



Wyndham Orlando I-Drive: comfort and fun in the middle of all (review)

Thank you to the Wyndham Orlando International Drive for hosting us!

Long security lines, increasing restrictions and fees on baggage, and other hassles of air travel have made flying a bit trickier for everyone, but especially families. This is one reason why we have embraced more road trips, which afford extra space, flexibility, and savings. The down side? More time travel and exhaustion from being on the road for hours.

By the time we arrive at our destination after a long drive, the two things we seek the most are total comfort and the ability to “stay put.” We drove from Northern Virginia to Orlando, Florida, last month and found all of this at the Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive. If you’re heading to the area soon with family, this is a very good option. This resort, located at the epicenter of Orlando’s popular International Drive, is within walking distance of many restaurants and attractions, close to major theme parks, and with enough amenities that you never need to go far for fun (see “Nearby Attractions” below).

After a pit stop in South Carolina the previous night, we still had several hours to drive before we reached Orlando. When we arrived at the Wyndham, we were thrilled to find a nice, welcoming setting with tropical landscaping, small winding man-made lagoons, and relaxing courtyards. The property is surrounded by lush tropical gardens, and there is a poolside restaurant and bar.



Our actual room at the Wyndham: comfy, clean, and modern

Accommodations

Our son has long outgrown naptime, so we tend to have busy, action-packed days while on vacation. By the time we hit the sack, we welcome a restful sleep. The [Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive](#) has comfy beds with pillow-top mattresses, which made our stay enjoyable. All of the hotel’s 613 guest rooms feature these, plus massaging showers, 40-inch flat-screen TVs and high-speed wifi access. Family-friendly suites include an area just for the kids with fun bunk beds and a kid’s TV with a game station (with parental controls). If

you're traveling with the whole family, including pets, you'll be happy to know that the resort is pet friendly, so even the furry members of the family are welcome to join the fun.

The large, modern main lobby (by the convention center) has a nice lounge, and check-in was easy. Rooms here are average-sized for this price point, and the bathrooms are a bit small, so keep that in mind if you are traveling with a lot of stuff. I will say, though, that the closet was HUGE and you can easily get to all parts of it, and the in-room safe was probably the biggest we have ever seen at any hotel, large enough to fit my Mac laptop, an iPad, an iPad mini, cell phones, and more, with room to spare!

The buildings are two stories tall and there is no elevator, but this was not an issue for us since we traveled with multiple smaller bags instead of fewer but bigger ones. If you do have large bags, mention this at check in and they will send someone to help you. There is no lobby in the accommodation buildings, but the rooms are still interior-access (you can't just walk up to a guest room from the parking lot; you need a hotel key card to access the door to the hallway).

The resort is spread out, so if you are with a larger group, you may have family and friends in separate buildings, but it's easy to get around: the property map can look intimidating because it's so large, but we never had to walk for too long. As of this writing, room rates start at around \$125 per night, plus a \$19.95 per night resort fee.



Nearby Attractions and Amenities

The [Wyndham Orlando I-Drive](#) is in a good spot, convenient to I-4 and the Florida Turnpike, and just 12 miles from the airport. Once you arrive, you don't need to go far to have fun on your vacation: the hotel has a complimentary shuttle to the Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, and SeaWorld Orlando theme parks, and it's the official hotel of I-Drive 360, an entertainment center with dining, shopping, and attractions.

Family Fun

One very popular attraction at [I-Drive 360](#) is the Coca-Cola Orlando Eye, just a short walk from the hotel. This giant Ferris wheel, 400 feet tall, offers 360-degree views of Orlando and Central Florida. The Eye is of the newest attractions in Orlando and the largest observation wheel on the East Coast. Its 30 air-conditioned passenger capsules each can carry up to 15 persons. Unfortunately, the Orlando Eye was closed for annual maintenance during our visit, so we didn't experience it.



The Orlando Eye is a short walk from the hotel

Another I-Drive 360 attraction is Madame Tussauds Orlando, featuring ultra-realistic wax figures. Here you can “meet” the likenesses of Hollywood celebrities, sports legends, and stars from music and television. I-Drive 360 also has an arcade and the Skeletons Museum of Osteology, with more than 450 animal skeletons posed and composed of real bones in unique settings.

But our favorite I-Drive 360 attraction was the SEA LIFE Orlando Aquarium. Here, guests come face-to-face with more than 5,000 marine creatures. You can even walk through the 360-degree ocean tunnel, where the animals surround you and turtles and sharks swim overhead.



This is a brightly decorated place with lighting that makes you feel like you are exploring under water. Some of the first exhibits have crawl-through structures and pop-up domes where you can become a part of the aquatic scene (bring your cameras!). There are interactive exhibits and educational signs throughout, and some of the information is even projected onto the “rock” walls. There also is a playground area for kids and “touch tanks” where you can pet anemones, which live in very cold water! (Tip: if you plan to go, ask the Wyndham for vouchers for 25% off admission.)

An especially useful aspect of the I-Drive 360 attractions, including the aquarium, is the operating hours: these are open late, which is helpful for families arriving to town late in the evening or who venture out again at night after the kids take an afternoon nap. (During our February 2017 visit, you could enter as late as 8 pm for the aquarium and 10 pm for the wax and skeleton museums.) Very close by there are many other fun spots such as Ripley’s Believe it or Not.

Shopping and Dining

For shopping, there are a few specialty shops at I-Drive 360 and more at the shopping plazas around the hotel. On a practical note, there is a WaWa convenience store next door, which is handy for travelers, as well as a Walgreens nearby. We bought last-minute items at both stores, and took advantage of Wawa’s vast selection for breakfasts on the go and sandwiches for a dinner by the pool one night when we were too tired to go anywhere.

If you like to dine at familiar restaurants, just about every national chain has a presence on International Drive so grabbing a bite is easy at any time. If you prefer to eat at the hotel, the upscale Cooper’s Hawk Winery & Restaurant next door is good for continental food, and the hotel’s own Gatorville Poolside Bar and Grille, where we ate late on our first night, is a nice choice for a more casual meal.



While we had a car since we had driven to Florida, this Wyndham is one of those places where you definitely do NOT need a car to get around and have a good time. All in all, we found this to be a nice and comfortable stay at very convenient location, and we surely would return for another visit!

Disclosure: The Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive hosted our stay for two nights to facilitate this review (we extended our stay by one night at a discounted media rate); this writing is original and the opinions expressed here are my own.