

Flying High Above Kauai: Disney Cruise Line Hawaii Shore Excursion Review

by Michele Dakho, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I was delighted to have the opportunity to sail on the Inaugural Voyage to Hawaii on the Disney Wonder.

But I'd be lying if I said I was prepared for all that Hawaii cruise had to offer.

I felt very out of my element selecting port adventures, as we generally just wander about on our own, but Hawaii is one of our "bucket list" destinations and I wanted to see and do as much as possible. It sounded like a great plan at the time, until my research process began. I began on the Disney Cruise Line website and thought I'd never be able to make a house payment or feed my family if I did all the excursions I was interested in through Port Adventures. This started my research process down a path I'd never trodden; booking my excursions independently.

□ My husband was determined to take our first helicopter ride in Hawaii. He rarely speaks so strongly about shore activities, so I got to work. Volcanoes didn't have much of a draw for us, but being the movie buff that he is, the chance to view "Jurassic Park Falls" grabbed his attention.

□ During my research for Kauai helicopter tours, Safari Helicopters was a recurring name, so I decided to look into them. After several e-mails with the company I felt comfortable in what they were offering, and I was very thankful for the assistance and explanations they graciously provided to this "first timer" so I booked. While I was thrilled to have booked my first port adventure, in the back of my mind I was sure it was going to turn into a disaster. Murphy's Law, right? I'm happy to say that Safari Helicopters didn't let me down. The company was everything they presented themselves to be and more, and the reviews on Trip Advisor proved to be accurate.

We were met at the port by a Safari Helicopter van, right on time. The van was clearly marked and easy to find and the driver knew who we were and which tour we were scheduled for. It was less than a 10-minute drive to the helicopter office, where our adventure began.

□ The office has a small gift shop, waiting area, restroom, and a very friendly staff. We paid for our tour (the online booking is only a credit card hold, you pay in full at the time of your tour) and stashed our

belongings in a complimentary keyed locker. Due to TSA safety regulations, guests aren't able to carry bags of any sort onto the helicopter. You may take what you can carry in your hands, so a camera (no camera bag) and a spare lens were basically it for me. If you have a multi-lens camera like I do (a digital Cannon EOS Rebel) you don't need to bring your larger zoom lens. I made the mistake of bringing mine and didn't use it. Note: My husband wished he had worn his cargo shorts that day to free up our hands a bit, so men...if you have a pair and are doing a helicopter tour...cargo shorts are the way to go!

My least favorite part of the check-in process was the mandatory weigh-in. The lovely attendant graciously gave us all the option of knowing our weight or accepting that ignorance is bliss. Clearly, I chose the latter. The weigh-in process was very quick and discreet, but very important. No one can board the helicopter without being weighed. For safety reasons, they use the information to balance the weight distribution on board, and they assigned us seats accordingly. Our helicopter had six passengers and a pilot. The back row sat four people across, but everyone was very adult-like and didn't argue about sitting by the window; mostly because the seats were assigned! It turns out that every seat is a good seat. Thanks to the over-large windows and the close quarters, you aren't more than 18 inches away from a window no matter where you sit.

After another quick ride to the helipad, we watched our helicopter fly in with the previous tour and were given our waist-worn flotation devices, which are mandatory for flying over water. These fit like a fanny pack, and were no problem at all. We were then escorted to our seats by our van driver and belted in. The real adventure was ready to begin!

I was a bit disturbed when the pilot introduced us to the "Aloha Bag," as my stomach was already jumping up and down doing an "aloha" dance of its own. Thankfully (mahalo, as the Hawaiians say), no one needed to use the Aloha Bag, as the flight was much smoother than all of us had anticipated. I have been on commercial flights that made me far more queasy than the helicopter ride did. If you have a sensitive stomach, a mild dramamine or even your sea-bands will probably do the trick.

The pilot was extremely friendly and made everyone feel comfortable before we even left the ground. We had noise-canceling headsets that also allowed us to hear (and speak) to the pilot. The flight was narrated by our pilot, who grew up on the island, and nice Hawaiian music played in the background as a soundtrack for those landscapes that needed no narration. My first thought was that it felt like a scene from a movie,

especially with the dramatic music playing in our headsets. It was at that time our pilot told us those scenes were actually from a movie... quite a few of them! We saw places where scenes from Jurassic Park, South Pacific, and Fantasy Island were filmed.

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□We flew over Waialeale Crater, Waimea Canyon, and the Na Pali Coast (my personal favorite), just to name a few. The North Shore coastline was breathtaking, and we were told by our pilot there is excellent snorkeling because of the immense reef. We asked if he would drop us off for a snorkel, but he declined. (Hey, you never know until you try!)

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□I felt the tour had the perfect amount of narration, themed music, and amazing sights. Our guide talked when we needed to know something and remained silent when he knew we were breathless from what we were seeing. The amount of time in the air (60 minutes) felt perfect. Don't get me wrong, I could have flown around all day, but I didn't feel cheated, rushed, or like I missed anything. I felt I really had an all-encompassing view of Kauai, of which approximately 80% can only be seen from the air.

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□We landed safely, took a short van ride back to the office to gather our belongings, and then were transported back to the port. We all chatted and raved about the tour, and I think everyone will be raving about this tour for a long time. I look at my photos almost every day and it's one of my best memories from Hawaii. I was hesitant to book a tour this expensive, but I can say it was worth every cent. I can't imagine not experiencing this tour in Hawaii. I would book with Safari Helicopters over and over again, knowing I'm getting an amazing price and service to match!

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□Tip: By booking online direct with the tour provider, we saved \$137.80 per person!

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□If you want to land at "Jurassic Park Falls" (Manawaiapuna Falls), [Island Helicopters](#) is the only tour provider with a license to land there. However, Safari Helicopters also offers an exclusive landing, as part of their [Kauai Eco Refuge Tour](#). This tour includes everything on the Deluxe Waterfall Tour and also lands within the Robinson Ranch, which overlooks Olokele Canyon and is completely inaccessible to the public otherwise. Not surprisingly, many movie scenes were filmed on this land, including scenes from Jurassic Park.

About The Author: Michele is an Authorized Disney Vacation Planner with Pixie Vacations and an avid Disney traveler. She is active on the PassPorter forums as PixieMichele.

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