



Thomas Jung

Best of Orlando on a Budget

Orlando, Kissimmee, 1 Day

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Orlando on a budget is totally do-able thanks to a bevy of economical options for attractions, dining and lodging. Take Fun Spot for example; there's no entrance or parking fees and rides are as little as a few dollars each. When it comes to dining, Orlando is packed with fabulous buffet restaurants for the frugal-minded family. And lastly, you'll find plenty of hotel options with rooms less than \$80 a night. Thanks to a plethora of economical offerings, your family never has to sacrifice quality or experience. There truly is something to suit every budget in Orlando.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Kissimmee, Orlando



Gatorland

Alligators on Display



Pirate's Cove Adventure Golf

Universal's pirate-themed mini-golf course



Fun Spot Action Park

Arcade and rides for all ages



Ponderosa Steakhouse

Steak, breakfast buffets



Sweet Tomatoes

Buffet bites



Golden Corral

Comfort food extravaganza



Comfort Suites Orlando

All-suite hotel close to Universal Studios Orlando



Orlando Grand Hotel & Suites

Perfect for your family



Holiday Inn and Suites Universal

Right across from Universal

Day 1 - Kissimmee, Orlando

QUICK NOTE

contact:

tel: 800/393-5297

http://www.gatorland.com

location:

14501 S. Orange Blossom Trail

Kissimmee FL 34837

hours:

Daily 9am-5pm, but closing times can vary by season

1 Gatorland

DESCRIPTION: Founded in 1949 with only a handful of alligators living in huts and pens, Gatorland now houses thousands of alligators (including a rare blue one) and crocodiles on its 70-acre spread. Breeding pens, nurseries, and rearing ponds are situated throughout the park, which also displays snakes, toads, insects, turtles, and a Galápagos tortoise. Its 2,000-foot boardwalk winds through a cypress swamp and breeding marsh.

The Screamin' Gator Zipline is the park's latest addition. It will open June 16.

Headliners include **Gator Wrestlin'**, using the old "put-them-to-sleep" trick, but it's more of an environmental awareness program; **Gator Jumparoo**, a crowd-pleaser in which the parks largest reptiles lunge 4 or 5 feet out of the water to snatch a hunk of meat from a trainer's hand; **Up Close Encounters**, showcasing the park's toothy carnivores, slithery snakes, and other wildlife; and **Critters on the Go**, a mobile show that allows younger kids a chance to interact with the parks cuddlier critters. A **train ride**, a treat for younger kids and tots, runs through the park (\$2 per person); the **Gully Gator Splash Park**, a new wet-and-dry play area; and **Allie's Barnyard**, a small petting zoo. While you're here, try the smoked gator ribs or nuggets in the open-air restaurant, or grab a gator-skin souvenir in the gift shop. Allow 4 to 5 hours. **Tip:** Look for additional parking, a refreshed facade with an open-air admission pavilion, and additional landscaping renovations coming soon. **Note:** Gatorland's **Trainer for a Day** program lets up to five guests get up close and personal with the gators for a day (or 2 hr., in this case). The \$125, 2-hour experience puts you side by side with trainers and includes a chance to wrangle some alligators (minimum age 12). Advance reservations are required, and admission to the park is included (and a 20% discount off a regular admission ticket is extended to up to six members of your party). A 1 1/2-hour Night Shine tour is also available (\$19.99, regardless of age) and takes you along the wooden walkways with only a flashlight and a guide (insect repellent and gator food is included). Advanced reservations are required. **Tip:** Printable discount coupons and special Internet ticket prices are available at the park's website. Be sure to check it out before you leave home. © Frommer's



by Kristen Manieri

contact:

tel: +1 407 352 7378
http://www.piratescove.net/location/5

location:

8501 International Drive
Orlando FL 32819

2 Pirate's Cove Adventure Golf

DESCRIPTION: Hoist your jib and set your sails for this pitch and putt course, where playing putt-putt is a little like walking the plank. You'll find plenty of pirate references to amuse you, including shipwrecks and skulls with eye patches, but don't worry, this place is strictly family fare. From its two separate courses to its complimentary leis, it's a tropical tee-off, as you escape cascading waterfalls and rubber swords. Don't forget to check out the snack bar on your way out, and you can't leave without a handful of free Pirate's Cove stickers, plastic doubloon rings and pirate flags. © wcities.com



citysearch

contact:

tel: +1 407 363 3867
fax: +1 407 363 5313
http://www.fun-spot.com/

location:

5551 Del Verde Way
Orlando FL 32819

3 Fun Spot Action Park

DESCRIPTION: All kids and many grownups love this place. It offers a 10,000-square-foot, two-story arcade filled with high-tech video games. Outside, you'll find time-tested rides like go-karts, bumper cars and bumper boats. The park's KidsSpot offers mild thrills appropriate for children ages 2-6. If all this activity leaves you hungry, eat at the on-site snack bar. Admission is free, but you do pay for each ride you take and each arcade game you play. © wcities.com



citysearch

contact:

tel: 1 407 238 2526
http://www.ponderosaorlando.com/

location:

8200 World Center Drive
Orlando FL 32821-5454

hours:

Breakfast: 7a-11:30a M-Su,
Lunch: 11a-4p M-Su, Dinner:
4p-11p M-Su (diner timing
subject to change according
to season -)

4 Ponderosa Steakhouse

DESCRIPTION: Featuring one of the biggest and best-priced breakfast buffets in Orlando, Ponderosa Steakhouse is a local favorite for that reason alone. For breakfast lovers, it's hard to resist a buffet that boasts an enormous variety of egg preparations, not to mention bacon, sausage, biscuits, toast, grits, cereal, muffins, pancakes, and fresh fruit to round out a meal that's sure to get your day off to a full start. Lunch and dinner are served here too, and, of course, steaks dominate the menu. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Ponderosa Steakhouse

contact:

tel: 407 363 1616
fax: 407 363 1159
http://www.sweettomatoes.com/

location:

6877 South Kirkman Road
Orlando FL 32819

hours:

5 Sweet Tomatoes

DESCRIPTION: Hungry? Walk in here, grab a plate and proceed down the long row of tables, scooping up what you crave. Soups, salads, pastas and muffins are there for the eating. It's an all-you-can-eat affair, with chicken, noodles and veggies tossed into all the lip-smacking dishes. Potatoes, and, as the name suggests, tomatoes rule the roost, with a variety of options. The breads are another delight, piping hot and with nuts embedded in them. If this has failed to quell those hunger pangs, move on to the desserts—fresh fruit and yogurt for the



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M-Th 10:30a-9p, F-Sa
10:30a-10p, Sun 9a-9p,
Brunch: Su 9a-noon

health conscious and Cheery Cherry Cobbler for those who
have a high metabolism rate! © wcities.com

contact:
tel: 1 407 352 6606
<http://www.goldencorral.net>

location:
8032 International Drive
Orlando FL 32819

hours:
Daily 11a-10p, Sa 7:30a-11a,
Su 7:30a-11a

6 Golden Corral

DESCRIPTION: Located on popular International Drive, Golden Corral is an all-you-can-eat extravaganza of every comfort food you've ever craved. Open for breakfast, lunch or dinner, Golden Corral features popular favorites good at any time of day. Fresh carved meats, rotisserie chicken, handmade pizza, fresh vegetables, salads, soups and, of course, their "Sweet Spot" dessert bar, featuring soft serve ice cream with plenty of toppings in addition to treats from their bakery. If you're hungry for the kind of food Mom made, come to Golden Corral! © wcities.com



Golden Corral

contact:
tel: +1 407 351-5050
www.comfortinn.com

location:
9350 Turkey Lake Rd
Orlando FL 32819

7 Comfort Suites Orlando

DESCRIPTION: At Comfort Suites Orlando, you will relax in the luxury of tastefully furnished accommodations complete with all of the creature comforts expected of a top-notch Orlando hotel. This hotel has all the amenities for your relaxation and convenience to make your stay more enjoyable. Enjoy the hotel's tropically landscaped courtyard complete with a heated pool, a kiddie pool and a Jacuzzi, a playground, and a Poolside Bar & Grille, serving food and beverages daily. This Orlando Florida hotel is 1 mile from Universal Studios, 1.5 miles from Sea World, 6 miles to Disney World, 2.5 miles from the Orlando Convention Center and 4 miles to Prime Outlet Shopping Mall.



Hotels.com

contact:
tel: +1 407 996-7400
www.orlandograndplaza.com

location:
7400 International Dr
Orlando FL 32819

8 Orlando Grand Hotel & Suites

DESCRIPTION: This two-story Orlando hotel on International Drive is 2 miles from Universal Studios and 3 miles from SeaWorld. All guestrooms include refrigerators, coffeemakers, irons/ironing boards, and cable TV. This hotel has two computers with complimentary high-speed Internet access in the lobby and an outdoor pool.



contact:
tel: +1 407 351 3333
fax: +1 407 351 3577
<http://www.hiuniversal.com/>

location:
5905 S Kirkman Rd
Orlando FL 32819

9 Holiday Inn and Suites Universal

DESCRIPTION: This 10-story hotel sits directly across the street from Universal Studios, making it a great choice for families needing a theme park fix. The redecorated lobby offers a clean, friendly look, with lots of tropical white, off-white and green colors. Each of the 256 guest rooms is done in comfortable, upscale American décor with many amenities.



Hotels.com

Private porches and patios overlook the theme park. ©
wcities.com

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 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 characters, rent watercraft 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's 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.

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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.

© NileGuide

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.

©

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

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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