

Cabana Bay Beach Resort at Universal Orlando: A Universal Orlando Resort Review

by Kim Roe, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My husband and I just got back from our first trip to Universal Orlando.

□ We are huge Disney fans and visit Walt Disney World at least once a year. This year we decided to try something different and go to Universal Orlando.

We always stay on-site when we go to Walt Disney World and wanted to do the same at Universal Orlando. We decided to stay at Cabana Bay Beach Resort because it was the most affordable option and the theming of the 50's and 60's really appealed to us. Cabana Bay Beach Resort is one of five on-site hotels and is the only one in the "Prime Value" category.

□ So how does Cabana Bay Beach Resort compare to Disney's Value Resorts? I thought PassPorter News readers might appreciate a comparison in case they are considering spending some time at Universal Orlando on their next trip.

□ Rooms

□ Cabana Bay Beach Resort has 1,800 guest rooms -- 900 standard rooms which sleep up to four and 900 family suites which accommodate up to six. Standard rooms have two queen beds, a coffeemaker, mini refrigerator, iron, ironing board, hairdryer, in-room safe, TV, table and chairs, and complimentary Wi-Fi.

Cabana Bay Beach Resort's family suites also offer a kitchenette (with a microwave and small sink), a living room, TV and pull-out sofa, a sliding privacy partition and an extra-large bathroom area that allows three people to get ready at once.

□ We stayed in a standard room at Cabana Bay Beach Resort and loved it! We were impressed on how spotless the room was and how clean it smelled. We loved the theming in the room, down to the old fashioned alarm clock and the VO5 shampoo & conditioner and Zest soap.

□ So how did our room compare to a room at Pop Century? I think the size of the rooms are similar at both resorts, but we really appreciated having queen beds at Cabana Bay Beach Resort vs. full size beds at Pop Century. Another thing I loved was having a coffeemaker in the room,

which Disney's value resorts don't offer. One other small difference was Cabana Bay Beach Resort offered conditioner in addition to shampoo and soap.

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□The hotel wing we stayed in (Continental) had indoor hallways and was connected to the lobby, which was very nice and convenient. Pop Century's buildings all have outdoor hallways and are not connected to the main lobby.

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□Price

□I compared several different dates for two adults staying at Cabana Bay Beach Resort in a standard room versus two adults staying in a standard room at Pop Century. The rates were very similar, with some dates being cheaper at one or the other. According to Touring Plans.com, rack rates for a standard room at Cabana Bay Beach Resort range from \$119 - \$199, while rack rates at Pop Century range from \$107 - \$209 per night.

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□Theming

□While we really like the whimsical theming at Pop Century, we loved the theming at Cabana Bay Beach Resort!

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□Cabana Bay Beach Resort has vintage cars parked in front of the hotel, 50's and 60's music playing in the lobby, and old cartoons, commercials, and sit-coms playing on the huge black and white TVs in the dining area. There are retro lighting fixtures and furniture in the hallways, lobby, and guest rooms.

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□Stepping into Cabana Bay Beach Resort reminds me of when Marty McFly arrives in the 1950s in Back to the Future. Everything is themed and seems very authentic to the time period. They did a fantastic job!

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□Pools

□Cabana Bay Beach Resort offers two huge zero-entry pools on either side of the lobby. One side is called the Lazy River Courtyard which has a pool and a separate lazy river. You can bring your own floats for the lazy river or purchase them at the Tube Shack where they will inflate them for you. The lazy river was surprisingly long and very relaxing. On the other side of the lobby is the Cabana Courtyard pool. This pool features a water slide.

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□Both pool areas offer sandy beaches and plenty of lounge chairs and tables. Each has a splash area for the kids and a whirlpool/hot tub area. Both sides have a bar and food options, and a soda machine where refillable mugs can be filled. Music is played at both pools, and you can even hear the music underwater in the Lazy River Courtyard pool! Both

pool areas have clean beach towels available and a bin to throw the wet towels in.

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□Pop Century has three pools -- the Bowling Pin Pool, the Hippy Dippy Pool, and the Computer Pool.

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□We loved the pools at Cabana Bay Beach Resort and spent several hours at both pools each day of our trip. We preferred these pools over Pop Century pools because of the towel service, the lazy river and slide, the hot tubs, and being able to refill our mugs at the pool instead of having to walk inside to the food court.

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□Transportation

□A nice perk of staying on-site at Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando is complimentary transportation to the parks. Cabana Bay Beach Resort offers excellent bus service between the hotel and the parks. We never had to wait for a bus because they ran so often. The buses were even themed to the resort, looking like old "woodie" station wagons. The resort is so close to the parks that it was only a five minute bus ride which was nice.

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□We usually have pretty good luck with the buses at Walt Disney World as well. The bus service from All Star Sports during our last trip was excellent.

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□Parking

□The only negative about Cabana Bay Beach Resort is that they charge \$12 per night for parking. All Disney resort guests park for free.

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□Food Court

□Cabana Bay Beach Resort has a very nice food court which is very similar to Disney's value resorts. The only difference I could notice was that Cabana Bay Beach Resort had a wonderful fresh salad bar for a healthier option.

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□Hotel Amenities

□Cabana Bay Beach Resort has a bowling alley on the second floor of the resort called the Galaxy Bowl. It was really nice and had big screen TVs at the end of the alley. They also serve food and drinks in there. There was also a very nice fitness center next door -- the Jack LaLanne Physical Fitness Studio. The Swizzle Lounge is a cute bar in the lobby that had some good happy hour specials. And for you coffee lovers out there, Cabana Bay Beach Resort has a full service Starbucks in the lobby! These are nice hotel perks that aren't offered at any of Disney's value resorts.

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□ Theme Park Perks

□ All Universal Orlando on-site hotels offer early park admission to "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter" one hour before the theme park opens. During our visit we were allowed entry into the Universal Studios Florida park at 8am every day (one hour before the park opening).

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□ Walt Disney World offers Extra Magic Hours which is definitely a better perk since they have most rides open and they offer it in different parks each day. We wished Universal Studios had more rides open during that extra hour in the morning.

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□ I would definitely recommend spending a few days exploring Universal Orlando and staying at Cabana Bay Beach Resort. The hotel was terrific and the Harry Potter areas in both theme parks are simply amazing!

About The Author: Kim Roe lives in Roanoke, Virginia and has been a Disney fan all her life. Her dream is to work for the Walt Disney company one day.

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