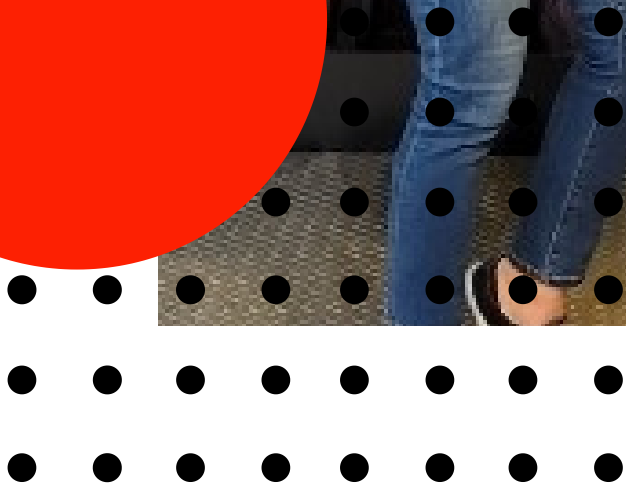
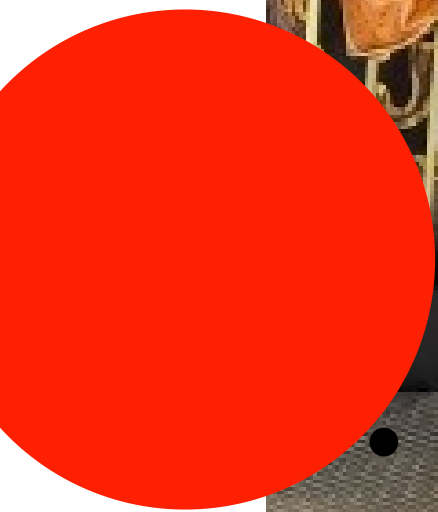
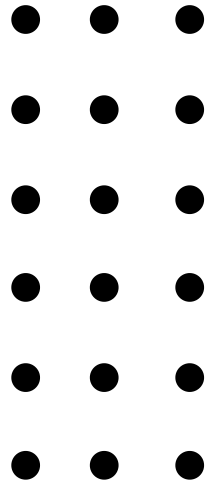


Orlando Fun





Finding Fun on “Orlando’s Strip”

Chicago has its “Magnificent Mile,” Las Vegas has its “Strip” and Orlando has its own version under the much lesser-known and generically named “International Drive.”

I’m as guilty as the next person for writing off Orlando as being only about theme parks and traffic—but on a recent rainy afternoon, Erin and I had a surprisingly memorable day bouncing between fun attractions...far from the usual contrived activities with turnstiles.

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We had an extra day after attending a conference in Orlando and Googled “Fun activities in a day in Orlando.” I jotted down a handful of ideas—and then realized most of them had the same address:

Welcome to ICON Park—an oversized strip-mall full of fun on International Drive near I-4.

First stop was the Museum of Illusions. Walk through a series of optical and sensory illusions. Fun for kids and adults. They have over fifty exhibits, many of which are made better by taking pictures and seeing later. Staff members roam the area, ready to take pictures with your camera.

From there we went next door to Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum. It was nothing less than surreal how real they seemed! It was fascinating to see how tall—or short—various celebrities actually are. I found myself getting up close, making “eye contact” and feeling what it’s like to be in their presence. Some of the best were Jennifer Aniston, Derek Jeter and Steve Jobs.

Next stop was just across the big lobby to the SEA LIFE Aquarium. The highlight here is a 360-degree ocean tunnel. Walk right through a “tube” with sea life above and below. I found myself lingering around the beautiful, oversized fish tanks, marveling at these beautiful creatures.

Still within the same complex, it was time for a bird’s-eye view of Orlando on The Wheel at ICON Park. It is one of the highest points in Central Florida—and is identical to “The London Eye” which I rode 15 years ago on the banks of the Thames River. It’s an oversized Ferris-wheel, and you and your friends get your own air-conditioned glass bubble. It’s a twenty-minute ride. Four attractions in less than four hours without going back to the car! But now it was dinner time, and we found an excellent restaurant around the corner.

American Social Bar & Kitchen is an upscale sports bar and restaurant in Orlando—as well as Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami. This location on West Sand Lake Road in the Rialto Plaza is part of Orlando’s famous “Restaurant Row.”

They’re known for half-price Happy Hour drinks, \$6 appetizers, and great dinner specials. I had salmon and Erin had ribs. Both excellent!

After coffee and ice cream for dessert, we had one more stop back on International Drive before this eventful day was over—and this last one did not disappoint.

The Outta Control Magic Comedy Dinner Show was absolutely memorable. Your ticket includes free pizza, a drink and dessert. Then the show begins: A magician who is a comedian (or a comedian who is also a magician?) kept us entertained for an hour. He brought audience members on stage and kept us riveted with his tricks and humor. Highly recommended!

Who would think you could spend an afternoon and evening in Orlando, have so much fun...and never get near a single theme park?

Ray Collins has written for Family Beautiful since 2011. To see other articles, go to www.raycollinsmedia.com/articles.

