

Alan Spicer's very comprehensive guide to taking a trip to Orlando. Getting away seems a wonderful dream at the moment.

Orlando – A Holiday to Remember – Part 1

It is something kids dream about, girls for the fairy-tale aura and character meets, especially the princesses, and boys for the scarier rides and to train as a Jedi. But this is not just a holiday for the young, adults especially grandparents, will all take something away and, for 75% of you, the planning (or dreaming) for the next trip will start on the plane back.

This is really for people who have never been to Orlando although I suspect that the majority who have visited the Magic will be reminded of the great time they had and would want to go back immediately. I have now visited nine times, the last being in June 2019, five times with my wife and daughter and four before she was born (the daughter not the wife) – I am hooked and the current plans are to return to celebrate Disney's 50th year in Orlando from September 2021.

I intend to write this in three parts, simply because I want to do it justice – you can always ignore these articles if it has no interest. Today will be the preparation, planning and touchdown in Orlando, the second part will be accommodation, transportation, shopping and eating and the third part will be the parks. I hope you enjoy it and find some of it useful.

Part 1 – Preparation

Who should I book with? We have been with three different Companies and we think that Virgin are the best. Get a price on-line (with discount) and then go visit them in-store, where they will match the price and you get to talk to a human being. Look at the 'extras' that your holiday Company are offering. Virgin gave early entry into the 2 Universal parks which is a valuable perk but they also offered free Disney Quick Dining for the whole party. This perk is usually promoted for a set period and is literally worth hundreds of pounds. You get breakfast – cooked or pastry – plus a non-alcoholic drink (say \$15) a snack - ice cream/bottle of water or pop (say \$5) and an evening dinner – main meal, non-alcoholic drink and pudding (say \$25). You won't spend all your credits as you will visit other parks and although your allowance carries over, you would really have to be a pig to catch up. As you can see, \$45 per day times the number in your party is quite significant so book when that is being offered. Virgin also gave 200 Disney Dollars which you can spend as cash in any Disney park or shop in Disney Springs. Two airports - Orlando International & Sandford. The former is a much bigger airport and is nearer Disney by half an hour, the latter is nearer Universal.

When is the best time to go? If you have a choice, then this is very much determined by your heat tolerance. Summer is hot, with day temperatures easily reaching 35C (95F) so although this is manageable, you will not be able to race around that is usually necessary on your first visit. We have gone at the end March/beginning April, May, August and at the end September/beginning October. August was just too hot but the other months are great. Usually 21C+ (70F+) in the day, so wet rides can be done (do not ride these on cold days without a change of clothing), evenings can be cooler but not uncomfortable. It is sometimes useful to check American school holidays as they do differ from the UK and it does make a small difference to queues. For example, American kids go back to school in the third week of August. Easter breaks tend to be different as well.

Should I drive, taxi or train to the airport? If you train it then you are reliant on public services and you will have your luggage to manage (it will be heavier coming back). Using a taxi, you are still reliant on another person, the state of the roads and I've never been comfortable basically advertising to someone that I am away on holiday. Driving yourself still leaves you reliant on the roads but we usually go the day before and stay in a local hotel. Some hotels offer a parking deal which includes 14 days free parking with the cost of an overnight stay but there are many parking options both on-site and a few miles away with free transportation to and from the airport