

Disney's Port Orleans Riverside: A Resort Hotel Review

by Sean Prescott, PassPorter Guest Contributor

One of my favorite resorts at Walt Disney World is **Disney's Port Orleans Riverside**. This unique resort gives you the feeling of stepping back in time to a slower pace.

Port Orleans Riverside is a grouping of smaller buildings as opposed to the large single building that is typical of many deluxe resorts. Some of the buildings such as the Magnolia and Arcadia houses are designed in a plantation manor house style, while others in the Alligator Bayou district look a bit more rustic. Room layouts at Port Orleans Riverside are the same, but room decor is in keeping with the building's style. The property is enormous -- there are a total of five swimming pools, Boatwright's Dining Hall, the Riverside Mill Food Court, a lounge, an arcade, horse drawn carriage rides, boat rentals and so much more. You can literally spend a whole day at Port Orleans Riverside and be entertained without ever stepping foot in a park.

My wife and I are Florida natives and, of course, Walt Disney World is a major part of our lives. Our first visit to Port Orleans Riverside was in December 2004. We spent 4 days and 3 nights and attended **Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party**. Anyone who has been to Walt Disney World during the holidays knows that they go all out, and Port Orleans Riverside is no exception. When we arrived to check-in around 3:30 pm, we were greeted by a group of carolers singing Christmas songs. The lobby was fully decorated with garlands hanging from the ceiling and an enormous Christmas tree.

We planned the trip to be a romantic getaway and Port Orleans Riverside is a perfect hotel for that. There is almost a mile of paved walking and jogging trails that follow the **Sassagoula River**. Port Orleans Riverside also offers a horse drawn carriage ride in the evenings (booking early is a necessity). We have seen the route that the carriage follows and it's beautiful. Surrounded by huge Oaks and the Sassagoula River, the trail is a wonderful way to slow down after a busy day of park hopping. It truly takes you back in time.

Port Orleans Riverside has many different things for people to do on the water. You can rent **Sea Raycer personal power boats by Sea Ray®**, **kayaks, canopy boats or pontoon boats** and make your way up and down the river. The rates for all rentals vary by time of year, so check with the resort or call 407-939-0754 to reserve in advance. You can also reserve a fishing excursion on the Sassagoula by calling

that number, and for a far smaller fee, there is an old fishin' hole (catch and release only) in the Ol' Man Island recreation area.

For something more than "basic" transportation, a free ferry runs frequently from Port Orleans Riverside to **Port Orleans French Quarter** and then on to **Downtown Disney**. Though you can make the trip faster by taking the bus or driving yourself, the ride down the river is very nice. You will enjoy a view of one of the Lake Buena Vista golf course and you will also pass by the Saratoga Springs resort. The trip is nice if you are not in a hurry. Transportation from the resort to all parks is available by bus from the resort. If you're bound for another resort, you can take the bus or ferry to Downtown Disney and transfer there to buses to all resorts.

Another thing that is always important to talk about is the food. **Boatwright's Dining Hall**, Port Orleans Riverside's table-service restaurant, serves dinner only. It is a mix of American and Southern comfort foods. Choices include Southern favorites like Bourbon Barbecue Shrimp, Jamabalya, and Pecan Pie.

The other option is the cafeteria-style offerings at the **Riverside Mill food court**, open 6:00 am - midnight for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Here you can get a la carte items such as pastries or bagels or complete meals for dine-in, or boxed to go back to your room. The seating area is very spacious. They have a kid's corner near the working water wheel with a low table for coloring and a TV playing one of Disney's animated classics. The food here is just as good as Boatwright's, without as much of a wait and at slightly less expense. There is also a very wide variety of food available, so even the pickiest of eaters should be able to find something they will enjoy. Also available from Riverside Mill is fresh pizza, delivered to your room (for a small delivery charge) until midnight. This is great for those late nights after you get back from enjoying the evening Extra Magic Hours that are one of the perks for staying at a Disney resort.

(If you have not been a Guest at one of the Walt Disney World resorts, the **Extra Magic Hours** are a special time every morning and/or evening when one park will open an hour early or stay open up to three hours later for resort guests only. It is a fantastic benefit that you get just for being a guest at any Walt Disney World resort. For more information on the Extra Magic Hours check out the Walt Disney World web site for all the details and schedule.)

I think that one of the best ways to enjoy a Walt Disney World vacation is to be able to get away from the parks and crowds at some point and just relax. The Port Orleans Riverside Resort is one of the best places I

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have found in the "World" to relax. You have all the benefits of staying at a Disney resort with out feeling like you have to be on the go all day, every day. This resort is **great for couples or families**. If you want a **romantic getaway** or just a nice place to rest between parks, this is the place. With the beautiful grounds and all the activities, you can stay at this resort many times over many years and still not get to see and do everything they have to offer. In my opinion it is the "Happiest Resort in the World."

About The Author: Sean and his wife live in Florida, where he is a realtor. They had a Fairy Tale Wedding at Disney's BoardWalk Resort in May 2005.

Article last updated: 03-10-2011

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