

What to Do in O-Town

(Now That the Hurricanes Are Gone)

By Joel Jackson
Contributing Editor

ORLANDO/ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, NASA's headquarters, is located about 45 minutes from Orlando.

Central Florida had to hunker down during the 2004 hurricane season, but the area did not sustain any damage that will dampen a visitor's experience at the Golf Industry Show. All the theme parks were up and running within a day or two and are ready to entertain any families making the trip with their superintendent dads.

Area golf courses are open and will be crowded with snowbirds, so comp rounds might be harder to come by than say in July or August, but you can certainly try if you know someone who knows someone. (That someone isn't me.)

Trying to appeal not only to hungry and thirsty superintendents looking for a break from convention food, but also spouses who may make the journey to Orlando, here are some dining and shopping venues. Some were around in 2002, but there are new additions to the area. Many of the upper-end places are quite popular, so reservations may be necessary. Call ahead.

On South International Drive: If you don't want to venture too far afield, TGI Friday's Front Row Sports Bar and Restaurant, located just south of Sand Lake Road, offers a gazillion TV sets tuned in from everything from badminton to wrestling. If you are hankering for pint in a pub atmosphere, there's the Cricketer Arms located in the Mercado Plaza. For those with fat wallets and hearty appetites, Vito's Chop House and Charley's Steak House are local favorites. For the more eclectic pallet, the Bahamas Breeze restaurant of-

fers a Caribbean flavor to the dining experience, and Tu Tu Tangos has been a hit with its tapas-style dining. There are tons more places to eat along the strip, of course, with more modest pricing like Tony Roma's for Ribs and Darryl's to name a couple.

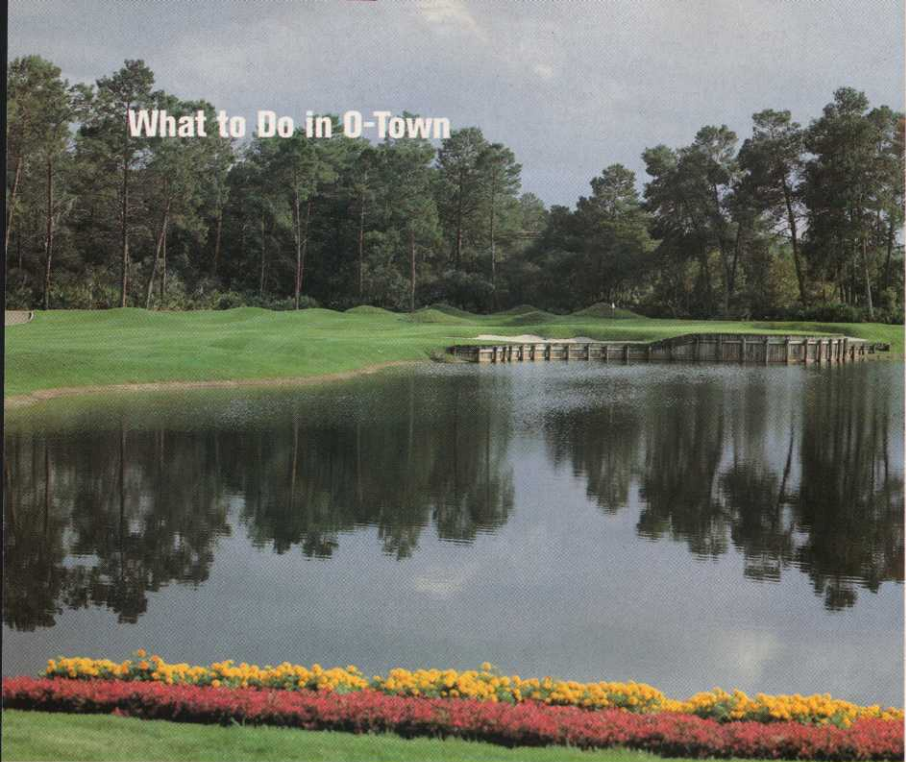
North International Drive: There's some new digs way north on I-Drive up past Wet & Wild near the Belz Outlet Mall area. A new shopping area called Festival Bay, which had a cinema multiplex and Bass Pro Shops last time you were here, now sports more shops and eateries, including a Coldstone Creamery, and Murray Brothers Caddy Shack Bar and Grill. We've had two University of South Florida alumni football watch parties there and our servers were "Worm Burner" and "Crank It" if that gives you a clue. Maybe GCSAA can get Bill Murray to drop in for a little Carl Spackler networking session.

For mind-boggling window shopping a little farther east up Interstate 4, there's the new Mall at Millennia (I know, but that's how THEY spell it), housing a Nordstrom's, Neiman Marcus and Macy's. The mall also has a P.F. Changs, McCormick & Schmicks and Cheesecake Factory. Across the street is a Mimi's Café and another TGI Friday's for dining without sticker shock.

Sand Lake Road: Go a couple of miles west of International Drive on Sand Lake Road and you'll find a new restaurant row in the Plaza Venezia and The Fountains shopping areas near

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MIKE KLEMM

There are plenty of awesome courses in Orlando, including Grand Cypress Golf Club.

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the long-standing Dr. Phillips Market Place. Some can be pricey like Chatham's, Morton's, Roy's, Christini's and Ruth Chris' Steakhouse. The Samba Room, Timpano's Chop House, Bonefish Grille, Moon Fish and Season's 52 offer a variety of cuisines at more moderate prices.

And the area also has reasonable places like TooJay's Deli and Moe's Southwest Grill with golf-themed tacos and burritos. There are many more restaurants in this area; I just haven't had time to sample all of them.

Lake Buena Vista/Disney: Nothing beats dining around the world at Disney's Epcot for a unique experience. Epcot fireworks are at 9 p.m. nightly. Of course, Disney has many fine restaurants including the California Grill atop the Contemporary Hotel and the Artist's Point for some northwest cuisine at the Wilderness Hotel. Fine dining can be had at Victoria's and Albert's and Narcoosee's at the Grand Floridian Hotel. You can also find a range of dining and nightclubbing at Disney's Pleasure Island and Downtown Disney with everything from jazz to the House of Blues.

The same is true for Universal Studio's City Walk. Just take the Universal Drive (right fork) at Pointe Orlando just north of the convention center all the way to the theme park. Signs will direct you to parking. I believe there's no fee after 6 p.m.

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Orlando Offerings

Shopping

Bass Pro Shops – North International Drive
Belz Outlet Mall – North International Drive
Festival Bay – North International Drive
Florida Mall – East Sand Lake Road and U.S. 441
Mall at Millennia – Conroy & Interstate 4
Outlet World – South International Drive

Sports Bars

Froggers – West of Kirkman on Conroy Road
Hooters (3) – International Drive, Kirkman Road & Lake Buena Vista
JB's – Kirkman Road at Conroy Road
Murray Bros Caddyshack – North International Drive
TGI Friday's Front Row – International Drive
TGI Fridays – Lake Buena Vista
Orlando Ale House – Kirkman Road & Lake Buena Vista

Pubs

Cricketeer Arms – International Drive
Kitty O'Sheas – Lake Buena Vista

Attractions/Entertainment

Cape Canaveral – Titusville
Cirque du Soleil – Lake Buena Vista
Disney World (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom, MGM Studios)
Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede Dinner Show – Lake Buena Vista
Sea World
Universal Studios

Nearby Golf Courses

Champions Gate (International, National)
Disney World (Osprey Ridge, Eagle Pines, Magnolia, Palm, Lake Buena Vista)
Grand Cypress (North, South, East, New Course)
Marriott's Hawk's Landing
Marriott's Grande Pines
Marriott's Grande Lakes
MetroWest G.C.
Reunion (Palmer, Nicklaus, Watson)
Shingle Creek (Just east of International Drive)

For those hankering spicy wings, sandwiches and a frosty beer, there's Hooter's restaurants and two Orlando Ale Houses nearby on Kirkman Road and Lake Buena Vista and Pointe Orlando on International Drive.

If you go sightseeing in Central Florida, be advised that Interstate 4 is notorious for its traffic snarls especially during morning and afternoon rush hours and around the theme parks in the southwest area. Using International Drive southbound to Disney and other surface roads like Kirkman northbound, Central Florida Parkway, Palm Parkway, Conroy, Bee Line, state Route 528 (toll) and Green Way 417 (toll) may save some road rage. Sand Lake Road is another east-west artery, but can be busy as well at rush hour. ■

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.

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