

Shades of Green Resort: Especially for Military Families

by Sarah Mudd, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Tucked between the Walt Disney World Palm and Magnolia golf courses, and just a short distance from Disney's Polynesian Resort is a small resort owned by the U.S. Department of Defense called Shades of Green.

Opened in 1972, the resort was originally called The Golf Resort (due to its location). Then, in 1986, the name was changed to The Disney Inn. In 1994, the Department of Defense (DoD) leased the resort for use by military members and renamed the property to Shades of Green. Ten years later, in 2004, the DoD bought the resort outright and performed a major renovation and expansion to make Shades of Green the beautiful resort it is now.

The resort contains just 586 guest rooms, 6 of which are Junior Suites that will sleep 6 people and 5 which are large Suites that will sleep eight. It is among the smaller resorts on property being right about the same size as Disney's Beach Club resort, as far as room count goes. However, Shades of Green boasts the largest standard guest rooms on property at 480 square feet!

The resort's amenities include two swimming pools, a kiddie pool, two tennis courts, playground, fitness center, arcade, on-site laundry, gift shop... all the normal resort amenities. But in addition, it also includes the *only* place on Walt Disney World property where you can get your hands on Starbucks coffee! There is a ticket office in the main building of the resort where guests (either staying at the resort or military visitors to the resort) can purchase discounted tickets for Disney parks as well as other area attractions. There is also an AAFES shop where guests can purchase basic grocery items as well as discounted Disney souvenirs.

Shades of Green now has a photo service available that is similar to (but spendier than) Disney's PhotoPass resort sessions. The Shades of Green photographer will take your family's photo at various locations around the resort and make a package from those or can just take your photos with the patriotic Mickey Mouse statue in the resort lobby. The package prices vary and are a bit pricier than that of PhotoPass but the individual Mickey statue lobby photo prices are about on par with what you might pay for individual PhotoPass photos or a ride photo in the park.

There are a couple of buses that run on a schedule between the resort and the main parks, water parks and Downtown Disney. If you would rather not wait for a Shades of Green bus, you can hail the "Shady Shuttle" (a multi-passenger golf cart) or walk down the path to the entrance of the resort and cross the street to the Polynesian to catch a bus or monorail. It is a nice 10-15 minute walk but can be fun, actually! Sometimes, you may be able to catch a glimpse of an alligator or two in the ponds along the way, so many times our family prefers to walk so that we can go on a "wildlife hunt" of sorts.

Shades of Green has three restaurants and a quick-service counter eatery to choose from. Garden Gallery is open for breakfast and dinner and offers both a buffet and menu ordering. Mangino's Bistro was once solely Italian in terms of menu items but, last year, revamped their menu to include some American items like steak, chicken wings, and burgers. Evergreen's Sports Bar was closed for a time but has reopened with a limited food menu and a full bar. They now offer salads, cold sandwiches, hot dogs, and hamburgers. Express Cafe is a great spot to pop into along the way to the bus stop in the mornings. They offer pastries, hot breakfast sandwiches, coffee, cereal and such.

All that said, you're essentially getting the accommodation of a deluxe resort, especially with the proximity to the Magic Kingdom, for less than the price of a moderate Disney resort.

Room rates typically go up on October 1 each year (the start of the new fiscal year) and are set in three categories, based on rank.

Category 1 rates are for military members ranked E-1 through E-5. The current rate for a standard room is \$95 per night and just \$10 more per night for a poolside room.

Category 2 rates are for members ranked E-6 through E-9, O-1 through O-3, WO1-WO3, military widows, 100% disabled veterans and Medal of Honor recipients. The room rate for this category is currently \$123 per night for a standard room and \$10 more for poolside.

Category 3 rates are for members ranked O-4 through O-10, WO-4 and WO-5, active DOD civilians, foreign military, and DOD contractors assigned to US bases. The room rate is currently \$131 per night for a standard room and just \$10 per night extra for a poolside room.

If you are a member that falls under category 1 and you reserve more than one room, your first room will fall under the category 1 rate while your additional room will fall under category 2. Each member, regardless of category, may reserve up to three rooms. The resort does charge a

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parking fee for their parking garage so if you'll have a car with you, be prepared to pay \$5 per night of your stay. One night's deposit, per room, is required when you make your reservation and there is a 30-day change or cancel policy.

Shades of Green is only for the use of active or retired Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard, reserve components of each branch and DOD civilians year round, however, if you are an honorably discharged veteran who does not have an ID card but DOES have your DD-214 discharge form, you can go to SHADESOFGREENVETS.ORG and you may be eligible to stay at the resort during the months of January and September only!

Whether you are a guest staying at the resort or a military member visiting, you may use the services of the attraction ticket office. They offer tickets for Walt Disney World, Universal Studios, Busch Gardens, Sea World, Kennedy Space Center, Gatorland, Ripley's Believe It Or Not, Titanic the Experience, Boggy Creek Air Boat tours, area dinner shows, and the Richard Petty Experience. The tickets are at a pretty good discount and are tax-free when purchased at Shades of Green.

As an example of the savings you can get purchasing your tickets there, Shades of Green offers the Rookie Experience at Richard Petty for \$361. If you were to book that same experience through Disney, it was cost you \$449. Also, a 4-day Magic Your Way base ticket with no options added will cost you \$247.08 if purchased at a Disney World ticket window whereas if purchased at Shades of Green, it will run you only \$228! The savings on some attractions are pretty significant when you use the benefit of Shades of Green's attraction ticket services!

Some folks ask "Why stay there? Don't you like getting that Disney feeling staying at a more 'themed' place?" Sure I do! But where else would I find such a large, lovely room and all those great amenities for that low of a price and so close to my favorite things at Disney World (the Polynesian, Magic Kingdom and the monorail)? Besides, there's a big, patriotic Mickey Mouse in the lobby that sends me off to the parks each morning and greets me when I come back to the resort at night. And that's enough for me.

About The Author: Sarah is a stay-at-home mom, PassPorter Message Board Guide and Navy wife currently stationed in Washington state. She has made many trips to both Walt Disney World and Disneyland. Her family is currently planning their 2-year-old son's first Disneyland trip in summer 2011!

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