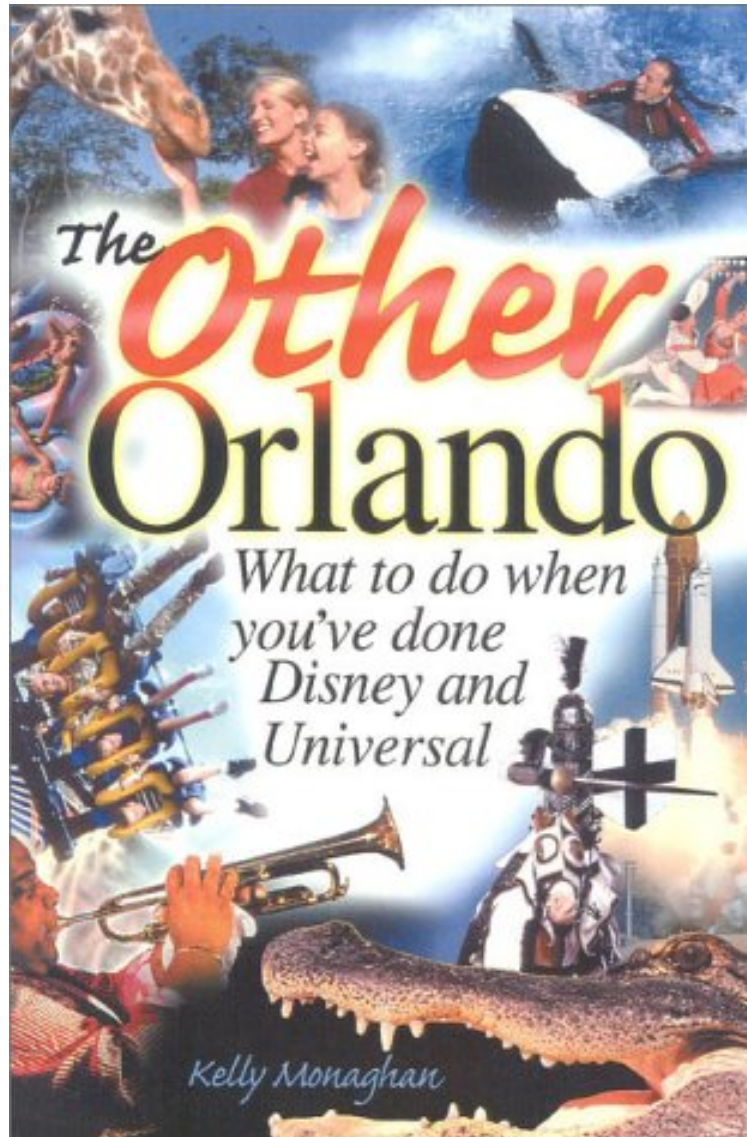


The Other Orlando

Kelly Monaghan

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Kelly Monaghan : The Other Orlando before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Other Orlando:

Orlando is home to a lot more than two giant theme park complexes.

About the Author Kelly Monaghan is the author of eight travel titles, including Universal Studios Escape. He lives in Connecticut when he's not checking out the latest in Orlando attractions. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From Chapter 13: Do It! Cost: \$895 and up Hours: Daily, by appointment, weather permitting, October through May Location: At Kissimmee Municipal Airport Earlier in this book I ventured the opinion that Back To The Future at Universal Studios Florida is the best thrill ride in Orlando. Allow me to rephrase that: Back To The Future is the best thrill ride in Orlando that costs less than \$895. If you have the big bucks, you might just want to enlist for an adventure that could quite literally be the thrill of a lifetime. For a mere \$895 (plus tax, of course), Fighter Pilots USA will put you at the controls of a real fighter-trainer and let you shoot it out against another Top Gun wannabe high over the Florida countryside. The planes are SF260 Marchettis, Italian built prop planes used by the air forces of 23 countries to train fighter pilots. Astonishingly enough, you don't need a pilot's license or any prior aviation experience to fly these things. Of course, you will have a real pilot sitting next to you to get the plane aloft and keep you from doing something real stupid, but otherwise you're on your own in your own personal dogfight, zooming along at 250 miles per hour, pulling Gs and shooting laser bullets at a real opponent who's shooting back at you. And speaking of Top Guns, the guys who run this operation and serve as the copilots look like they just stepped out of a movie themselves. They are all military veterans, many of them with impressive combat records, and the right stuff seems to ooze from every pore. A big part of their job seems to be to transfer their calm assurance, gung-ho attitude, and Chuck Yeager cool to you. They do this through an extensive pre-flight briefing during which you discuss tactics ("Speed is life.") and the airmen's code of honor when discussing a mission ("Lie, lie, lie."). Then it's into the wild blue yonder to practice for a while before they turn you and your opponent loose to fight it out. Laser guns trigger bursts of smoke from your opponent's tail when you score a hit. On a typical mission, you get to fly three to five fights, all of which are captured by three on-board video cameras. When you land, you review the tapes from both planes and get a critique from the aces. Then you're assigned your very own "tactical call sign" and an Air Combat Certificate. The video is yours to keep as well. If you catch the fighter pilot bug, there are post-graduate courses that can lead to exciting multi-pilot contests like the "Red Baron Flyoff" or bankruptcy, whichever comes first. Nearby: Flying Tigers, Skate Reflections, Green Meadows Farm.