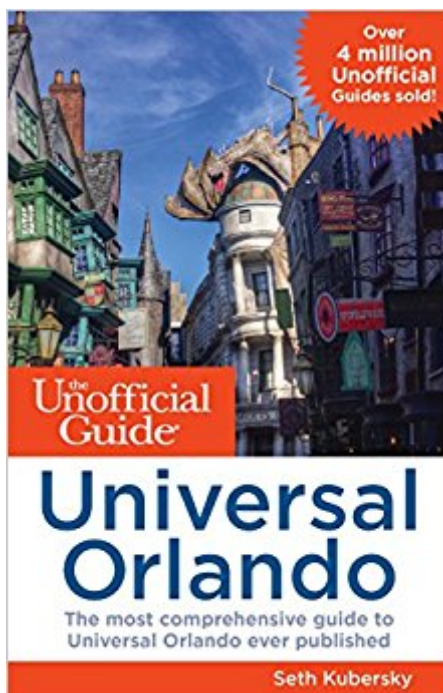


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The Unofficial Guide To Universal Orlando



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Series: Unofficial Guide to Universal Orlando

Paperback: 360 pages

Publisher: Unofficial Guides (August 18, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1628090308

ISBN-13: 978-1628090307

Product Dimensions: 8 x 5.1 x 0.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 62 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #161,435 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Travel > United States > Florida > Orlando #82 in Books > Travel > Specialty Travel > Theme Parks #144 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Activities

Customer Reviews

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?'

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.

If you are a planner and don't like to walk into unknown situations, you will like this book. The planning information on hotels etc., was helpful, although the information on the Universal hotels tells you little more than the hotel websites (e.g., can you figure out whether you can easily buy breakfast at the Cabana Bay?-- I couldn't-- no mention that the "diner" is a gigantic cafeteria or the difference between the various buildings). My husband loved the Touring Guides at the end of the book. I have to say that two hours into them, I was ready to throw them in the lake. They would have been more necessary if we had been at the parks during a peak holiday season. But we weren't. Most people are there to see the Harry Potter stuff so the Plans' advice to do that early in the morning was great. But then it has you criss-crossing across the two parks in a truly exhausting manner. After stamping my feet a bit, I convinced my husband to stay in one park for the day and use the free Universal app to monitor wait times. It worked well for us (April, mid-week) partly because we had a "buy a 2-day pass, get a 3rd day free" which was advertised this spring. The book did not account for any touring that would take more than 2 days. I found the description of the rides useful, because I am very prone to motion-sickness. The advice given on whether or not to purchase Express pass was spot-on. We found the restaurant guide very useful.

It took a few weeks to slog through the book before our trip, but it RADICALLY improved every facet of our family's Spring Break 2016 Universal Trip. We benefitted on hotels, express passes, dining, and wait times. The book does plug their touring plan smartphone app and website which was also worth EVERY penny. You even get a discount on the app if you bought the book. Several other families took the same trip over the same number of days that we did and only covered a quarter of what we were able to get done. I felt sorry for their kids once they were done talking with our kids! One family didn't even ride one of the Harry Potter rides due to waiting in lines and we were able to ride it five times in under 1 hour the same day (I'm dead serious)! There is one catch: You MUST be willing to wake up VERY EARLY for this to work. If you want to squeeze every drop of value out of your Universal vacation this is the tool to do it.

I found the first half of this book to be extremely useful. The background information on planning, accommodations, etc. was top notch, 5-stars. We followed all of the planning advice and had a wonderful time at Universal Orlando, with minimal time waiting in lines. Who could ask for more? I also found their advice on things like butterbeer (frozen is definitely the best) and refillable drinks to be very helpful. Overall, though the second half of the book was too much information for me. The simple, "we recommend eating at Fast Food Boulevard" that was included on the Touring Plan was

enough. We had no desire to research and memorize the profiles of every restaurant in Universal, Islands of Adventure, and CityWalk (and I definitely don't want to carry a book around all day). Same goes for the rides. Reading detailed descriptions of every ride sort of spoils the fun, no? The biggest problem with the book is that publishing requires long lead-times and things at USF/IOA are always changing so imagine my dismay when the Touring Plan told us to visit three attractions that are no longer there (Beetlejuice Graveyard Review, Twister, and Disaster!). Not temporarily closed, like the Hulk coaster, but completely, permanently gone. Not a great way to start our visit. On day two, we switched over to using their app, but it listed incorrect showtimes for multiple shows and left us standing around, trying to decide what to do (exactly what the book and app are designed to prevent). So, buyer beware.

The best guide that is out there! It has touring plans for however many days you will be at the park, and includes a lot of information about the rides, including which ones have stationary seats, as well as (especially) how if you don't want to ride one of the rides, how you can access the fun experiences that other guests see while in line (no spoilers). This book is an easy read, and is well labeled throughout! I can't recommend this book enough! It includes everything Harry Potter, and this is the first year where it has been a separate book (according to the synopsis on). I originally got the 2013 Disney World guide from a friend, and bought the 2016 prior to our trip. I was impressed with how the Disney World guide was written, so I purchased this one. Additionally, there are online resources and an app! Definitely saves you a lot of time!

This guide was spot on! It gave solid recommendations on food and advice on getting in to different places at specific times. If you're at all interested in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, this guide is a must. There are so many nooks and crannies there that it would be easy to miss fun and interesting things. There are also some hidden menu items and beer and treats specific to only certain shops and restaurants. This guide breaks all that down for you and tells you how to navigate this busy part of the park effectively. As someone who isn't a big roller coaster person, I found the intensity guide particularly useful for judging whether it was a ride I would enjoy.

Great addition to the Unofficial Guides lineup. It's about time UOR had its own book. Seth K., the main author, has written with other travel writing teams so glad to see him working with the Unofficial/Touring Plans group now. A very approachable and humorous book packed with info that's actually useful. The Unoff. Guides to WDW and DLR are the first I buy when planning a

Disney trip. This one on UOR is just as great.

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