



# Thrills and Frills

New and notable Florida theme park attractions

BY BRITT KENNERLY AND WENDY O'DEA

The phrase “new and must-do in '22” has a nice, rhyming ring for theme park lovers heading to

the Orlando, Fla., area this year.

Some oldies but goodies are returning, but brand-new adventures also await vacationers seeking sun, sand or even a taste of outer space.

Here are some highlights of what you can expect to see, do and ride on your next trip:

## WALT DISNEY WORLD

The 18-month party that started last October continues as Walt Disney World Resort celebrates its 50th anniversary.

After a long, COVID-19-forced hiatus that continued even after Disney World reopened in July 2021, tram service returned from parking areas to **Magic Kingdom**,

**Epcot** and select Disney resorts.

The **Typhoon Lagoon** also reopened, but **Blizzard Beach** is closed for refurbishment.

MagicBands, the bracelets introduced in 2013, are getting an upgrade. **MagicBand+** will include all the hands-free conveniences of the original — park and guest room entry as well as payment capabilities — along with new interactive options.

Once guests enter the theme park, MagicBand+ comes to life. It will light up, change colors, vibrate and even recognize some movements the guest makes, all to enhance the storytelling in the parks. Guests will be able to take part in interactive experiences, from finding virtual bounties throughout Black Spire Outpost in **Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge** at Disney's Hollywood Studios to seeing their bands light up in



**Mickey Mouse** and friends celebrate Walt Disney World's 50th anniversary.

unison with the new night shows at Epcot, **Harmonious**, and Magic Kingdom, **Disney Enchantment**.

MagicBands start at \$29.99 and go up for specialty ones. The cost of the MagicBand+ hasn't been announced yet, but the company said there will be a discounted price for Disney Resort hotel guests, as well as new and renewing Walt Disney World Annual Passholders.

Disney's new ride reservation system, **Genie**, replaced free FastPasses last year.

The base-level Disney Genie planning tool is free, but it doesn't let guests cut long lines like FastPasses used to. To do that, guests must pay \$15 per person per day for Genie+ or separate à la carte fees for Individual Lightning Lane access to the most popular rides at each park. All rides do offer a traditional standby line, including **Remy's Ratatouille Adventure** and **Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance**, which previously operated with virtual queues.

## EXPERIENCES AND RIDES

The much-anticipated **Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser** is the spaced-out treat of a lifetime for **Star Wars** fans. It's a two-night immersive event like no other in this neck of the woods, aboard the Halcyon starcruiser.

Billed as a vacation experience “going beyond anything Disney has created before, inviting guests to become the heroes of their own stories during a two-night adventure where they see, feel and live their own **Star Wars** story,” it comes with a hefty price tag.

Rates vary depending on how many are in your party, the type of cabin you choose and when your voyage departs. For \$5,999, three adults and one child (kids ages 10 and up count as adults) receive two nights' accommodations on the >

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Galactic Starcruiser, four meals and refreshments while aboard, one quick-service meal at Disney's **Hollywood Studios**, ongoing interactive entertainment in an immersive theater environment and admission to Hollywood Studios for a **Galaxy's Edge** excursion.



Galactic Starcruiser cabin

Valet parking and one exclusive **MagicBand** per guest are also included.

If you're not on a "voyage," you won't be able to just look around, unlike at other Disney hotels.

#### EPIC AT EPCOT

Coming to Epcot this summer is a coaster for the cosmos and *Guardians of the Galaxy* fans that is sure to be breathtaking.

**Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind**, officials say, will be the park's first "other-world" showcase pavilion as well as the first reverse launch on a Disney coaster. You'll travel through Xandar's treasures "until the moment when the Guardians of the Galaxy arrive, and an intergalactic chase through time and space begins." ■

— Britt Kennerly writes for *Florida Today*. Eve Chen, Michelle Spitzer and Paul Natcher contributed to this story.



## MORE IN STORE

Fill your amusement quota at other parks in and around Orlando:



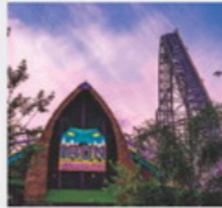
#### ► Ice Breaker, SeaWorld Orlando

Thrill-seekers can finally board the long-awaited Ice Breaker, which welcomed riders in February, after nearly two years of delays and pandemic shutdowns. Featuring the steepest vertical drop in Florida with both forward and backward launches, the new coaster culminates in a reverse launch into a 93-foot-tall spike with a 100-degree angle.



#### ► Reef Plunge, Aquatica Orlando

Tighten your goggles if you want to see your way through the new Reef Plunge that is a splashing and twisting adventure through more than 330 feet of eye-catching translucent cutouts and rings. Opening in spring, guests will zoom past a dynamic new underwater habitat that is home to a vibrant array of marine life, including Commerson's dolphins, leopard sharks and other cold-water fish.



#### ► Iron Gwazi, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay

North America's tallest hybrid coaster — with a wood and steel design and the fastest and steepest of its kind in the world — made its debut this spring. Iron Gwazi takes daredevils to new heights, plunging from a 206-foot-tall peak into a 91-degree drop at speeds topping 76 miles per hour. There are a dozen potential airtime moments, including three inversions.



#### ► Rapids Racer and Wahoo Remix, Adventure Island Tampa Bay

These two attractions are scheduled to splashed down this spring. Rapids Racer lets guests compete on a parallel track and features the world's first dueling saucers. Wahoo Remix (formerly Wahoo Run) is a high-energy water ride with synchronized light and sound elements and a 600-foot watery track.



#### ► Peppa Pig Theme Park, Legoland Florida Resort

Children and their families will discover attractions such as Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster and Muddy Puddles Splash Pad at the world's first Peppa Pig Theme Park. Based on a British television show featuring Peppa, her brother George and other family members and friends, the park offers rides, attractions and live shows.