

## Five Resorts, One Vacation: A Walt Disney World Resort Review

by Amy Jones, PassPorter Guest Contributor

If variety is the spice of life, then our most recent trip to Walt Disney World was as piquant as Kung Pao Pork.

We were able to enjoy stays at not just one, but four different Walt Disney World resorts ranging from value to deluxe, plus one night at an off-property hotel.

The term for staying at more than one resort is "resort hopping," but we were bouncing like Tigger on too much caffeine! Still, the result was an awesome vacation that none of us is bound to forget.

□ Our first resort was Pop Century. This was the first time we had stayed in a value resort. We are Disney Vacation Club members, so staying on points is usually the most economical choice. Still, I'd heard good things about Pop Century, and we had decided en route to arrive in Orlando a night early, so I was able to arrange a room there.

□ I absolutely loved the entrance to the resort, with its giant "decades" gracing the sidewalk in bright colors, and the lobby, with its timeline of pictures, was charming. Our room was small, but quiet and comfortable, and while we weren't used to full-sized beds, we made it through the night fairly well-rested.

We stayed in the 1950's section, which is flamboyantly Disney, complete with giant Lady and Tramp statues and huge jukebox entries. For a first night at Disney, this fit the bill with lots of fun.

□ Next we moved to Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa, where we would spend the bulk of our vacation. We found this resort to be truly lovely, as was our room. The resort has a horse-racing theme (which struck a chord with us Kentuckians), and the lobby gives homage to all Disney horses, such as Maximus, Philippe, and Prince Charming's steed.

□ Our Deluxe Studio room was in The Paddock, which was a pretty far hoof (pardon the pun) from the pool/laundry/bus stop, but was still within a reasonable walking distance. Our room, which had cute throw pillows graced with depictions of Maximus and Philippe, was spacious and comfortable, with a balcony that faced the river and the green.

□ The buildings were painted in peaceful pastels, a bridge spanned the fountain-adorned lake, and my morning (pre-buffet) run was an

absolute pleasure.

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□After a luxurious stay at the spa, complete with Princess Pedicures for my girls, we migrated to my favorite resort of all: Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa.

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□The Grand Floridian is a lavish, luxurious blend of late Victorian opulence and Disney fun. And, trust me, when you're at the Grand Floridian, you will not forget that you are still on Disney property. The flooring depicts multiple characters, such as Mrs. Potts and Chip, Cinderella and Prince Charming, and the Fab Five themselves. A jazz band played swinging Disney classics like "Everybody Wants to Be a Cat," and the pianist was rolling out a lovely rendition of "Rainbow Connection" as we crossed the lobby.

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□Is the Grand Floridian too uppity for the likes of "normal people"? Well, we are the epitome of country bumpkins and we felt right at home amongst the scads of other "normal" folks who had taken Walt at his word and decided "If you can dream it, you can do it." After all, the Grand Floridian isn't really for royalty. It's for regular people who need to be treated like royalty every now and then, and it does not disappoint!

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□One of my favorite elements of staying at the Grand Floridian was the proximity to, well, everything. Of course, this resort is a monorail resort, so we found that we could be at Magic Kingdom in a matter of minutes instead of having to block off an hour and a half for bus travel. The laundry facilities were free to use (not so at moderate or value resorts), and I only had to take a few steps and a very short elevator ride to get there.

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□Another key difference in staying at a deluxe resort is the service. Not only were people willing to help us with our bags, but one Cast Member even disappeared before we could give him a tip. And another wonderful Cast Member gave us a ride on his golf cart to the monorail when we told him we were about to be late for breakfast at Be Our Guest.

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□But possibly the best part of staying at the Grand Floridian was that we were able to watch the fireworks over the Magic Kingdom from our own balcony while we sat in our pajamas. Now that's luxury!

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□I could write an entire article about the Grand Floridian, and may do so soon, but we need to move on to our next resort, Port Orleans French Quarter.

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□ We had stayed at Port Orleans Riverside on our last vacation, so we knew basically what to expect. French Quarter is fun with its gator-themed pool and, of course, beignets. Still, I got very spoiled at the Grand Floridian, having the free laundry facility and the monorail so close at hand. Our room at French Quarter was quite a walking distance from the parking lot, the laundry, the pool, the food--well everything. I actually logged 2.5 miles that morning just doing laundry and getting breakfast!

□ Our daughter got sick on our last day at Walt Disney World, so, thanks to Priceline, I was able to get us one more day in Orlando. This resort was a very nice Sheraton, which is not a Disney resort, of course, but was in very close proximity to Walt Disney World.

□ Our room at the Sheraton turned out to be a suite, which was fine by all of us. The kids had their own bunk beds, and for the first time in a week, my husband and I had a room to ourselves!

□ While the suite was comfortable and we had a great night, we could definitely tell that we were no longer at Disney. First of all, there were several extra charges that Priceline neglected to tell me would be coming, like parking and various hotel fees. With Disney, the price they tell you is the price you pay.

□ And, while the pool was fun, clean, and had no problems, I missed the theming, the music, the games, and just knowing there was a competent lifeguard nearby. On top of that, the water slide was closed--which is a bummer since kids love water slides. (\*wink\*)

□ When I first began planning this vacation, it was not my intention to tour every kind of resort, but I'm glad we did. We now know exactly what makes the deluxe resorts so, well, deluxe, and we've now tried a value resort just to say that we have.

□ I love the freedom to mix and match that comes with being a Disney Vacation Club member, and our annual pass can get us great discounts on moderate rooms, like our room at Port Orleans French Quarter. But one thing is for sure--our next vacation will be deluxe monorail resorts, all the way! Again, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

*About The Author: Amy Jones lives in Kentucky with one husband and two future Disney imagineers. She is a stay-at-home mom, a runner, a writer, and a Disney planning fiend. She and her family have been to the World twice and have two more trips scheduled for 2017 to celebrate birthdays, Star Wars, and a long-awaited 20th wedding anniversary.*

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