

# Orlando Tourism Workers Need a Raise



# Introduction

In 2018, unionized Disney workers negotiated to raise minimum wages from \$10 to \$15 — and even more for Housekeepers and Cooks. As other Orlando hospitality employers raised their workers' pay to keep up with the union standard at Disney, tens of thousands of Orlando tourism workers finally achieved financial stability. For a time, a \$15 wage put some families on track with a living wage.

But the skyrocketing cost of living has put Orlando tourism workers and their communities back in economic danger.

Our message is simple: Orlando tourism workers need a raise!

## In this report:

- We conducted a survey of 2,415 hourly tourism workers at 6 different employers about the cost of living in Florida. Respondents reported that in the last year:
  - 69% have not had the money to pay rent or mortgage
  - 42% had relationship or family problems because of stress about money
  - 45% skipped meals
  - 62% have less than \$100 in savings
- Central Florida is experiencing what one county government declared a “housing emergency.” In this past year the average rent in the Orlando metro area increased 23.7% — a monthly increase of \$313 for a two-bedroom apartment.
- Tourism is a low-wage industry, but dominates the economy in Central Florida. In August 2022, 1 out of every 5 jobs in Central Florida was in the Leisure & Hospitality sector.
- Median wages in hourly tourism jobs are too low to cover the basic needs of a family.
  - The median wage among hourly workers represented by Local 737 at six tourism employers was \$16.50 as of October 28, or \$34,320 a year for a full-time worker.
  - The living wage for an adult with no dependents in Orange County is \$18.19, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator — and \$23.91 for two working parents with two children.<sup>1</sup>
  - A two-income household with two children and two adults making \$16.50 and working full-time would fall short of paying their family's basic necessities by \$1,533 every month.
- The Central Florida tourism industry has surpassed pre-pandemic profits. In 2022, hotel occupancy was up by 21.1% compared to 2019. The two largest tourism employers reported higher revenues in the third quarter of 2022 compared to the same quarter in pre-pandemic 2019: Disney (+\$800 million in parks division revenues) and Universal Studios (+\$500 million in theme park revenues).

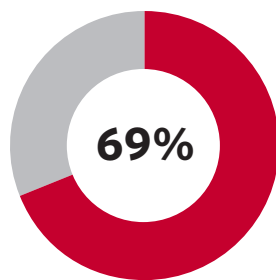
# Orlando tourism workers struggle to cover basic expenses

In October 2022, UNITE HERE Local 737 conducted a survey of 2,415 hourly workers represented by Local 737 in 6 different unionized businesses in the Orlando tourism industry.<sup>2</sup>

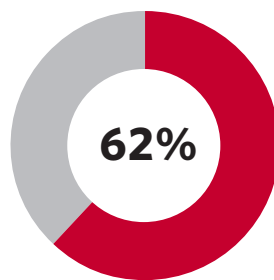
The results revealed that Orlando tourism workers struggled during the past 12 months to cover the cost of basic necessities including housing, food, healthcare, and utilities.

## In the past year, have you ever not had the money to pay any of these expenses?

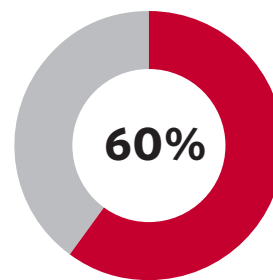
Percentage of survey respondents



Rent/Mortgage



Food



Transportation



I am the pillar of my household economically and emotionally. It's five of us living in the house. My oldest daughter suffers from lupus and is currently on dialysis, so I help her out with my grandson. We try to divide the expenses and buy only the necessary groceries, and we don't go out to eat at restaurants because gas is so expensive. My other daughter helps me out a lot with the bills and if I didn't have the help and support from my family members I would be struggling."

—**JACKELINE PONCE**, Retail, Sodexo at Orange County Convention Center. Nine years, \$13.60 per hour

# Rent emergency created a new state of crisis

Central Florida was already difficult to afford for many hourly workers before the pandemic. But the last year saw the cost of living skyrocket, particularly driven by explosive rent increases that are by some measures the worst in the nation. For many tourism workers — many of whom were already living paycheck-to-paycheck — living expenses have gone from difficult to nearly impossible to pay.

According to one report from Florida Atlantic University in June, average rent in the Orlando area had increased 23.7% in the past year<sup>3</sup> - an increase amounting to thousands of dollars a year.

Take, for example, a worker who in 2021 rented a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,321 per month — HUD's Fair Market Rent for Orange County at the time.<sup>4</sup> This year, with a 23.7% increase, that worker would pay \$1,634 per month, adding an additional \$313 a month to their household expenses, or \$3,756 a year.

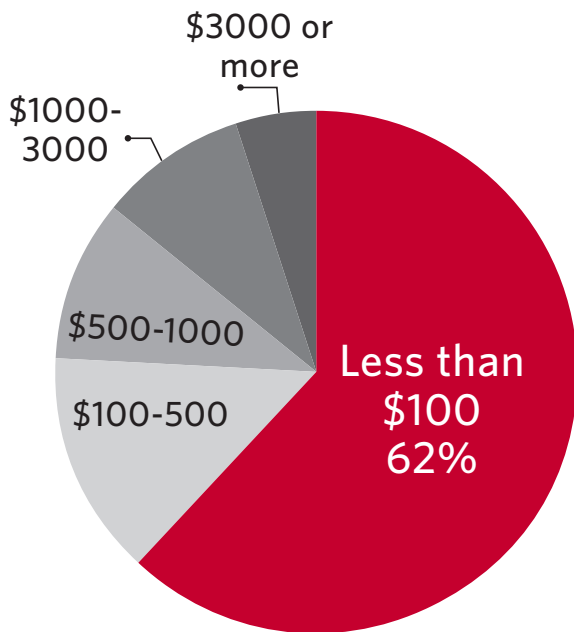
In fact, citing the extreme amounts of local rent increases, the Orange County Commission declared on August 9, 2022 that the county was in “a housing emergency so grave as to constitute a serious menace to the general public.”<sup>5</sup> An August 2022 report from CoStar found that Orlando, Florida held the top spot for annual rent growth out of the 40 biggest rental markets in the county.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, other prices increased as well. Gas prices spiked up to \$4.77 per gallon during the summer.<sup>7</sup> Food saw massive inflation, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) showing the biggest 12-month price increase for food ever since March of 1981.<sup>8</sup> Although gas prices have fallen, the end is not necessarily in sight: the Congressional Budget Office says that inflation will continue to rise and projects that the consumer price index will rise another 3.1% in 2023, which is still well above the long-term baseline of 2.3%.<sup>9</sup> One expert from CoStar Group projected that rent will continue increasing well above normal levels for at least another year, and even then will settle in to regular 6% average annual increases.<sup>10</sup>

Now, nearly three years after the economic upheaval that started with the Covid-19 pandemic, workers have little to fall back on.

Nearly two out of three workers surveyed respond that they have less than \$100 in their savings for emergencies.

### How much money do you have in your savings to cover an emergency?



“We have no money in the bank. Sometimes I pay a bill this month and if I can’t pay the other bills, I leave it for the next month. My husband and I, we don’t go out to eat, movies, stores. I wanted to go to Puerto Rico because my oldest daughter has health issues and maybe would need surgery, so I’m trying to save money but it’s very difficult to do it even for that. That’s how we live now. I have a lot of health conditions, so I buy all my medication first, because without my medication I cannot work, then the next week I pay bills.”



—MIGDALIA VIERA, Walt Disney World, Quick Service, Disney All Star Music. Four years, \$15 per hour

## Central Florida economy hinges on tourism workers

Tourism is the dominant economic engine in Central Florida. The Leisure & Hospitality sector accounted for 1 out of every 5 jobs in Central Florida in August 2022 — a total of 270,800 jobs, almost back to March 2020 employment levels, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>11</sup> The single largest employer in Central Florida is Walt Disney World Resort, with 70,000 workers; Universal Studios alone has another 24,000 workers.<sup>12</sup>

## But tourism & hospitality wages remain low

The tourism jobs that underpin this economy are notoriously low-wage.

Even at the flagship theme parks, which have set the standard for the industry's wages in the past, a common minimum wage is \$15 per hour: Disney settled an agreement with its unions in September 2018 that said its minimum wage would increase to \$15 in 2021;<sup>13</sup> Universal Studios announced in May 2021 that its minimum would also go to \$15 that year.<sup>14</sup>

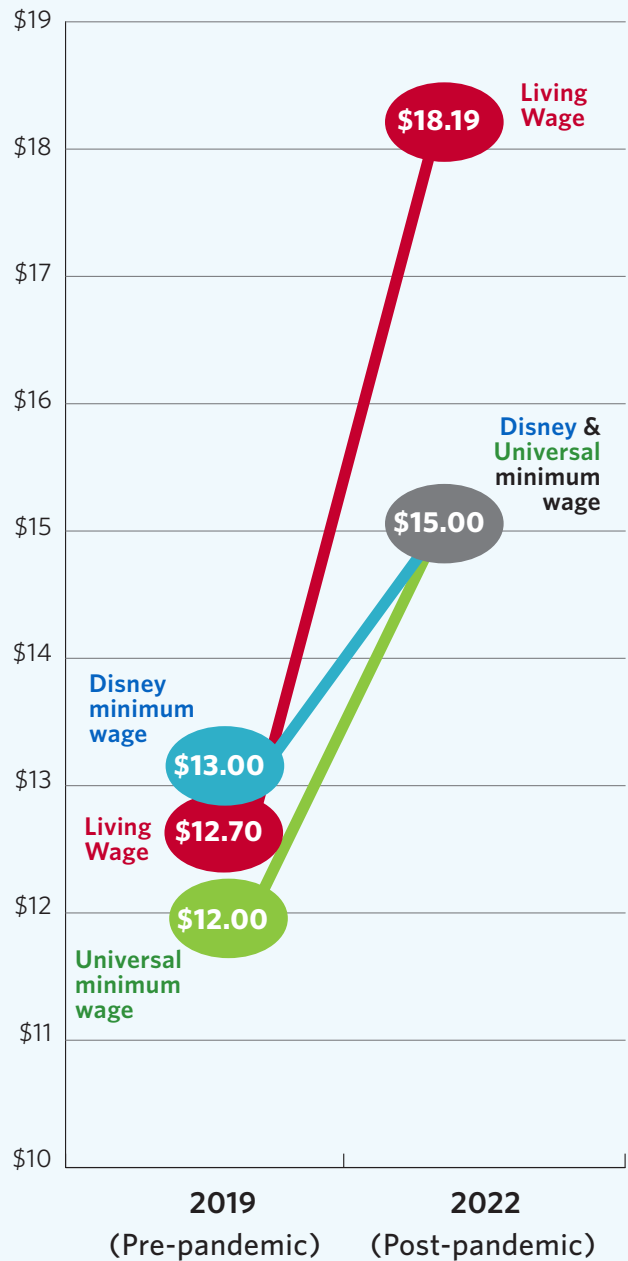
The **median hourly wage is \$16.50** among the over 14,000 hourly workers at the six employers represented by Local 737, as of October 2022 — meaning half earn less than that amount. The **most common wage was \$15.**<sup>15</sup>

Before the pandemic, at least some families in the \$15-16.50 wage bracket could expect to pay their major bills. As of three years ago, in October 2019 — after the Disney announcement that set the first path to \$15 — the MIT Living Wage calculator estimated that the living wage in Orange County for one adult with no children was \$12.70. For a family of two working adults and two children, both adults would require a living wage of \$15.85.<sup>16</sup>

**Today, a single adult with no dependents would need to earn \$18.19 to make a living wage. The family — with two children and two parents — would need both parents to earn \$23.91.**<sup>18</sup>

### Disney and Universal Minimum Wages vs. Living Wages

Living Wage to Pay Basic Needs for Adult:  
Orange County

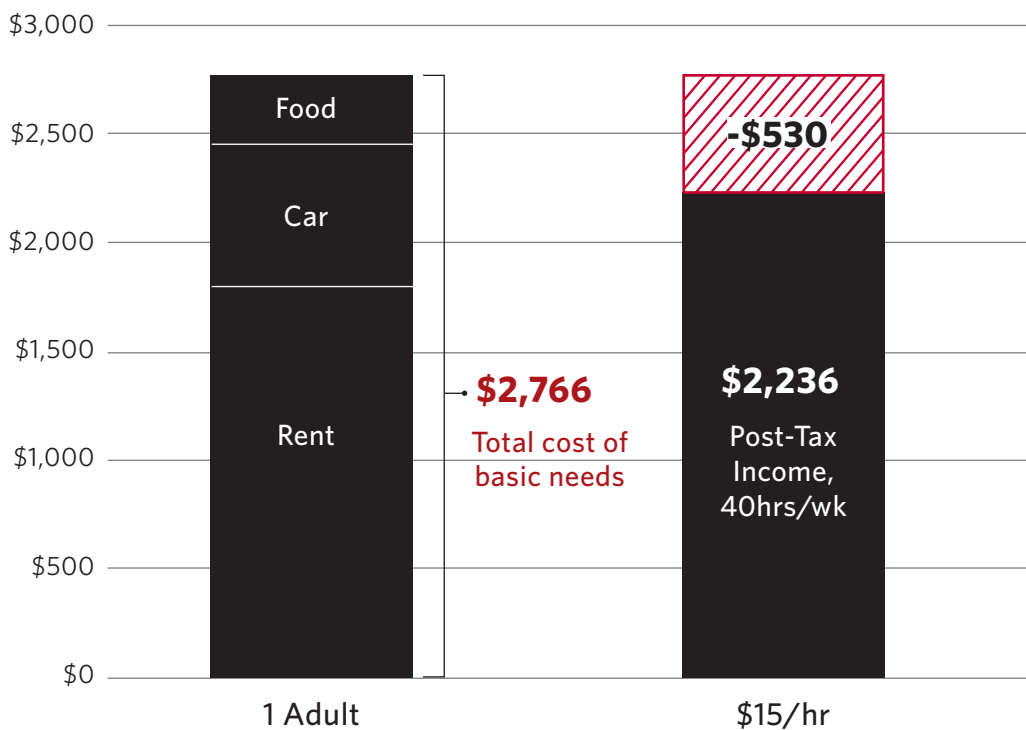


[Source<sup>17</sup>]

# Tourism workers can't afford Central Florida

Just as workers struggled to return to work following the pandemic, inflation has caused the price of rent, gas and food to skyrocket. As the graph below shows, a worker earning \$15 per hour full-time earns \$530 less than they would need to pay for their basic needs of rent, gas, and food each month — just for a single adult. Tourism workers cannot afford to live in Central Florida.

## Hospitality Wages are Not Keeping Pace with the Cost of Monthly Basic Needs in Orlando



The above cost estimate includes only rent, gas, and food but does not include other necessities like a cell phone or internet service. The EPI Family Budget Calculator estimates that an adult in the Orlando/Kissimmee metro area might need to spend \$424 on healthcare and \$488 on other expenses like a cellphone, internet, etc.<sup>19</sup>

The next pages of this report will consider several scenarios with average expenses and wages, and then compare them to the real-life stories of tourism workers in a range of circumstances.

# Case study 1: Can one full-time tourism worker support herself?

Our first scenario is one adult living in Orlando working full-time for \$15 an hour. Even with no dependents, the average cost of housing, transportation, and food expenses are as follows:

<b>Rent</b> (studio apartment average in Orlando, FL) <sup>20</sup> :	<b>\$1,816 per month</b>
<b>One car</b> (including gas, insurance, and car payment) <sup>21</sup> :	<b>+ \$648 per month</b>
<b>Low-cost food plan</b> , preparing all meals at home <sup>22</sup> :	<b>+ \$302 per month</b>
<b>Total expenses:</b>	<b>= \$2,766 per month</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Total income</b> (post-tax, \$15 per hour, 40 hours per week) <sup>23</sup> :	<b>\$2,236 per month</b>
- expenses	- \$2,766
Shortfall:	<b>- \$530 per month</b>

To cover these basic expenses, a worker in this situation with no dependents — a best-case scenario for many workers — would need **an immediate raise of \$3.05**.



I want independence. I work full time, 40 to 50 hours a week right now, making \$15 an hour. I want to move out to live in my own apartment,

but I can't afford to, so my older sister and I live with our parents. I still want to help them, of course, but I want to grow up by myself. But I look at the rent prices around me and it seems like I could only pay that if I worked all day, all the time. Even now, I can just buy what I need and not the extras.

I worked a second job for two years, starting when I was 18 – two 14-hour shifts at a buffet restaurant on my days

off because it wasn't enough money working five days at Disney. Now I've thought about getting a second job again, but I want to be able to see my family. I don't really have savings. I try to save, but when we're short on bills we have to take it out of savings.

We want some change, and it feels like we're stuck. I aspire for things in my life, and I'm stuck living with people because I can't afford living by myself. Everybody should be able to have their own place, not have to look for people to live with. It feels impossible because everything's going up and we're here with the same money. We're just stuck in the same place."

—**MARIA JOSE GALARRAGA, Walt Disney World, Quick Service. Four years, \$15 an hour**



## Case study 2: How does a family make ends meet?

Consider the classic, statistically average American family, with two adults and two school-aged children. That family would have average month costs in Orlando as follows:

<b>Rent</b> (3-bedroom apartment average in Orlando, FL) <sup>24</sup> :	<b>\$2,515 per month</b>
<b>Two cars</b> (including gas, insurance, and car payment) <sup>25</sup> :	<b>+ \$1,400 per month</b>
<b>Low-cost food plan</b> , preparing all meals at home <sup>26</sup> :	<b>+ \$1,042 per month</b>
<b>Childcare</b> for two school-aged children <sup>27</sup> :	<b>+ \$1,090 per month</b>
Total expenses:	<b>= \$6,047 per month</b>
<b>Total income</b> (post-tax, \$16.50 per hour, 40 hrs/week) <sup>28</sup> :	<b>\$4,514 per month</b>
- expenses	- \$6,047 per month
Shortfall:	<b>- \$1,533 per month</b>

If two parents both earned the wage of \$16.50 per hour and worked full-time hours, their income after-tax combined would be of \$4,514 per month, falling \$1,533 short of those hypothetical expenses for housing, driving, food, and childcare every month.

At the end of the year, with no emergencies or additional bills, that family would find itself \$18,396 behind on their bills.



My husband and I both work and have two of our kids living at home with us. I just found out my rent is going up again, the third time in a year. The pay is not enough obviously, I shouldn't have to work 70 hours in one week just to be able to buy food. From working so many hours to keep up with the inflation, it's affected my health while I'm going through cancer

treatment. My saving account is -\$8 because chemo is so expensive, and I don't only pay for myself - my daughter too is going through radiation. Chemo and being so exhausted from working through it is killing me. Now my other daughter had her rent go up \$220 and she doesn't know how she'll pay for it either, so she might have to move back home too.

—ANNIE SIERRA,  
Walt Disney World Quick Service  
5 years, \$16.50 an hour

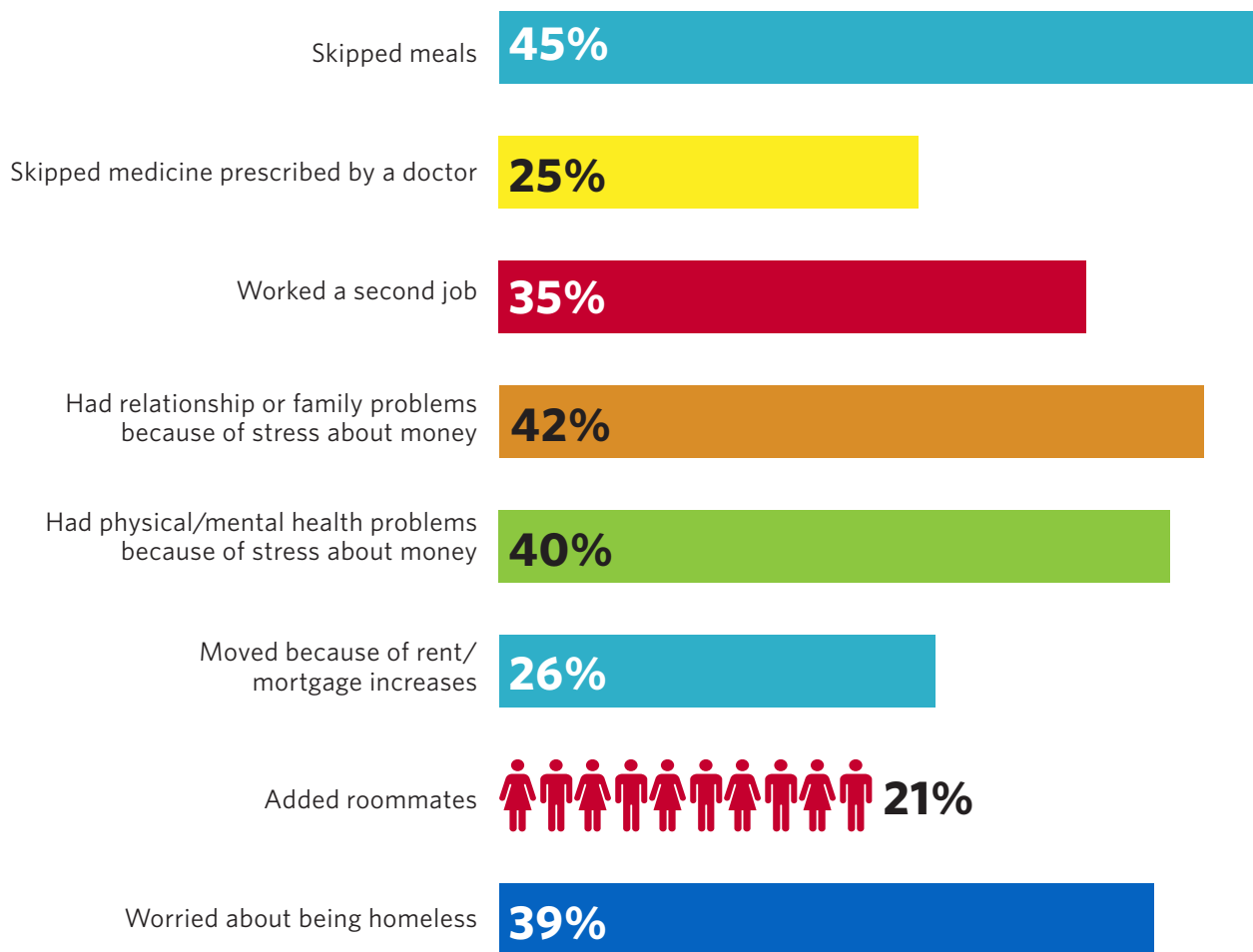
## Beyond the case studies:

The above case studies, with a single adult or a two-income household, do not match the circumstances of many families. In fact, as of 2021, 1 out of 4 kids in the Orlando metro area is living in a single parent home.<sup>29</sup> Each family's structure and circumstances are different, but none lend themselves easily to paying the bills on a \$16.50 wage.

Insufficient wages leave many families facing unacceptable choices: between paying rent and utilities, paying for food or medicine, between tending to family relationships and paying the bills.

The data below shows results from the survey conducted by UNITE HERE Local 737.

### In the last year have you done or experienced any of the following?



# Trying to make ends meet has consequences



## **SKIPPING MEDICINE**

**ROSELYN RODRIGUEZ,**  
**Walt Disney World, Quick Service**  
**3 years, \$15.00 an hour**

"I had surgery three months ago and had to lie to the doctor because I didn't have \$200 for antibiotics and pain killer. I had to hold my pain, and hope there was no infection. I still owe the hospital \$600, so I'm paying the minimum every month. Right now, I don't have any savings not even for an emergency, it causes me stress to think if my children or I was to get sick, I don't have nothing in my savings. My three children and mother depend on me."

## **WORKED A SECOND JOB**

**EARL PENSON,**  
**Walt Disney World Food Handler**  
**11 years, \$15.50 an hour**

"I do side jobs and work nights, as many hours as I can, and it's still not enough to make ends meet. I work full time at Disney, and I put in about another 24 hours most weeks on my odd jobs. I take care of my parents, and I have two daughters who are trying to get started and a grandson who just turned one month old. My daughters moved out on their own, but just moved back in with me last month because you can't afford things on your own anymore. Now we have six of us in one house. My dad was a hard worker, and I'm a chip off the old block, but we don't get the pay or respect we need."



## **CONSIDERING ADDING A ROOMMATE**

**CARLOS CORDONES MORALES,**  
**Walt Disney World, Quick Service**  
**4 years, \$15 an hour**

"My wife and I are looking for a place to live and can't find something affordable for us and my stepson. It stresses me out because even with my wife and I both working full time we can't find something close to our budget. We are thinking of renting a place and adding a roommate, but it's an insecure and uncomfortable decision. My car is currently giving up on me and I can't afford to get a car loan right now. I take care of my daughter in another country."

# Tourism is booming and profits are high

Florida’s tourism industry has more than just recovered from the pandemic. It has, by many measures, surpassed even its pre-pandemic successes. Visit Florida, the state’s tourism marketing agency, reported an all-time three-month record for visitors to Florida this year: 35,628 million visitors during this year’s first quarter.<sup>30</sup>

This year, hotel bed tax collections in Orange County saw their highest-ever levels in May. Hotel room demand and average daily room rates have both been higher than in 2019, the last year prior to the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> According to a report by CoStar, hotel occupancy in Orlando went from 52.7 beds out of every hundred in 2019 to 63.8 in 2022 – an increase of 21.1%.<sup>32</sup>

As the visitor rate has continued rising, the industry-leading companies have reported higher revenues than 2019. Universal reported that the 2022 adjusted third-quarter earnings for its Orlando theme park were the highest it has ever recorded.<sup>33</sup>

	Pre-pandemic 2019	Post-pandemic 2022	Change from Pre-Pandemic
	<i>Revenues listed are for one quarter only</i>		
<b>Hotel beds occupied</b> (out of 100) (Orlando, Florida) <sup>34</sup>	52.7	63.8	<b>+11.1</b> (+21.1%)
<b>Disney</b> Revenue Disney Parks, Experiences & Products, 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter <sup>35</sup>	\$6.6B	\$7.4B	<b>+\$800M</b> (+12%)
<b>Universal</b> Revenue for Theme Parks Division, 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter <sup>36</sup>	\$1.6B	\$2.1B	<b>+\$500M</b> (+31%)
<b>SeaWorld</b> Overall Revenue, 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter <sup>37</sup>	\$406M	\$505M	<b>+\$99M</b> (+24%)

The future looks bright, too. One investor report predicted that Disney's theme park profits will soar even further in the next few years:

The increase in [theme park] profit is expected to keep growing in 2023 and 2024. The report predicts the U.S. Parks to bring in \$5.2 billion in 2023 and \$6.3 billion in 2024, which is above the \$4 billion reported in 2018 and the \$4.4 billion in 2019, prior to when the COVID-19 pandemic began.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Disney committed to a \$20 million annual bonus for its CEO, Bob Chapek, for the next three years.<sup>39</sup> As of March 3, 2021, Universal Studios restarted construction on their multibillion-dollar project Epic Universe, a major financial investment in its Central Florida parks.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

Tourism workers can no longer survive on tourism wages in Central Florida. Three years ago, the common minimum wage of \$15 was enough to support the basic needs for some workers. With skyrocketing rent, food, and gas prices in the last three years, it's no longer possible to survive with those wages. Workers and their families are forced to make unacceptable choices. When one out of five jobs are in the leisure and hospitality sector in Central Florida, low wages in that industry will cripple the economy and community.

With the current cost of living, no worker should be making less than \$18 - which is still just a \$37,440 annual salary, at 40 hours a week. Most workers need to make much more than that to cover their necessities.

The tourism industry's profits have recovered from the pandemic and have started turning toward a brighter future. Workers have not.

Today, Central Florida is plagued with a rent crisis and struggling families. If workers across the region's biggest industry got an immediate, three-dollar raise, Central Florida could start to recover.

**Tourism workers need a raise — today!**

# Endnotes

- 1 MIT Living Wage Calculation for Orange County, Florida. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/12095>, last accessed October 28, 2022.
- 2 Employers included are Walt Disney World, Sodexo at the Orange County Convention Center, the Hilton Buena Vista Palace, the Doubletree by Hilton at the Entrance to Universal Studios, Patina Restaurant Group and Palmas Services. Respondents included cooks, dishwashers, housekeepers, quick-service restaurant staff, restaurant seaters, convention retail workers, and warehouse/food handlers.
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- 4 HUD Fair Market Rents (40<sup>th</sup> percentile) for Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford Metro Area. [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2021\\_code/2021summary.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2021_code/2021summary.odn) and <https://www.rentdata.org/orlando-kissimmee-sanford-fl-msa/2021>, last accessed October 28, 2022.
- 5 Orange County Board of County Commissioners, Ordinance 2022-29, passed August 9, 2022. <https://occompt.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5743236&GUID=638DAF23-A03B-45CB-A8EA-D9BF6149DE74&Options=&Search=>, Attachment 8. Ordinance 2022-29, Page 4 (l)
- 6 “Monthly Apartment Rents Fall in August for First Time in Nearly Two Years; Orlando, Florida, Holds Top Spot for Annual Rent Growth.” Richard Lawson, CoStar News. Sept. 8, 2022. <https://www.costar.com/article/1047069912/monthly-apartment-rents-fall-in-august-for-first-time-in-nearly-two-years>
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- 9 “Inflation to last into 2023, says Congressional Budget Office,” CBS News. May 25, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inflation-2023-congressional-budget-office/>
- 10 “Sky-high Orlando rent hikes top the U.S., with relief years away,” Trevor Fraser, Orlando Sentinel. July 19, 2022. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/business/real-estate/os-bz-orlando-rent-growth-fastest-in-us-20220719-z4bkqcbxwbeaznifamqzpz6tey-story.html>
- 11 Bureau of Labor Statistics Labor Force Data for Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL. [https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag/fl\\_orlando\\_msa.htm](https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag/fl_orlando_msa.htm), accessed Oct. 28, 2022. “Central Florida’s largest workforce is lost in a fog with an uncertain future. Here’s what needs to be done about it,” Richard Bilbao, Orlando Business Journal. <https://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/news/2021/05/07/central-floridas-largest-workforce-lost-in-a-fog.html>, accessed Oct. 28, 2022.
- 12 “Central Florida Largest Employers,” Orlando Business Journal. <https://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/subscriber-only/2022/06/03/largest-employers.html>, accessed Oct. 28, 2022.
- 13 “Disney union workers overwhelmingly approve new contract to phase in \$15 minimum wage,” Gabrielle Russon, Orlando Sentinel, Sept. 6, 2018. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/business/tourism/os-bz-disney-union-election-results-20180904-story.html>
- 14 “Universal increases starting pay to \$15 an hour, first major Orlando theme park to do it,” Gabrielle Russon, Orlando Sentinel, May 27, 2021. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/business/tourism/os-bz-universal-15-an-hour-pay-20210527-5iixsmt4dzaxbkt75tpv7hj2rq-story.html>
- 15 Wage data analysis of 14,424 hourly workers’ wages from Unite Here Local 737 bargaining unit lists at all employers represented. Latest wage data available as of October 28, 2022. See footnote 2 for list of employers and job classifications.
- 16 “MIT Living Wage Calculation for Orange County, Florida,” archived by Internet Archive on October 20, 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190401000000\\*/https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/12095](https://web.archive.org/web/20190401000000*/https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/12095)
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- 18 “MIT Living Wage Calculation for Orange County, Florida,” accessed on October 28, 2022.
- 19 EPI’s Family Budget Calculator. Accessed online, results for Orlando/Kissimmee/Sanford Metro Area, 1 adult and no children. <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>, accessed October 28, 2022.
- 20 “Rental Market Trends in Orlando, FL,” Rent.com, accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://www.rent.com/florida/orlando-apartments/rent-trends>. Last updated 10/20/2022.
- 21 Center for Neighborhood Technology’s H+T Index Total Driving Costs calculator. Cost of driving in Orange County, including gas at a price of \$3.50, insurance, car payment, and car use. Total amount listed is for 1.79 cars; our calculation is for the cost of one car. <https://htaindex.cnt.org/total-driving-costs/>, last accessed September 12, 2022.
- 22 “Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, July 2021,” US Department of Agriculture. Low-cost plan for a female between 19-50 years, adding 20% to amount in table as recommended by the USDA for a one-person household. This cost is the U.S. average and not adjusted for Orlando. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/media/file/CostofFoodJul2022LowModLib.pdf> (last access: September 10, 2022)

- 23 ADP Hourly Paycheck Calculator, <https://www.adp.com/resources/tools/calculators/hourly-paycheck-calculator.aspx>. Assumed \$84.06 in payroll tax deductions on \$600 in weekly pay.
- 24 Ibid., Rent.com
- 25 Center for Neighborhood Technology's H+T Index Total Driving Costs calculator. Cost of driving in Orange County, including gas at a price of \$3.50, insurance, car payment, and car use. Total amount listed is for 1.79 cars; our calculation is for the cost of two cars. <https://htaindex.cnt.org/total-driving-costs/>, last accessed September 12, 2022. (last access: October 22, 2022)
- 26 "Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, July 2021," US Department of Agriculture. Sum of low-cost plans for a female adult between 19-50 years, a male adult between 19-50 years, and two 9-11 year old childred. This cost is the U.S. average and not adjusted for Orlando. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/media/file/CostofFoodJul2022LowModLib.pdf> (last access: September 10, 2022)
- 27 EPI's Family Budget Calculator.
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**Dr. Semrad and Dr. Croes are co-author of “The State of the Hospitality Industry 2021 Employment Report: COVID-19 Labor Force Legacy” and “Why Employees are Leaving and Will Not Return to Work in the Hospitality Industry.”**

“This report demonstrates findings that are in line with our research, which indicates that tourism and hospitality employees work in poor conditions and struggle to make a livable wage. These employees are the heartbeat of our local economy. Without them, the tourism industry cannot function. Tourism benefits our entire community via an economic impact that assists in supporting our schools, parks, public safety, infrastructure, and quality of life. We have been fortunate that post COVID our tourism tax income is breaking records, boasting monthly tourism tax collection records and earning the highest annual collections in a fiscal year. We are the nation’s number one tourist destination. We are also the nation’s lowest in paid wages. Our research indicates that most of the industry’s wages are not commensurate with the cost of living.”

—Dr. Kelly Semrad

*Associate Professor, Tourism, Events & Attractions, University of Central Florida*

“The result of this survey does not surprise me. Our research about hospitality employee well-being indicated that low wages and lack of benefits are serious problems in the industry and are two of the main reasons for the pervasive labor high turnover and shortage in the industry.”

—Dr. Robertico Croes

*Professor, Tourism Economics and Management, Rosen College of Hospitality Management, UCF  
(Dr. Croes noted that he has not reviewed the survey and methodology, so he cannot validate the study.)*

**The Christian Service Center for Central Florida seeks to eradicate poverty through the provision of services and resources that foster hope, well-being, and empowerment.**

“When 39% of workers are worried about being homeless, that should be taken seriously by service providers, local elected leaders, and employers. Homelessness is a life-threatening event. And when that many people who have jobs are worried about it, that’s a serious problem. These survey results don’t surprise me. In our organization, we easily receive 20 times as many requests for rental assistance as we’re able to serve right now. What we’re doing now in Central Florida is not meeting the challenge of the housing problems we face.”

—Eric Gray, Executive Director, Christian Service Center



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