

Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort: Don't Worry, Be Happy!

by Don Willis, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My choice of the Caribbean Beach Resort (CBR) for my most recent Walt Disney World stay was based on a desire to try a different moderate resort. Having stayed at Port Orleans (both French Quarter and Riverside) the choice was between CBR and Coronado Springs. I chose the CBR because of its food service (no mandatory tip at the food court, unlike Coronado Springs). To add to my pleasure, my travel agent was able to get me an upgrade to a water view room about seven months after my initial reservation.

I knew instantly the Caribbean Beach Resort was different. My bus from the Disney Wonder arrived at the Customs House. The Customs House has check-in, concierge services, bell services, and the airline resort check-in service. Your luggage is immediately tagged while you do the check-in. After a very rapid check in, a bell staff retrieved my luggage and we were dispatched in a van to my room in Trinidad South. (Unless you are driving, you and your luggage are transported to your room). I really enjoyed that it did not have to make a long walk pulling my luggage behind me, like at the Port Orleans resorts. The valet-style service was really refreshing.

I checked into the pink and white Building 35, and entered my first floor water view room. The waters of Barefoot Bay were about 30 feet away. The building exteriors were very reminiscent of my visits to Nassau, Jamaica, and Antigua. The rooms in Trinidad South still maintain the resort's old tropical motif, with two double beds, lots of storage, and a large sink area. The extra twenty or so square feet (the rooms are the largest of the moderate resorts) would be extra nice if your party maxes out the allowable number of guests in the room, or if you have to use a Pack-n-Play for a toddler. Unpacking quickly, I headed out to the nearby bus stop for the first day of my Walt Disney World stay. From arrival at the Customs House to boarding the bus, only about 45 minutes elapsed.

The return that evening from Magic Kingdom was typical of the bus service I encountered. I don't think I ever waited more than 15 minutes at a park for a bus back to the resort, or at the resort for a bus to the parks, or for the internal bus that stops at each CBR group of buildings ("villages") as well as the resort's hub, Old Port Royale.

Getting up on day two I walked from my room to Old Port Royale (about a ten minute walk from Trinidad South). Even the walk was decorated. The walkway under the bridge over Barefoot Bay had stanchions

painted similarly to gingerbread men to keep electric carts and the surrey rental bicycles from crossing under the bridge. The entire resort had Caribbean plants in bloom. The amount and variety of flowers blooming in December reminded me of my visits to Nassau and Disney Cruise Line's private island, Castaway Cay, earlier in the week. I then entered Old Port Royale for a quick-service breakfast and a stroll through the Straw Market shopping area. The various food service counters are on one side of an indoor "street," with the registers and seating on the other. The selection was very nice and the food hot and fresh. The Straw Market had Calypso- and Pirate-themed merchandise, including items for use in the pools. The selection of Pirates of the Caribbean merchandise was almost as broad as that of the Plaza del Sol Caribe bazaar at the exit to the Pirates of the Caribbean ride in Magic Kingdom. The Calypso Trading Post (store) had something on sale every day. There was more resort-specific merchandise than I had seen at Disney's other Moderates. While there, I also looked at the rentals available at the Boat and Bike Works, and viewed the newly-efurbished pools. It was super cool. The pool gates were locked this early in the day - I suspect that it is only open when life guards are present.

I stopped at the concierge desk (they have them both at the Customs House and in Old Port Royale) to change some advanced dining reservations (ADRs) and then caught a bus to Animal Kingdom. After Animal Kingdom's closing, I got off the bus at Old Port Royale to pick up merchandise I had bought the previous day. The merchandise pickup service was quick (and the merchandise was right there under the counter-not off in some back room). I then took the resort's internal bus to my room, changed, and tried one of the pools. Even on a December evening, the water was warm and refreshing after a day walking in the parks. Each of the Villages (Jamaica, Aruba, Barbados, Martinique, Trinidad North, and Trinidad South) has its own pool and beach area. The pools are large and heated. The beach areas have hammocks and 'sand' decorations. You can dip your toes in Bay Lake, but no swimming in the lake.

Saturday morning I returned for breakfast, and then concierge services in Old Port Royale summoned me a cab to get to the Yacht and Beach Club Convention Center. The concierge here can do all the services that the concierge desk at the Customs House can. The cab arrived almost as fast as I could walk out front, and the fare was about \$10.

Check out at the Caribbean Beach Resort is the reverse of your arrival. If departing by Disney's Magical Express (DME) for Orlando Airport, you call bell services the day before your departure. They make an appointment to pick you and your luggage up at an agreed upon time and transport you to the Customs House. There you can use the Resort

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Airline Check-in for participating airlines. Your bags are weighed and tagged and placed in 'airline' custody. Your boarding passes are printed, and you can lock them in your carry-on and secure the bag at bell services. Since my plane did not leave Orlando until 6:00 p.m., I did check my carry-on, walked across the street to the Barbados buildings, and caught a bus to a park. I returned 30 minutes before my DME bus, retrieved my carry-on, put my boarding passes in my pocket, and boarded the bus to leave. The departure was seamless, without having to worry about handling luggage on departure day.

Caribbean Beach Resort is physically very large. The internal bus circling the lake and visiting all the villages makes it much smaller. Old Port Royale's shopping, dining and recreational facilities are super. The bus system makes a visit to the main pool (or a visit to shop or eat) easy. Just hop on the bus and off at Old Port Royale. Go straight through the center of the building and exit to hop in the pool.

This visit may have pushed the Caribbean Beach Resort to the top of my Moderate list.

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