

I had heard about this geographic region of Central Florida, but didn't know what to make of it. Was it a town? Was it part of Disney World? It was time to find out.



Remember that movie starring Jim Carrey back in the 1990's called "The Truman Show?" It was this idyllic community where everything was perfect, straight from a fairy tale? That could have been filmed in Celebration. It makes Lake-wood Ranch seem like Height-Asbury or SoHo.

Celebration began around the time of that Jim Carrey movie actually. It is a master-planned community originally developed by the Walt Disney Company. Though Disney has since divested, one of it's streets, World Drive, actually begins near the actual Magic Kingdom.

Another road, Celebration Place, leads you to Melia—a perfect hotel minutes from downtown Celebration. This facility opened in 2008, rates range from \$99-\$299, and it has 240 suites. It's like staying in your own sparkling-clean 2/2 apartment, complete with a spacious kitchen with full-size appliances.

Interior suites overlook a large pool in the courtyard of Melia. It's a winding circular pool with lots of twists and turns and privacy. As a former DJ, I was impressed by the light-mix of music that gently wafted overhead.

Having written about dozens of properties for Family Beautiful over the years, I try to focus on the little things that show a place is trying:

*Not only do they stock the kitchen with regular and decaf coffee packets, they also include actual creamers in the refrigerator. No powder here!

*This is tell-tale: Every worker we passed on the sidewalk or in the hallway greeted us with a smile. To me, that is huge. I don't deal with sullen employees, and I don't want to hear any complaining or internal chatter among workers. Not the case here!

*If you don't want to drive into downtown Celebration, the hotel has a shuttle and will take you on a moment's notice. They'll also take you to the area theme parks as well.

The other big thing about Melia is the food! Two restaurants, downstairs and upstairs off the lobby, casual and less casual. Executive Chef Timothy Schumacher sets a great tone for his staff. We enjoyed a first-class tapas dinner and omelets for breakfast during our stay.

We also enjoyed chatting with John Gallacher, the Assistant Food & Beverage Director. Both gentlemen dealt with my gluten-allergy in stride, something I always appreciate.

Don't put off your Celebration! This is a great place for a family to spread out in the suite, take a shuttle to the theme park and come back to some great cooking—all under one roof. RAY COLLINS



Another Reason to Enjoy Celebration

Tucked away in the massive Florida Hospital complex in the Celebration community is a jewel of a facility. It's called "The Fitness Centre & Day Spa."

Just down the hall from the hospital's main entrance is a combination health club and spa. The brochure calls it "A great place to renew your body, mind and spirit," and it's really true!

When we first arrived, I was given a locker to change clothes – and then go up to the work-out area to loosen up on the treadmill, shoot baskets in the gym, and lift weights.

Then the time arrived to switch into one of those soft bathrobes and a short trip down another hall and a world away.

I was lucky enough to have Virginia Melendez as my massage therapist. The good news is —she was so soothing. The bad news is — she put me to sleep! That's an expensive nap! She was wonderful.

Erin enjoyed a facial with a therapist named Unity which she thoroughly enjoyed. They were able to talk about their mutual love of essential oils.

The menu also includes holistic health & wellness (acupuncture), waxing, hot stones as well as manicures and pedicures. The list goes on. (More information at 407-303-4444.)

We plan to return soon to experience their cutting-edge fitness assessment.

It's a hidden gem in the middle of a beautiful place in Central Florida. RAY COLLINS

