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Mini-Mickey: The Pocket-Sized Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World

The Unofficial Guide Color Companion to Walt Disney World

The Unofficial Guide to Britain's Best Days Out: Theme Parks and Attractions

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To the Ortiz-Valle gang: We love your reports from the parks and the insights from your annual takeover of the Disney fleet. This year you outdid yourselves! We loved your report about tying the knot with the Mouse. (We hear the photographer is still recovering from trying to get the entire class into one picture.)

Thanks also to Amber Kaye Henderson and Ritchey Halphen for their editorial and production work on this book. Scott McGrew and Steve Jones created the maps, and Frances Lennie prepared the index.

—Bob Sehlinger, Liliane Opsomer, and Len Testa

INTRODUCTION

HOW COME “UNOFFICIAL”?

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

THE AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS OF THIS GUIDE specifically and categorically declare that they are and always have been totally independent of the Walt Disney Company, Inc.; of Disneyland, Inc.; of Walt Disney World, Inc.; and of any and all other members of the Disney corporate family not listed.

The authors believe in the wondrous variety, joy, and excitement of the Walt Disney World attractions. At the same time, we recognize that Walt Disney World is a business. In this guide, we represent and serve you, the consumer. If a restaurant serves bad food, or a gift item is overpriced, or a certain ride isn't worth the wait, we can say so, and in the process we hope to make your visit more fun, efficient, and economical.

YOUR *UNOFFICIAL* WALT DISNEY WORLD TOOLBOX

WHEN IT COMES TO WALT DISNEY WORLD, a couple with kids needs different advice than does a party of seniors going to the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival. Likewise, adults touring without children, honeymooners, and folks with only a day or two to visit all require their own special guidance.

To meet the varying needs of our readers, we've created *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World*, or what we call the “Big Book.” At 864 pages, it contains all the information that anyone traveling to Walt Disney World needs to have a super vacation. More than 25 years in the making, it's our cornerstone.

As thorough as we try to make the main guide, there still isn't sufficient space for all the tips and resources that may be useful to certain readers. Therefore, we've developed four additional guides that provide information tailored to specific visitors. Although some advice from the Big Book, such as arriving early at the theme parks, is echoed in these guides, most of the information is unique.

Here's what's in the toolbox:

The guide you're reading now presents detailed planning and touring tips for a family vacation along with more than 20 special touring plans for families that you won't find anywhere else. *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World with Kids* is the only *Unofficial Guide* created with the guidance of a panel of kids, all of varying ages and backgrounds.

The Unofficial Guide Color Companion to Walt Disney World, by Bob Sehlinger and Len Testa

is a visual feast that proves a picture is worth a thousand words. In the Big Book, for instance, you can learn about the best guest rooms to request at Disney's Wilderness Lodge, but in the *Color Companion* you can see the rooms, along with the pool and the magnificent lobby. Full-color photos illustrate how long the lines get at different times of day, how wet riders get on Splash Mountain, and how the park is decked out for various holidays. The *Color Companion* whets your appetite for Disney fun, shows pictures of all the attractions, serves as a keepsake, and, as always, helps make your vacation more enjoyable. Most of all, the *Color Companion* is for fun. For the first time, we're able to use color photography to express our zany *Unofficial* sense of humor. Think of it as Monty Python meets Walt Disney ... in Technicolor.

Mini-Mickey: The Pocket-Sized Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World, by Bob Sehlinger, Len Testa, and Ritchey Halphen, is a portable Cliffs-Notes-style version of the Big Book. It distills information to help short-stay or last-minute visitors decide quickly how to plan their limited hours at Disney World.

Beyond Disney: The Unofficial Guide to Universal, SeaWorld, and the Best of Central Florida, by Bob Sehlinger and Robert N. Jenkins with Len Testa, is a guide to non-Disney theme park attractions, restaurants, outdoor recreation, and nightlife in Orlando and Central Florida.

THE MUSIC OF LIFE

ALTHOUGH IT'S COMMON in our culture to see life as a journey from cradle to grave, Alan Watts, a noted late-20th-century philosopher, saw it differently. He viewed life not as a journey but as a dance. In a journey, he said, you are trying to get somewhere, and are consequently always looking ahead, anticipating the way stations, and thinking about the end. Though the journey metaphor is popular, particularly in the West, it is generally characterized by a driven, goal-oriented mentality: a way of living and being that often inhibits those who subscribe to the journey metaphor from savoring each moment of life.

When you dance, by contrast, you hear the music and move in harmony with the rhythm. Like life, a dance has a beginning and an end. But unlike a journey, your objective is not to get to the end but to enjoy the dance while the music plays. You are totally in the moment and care nothing about where on the floor you stop when the dance is done.

As you begin to contemplate your Walt Disney World vacation, you may not have much patience for a philosophical discussion about journeys and dancing. But you see, it is relevant. If you are like most travel guide readers, you are apt to plan and organize, to anticipate and control, and you like things to go smoothly. And truth be told, this leads us to suspect that you are a person who looks ahead and is outcome-oriented. You may even feel a bit of pressure concerning your vacation. Vacations, after all, are special events and expensive ones as well. So you work hard to make the most of your vacation.

We also believe that work, planning, and organization are important, and at Walt Disney World

they are essential. But if they become your focus, you won't be able to hear the music and enjoy the dance. Though a lot of dancing these days resembles highly individualized seizures, there was a time when each dance involved specific steps, which you committed to memory. At first you were tentative and awkward, but eventually the steps became second nature and you didn't think about them anymore.

Metaphorically, this is what we want for you and your children or grandchildren as you embark on your Walt Disney World vacation. We want you to learn the steps ahead of time, so that when you're on your vacation and the music plays, you will be able to hear it, and you and your children will dance with grace and ease.

YOUR PERSONAL TRAINERS

WE'RE HERE TO WHIP YOU INTO SHAPE by helping you plan and enjoy your Walt Disney World vacation. Together we'll make sure that it really *is* a vacation, as opposed to, say, an ordeal or an expensive way to experience heatstroke. Our objective, simply put, is to ensure that you and your children have fun.

Because this book is specifically for adults traveling with children, we'll concentrate on your special needs and challenges. We'll share our most useful tips as well as the travel secrets of more than 42,000 families interviewed over the years we've covered Walt Disney World.

So who *are* we? There's a bunch of us, actually. Your primary personal trainers are Liliane and Bob. Helping out big-time are Isaac, Ethan, and Julia, our Florida-based crew; Erin, who lives in New York City; and Hannah, from North Carolina.



Isaac



Ethan



Julia



Erin



Hannah

Isaac, 14, is our easygoing King of Patience. He calms the troops and always makes sure that nobody misses their favorite rides and attractions. Isaac plays football and rows crew; he also enjoys music and has performed at Walt Disney World with his school's orchestra and choir.

Ethan is 11 years old and always on the go. On his agenda: action, adventure, and what's new. A dedicated tennis player who loves to travel, he can't wait to experience Seven Dwarfs Mine Train.



BOB



LILIANE

Julia, 10, loves face painting, Disney pin trading, autographs, and parades. She's a great soccer player in addition to being a talented singer and dancer.

Erin is 15 years old; he loves to paint, and the creative side of Disney appeals to him. His French-born mom takes him to the parks regularly, and he has a special fondness for Disney Hollywood Studios. Erin loves the thrill rides there, and he delights in seeing his mom's expressions when they ride *The Twilight Zone of Terror* together. He also makes sure that his little brother, Max, always has a good time when they visit the parks.

Keeping the gang in check is Hannah, 15. She really knows Disney and will read you the riot if you mess up. The rest of us work for her. Needless to say, our gang has lots of opinions—so many, in fact, that they think Liliane's and Bob's are largely irrelevant.

Faithful readers will note that except for Hannah, this is a brandnew crew. After contributing for years to this guide, Idan, Ian, and Shelton are off to new adventures. We thank them for their witty contributions and wish them magical trails. They will always be part of our *Unofficial* family.

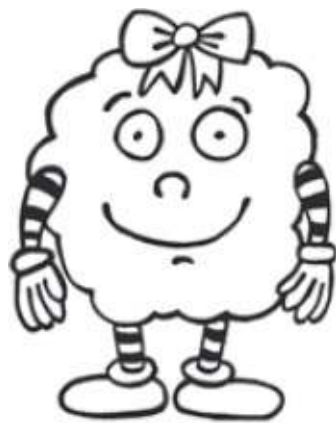
Liliane, a native of Belgium, moved to Birmingham, Alabama, in 2014 after having spent 2 years in New York City. She's funny and very charming in the best European tradition, and she puts more energy into being a mom than you think possible without performance-enhancing drugs. Optimistic and happy, she loves the sweet and sentimental side of Walt Disney World. You might find her whooping it up at the *Hoop-Dee-Doo Musical Revue*, but you'll never see her riding a roller coaster with Bob.

Speak of the devil, Bob isn't a curmudgeon exactly, but he likes to unearth Disney's secrets and show readers how to beat the system. His idea of a warm fuzzy might be the *Rock 'n' Roller Coaster*

but he'll help you save lots of money, find the best hotels and restaurants, and return home less than terminally exhausted. The caricatures above pretty much sum up the essence of Bob and Liliane.

If you're thinking that the cartoons paint a somewhat conflicted picture of your personal trainer well, you're right. Admittedly, Bob and Liliane have been known to disagree on a thing or two. Together, however, they make a good team. You can count on them to give you both sides of every story. Let's put it this way: Liliane will encourage you to bask in the universal-brotherhood theme of "It's a Small World." Bob will show up later to help you get the darned song out of your head.

Len is our research dude. His really complicated scientific wizardry will help you save a bundle of time—would you believe 4 hours in a single day?—by staying out of those pesky lines.



Oops, almost forgot: There's another team member you need to meet. Called a Wuffo, she's our very own character. She'll warn you when rides are too scary, too dark, too wet, or too rough, and she'll tell you which rides to avoid if you have motion sickness. You'll bump into her throughout the book doing, well, what characters do.

So why did we create our own character when Disney has dozens just sitting around? Simple—Disney characters toe the company line. We needed a tough (but lovable) independent character who would give you the skinny on what Disney rides do to your stomach and central nervous system.

ABOUT *This* GUIDE

WALT DISNEY WORLD HAS BEEN OUR BEAT for more than two decades, and we know it inside out. During those years, we've observed many thousands of parents and grandparents trying—some successfully, others less so—to have a good time at Walt Disney World. Some of these, owing to unfortunate dynamics within the family, were handicapped right from the start. Others were simply overwhelmed by the size and complexity of Walt Disney World; still others fell victim to a lack of foresight, planning, and organization.

Walt Disney World is a better destination for some families than for others. Likewise, some families are more compatible on vacation than others. The likelihood of experiencing a truly wonderful Walt Disney World vacation transcends the theme parks and attractions offered. In fact, the theme parks and attractions are the only constants in the equation. The variables that will define the

experience and determine its success are intrinsic to your family: things like attitude, sense of humor, cohesiveness, stamina, flexibility, and conflict resolution.

The simple truth is that Walt Disney World can test you as a family. It will overwhelm you with choices and force you to make decisions about how to spend your time and money. It will challenge you physically as you cover miles on foot and wait in lines touring the theme parks. You will have to respond to surprises (both good and bad) and deal with hyperstimulation.

This guide will forewarn and forearm you. It will help you decide whether a Walt Disney World vacation is a good idea for you and your family at this particular time. It will help you sort out and address the attitudes and family dynamics that can affect your experience. Most important, it will provide the confidence that comes with good planning and realistic expectations.

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

EVERY WRITER WHO EXPRESSES an opinion is accustomed to readers who strongly agree or disagree: it comes with the territory. Extremely troubling, however, is the possibility that our efforts to be objective have frightened some readers away from Walt Disney World or made others apprehensive. For the record, if you enjoy theme parks, Disney World is as good as it gets, absolute nirvana. It's upbeat, safe, fun, eye-popping, happy, and exciting. If you arrive without knowing a thing about the place and make every possible mistake, chances are about 90% that you'll have a wonderful vacation anyway. In the end, guidebooks don't make or break great destinations. Rather, they are simply too good to help you enhance your experience and get the most for your money.

BOB Be prepared to read experienced Disney World visitors' opinions of the parks in this book and to apply them to your own travel circumstances.



As wonderful as Walt Disney World is, however, it's a complex destination. Even so, it isn't nearly as challenging or difficult as New York, San Francisco, Paris, Acapulco, or any other large city or destination. And, happily, there are numerous ways to save money, minimize hassle, and make the most of your time. That's what this guide is about: giving you a heads-up regarding potential problems or opportunities. Unfortunately, some *Unofficial Guide* readers add up the warnings and critical advice and conclude that Walt Disney World is too intimidating, too expensive, or too much work. They lose track of the wonder of Disney World and focus instead on what might go wrong.

Our philosophy is that knowledge is power (and time and money too). You're free to follow our

advice—or not—at your discretion. But you can't exercise that discretion if we fail to present the issues.

With or without a guidebook, you'll have a great time at Walt Disney World. If you let us, we'll help you smooth the potential bumps. We're certain that we can help you turn a great vacation into an absolutely superb one. Either way, once there, you'll get the feel of the place and quickly reach a comfort level that will allay your apprehensions and allow you to have a great experience.

LETTERS AND COMMENTS FROM READERS

MANY WHO USE *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World with Kids* write us to comment or share their own touring strategies. We appreciate all such input, both positive and critical, and encourage our readers to continue writing. Their comments and observations are frequently incorporated in revised editions of the guide and have contributed immeasurably to its improvement.

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When e-mailing us, please tell us where you're from. If you snail-mail us, put your address on both your letter and envelope; the two sometimes get separated. It's also a good idea to include your phone number. Because we're travel writers, we're often out of the office for long periods of time, so forgive us if our response is slow. *Unofficial Guide* e-mail isn't forwarded to us when we're traveling, but we'll respond as soon as possible after we return.

Online Reader Survey

Express your opinions about your Walt Disney World visit at touringplans.com/walt-disney-world/survey. This online questionnaire lets every member of your party, regardless of age, tell us what he or she thinks about attractions, hotels, restaurants, and more.

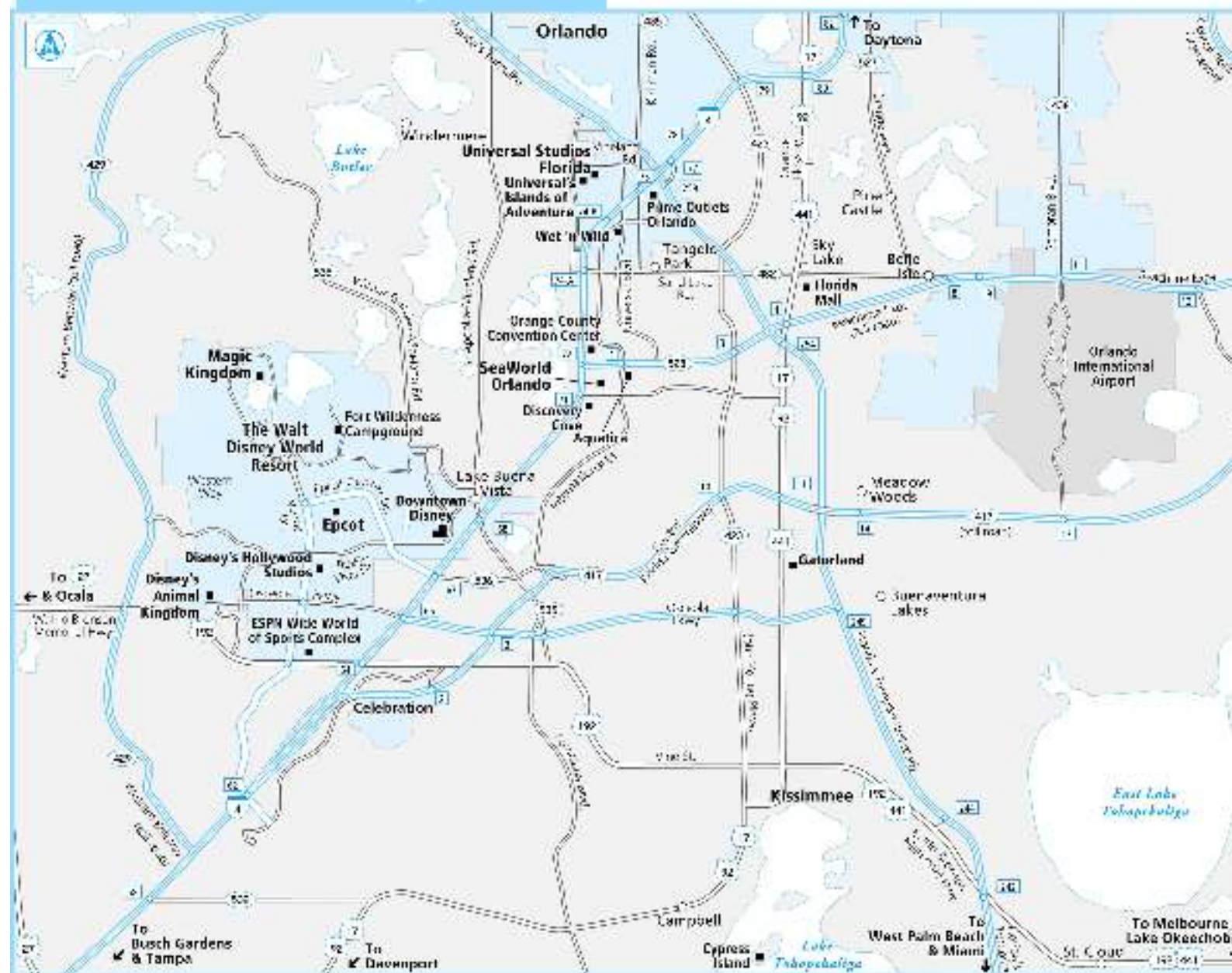
If you'd rather print out and mail us the survey, send it to **Reader Survey, *The Unofficial Guides*, PO Box 43673, Birmingham, AL 35243.**

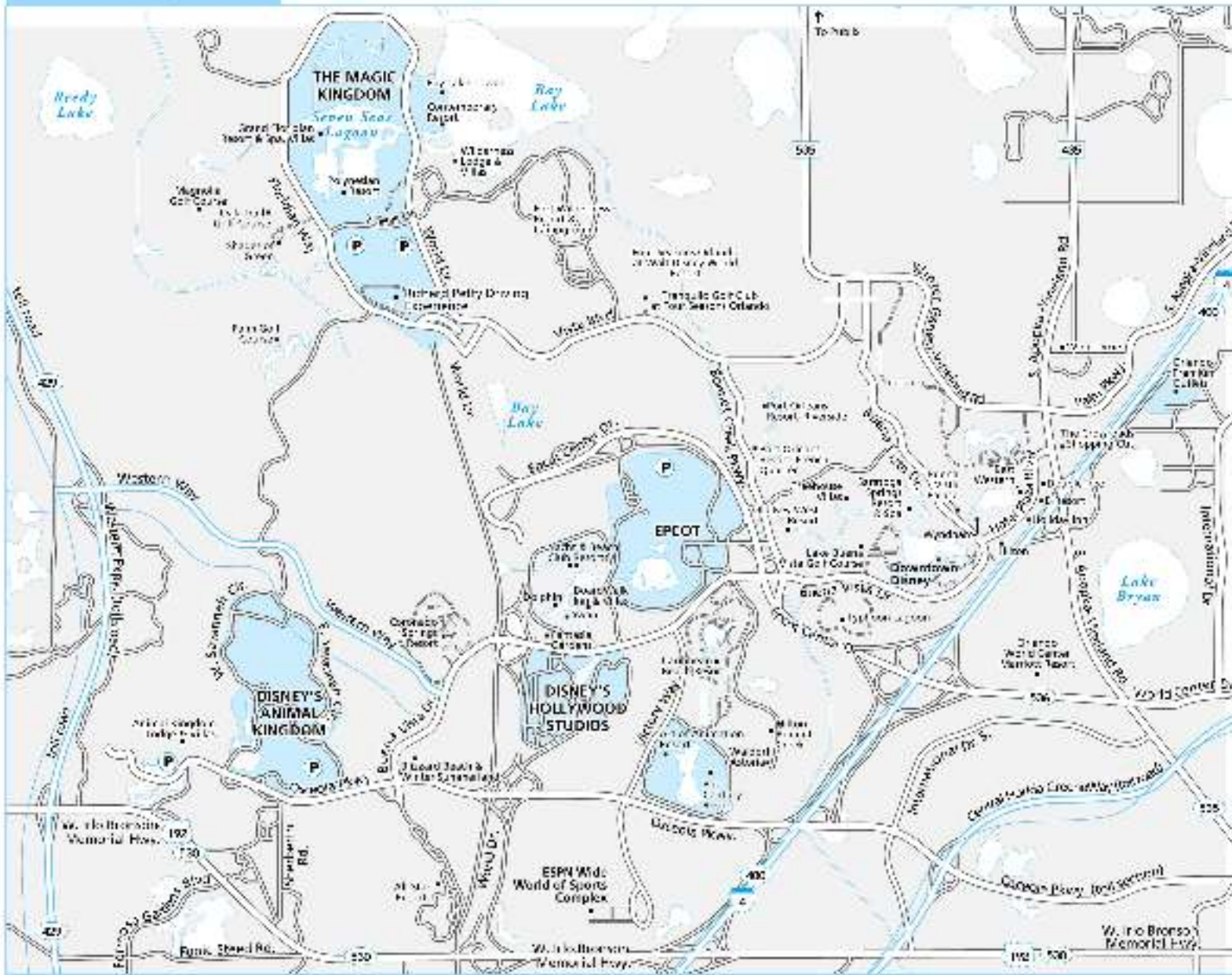
In any case, let us know what you think!

A QUICK TOUR *of a* BIG WORLD

WALT DISNEY WORLD COMPRISES 43 square miles, an area twice as large as Manhattan. Situated strategically in this vast expanse are the **Magic Kingdom**, **Epcot**, **Disney's Hollywood Studios**, and **Disney's Animal Kingdom** theme parks; 2 swimming theme parks; a sports complex; 5 golf courses; 41 hotels and a campground; more than 100 restaurants; 4 interconnected lakes; a shopping complex; 8 convention venues; a nature preserve; and a transportation system consisting of four-lane highways, elevated monorails, and a network of canals.

South Orlando & Walt Disney World Area





THE MAJOR THEME PARKS

The Magic Kingdom

When people think of Walt Disney World, most think of the Magic Kingdom, opened in 1971. It consists of the adventures, rides, and shows featuring the Disney cartoon characters, and Cinderella Castle. It's only one element of Disney World, but it remains the heart.

The Magic Kingdom is divided into six "lands," with five arranged around a central hub. First, you come to **Main Street, U.S.A.**, which connects the Magic Kingdom entrance with the hub. Clockwise around the hub are **Adventureland**, **Frontierland**, **Liberty Square**, **Fantasyland**, and **Tomorrowland**. Five hotels (**Bay Lake Tower**; the **Contemporary**, **Polynesian**, and **Grand Floridian Resorts**; and **The Villas at the Grand Floridian**) are connected to the Magic Kingdom by monorail and boat. Two other hotels, **Shades of Green** (operated by the US Department of Defense) and **Wilderness Lodge & Villas**, are nearby but aren't served by the monorail. Also nearby and served by boat and bus is **Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground**. Served by bus is the luxurious

new **Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort**, the first five-star hotel on Disney property.

Epcot

Opened in October 1982, Epcot is twice as big as the Magic Kingdom and comparable in scope. It has two major areas: **Future World** consists of pavilions concerning human creativity and technological advancement; **World Showcase**, arranged around a 40-acre lagoon, presents the architectural, social, and cultural heritages of almost a dozen nations, each country represented by replicas of famous landmarks and settings familiar to world travelers.

The Epcot resort hotels—the **BoardWalk Inn & Villas**, **Caribbean Beach Resort**, **Dolphin Princess Swan**, and **Yacht & Beach Club Resorts and Beach Club Villas**—are within a 5- to 15-minute walk of the International Gateway, the World Showcase entrance to the theme park. The hotels are also linked to Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios by canal and walkway. Epcot is connected to the Magic Kingdom and its hotels by monorail.

Disney's Hollywood Studios

Opened in 1989 as Disney-MGM Studios and a little larger than the Magic Kingdom, Disney's Hollywood Studios consists of two areas. One, occupying about 75% of the Studios, is a theme park focused on movies, music, and television. Park highlights include a re-creation of Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards from Hollywood's Golden Age, four high-tech rides, several musical shows, and a movie stunt show.

The second area encompasses soundstages, a back lot of streets and sets, and an outdoor theater for an automobile stunt show. Public access to the soundstages is limited to a tour which takes visitors behind the scenes of Disney animation and moviemaking.

Disney's Hollywood Studios is connected to other Walt Disney World areas by highway and canal but not by monorail. Guests can park in the Studios' pay parking lot or commute by bus. Guests at Epcot resort hotels can reach the Studios by boat or on foot.

Disney's Animal Kingdom

About five times the size of the Magic Kingdom, Disney's Animal Kingdom combines zoological exhibits with rides, shows, and live entertainment. The park is arranged in a hub-and-spoke configuration somewhat like the Magic Kingdom. A lush tropical rainforest serves as Main Street, funneling visitors to **Discovery Island**, the park's hub. Dominated by the park's central icon, the 140-foot-tall, hand-carved **Tree of Life**, Discovery Island offers services, shopping, and dining. From there, guests can access the themed areas: **Africa**, **Asia**, and **DinoLand U.S.A.** Discovery Island, Africa, and DinoLand U.S.A. opened in 1998, followed by Asia in 1999. Africa, the largest theme park area, at 100 acres, features free-roaming herds in a re-creation of the Serengeti Plain.

Camp Minnie-Mickey, the park's former character-greeting area, closed in 2014 to make way

for a new “land” based on James Cameron’s *Avatar* films, with construction ongoing until 2017.

Disney’s Animal Kingdom has its own parking lot and is connected to other Walt Disney World destinations by the Disney bus system. Although no hotels lie within Animal Kingdom proper, the **All Star Resorts**, **Animal Kingdom Lodge & Villas**, and **Coronado Springs Resort** are all nearby.

THE WATER PARKS

DISNEY WORLD HAS TWO MAJOR water parks: **Typhoon Lagoon** and **Blizzard Beach**. Opened in 1989, Typhoon Lagoon is distinguished by a wave pool capable of making 6-foot waves. Blizzard Beach is newer, having opened in 1995, and it features more slides. Both parks are beautifully landscaped, and great attention is paid to atmosphere and aesthetics. Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach have their own adjacent parking lots and can be reached by Disney bus.

OTHER WALT DISNEY WORLD VENUES

Downtown Disney, a.k.a. Disney Springs

Downtown Disney is a large shopping, dining, and entertainment complex that encompasses **Downtown Disney Marketplace** on the east, **Downtown Disney West Side** on the west, and what used to be **Pleasure Island** in the middle. Downtown Disney Marketplace contains the world’s largest Disney-character-merchandise store, upscale resort-wear and specialty shops, and several restaurants including **Rainforest Cafe** and **T-REX**. Downtown Disney West Side combines nightlife, shopping, dining, and entertainment. **House of Blues** serves Cajun-Creole dishes in its restaurant and electric blues in its music hall. **Bongos Cuban Café**, a nightclub and café created by Gloria Estefan and her husband, Emilio, offers Latin rhythms and flavors. **Wolfgang Puck Grand Cafe**, sandwiched among pricey boutiques, is the West Side’s prestige eatery. For entertainment, you’ll find a 24-screen **AMC Theater**; **Splitsville**, an upscale bowling alley and restaurant; a permanent showplace for the extraordinary 70-person cast of **Cirque du Soleil *La Nouba***; and **DisneyQuest**, an interactive virtual reality and electronic-games venue. Access Downtown Disney via Disney buses from Disney resorts.

Since the nighttime-entertainment venues at the former Pleasure Island were shuttered in 2008, The Big Mouse has suffered great angst in trying to arrive at an overall vision for Downtown Disney. After several false starts, Disney has embarked on an expansion with a Florida-waterfront-to-Disney theme. Called **Disney Springs**, it will encompass the current three areas and add a fourth. Pleasure Island will become **Town Center** and be built out toward the parking lot. Adjacent to the waterfront will be **The Landing**, with shops, restaurants, docks, and a promenade. Construction began in April 2013 and will be completed in 2016.

Disney’s Boardwalk

Near Epcot, the BoardWalk is an idealized replication of an East Coast 1930s waterfront resort. Open all day, the BoardWalk features upscale restaurants, shops and galleries, a brewpub, and an ESPN sports bar. In the evening, a nightclub with dueling pianos and a DJ dance club join the lineup. Bo

are for guests age 21 and up only. There's no admission fee for the BoardWalk, but the piano bar levies a cover charge at night. This area is anchored by the BoardWalk Inn and Villas, along with its adjacent convention center. The BoardWalk is within walking distance of the Epcot resorts, Epcot International Gateway, and Disney's Hollywood Studios. Boat transportation is available to and from Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios; buses serve other Disney World locations.

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex

The 220-acre Wide World of Sports is a state-of-the-art competition and training facility consisting of a 9,500-seat ballpark, two field houses, and venues for baseball, softball, tennis, track and field, beach volleyball, and 27 other sports. The spring-training home of the Atlanta Braves, the complex also hosts a mind-boggling calendar of professional and amateur competitions. Walt Disney World guests not participating in events may pay admission to watch any of the scheduled competitions.

LILIANE [Check out our *Unofficial Guide to Disney Cruise Line* for in-depth information on DCL including our advice on cruising with kids and teens.](#)



Disney Cruise Line: The Mouse at Sea

In 1998, the Walt Disney Company launched (literally) its own cruise line with the 2,400-passenger *Disney Magic*. Its sister ship, the *Disney Wonder*, first sailed in 1999. Most cruises depart from Port Canaveral, Florida (about a 90-minute drive from Walt Disney World), or Miami on three-, four-, and seven-night itineraries. Caribbean and Bahamian cruises include a day at **Castaway Cay**, Disney's private island. Cruises can be packaged with a stay at Disney World. In 2011 and 2012, respectively, two new ships, the *Disney Dream* and the *Disney Fantasy*, joined the fleet, enabling Disney Cruise Line to expand sailings to the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii, the Mexican Riviera, the Mediterranean, and northern Europe.

Disney cruises are perfect for families and for kids of all ages. Although the cruises are family-oriented, extensive children's programs and elaborate child-care facilities allow grown-ups plenty of opportunities to relax and do adult stuff. The ships are modern ocean liners with classic steamship lines. Cabins are among the most spacious in the cruise industry, and the staff is very attentive and accommodating. From the waitstaff at breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the cabin stewards, yours truly has not experienced any better.

LILIANE Board the ship as early as possible. Check on your dining rotation, and reserve Palo or Remy, spa treatments, and kids' programs. Relax and get ready for the departure party



Cabin design reveals Disney's finely tuned sense of the needs of families and children and offers a cruise-industry first: a split bathroom with a bathtub and shower combo and sink in one room, and toilet, sink, and vanity in another. This configuration, found in all but standard inside cabins, allows any family member to use the bathroom without monopolizing it. All bathrooms have a tub and shower, except rooms for persons with disabilities (shower only). Decor includes unusual features such as bureaus designed to look like steamer trunks. Cabins also have a telephone, TV, hair dryer, and a cooling box. In some cabins, pull-down Murphy beds or drop-down bunk beds allow for additional daytime floor space. Storage is generous, with deep drawers and large closets.

A big party with appearances by Mickey and Minnie marks departures, when the ship's horn toots "When You Wish Upon a Star." Halfway through your voyage Disney throws a deck party, where Mickey saves all passengers from Captain Hook and his evil plans.

Dining is a true pleasure. Each night, passengers move to a different family restaurant—each with its own unique theme and menu—and take their table companions and waitstaff with them. In addition to the family restaurants, the ships have a range of cafés offering pizza, burgers, sandwiches, and ice-cream bars. Room service is available 24/7.

LILIANE Disney strictly enforces a minimum age limit (18) for dining at Palo and Remy and a jacket (no ties) is a must.



For a night out without kids, Palo, which offers tables with a view, is a must. Reservations are also a must, and a surcharge of \$25 is added for this service to your onboard bill. The food is excellent, the ambience sophisticated. Disney enforces a strict policy for diners at Palo to be 18 years

of age or older.

In addition to Palo, the *Dream* and the *Fantasy* crank it up a notch with Remy. Chefs Scott Hunnel of Victoria & Albert's and Arnaud Lallement from L'Assiette Champenoise—a Michelin two-star restaurant outside Reims, France—created the French-inspired menu, served in an Art Nouveau style dining room. This upscale dining experience on the high seas costs \$75. If you think this is a little over-the-top, we completely agree. Whatever happened to the no-frills, great-food philosophy we learned from Remy in *Ratatouille*?

The Disney ships offer 15,000-plus square feet of playrooms and other kids' facilities. Programs include interactive activities, play areas supervised by trained counselors, and a children's drop-off service in the evening. Passengers can register their children for the nursery, and group babysitting is available for select hours every day. Cost is \$9 per child for the first child and \$8 an hour for each additional child in the same family. **Oceaneer Club**, featuring a Never Land theme on the *Wonder* and subdivided into differently themed spaces (*Toy Story*, *Marvel's The Avengers*, and the like) on the other ships, is perfect for kids ages 3–7, though children up to age 12 can participate. **Oceaneer's Lab** offers high-tech play. Kids wear ID bracelets, and parents receive pagers. There are also special clubs for tweens (**Edge**) and teens (**Vibe**).

Big with kids of all ages are the pools and the nightly entertainment on board, which shows Disney at its best. The **Walt Disney Theatre** stages several musical productions each cruise, and the **Buena Vista Theatre**, with its full-screen cinema, shows first-run and digital 3-D movies as well as classic Disney films. Movies are also played poolside on a state-of-the-art 24 x 14-foot LED screen affixed to the forward funnel in the ships' family-pool areas.

The *Dream* and the *Fantasy* feature the first-ever onboard water coaster. At 765 feet long and the height of four decks, **AquaDuck** is a major attraction for kids and grown-ups alike (the *Magic* counterpart, similar though not identical, is **AquaDunk**). Following an initial drop, guests glide through a translucent tube in a loop that extends 12 feet over the side of the vessel, allowing them to look down on the ocean 150 feet below. The ride lasts about 90 seconds and comes with climbs and drops, twists and turns. If you can keep your eyes open while riding, the AquaDuck will provide you with a spectacular view of the ship.

Senses Spa & Salon on the *Dream*, *Magic*, and *Fantasy* is a great place to relax not just for adults but also for teens, who get their own separate area called **Chill Spa**. (**Vista Spa & Salon** on the *Wonder* is strictly for Mom and Dad.) The treatments are pricey, and there's a surcharge (\$16–\$25 per day depending on the ship) for the use of the spa's Rainforest suite of saunas, steam rooms, and aromatic showers. The fitness center's showers and lockers are free of charge.

Keys, the piano bar on the *Magic*, and **Cadillac Lounge**, on the *Wonder*, are the most relaxing and beautiful lounges on the Seven Seas. Make a before-or-after dinner drink there part of your routine.

Shore excursions depend on the itinerary, but all Cape Canaveral, New York, and Bahamian sailings make at least one call at **Castaway Cay**, Disney's 1,000-acre private island. The natur

environment and miles of white-sand beaches have been nicely preserved. The best way to enjoy the island is to disembark first thing in the morning and secure a prime spot at the beach complete with hammock and shade. **Castaway Family Beach** is served by a tram running every 5 minutes. We walked the quarter-mile to the beach but realize that it could be tiresome to walk in the blistering summer heat. **Cookie's BBQ** and **Cookie's Too** serve an array of food that is included in the price of your cruise. Programs for kids on Castaway Cay give parents a chance to enjoy **Serenity Bay**, the adults-only beach.

Another great family experience is a wedding or vows renewal, offered both at sea and on Castaway Cay. Liliane recently joined 26 family members with the mission of getting her cousin Sergio and his bride, Nancy, hitched on Castaway Cay. She still chuckles when she thinks about the frantic efforts of the wedding coordinator and the photographer trying to make sense of the unruly group. With the help of some pixie dust, though, the ceremony went off without a hitch.

Disney's Fairy Tale Wedding packages on Castaway Cay start at \$4,000 for a party of eight guests plus the couple; the charge for additional guests is \$20 per person ages 3 years and older. Each package includes the ceremony, a wedding coordinator, concierge service, and the officiant. Also included are live music during and after the wedding, a bouquet for the bride and a boutonniere for the groom, and a reception aboard the ship. The couple is also treated to dinner at Palo and a \$100 onboard stateroom credit. A photographer, a surprise visit by Disney characters, and much more can be booked for an additional cost. For more information, check out disneyweddings.com/cruise.

Disney Cruise Line fared better than most of its competitors during the recession and is thriving as of this writing. Sailings enjoy high occupancy these days, and a number of new itineraries have been added for 2015. Fans of Disney's *Frozen*, for example, can experience the country that inspired the icy kingdom of Arendelle on a Norwegian Fjord Cruise of 7, 9, or 11 nights. (Anna and Elsa have also joined the character-greeting lineup on the *Magic*, *Wonder*, and *Fantasy*.)

Cruises are a terrific value in travel. Deals abound. Check websites such as cruisecritic.com, cruisemates.com, vacationstogo.com, and lastminutetravel.com for the latest discounts. Search engine kayak.com is another great resource for uncovering cruise bargains. If you prefer to buy directly from Disney, here's how to get in touch:

[Disney Cruise Line](http://DisneyCruiseLine.com)

☎ 800-951-6499 or 800-951-3532

disneycruise.com

Disney Cruise Line offers a free planning DVD that tells you all you need to know about Disney cruises and then some. To obtain a copy, call ☎ 888-DCL-2500, or order online at disneycruise.com.

Finally, to get the most out of your cruise, we recommend *The Unofficial Guide to Disney Cruise Line*, by Len Testa with Laurel Stewart and Erin Foster.

DISNEY-SPEAK POCKET TRANSLATOR

ALTHOUGH IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE to many, Walt Disney World has its own somewhat peculiar

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