

# Using RCI Points for Disney Vacation Club Resorts: A Walt Disney World Resort Review

by Heath Hawkins, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I got my first Disney "hit" in the summer 2010, and have been a full-fledged addict since.

Unfortunately, this addiction is one I am unable to sustain. I find myself listening to Disney podcasts every day to try to escape, but it is just not the same.

My family vacations every summer, but it is usually regionally. We live in northeast Arkansas and typically spend a week or so in Branson, Missouri. Next to Walt Disney World, there is no place I would rather be than at Silver Dollar City, a theme park in Branson. We always spend a week at our timeshare condo in Branson. Yes, you heard me right; we own a time share week, but not Disney Vacation Club.

□ Anyone who owns a timeshare knows that they call you in for owners update meetings when you are at the resort. For years my wife and I referred to them as "Benefit Reduction Meetings," because when we came in it was always to let us know that we were losing some benefit unless we "bought more." We finally gave up and settled into the fact that we bought this, and we are stuck with it. We might as well just use it and be happy. That was a turning point for us, that is until an owner's update meeting in 2013 that changed my life forever.

□ In that meeting the salesman made a comment about Walt Disney World. They always ask us to make a list of the places where we would like to travel, and I ALWAYS say Walt Disney World as my top choice. He then said that he and his grandkids had just returned from a trip. My comment was, "Well, I know we could get a resort in Orlando, but I really only want to stay on Disney Property." He said, "What about Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge?" He had me! I knew about Disney Vacation Club (DVC), but thought it was only for DVC members. I was not aware that I was able to bank my week with RCI (Resort Condominiums International, a time share trading company), and get into a Disney resort. So the next week I was on the phone.

This call was launching me into uncharted territory. I spoke with the RCI representative for my resort company, which happens to be Silverleaf Resorts. He was happy to take my name, information and of course the \$300 exchange fee, right away. Unfortunately, he did not

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have a resort reservation for me at the time. He said to just be patient and wait. That was the hardest part. I made that call in July of 2013, and waited, and waited, and waited. I have to admit I got worried, and almost gave up. Finally, on my birthday in November, almost five months later, they called with a reservation.

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□ This will be a 15th Anniversary trip for my wife and me, no kids. We hoped to be at BoardWalk, but were open to whatever resort that was available. I just wanted on Disney property, and beggars can't be choosers. When RCI called, he had a 7-night stay available for us in a one-bedroom suite at Saratoga Springs Resort in the Downtown Disney area. I could not believe we got it! Seven nights in a 1-bedroom suite for \$300, plus a \$99 resort fee upon arrival. Before this option I was looking at Pop Century Resort, which would have been \$1,000 plus for a hotel room only.

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□ Let just say that this experience has made me feel a little better about buying timeshare and paying the monthly maintenance fee. Though I would never recommend to anyone that they buy a timeshare, this seems to be working out for us this time. Maybe we will even be able to afford to go back in 2015 and take the kiddos. Maybe!

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□ Saratoga Springs Resort was not even on my radar. I spent the month of November researching the resort and discovering all I could about it. It seemed huge, but it is a Disney resort. That means we will have access to Disney's Magical Express, Extra Magic Hours, Magic Bands, and FastPass Plus. This reservation came just a few weeks before our 180-day mark, so I quickly made some decisions and we were off and running. Luck was with me, because I landed a dining reservation for breakfast at Cinderella's Royal Table at 8:00 am and dinner at Be Our Guest.

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□ This is not a review of Saratoga Springs Report, but know that it is an amazing resort and that we had an incredible stay. As the time approached for our actual check in, I elected to do the online check in because there was a \$99 resort fee that I wanted to take care of ahead of time. I worried that there might be other issues that we might encounter, but things went so smoothly. We enjoyed the week in a 1-bedroom suite in the Grandstand section, just outside the pool and mere moments from the main building. There were no additional, hidden fees. The only thing I did not realize until check-in was that housekeeping would only be in once during the week, but with just two people in the room that was not an issue either.

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□ If you are a timeshare owner and a member of RCI, this is something worth looking into. It is not a perfect process, does require to trust and

waiting; but if you get in it will all be worth the effort. We ended up loving the beautiful resort and were treated like family while we were there.

*About The Author: Heath Hawkins is a father of three rambunctious children. He spends his day as a computer teacher and his weekend in the pulpit as a Baptist minister. He loves theatre and traveling the county visiting theme parks.*

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