



Disney Goofy Marathon Trip Notes With Winter Park Tourist January 5-13, 2012

I need a head check. I called this a rite of passage: it's been five years since my first and only other Goofy Challenge and I wanted to know if I could do it again. Will I need to try again when I'm 71? I should be so lucky as to still be moving then.

It was also said that I had to do Goofy again for a t-shirt since in 2007 there were no Goofy t-shirts and of course I need a t-shirt. We got three t-shirts and three medals as part of the entry: Donald Duck in navy for the half marathon on Saturday; Mickey Mouse in red for the full marathon on Sunday; Goofy in white for having been goofy enough to do the two in two days. So for you non-runners (smart!) you are reading this right – it's a double or a triple day event.

In 2007 I'd announced that if they offered a Dopey or a Dumbo award that maybe we'd do that too and sure enough they added a 5K on Friday which we did – resulting in four medals.

Why do Disney's Goofy Challenge?

- Where else can you get so much professional entertainment and entry into four parks without paying \$90 for a park entry admission.
- A dear friend arranges for me to stay in his time share, Old Key West Resort, which is about a 3 minute walk to the very start of the start – eliminating the need to catch a Disney shuttle bus at 3am.
- Fireworks at the start.
- Medals are big and classy and you'll earn at least three and maybe four.
- T-shirts are the best known; yet I was surprised by all the ads on the back considering its Disney.
- Tour of four parks was varied between the half and the full; example, Saturday we saw Magic Kingdom in the dark and in lights, and Sunday in the daylight. I swear there's a kid in all of us and I love the parks.
- Where else do you have the opportunity to take about 350 pictures each day? Pictures with the Disney characters; pictures of the theme parks, pictures of crazy runners in costumes!
- Plenty of fluids unlike 2007 in the extreme heat and humidity and when they ran out of water.
- Plenty of porta potties which is rare.



- Chocolates near the 20 mile marker and I ate a couple handfuls, though I'd been fussy that they were short of food up until then.
- Lots of time to finish with at least 7 hours: it does my heart good to see so many behind me – a rare occurrence.

Are we crazy to do this marathon? Downsides -

- Its concrete between the parks and plenty of back alleyways but how else will they get you from park to park.
- Too much traffic and too many narrow one lane roads and even one walkway where we pretty much came to a stop.
- Some scenery was interesting but I think we could do without it – such as the recycling and sewer treatment section where it was very strong.
- Costly entry is really hefty at the \$300 range (and that was with the \$20 discount coupon.)
- If you don't have access to the Old Key West Resort, the bus to the start only runs from 3 to 4am necessitating standing around at the start until 5:30am or later. And it's usually very cold at the start, and hot at the end.
- The Expo on Friday mid-day was so crowded as to cause total gridlock. Not a good job Disney!
- So many runners that wave starts are needed and one could start as late as 45 minutes after.
- Weather could be freezing at the start and boiling at the end. We had high 30s to mid 60s. In 2007 it was closer to 90.
- Goofy t-shirt wasn't offered in 2007 compounded by the sizing running so small that I bought Maricar's size large and the poor gal got zilch. This year the shirts are huge, so who knows how to order.
- Lines and more lines. Economy is great!
- Humbling being with a lot of old tubbies. Proves that there is NO magic or talent in getting this done.
- It's pretty dark for the first hour and a half. I was envious of those with headlamps because stretches were quite dark. My depth perception is not very good in the dark
- There are no bargains at Disney.



Posters from the Expo





That's me at the fifth poster and I'm in my (well, really it was Maricar's) 2007 Goofy t-shirt which was the only real Goofy memento received that year – for additional purchase.

This year the shirts were great and they were cut really large. I was offered to exchange mine despite exchanges not allowed since everyone was asking for a size smaller. My size extra small was big even compared to the usual size smalls. They came with uniquely long and very narrow sleeves and that was probably good.

It's surprising and special how many people offer to take my picture – as here. I've never asked anyone but I suppose by my being alone brings out the best in people. On the course I had many more offers than I accepted.

Results

There is no incentive to hurry at Disney unless you're in the money. First of all we all came to have fun so why not use up all the time allowed -- which I nearly did. Saturday half marathon had me coming in at 3:06 (9,090 out of 12,328.) Sunday's marathon started cool and I felt that I needed a wee bit of exercise so I did my first 5 miles in 1:01 (even with all the picture taking) and then finished by walking from the half (3:08) and coming in at 6:45 with Bernie and a few hundred photos taken each day.

Diane did 2:21 and 5:10; Amy did 2:14 then 2:27 for her second day as a relay; Bernie did 3:13 and 6:45; Seth did the marathon only at 4:39 and he's on a perfect 19 streak; and Csaba also did the marathon only at 3:44. Everyone was happy. But you probably notice a trend here: the fast boys don't do run both days.

Mysteries

Question: Do men have lesser bladders than women? Why are they always in the bushes peeing whereas the women wait for the porta potties?

Heard on the Street: The most unexpected and least athletic-looking people are wearing medals!

Been there/done that

No matter how many times I have been to Disney, there remains a kid in all of us and certainly in me. I love the place! Running through the Magic Kingdom both in the darkness with the dramatic lights and in the sunlight, both times I had to stop, turn around, take it all in, and take a bunch of pictures. It was hard to move on, to run on.

I was trying to count up the number of times I'd been to Disney and it's been quite a few. We lived in Miami in the 70s and made the trip as a family. Then one year there was a four-generation family trip with my parents, us, daughter and grandson. I've squired analysts there for the home builders show at least twice if not three times and stayed at the Peabody and at some time-share resorts. The National Investor Relations group I belonged to held their annual convention there at least twice and once at the Gaylord Palms and Tom accompanied me on at least one of these trips. When grandson Joseph was 16 or 17, he and daughter Alayna joined me over the Christmas holidays there. Maricar and I went with Csaba and Bernie in 2007 and stayed a few days and I stayed on longer. I was ready

to experience it again but I can attest to the fact that I'd never paid over \$90 for a one day park entry before nor do I plan to do so again!

Downtown Disney – near to my resort



I don't remember Disney's Downtown being so interesting, full of restaurants nor anywhere as big. I've done the Cirque du Soleil there twice and this time enjoyed 'A Hole in the Wall' Irish pub with Tommy and Diane. Downtown was near to my resort so I would return there again for another meal. Wolfgang Puck's restaurant was also good and new to me. There's nothing wrong with the economy by the looks of the lines at restaurants and shops in Downtown Disney!

Selected pictures from the first day's event



A couple of unknown runners in costume at the start line, and there's Bernie, wife Janine, and John in the second picture, and me in a line of antique cars.



In Epcot with the holiday lights shining, then in Magic Kingdom. It's no wonder they call it magic!



Here are some of the characters on the course – Disney, runners, Cirque du Soleil and even see the spectator with the huge hands. The last one was at the finish line.

Then next is still another character – they filmed the runners onto a huge screen and I took a picture of the big screen just as I was center front! This was on a turn-around or also called an out-and-back.



Then – here's what a finish line looks like. Tulsa friends – note the shirt.



All those people are basically going home hungry. But well dressed in Disney space blankets. Disney didn't run out of food but there wasn't very much. I couldn't walk home because I didn't know the way, so most of us were ushered over to the lines of buses taking us back to the resorts. From there I high-tailed it quickly to the snack bar for a big hamburger.

Selected pictures from the second day's event



Diane (also my pacer in Memphis), Bernie from NJ, Csaba (my host at the time share) and the starting fireworks. Epcot was still dark but we'd finish in Epcot later.



This guy's blue was body paint. I wonder if it lasted through the sweat. There were two race cars outside their track and three drivers. The car is Richard Petty's but don't know that the driver was Petty.



The sunrise was not only lovely but needed as there were plenty of areas that could have used some more spotlights. We had antique cars and antique bicycles. Every owner was appropriately dressed in antique costume too.



It was sweet how many 'teams' there were dressed alike. The hotel is one of the original ones called The Contemporary. Behind the sign "you can go the distance" was a man singing and applauding us with giant hands.



Oh how I love the downtown of the Magic Kingdom. Sunday was in sunlight whereas Saturday had been in holiday lighting.



I'm in good company, right? Here I am in my new shirt look called I-don't-know-if-I-want-it-on-or-off look. Or Phantom-of-the-Shirt. We are all on our way AGAIN to and through the castle but not before finding the landscaped Mickey and Minnie Mouse which was amazing stuff and somewhat off the course.



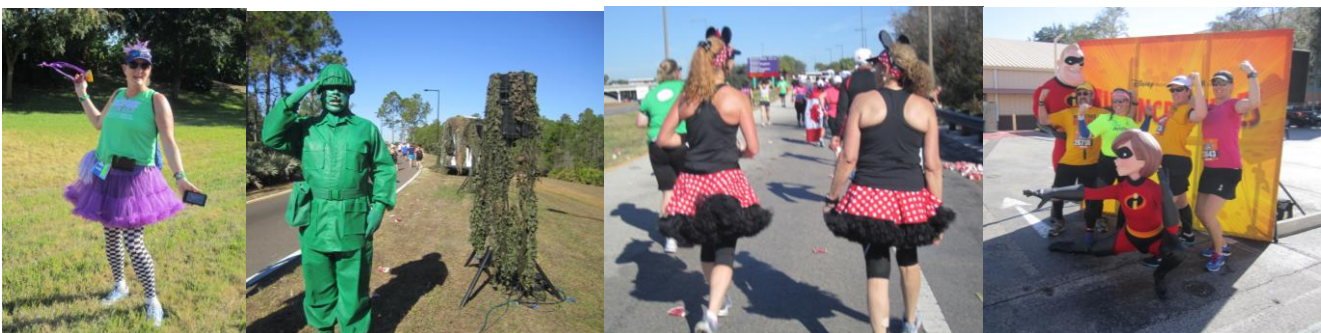
Just as we were entering the castle; inside the castle walkway with all the mosaics.



Notice this gal's on her phone? Not an unusual occurrence. The railroad men seemed surprised that I wanted their picture; little did they know that I grew up with trains. We maybe all wanted to stay with Winnie the Pooh. This top-hatted guy was a Team-in-Training coach.



There was an area just before Animal Kingdom where they had hawks, falcons, hedgehogs, ponies, and bunnies – all kinds of animals to pet and learn about. Between the animals and the bongos of Animal Kingdom was this cute little Minnie-Mouse runner.



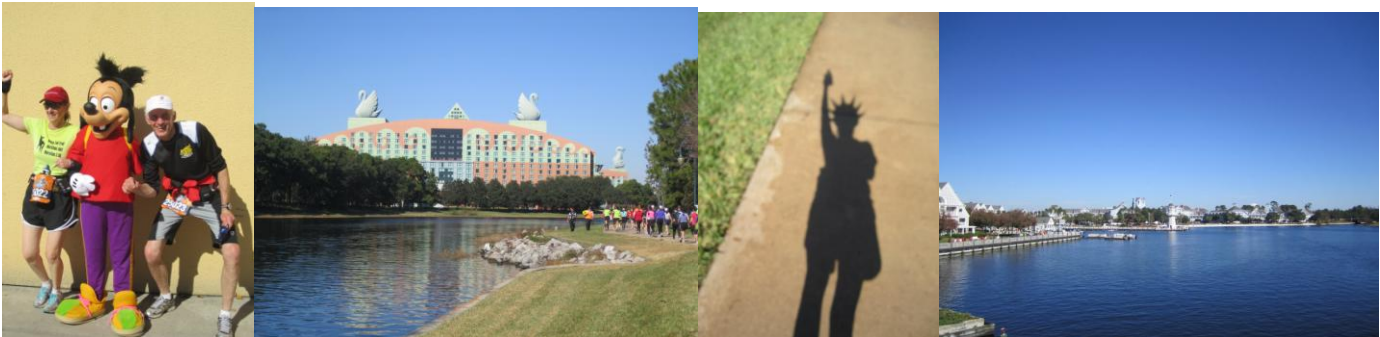
Another Team-in-Training Coach: we always like to be with that group and even better when their coaches help us along too. This Marine had the best voice and he kept going non-stop for both days.



Who is this? Upon entering Hollywood and the back stage costume design shops. Youse Guys Moychindice shop comes up just before New York Street.



Linda and family own the original Crossroads in Hollywood California. I hadn't thought how Disney copied them and the entire streets and courtyard; I hope they got something from Disney! Someone coincidentally asked if I wanted my picture taken and that was right before the Miss Piggy Fountain where she's wearing her Liberty Lady Crown. This time the course runs behind her and I took the picture through the courtyard but she's there! Me too! And another coincidence: where else would you have so many costumes than at the Medoc Marathon whose shirt I'm wearing.



The course runs by the water quite often and here we are by the Swan and within view of the Dolphin Hotels. Look! I took my own picture! The big lake is the Boardwalk area.



I ran into Dr. Boyd and his son and he took this picture. I don't know why I didn't get one of him except that by this time in the marathon some of us become rather brain dead. The last time I saw Dr. Boyd was at Cape May just before he got a pacemaker and here he was passing me. He said he'd turned his pacemaker UP that morning. Once into Epcot we finished whatever countries we hadn't seen in the dark. Here's Venice! I would see them all the next day in my Epcot Shuffle or my new game: Eating My Way around the World.



And what should I find at the finish line? Look at this guy up in the stands! Next came Mickey and Minnie.



Medals and more medals. Here I am wearing two more and feeling well enough and cocky enough that I caught myself wondering if I could come back in five years at age 71.

I should have been wondering how I would do another marathon one week later!

The Epcot Shuffle aka Eating My Way Around the World

Then there is the Monday unofficial event called the Epcot Shuffle. Yes, some runners shuffle, can't use the stairs and look genuinely in pain following a marathon. That generally does not include those of us who are in the back. Speed kills.

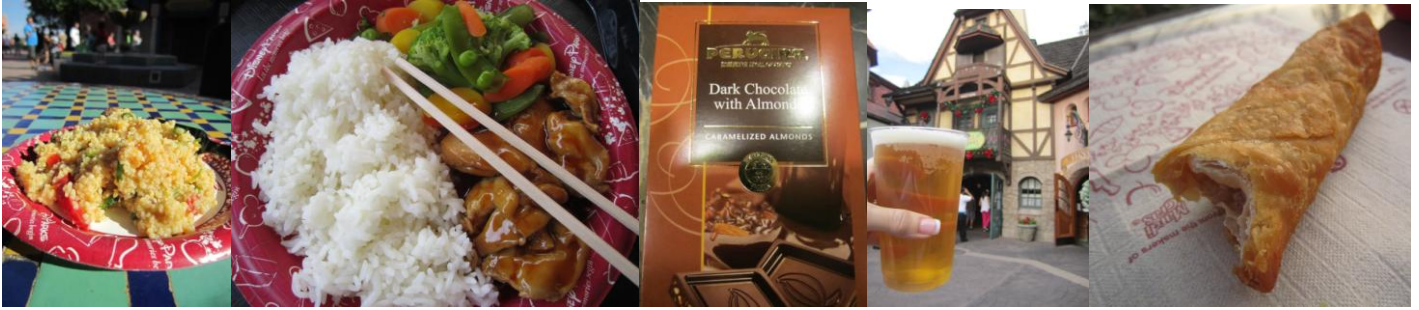
The idea is to have a beer in each of the world showcase country pavilions. I didn't think that was possible for me to accomplish, but many others did it or at least tried resulting in a different kind of shuffle. I decided I'd do it by either eating and/or drinking in each pavilion and I got it done. I do confess that before I got through all eleven countries I wasn't thinking very favorably about food. Mexico was my last stop and it went home with me.



On my way to Epcot on Monday morning, I found a team of gals who had custom t-shirts made for their Drinking Around the World Event. We'd learned about this event from a friend of a friend who wrote a report on his adventure. (If you'd like to see his trip report about the 2006 event, let me know but be warned – he is wordier than I am and its 27 –humorous- pages.)

And yes – runners were wearing their medals. Some were wearing three medals. That must have been a work out in itself. And a big reach for attention.

The Plan: I entered and wanted to turn towards Mexico with one of my favorite restaurants but I knew I'd eat too much so should save it to the last; thus I turned right and started with Canada. (1) Canada is noted for their maple syrup so I had maple candied cashews. (2) United Kingdom requires fish & chips where I ate them lakeside among seagulls; they were gutty enough to dive into my lap to snatch a chip reminding me of the Squirrels and Ravens in Grand Canyon. (3) France of course is wine and I had a Vouvray. (4) Morocco called for a cous cous salad. (5) Japan was Teriyaki chicken and vegetables from their Katsura Grill, complete with green tea sitting in the sunshine watching the Taiko Drummer show. (6) United States deserves Paula Deen! When I found limited offerings of things like a huge turkey leg or funnel cakes I decided I owed it to myself to ignore American food. Little did I know that Paula Deen was hiding her diabetes which news would come out a few days later with her being paid to promote a diabetic drug. Besides, I'd already had my dose of crap-food at the Coca Cola showcase where I tried them all. (7) Italy was easy: Perugina chocolate in bitter sweet. (8) Germany called for a Pilsner beer. (9) China offered an apple cinnamon egg roll which I ate while watching the Chinese acrobatic show. (10) Norway didn't have many selections and only Californian wine but the School Bread was a tasty surprise with a not-very-sweet pudding interior. Makes sense that Norway populous hasn't so many fatties. (It was here that my camera died from too many pictures but I kept proof using my iPhone camera and receipts!) (11) Mexico, my favorite, didn't exactly beckon me as it was around mid-point that I surprised myself by not caring if I ate or not. I thought I could eat any and everything all the time. So the full dinner of tacos, guacamole, chips, beans and rice went home with me and by midnight my mission was accomplished and who knows how many pounds that cost me. (No, I won't be competing with Paula Deen – I'd been down a few pounds to start.)



Selected pictures from my day in Epcot



A panorama of China; a rotating medal of Mickey in all the countries that I added to my Goofy Medal in honor of my Epcot Shuffle; Victorian Gardens; multiple 360 degree films and the home of Alice in Wonderland.



This is one of the birds that tried to snatch my fish 'n chips from me. I could have stayed in France with all the fond memories in 360 degrees from Notre Dame to the Chateaux of the Loire to Mont St Michelle. But I had to return to real life and a reminder of the fatties that populate Disney. We can only hope these young gals dressing up in belly dancing costumes can dance away their upcoming fat.



The sights were extreme: Taiko drummers to spectators – ones that would have to take the offered boat transport from one side of Epcot to the other. Is it any coincidence that it was primarily tubbies in line? Germany offered miniature villages to walk through and China had their usual acrobats. Just before Norway and after China's 360 degree my camera battery died, but so was my body and certainly my stomach was done.



Here's Norway obviously taken by a professional.



Noticed over and over again: So disgusting and so Disney -- the fatso slobs are in abundance and they were simply buying up everything they could find – food and Chinese made trash, surely stuff that will never see the light of day again.

The Disney Town of Celebration

I spent an afternoon wandering Disney's Town of Celebration and remembering some of how it had been Walt Disney's desire to create a utopia with rich and poor living together and a town that didn't need cars. Well, it's no wonder some say it resembles the too-perfect town of *The Stepford Wives*, yet there are those who see Celebration as a return to small-town values with walkable and safe communities. I saw a more fake looking town than those in the Magic Kingdom



Will I return to Disney?

It's a perfect place for multiple generations to vacation and yet it's a crazy price. I'd rather see folks going to see the real Eiffel Tower than the fake one but I did enjoy the reviews. No one knows how to make an amusement park like Disney! And I could be so lucky as to return to run in five years!!!

Memphis Marathon report correction/clarification

I had called it a 'marathon from hell' and that needs correction and clarification and apologies to anyone who thought it was centered on any one item. There were a series of *many* "stuff happens" on my way, while there, and after.

Winter Park for three days tourist add-on

Friends Seth and Janice – from Capon Valley 50K, to Marv's 50th at Outer Banks, to Surfside 50K, Seth has been a great supporter and Janice a load of fun and information. Never did I dream that I'd be able to spend time with them in their own home town. I'd learned somewhere along the course that they were friends with Marv and Maryanne having met in Albuquerque in a Jacuzzi hot tub.

Seth suggested and I followed his suggestions which had coincidentally been Ellen's suggestions too: Morse Museum. <http://morsemuseum.org/>. This could have been called the Tiffany Museum and it's certainly worth a trip.

Tiffany Collection - The Morse Museum of American Art has the world's most comprehensive collection of the works of Louis Comfort Tiffany, including Tiffany jewelry, pottery, paintings, art glass, leaded-glass windows, lamps, and the Tiffany Chapel he designed for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. (Remember that world's fair from the book "White City"?) After the close of the exposition, a benefactor purchased the entire chapel for installation in the crypt of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York in New York City. As construction on the cathedral continued, the chapel fell into disuse, and in 1916, Tiffany removed the bulk of it to Laurelton Hall (his now destroyed home on Long Island). After the 1957 fire, the chapel was rescued by Hugh McKean, a former art student in 1930 at Laurelton Hall, and his wife Jeannette Genius McKean, and now occupies an entire wing of the Morse Museum which they founded. Many glass panels from Laurelton Hall are also there; for many years some were on display in local restaurants and businesses in Central Florida. Some were replaced by full-scale color transparencies after the museum opened.

The Polasek Museum. <http://www.polasek.org/> with gardens, home and museum. This is especially known for the garden sculpture.

The Winter Park Boat Tour through the chain of lakes is educational and relaxing. It reminded me of a mini-Palm Beach. <http://scenicboattours.com/home.htm>

Rollins College is in town and in and about the lake regions. It's a rich college that's quite lovely and I went to their museum but didn't get there in time. The walk around the grounds and the edge of the lake was well worthwhile.

Wednesday was a walk through Winter Park's Worth Avenue called Park Avenue here but a mini-Worth Avenue. Janice and Seth were a world of information and history and introduced me to Turkish food on Park Avenue. Thursday night was dinner at Seth and Janice's home following a walk through the famous houses of their adjoining neighborhood. I frankly thought their neighborhood was the most interesting and very special also because it was populated with peacocks and a neighbor who corals and feeds them.

After dinner Seth was scheduled to meet with his a cappella group called MAKESHIFT so I got a private concert! <http://www.harmonize.com/makeshift/>

Winter Park deserves some pictures but I'm off to another adventure so it's just not going to happen.

Next? I fly through Houston to get to New Orleans where I'll drive to Baton Rouge for another marathon. I like state capitals. Then to finish off the trip will be a stay in the French Quarter of New Orleans before flying home to re-pack for a trip with my sister to Kripalu Yoga Retreat in the Berkshires. February takes me to Tallahassee and Jacksonville for marathons followed by a two week hiking trip to Kauai and The Big Island.

There's more but I'll save you! Somebody's got to do it and I'm glad it's me.

The Heroes of Our Sport Aren't Usually Near the Front

From a post sent to me during Disney. (Angela is a friend of Diane who reported that while we were at Disney Angela was turning 40 and wanting to walk 40 miles. Many of her friends showed up to support her.)

Too often those that bring home the trophies from a race are given all the praise when those that have done the more remarkable feat are further back in the pack. Angela Ivory has completed over 300 marathons and ultra marathons. She has completed six 100-mile ultras. Her accomplishments will never make ESPN or Sports Illustrated, but that is only because we live in a world that judges any accomplishment by who is the first to come across the line.

Angela has been battling Metastatic Breast Cancer for quite some time. I've been told it has now consumed most of her body. She has been battling it for years, and the last two, I have known her. I know her from running...really long distances. I know her because she is one of the friendliest and nicest runners I've ever had the joy of competing with. She has never mentioned one word about cancer to me, but I know. I've known for about as long as I've known her.

Runners talk, especially about runners that we respect and do things that amaze and inspire us. She has running friends that truly love, respect, and want to share her story. That is how I know what Angela is battling. Angela has continued to complete one ultra after another. Her times might have slowed, but her indomitable will has risen to a level that perhaps only someone like **Aron Ralston** would understand.

In 2011 to date, Angela has completed 27 ultras and marathons. 297 of her 303 marathons/ultras have taken place since 2004. You can do the math. Angela's last race was on September 24th. The cancer and medications are really hitting Angela hard right now. She is struggling to get enough oxygen into her lungs to do even the most simple things like walk a block. But Angela is still going ham against her immune system and that bastard of a disease. She is still prodding away one step at a time, but now her 100 miler is a simple 3-miler.



Itinerary

Thu Jan 5

1:29pm Depart Newark EWR via CO#37
4:22pm Arrive Orlando MCO

Shuttle service available but at the last minute I found a cheap rental car.

2:05pm Diane and Tommy arrive Orlando via SW#342, staying at Hampton or Embassy Suites

Why Goofy's Race and a Half Challenge? It was five years ago that I did the 2007 Goofy and need to see if I still can. Besides I never got a Goofy shirt and I need a t-shirt.

10:00am Expo at Jostens® Center at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to 7pm

Hotel Old Key West Resort in Downtown Disney area - for 5 nights thru Csaba Konya
1510 North Cove Road, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830 Tele: 407 827 7700
Near to Downtown Disney and within short walk to start of marathons.
Coffee, refrigerator and WiFi provided complimentary

Fri Jan 6

9:00am Expo at Jostens® Center at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to 8pm

Sat Jan 7

5:30am Half Marathon

10:00am Expo to 5pm.

Sun Jan 8

5:30am Full Marathon

Mon Jan 9

Breakfast Monday or Tuesday with Csaba. In attendance are Bernie, family and John.
Epcot Shuffle? Ha ha – see wild trip report of a beer per country visited.

Tue Jan 10

11:00am Shuttle from resort to airport for rental car from Orlando airport – check with Disney if better deal direct from Disney - drive to Winter Park; requested shuttle allegedly for CO#1078 at 12:55pm since they needed a time and flight number.

12:00noon Thrifty Rental car Conf#FG9L8Y at Orlando airport

Hotel Best Western Mt Vernon Inn – for 3 nights
110 S Orlando Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789 Tele: 407/647-1166

Visit Seth and Janet Elsheimer
419 Balmoral Road, Winter Park FL 32789-5201 Cell of Seth: (407) 491-4021

Fri Jan 13

Noon Return rental car to Orlando airport

1:20pm Depart Orlando MCO via CO#1731
3:06pm Arrive Houston IAH for plane change

3:35pm Depart Houston IAH via CO#33
4:47pm Arrive New Orleans MSY

Rental car Drive to Baton Rouge 72 miles or 1:10 hours (Took over 2 hours.)

Hotel Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center – 4 nights – a 4-Diamond property (cancel last night)
201 Lafayette Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70801

Host hotel is Belle of Baton Rouge Tele 800 676 4847

Sat Jan 14

Expo and offered to assist at 50-states booth

Area Information – AAA Gems include State Capitol, LSU Rural Life Museum, Shaw Center for the Arts, LSU Museum of Arts

Sun Jan 15

The Louisiana Marathon at www.thelouisianamarathon.com with 7 hour time limit

Out and back course starting from 1 mile away from Hilton – see more details below

Participants: Diane Bolton (arriving Friday? and Kathy Kass), Carol Goslin and Elaine, Lois Berkowitz (arriving 13th mid-day), Robert “Cowboy Bob” Bishton, Ted Hobart, Cathy Troisi, Beth Davenport,

Mon Jan 16

MLK Day

Drive rental car to New Orleans – 72 miles and approximately 1 ¼ hours

Hotel Hotel Monteleone
214 Royal Street, French Quarter (Vieux Carré), New Orleans, LA 70130

The Hotel Monteleone stands in the French Quarter within four blocks of Jackson Square, Canal Street Shops, Harrah's New Orleans Casino Cafe du Monde and lively Bourbon Street. Dating from 1886, the Hotel was a favorite haunt of Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Truman Capote. A family-owned property, the Monteleone portraits add personal history to the lobby. Dining options include Le Cafe serving buffet-style breakfasts and cooked-to-order selections. The Carousel Lounge completes a 360-degree rotation every 15 minutes and is decorated in a circus motif. Many guests enjoy their stay so much that they would like to stay longer. In fact, apparently some never leave. The Hotel is known for its paranormal activity, and guests can sign up for an MP3 audio tour that showcases the hotel's history and hauntings.

Tue Jan 17

2:00pm Turn in rental car
3:47pm Depart New Orleans MSY via UA#5144
7:38pm Arrive Newark EWR

Event Name: 2012 Goofy's Race and a Half Challenge
Date & Time: January 07, 2012 05:30 AM
Location: Walt Disney World® Resort (map)

PACKET PICK-UP

All runners must attend Disney's Health & Fitness Expo for race number and packet pick-up at the Jostens® Center at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

Thursday, January 5, 2012
10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Friday, January 6, 2012
9:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 7, 2012
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

From Ellen: Winter Park is a charming small city. Besides the Tiffany Glass museum, there are other museums there, including one at Rollins College where I saw a surprisingly important exhibit of Picasso drawings. Check out "Things to do in Winter Park" on Google. It's a charming small city, designed well by people with money and good taste. There's also a wonderful botanical garden that doesn't come up on most of the Google lists. It became my favorite spot for return visits. It's the Henry P. Leu Garden. When you google the name, you'll get pictures, description and map.

I used to leave Lazaris seminars in Orlando, drive to Winter Park, lunch on the way, have an hour in Leu Gardens, then drive back to Orlando. I've spent a whole day there, and gone back to take friends. Lovely place.

There's a boat trip that circles several lakes in Winter Park and a sculptor's home and garden that's open for tours. The main street of Winter Park is charming, but the shops back in the little arcades are the best. I'm sure you'll enjoy your visit. For a town of 24,000 residents, it's surprisingly well endowed. Not as notable as Niagara on the Lake, but it qualifies as special, in my book.

From Ellen: I've been to Orlando and Winter Park so many times, I got used to staying in inexpensive hotels because I was never there and couldn't see spending a lot of money for a bed.

Winter Park is worth 2 days if you take your time, if you go to the museums, take the boat trip, and spend some time at the Leu Gardens. - especially if you stay with friends who will probably be available as dinner companions.. (The Leu Gardens are some distance from Downtown Winter Park -away from any hotels.)

Orlando is a town that is a gateway to amusement park over-kill that goes on for miles and miles and miles and miles and miles. It's impossible to describe the miles and miles of amusement parks until you actually drive through them. All of Disney (which is also miles and miles) is several miles from Orlando at Lake Buena Vista. The Disney theme parks are on a monorail circle and each is worth a cursory look. But Epcot is huge with pavilions that mimic some of the famous architecture from each of the 11 countries represented. The fireworks at Epcot are spectacular. But some of the "rides" are "not recommended". They do something disgusting and awful like spit water on you or make you think there are snakes crawling on you, etc. But aside from these, Epcot and Animal Kingdom are my favorites. I bought a pass to 5 parks and kept going back to Epcot and Animal Park. At Epcot, in particular, there are events going on all over the place. Some free, others ticketed.

High Tea the Grand Floridian Resort (on the Disney world Monorail) is elegant. I used to try my best to treat myself to high tea there at least every other month. But then, I used to be into high tea (had books recommending tea salons all over).

A dinner show entitled "Arabian Knights" was very entertaining. I'd see it again. The "dinner" is sort of thrust at you in the dark, but its incidental to the show which is beautiful. It's a drive from Disney, but I found it worth it. I also like the buffet at the Animal Kingdom Lodge because I love the food of Africa. I've only been there at night and I find it rather magical. But you and Tom went there in the daytime and found it disappointing.

My favorite restaurants in Orlando are Hemmingway's at the Hyatt Grand Cypress Hotel. This is a favorite that all my friends from Lazaris agreed upon and we went there almost every time we were in Orlando. Dux at the Peabody Hotel near the convention center was a favorite of mine. Gourmet. Tom would like it. I'm not sure it's still there. I couldn't find it on their website

Downtown Disney is not worth your time, unless you want to see the Disney special Cirque du Soleil (which I didn't care for). I don't know if you've noticed, but Cirque always has bits of the dark side in the show. This one had too much dark. But it may be a new show now.

I should be more specific about the Disney rides I don't recommend. There's one at Epcot called, "Honey, I stole the audience" or something like that. Not funny. Another is in Animal kingdom. I forget the name, but it's something about bugs. If it's still there, it was near a fake Baobab tree. It makes you think there are bugs crawling on you. 12 year old boys love it. You don't need this experience!

There was a time when Disney was about fantasy and magic and beauty and charm. It's evolved away from that model. As we've all been immunized by our exposure to daily violence on TV, charm and fantasy and magic have been relegated to "boring". So to keep people's interest, Disney parks and movies have moved toward satisfying 12 year old boys to the detriment of small children and the innocence of childhood. I'm so glad I grew up when I did. I remember what childhood was like before TV, when born. It was about imagination; reading was the entrance to other worlds, and there were no commercials! Remember?

Disneyland opened the year before my first daughter was born. The entrance fee was 95 cents. A great time could be had by taking little ones to Disneyland to watch the Disney characters walk around and shake your hand, go for a free ride on the main street fire truck, go walk through Tom Sawyer land, watch the Pirate Ship come round the lake, look at the magical displays in the windows of Main Street shops, look at all the stuff in the shops, watch the parade on Main Street, have an ice cream at the old fashioned Carnation Ice Cream Parlor,, and buy a balloon. It was all about magic and to my little ones, their big eyes and intense concentration was quite satisfied by the itinerary above. For years we never went on a single ride and loved the place. (Never thought I'd have nostalgia for the "good old days.")