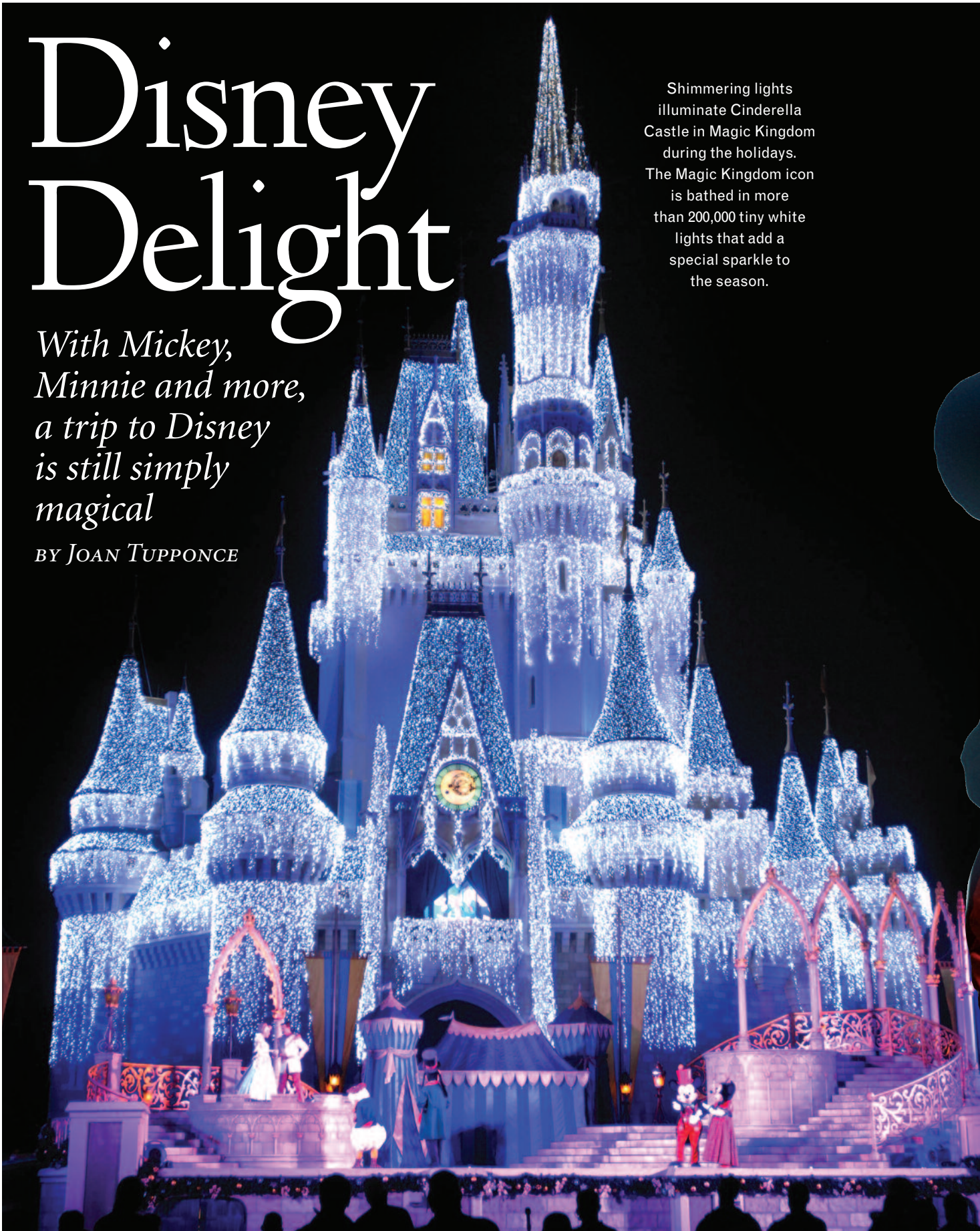


Disney Delight

*With Mickey,
Minnie and more,
a trip to Disney
is still simply
magical*

BY JOAN TUPPONCE

Shimmering lights illuminate Cinderella Castle in Magic Kingdom during the holidays. The Magic Kingdom icon is bathed in more than 200,000 tiny white lights that add a special sparkle to the season.





Mickey Mouse greets guests at Disney, a vacation classic where magical storybooks come alive. ABOVE: Lake Buena Vista is part of 99 holes of golf on five championship layouts.

GOLF ISN'T TOP-OF-MIND for most folks when they think of Walt Disney World Resort, but it should be. Since opening, the sprawling Florida-based resort has grown from a family fun spot offering a couple afternoons of golf to a world-class golf vacation destination with four championship-caliber courses.

"Golfers enjoy playing the Disney courses for a number of reasons," says Kevin Weickel, head PGA professional and tournament chair of the Children's Miracle Network Classic, a PGA Tour event.

"They come for the convenience, the weather, the natural surroundings and the heritage and tradition,"

he says. "Beyond golf, there is so much to do here."

TIME TO PLAY

One of the largest golf resorts in the country, Walt Disney World has a total of 99 holes on the 40-square-mile property. It has become a golf haven, listed as a top golf resort over the years by *Golf Magazine*, *Golf Digest* and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

In addition to its scenic and challenging layouts, Disney's golf program offers private and group instruction, along with well-equipped golf shops.

Disney's courses include Osprey Ridge, Magnolia, Palm and Lake Buena Vista. The resort also has a nine-hole walking course, Oak Trail, a regulation par-36 executive golf course that is per-



The Magnolia Course features elevated tees and greens, rolling terrain and a very special bunker on the sixth hole. The Joe Lee-designed course is aptly named for its more than 1,500 magnolia trees.

fect for a quick practice or a beginner golfer. “It’s a beautiful walk,” Weickel says. “You’ll see lots of native birds. We even have flocks of wild turkey.”

The four Disney championship courses have the signature of distinguished golf course designers Pete Dye, Tom Fazio and Joe Lee. And the tracks have tested some of the world’s best-known golfers as Walt Disney World Resort has hosted PGA Tour and LPGA events.

The Tom Fazio-designed Osprey Ridge course features a unique layout, not usually seen in the flat Florida landscape.

“It has a couple of large ridges and different elevation changes,” Weickel says. “The par-3 third hole is the highest point on Disney World property. Holes 16-18 are majestic.”

PLENTY OF PEDIGREE

Golfers feel like they are in their own private oasis on the course, thanks to the attractive natural surroundings. Each of the courses on Disney property is designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS).

“Osprey Ridge is pure wilderness,” Weickel points out. “You won’t see a resort, car, plane or train. It’s just golf and nature.”

The Lee-designed Lake Buena Vista course stretches to 6,829 yards from the championship markers. The well-bunkered putting surfaces wrap around Disney’s Old Key West Resort and Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa.

“It’s a traditional resort golf course with a fun, challenging layout,” Weickel says. “It’s more of a shotmaker’s course. Accuracy is more of a premium.”

The Palm Course, also designed by Lee, showcases the natural beauty of the Florida

woodlands. Known to some golfers as one of the toughest courses at the Walt Disney Resort, the Palm includes an ample share of lakes and canals. The course’s finishing hole has been rated as high as fourth most difficult on the PGA Tour.

The Magnolia Course has hosted the PGA Tour since 1971.

“It’s our signature championship course,” Weickel says. “Jack Nicklaus has won three times here and Tiger Woods has won twice.”

Magnolia is one of the two original Disney courses and includes more than 1,500 magnolia trees and 97 bunkers.

“The Magnolia is a nostalgic course with a rich history,” Weickel says. When you play, take notice of the special bunker on the par-3 sixth hole known as the “Mouse Trap.” It features Disney favorite Mickey Mouse.

Each of the Disney courses has four sets of tees to accommodate every skill level of golfer, from novice to professional.

“We are very Disney,” Weickel says.

“Bonsu” is the fourth baby giraffe born at **Disney’s Animal Kingdom** this year, and is the eleventh giraffe overall to be born at the Walt Disney World theme park since its opening in 1998.





Spectacular views await golfers at **Osprey Ridge.**

“We have something for everyone.”

Golfers who stay at the Walt Disney World Resort receive complimentary transportation to the courses. They are also offered complimentary golf club rental with the purchase of a non-discounted round of golf on one of the four layouts.

WORTH SMILING ABOUT

When it comes to accommodations, Disney offers more than a dozen themed resort hotels, from luxurious properties such as Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa to value-minded, whimsical themed hotels like Disney’s All-Star Movies Resort.

Because it is the happiest place on earth, golfers and their families can share a world of experiences at Walt Disney World Resort. Two not-to-be missed adventures include Disney’s fishing excursions and the Richard Petty Driving Experience.

“Our lakes have the highest catch rate in the country for largemouth bass,” Weickel says. “In a two-hour time frame during a 7 a.m. trip, you are going to catch some fish.”

Trophy-size largemouth bass lurk in the lakes and canals around several of Disney World’s resorts. You may even land the big one near Cinderella’s Castle. The catch-and-release BASS excursions give you access to

more than 100 new Bassmaster rods and reels.

Golfers who want the thrills of NASCAR can get just that at The Richard Petty Driving Experience. It offers several ride-and-drive programs, everything from a three-lap ride along as a passenger to the “Experience of a Lifetime,” a series of three 10-lap sessions.

Other fun outings include relaxing at either Disney’s Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa or Disney’s Grand Floridian Spa & Health Club, or roaming through Disney’s four theme parks – Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney’s Hollywood Studios and Disney’s Animal Kingdom – and two water adventure parks, Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon.

Magic Kingdom, with the 189-foot-tall Cinderella Castle at its center, offers everything from Main Street U.S.A. featuring parades and special events to Tomorrowland with the ever-popular Space Mountain.

Epcot is home to Future World, where you’ll find Soarin’ and Mission: SPACE along with World Showcase, which features 11 nations circling the large World Showcase lagoon.

Disney’s Hollywood Studios is a working



Disney’s theme parks put visitors in a cheerful – and refreshed – mood.

film, television and radio studio, as well as a 135-acre theme park. Don’t miss “The American Idol Experience,” “Toy Story Mania!” or the “Lights, Motor, Action! Extreme Stunt Show.”

Disney’s 403-acre Animal Kingdom features high adventures with real exotic animals. Check out the Kilimanjaro Safaris, Expedition Everest and “Finding Nemo-The Musical.”

“Typically golf vacations include golf, food and sleep,” Weickel says.

“Here it’s golf, food and you name it.”

Author Joan Tuppence is a writer from Glen Allen, Va., and a frequent contributor to Virginia Golfer.