

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge: A Resort Hotel Review

by Dawn Dobson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Turning the corner into **Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge** drive is like beginning a journey to a far off land. The vision of the thatched roofs and massive carved wood structure invites you to explore this phenomenal deluxe resort even further.

Step through the doors and you are greeted with an intoxicating fragrance of smoky woods, coriander, and other exotic spices that are delicately used in the resort's restaurants, **Boma, Jiko, The Mara, and Sanaa**. As you lift your eyes to take in the massive lobby, you may even gasp at the rich beauty that awaits you. But this is only the beginning. If you take your time and look to your feet, you will see beautiful, intricate floors, inset with medallions. Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge lobby is filled with comfortable furniture that invites you to relax and enjoy the peaceful retreat from the frenetic pace of the parks.

As you pass through the lobby, take note of the works of art, including the Igbo mask, the only one of its kind to leave Africa. Pass down the stairs at the far end of the lobby and even more surprises await you as you enter another world ... the world of the savanna. giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, Tommies (Thomson's Gazelles), and more await you as you step out onto **Arusha Rock**. Pass the fire pit and explore the habitats of these fascinating creatures. Along the way, make sure to take time to visit with the Animal Kingdom Lodge's cast members. They love to talk about their homes in Africa and you will see their faces light up as they tell you stories and share their customs. Even if you are just visiting, it is worthwhile to come in the evening, around 10:00 pm (check with the resort for times) and experience the savannah through night vision goggles. It is astonishing what can be seen in the dark.

We have always been fortunate to have a **savannah view room at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge** and one of my fondest memories is sitting on our balcony, rocking my youngest child to sleep to the sound of a wildebeest just at our feet, grazing and chewing the grass. It was so quiet and peaceful; we could actually hear the grass tearing and its teeth chewing. Where else in America, but at the Animal Kingdom Lodge? Even if you are in a standard or pool view room, there are ample viewing areas for the savannas. Sometimes, after my children and husband are asleep, I will sneak out into the corridor with my laptop or journal to record my thoughts for the day, sitting on a bench by the window watching the zebra graze or the Ankole cattle nuzzle their

young.

The **zero-entry pool at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge** is a pleasure for everyone. My children can play and slide while I wade, and babies giggle as the water gently laps their toes. The lush landscaping and surrounding kraal (corral) construction of the resort makes you feel a world away. Take time to experience the programs the resort offers as well. My children both participated in "bead activities" where they learned about flamingos, animal tracking, music, and more while earning beads for a necklace. At the conclusion of the final activity, they were allowed to choose a "totem" bead and to talk with a cast member from Africa about what the children could do to make our planet a better place. How exciting to watch them enjoy learning from people whose homes are half a world away! Even a full weekend of just resort time wasn't enough to experience all the Animal Kingdom Lodge has to offer.

There are four dining options at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge and we have enjoyed two -- **Boma (buffet)** and the **Mara (counter service)**. We find the food to be fresh, tasty, and reasonably priced. I now make many of our favorites at home to remind us of the scents and flavors we experienced. We have not yet had the pleasure of dining at Jiko or **Sanaa**, but plan to remedy that on our next visit. Often, after our meals, we wander into **Zawadi Marketplace**, the Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge's shop that is so much more than just a gift shop. Items here range from the traditional stuffed Mickey to traditional African-carved stone eggs. Beautiful wooden giraffes and intricate masks can be purchased for much less than you would expect. There is so much to see that we usually have to make several trips just to enjoy the craftsmanship of the African people. The selection is so diverse that I have had no trouble finding beautiful souvenirs for my African-inspired office-on-a-budget.

Many people express concern that Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge is "too far" or "inconvenient", and it is fairly distant from all theme parks but Disney's Animal Kingdom. That, however, is also the beauty of it. An advantage is that buses are not shared with another resort, so transportation is quite easy. There is nothing quite as relaxing as passing through the doors and being greeted with that marvelous aroma after a long day in the parks. Quiet, peaceful, exotic, and beautiful...

Animal Kingdom Lodge is our Walt Disney World home.

About The Author: Dawn is a scrapbook and tie dye designer who homeschools two of her four daughters and is always looking for an excuse to talk about Walt Disney World!

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