

Disney's Port Orleans Riverside Resort: Southern Charm

by Eileen Farnsworth, PassPorter Guest Contributor

After not visiting Walt Disney World for over 25 years, my family and I decided that it was time to take a vacation there. So in December 2005, my husband, his parents, our four children and I took the plunge. I was hooked! Since then I have been back three times, and can't get enough. When I tell friends or family members about yet another upcoming Disney trip, I get strange looks or questions like, "You're going again?" My sister recently asked me, "Why do you like going to Disney World so much? What makes it so special for you?"

I gave my sister's question some serious thought before answering, "You know, I'm not sure why. While I love the parks, the thing that really makes me love going there are the Disney resorts. They are so beautiful, and have such creative theming, that staying at one of them is almost like having two vacations in one. My husband, Mark and I have stayed at a different Disney resort each time we have gone to Walt Disney World. We recently returned from a 6-night stay at Port Orleans Riverside.

I have to say that that staying there truly did make our visit to Walt Disney World feel like two vacations in one! Staying at this resort, you almost feel as though you have left Orlando and have been transported to the Deep South. When you stay at Disney's Port Orleans Riverside, you have entered a place that has a beautiful and relaxing setting, both by day and by night. You also will be treated to plenty of Southern charm! And to top it all off, there are plenty of fun activities that you and your family can enjoy during your time there.

Climbing off our Disney's Magical Express bus, we headed straight toward the registration desk of the Sassagoula Steamboat Company building. We checked in, and then walked down the hallway to grab some lunch at the Riverside Mill Food Court. Right away we noticed the low-level lighting, the dark wood beams, and the large windows with a view of the marina that gave the room a pleasant and distinct ambiance. Before sitting down to eat, I went to the ladies' room to wash my hands. I think my husband was surprised when I immediately returned to our table and said, "Give me the camera--I need to take a picture of the toilet!" In the stalls were old-fashioned commodes, complete with wooden seats and an overhead water tank with a flushing chain. We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto!

Since our room wasn't ready yet, Mark and I decided to take a walk on the grounds. We went outside and saw the large, operating water wheel and the beautiful Sassagoula River. We went across a foot bridge and walked along the length of Magnolia Bend, sometimes referred to as the "Mansion Section" of Riverside. The buildings are beautiful renditions of southern plantations. The large green lawns are dotted with magnolia trees, flower-filled gazebos and water fountains. We stopped and watched some boats heading down the sun-glistened water. We continued our walk through Alligator Bayou (also in Riverside) and down to the French Quarter, Port Orleans Riverside's sister resort. As we strolled through each of the areas, I said to my husband, "Oh, I wish we were staying in this section!" The Alligator Bayou buildings are pretty with their painted wood railings and shutters. Port Orleans French Quarter has narrow brick-lined "streets" with names like "Rue D'Baga" and "Cafe au Lait Way," and beautiful wrought-iron railings on its buildings.

If walking through Port Orleans is beautiful and relaxing during the day, then strolling through the same area at night is simply breathtaking and magical. Whether you're gazing at the moonlit Sassagoula River or sitting on a bench listening to the clip-clop of the horse's hooves from the horse-drawn carriage, you can't help but be entranced.

I had read that the Sassagoula Floatworks and Food Factory made something called beignets (pronounced ben-yays) that were supposed to be good, so my husband and I decided to try those out. Oh, were we glad that we did! The baker deep-fries rectangular pieces of dough and then sprinkles them with powdered sugar, right there while you wait. The beignets are delicious, but be forewarned. If you don't like getting your clothes or face dirty when you eat, you're in trouble. Even the most careful of eaters will probably be sitting at their table with powdered-sugar rings around their mouths and even more sugar dusted all over their shirt. I think that the cast members who have to clean up after beignet eaters should get extra pay!

The Port Orleans Resort is brimming with "Southern Charm." Of course, southern charm can't exist without the people who are supplying it. The ladies at the Food Court paraded around one morning and in their own special way (banging on pots and pans) wished a happy birthday to a young lady. My favorite instance of southern charm occurred quietly--I may have been the only one who noticed. While riding the boat from Downtown Disney back to the resort, we came upon another boat going in the opposite direction. As the two boat drivers passed each other, they tipped their hats and gave a slight bow to each other. I thought that it was just the thing that a southern gentleman might do! Whether you're spending a leisurely day away from the theme parks, or just

relaxing at the end of a long day, there are plenty of fun activities that the whole family can enjoy.

Go to the marina and rent a boat so that you can enjoy the river up close. Or rent a bike (for one) or a surrey bike (for up to 4 people), and explore the vast grounds of the resort. Also, there are playgrounds where your children can play. Even more popular are the pools. Whether you are a child or an adult, who can resist swimming in a pool where a giant clam spews water?

Another activity that my husband and I thoroughly enjoyed was watching "Bob, the Piano Man" at the River Roost Lounge. Bob involves the entire audience in his performance while he sings and literally "rocks and rolls" his piano. I think that Bob is one of the few people who can get grown men to sing songs like "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," "I Got You Babe," and "Yippee-I-Aye, Yippee-I-Oh!" (The latter was sung while, at Bob's suggestion, a few guys pranced around as if they were riding horses!) It was definitely a performance to remember!

Walt Disney World has so many wonderful resort hotels that it can be hard to choose between them. But, Port Orleans is so beautiful, so full of southern charm, and so full of fun activities for the whole family that you simply must choose to stay here at least once. (That is, "Ya'll just gotta come visit!")

About The Author: Eileen Farnsworth "discovered the magic" of Walt Disney World in 2005. She and her husband Mark have 4 children. Eileen is secretly planning her family's next trip to Disney World; at least she wishes she were!

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