

Travel deals

◆ More people will be travelling from Norwich to good-value Bulgaria next year.



Balkan Holidays has brought out a new brochure which includes six additional departures from Norwich to Bourgas. Direct flights start on Sunday May 20 and operate weekly to September 23. This year Bulgaria was once again voted top of the Post Office Family Holiday Report for value for money partly because, while part of the EU, it is out the euro zone so not affected by the weakening pound. Balkan Holidays is offering low deposits of £70 per person and prices starting from £337 for a seven-night, four-star half-board holiday. Norwich airport boss Andrew Bell said Bulgaria was a very popular destination and was delighted the company had increased the number of flights to meet demand. More information at www.balkanholidays.co.uk or telephone 020 7543 5564.

◆ Celebrate autumn with a tranquil break at one of England's beautiful Grade I



listed four-star Country House Hotels, standing in 175 acres of rolling Suffolk countryside. Hintlesham Hall is ideally situated for the delights of Lavenham, Long Melford, fish and chips at Aldeburgh or a walk on Southwold Pier. Once home to celebrated chef and TV personality Robert Carrier, the hall has 33 bedrooms and top facilities. Until the end of October the hotel is offering a package including accommodation and half board from £94.50 per person per night. Telephone 01473 652334, e-mail reservations@hintleshamhall.com or visit www.hintleshamhall.com

Local offers

Late holiday offers with flights from Norwich. Telephone Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, e-mail enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk to check availability or visit the website at www.travelnorwich.com

- ◆ **Malta** – October 25, three-star named in Bugibba, seven nights, bed and breakfast, £389 per person.
- ◆ **Tenerife** – December 13, 3T named in Puerto Santiago, seven nights, half-board, £369 per person, saving £140 per couple.
- ◆ **Tenerife** – December 20, four-star named in Puerto del Cruz, seven nights, half-board, £559 per person.
- ◆ **Tenerife** – January 24, four-star named in Puerto Cruz, 21 nights, half-board, £930 per person.
- ◆ **Turkey** – March 30, four-star named in Marmaris, seven nights, all-inclusive, £439 per person, saving £110 per couple.
- ◆ **Jersey** – April 21 and 28, two-star named Stafford Hotel, three nights, half-board, £299 per person.
- ◆ **Guernsey** – May 19 and 26, L'Eree Bay Hotel, seven nights, half-board, £479 per person.

Prices correct at time of sending – all are subject to continuing availability and based on maximum occupancy.

Andy Russell and wife Denise celebrate their 50th birthdays by visiting Walt Disney World in Florida which is marking its 40th anniversary.

It is my wish to delight all members of the family, young and old, parent and child” – Walt Disney. This small sign on the fence around some building work at Florida's Walt Disney World summed up the Disney experience.

For Walt Disney World has been bringing pleasure to families from around the world and, since opening 40 years ago, is reinventing itself with new attractions and entertainment to keep generations of children and big kids coming back for more.

So it is a shame the great man never lived to see it take shape. His Florida fantasy was a utopian working city of the future – EPCOT or Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow – but after his death his vision became a theme park and Walt Disney World Florida was born.

It has grown to cover 43 square miles with four theme parks, two water parks, two night-time entertainment areas, a sports complex, five golf courses, more than 30 hotels and 100 restaurants as well as a shopping complex, convention venues and nature reserve to name just the major attractions... and it's still growing. Oh, and it employs 62,000 people – known as cast members.

It's not difficult to see why it is a holiday destination in its own right and why so many visitors come back year after year to enjoy new attractions and old favourites.

We never managed to get to Disney in Florida when our two boys were young and it says something about the magic of the place that, even at 21 and 20, they and their girlfriends jumped at the chance to put that right as a special family holiday for mine and my wife's 50th birthday. I had been concerned our boys might think themselves too old to find Disney 'cool' but it's hard not to get swept along in the child-like infectious Disney hype.

With something as big as Walt Disney World and so much to see and do you need a good idea what you want to achieve. It's difficult to know where to start so we opted for the beginning – Magic Kingdom, the first theme park back in 1971.

It lives up to the name from the moment you arrive on the monorail or cross the lake on the ferryboat to Main Street, USA – a town street from more than 100 years ago leading to Cinderella's castle. There's lot to explore in Magic Kingdom with Adventureland, Wild West-style Frontierland where you must do Splash Mountain and runaway train coaster Big Thunder Mountain rides, Liberty Square set at the time of the Civil War, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland with its Space Mountain ride.

Even if you don't like rides this is a great place to wander, soak up the atmosphere and see lots of Disney characters, shows and parades. Fantasyland is being redeveloped and when finished in 2013 will be almost twice as big and feature a new Disney princesses castle among a host of new attractions.

Epcot, the second theme park which opened in 1982, aims to make education enjoyable and puts the world at your feet with its World Showcase highlighting the culture, architecture and food of 11 countries, including China, Japan, Italy and France recreated around a 40-acre lagoon. It's impressive but this is the world as Americans see it and we had a chuckle in the UK zone with the Rose and Crown pub a fish and chip shop (the food was very good), thatched cottages, a 'cast

member' who told us in a posh, clipped Home Counties voice she was from 'Devon' and a building that looked like a small royal palace with a sports shop in one end. Fun but a rather surreal caricature.

In Epcot you will also find Future World focusing on technological innovation and creativity. Try to visit Spaceship Earth adventure inside Epcot's famous landmark – the golfball-style dome – whiz round Test Track, the longest and fastest ride in Disney history, and get the buzz of a free-flying hang-gliding adventure across America with Soarin'. Younger visitors also love boarding a 'clamobile' for The Seas with Nemo and Friends complete with its own aquarium.

Disney is renowned for its fantastic firework shows so stay into the evening at Epcot for its IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth show over the vast lake but get there early if you want a good view.

Next stop is Disney's Hollywood Studios, opened in 1989 as Disney MGM Studios, with movie-themed rides and attractions. The entrance up Hollywood Boulevard with its art deco buildings leading up to a giant Mickey Mouse Sorcerer's Apprentice hat is quite spectacular as are the many stunt shows, although the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular, while fun and slick, is feeling rather dated considering it is based on the first movie. There's also a lot of film and TV production facilities to tour but with so little happening when we were there felt a bit like a ghost town.

The big rides are Twilight Zone Tower of Terror with a lift that drops 13 storeys at random, Toy Story Mania – a 4D ride through an indoor shooting gallery and the new Star Wars-inspired Star Tours flight simulator.

An unexpected highlight for us – one we would have missed if it hadn't been for a sudden downpour – was Walt Disney: One Man's Dream, launched in 2001 to mark the centenary of his birth, which takes you through his life and business story in a walk-through exhibition of memorabilia, recordings and film.

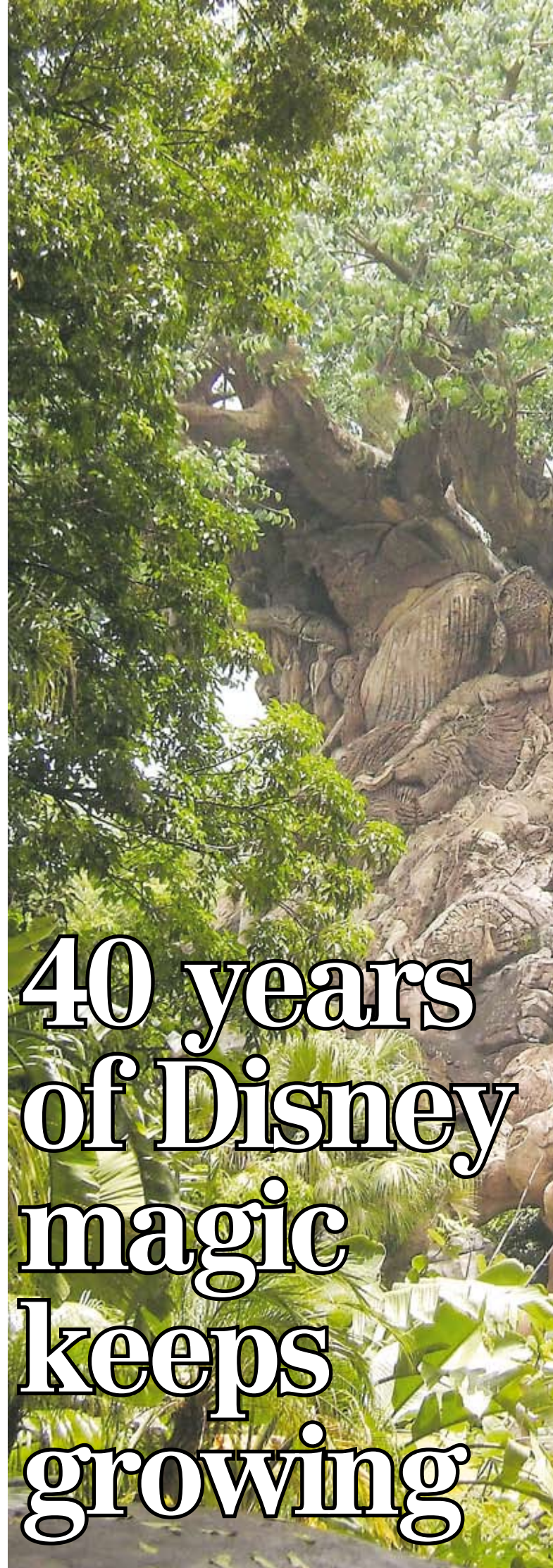
For those staying late into the evening don't miss the Fantasmic! night-time spectacular with lasers, light, dancing fountains and special effects.

The newest theme park is Disney's Animal Kingdom, opened in the late Nineties and the biggest at five times the size of Magic Kingdom. It needs to be with its themed areas of Camp Minnie-Mickey, Discovery Island, DinoLand USA, Asia with its exciting Kali River Rapids and excellent Expedition Everest – Legend of the Forbidden Mountain rides, and Africa.

One of the most memorable sights is the iconic 14-storey tall carved Tree of Life on Discovery Island, the hub of the theme park, but the most memorable experience is boarding an open-air off-road vehicle for Kilimanjaro Safaris – an exciting expedition through African-style savanna where wildlife including lions, rhinos, hippos, giraffes, elephants and gazelles roam free... or as free as possible with well hidden electric barriers to prevent them answering the call of the wild and eating each other!

Getting around the Disney theme parks involves a lot of walking so if you want to take the weight off your feet, go swimming instead at the two water parks where you can spend a whole day with fun for all the family, super slides, rip-roaring rapids and special areas for younger children.

Typhoon Lagoon is designed to be a



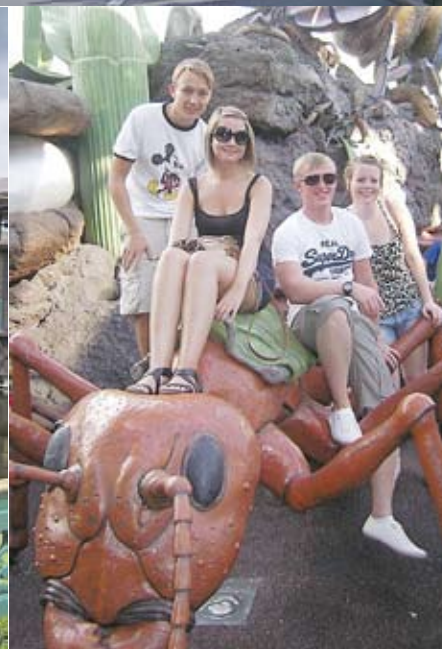
40 years of Disney magic keeps growing

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topsy-turvy tropical paradise but if you really want to chill out our pick would be Blizzard Beach, a 'snowy-capped' ski resort where the rides are even better including the 120ft vertical free-falling Summit Plummet body slide, Teamboat Springs the world's longest family raft ride, a chairlift to the top of Mount



Above, left, Big Thunder Mountain runaway train coaster at Magic Kingdom theme park's Frontierland and, right, Blizzard Beach water park. Right, art deco-style Hollywood Boulevard in Disney Hollywood Studios. Below, left, Denise Russell blows a kiss to the Lego Nessie at Downtown Disney, and, right, Ben, Rachel, Tim and Harriet live out Honey I Shrank the Kids at Hollywood Studios.



Gushmore and various tube runs and toboggan-style mat slides.

After 40 years of fun in the Florida sun, Walt Disney World's appeal keeps growing and it's not difficult to see why people go back for more. We will be... to rediscover all those magical memories and the Disney dream.

Branching out: The magnificent Tree of Life in Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Florida. Inset, the world's your oyster at Epcot.

Factfile and handy hints

- ◆ We booked our package through Destinations Travel in Norwich (telephone 01603 630333) with a four-bedroom luxury villa with private pool at Davenport, a half-hour drive from Orlando International Airport and 20 minutes from the Disney theme parks, an eight-seater people-carrier and flights with Virgin.
- ◆ Our seven-day Disney hopper tickets gave seven days unlimited admission over 14 days to the four theme parks and two water parks. For more information visit <http://disneyworld.disney.go.com>. For all things Disney visit www.disney.co.uk
- ◆ Disney World is mighty popular and with so much to do, you need to plan your park itinerary before going on holiday. Once in the park check out rides with the longest queue times – it can be up to a couple of hours – and, if available, get a Fast Pass for that ride which allows you to come back at a specified time so avoiding the wait. You can get Fast Passes for only one ride at a time or one every hour.

- ◆ Some people swear by getting to the parks early when they first open and if your youngsters are early-risers go for it – by late morning the parks are very busy – and hit the popular attractions first.
- ◆ It's hot and humid so drink plenty. Buy a special cup at the start of the day and enjoy cut-price or free refills – it works out cheaper at the end of the day and is better than carrying your own heavy, luke-warm drinks.
- ◆ Prepare for rain – most days we were there it rained in the afternoon or early evening. Usually it's a short, sharp shower but it can be torrential – we had four inches in one day! So take a lightweight waterproof jacket – you can buy hooded Mickey Mouse ponchos there.
- ◆ Guidebook – We used The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World 2011, published by John Wiley and Sons, price £14.99, packed with information and tips of how to see as much as possible by waiting and queuing as little as possible.

Downtown Disney



Portobello Italian restaurant.

Two waitresses suddenly appeared at our table and, in perfect harmony, burst into singing Happy Birthday to my wife and I. We have the dubious delight of birthdays on December 23 a year apart and marked our milestone by taking the family to Florida between our 50ths. And for a 'birthday' meal we chose Portobello Restaurant, one of the stars in the culinary crown of Downtown Walt Disney. Downtown Disney, part of the 'empire', is a large shopping, dining and entertainment centre based around Buena Vista Lake and includes the world's largest Disney emporium and Lego fans will love the huge creations including George and the Dragon, toy Story's Buzz Lightyear and Woody and the Loch Ness monster all made out of the building bricks.

In a prime lakeside spot is Portobello, a wonderful Italian eatery open more than 20 years where the service is as excellent as the food – executive chef Steven Richard came to our table to talk through the menu with my gluten-free wife... and he had pasta she could eat!

And what a feast we had with huge portions of fabulous food. Having sampled its roasted cloves of garlic spread on fresh crusty bread while perusing the menu, our starters, priced \$4.95 to \$12.95, included lightly-fried calamari with tomato basil sauce, Mozzarella stuffed rice balls, beef and veal, chicken and spicy pork meatball sliders and an antipasti platter. The pasta mains (work on about \$20) are equally spectacular. I love good Italian food and my black linguine with rock shrimp, tomatoes and asparagus was divine. Others in our party were equally impressed with their pasta. My carnivorous elder son devoured the T-bone Fiorentina (\$37) with wilted spinach and crispy Trattoria potatoes and a side order of vegetables. We didn't need dessert but they sounded so good we had Biramisu – Portobello's version of Tiramisu with organic porter and mascarpone cream, a rich chocolate cake and a portion of signature dessert, the white chocolate custard with a crispy candy glaze... and six spoons!



'Walt's home': Fulton's Crab House.

We enjoyed Portobello so much that we also visited sister restaurant Fulton's Crab House next door for a light lunch. This riverboat-style restaurant was built as a house by Walt Disney, when working on his Florida vision, for wife Lillian and was called the Empress Lilly. As well as traditional seafood dishes – the chowder was wonderful – and juicy steaks, when it comes to crab creations Fulton's, as the name suggests, is as big as Cromer.

Portobello and Fulton's Crab House are at 1650 and 1670 Buena Vista Drive, Lake Buena Vista, in Downtown Disney. Websites – www.portobellorestaurant.com and www.fultonscrabhouse.com