

Kidani Village: New DVC Property at Animal Kingdom Lodge Resort

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Since it's opening in April 2001, Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge has become a favorite with many visitors to Walt Disney World. It's hardly a surprise, considering the unique features of the resort! Where else can you see zebras and giraffes roaming on the savannah below your room?

There was some surprise when Disney Vacation Club (DVC) announced its newest property at the Animal Kingdom Lodge, as most of the speculation at the time swirled around the construction at Disney's Contemporary Resort.

Kidani Village, as we learned it would be called, was a completely separate building on the same site as Animal Kingdom Lodge. Disney Vacation Club villas first opened at Animal Kingdom Lodge in 2007 in the original main building that would soon become known as Jambo House. Having stayed in one of those villas shortly after they opened, I was delighted to find that Kidani Village would be throwing open its doors on May 1, 2009, when we would be at Walt Disney World for part of PassPorter's Decade of Dreams Tour. Instantly, I made plans to visit it to see the newest home resort on offer to DVC members.

The first surprise as we pulled up was to see that the signs had changed, with the entrance to what used to be Animal Kingdom Lodge now instead welcoming you to Jambo House. Although I knew this would be the new name, I somehow wasn't expecting it to be as obvious as it was. We soon came to the Kidani Village sign and drove in and my first impression was, sadly, disappointing.

As you pull up, my first thought was that the building looks a bit like a prison camp, with very few windows. Even understanding the reason (the vast majority of rooms here have savannah views, so as you approach, you face just huge blank walls, rather than rooms with balconies), it's a very odd sight and I almost felt as if we were backstage. The Cast Member who was driving us even remarked that it wasn't quite what she had expected.

Fortunately, that was the end of feeling disappointed. As soon as you pull up, Kidani Village suddenly has the much more familiar feel of its older brother. Some of the rooms you can see by the entrance obviously have views of the parking lot. That was confirmed when I spoke to Member Services a while later to make our booking there for December, with the Cast Member informing me that standard views could be of the

pool or the parking lot. With this in mind, I opted for a savannah view.

Before you even step inside Kidani Village, you immediately know that it's a DVC resort, with the obvious, but still subtle, "Welcome home" sign above the doorway. And it did indeed feel like home the second we entered the lobby. It's strange, considering that it is technically a new resort, that it really feels as though it's not. It's very much part of Animal Kingdom Lodge and the architecture is very similar, although some of the fixtures inside are different, including the lights. I loved the design of those, as they looked as if they had vibrant orange flames emanating from them.

Anyone who's been to Jambo House will instantly recognize the layout. The shop, Johari Treasures, is to the right of the lobby and check-in is to the left. Walk through and you head down the stairs to the savannah outside and the restaurant, Sanaa, which is located immediately below the lobby. We dined at Sanaa on its opening night (see the May 21 PassPorter News for the review), it's a great addition to the wonderful selection of dining that Disney has and it's definitely worth trying out. I can easily see it becoming just as popular as Boma and Jiko, and cements Animal Kingdom Lodge's position as one of the best resorts when it comes to dining.

It's really only when you head away from the main lobby and up to the rooms that you again remember that this is a Disney Vacation Club resort. The first thing I should say is that Kidani Village feels huge. I was lucky enough to get a sneak peek at both a one bedroom villa and a studio that friends were staying in and the studio seemed to be miles away from the lobby. It's something worth keeping in mind if you plan on staying here. If walking distances is an issue, requesting a room near the lobby may be useful.

The rooms come as no surprise to anyone who's seen the model rooms at the DVC Preview Center at Saratoga Springs Resort. I had taken a good look at those on our last visit and I couldn't spot any differences. What you obviously couldn't see from the model rooms was the savannah view and this is what I was most interested in. I wasn't disappointed and spotted a few ostriches out on the savannah. The impression I got immediately was that this savannah felt a lot quieter and more peaceful than the ones we had previously had outside our rooms at Jambo House. I couldn't help but wonder if that was just because it was the first night of operation, as there was no way of knowing how busy Kidani Village was on that particular night.

The long hallways are broken up by various examples of African art along the way, which is a lovely touch and very homely. I don't doubt

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that's the feeling that the Imagineers were trying to create, as DVC resorts are all about feeling at home.

Like any other DVC resort, Kidani Village has a range of facilities to reinforce that feeling of home, including the guest laundry, an arcade, and the community hall, which is the place to hang out and enjoy your free time. When I poked my head around the door, it was being well used, with people playing pool and others sitting at the tables there.

Sadly, the only part I didn't get the chance to check out was the new swimming area, called Samawati Springs Pool, but it's something I can't wait to explore on our next visit there, when we'll be staying there as members. The same is true of the basketball, shuffleboard, and tennis courts that Kidani Village adds to Animal Kingdom Lodge, but it leaves me the excitement of knowing there's more to see when we return in December.

From what I saw of Kidani Village on its opening night, it's a great addition to Animal Kingdom Lodge and I have a strong feeling that we're going to enjoy our stay there and will probably be returning there more than once.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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