

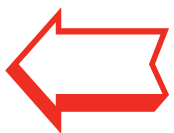


So you're going to

DISNEY WORLD?



A Philadelphian's Guide to the Happiest Place on Earth

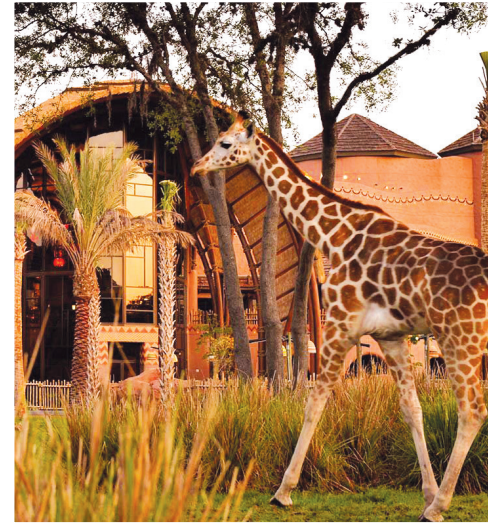


A fact that's perhaps not surprising to you: The number one destination out of Philly's airport is Orlando. Philadelphians—those with kids and without!—*love* Disney. But just because it's a popular trip doesn't mean it's an easy vacation. Maximizing your day and your money and creating those “magic” moments takes more coordination than a last-minute tailgate at the Linc. (Someone we know—*not us, swear!*—once called Disney planning a “hellscape.”) But we're here to help, with recommendations on hotels, activities and food, plus the smartest tips from the locals who know Disney best.

EDITED BY ASHLEY PRIMIS & REGAN FLETCHER STEPHENS



From left: The Four Seasons Resort Orlando; Animal Kingdom Lodge.



Find Your Perfect Housing Situation

In Orlando, hotel rooms are almost as abundant as mouse-eared merch. Zero in on the one that's right for your fam.

If you're with a big group ... The two-bedroom suites at Disney's New England-themed (read: classy) **Beach Club Resort** can accommodate seven adults, have common areas, and are a short walk from Epcot or a boat ride from Hollywood Studios. (They start at \$1,585 a night.) For more space—plus a full kitchen, an in-unit laundry and a dining room—try the three-

bedroom option at **BoardWalk Villas**. It sleeps up to 12 people, has lots of outdoor space, and starts at \$2,078 a night.

If you want this to be a relaxing vacation, too ... The **Four Seasons Resort Orlando** is officially in the park, but considering the lack of kitsch and the insane amenities, you might as well

be on a remote island. There's a five-acre water park with slides, a lazy river, and an adults-only pool (the only one on Disney property), plus a complimentary kids' club. (Free! Child care!) What to do with all that downtime? Have a lakeside lunch, book a spa treatment, or just hit up the in-room Plum wine machines that dispense glasses of chilled chard on demand. Rooms start at \$449 a night.

If you're all about convenience ... The monorail goes right through the hotel, but the **Contemporary** is also only about a 10-minute walk from the Magic Kingdom, which is clutch for those moments when you just can't bear to line up for another moving attraction. Rooms are updated, and the ones on the CONTINUED ON PAGE 136

MY BEST TIP



THE SUPERFAN: Tomika Bryant, King of Prussia

DISNEY CRED: She's gone to Disney every other year or so since her eldest was one. (He's 15 now.) Sometimes she goes without her kids!

“Stay on-property whenever you can. It helps avoid travel stress, because Disney handles everything from delivering your bags to transporting you to the parks. You can also utilize those Extra Magic Hours that way.”

POOL: FOUR SEASONS; LODGE: DISNEY

THE BEST BITES AT DISNEY

There's a whole lotta food, some not worth your time. (This is not the place to get a cheesesteak.) These are the morsels worth skipping a ride for.

AT THE MAGIC KINGDOM:

1. Dole Whip at Aloha Isle → The sweet-tart pineapple soft-serve is the iconic Disney dessert.

2. Fruit waffle sandwich at Sleepy Hollow → Put the emphasis on the fruit, and this hot waffle with chocolate hazelnut spread and fresh strawberries can pass for a healthy snack.

3. Corn dog nuggets at Casey's Corner → So much better than chicken nuggets.

4. Turkey legs at Liberty Square Market → Are people waiting in that line to get on It's a Small World? Nope, they're waiting for turkey legs.

5. The Grey Stuff at Be Our Guest Restaurant → In a fun nod to *Beauty and the Beast*, the Master's Cupcake is chocolate sponge cake piped with gray icing.

6. Night Blossom at Pongu Pongu → An *Avatar*-inspired Insta-friendly slushie with vivid layers of apple and desert pear limeade, topped with a pile of passion-fruit boba balls.

7. French fries with pulled pork and cheese at Flame Tree BBQ → This heaping plate of all the best junk foods is a thank-God-I'm-wearing-elastic-waist-pants meal.

AT EPCOT:

8. Croque Glacé at L'Artisan des Glaces, France → Scoops of gelato sandwiched in a warm brioche bun might be the classiest ice cream in all of Disney World.

9. Frozen margarita at Choza de Margarita, Mexico → Order this with all three flavors—mango, strawberry and lime—and don't forget the side of mango-topped guac.

10. Caramel popcorn at Karamell-Küche, Germany → The heady aroma of freshly popped corn coated in warm Werther's Original Caramel is pretty much the official smell of Germany.

11. Peanut Butter and Jelly Milkshake at 50s Prime Time Cafe → Wash down a plate of Mom's Old-Fashioned Pot Roast with one of these thick and creamy shakes.



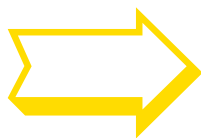


A home in Golden Oak



High-End Disney Experiences

For when you want to make it rain



- Without a doubt, the best way to dole out your dough is to book a **Private VIP Tour**. You'll get picked up at your hotel, be shuttled around by a guide, skip the ride lines, and enjoy special seating at parades. Plus, they do all the planning. (Take that, Fastpass suckers!) Starts at \$425 an hour. (Note: There are other themed tours that aren't as expensive, like one that gets you on a ton of rides for \$349 per person per day.)

- You can now **own a home at Disney**, on the Four Seasons property. The neighborhood is called Golden Oak, and homes start at \$3 million. If you just want to live there for a few hours, Markham's, the private restaurant built to serve residents in Golden Oak, opens up to the gen pop for a special monthly dinner that costs \$349 a person. Meals are themed, cooked by guest chefs (sometimes a few!), and full of surprises.

- The nightly fireworks shows are legendary, but seeing them from a **chartered pontoon or private yacht** makes them next-level. There are pickups from multiple hotels, and you'll have your choice of show (Epcot or Magic Kingdom). Music is piped into the boat, and snacks and beverages are served. You can also add on and make a whole meal out of it. Prices start at \$299, or \$399 per hour for the yacht.

- The Royal Suite at **Four Seasons Orlando** has a movie theater, 1,000 square feet of outdoor space and a butler. It's \$15K a night. A little outside your budget? Book the Park View Deluxe Suite for around \$4,000 a night. There's a soaking tub for you and views of the fireworks for the kiddos. You'll also get access to extra park hours, transportation, and an on-site army of planning experts.

Win at Fastpass

And eight other know-before-you-go insider tips—because you need a Philly Special kind of play to get the most out of your trip

Get out of Philly as early as possible. →

Book the earliest flight you can, says Colleen Anastasi, a Langhorne agent who works with Kingdom Magic Vacations: “Airport delays happen later in the day.” And take advantage of Magical Express, a service that’s free for those staying at a Disney property: Your bags will be delivered to your hotel room, so you get to bypass baggage claim.

Start planning sooner than you think (like, right now). →

Disney created Fastpass to address long lines at rides. And it works. But you have to know how to manage it: Depending on where you’re staying, you’ll be able to reserve ride times 30 to 90 days out. Plot your strategy, and mark your calendar for booking day, says Blue Bell-based Maria Heiser of Curran Travel.

About that plan ... → You can reserve three Fastpass rides before your trip, say Joanna Bistline and Lauren Lieberman of the Main Line’s 2 Dis Chicks. (Once those are used, you’ll get additional passes via the app.) Plan your first two rides in the morning, so there’s time to book those extra passes.

Download the My Disney Experience app. → This is how you book additional rides. But it also offers mobile food ordering—a.k.a. skipping more lines!

Get in the right (non-Philly) mind-set. → The logistics can induce Conshohocken

Curve-traffic levels of ire. Try to go in with a Zen attitude, says Randee Segal of MickeyTravels LLC. “Capitalize on the things your family will enjoy at *this* stage. If your kids want to ride Dumbo 10 times, then ride it 10 times. Enjoy being together.”

Get creative with the character meals. →

The Goofy and Pals breakfast at the Four Seasons is civilized and tasty and comes with free professional digital images. Or consider booking a character lunch, suggests Segal; it’s a good air-conditioned midday break. Downingtown-based Dana

Zificsak of Magical Moments Vacations says Epcot’s Garden Grill character meal is a hidden gem: “It slowly rotates through the Living with the Land boat ride, and food is served family-style.”

Don’t make it all about the rides. → See shows, says Heiser. “Disney’s Hollywood Studios has *Fantasmic*, held in an amphitheater. *Rivers of Light* in Animal Kingdom is a delight.” (Bonus: All shows are free.) Segal also suggests Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, where kids can get princess-ified, and the Pirates League, where they’re transformed into mermaids or pirates.

Consider hiring a travel agent. →

Between learning how to use Fastpass and your dining points, keeping track of times, and the crowds and heat, your trip can feel like a high-stakes competitive sport. Disney-certified agents know all the hacks and lingo to make it more seamless.



MY BEST TIP

THE SUPERFAN:

Tara Haaz,
Rittenhouse

DISNEY CRED:

An annual-pass holder who visited three times just this past year.

“This is not the time for hard parenting. Whether it’s to keep the day moving or to keep everyone happy, let loose a little—it’ll make your experience so much better. If your kid asks for a Mickey Ice Cream Bar before noon, indulge ... and get yourself one, too. In fact, throw in a churro and call it lunch!”





Bok Tower Gardens

12 AWESOME NON-DISNEY THINGS TO DO NEAR ORLANDO

It's not such a small world after all.

1 Kiss a dolphin at Discovery Cove. After you take a lap in the pristine lazy river, get personal with exotic birds, and snorkel with thousands of tropical fish, you can cuddle with a dolphin.

2 Bike through orange groves. An old rail line is now a fantastic bike trail that winds you through small towns and orange farms and deposits you in quaint Winter Garden, where you can lunch in a brewery, hit up the playground, get ice cream, and shop. Rent bikes and pull trailers at Killarney Station trailhead.

3 Take a spa day at the Four Seasons. There's one massage that's designed to put you in a deep sleep and another that utilizes birchwood massage sticks, but what makes treatments here worth the high tariff are the lounging areas you have access to all day.

4 Cool down in a water park. It feels like there are more water parks than gators in this part of Florida. Disney has Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach; Universal has Volcano Bay; Aquatica's lazy

FROM TOP: SEAN PAVONE/ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; KIMBERLY SNEED/INSTAGRAM.COM/MYDISNEYEATS

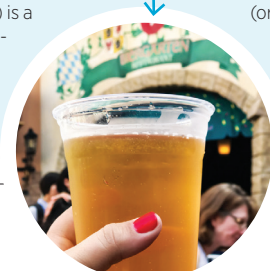
But What If You Hate Disney?

Skeptics, take note: These experiences could turn your frown upside down.

If you fear that an endless barrage of cloying Disney kitsch will erode your soul, consider visiting a therapist. Kidding! Consider carving out some grown-up time by booking an **adults-only tour**. **Eating Around the World** (get a snack and drink at each country in Epcot) is a one-of-a-kind progressive dinner; there's a Magic Kingdom dine-around that

gets you time in kitchens; the Backstage Magic tour brings you behind the scenes of sets. Now, if you keep using the "There's just never a good time" excuse, maybe you should make it about more than just a vacation. Example: If you're a runner (or aspiring runner), **book a trip during one of Disney's marathon weekends**. (They're held in October

and January, and races range from 5Ks to full marathons.) All the training will get you excited for race day, and you'll get to run through empty parks. "It's like a few hours of behind-the-scenes magic," says Lauren Molino of South Philly, a Disney regular. Or maybe you should try **visiting during a holiday**. When **Halloween** or Christmas becomes the focus—Disney





Discovery Cove

river takes you under a pool of tropical fish; and the Orlando Watersports Complex has an inflatable obstacle course and wakeboarding on a lake.

5 Be a local in Winter Park. Orlando is a beautiful city, but head to the toniest part of town. Stroll the shops on Park Avenue, take a boat tour to ogle the sprawling waterfront homes (including where Mister Rogers lived!), and dig into handmade pastas at Prato.

6 Chill with Elmo at Sesame Street Land. SeaWorld is diversifying its options (thank you, *Blackfish*) with this charming mini-park that's Sesame Street come to life. The tiniest members of your group will love Super Grover's mini coaster, story time with Big Bird, and selfies with that beloved red monster.

7 Get a little nature in at Bok Tower Gardens. This greenspace has a huge bell tower and an old mansion, plus flowers, birds and trees that you won't see in the Northeast. And yeah, it's named after *our* Bok: The *Ladies Home Journal* editor built the place and opened it to the public in 1929.

8 Scream your head off at Universal Studios. Doctor Doom's Fearfall, the Incredible Hulk Coaster, Revenge of the Mummy, and everything in Harry Potter World, including the new you-might-pee-yourself Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure.

9 Get high at Kennedy Space Center. See where shuttles launch, learn about our space history, step inside the *Atlantis*, and then buy one of those cool NASA tees from the authentic source.

10 Hang in a swamp on an airboat ride. The closest you'll get to wrestling a gator is on an airboat ride. Book at Wild Florida because it has Gator Park, where you can pet a sloth, too.

11 Get creative at Legoland. This is most definitely not the Legoland Discovery Center in the Plymouth Meeting mall. At the theme park, kids can drive Lego cars, ride in a Duplo train, build a boat to race down rapids, and so much more.

12 Get out of the sun at the Orlando Science Center. This museum has all sorts of stuff for little kids to explore, including an indoor climbing gym, a pretend orange factory, and pneumatic tubes that send scarves high into the air. (It's like a giant game of catch.)

MY BEST TIP



THE SUPERFAN:

Abbey Beekman, Fairless Hills

DISNEY CRED:

Along with her parents, her sister, her niece and her son, she goes at least once a year. Her six-year-old boy has been five times. She also honeymooned here.

“Don't waste your snack credits on water. You can get free cups of ice water if you ask. And you can bring snacks into the parks. Make your credits count!”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RICHMOND GIBBS/DISCOVERY COVE; PHILHARMAGIC AND FIREWORKS; DISNEY



decorates the hell out of the parks and has special parades—it's easier to get into the spirit of the whole thing. (Fake it till you make it and all.) Plus, there can be fewer crowds (kind of). And if all else fails and you find yourself stuck under a rain cloud while everyone else is dancing on rainbows?

Go back to the basics. Some of the new multi-dimensional sensory-overload rides based on movies you don't care about (hi, *Toy Story 4!*) can make the whole experience feel like a show on top of a spectacle. Seek out the **rides that have been around for decades**—Space Mountain, *It's A Small World*, *PhilharMagic*—and you'll remember that Disney is actually a history-making enterprise built atop the bold idea of one real man.



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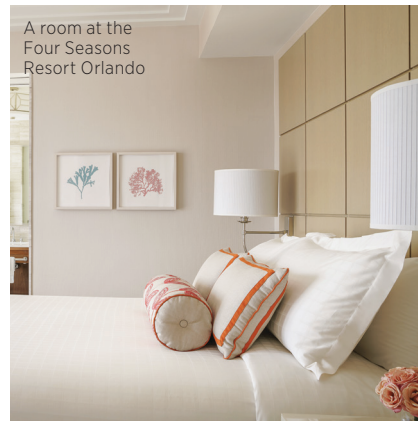
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Walt Disney World

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 130



Club Level have access to a concierge and gym. Plus, the property is home to the California Grill, where diners have front-row seats for the nightly fireworks show. Rooms start at \$421 a night.

If you want to be a bit removed from the action ... Don't feel like you have to spend every waking minute at Disney; you *are* on vacation, after all. The **JW Marriott Orlando, Grande Lakes** is home to a mega-pool situation (there's a water obstacle course) and a Greg Norman-designed golf course. It's close to other attractions like Discovery Cove and Universal Studios and is still only 25 minutes from the Magic Kingdom. Rooms start at \$250.

If money is no object ... Get two vacations in one. The 2,000-square-foot Royal Asante Presidential Suite at **Animal Kingdom Lodge** has a TV room with a thatched ceiling, soaking tubs, enormous beds, a dining room, and a large balcony with views of the animal park. (That thatched ceiling is cool, but seeing a zebra or wildebeest from your porch is way cooler.) There are also waterslides and an in-pool playground on-property, plus the opportunity for a private safari. The suite starts at \$2,784 a night.

If you're on a budget ... Rooms at the **Pop Century Resort** got a refresh last year, with cleverly designed layouts (a table transforms into a Murphy bed) and in-room extras like coffeemakers. And while other well-priced hotel options nearby (Art of Animation, All-Star Sports) share a bus to the parks, Pop Century has its own, getting you aboard Dumbo the Flying Elephant that much faster. Rooms start at \$131. **D**

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