

## Disney's Vero Beach Resort Review: Reflections On My Trip

by Susan Crawson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Did you know that you can enjoy a Disney resort experience in Florida without setting foot in Walt Disney World? Disney's Vero Beach Resort, located about 100 miles from Orlando, opened in 1995 yet it still remains unknown to many Disney fans. A stay at Vero Beach is a wonderful way to unwind after a few days at Disney World, but it also makes for a perfect vacation on its own.

Disney's Vero Beach resort is a Disney Vacation Club (DVC) property, but you don't have to be a DVC member to stay there. Guests can book available rooms and pay cash rather than use DVC points. The main building, The Inn, has rooms that are similar to those at Deluxe Disney resorts. There are three villa buildings housing studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units, and six three-bedroom cottages. Most rooms face the ocean or have at least a partial ocean view. Beautifully landscaped grounds maintain some privacy between the buildings.

There's very little Disney-themed decor. The most "Disney" spot on the property is the pool area. The pool itself is a very large free-form Mickey head with a lighthouse slide. Although Playful Pastimes, the listing of daily activities guests receive at check-in, indicates that there's only a DJ at the pool on weekend afternoons, there's usually music playing in this area, and there are often pool games and other activities throughout the day. The pool is the daytime hot spot of the resort.

Hair braiding, miniature golf, and shuffleboard are all available in the pool area. Bikes and other sporting equipment can be rented poolside at Eb & Flo's. Tennis, archery, basketball, horseshoes, and barbecue grills are available across the street at the resort's lakeside facility, which can be reached via car, or by walking or biking through an underground tunnel.

The children's wet deck at the pool has the Tiger Lily, a miniature pirate ship, with water cannons and a small water slide. It's not for the littlest of kids, though, and there is no wading pool. However, there are wide stairs in both "ears" of the Mickey-shaped main pool, and that's where toddlers and their parents can hang out and splash around without getting in the way of other swimmers.

Don't forget the beach. Beach chairs, umbrellas, cabanas, and some

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water sports equipment are available for rent on the beach, which is usually pretty quiet. The tide brings in a lot of shells and you'll likely come back from walk on the beach with a pocketful of pretty ones you just couldn't resist. The shop in the Inn lobby sells pail and shovel sets, but before you buy them, check out the playground at the pool. It seems that a lot of people leave behind the pails and shovels purchased onsite, and it's fine to take them to the beach as long as you return them.

The resort has a poolside bar and grill, and a lounge where staff emphasize that kids are welcome. The lounge has live entertainment many nights. The two full-service restaurants, Shutters and Sonya's, share a kitchen. Shutters, the more casual of the two, is open daily and hosts a character breakfast with Goofy and his son Max a few times a week. Sonya's hosts a Sunday brunch and is open Thursday through Sunday for dinner. For guests staying in quarters with kitchens, there's a Publix supermarket an easy 10-15 minute drive from the resort.

What shouldn't you miss at Disney's Vero Beach Resort? For guests of all ages, a walk on the beach, the sing-along campfire, and relaxing on the beach or poolside will do the trick. Our preschooler preferred the pool, the poolside playground, and the activities for younger children. There are nonstop organized activities and programs for children from three years old up until their teens, with quite a few activities limited to kids age 12 and over, with something to capture almost any child's interest. Active guests won't want to miss the fitness center, tennis, and other water sports. For those who venture off-property, there are private and public golf courses nearby as well as Dodgertown, the spring training home of the Los Angeles Dodgers and the summer home of the minor league Vero Beach Dodgers. Nature lovers will be interested in the turtle hatching on the beach and can join the Turtle Patrol (in season) or attend a Sea Turtle Information Session.

The resort isn't just for families with children. There are plenty of things that adults will enjoy. A poolside massage, breakfast on the balcony of an ocean view Inn room while watching the sunrise, or a wine tasting might just hit the spot. Shortly after we visited the resort as a family, my brother and his wife spent some couple time there, and all of us had the same reaction -- we wished we had spent more time at Disney's Vero Beach Resort and we will definitely be back.

*About The Author: Susan Crawson made her first trip to Disney World as a preschooler in the spring of 1972. She's been back to Disney World and to Disneyland many times and is looking forward to her first Disney Cruise Line experience in October 2006. She lives with her husband and two children in New England.*

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