



# The Unofficial Guide to Universal Orlando

By Seth Kubersky

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Compiled and written by a former Universal Orlando employee, and based upon decades of research from a team whose work has been cited by such diverse sources as *USA Today* and *Operations Research Forum*, *The Unofficial Guide to Universal Orlando* is packed with detailed, specific information on every ride, show, and restaurant in the resort, including insider insight on Harry Potter's Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley attractions.

Step-by-step detailed touring plans allow you to make the most of every minute and dollar during your Universal Orlando vacation. Where to find the cheapest Universal Orlando admission tickets, how to save big on Universal on-site hotel rooms and skip the regular lines in the parks, when to visit Universal Orlando for the lightest crowds, and everything else you need to know for a stress-free Universal Orlando experience.

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## **Editorial Review**

From the Inside Flap

### **A BETTER MOUSETRAP?**

Diehard Disney devotees may want to cover their mouse ears, because we are about to utter the ultimate blasphemy: it is possible to enjoy an awesome Orlando vacation without spending a single minute in Mickey's world. For much of the past four decades, the notion of spending a holiday in central Florida without seeing Walt Disney's sprawling wonderland seemed silly. While visitors might take a day or two out of their trip to explore independent attractions like Sea World, Busch Gardens, or Kennedy Space Center, the Magic Kingdom and its sister parks were seen by most as the area's main draw.

Much to the Mouse House's dismay, that situation is swiftly shifting. While Walt Disney World is in no danger of closing for lack of interest – attendance at Disney's theme parks hit an all-time high in 2014 – their share of Orlando's lucrative tourism market has been steadily and significantly swinging in favor of an energetic upstart located a few miles up I-4: the Universal Orlando Resort.

Originally opened in 1990 as a single theme park packed with advanced but unreliable attractions, Universal Orlando has matured into a full service, fully immersive vacation destination with enough world-class activities to keep a family occupied for four days or more. Universal Studios Florida, a longtime rival of Disney's Hollywood Studios that draws its inspiration from movies and television, has been almost entirely overhauled since its debut, and now houses one of the world's top collection of cutting edge attractions. Universal's Islands of Adventure debuted in 1999 as the most modern, high-tech theme park in the United States, featuring an all-star lineup of thrill rides that make it the best park in town for older kids and young-at-heart adults.

Together, the two parks are home to the game-changing Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a meticulously imagined multi-layered experience that's drawing millions of Muggle fans from around the world to the hallowed halls of Hogwarts Castle and Gringotts Bank. Surrounding the two parks are four (soon to be five) immaculately appointed on-site resort hotels, and the CityWalk nightlife complex full of restaurants, nightclubs, and entertainment options appealing to families and adults.

Universal Orlando's ascendance is not about to bankrupt Walt Disney World, and likely never will – Disney's nearly unlimited dominion over its vast 43 square mile kingdom practically ensures its dominance. But those who approach the Universal with open eyes will find the resort can provide just as much magic and fantasy in its own fashion. Universal Orlando has an energy, pace, and attitude all its own that might appeal to the most adamant anti-amusement park person, and could even convert confirmed Disney customers. Instead of opting for the same old rat race, consider spending your next vacation playing Quidditch with Harry, saving New York with Spidey, and drinking Duff with the Simpsons. You may just find yourself asking, "Mickey Who?"

### **About the Author**

**Seth Kubersky** has worked for more than 20 years as a theatrical artist, culture critic, and travel journalist. In addition to coauthoring *The Unofficial Guide to Disneyland*, Kubersky also contributes to *The Intrepid Traveler's Florida* guidebooks and *Orlando Attractions Magazine*. Named Best Arts Writer in The Daily City's 2013 readers' poll, Kubersky writes an arts and entertainment column, "Live Active Cultures," that

appears in every issue of the *Orlando Weekly*, central Florida's leading alternative newspaper. Kubersky lives in downtown Orlando, FL, with his wife, Genevieve, and their cats, Java and Brubeck.

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