

Thank you to Alan for these great articles on his Orlando holiday plans . It gives us something to look forward to and help on planning our own trips.

Orlando – A Holiday to Remember – Part 3

I really hope, in the first two parts, this is giving you some inspiration to seriously consider Orlando as your next holiday destination. Part 3 will be looking at shopping, transportation, eating and entertainment. As before, very happy to answer questions on ahsPCR@ntlworld.com or just ask me when this is all over and we meet again at Jimmy Macs!

Shopping

The price you see is the price you won't pay. Add 6% sales tax to all advertised prices in shops and restaurants, not much but it does catch you out and you end up scrabbling for coins.

As you can imagine, the number of souvenir shops in every park is immense with each shop tending to be themed to the attraction in the immediate vicinity. Many rides, when you finish, will exit you through that shop so your current excitement is heightened and you may be drawn to a tee-shirt that says, "I conquered Everest" or a hoodie displaying "Gryffindor". By all means buy it if it really tickles your fancy but it won't be cheap and you may find something you want more later in the day. Although there is usually a large general shop at the front of every park that has all types of merchandise, there will be things that can only be purchased at that specialist shop, so make a note of where your original fancy is and be prepared to go back.

Besides the parks, both Disney and Universal have their own specialised shopping and entertainment areas called Disney Springs and Universal CityWalk respectively. The majority of these will be not owned by them and you find shops like Under Armour, UniQlo, Lego and Kate Spade at Disney Springs with more specialised stores at CityWalk (you can even get a tattoo there if it is on your bucket list).

There are numerous Malls in Orlando. The Florida Mall is the biggest and the one we visit every trip. Great shops (if you have a late teens daughter, try "Garage" – guaranteed she will be in there a long time and spend all her money). Orlando International Premium Outlets has a Disney Character Warehouse store which has pukka stuff at around a third of the price in the parks although these may not be the latest. For really high-end clobber go to The Mall at Millenia.

Transportation

If you stay at a Disney property then all transportation to the Disney parks, water parks and Disney Springs is included. Same at Universal between the Universal parks, water park and CityWalk.

The car you hire, via your holiday company, is not necessarily included in the holiday price. Using Virgin as the example, what is included is basic 3rd party cover but this does not include various taxes and other charges that you must pay when you pick up your car which will be more if you hire a bigger car. You will need your licence and certainly up until 2019, the old green licence was still acceptable. Virgin offer two packages to cover this which has other benefits and these will cost £310 and £413 respectively. There is an option to use Virgin's coach transfer currently at no cost (although if you are staying at a Disney Hotel then use Disney's free Magical Express coach service). Hotels also charge for overnight parking (from 2020) so that will be another \$20 or so a day.

We have always hired a car but now, with the Uber/Lyft option being so cheap, plus the fact that you won't need the car for 75% of the time you are there, I think we will now use Uber e.g. Uber SUV (for up to 6 and one way) : Disney to SeaWorld is £16, Disney to Florida Mall is £23, Disney to Universal is £22. Perhaps if you are planning to go further afield like Kennedy Space Centre or Busch Gardens then a car may be not just convenient but may actually save you money.

Eating

A standard tip is 18% (ouch) with 20% expected for good service. Don't worry, bills in restaurants handily show both amounts at the bottom of the bill, to enable you to add this (or any amount you like) to the final bill.

There are many eating places in all the parks and in the shopping areas and they cater for all pockets and tastes. However, strongly suggest you research the menu before you book (absolutely necessary for sit down dining) to ensure all of your party will eat something!

I will highlight a few.

The Brown Derby @ Hollywood Studios - Probably the 'poshest' restaurant in the four Disney parks and won't be to everyone's taste. The food is an attempt at fine dining so if you have fussy kids (or you are picky) then you may be spending a lot of dollars for food that is either not eaten or enjoyed. Service is good but study the menu and if you think the food sounds fine then it will be.