



Orlando's *hot* tables

*Don't just eat on the run in the theme parks.
Try these places for delicious food and fun entertainment*

By **Rona Gindin**

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Do your taste buds determine your vacation itinerary? If so, you may have dismissed Orlando as just a burgers-and-fries kind of town. True, the theme parks do serve up classic American fare, but elsewhere there are serious chefs committed to seeking out fine ingredients and preparing dishes with care. Not surprisingly, you often get more than a meal: Many restaurants invite performers to enhance the experience. You might find your kids—or yourself—high-kicking with an Irish line dancer or joining a Zorba-style conga line. On the following pages, we lead you to nine of Orlando's most satisfying meals, from budget-friendly to worth a splurge. (And none require paying a theme park admission.) Dig in.

DISHING IT UP:

Chef Brandon McGlamery at Luma on Park. Below: A pear and duck salad at the Ravenous Pig; the fountain in Lake Eola, downtown Orlando.





MOVING ON UP:
(clockwise from right) Corner table at Luma on Park; pigtail-shaped donuts at the Ravenous Pig; Taverna Opa's baklava.



stylish family dining

With its grand design and exhibition kitchen, **Luma on Park** is one of the area's most stylish restaurants. The menu features chef Brandon McGlamery's cutting-edge creations, made with locally sourced ingredients. Families can book parties in the Cellar, a private downstairs room that was once a bank vault. You can have sofas, tables and chairs for as many as four dozen set up. The high-tech A/V equipment is handy for showing, say, reminiscences of Grandpa's life. The kitchen crew will create a menu to fit your style and budget, offering such dishes as filet mignon with butternut-chipotle corn cake and duck confit with red wine-rhubarb jam. 290 Park Ave. S., Winter Park; 407-599-4111; lumaonpark.com; dinner for two, \$75*; prices for the Cellar on request

good times, good food

The food at **Taverna Opa** is exceptional, beginning with the garlicky hummus that diners prepare themselves with a wooden mortar and pestle. To the sounds of upbeat Greek music, folks take time out from feasting on lemony grilled chicken and creamy moussaka to toss white paper napkins into the air while shouting "Opa!" (a Greek expression of joy). Keep an eye out for the belly-dancing lesson given by a pro in sequined attire. And then the Zorba-style conga line starts, and diners of all ages weave around the communal tables. Soon you'll be clapping enthusiastically as a belly dancer stands on a table, wiggles her navel and performs a startling fire-swallowing act. 9101 International Dr., Orlando; 407-351-8660; opaorlando.com; dinner for two, \$50

comfort food 2.0

Orlando gastronomes vie for tables at the **Ravenous Pig**, a semi-casual "gastropub" where everything is expertly prepared, often with local ingredients. Families in the know stop in for lunch, when kids feel more comfortable and the prices are lower (most dishes are around \$15). The ham and cheese sandwich will be the most amazing you've ever had; the meat began in the Pig kitchen as a whole hog. The Italian sandwich? Those salamis were tenderly cured in-house. Order comfort food like shrimp and grits or one of the city's best burgers, served with a side of fries with truffle salt. End the meal with "pig tails," piping-hot curly donuts tossed with cinnamon sugar and drizzled with chocolate-esspresso sauce. 1234 N. Orange Ave., Winter Park; 407-628-2333; theravenouspig.com; lunch for two, \$50

*Unless otherwise noted, meal prices do not include drinks, tax or tip.



FOOD WITH A SIDE OF FUN:

(clockwise from near left) Irish dancing at Raglan Road; bacon-wrapped jalapeños at 4Rivers Smokehouse; the dining room at Hawkers.



asian delights

On street corners in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, “hawkers” sell savory snacks—pork dumplings, skewered chicken with peanut sauce, char siu pork and stir-fried egg noodles. In Orlando’s Mills 50 district, the restaurant **Hawkers** sells dozens of these authentic dishes, plus a few Americanized ones. Some recipes have been passed down through the families of the young Asian-American owners. The place is bare-bones yet stylish (in a minimalist way), and the small plates are meant to be shared. Don’t miss the five-spice fish, green-papaya salad, basil fried rice or roti flatbread with curry sauce. Also worth the trip: General Tso wings, roast-duck lettuce wraps and beef lo mein. Did we mention the extensive beer menu? *1103 Mills Ave., Orlando; 407-237-0606; hawkersstreetfare.com; dinner for two, \$20*

pan-southern bbq

Each region of the South has a version of barbecue—except Florida, which churns out copycats. Orlando’s John Rivers has turned that replication into an art form at **4Rivers Smokehouse**, serving a Texas-style brisket, Memphis-style pulled pork and other Dixie treats. Rivers opened his first restaurant two years ago, and his food brought the town together—in line, waiting for his smoked treasures. Now Rivers is set to open his third spot. Items on the menu: brisket and pork as well as a burnt end sandwich and bacon-wrapped jalapeños. *2103 W. Fairbanks Ave., Winter Park; 1047 S. Dillard St., Winter Garden; 1869 W. State Rd. 434, Longwood; 407-474-8377; 4rsmokehouse.com; lunch for two, \$25; closed Sunday*

beyond the irish pub

Immerse yourself in the Emerald Isle at **Raglan Road**, an upscale Irish restaurant. Irish dancers do fancy footwork onstage while folk bands belt out spirited ditties. The menu, developed by Irish celebrity chef Kevin Dundon, is a mix of uptown Gaelic classics, such as shepherd’s pie made with Angus beef, and contemporary creations like a tangy asparagus and goat cheese tart with garden peas and arugula. The bar serves up craft beers, Irish imports as well as 36 whiskeys. Try a flight of brews from four Irish provinces or three single malts. *Pleasure Island, Downtown Disney, 1640 E. Buena Vista Dr., Lake Buena Vista; 407-938-0300; raglanroad.com; dinner for two, \$50*



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**ORLANDO'S
MAGIC:** (clockwise
from right) Kostya
Kimlat, the magi-
cian at Del Frisco's;
stuffed French
toast at Bananas;
Boma's buffet.



take a culinary safari

Boma is tucked away inside a hotel in the far reaches of the Disney World complex. This casual buffet restaurant weaves the flavors of Africa into foods that Americans know and love. You'll taste a variety of dishes, like tamarind-flavored beef, pistachio-crusting fish and "Durban-style" chicken flavored with onion, garlic and spices. Try the different hummuses (flavored with kalamatas or red pepper), flatbreads, watermelon-rind salad and, for dessert, a zebra dome (a dome-shaped mousse striped with dark and white ganache). Follow dinner with a stroll around the property, where you may spot zebras, giraffes and gazelles on the private savannah. *Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, 2901 Osceola Pkwy., Lake Buena Vista; 407-939-3463; disneyworld.com/dining; dinner for two, \$70*

tricks and treats

You'll feel anticipation in the air as you're ushered into **Del Frisco's Prime Steak & Lobster**. You're here for dinner, sure, but also for an evening of surprises. On certain Friday evenings, the steak house—a family-owned cousin of the Del Frisco's chain—hosts a combination magic show and four-course meal in its dark-wood-and-quilted-red-leather space. Before and after your salad, shrimp appetizer, steak or salmon entrée and chocolate mousse, you'll be mesmerized by the antics of Kostya Kimlat, a Ukrainian-born master of sleight of hand. Maybe Kimlat will correctly guess where you hope to vacation next, or find your name jotted on a hidden playing card. *729 Lee Rd., Orlando; 407-645-4443; magicshoworlando.com; \$98 per person (includes tax, tip and valet parking)*

eat like a kid

You don't have to order the Peanut Butter Jelly Time milkshake. Nor must you devour the banana-flavored cotton candy presented with the check. But you may not be able to help yourself at **Bananas**, a diner with modern takes on greasy-spoon fare. The décor is part nostalgia, part disco, with red-vinyl booths and a red-and-black-checked ceiling. Fuel up on entrées such as Dijon-crusting meatloaf with mashed potatoes. Or have breakfast for dinner (or for breakfast or for lunch). Order eggs Benedict the standard way, or mix it up with blue cheese and buffalo sauce. The stuffed French toast is filled with strawberry cream cheese and coated with Rice Krispies. Bananas is a conventional restaurant, but on certain evenings and for Sunday brunch, the staff is in drag—so plan accordingly. *924 N. Mills Ave., Orlando; 407-480-2200; bananasdiner.com; lunch for two, \$35* 🍷

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STAY



RCI affiliated resorts near Orlando include:



Disney's Animal Kingdom Villas DV01

See animals of the savannah right from your room and enjoy four on-site restaurants. 3701 Osceola Parkway, Lake Buena Vista

Member Review: "Most of the staff cannot do enough to help you, and they had a lot of things for the kids to do."



Legacy Vacation Club Orlando—Spas 8615

Cycle (or walk) through the tropical gardens on this beautifully landscaped property. 2800 N. Poinciana Blvd., Kissimmee

Member Review: "Safe, peaceful, clean, good location."



Vacation Village at Parkway 4940

Oversized swimming pool and picnic area for supper under the stars. 2949 Arabian Nights Blvd., Kissimmee

Member Review: "We would recommend this resort to all. Everything was so clean, and we felt like it had been prepared just for us."



Holiday Inn Club Vacations at Orange Lake Resort—West Village 0670

A lazy river, four golf courses and a lake with beach and water sports. 8505 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy., Kissimmee

Member Review: "I was impressed with the rooms as soon as I walked through the door!"



Sheraton Vistana Resort 0450

Enjoy tanning beds, a massage facility and a miniature golf course. 8800 Vistana Centre Dr., Orlando

Member Review: "Near everything! Major attractions, shopping, dining and transportation."



Summer Bay Resort 3175

Free transportation to Disney parks and a tiki bar on-site. 25 Town Center Blvd., Clermont

Member Review: "Clean and well-maintained grounds. Lovely, relaxing pool areas. Unit had been refurbished and was very clean."

Non-RCI affiliated resorts:

Park Plaza Hotel

A 1922 hotel filled with antiques, on Winter Park's main retail-and-restaurant drag. Breakfast is delivered to rooms daily. 307 Park Ave. S., Winter Park; 407-647-1072; parkplazahotel.com; doubles from \$140 per night

Eo Inn and Spa

A boutique hotel only a block from the restaurant-filled Thornton Park neighborhood. 227 N. Eola Dr., Orlando; 888-481-8488; eoinn.com; doubles from \$129 per night

Hilton Bonnet Creek

Minutes from the Walt Disney World® Resort, this upscale hotel has a lazy-river pool, a Rees Jones-designed golf course and a Guerlain spa. 14100 Bonnet Creek Resort Lane, Orlando; 888-353-2013; hiltonbonnetcreek.com; doubles from \$249 per night

Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress

This 815-room resort has 45 holes of golf, a 21-acre lake and a lagoon swimming pool with waterslides. The Sunday brunch is legendary. 1 Grand Cypress Blvd., Orlando; 407-239-1234; grandcypress.hyatt.com; doubles from \$229 per night

Caribe Royale

Mid-priced and independently owned, this all-suite and -villa resort has a fine-dining Continental restaurant and a spa. 8101 World Center Dr., Orlando; 800-823-8300; thecaribeorlando.com; doubles from \$129 per night

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