

'Ohana at Disney's Polynesian Village Resort: A Walt Disney World Dining Review

by Kim Ringlever, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Disney's Polynesian Resort is by far my favorite vacation retreat, but I'm embarrassed to say I've never eaten at 'Ohana. On a recent grownups-only weekend with my husband Brendan, and I made it a priority to try this highly rated hot spot.

We scheduled a 9:35 pm reservation, to give us time to sit on the beach and catch the 8:50 pm Electric Water Pageant followed by the 9 pm fireworks. Since the beach is just a one-minute walk to the Great Ceremonial House, we made it to the hostess stand well before our reservation time and our table was ready immediately.

□ Due to the late hour, 'Ohana was comfortably uncrowded. Even though we did not have a window seat, we still had a romantic nighttime view of the Grand Floridian, the Seven Seas Lagoon and Cinderella's Castle because there were no other guests sitting in front of us.

□ We both ordered a pre-dinner drink. Brendan chose one of his favorite brews, a SweetWater 420 Extra Pale Ale from Atlanta. Being in the mood for a tropical cocktail, I went with an Island Sunset (Seven Tiki Spiced Rum, Parrot Bay Coconut Rum, melon and peach combined with guava-passion fruit juice). The drink was very sweet, light in rum flavor and large. Probably a bad choice before a big meal, but the novelty of it was what I enjoyed (and the pile of maraschino cherries on top).

'Ohana is lush in island decor complete with Tikis and tropical plants everywhere. The grill stands near the entrance where castmembers roast giant skewers of chicken, shrimp and steak. Everyone greets each other with a "hello cousin" to prepare you for this family-style meal.

□ During dinner, a Hawaiian singer entertained with her ukulele and chatted up guests. Everyone was provided with a lei and children and daring adults gathered to learn an island dance.

□ The best part about 'Ohana is there is no stress in deciding what to get. You get everything! Dinner is served family style, which means plates of food arrive at your table and loads of castmembers are on hand to refill any dish you choose. We had an extremely attentive waiter, Jason, who never let us go a minute without a new dish to try or an empty drink glass.

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□The first food we received was the pineapple coconut bread. Sweet, as you would expect a Hawaiian bread to be, but more importantly warm and fresh from the oven. It was difficult not to ask for another basket. Next came a simple salad of lettuce, papaya and mandarin oranges heavily dressed in a signature dressing (passion fruit seems to be the secret ingredient). Brendan thought the amount of dressing was way too much. I thought it was indulgently perfect and a flashback to how I remember salads being served in the 70s.

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□Next came the appetizers: honey coriander chicken wings, pork dumplings in garlic ginger sauce, teriyaki noodles and stir-fry vegetables. We tried the wings first. They were enjoyable, tender with a good dose of sweet honey sauce.

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□The pork dumplings were a big surprise. These are either pan-cooked or grilled, giving them a chewy texture rather than the soft bite you get from stemmed dumplings. However, the difference was delicious as was the ginger-garlic sauce.

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□The crunchy stir-fry veggies (broccoli, cauliflower, carrots) and noodles were a were a meal in themselves, and a perfect base for the main event.

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□The first entree to our table was the peel-n-eat shrimp. We each received about six shrimp that were grilled to perfection. The shrimp was plump, juicy, and well-seasoned (maybe a with slight heat).

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□Our next offering was the chicken. Jason swiped several two- or three-ounce portions onto our plates straight from the grill. We could not eat them fast enough. Between bites Brendan even said, "We need to slow down. I feel so rushed." When Jason returned to our table next, we asked him what made the chicken so good. He said the portions are all thigh cuts marinated in a sweet and sour sauce and then basted again once on the skewers. The chicken is hand cut by their own butcher.

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□Last, we were served the steak kabobs. Large chunks of tender steak bites. All the meats were served with a peanut and a sweet-n-sour sauce. We tried the sauces, but the meats were so flavorful on their own we really didn't need them.

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□For dessert, 'Ohana's specialty is a bread pudding. Now I am not a big bread pudding fan, but Brendan is, and he loved this. It is served with a large dollop of vanilla ice cream, bananas and a side of caramel sauce. We were lucky to get a corner piece, where the bread is really toasted

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and crunchy. It was stellar, and I am so glad I put aside my bias to try this dessert.

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□What we enjoyed and reviewed was a traditional 'Ohana meal. Vegetarian and less exotic kids' meal options are available. If I had one negative to offer, it would be to warn people that the food here comes heavily sauced. I would recommend trying the food as prepared. However, if you find it too overpowering, talk to your server. Perhaps a second serving can be prepared with a lighter touch.

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□Our bill amounted to \$43 per person, and we ordered drinks with alcohol ranging in price from \$8-\$9.75, which added another \$35 to our bill. If you choose a soft drink, those are included in the base price. As annual passholders, we received a 10-percent discount off our food. All-in-all, I would say 'Ohana is not only delicious but a good deal.

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□Another hidden gem is that if you are a guest staying at the Polynesian, you can order this entire meal to enjoy in your room through the private dining menu. For \$40 per adult and \$20 for kids 9 and under, you get the exact same meal described above (minus the option of receiving seconds and refills). This is an incredible opportunity to have a very popular dining reservation, without making a reservation!

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□What I love about 'Ohana is that you are totally immersed into the Polynesian's Hawaiian theme and specialty foods. Eating there is all about trying things you might not normally order. Just like eating at your cousin's house, right? After all, as any good Lilo and Stitch fan knows, 'Ohana means family.

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