

## Fort Wilderness: A Resort Full of Adventure

by Rob Sielert, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When you pull into Disney's Fort Wilderness, it's like being transported back to the pioneer days.

Well, without all the danger and with a lot of modern conveniences! This Walt Disney World resort has so many things to see and do; it's almost like a theme park itself. For the family that enjoys the great outdoors, there's no better place to stay on Disney property.

Let's start with the options for lodging. This is the only Disney resort where you can actually bring your own! Fort Wilderness is broken into several camping loops. Most are for people with tents or Recreational Vehicles (RV's), while others have cabins available for rental. The first time my family and I vacationed at Fort Wilderness, we rented an RV. We had never stayed in an RV before, let alone renting and driving one, but we were up for the adventure. Luckily, we received thorough training from the rental place before we were sent off to fend for ourselves. Everything worked out great, and it was definitely a unique and fun way to spend our week.

The next time we stayed at Fort Wilderness, we were feeling even more adventurous -- we brought our tent with us on the plane. We were very glad that our baggage arrived on schedule! The highlight for our son was the toad we discovered under our tent while breaking down camp on the inevitable sad last day of our Disney vacation. The toad kept him entertained while Mom and Dad were busy packing up.

Another option for lodging is to reserve one of the cabins, which sleep up to six people.

Fort Wilderness is one of the nicest campgrounds you will ever find. The sites are kept very clean, and the staff is always friendly and helpful. One of the biggest differences between this and other campgrounds are the comfort stations. That's Disney-speak for rest rooms and showers. They are all roomy, air-conditioned, and from my experience, clean. There are also ice machines, so it's easy to keep your cooler stocked.

One of the great things about Fort Wilderness is the amount of activities available. There's truly something for everyone here. How about fishing, boating, canoeing, and horseback riding? Not enough for you? Okay, how about swimming, tennis, basketball, horseshoes, and

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bike riding. Still not enough? How about a visit to the Tri-Circle D Ranch, where you can visit the horse barn (be sure to look out for some neat old photos of Walt himself) or visit the petting farm. There are even pony rides for the kids. How about a leisurely nature walk? You're sure to see peacocks, squirrels, and lizards. If you're lucky, you might even spot a deer or two. And I saved the best for last. How about a campfire sing-a-long with Chip and Dale, followed by a Disney movie in the woods, all for free. Yes, it's true - a fun event for the whole family at Walt Disney World that's absolutely free. Be sure to get there early, as seating is limited. You can even bring your own marshmallows to roast on the campfire or buy some and a roasting stick while you're there. You can also catch the Electrical Water Pageant every night, weather permitting, from the dock at the marina. This is a light and music show presented from floating barges right on Bay Lake.

Fort Wilderness is a big place. Luckily it has its own internal bus system. There are three main bus routes that run from one end of the resort to the other. All three make a stop at the Outpost Depot and Settlement Depot, where you can catch a bus to the parks or Downtown Disney. You can also catch a ferry at the marina for a fun ride to the Magic Kingdom. While it's possible to walk or ride a bus to any destination within the Fort Wilderness resort, you may also choose to rent or bring your own golf cart.

One of the most popular dinner shows at Walt Disney World is located at Fort Wilderness. The Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue is an old west stage show with a cast of lovable characters. This is an annual event for my family and is always the first Disney-related thing we do when we arrive. Here you'll be fed with all-you-can-eat portions of salad, fried chicken, ribs, bread, corn, baked beans, and strawberry shortcake for dessert. Soft drinks are included with the meal. The show starts with a few song and dance numbers, including old west classics like "Darlin' Clementine." The cast interacts with the crowd, asking for people celebrating anniversaries or birthdays, and then they make up clever rhymes about where the people are from. The show is a little corny at times but very fun and enjoyable. My 8 year old son has seen it several times and always has a great time. It's nearly impossible not to have a good time here, and you'll probably find yourself humming the "Hoop-Dee-Do" theme song on your way out. There's also Mickey's Backyard BBQ, where you will enjoy the same basic food served buffet style. The big difference here is that Mickey, Minnie, Chip and Dale work their way from table to table for hugs and photos. A band plays country favorites as well. After dessert, join Mickey and friends in front of the stage for some dancing lessons. Other dining options include the Trails End Restaurant, which has a delicious buffet, or Crockett's Tavern, which has good food as well but a more limited selection.

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While you're in Fort Wilderness, be sure to check out one of the two trading posts. They both feature t-shirts, hats, mugs and other items with the Fort Wilderness logo on them. They also have a limited selection of other Disney souvenirs, as well as a small amount of groceries, etc. You can even enjoy a friendly game of checkers by the fireplace in the Meadow Trading Post.

If you happen to be lucky enough to visit during the month of October, be sure to ask about the Haunted Hayrides. They usually start around mid-October and run through the end of the month. You'll board a wagon that can seat around thirty people and is pulled by two very large and intimidating black horses. Along the way you pick up a storyteller who entertains you with the legend of Sleepy Hollow. You pull up alongside Ichabod Crane, before he mysteriously disappears. As you continue along the path and round a corner, who's that across the bridge? It's the Headless Horseman himself! The wagon picks up speed to try and outrun him, but he keeps getting closer and closer, all the while swinging his sword trying to get your head. You escape at last, and everyone has their heads intact. For a more intense ride, sit in the back where you'll be even closer to the Headless Horseman. My son rode this when he was 5 and absolutely loved it. He talked about the "Headless Headler" for weeks. Be sure to consider how your child handles scary rides before signing up for this. In my opinion, it's well worth it and is definitely one of our favorite Walt Disney World memories.

I hope I've given you at least a few reasons to visit Disney's Fort Wilderness resort, or perhaps even stay there. There are plenty of activities for everyone's tastes. I hope you have as much fun as my family and I do.

*About The Author: Rob Sielert is a certified Disney nut, known to family and friends as "Mr. Mouse." He often daydreams about how cool it would be to live on Disney property. Fort Wilderness is his favorite resort, and he and his family can't wait for their upcoming trip to Walt Disney World in December.*

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