

# Hints and Tips

## THEME PARKS

Make use of the “avoid the lines” information on the Undercover Tourist website. It will give you an indication of the best months and best days to go to the theme parks. Also they will give you information on public holidays and special events on in the parks. Trip Advisor is another website that can give you useful information about the theme parks and how to avoid the long queues.

We have just heard (14 July 2010) that the queues for Harry Potter are unprecedented, ie 5 hours just to get into that part of Islands of Adventure and you have to queue again for each of the attractions!!!

Hot tip from our friends is either to book your tickets direct from Virgin (this gives you an invitation to view HP and go on the rides one hour before the park opens with complimentary breakfast and free parking) OR do the rest of the park first and visit HP late afternoon and you won't have to queue to enter that part of the park.

On busy days we find it best to get to the theme parks as early as possible aiming to be on the first ride by 10am. Although the villa is close to Disney you will need to factor in time to park the car, be transported to the park entrance, have your bags inspected, queue up to enter the park, hire a locker etc all this means that it can take almost an hour from the time you leave the villa to the time you get to that first ride. We always research on the park websites as to which rides, shows etc we are interested in and decide which of those are going to be most popular and aim to do those rides first. In Disney you have free fast pass with your park tickets so you can go on one ride and get fast pass tickets for another but in the non-Disney parks you have to pay extra for this and I believe it's about \$15 each per day for the fast pass facility.

Another good idea is to take a piece of paper and a pen with you when you visit the theme parks. When you park your car make a note of the area and lane you are in eg Goofy 31. Then take this with you into the park. It makes finding your car much easier at the end of a long day as the car parks are vast.

Another thing about the theme parks is to realise that it is physically impossible to see and do everything in a park in one day. If you only have one day to do a particular park then research it on their website. Pick out the things that most interest you, be it big rides, shows or the history of Walt Disney and plan your day accordingly. All the park websites will give you the opening hours for each of the days, some websites eg Sea World will even give you information as to what shows are on and at what time each day. All of this information is invaluable in planning your day.

In really hot weather we tend to plan our day thus. First thing do all the big rides likely to attract big queues so we are not spending too much time queuing. 30 minutes is our maximum any longer than that and we either don't do the ride, do it later or get a fast pass ticket if we can. Just before lunch do the wet rides. You might want to think about taking a change of clothing especially if the weather is not that hot. Outer clothes eventually dry off but underwear tends to stay damp. At lunchtime therefore you might want to change into dry clothes. After lunch when it's starting to get really hot, look for undercover or inside things to do. Being in the full sun is very tiring especially for young children. If you are planning to watch the fireworks later in the evening then a wise thing to do is to leave the park for a few hours and go back for the fireworks. Your parking ticket will be ok for a second visit that day. We would go back to the villa for a couple of hours in the late afternoon, cool down, have a shower then go and have a meal and then go back for the fireworks.

### **FOOD AND DRINK**

To save time, money and calories take your own food and drink into the parks. For example a 500 ml bottle of water will cost you \$2.79 in a park but only about 20c from a supermarket! The only ones that you can't take food into are Aquatica and Kennedy Space Centre. We make up rolls/sandwiches in the villa before we leave for the theme park and take some Pringles, fruit and water and rent a locker at the theme park, approx \$5 a day, and leave the provisions there whilst we enjoy the park. Just taking some water around with us. The lockers are always in the shade and the provisions will still be cool at lunchtime. We find we only need to stop for about 20 minutes for lunch instead of queuing up for maybe an hour to buy lunch. Some of the parks (Non-Disney) are now doing food and drink deals where you can eat and drink all day for a set price. I think it applies mainly to Sea World, Busch Gardens etc and costs \$30 for adults and \$15 for kids. Could be good value if you maybe have breakfast, lunch and your evening meal there. Worth checking out on their websites to see if it will be of benefit to you.

Close to the villa on the 192 there are a multitude of restaurants. You could probably eat out every night of your 2 week stay and visit a different restaurant each night. There are restaurants to suit everyone's taste and budget, from fast food at Burger King to seafood at Red Lobster. A little further away there are some great restaurants on International Drive, Downtown Disney and Universal's Boardwalk. Places like Sizzler and Ponderosa Steak House are fantastic value for breakfast and your evening meal as they both have all you can eat buffets. Both are close to the villa on the 192.

### **WHAT TO WEAR**

A definite must is very comfortable footwear. You will be doing a lot of walking, up to 5 miles a day is not unusual. So this is not the time to be breaking in those fashion sandals with the stiletto heels!

Something we have noticed in the theme parks which large parties might find useful. We have seen lots of large groups wearing the same coloured t-shirts usually in bright colours. This makes it much easier to keep track of your party especially the children when the parks are crowded.

As we have a large washing machine and separate large tumble dryer in the villa then it is not necessary to bring 2 weeks worth of clothes with you. About 5 days worth is usually all you need and it will save you some space in your suitcase to take those souvenirs home!

### **LITTLE ONES**

Hats are a good idea too especially for the little ones. We do provide a couple of strollers/pushchairs for our guests so if your little one is just out of a stroller/pushchair at home but might struggle with the amount of walking in the parks then please feel free to take the stroller/pushchair to the park for the little ones to use when they get tired.

### **OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

If you want a change from the theme parks, Kissimmee has many alternative attractions. Check out Gatorland and the Boggy Creek Airboats both good for a half day visit. There are many other places too. Go to the Orlando Information website from our "links" page for more ideas of where to visit. Places like Walmart and Ponderosa Steak House have displays with discount coupon books. These can give you quite a saving on attractions.

Something well worth doing at the end of your vacation is a helicopter trip. There are several companies operating on the 192 that do short trips, about 10 minutes, around the Kissimmee/Disney area. They cost approximately \$45 and it is lovely to see from the air some of the theme parks you have visited during your stay.

### **HIRE CARS**

When you collect your hire car from the airport you must bring your driving licence with you including the paper document if you have the new plastic one.

For visitors from the UK on your first trip to the US, filling up your hire car at a gas station is slightly different to back home. Most gas stations will require you to pay before you fill up but don't worry; they will refund you if you have paid for more fuel than you can get into the tank!

If you are going to be travelling on the toll roads, the road down to Kissimmee from the airport is a toll road, and then it is a good idea to save your quarters/25 cent coins as some of the toll booths are unmanned so the exact amount in coins is required.