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How to Have an Amazing Family Vacation in Orlando

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The best family-friendly places to stay, visit, and eat in Orlando.

By [Judy Koutsky](#) October 8, 2019

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Are you thinking of Orlando, FL as your next family vacation destination? With Universal Studios (Wizarding World of Harry Potter, anyone?), Discovery Cove, Gatorland, and more, you'll find something to entertain every member of your family—no matter the age. We took the guess work out of planning your family vacation to Orlando and found the best places to stay, eat, and things to do with kids (other than Disney).

[Orlando](#) is packed full of attractions, restaurants, great hotels, and hospitable people. When visiting Orlando on your family vacation, the question isn't what to do, but where to start? We put together a list of our favorites, so your family can have a great visit. Just don't be surprised if the kids don't want to leave.

Where to Stay in Orlando

There are a lot of great options in this town, but two of our favorites include the [Castle Hotel](#) and [Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando](#). The Castle Hotel is part of the Autograph Collection and is unique in that it's a boutique property with Bavarian architecture. Kids will love the heated pool (you might have difficulty getting them out!) and the three on-site restaurants are as convenient as they are yummy.

The Sapphire Falls Resort will make you feel like you're in the Caribbean with its cascading waterfalls, 16,000-square-foot pool and island theme. The resort has more than 1,000 guest rooms and four on-site restaurants. But perhaps the biggest perk is travelers staying here get early park admission to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, complimentary water taxis to park entrances, and several other exclusive benefits throughout the parks and CityWalk. For Harry Potter fans, it doesn't get much better than this.

Family-Friendly Restaurants in Orlando

[SLATE](#)

This open-air dining venue has a nice mix of cuisine to satisfy even the pickiest palate. Be sure to sample the meatballs, the chicken pizza, and the fillet mignon. There are plenty of options here for adults and kids.

[Tapa Toro at ICON Park](#)

Tapa Toro is located in International Drive and serves contemporary Spanish cuisine. The extensive tapas-style menu, unique paella pit, nightly flamenco dancing, and Spanish-inspired atmosphere create a memorable dining experience.

[Strong Water Tavern](#)

This tapas-style restaurant is located inside Universal Orlando's Loews Sapphire Falls Resort. It has a lot of yummy options for kids—and plenty more for adults. Especially noteworthy is the wall of vintage rums, the ceviche bar, and rum tastings.

[BigFire at Citywalk](#)

This restaurant is ideal if you're at Universal Studios. It's steps away from all the rides and offers pretty much everything—steaks, burgers, pastas, fish, and some yummy drink options for kids and adults. For kids, the canister of hot chocolate is a favorite.

Things to Do with Kids in Orlando

[Universal Studios Florida](#)

Plan to spend a whole day here. From attractions based on pop-culture icons, blockbuster films, and hit television shows to the much-talked about Wizarding World of Harry Potter, it will be hard to figure out how to cram it all in your stay. Universal's Islands of Adventure features some of the most innovative rides and attractions ever made on seven spectacularly themed islands: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Marvel Super Hero Island, Toon Lagoon, Jurassic Park, The Lost Continent, Seuss Landing, and Port of Entry.

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Board the Hogwarts Express and make your way to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios Florida.

Judy Koutsky

Soar above Hogwarts with Harry Potter, swing above the streets with Spider-Man, get soaked to the skin on Popeye and Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges, and experience Skull Island: Reign of Kong and the recently relaunched Incredible Hulk Coaster. The most popular ride may well be the new roller coaster Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure. Wear comfortable sneakers and plan a day of fun!

[Wonderworks](#)

The nice thing about Wonderworks is it really does appeal to kids of all ages, and there's a nice "edu-tainment" slant to the activities. It's an amusement park—so think plenty of fun—with learning opportunities on top of that. There's 35,000 square feet of fun with more than 100 hands-on exhibits. Relive the earthquake of 1989 by feeling the power behind a magnitude of 5.3 on the Richter scale. Lay on a bed of nails and get the science behind why it doesn't hurt (it really doesn't!). And try moving at the speed of light! Plan to spend at least an afternoon—if not the whole day here.

[Discovery Cove](#)

There's so much to do at Discovery Cove, it's hard to say where to start. Go swimming with the dolphins or take an underwater walking tour on SeaVenture, The Grand Reef's aquatic adventure that allows you to experience sharks, rays, and colorful fish up close and personal. Snorkel with hundreds of tropical fish, relax on a sandy beach, or traverse through a rain forest and cascading waterfalls, before making your way through an underwater cave. Hungry? Be sure to sample the unlimited (and included in the price) food and beverages.

[ICON Park](#)

Want lots of experiences in one place? Then ICON Park is ideal. There's shopping, restaurants, and attractions including the famous 400-foot-tall observation wheel (the massive Ferris wheel was fashioned after the London Eye). The Wheel has some of the best views in Florida—get 360-degree vistas in all directions, while staying cool in air-conditioned glass capsules. At ICON Park there's also Madame Tussauds Orlando (the world's most famous celebrity wax attraction), SEA LIFE Aquarium, the quirky Skeleton Museum, and the Orlando StarFlyer—the world's tallest swing ride.

[Wild Florida](#)

You can't visit Florida without taking an airboat tour in the Central Florida Everglades where you'll learn about the protected marshes, swamps, and rivers that make up this area. You'll get a chance to see some of the amazing wildlife in this area including alligators, a variety of birds, even eagles, as well as reptiles. With more than 100,000 acres of beautiful wetlands, it's hard not to be impressed with this natural habitat.

[Gatorland](#)

Head to the alligator capital of the world and learn more about these fascinating creatures. Get a chance to see alligators and crocodiles of all sizes, from babies, also known as grunts, to the 14-footers. Plus, there's an aviary, petting zoo, animal shows, and zip line course. It's a great way to spend an afternoon.

Main image: The author's sons at Discovery Cove in Orlando, FL

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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor and her work has appeared in over 30 publications, including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, Scholastic, and Prevention. She writes often about travel, parenting, health, and lifestyle. Follow her @JudyKoutsky or visit her website JudyKoutsky.com.

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