

A Birds' Eye View: Parasailing at Walt Disney World

by Dianne Cook, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to fly like a bird? Have you wondered what Walt Disney World looks like from above? Are you adventurous by nature? Well, if you answered yes to at least two out of those three questions, consider parasailing on your next trip to Walt Disney World!

Parasailing is offered at Sammy Duvall's Watersports Centre at Disney's Contemporary Resort, the only parasailing location in Central Florida. You just walk out the back door of the Contemporary Tower, as if you were going to catch a boat to the Wilderness Lodge or Fort Wilderness Campground. On your way to the pier you'll pass between two buildings. Sammy Duvall's is located in the rear of the building on the right.

Just to give you some background information, I am TERRIFIED of heights! I was talked into parasailing by my sons. My oldest son was going with his friend, and our youngest doesn't weigh enough to ride alone, so I was elected. (You may ride either alone or tandem. The requirement is that the total weight must be at least 125 pounds and no more than 330 pounds.)

The first thing I did was check out the safety of the equipment. I was assured that Sammy Duvall's uses the latest in parasailing technology and that their boat exceeds U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) safety regulations. The equipment is checked daily and the captains of the boat are USCG Certified.

Any scheduled flights are cancelled if a storm is approaching or in the event of severe winds. We know this for a fact, as it happened to us. They called us about 45 minutes before our scheduled flight and cancelled. Reservations are held with a credit card (which will be charged if you do not cancel 24 hours prior to your reservation) but you will not be charged if your flight is cancelled due to weather. We were given the option of rebooking and we did, for 3:00 pm the following day.

They say that you will not get wet and that you may wear regular clothes. We chose to wear bathing suits and cover-ups, just in case. You take off and land on the boat itself. We got on the boat, sat down, were given safety instructions, and we were told to remove our shoes/sandals. Then we headed out into Bay Lake.

Matt and I went first. I was nervous, but the captains put me at ease. They put harness-type straps around your bottom and you sit down into it, the strap goes over the tops of your thighs and between your legs. You hang onto two straps, similar to sitting on a swing.

We went onto the back deck of the boat. I was in the back and Matt was in front with the huge parachute behind us. The boat began to speed up and we were pulled backwards and upwards. I was totally amazed at how smooth it was! It was also very gradual. I was totally shocked that once we were in the air, I wasn't nervous at all, even with my fear of heights. You go 450 feet in the air -100 feet higher than the top of the Contemporary Tower. What an incredible view! We brought waterproof cameras and were taking pictures non-stop.

You can see every park from up there. You can even see downtown Orlando (and of course Downtown Disney). You really get a feel for how vast Walt Disney World really is.

Probably most amazing to me was how relaxed I felt. The fear factor was totally gone, you just feel like you are floating. Our time in the air was 10 minutes, but it seemed like seconds. Before we knew it, we were being gradually reeled in toward the boat deck. One of the captains was there to grab onto the harness and the parachute. We landed right on top of the deck standing up.

There are two kinds of flights - the regular flight is 450 feet in the air and lasts 8-10 minutes. The cost is \$95 plus tax for a single rider and \$160 plus tax per tandem (two people riding together). The deluxe flight takes you up to 600 feet for 10-12 minutes. The cost is \$120 plus tax for single riders and \$185 plus tax per tandem. (Discounts are available for DVC members and Annual Pass holders.) Flights are scheduled seven days a week, weather permitting. During the summer, flights depart every 30 minutes from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. During the colder seasons flights are every 30 minutes between 10:00 am and 4:30 pm.

You may "walk-up" to try to make a reservation but I would recommend making them in advance. Reservations can be made 90 days in advance by contacting Sammy Duvall's directly at 407-939-0754 (phone) or 407-939-0756 (fax). You can also submit a request by e-mailing Disney@sammyduvall.com. Children under the age of 18 must have a parent or legal guardian present to sign a release form and those under 14 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. You also must be at least 5 years of age (a new requirement).

I would definitely recommend this for everyone! Did this cure me of my fear of heights? Nope! But I would do it again in a heartbeat.

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Article last updated: 8/31/2006

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