1929)

Like everything else, food is expensive at Walt Disney World. Fortunately, the food is pretty good, top to bottom. At the bottom you'll find portable food carts and fast counter-service (or "quick-service" in Disney's parlance) options. Once upon a time, these options were dismal; each counter service location served the same bland menu of burgers and chicken fingers, to the point where even the kids were sick of them by the end of your vacation. Happily, this has all changed in the last 15 years or so.

The small stands usually sell pre-packaged treats and snacks. The counter-service restaurants are on par with most chain fast-food joints in quality, but significantly more expensive in price. Still, it's not your typical amusement park fare; some of them are in fact quite good, and there's a lot of variety to be had. Three excellent options are Cosmic Ray's Starlight Cafe in Tomorrowland at the Magic Kingdom, the Seasons Food Court at The Land pavilion in Epcot, and Flame Tree Barbecue on Discovery Island at Animal Kingdom. The ABC Commissary at Hollywood Studios has a surprisingly international menu, and Toy Story Pizza Planet in the same park has arcade games to pass the time.



For the lowest possible prices, there is one McDonald's restaurant on WDW property, at the intersection of Buena Vista Drive and Osceola Parkway, between Blizzard Beach and the All-Star resort hotels.

Moving up the scale, there is a fairly big gap between the counter-service and the lower-end table-service restaurants. If anything can be said to fill that gap, it's the buffets, but there are not many around, and most of them feature walk-around characters. For table service, you'll find the menus tend to be surprisingly limited; although the food is generally good, if your party has a lot of picky eaters you may have trouble finding a restaurant everyone can agree on. (Fortunately, Disney is very accommodating of special requests, so don't be afraid to ask for the demi-glace to be left off or to substitute fries for the au-gratin potatoes.)

At the high-end of Disney dining, you'll find some options on par with the best in the country, including perhaps the fanciest restaurant in all of Central Florida Victoria and Albert's at the Grand Floridian. These high-end restaurants do tend to be found at the resorts; few people want to go out to a fancy dinner after walking around the parks all day without changing first. Don't feel like you have to leave the kids behind, either; every restaurant on property (except Victoria and Albert's) welcomes kids and will accommodate them as best as they can.

If a dietary restriction requires you to bring your own food into the parks, it is permissible to do so, on the condition that it does not require heating or any other kind of preparation. To ensure freshness, carry it in an insulated lunch box or bag. Keep in mind, though, that Florida Department of Health regulations prohibit Disney's Culinary Cast Members from preparing, or even handling, foods brought in by guests. If you're interested in making sure your kids (or your spouse) get healthy meals and snacks, keep an eye out for the new Mickey Check logo, introduced in 2012 and prominently displayed next to the healthiest options on menus and snack stands. Items with the Mickey Check meet Disney's new nutrition guidelines, which are aligned with U.S. federal guidelines.

Character dining

One of the unique attractions of dining at Walt Disney World is the opportunity to interact up-close with favorite characters during Disney's character dining meals. Needless to say, these opportunities are extremely popular; for all practical purposes, advance reservations are required. In exchange for planning ahead, though, you will get to meet and take pictures with the characters, making for a memorable experience. The range of characters to be found is enormous. Mickey and Minnie and the gang are the most common of course, at places like Chef Mickey's in the Contemporary Resort but you might also find Mary Poppins at 1900 Park Fare at the Grand Floridian, or characters from Disney Junior at Hollywood & Vine in Hollywood Studios. And of course the (fairy) godmother of them all is Cinderella's Royal Table, inside the castle in the Magic Kingdom, where little girls can indulge their princess fantasies to their hearts' content, so long as their parents can actually get reservations.

Disney Dining Plan

Guests purchasing a Disney vacation package with hotel stay are eligible to participate in the Disney Dining Plan. For a flat additional fee, the plan allows guests a set number of meals per person per night of their stay. The Disney Dining Plan is accepted at any

Disney-run restaurant on the property except Victoria and Albert's. In addition, all of the restaurants at Downtown Disney, even those run by outside companies, also accept the Dining Plan.

Advance Dining Reservations

Walt Disney World restaurants do not take reservations, per se. Disney's system for its table-service restaurants is called Advance Dining Reservations (ADRs). An ADR is sort of like a restaurant FastPass. Essentially, when you make an ADR, you are reserving a spot on the restaurant's waiting list. When you arrive at the restaurant at your reserved time, you will immediately be placed at the top of the waiting list and get the next available table suitable for your party.

The importance of ADRs cannot be understated. During the slowest times of the year, you may find you don't have any problem walking up to a restaurant and getting a seat within 15-30 minutes. If you don't particularly care where you eat, or are willing to eat early or late, you can probably get by without ADRs. But if you have your heart set on a particular restaurant, or you want to make sure you can eat right at noon or 6PM, you'll want an ADR. And if it's peak season, better safe than sorry; without an ADR you may find yourself searching high and low for a table even at 8PM. Of course, you can also get by without ADRs if you decide to only eat at counter-service restaurants (which don't take reservations at all).



A few restaurants are so popular that they regularly fill up even during the slowest periods. ADRs are essential for these. The one that takes the cake is Cinderella's Royal Table, inside the castle in the Magic Kingdom, which is usually booked solid within minutes of reservations opening. Le Cellier in the Canada pavilion at Epcot has a reputation as the best steakhouse on the property and so is very popular. Victoria and Albert's at the Grand Floridian also strongly suggests ADRs so that you can get a menu customized to your tastes. ADRs are also a good idea for any of the dinner shows, and any meal featuring the Disney characters.

To make Advance Dining Reservations, do not try to call the restaurants directly. Call Disney Dining at +1 407 WDW-DINE (daily 7AM-10PM ET) to make all of your reservations. ADRs are accepted up to 180 days in advance of the date of the reservation. If you want to get in to any of the restaurants mentioned above, especially

Cinderella's Royal Table, start dialing at 6:55 on the first day you can make the reservation, and keep hitting redial until you stop getting told they're closed.

As of June 2009, you can book ADRs online. Go to Disney's restaurants page, find the restaurant you want to eat at, and see if it has an orange "Book a Reservation" button. Many people continue to stick with the tried-and-true phone call, though, because the operators can quickly suggest and check for alternatives if your first choices aren't available. Note that guests staying at a Disney-owned hotel are allowed to make ADRs for their entire trip on the 180th day before they arrive. That means you can make an ADR for the seventh day of your trip 186 days in advance; this is a big perk of staying at a Disney hotel.

If you're already on your vacation, you can visit Guest Relations at any park or Downtown Disney, or even your hotel concierge, to book your ADRs. Restaurants frequently get cancellations, so don't be afraid to ask if that popular restaurant you've had your eye on has an opening tomorrow, especially if you're willing to eat early or late. In most cases, cancellations can be accommodated without penalty, especially if done in advance. However, select restaurants will charge a \$10 cancellation fee if the reservation is canceled fewer than 24 hours in advance. When making an ADR for one of those restaurants, the agent will ask for a credit card number; the card will only be charged for a no-show or a late cancellation. If you need to cancel an ADR, use the special cancellations line, +1 407-WDW-CNCL (939-2625).

In-Park Dining

By summer 2013, Main Street Bakery in the Magic Kingdom and Fountain View in Epcot will be redesigned into Starbucks shops. These will be distinctly different from most ordinary Starbucks locations, retaining the interior design and continuing to serve Disney treats alongside their own products.

Food is easier than easy to find in all four theme parks. In-park dining opportunities range from snack carts to the most common fast-food joints to the less common table service restaurants. Bear in mind that the hours between noon and 2PM are generally considered the "peak" dining time in the parks. If you find yourself eating lunch within this time frame, expect to wait 30 minutes to an hour in line before being served, unless you have a reservation at a table service restaurant. As an alternative, some snack carts serve fairly large portions (such as smoked turkey legs in the Magic Kingdom's Frontierland), and have short lines most of the time.

Every park has low cost meals in the \$3–\$4 range for kid meals and \$6–\$8 for adult meals at the sandwich shops, ethnic specialty nooks, cafeterias, and communal dining halls. They provide ample food for the money. You can often feed your whole family for little more than the cost of one expensive entrée at any of the upscale restaurants.

Resort Dining

All of the Disney Resorts have at least one restaurant, ranging from food courts and buffets all the way up to award-winning table-service restaurants. The Value resorts only

have simple food courts, but the dining options expand as you go up the price scale. Best of all, some of the hotel restaurants have Disney character greetings. Most people, when visiting other hotels, make reservations at the resorts' buffets and sit-down restaurants. However, what they don't always realize is that some of the hotels' most delicious and unique foods can be found in their food courts and smaller dining areas—and they're cheap, too.

Check out some of these hidden gems: Boardwalk To Go, Boardwalk Inn. BTG serves many quick foods like corn dogs and chicken sandwiches, but one of its tastiest items is the cheese and/or chili fries. You can get a basket of cheese fries for \$4.00. The chili fries are also \$4.00. Chili and cheese fries are \$4.50. It makes for a great afternoon or evening snack.

Captain Cook's, Polynesian Resort. One of the Polynesian's specialties is Tonga Toast—a deep fried and battered breakfast dish made from sourdough bread, sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, and stuffed with bananas. It's available at the Kona Café for \$10.99, served with strawberry compote and your choice of ham, bacon, or sausage. However, for those of you on a budget, you can also get Tonga Toast at Captain Cook's food court for only \$5.09. If that's not to your liking, try the adult breakfast platter for just \$6.29, which has more than enough food to share with others.

Mara, Animal Kingdom Lodge. One of the resort's most unique and popular desserts is the Zebra Domes. They are a layer of yellow cake topped with mocha-chocolate mouse, covered in white chocolate ganache and painted over with milk chocolate ganache stripes to resemble a zebra. They are originally made and served in Boma, the resort's buffet restaurant. However, guests on the go can buy a four-pack at Mara for \$3.69 during lunch and dinner.

Market Street Food Court, Caribbean Beach Resort. One of this food court's specialties is the rotisserie chicken in the Bridgetown Broiler section. It's only served at dinner and comes with your choice of two sides.

Roaring Fork, Wilderness Lodge. Don't miss this food court's brownies. Each \$3.29 brownie is frosted and cut in squares roughly four inches wide and half an inch thick, making them well worth the price. They're quite hefty, so be careful when picking one up. You might need to use both hands!

Sassagoula Floatworks and Food Factory, Port Orleans-French Quarter. One of the specialty foods here are the beignets, medium-sized fried French donuts covered in powdered sugar. They are part of the New Orleans culture and exclusively served at the Port Orleans Resort. You can buy three beignets for \$2.99 or six for \$4.29. They're tasty, but watch out for the sugar. It can get everywhere!

Drink

Once upon a time, Pleasure Island was a hot and happening nightspot, right on Disney property—and after a certain hour you knew there'd be no kids around. Today, Pleasure

Island's nightclubs are but a memory, but that doesn't mean adults can't have some grown-up fun after dark.

Certainly Downtown Disney is still a vibrant and active place at night. Several of the restaurants there, especially in Pleasure Island and on the West Side, have full-service bars; Raglan Road in particular is really more an Irish pub than a restaurant. And the DJ at Bongos Cuban Cafe will keep you dancing throughout the evening.

Despite the closures at Pleasure Island, don't think Walt Disney World is completely devoid of nightclubs these days. If you take a trip over to Disney's BoardWalk, you'll find a modern dance club called Atlantic Dance Hall and a dueling-pianos bar called Jellyrolls. The rest of the BoardWalk also stays brightly lit until late at night, with sidewalk cafes, strolling magicians, and other quaint beach-style nightlife.

Most of the resort hotels have their own lounges as well. While they're not exactly a good place to dance the night away, they do offer a more intimate, relaxed atmosphere and plenty of adult beverages. And if you just want to have a drink with dinner, most of the restaurants on property offer at least a few alcoholic options—though you won't find any in the Magic Kingdom.

In Epcot a popular stunt is called Drinking Around the World: have a drink in each of the countries of World Showcase. (Or, for a fun, free, and sober trip "around the world", try a variety of international Coca-Cola products at Club Cool in the Innoventions pavilion.) There are a few things to keep in mind when purchasing alcohol at WDW: There are no alcoholic beverages for sale in the Magic Kingdom, except for Be Our Guest in Fantasyland.



The drinking age for alcohol in Walt Disney World (and all of Florida, for that matter) is 21. Be prepared for strict enforcement of this rule; anybody caught drinking underage, even with parents, may be subject to ejection from the property and criminal prosecution. Be sure to bring an actual I.D. with you when purchasing beverages. Copies will not suffice.

No alcoholic beverages may be brought in to any of the theme parks. Alcoholic beverages may not be consumed outside of, or even removed from, their designated places of purchase (i.e., alcohol purchased in Disney's Hollywood Studios cannot leave

the park). Alcohol purchased at selected gift shops (such as Weinkeller in Epcot's Germany pavilion in World Showcase) will be sealed in a gift box; if the box is opened, the purchase cannot be carried out of the park. As an alternative, the shop will have the package delivered to the front gate or to your on-site resort hotel free of charge, or you can arrange for shipping back home for a fee.

Stay safe

Walt Disney World is a very safe area, and the company spends a lot of time and money ensuring that it remains so. Still, it's wise to take common-sense precautions. Even Disney can't account for every contingency. People have been victimized and injured while visiting Walt Disney World, but there are plenty of steps you can take to minimize the chance of anything happening.

Security

Weapons of all sorts are prohibited in the parks. If you are carrying in a bag or backpack, a security officer will check its contents before you enter. While theft is rare and security is always present throughout the resort, it's still a good idea to keep valuables locked in the electronic safe in your hotel room. Avoid bringing unnecessary items with you, and if you must, rent a locker and store them locked inside during your visit.

Keep your eye on your belongings at all times. Do not display cash in public. Consider wearing a money belt. Do not leave anything in an unattended stroller or wheelchair, especially when you go on a ride. If possible, leave loose articles with a non-rider. Children are very safe at Walt Disney World, but it's not uncommon for parents and children to get separated due to the crowds. One suggestion is to write down your child's name with your name, resort, cell phone number, and any vital medical information on a 3x5 index card. Place the card in your child's pocket and instruct him/her to show the card to any Cast Member in the event that you get separated. Likewise, if you lose your child, notify a Cast Member immediately. They are all well trained and will get you reunited as quickly as possible. Some families also wear T-shirts with very bright, bold colors, making it less difficult to spot a member of your party in a sea of people.

If your child goes on a ride on his/her own, make sure you know where the ride's exit is. Arrange a place to meet with all members of your party if you become separated. Make the meeting place easy to find, but out of the way. Areas such as in front of Cinderella Castle or the front of the park are likely to be too crowded to be useful.

Ride Safety

Some attractions have safety restrictions. Children not meeting the minimum height requirement and pregnant women are not permitted to experience these attractions. Persons susceptible to motion sickness or having high blood pressure or heart, neck, or

back problems should also avoid riding as these conditions are easily aggravated. Restraining devices may prevent persons of certain body shapes or sizes from riding.

Animal Safety

With the exception of working service animals, pets are not permitted in the parks, Downtown Disney, transportation vehicles, or resorts. Designated areas of Disney's Fort Wilderness Campground do allow pets, specifically dogs, but those areas are limited. Best Friends Pet Care operates a "pet resort" near the Port Orleans resorts, offering a variety of packages, including both day stays and overnight accommodations, with separate areas for dogs, cats, and "pocket pets" like hamsters. Do not leave your pet in your car. It is against the law in Florida, as well as potentially fatal. The penalty is a \$5,000 fine. A car with a pet locked inside will be broken into to remove the pet, and WDW will not be held liable for any damages incurred. Service animals may not be accommodated on some attractions. In that case, they must remain with a non-riding member of your party, as Cast Members are not authorized to handle service animals.