

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel: Universal Studios Orlando

by Jane Price, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I had wanted to take my eldest granddaughter to Universal Studios, as she is now old enough to appreciate the two parks there. When a Harry Potter Package was offered a few months ago, I jumped at the chance for the two of us to go. Included in the package was three nights at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel. Having stayed at other Loews resorts I knew we would be in for a treat. We were not disappointed.

The hotel is close to both parks, but feels far removed from them, more so than any Disney hotel in which we have stayed. Parking is covered and close by, not interfering with the hotel ambiance in any way. We were booked for a garden view room, but were given an upgrade to a deluxe villa room overlooking the quiet pool.

The room was spacious with a HUGE bathroom with double marble sinks, separate shower and bathtub and 2 comfy cotton robes hanging on the door. A side cabinet by the door had a coffee maker with a nice selection of Emeril Coffee packs and a locked honor bar, which we never used. All that was missing was a mini-fridge.

I have been to Italy, and this hotel does a lovely re-creation of it, just cleaner, a lot less people in the piazzas, and the motor bikes have all their parts intact and are not running red lights! The extensive use of trompe l'oeil frescoes throughout the hotel's interiors and exteriors adds to feeling of being in real Italy. The expansive bay area is a very good re-creation of the real Portofino Bay, and offers up a musical event most evenings at sundown. We caught the end of one upon our return from the park via water taxi.

The hotel has seven restaurants and bars to choose from, all with Italian-style offerings. Unfortunately, we did not have time to try one. Maybe next time? We did poke around some of the shops while waiting for the water taxi, and they had the usual assortment of t-shirts, clothes, sundries, and toys.

The three ways to get to City Walk and the theme parks are water taxi, bicycle rickshaws, and walking. The water taxi is the most popular way, as it is cool and comfortable, with beautiful gardens along the water. It reminded me of the ferries at Port Orleans Resort. The bicycle rickshaws seat two and are peddled by buff guys who will take you over to City Walk for tips only. This was the fastest way to get around, and I tipped \$4.00/person. Walking is for the physically fit, as it is close to

one mile each way, although it is a pleasant walk by the water, through the gardens. After walking most of the day in the heat in the parks, we opted for the water taxi, which runs every 15-20 minutes.

There are three pools at the hotel. We went to two of them as they were close to our room, the quiet, villa pool appeals to adults sans children, and the lively beach pool suits families. Both places offered us large, fluffy towels and complimentary iced water with citrus slices, and all lounge chairs had thick padding in both sun and shade. The beach pool had a large, zero-entry lagoon. I sat and had a Bailey's Irish Cream milkshake where the lagoon connects to a large swimming area complete with waterslide, waterfalls and grotto. There was a large kiddie pool/play area and a large spa with a HOT waterfall. The theme here rivaled any of the Disney hotel pools, including my favorite, the Beach Club.

The staff was always friendly and helpful, serving with a smile. The only caveat here is the cost of parking, \$15/day for self parking and even more for valet. However the hotel was so wonderfully themed and the service so good, I am sure we will return again.

About The Author: Jane Price is a first-time contributor to PassPorter News. Jane lives in southeast Arizona with her husband, three granddaughters, and the family parrots. She is an Annual Passholder for Disneyland as well as a Disney Vacation Club member.

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