

Enjoying Aulani - A Disney Resort & Spa at Ko Olina: A Disney Destination Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Ever since Disney announced that they would be building a resort at Ko Olina on the beautiful Hawaiian island of Oahu, I had my heart set on going there.

Finally in 2013 we realized that dream, spending a wonderful eight nights there in an ocean-view studio, using the points we have as Disney Vacation Club members.

So what can you expect from this resort in terms of ambiance and ways to relax here? The first thing I need to say is that before we visited Aulani, I literally hadn't heard one bad word about the resort. Every report I'd read by people who'd stayed there had been glowing, with no negatives at all. Therefore, I had high expectations of Aulani. **Did it live up to those expectations?** In one single word, yes! In fact, it even exceeded those high expectations.

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□When you first arrive at Aulani, we found the resort almost overwhelming, as there's **just so much to take in**, and that's just in the lobby! Honestly, it really is like walking into another world the second you step inside, and there's so much beautiful theming everywhere you look. The cast members escorting us pointed out some of it, too, as they were gradually moving us over to resort check-in. While this is a nice touch, and makes for a seamless start to your vacation, I would have preferred more time, just to take everything in. Fortunately, we had plenty of time to go back and do just that, and over the next few days we spent a fair bit of time in the lobby, marveling at all the detail.

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□One thing I knew I wanted here was an **ocean-view room**, and I lucked out when we were assigned our Disney Vacation Club studio (which is similar to a standard room). The second I saw the view from our room, I knew we'd done the right thing, as it looked like paradise outside, with the resort sprawled out in front of us, and to the right, the palm tree-fringed private beach and Pacific Ocean. As I say, this is truly paradise. Trust Disney to find a perfect spot for their resorts!

Because of the way Disney designed this Aulani, with 15 floors, unlike many of the sprawling resorts at Walt Disney World, the lobby is a fairly short walk from any guest room, which is a very pleasant change. Having said that, **getting from one part of the resort to another can**

be a challenge. The lobby, and shops are on the third floor, while beneath the lobby, linked by stairs and an escalator, you'll find one of the resort's restaurants, Makahiki, and the 'Olelo Room lounge.

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□ Just about everything else at the resort is outside in Aulani's expansive grounds. There's no simple, straight route to walk from one tower to the other, which can be frustrating, but having said that, the **winding walkways fit in beautifully with the theming**, as this is Waikolohe Valley. Covering pretty much the entire area between Aulani's two towers than fan out at 90 degrees from the lobby, the valley is essentially a huge water play area, designed for all members of the family. It's somewhere you really need to take the time to wander, as there's so much detail to see. We didn't properly explore the Wailana adult pool or the Ka Maka grotto infinity pool (one of the resort's newest additions) until a few days into our stay, as we were, again, almost overwhelmed by everything else here.

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□ Starting from the lobby, the first thing you come across is Waikolohe Stream, a river tubing experience that offers both **a rapids ride and a lazy river that meanders through the resort grounds**. We absolutely fell in love with slowly drifting in our inner tubes, although this thing really is lazy! Be warned, it does take some time to do a complete circuit, because of the lack of current. On a hot day, do make sure you apply plenty of sunscreen, as some of the stream is out in the full sun.

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□ Waikolohe Pool, the resort's family pool, complete with **Volcano Vertical, a tunnel body slide**, looks like a lot of fun, and is certainly beautifully themed, looking stunning both in the daylight and at a night. I can't say more than that, as it wasn't something we sampled. However, the families and children we saw in there seemed to be enjoying themselves.

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□ Aulani also has two water play areas. The Menehune Bridge area is open only to those 48 inches or less, and is by far the more creative of the two, complete with a **boat on top that regularly deposits water on to the delighted youngsters below**. The Keiki Cove splash zone is open to all ages. I have to be honest, watching the people at play here was one of the highlights of the view from our studio balcony.

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□ We absolutely adored Wailana Pool, perhaps because it is only for those of us age 18 and upwards, which was a very pleasant surprise. I thought **an adult pool was a wonderful addition to the resort**, and personally I'd like to see this idea extended to other Disney resorts. While I appreciate Disney is very much about family, it's also a huge destination for couples, and there are times it's nice to just get away. Our only complaint here was that there aren't any hot tubs there, which

we found hard to understand. Instead, they were located a little walk away, by the Ka Maka Grotto infinity pool, which was aimed at teenagers. In fairness, whenever we went in there, it was filled with people of all ages -- it offered some superb views over the private beach below.

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□Speaking of the private beach, we enjoyed strolling along there, and relaxing, but we didn't spend much time there. While we admired the beautiful view of the lagoon, and the Pacific Ocean beyond, we much **preferred the theming in the Waikolohe Valley**, as it somehow felt more "Disney" and cut off from the real world. The private beach, although directly behind Aulani, it can also be accessed by guests at the JW Marriott Ihulua Ko Olina Resort next door, and the two resorts further to the left of Aulani, Marriott's Ko Olina Beach Club, and the Beach Villas at Ko Olina.

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□Having taken you on a tour of Aulani and what you can enjoy there, in the next in this series of articles I'll be looking at some of the **activities you can dive into at Aulani**, if relaxing in the Waikolohe Valley or at the beach, or chilling in your room or the lobby isn't enough for you.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 03-06-2014

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