

## The 'Hidden Disney' Part 2

In my May column, we looked at some of the wonderful dining options that make Walt Disney World a world-class resort destination. Now, let's take a look at the off-season events that make this an attractive destination either with or without the kids. If you've never considered visiting Walt Disney World without children, or if you thought there would be nothing for you to do if you don't have kids, think again. There is enough here to rival any resort, and many of these events are free as long as you have park tickets.

- Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival – runs from mid-April to early June. The ultimate event for gardening fans, the festival is co-sponsored by HGTV. From floral displays to expert lectures, there's something to interest anyone with a green thumb. This event is free with Epcot admission.
- Star Wars Weekends – runs Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays from mid-May to mid-June. You can come face to face with your favorite Star Wars heroes and villains, test your knowledge of Star Wars' trivia and meet celebrity actors from the movies. Top it off with the Legends of the Force Celebrity Motorcade, and you've got a recipe for a great intergalactic experience at Disney MGM Studios. This event is free with park admission.
- Night of Joy – this increasingly popular event has been expanded to three nights this year and will be held September 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>. It's a night filled with contemporary Christian music at the Magic Kingdom. This year's performers include Michael W. Smith, Stephen Curtis Champan, and many others. Advance tickets are recommended as this event sells out every year.
- Epcot International Food and Wine Festival – has been expanded this year to run from October 1<sup>st</sup> through November 14<sup>th</sup>. Now in its ninth year, the festival offers delectable food and wine samplings. More than 100 wineries offer tastings, and savory cuisine is featured from more than 20 regions of the world at international marketplaces. Cooking demonstrations are abundant and many are free with your Epcot admission.
- Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party – takes place at the Magic Kingdom on select nights during the month of October. The kids can dress in costume and trick-or-treat in a safe environment. Live entertainment can be found throughout the park as well as a special Halloween Parade followed by Halloween Fireworks. A separate ticket is required for this event and weekend dates sell out months in advance.
- Holidays Around the World – runs this year from November 26<sup>th</sup> through December 30<sup>th</sup> and takes place all around the World Showcase promenade at Epcot. Holiday traditions and customs from around the world are showcased throughout the month-long celebration. A special tree-lighting with the Disney characters takes place nightly. The nightly Candlelight Processional is an inspiring musical retelling of the Christmas Story along with a huge choir and live orchestra (separate ticket is needed for Candlelight

Processional). This event is free with Epcot admission.

- Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party – on select evenings beginning just after Thanksgiving and running until just before Christmas you have the opportunity to join Mickey and the gang at the Magic Kingdom for an evening filled with holiday treats, the Very Merry Christmas Parade, and special Holiday fireworks. In true Disney fashion, they even make it snow on Main Street USA. A separate ticket is required for this event and weekend nights sell out months in advance.

This is but a sampling of some of the great events that Walt Disney World has to offer. I didn't have space to tell you about the Disney Marathon, the Walt Disney World Golf Classic, the Festival of the Masters, etc., etc. Perhaps we'll get to those another time.

In July, we'll wrap up this series with a look at all the great Disney resort hotels that are waiting to welcome you home.

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