

Disney's Old Key West Resort: A Walt Disney World Resort Review

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Last March was my family's first stay at Disney's Old Key West and our first stay at a Disney Vacation Club resort. It may surprise you to learn that you don't have to be a Disney Vacation Club member to stay at one of the properties. Priority for booking the villas goes to members first, but inventory is commonly available at Old Key West and Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort.

While our experience was overwhelmingly positive at this resort, I've tallied up some key points to help you decide if it's the right fit for your family. Naturally, what is a con for one family may be a pro for another...

I'll preface by saying that we checked into Old Key West after spending three nights in the standard Little Mermaid rooms at Disney's Art of Animation. We hadn't stayed at a Disney value resort in five years, but we were blown away by the theming at Art of Animation. So, much to my surprise, it was a tough act to follow! (You can read my full review of Art of Animation [here](#).)

Atmosphere: We arrived at Old Key West in style, via the scenic boat ride from Disney Springs. We were immediately taken with the upscale atmosphere and Florida Beach resort feel around the main lobby, gift shop, and grounds. Cast members at this resort were especially welcoming and would go out of their way to make you feel "at home" around the resort.

Theming: What we didn't notice, however, was much in the way of Disney theming. Our eleven-year-old daughter has become an avid Hidden Mickey fan. Hidden Mickeys were few and far between at this resort, but the ones built into the walkways with shell imprints are not to be missed. Also take note of the fence railings around the resort.

Accommodations and amenities: While our studio villa had no Hidden Mickeys that we could find, what it did have going for it was spaciousness. Old Key West was the first Disney Vacation Club resort; hence, it also has some of the largest villas on Walt Disney World property. After staying in the 277 square foot Little Mermaid rooms at Art of Animation for our first three nights, our studio felt more like a suite than a studio (376 square feet).

Compare this to the typical deluxe studios at Animal Kingdom Lodge's

Kidani Village (316 square feet). This resort also offers very spacious one-bedroom villas (942 square feet) that can accommodate five people plus a child under age three and two-bedroom villas (1333 square feet) that can accommodate up to nine people plus a child under age three. It's no wonder these are so popular with larger families!

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□ While all Disney resort rooms now have a mini-fridge, the studios come with kitchenettes. I made full use of the toaster, microwave, full-size coffee maker, and kitchen sink. This was a little luxury, since we typically make breakfast in our resort room with only a small coffee maker and mini-fridge at our disposal. (Note: Not all Disney resort studios come with the same amenities). I was hoping for more to work with in terms of dishes, but managed with the paper plates and bowls, along with the limited supplies I brought from home.

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□ These studios also come with a good size table and two chairs, as well as a balcony or patio. And the two queen beds? The mattresses were heavenly after sleeping in the small double beds at Art of Animation. We certainly felt at home with our accommodations.

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□ Pools & Recreation: This resort has three leisure pools spread throughout the resort, as well as the main Sandcastle pool. The small waterslide at the Sandcastle pool runs through a sandcastle and opens at the bottom through a not-so-hidden Mickey. The overall theming is pretty toned down, but our girls certainly enjoyed some afternoons here.

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□ Dining: Good's Food To Go is the main counter service food option at this resort. It offers take-out food with a few picnic tables nearby. While it is small, we were pleased with what we could order, including several menu items from Olivia's restaurant. Since we forgot to try key lime pie during our port visit to Key West on our Disney Magic cruise last December, we made a point of sampling the famous key lime pie here instead.

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□ Olivia's is the resort's only table service restaurant. While we didn't have a chance to dine here, we've heard all good things. For an idea of what they serve, check on the menus at All Ears:

<http://allears.net/dining/menu/olivias-cafe/dinner>

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□ Price-point: As Disney Vacation Club properties go, Old Key West is one of the most attractively priced and about on par with Saratoga Springs Resort. It's also sometimes available for room discounts that help narrow the gap between a studio here and an upgraded room at a moderate resort.

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□ Location and Transportation: Unlike most other deluxe and deluxe villa resorts, this resort isn't close to any of the parks. It does offer a lovely boat ride to and from Disney Springs, which we enjoyed on three separate nights. Be sure to take note of the boat transportation times, however. If you're in a hurry, it can be faster to take the bus.

□ Bus transportation to the parks, however, is very tricky here. This is such a sprawling resort that a vehicle is almost necessary unless your room is close to the main resort area around Hospitality House. Since we didn't have a rental car, we actually changed rooms after the first night for easier accessibility around the resort.

□ Overall Impression: At one time or another during our seven-night stay, each member of our family remarked that it felt like we were back in Key West on our Disney cruise rather than at a Disney resort. Some days we enjoyed feeling "away from it all" in a beach town atmosphere.

□ Other days we wanted a little more Disney in our resort. Hence, this resort is well-suited to the reluctant Mousketeer who wants to feel a bit removed from the parks -- and would rather golf than spend time at the parks! Did I mention this resort overlooks Disney's Lake Buena Vista golf course?

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