

Shades of Green Resort: A Hidden Gem

by Besty and Eric Walton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

In the midst of Walt Disney World lies a hidden gem, the Shades of Green Resort. Previously known as the Disney Inn, this resort was purchased by the United States military for use as an Armed Forces Recreation Center and opened as the newly renamed Shades of Green in February 1994.

When Shades of Green re-opened its doors in March 2004 after a lengthy renovation, the hotel contained amenities equivalent to a Disney deluxe resort. Its 586 guest rooms are some of the largest in Walt Disney World, providing a great deal of space for visiting families to relax. The resort lies surrounded by two of Walt Disney World's PGA championship golf courses -- the Magnolia and the Palm, making it a favorite destination for golfers. Guests at Shades of Green can enjoy the same Disney benefits as those guests that stay at a regular Walt Disney World resort, including the use of Disney transportation and Extra Magic Hours.

Could you be eligible to stay at Shades of Green? You might be surprised! If you are an active duty member of one of the branches of the United States military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard), you can stay at Shades of Green. Members of all of the "Ready Reserve" Forces of the United States (the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Reserve, Air Force Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve) are also eligible. Last, but not least, all members of the Army and Air National Guard are welcome as guests of the Resort.

Members of the military aren't the only ones who can stay on-site. Some military veterans can stay at Shades of Green. Those who retired from any military service (active or reserves), 100% disabled veterans with an honorable discharge, and those brave men and women who have won the nation's highest medal, the Medal of Honor, or have previously been Prisoners of War may stay at the hotel.

If you are a civilian who currently works for the Department of Defense or are a retired Department of Defense employee, you are also eligible to enjoy Shades of Green. If you are a contract worker with a private company working full-time at a military post within the U.S. or any length of employment outside the U.S., you are eligible. If you are a member of one of those civilian organizations that support our armed forces (typically, the American Red Cross, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), or United Service Organization (USO)) and are with U.S. troops overseas, you can stay on-site at Shades of Green.

Specific family members may also be able to stay at the resort in their own right. The spouses of active duty or reserve military personnel, or spouses of service members currently Prisoners of War or Missing in Action are eligible. Surviving spouses of military personal who died on active duty or those spouses who survive the death of a military retiree may stay at Shades of Green until they remarry. Children under 21 years old who are orphans of military personal may also stay at the hotel. Former (i.e. divorced) spouses of military personnel who served at least twenty years are also eligible until they remarry. Finally, spouses of Department of Defense civilians can also stay at Shades of Green.

There are a few groups of people who don't fall in any regular grouping that may still enjoy Shades of Green. U.S. Federal employees assigned outside the United States and any uniformed member of the Public Health Service or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are eligible. So are Federal employees who work on a Department of Defense installation. Finally, members of the general public and cadets of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) may stay at Shades of Green under certain specific circumstances. (See the Shades of Green web site at <http://www.shadesofgreen.org/service.htm> for details.)

If you are a member of any of the eligible groups above, you may make reservations at Shades of Green. The resort will inquire upon your reservation if you meet one of the above requirements but will accept your word to make the reservation. Please note that when you actually check into the hotel, you must prove your status. Often this requires simply an identification card like those produced by the Department of Defense. If you are a member of the more unique categories (like someone with the USO serving overseas), inquire with Shades of Green staff when making your reservations as to what specific documentation will be required at check-in.

What if you still want to stay at Shades of Green and don't meet any of the above requirements? Don't worry; all hope is not lost yet. Do you know anyone who is a member of any group listed above? Is your father a retired veteran? Is your daughter serving on active duty? If so, take a trip to Disney World with them!

Each member of the above group may sponsor up to three rooms for guests. There are only a few requirements to be met. First, the sponsor (i.e. the person who is in one of the above groups) must be a registered guest at the same time. Second, the sponsor must also accompany their guest during the purchase of tickets at Shades of Green. Finally, the sponsor must insure that their guests follow all resort rules.

Shades of Green also has a policy that allows the dependent spouses of

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military (active or reserves), retirees, or Department of Defense employees to also sponsor up to three rooms. These rooms are in addition to the rooms mentioned above. Thus, a guest who is an active duty member of the military can reserve three rooms and his or her spouse may reserve an additional three rooms. That is a total of six rooms for non-eligible guests who may now enjoy Shades of Green! There is one exception to this rule. During Shades of Green "Hollydays" (i.e. during the Christmas through New Year period), a dependent spouse may not reserve any rooms. Other members of the above listed groups can still reserve their three rooms as normal.

Prices at Shades of Green are dependent on which of the above categories you fit into. Those guests who are currently serving in the military or retired from the military holding a rank from E-1 to E-5 will pay \$72 per night for a standard room (\$76 after October 1). Guests who are currently serving or retired from the military and held a rank of O-4 to O-10 or CW-4 or CW-5, current Federal employees at levels GS-11 to SES or NF-4 to NF-6, and all retired Department of Defense employees will pay \$104 per night for a standard room (\$106 after October 1). All other members not specifically mentioned in the two above groups fall in the middle and will pay \$97 per night for a standard room (\$99 after October 1). Guests of a Shades of Green sponsor pay at the sponsor's rate. (Additional Shades of Green room rates can be found here: <http://www.shadesofgreen.org/PDFgallery.htm>).

Shades of Green is the only resort on Disney property that requires its guest to meet certain criteria before allowing entry. If these requirements are met, guests will be repaid with accommodations equal to a Disney deluxe resort for a price equivalent to a Disney value resort. It's a hard deal to beat if you are a deserving member of one of the above eligible classes. Staying at Shades of Green will allow guests to concentrate on the true purpose of their visit; experiencing all the magic available throughout Walt Disney World.

The Armed Forces Recreation Center at Shades of Green is located on the grounds at Walt Disney World. This resort provides deluxe resort accommodations at value resort prices. It also provides anyone staying there with the same benefits as guests at any of the Disney-owned properties. Once you have determined that you are eligible to stay at Shades of Green, the next step is to see if you can manage to reserve a room at this busy resort.

The popularity of Shades of Green means that it is often filled to ninety percent capacity. For this reason, it is necessary that anyone who wants to stay at the resort do some advance planning. Reservations at Shades of Green should be made as soon as you begin planning your Disney

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trip. Each room reserved requires a deposit of one night's stay. Note that the deposit is for each room not each reservation, so if you are reserving multiple rooms for sponsored guests the money required can rapidly add up. Additionally, keep in mind that Shades of Green has a thirty-day notice cancellation policy. If you cancel your reservations less than thirty days before your visit, you lose your room deposit for each room.

Reservations at Shades of Green can be made up to 53 weeks in advance, though as a practical matter, it is not necessary to do so, even during peak or holiday season. Usually, you can wait until nine months before your trip to make reservations during these seasons. You can wait still longer during the less visited times, ranging from six months during the regular season to as little as two to three weeks during the value season. There is one important exception to this rule: due to the limited number of Family Suites at Shades of Green (there are only eleven suites in the entire hotel), these rooms are almost always booked up months in advance during any season. If you would like to stay in these rooms, contact Shades of Green as soon as possible to reserve them.

If Shades of Green is booked up when you call, ask to be placed on a room wait list. It is not unusual for those on the wait list to eventually get rooms at the resort. This is because potential Shades of Green guests often make reservations that they are unable to keep for one reason or another. Facing the possibility of deposit forfeiture, these guests end up canceling their rooms thirty to forty-five days before their arrival date. Shades of Green then begins calling those on the wait list to see if they are still interested in staying at the resort. If the wait listed person still wants the available room, Shades of Green provides them with the reservation. If not, the resort moves down the wait list to the next person. It is possible for someone to be called only a few days before your scheduled visit. Thus, if you want to take advantage of the wait list, any vacation plans you make need to be very flexible, as you may need to cancel them on very short notice.

Whether you request the wait list or not, you should inquire as to whether Shades of Green can make an overflow reservation at one of the other resorts on Disney property. You may specify what type of Disney resort (value, moderate or deluxe) at which you would like your overflow reservations to be made. Although you may request a specific resort (like Port Orleans or All-Star Sports), it is not guaranteed that you will be placed at that particular resort. The only guarantee is that you will be placed at the type of resort you request. Another drawback to these overflow reservations is the pricing. While Shades of Green guests do get a discount on the regular Disney room rate, it may be possible to

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find greater room savings by booking the same room through another method.

Shades of Green reservations can be made by calling 1-888-593-2242 or on the Shades of Green web site at <http://www.shadesofgreen.org>. If you use the web site (which is the preferred method) and discover that the resort does not have any rooms available, you may make an overflow request for a room elsewhere on Disney property. Shades of Green will process your request in about a week and contact you either by email or telephone with additional information.

Now that you know the details of how to make a room reservation at Shades of Green, what types of rooms are available to reserve? The resort has both standard rooms and Family Suites to choose from; all of which have been recently renovated. Standard rooms are large by Walt Disney World Resort standards, at over 400 square feet. All standard rooms contain two queen-sized beds and a single sleeper sofa. Each room also comes with a seating area with a table and two comfortable chairs and also contains a refrigerator, in-room safe, iron and ironing board. Even with all the above amenities, the large size of the room means that there is still ample room for guests to move about.

In addition to the standard rooms, Shades of Green offers two types of Family Suites: the six-person Family Suite and the eight-person Family Suite. Both types of Family Suites contain a Master Bedroom with a king-sized bed and full bathroom. Each suite also contains a living area with two queen-sized sofa beds and a dining area with table and chairs. Another full-sized bathroom is located off this living area. All suites also contain the standard refrigerator, in-room safe, iron and ironing board. The major difference between the two types of suites is the addition of a fold-down Murphy Bed in the eight-person suite.

The bathrooms in a standard Shades of Green room are typical of those found in most Disney deluxe resorts. Each contains a large vanity area with two sinks, separated from a combination bath/shower and toilet area. In addition to the normal amenities, the vanity area also contains a 4-cup coffeemaker and hairdryer for guest use. Shades of Green does have some unique features in the bathroom, however. Unlike most resorts, Shades of Green does not provide individual packages of soap, shampoo, conditioner or the like. Instead, the bath area contains pump dispensers for such items, so you won't be stocking up on any free soap or shampoo while staying at this resort. Also, Shades of Green only provides one packet of coffee per day for the coffeemaker. If you require more to get going in the morning, you may need to bring or buy additional packets.

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The resort rooms available at Shades of Green are impressive by anyone's standards. If you meet the eligibility requirements and do the proper advanced planning to get a reservation at the resort, you will be amply rewarded with the accommodations you acquired. If you want to see photos of the available rooms at Shades of Green or learn more about the resort's other amenities, including their five restaurants, ticket center or Shades of Green-provided transportation, go to <http://www.shadesofgreen.org> or call 1-888-593-2242 for more information.

About The Author: Besty and Eric Walton are PassPorter readers and guest columnists. They've enjoyed visits to the Shades of Green Resort many times.

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