



# 8 OF THE Best FLORIDA ATTRACTIONS

Jo Cooke finds there's fun to be had outside Orlando's well-known parks



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; HELEN RAYNOR PHOTOGRAPHY; AUSTIN FLOWERS/AFLOWFILMS

**TOP TIP**  
Book a combo ticket to Gatorland and Boggy Creek Airboat Attractions for £28 – a 40% saving. [ttandf.com](http://ttandf.com)

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About a million UK tourists head there every year. It seems we really can't get enough of Orlando. But how well do we really know it?

On a fam trip with a top-notch team of travel pros, I hit Britain's most-visited Florida city to try out Orlando's lesser-known attractions. Here are eight of the best.

## 1 SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATOR!

**The attraction:** Gatorland  
**The lowdown:** No cartoon characters here, just 2,500 jaw-snapping, real-life alligators languishing in a network of lagoons. But it's not a case of 'look, don't touch'. At Gatorland, you can cradle a baby gator in the palm of your hand. Fancy starting a feeding frenzy? Go beyond the fence as part of Adventure Hour, and you'll be within a few feet of the inmates, tossing them a bucket-load of meaty morsels for lunch. Alternatively, you can zipline over them. Yikes!

The attraction's Stompin' Gator Off-Road Adventure ride, which launched in 2017, is a real crowd pleaser. Passengers sit in open-sided vehicles jacked up on giant wheels for a bumpy, muddy and comic journey through a redneck-themed outback.  
**The verdict:** Mark Leath, customer service representative at Attraction Tickets Direct, says: "Most clients check out of their hotel mid-morning for an evening flight – and Gatorland is on the route to the airport. It makes for

a chilled-out last day."  
**Book it:** Admission is £25 for adults, £17 for children. [dosomethingdifferent.com](http://dosomethingdifferent.com)

## 2 WHEELIN' AND DEALIN'

**The attraction:** Old Town Kissimmee  
**The lowdown:** Pick up some bargains and watch the motorcades of Old Town Kissimmee at the same time. Packed with souvenir shops, this pedestrianised area has an old-school feel, and is undergoing a sustained facelift. Fans of vintage Americana should hop along to the Saturday night classic car parade, while petrolheads will salivate at the fleet of high-performance cars that follows the same circuit through the old town on a Friday night.

**The verdict:** Abigail Legge, sales assistant at Orlando Attraction Tickets, says: "After clients have had a pool day, they can head down and make an evening of it."  
**Book it:** The car parades are free to attend.

## 3 HAVE A HOOT WITH OUTDOOR PURSUITS

**The attraction:** Revolution Off Road  
**The lowdown:** When in the hubbub of Orlando's frenetic metropolis, you might never imagine just a short drive away lies a lush, green wilderness. A pair of visiting Brits fell in love with one particular swathe of it, and opened an attraction that makes the most of the tropical landscape. Revolution Off Road

is awash with boys' toys, so guests can race ATVs, drive the amphibious Mucky Ducks through water and woodland, or try their hand at clay-pigeon shooting, archery or fishing on the lake.  
**The verdict:** Heather Owen, product executive at Gold Medal, says: "Revolution Off Road is a recent addition to our brochure and something exciting I'd recommend to anyone active or families who want to enjoy an experience in countryside surroundings."

**Book it:** The Orlando ATV Driving Experience starts at £80 for two hours. [dosomethingdifferent.com](http://dosomethingdifferent.com)

## 4 LIVE LIKE A LOCAL

**The attraction:** Winter Park  
**The lowdown:** Orlando is a honeypot for tourists and you'll bump into folk from across the globe. If your clients would rather spend some time brushing shoulders with the locals, direct them to the charming, upscale community of Winter Park.

Pavement cafes, galleries, a village green and weekly farmers' market make a delightful change of pace, plus speciality shops and boutiques offer bespoke items and the personal service visitors won't find in the malls. There's a golf course, too, and Winter Park is edged by lakes.  
**The verdict:** "It's perfect for foodies, art lovers and romantics," says Eleanor Calvert, customer support executive at

Travel Republic. "I'd particularly recommend it to clients without kids, and suggest they spend one night here during their stay."

## 5 DOWNSIZE TO SAVE DOSH

**The attraction:** Fun Spot America Theme Parks  
**The lowdown:** In the land of bigger and better, there's a reminder that small can also be beautiful, not to mention more economical. Fun Spot America Theme Parks, at Old Town Kissimmee and International Drive, may be pint-sized in comparison to the major players, but they deliver a lot of bang for your clients' buck, with free parking, free entry for non-riders, free re-entry, shorter queues and a midnight closing time.

Expect a traditional funfair atmosphere with waltzers, dodgems, rollercoasters, hook-a-duck and rifle ranges, plus the two tallest SkyCoasters in the world (extra charge).

**The verdict:** Ian May, USA travel specialist at Ocean Holidays, says: "For families on a budget, I'd definitely suggest spending some time at Fun Spot."  
**Book it:** A one-park day pass starts at £42 for unlimited rides. [attractionworld.com](http://attractionworld.com)

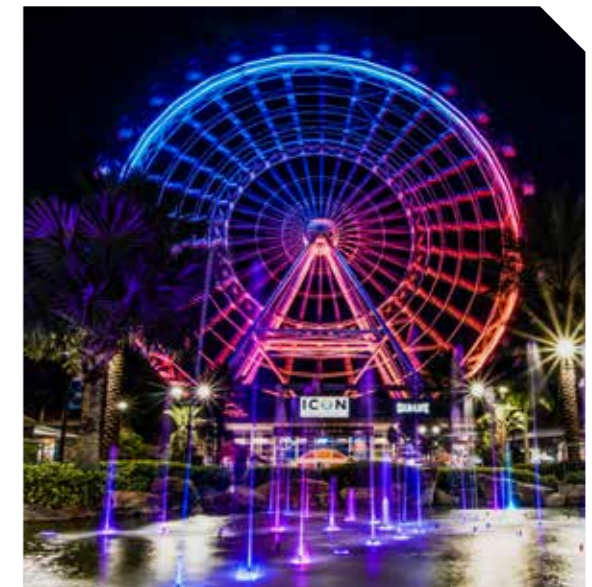
## 6 IT'S ALL HOT AIR

**The attraction:** Orlando Balloon Rides  
**The lowdown:** Orlando is a place where you make clients' dreams come true, from swimming with dolphins to

**RIGHT:**  
Fam trip  
group in  
Winter Park

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Icon Orlando 360

**BELOW:**  
Revolution  
Off Road



➔ having breakfast with Mickey Mouse, but if their dream is to soar across the sky, why not throw in a balloon flight? Orlando Balloon Rides hosts trips daily at sunrise, weather permitting. Passengers help inflate their balloon before climbing into the giant basket for the gentlest of lift-offs. It's a unique sensation – you're carried along by pockets of air while the world becomes a silent, miniature village below.

**The verdict:** Cleo Greaves, marketing executive at Travel Up, says: "It's been on my bucket list for years but I'd always been nervous. The lovely team are very professional and soon had me feeling relaxed. It's the perfect thing to do on your first day, when you're awake at 3am with jet lag anyway."

**Book it:** From £104 for adults and £68 for kids.  
[dosomethingdifferent.com](http://dosomethingdifferent.com)

## ASK THE EXPERTS



**Martin Page,**  
business  
development  
manager, **Do  
Something  
Different**

"Book the balloon flight at the start of your customer's stay, as it's weather dependent and, if necessary, can be rearranged for an alternative day."

**Chantelle Plowman,**  
sales executive,  
**Attraction World**

"It's cheaper to book everything before clients go, plus they won't have to dip into their spending money while away."



**A balloon ride is a unique sensation – you're carried along by pockets of air while the world becomes a silent village below**

**7 DOING A 360!**  
**The attraction:** Icon Orlando 360 complex

**The lowdown:** It's not just outdoor attractions that Orlando excels at. For rare rainy days, and the more common super-hot ones, tell clients about Icon Orlando 360. Sealife Orlando is here, plus Madame Tussauds, where you can pose beside the likes of Justin Bieber and Donald Trump. Top it all off with a spin on the Icon Orlando Observation Wheel, with its fully air-conditioned pods.

For something more interactive, Wonderworks is nearby, featuring floor upon floor of disorientating and fascinating exhibits, where you can walk through a rotating tunnel, experience a virtual earthquake or lie on a bed of nails. Stay on for the Outta Control Magic Comedy Dinner and you're in for a mix of tongue-in-cheek tricks, astonishing illusions and piles of food.

**The verdict:** Caron Cockburn, travel consultant at Attraction Tickets Direct, says: "It's a simple concept. Unlimited pizza, salad and beer makes for a

good-value dinner, and the show is hilarious."

**Book it:** Viator offers general admission, laser-tag and a dinner show from £51 for adults, £36 for kids.  
[viator.com](http://viator.com)

**8 POWER TRIP**  
**The attraction:** Boggy Creek Airboat Adventures

**The lowdown:** Orlando may be four hours from the Everglades, but you can still get clients on a classic Floridian airboat. Less than an hour from International Drive, Boggy Creek Airboat Adventures sits on the serene Toho River, where beds of reeds camouflage alligators, turtles and endemic birds.

We arrived at sunset and spent an hour skipping over the shallow waters on a nature hunt, then panned for gemstones, tucked into a barbecue, and roasted s'mores. Perhaps the highlight, though, was sitting under the starlit sky around a campfire, as a Native American recounted the history of local tribes and beguiled us with tales of his survival skills.

**The verdict:** Debbie Smith, store manager for Co-op Travel, says: "Boggy Creek is the real wild, where you get a taste of what inspired the theme park rides. You also get to contrast the Mickey Mouse culture with the Native American history of the region."

**Book it:** Adults from £25, children from £21.  
[attractionworld.com](http://attractionworld.com)