

The Universal appeal of Orlando

The area surrounding Orlando, Florida is one of the world's hottest tourist destinations, welcoming almost 50 million visitors per year. Its literally hot too, with a subtropical climate – summer temperatures regularly reach 90°F (32°C), while even in winter they rarely drop below 50°F – and hundreds of unique theme parks and tourist destinations, as well as attractive natural features such as springs, lakes and sandy beaches, all contributing to its success.

Nearby Lake Buena Vista is home to Walt Disney World, the most visited resort on Earth. It includes four separate theme parks, two water parks and many hotels and restaurants, with enough rides, slides and other entertainments to occupy children for at least a week – aside from the main rollercoasters and arcades, there are more varied attractions such as the 'Animal Kingdom' wildlife park, hang gliding, and a lagoon where you can snorkel with live sharks!

Another of the area's most popular destinations is Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure, which hosts high-speed roller-coasters, rides for younger children, live shows and technological marvels such as interactive 3D environments, all based around favourite movies, cartoons and stories. Jurassic Park, Spider-Man, E.T., the Incredible Hulk, Dr. Seuss and Jaws are all here, with a new Harry Potter-themed area coming soon.

Animal-lovers are well catered for in Orlando at the huge 200 acre SeaWorld amusement park which houses many marine creatures such as orcas, dolphins, sea lions, sharks, sea turtles and false killer whales, with shows including water skiing and human acrobats, and ten rides. Nearby Gatorland boasts thousands of alligators and crocodiles, along with many snakes, other reptiles, insects and birds. Visitors can get closer to some of the park's residents during the regular 'Up Close Encounters' with trainers and there's even a chance for anyone over 12 – and fearless – to have a go at 'gator wrasslin' in the Trainer for a Day events. And at Blue Spring State Park, during the winter there's a chance to see Florida manatees in the wild as well as a huge variety of birds and other wildlife. Canoeing, swimming and scuba diving are popular activities.

There are simply hundreds of other things to do in and around Orlando: slightly older children may enjoy the Florida Music Festival, a visit to the Cirque de Soleil, the huge Orlando Science Center or the John F. Kennedy Space Center, the working NASA spaceport on Merritt Island where visitors can view flight-ready and used space craft and rockets. On a less technological note there are stunning sights at the World of Orchids and the beautiful Harry P. Leu gardens - an oasis in the city with lakes, a butterfly garden and historical museum.

Unsurprisingly for such a popular destination, there is also a huge range of [accommodation in Orlando](#) and the surrounding area, from hostels to 5 star hotels and private villas – in fact, the only place in the country with more hotel rooms is Las Vegas. It's also a fantastic area for shopping, with everything from Tiffany's to the specialist Asian shops and restaurants of 'Little Saigon', and food including traditional Cajun, Cuban-style and round the world cuisine.

About the Author

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