



AllWays Traveller

Winter Garden, Florida, USA

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

## A future as bright as its orange past

Winter Garden is a small city located some 14 miles from downtown Orlando and within 40 minutes drive of the areas theme parks.

This one time agricultural community was established in the early 1900's and prospered on its vast citrus industry and railroad stations.

But times change and, although citrus farming has remained prominent, the city of Winter Garden itself stuttered and stalled during the economic decline of the 70s, 80s and early 90s.

True to the spirit of the place, however, its citizens refused to let the city die or be subsumed into the commercial sprawl of the wider Orlando metropolis.

Quite the opposite. The downtown area has been restored and rejuvenated and added to the US National Register of Historic Places.

And an ongoing regeneration by those same committed folk means Winter Garden is facing a future as bright as the oranges that still grow in abundance in the area.

Those visiting Orlando for the thrills and spills of the theme parks really should find time to take in Winter Garden and discover the pleasure of real town Florida.

### **Ashley Gibbins**

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[www.cwgd.com](http://www.cwgd.com)

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Winter Garden is succeeding on both counts.



# An independent view of Winter Garden

## The best little city in Florida?

By Ashley Gibbins



Driving along West Colonial Drive to Winter Garden, my 'sat nav' was telling me less than one mile to go.

Surely not when everything passing by was a procession of brash Americana. Gas stations, fast food outlets, shopping malls and advertising hoardings.

And yet, in less than that mile, I was driving through the city's welcoming arch, by its majestic water tower and into another world all together.



Winter Gardens is a real, small Florida town – with the emphasis on the real.

Acommunity in every sense of the word.

It's a place where folks walking dogs will say hi and mean it and where car drivers slow down to let pedestrians cross.

And Winter Garden is a place where those running the art studios, antique, flower and gift shops and bicycle stores will happily chat for 30 minutes with no hint of a hard sell.

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### How to get to Winter Garden

Winter Garden is located where the Florida's Turnpike meets the 408 East-West Expressway and Interstate 429.

### How to get around

As a small town Winter Garden is easily explored on foot. And is also a good place to rent bikes for a ride along the 19 mile West Orange (rail) Trail.

### What and where to dine



#### Plant Street Grill

The Plant Street Grill has a huge selection of domestic and foreign beers and really good food.

#### JR's Attic Door

JR's Attic Door is the sort of place the word eclectic was invented for.

The ultimate, intimate lounge bar, which features live music every Wednesday and Saturday evening.

#### The Chef's Table

The Chef's Table at the Edgewater Hotel offers fine dining.

[www.chefstableattheedgewater.com](http://www.chefstableattheedgewater.com)

#### Harry and Larry's BBQ

Harry and Larry's Bar-B-Que is a family run BBQ restaurant, offering award winning smoked BBQ ribs, turkey, brisket and BBQ sandwiches.

[www.harryandlarrys.com](http://www.harryandlarrys.com)

## Performing at the heart of town

The Garden Theatre, built in 1935 as the first 'talkies' movie house in the region, had an auditorium depicting a Spanish courtyard with balconies.



Showing the blockbusters of the day and movie news, the theatre quickly became the social heart of Winter Garden until the onset of television forced its closure in 1963.



The theatre fell into disrepair, and all information on its original design was lost.

But this is Winter Garden and the desire to restore the theatre was never lost. Thanks to a passionately committed group of 'friends', and 45 years after it closed, an official opening of this wonderful old theatre, as a multi-purpose performance venue, took place in 2008.

The Garden Theatre, now shows classic films, stages concerts and music festivals and has a theatre productions programmes that draws an audience from miles around.

The theatre, which is never 'dark', has once again become a beacon for downtown Winter Garden and a crowning glory in the city's regeneration.

[www.gardentheatre.org](http://www.gardentheatre.org)

## A place to stay

### The Edgewater Hotel

The Edgewater Hotel bed and breakfast, on Plant Street, is as unique as Winter Garden itself.

The hotel features a manually operated Otis elevator, an attraction all in itself when it was installed in 1926.

In the 1930's, Winter Garden had garnered a reputation as a premier bass fishing destination, owing to the abundant population of fish in nearby Lake Apopka.

In 1936, local businessmen leased the hotel and installed a large fireplace in the lobby and equipped each floor with a fish cleaning station, consisting of a sink and refrigerator.

[www.historicedgewater.com](http://www.historicedgewater.com)

## What else to do and see



### The Heritage Museum

This museum celebrates western Orange County history and past cultural character.

Established in 1998 and housed in the 1918 Atlantic Coast Line Depot in downtown Winter Garden, the museum has a large collection of local citrus labels, Native American artefacts and photographs.

There is also railroad memorabilia dating from the days of pioneer settlement to the present in West Orange County.

### The Central Florida Railroad Museum

This museum opened in 1983, is located in the former Tavares and Gulf depot built in 1913.

The museum has the finest collection of Florida *railroadiana* anywhere, including a collection of dining car china - the second largest in the USA.

[www.wghf.org](http://www.wghf.org)

### Farmers market



The Winter Garden farmers market takes place downtown every Saturday, there's concerts on the Plaza every Friday and a Crus-an-car- shop the third afternoon of every month.

## Green sky growing

Finally enture that typifies the resurgence of Winter Garden is Green Sky Growers, which runs a unique aqua-dynamic farm on the roof of the downtown Garden Building.



This is the world's first Certified Green with commercial scale "Aqua-Dynamic Farming" on the rooftop.

The greenhouse utilizes futuristic farming practices and technologies to provide year-round, sustainable urban food production of fresh produce and fish.

The majority of food produced is hand delivered to the local Winter Garden and surrounding communities & restaurants and is available in local Farmers Markets.

Green Sky Growers 3000 square-foot research and demonstration greenhouse is available for viewing weekly on Saturdays or via group demonstration tours by arrangement.

Visitors who tour this urban farm can see how fresh vegetables and fish are being produced without the use of any harmful pesticides.

[www.greenskygrowers.com](http://www.greenskygrowers.com)



### The International Travel Writers Alliance



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