

Echoes of old Spain at Mission Inn Golf and Tennis Resort



Central Florida

There's far more to Orlando than Mickey Mouse and friends, but you'll have trouble fitting in its 150-plus courses, theme parks and other attractions

More than a million Brits jet off to Orlando every year. For the vast majority of them it's Walt Disney World, Universal Studios and the other attractions they come for. After all, this is the world's top holiday destination and theme park capital.

But when you're packing to take the wife and kids for your next Florida holiday, why not take the golf clubs as well?

The Orlando area has more than 150 courses including many designs by some of the best in the business. Even Disney World has 99 holes of golf, so you don't have to venture outside its boundary to play.

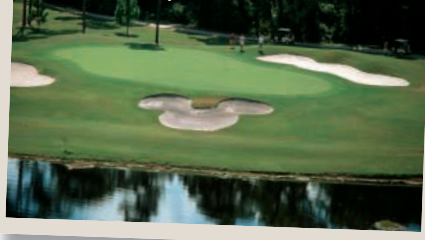
We're not talking pitch and putt here, either. Mickey and chums may be in residence at the Magic Kingdom but the golf at Disney's five 18-hole courses is serious stuff. They cover 775 acres of the huge 47-square-mile property, making it one of the largest golf resorts in

America. The annual Funai Classic PGA Tour event is also held each year on two of the five – the Joe Lee-designed Magnolia and Palm courses, which opened with the theme park in 1971. Palm's par-4 18th has been rated fourth toughest hole on the PGA circuit, needing a long drive followed by an accurate approach over water to a well-bunkered green.

Lee's third course, Lake Buena Vista, is located near the resort's Downtown Disney entertainment district and followed in 1972. Completing the quintet are Pete Dye's intimidating Eagle Pines, which mixes traditional grass rough with lots of sand and pine straw, and the beautiful and eco-friendly Osprey Ridge, my personal favourite. Both were added in 1992.

Tom Fazio disturbed as little natural flora as possible in Osprey's layout, which traverses oak trees, dense vegetation hammocks (jungle-like forests) and doglegs around water hazards on

Disney: don't get snared by this mouse trap



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several holes to test your accuracy. Fazio himself regards it as one of his best. Long-hitters will certainly appreciate it. The course is 7,101 yards off the back tees and nearly 6,700 yards from the middle set.

If the kids want to join you golfing, you can take them on Oak Trail, a nine-hole par-3 walking course.

The Orlando area isn't just home to Mickey. Arnold Palmer bought the prestigious Bay Hill semi-private club after outplaying Jack Nicklaus in an exhibition match in the late 1960s. As well as hosting the annual Bay Hill Invitational challenge, more than a dozen current and former stars have homes here, including Tiger Woods, Nick Faldo, Annika Sorenstam, Ernie Els, Mark O'Meara and Arnie himself. So a post-round drink in the clubhouse can be





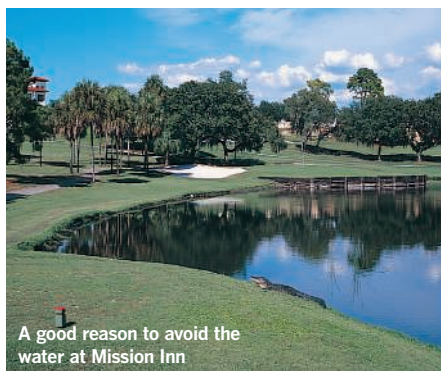
a celeb-spotting exercise. Palmer has tweaked many of the holes, adding yardage and reshaping greens on the two courses. Approach shots over numerous lakes to elevated, rock-edged and bunker-protected greens test players' mettle and can result in telephone number scores. John Daly once shot 18 on the Challenger's par-5 6th.

Perhaps he should have enrolled for some lessons at Bay Hill's Arnold Palmer Golf Academy. There's no shortage of places to brush up your game in central Florida. Among other schools are David Leadbetter's Golf Academy at ChampionsGate, where stars often helicopter in for personal tuition, the Fred Griffin Grand Cypress Academy of Golf and the Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott at the Grande Vista Resort.

ChampionsGate features two courses by Greg Norman, the National and International. At almost 7,400 yards, the International is styled like a British links with lots of pot bunkers and hard, fast playing surfaces. The course hosts the Father/Son Golf Challenge each December and attracts top golf stars and their offspring. The National is a typically American layout through 200 acres of southern woodlands, wetlands and orange groves.

For his second course at Grand Cypress Resort, Nicklaus turned to the home of golf for inspiration. The result was a course which recreated some of the classic holes of St Andrews' Old Course, in the heart of Florida. Replica courses may be clichéd now, but this was unique when it was built in 1988. Or as unique as a replica can be. Some holes are virtual carbon copies of the original, among them the 1st and 18th, while the 16th emulates the Old Course's par-5 14th including its infamous Hell bunker. It may not appeal to the purist – or Old Tom Morris – but it's well worth playing.

A 35-minute drive north-west of Orlando, Mission Inn Golf and Tennis Resort has Spanish-flavoured architecture and two 18-hole courses set among the wooded hills found in this part of Florida. Lakes provided an added hazard, as do the local alligators. On one of my rounds, my German lady cart partner found a gator on the edge of one of her tees. It didn't



A good reason to avoid the water at Mission Inn

PETER ELLEGARD

WHERE TO PLAY

Walt Disney World Resort

Five courses including Osprey Ridge: 7,101 yards, par 72, \$99-\$145; Eagle Pines: 6,772 yards, par 72, \$89-\$124; and Palm: 6,957 yards, par 72, \$74-\$119

Contact: 00-1-407-938-4653
disneyworld.co.uk

No Mickey-taking here – these are seriously good courses

Grand Cypress Resort

3 nines – North, South and East: 6,906-6993 yards, par 72
New Course: 6,773 yards, par 72

\$115-\$180
Contact: 00-1-877-330-7377
grandcypress.com

Top golf in every direction while the New is shades of the Old

Celebration Golf Club

6,792 yards, par 72

\$45-\$85
Contact: 00-1-407-566-4653
celebrationgolf.com

Celebrate this wetland wonder by Trent Jones father and son

ChampionsGate Golf Resort

National Course: 7,128 yards, par 72

International Course: 7,363 yards, par 72
\$70-\$170

Contact: 00-1-407-787-4653
championsgatgolf.com

Mix of Old and New World golf from the Great White Shark

Mission Inn Golf & Tennis Resort

El Campeon Course: 6,923 yards, par 72, \$65-\$130

Las Colinas Course: 6,820 yards, par 72, \$55-\$110

Contact: 00-1-352-324-3885
missioninnresort.com

Echoes of Spain on course and in clubhouse

WHERE TO STAY

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa

Contact: 00-1-877-330-7377
disneyworld.com

Villas of Grand Cypress

Contact: 00-1-407-239-4700
grandcypress.com

Mission Inn Golf & Tennis Resort

Contact: 00-1-352-324-3101
missioninnresort.com



PETER ELLEGARD

“The alligator didn't move as she approached for a photo, or as she posed on the tee for the snap. So she went ahead and drove”



Palm course 18th, Walt Disney World Resort

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5th hole, East Course, Grand Cypress Resort

FLORIDA FACTS

GETTING THERE

Direct flights operate from London and Manchester, serving Miami and Orlando. There are also many direct charter services from a number of regional UK airports. Flights from London to Orlando take about nine and a half hours, slightly longer to Miami.

GENERAL INFO

Time difference: GMT -5

Climate: Florida is a year-round golf destination with plenty of sunshine and tropical temperatures. Winters are warm, although it can get cool in more northern areas, particularly at night. Summers are hot and steamy, and are when most rain falls – generally as sharp afternoon thunderstorms. June to November is the hurricane season.

Information: flausa.com; **brochure line** 0870-770-1177.

For information on holiday packages contact 3D Golf 08701-200-300; 3dgolf.com

move as she approached for a photo, or as she posed on the tee for a snap. So she went ahead and drove, sending her ball right over the creature's snout. A miss-hit and she might have had one snap too many.

Orlando's golfing musts also include the beautiful Celebration Golf Club course, a joint effort by Robert Trent Jones senior and junior which weaves its magic through wetlands, lakes and native pine, oak and magnolia. Falcon's Fire, by the other Jones son, Rees, is yet another masterpiece, with extensive perimeter mounding and water and a profusion of bunkers.

New courses continue to add to the choice. The David Harman-designed Shingle Creek Golf Club, by Orlando's Orange County Convention Centre, opened in 2004 and another Norman course opened in 2003 at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, in Orlando's Grande Lakes. Reunion Resort & Club of Orlando, 25 minutes south of Orlando, is another new development with three championship courses by the trio of Tom Watson, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus.

So for your next Orlando holiday, don't just think about Mickey. Go play with Jack, Arnie, Greg and the boys.



Universal Studios Islands of Adventure

PETERLEGGARD

Central Florida Facts

WHERE IS IT

Orlando is Central Florida's gateway. Daily UK flights to Orlando International Airport are operated by Virgin Atlantic Airways and British Airways. Charter flights go to Orlando Sanford International Airport from more than half a dozen UK cities.

Information: orlandoinfo.com/uk, 0800-018-6760; floridakiss.com, 01732-875722.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

■ The world's holiday capital has theme park attractions to thrill kids of all ages. First-timers will want to see **Disney, Universal** and **SeaWorld**, and even those who've been before will find there are lots of new things to see.

■ Rise above the theme park queues in a **hot-air balloon**. Several operators will take you high over Central Florida including dawn champagne flights.

■ Ride as a passenger or take the wheel of a 600hp NASCAR race car at the **Walt Disney World Speedway** in Orlando. Not so much a white knuckle ride as a brown trouser one.

■ **Polk City's Fantasy of Flight** features flight simulators and displays of more than 50 vintage aircraft with daily tours of the restoration shop. You can take a flight in a biplane.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

■ Where else but **Walt Disney World**, with its Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios and Animal Kingdom parks plus its water parks.

■ **Universal Orlando** is another family favourite and includes Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure theme parks.

■ **SeaWorld Adventure Park** is famous for its Shamu killer whale shows, guaranteed to make a

splash. There are also rides and other marine exhibits, plus the **Discovery Cove** park which has limited admission and offers swimming with dolphins.

■ Escape the theme parks and take a family eco-safari on horseback through pristine **Central Florida swamps** on a working cattle ranch or take a kayak tour through a state park just minutes from Orlando.

CENTRAL FLORIDA FACTS

■ Central Florida was once little more than **cattle ranches**, and livestock was herded across the state to the Gulf of Mexico.

■ **Orlando** attracted more than 47 million visitors in 2004, and projects nearly 51 million in 2005 and 55 million in 2007.

International visitors totalled 2.6 million in 2004, of which more than a million were British.

■ **Walt Disney World** is Orlando's biggest employer, with 53,000 employees. Universal Orlando employs 12,000.

■ Orlando has more than **113,000 hotel rooms**. By the end of 2007 it will have 115,000.

■ **Lake Kissimmee State Park**, near Lake Wales, is home to deer, alligators, bald eagles and sandhill cranes and includes a 5,000-acre lake where visitors can canoe, camp and hike.

Cinderella Castle, Magic Kingdom



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