

# Walt Disney World Resort Celebrates 40 Years of World-Class Theme Parks and Resorts

## Magic Kingdom Opening Launched Disney Empire in Central Florida

*Once upon a time, a fairy tale castle rose on the edge of a Florida town where citrus grew, egrets waded and cattle roamed. In the shadow of the blue-spired castle named for the princess Cinderella, magical lands sprouted whimsical shows and attractions for world-weary families wishing to shed their cares and embrace a day of fun and fantasy.*

**LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla.** – It was October 1, 1971, and Magic Kingdom turnstiles began to spin after three weeks of trial runs by nearly 100,000 selected guests from throughout Central Florida. Twenty-two park attractions opened, and 5,000 costumed cast members (employees) made their debut as guests took a dive aboard 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, flew through the air in flap-eared Dumbo the Flying Elephant cars and met the iconic film character who started it all – Mickey Mouse.

The Magic Kingdom premiere 40 years ago, followed three weeks later by a star-studded grand-opening event with Bob Hope, Julie Andrews and other luminaries, put Walt Disney World Resort on the map. It was the most talked-about destination in the Western world, but no one could imagine what it would become.

“There were all kinds of predictions and expectations about how it might grow, but not very many people I knew had expected that it would grow the way that it did,” says Charles Ridgway, veteran Disney publicist. “I knew that there were great expectations, but when we started out, they were relatively limited expectations.”

Back then, just two of the current 25 Walt Disney World themed resort hotels opened- the Contemporary and Polynesian. Not until the 1980s, when two more theme parks, a water park, a nighttime entertainment complex and multiple Disney hotels rose across the landscape, did Walt Disney World establish itself as a multi-faceted, world-class vacation destination.

### Making Disney Dreams Come True

In the 40 years since guests first strolled down Main Street, U.S.A., Walt Disney World Resort has blazed brave new entertainment trails based on its founder’s fertile imagination and his vision that the resort would always be evolving.

“Here in Florida, we have something special we never enjoyed at Disneyland . . . the blessing of size,” Walt Disney said after the “Florida Project” was announced in 1965. “There’s enough land here to hold all the ideas and plans we can possibly imagine.”

In 1982, Epcot opened as a theme park celebrating innovation and discovery rather than as the “city of tomorrow” Walt initially had envisioned. In 1989, Disney-MGM Studios (now Disney’s Hollywood Studios) brought Tinseltown magic to Central Florida to showcase movies, television and animated treasures from the Disney collection. In 1998, Disney’s Animal Kingdom first welcomed guests to explore a world of exotic, extinct and imaginary animals. The park is a fitting tribute to Walt Disney, who once lived on a farm and whose love for creatures great and small shone in his Academy Award-winning film series Tru-Life Adventures.

As each new park took root and thrived, the Magic Kingdom churned out a blizzard of pixie dust, adding thrills like the iconic Space Mountain, high-tech interactive rides like Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin and immersive experiences like Monsters, Inc. Laugh Floor. A late 20<sup>th</sup> century wave of Walt Disney Studios animated film classics

inspired a treasure trove of additional Disney attractions. Beloved characters like Ariel, Simba and Nemo found homes at “Voyage of the Little Mermaid,” “Festival of the Lion King,” and “The Seas with Nemo & Friends.”

Even in the midst of those mega-park expansions, Walt Disney Imagineers – the creative designers, architects and engineers behind each new attraction – dreamed up new water adventure parks, resort hotels, Disney Vacation Club properties, a wedding pavilion, more championship golf courses and multiple dining, sports, shopping and nighttime entertainment venues. In 1998, Disney Cruise Line would extend the Walt Disney World entertainment experience to the high seas.

Ever since the Magic Kingdom opened, celebrities from across the planet have visited. Presidents and princesses, rock stars and movie stars have been photographed at Walt Disney World. A long lineup of Super Bowl heroes like Phil Simms, Hines Ward and Emmitt Smith hopped on planes to be Magic Kingdom grand marshals after appearing in post-game “I’m Going to Disney World!” television commercials. Musicians, dancers and other talents have performed at events ranging from the yearly holiday Candlelight Processional to springtime Flower Power concerts.

Could Walt Disney have imagined the outcome when he first snapped up more than 27,000 Central Florida acres for his new themed world? Maybe. Maybe not. But he knew the potential was there when he said: “Part of the Disney success is our ability to create a believable world of dreams that appeals to all age groups.” Surely he couldn’t help but be delighted to know that 60,000 well-trained cast members keep Walt Disney World Resort humming 365 days a year to welcome “kids” of all generations from around the world.

### **Entertainment Innovation in Action**

As entertainment technology became more cutting edge, the ideas and plans of Disney’s dream makers took shape in the form of innovative thrill rides and attractions. Engineers programmed the 13-story “haunted” Twilight Zone Tower of Terror at Disney’s Hollywood Studios so that new thrills could be added to the storyline and the runaway elevator’s drop sequence could be changed. Soarin,’ at Epcot, combines an IMAX high-definition projection system with a realistic motion-based ride system to take thrill seekers young and old on an exhilarating journey across the skies of California.

Imagineers collaborated with Pixar to break new ground at Turtle Talk with Crush in The Seas with Nemo & Friends pavilion in Epcot. Using computer graphics, digital puppetry and image projection with live improvisational banter, the attraction features a wildly popular real-time conversation between the surfer-dude turtle, Crush, from the film, “Finding Nemo,” and children in the audience. No two shows are alike.

In the spring, a new 3-D version of the long-popular Star Tours attraction based on the iconic Lucasfilm “Star Wars” films debuted with immersive new twists and more than 50 different ride experiences at Disney’s Hollywood Studios.

“The things that we do as Walt Disney Imagineers are extremely complex, yet our goal is to make them look like magic to our guests,” says Bruce Vaughn, WDI Chief Creative Executive. “It’s a real mix of innovation and new technology blending creative imagination with technical knowhow.”

### **Magical New Horizons**

In keeping with Walt Disney’s vision of an always-changing Florida entertainment kingdom, a lineup of openings is scheduled in the years ahead. In 2012, Disney’s Art of Animation Resort opens and another new ship joins the Disney Cruise Line fleet. In coming years, Downtown Disney will transform into a waterfront district with a modern twist on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century port city and amusement pier. The vibrant district will expand dining options by 25 percent and invite guests to explore stylish new boutiques and a lakeside park. A new shopping, dining and lodging district is slated to rise just outside Disney’s western gateway, and a 900-acre luxury resort by Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts is on the drawing board along with an 18-hole championship golf course as well as single- and multi-family homes and vacation homes.

And one of the most anticipated projects is taking shape right now as construction progresses on the largest Magic Kingdom expansion in history. The park’s Fantasyland will double in size, with initial phases beginning to open in 2012 featuring attractions based on blockbuster Disney films like “The Little Mermaid,” “Beauty and the Beast” and “Dumbo.” When The Seven Dwarfs Mine Train coaster opens and princesses like Aurora and Cinderella hold court

at Princess Fairytale Hall, the Disney storytelling legacy will have a compelling new showcase, says Phil Holmes, vice president of Magic Kingdom park and 40-year Disney theme park veteran.

“As an opening day cast member, I’m excited to see Fantasyland further transformed into Walt Disney’s original vision of a place where fairy tales come true,” says Holmes, whose first park role was as a Haunted Mansion greeter. “By showcasing modern-day classics like ‘Beauty and the Beast’ alongside Walt’s first animated feature, ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,’ our cast members will bring these stories to life in a way like never before, creating even more wonderful memories for our guests.”

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***“WALT DISNEY WORLD is a tribute to the philosophy and life of Walter Elias Disney...and to the talents, the dedication, and the loyalty of the entire Disney organization that made Walt Disney’s dream come true. May Walt Disney World bring Joy and Inspiration and New Knowledge to all who come to this happy place...a Magic Kingdom where the young at heart of all ages can laugh and play and learn — together.”***

– October 1, 1971 Dedication on Main Street, USA, by Roy O. Disney

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