

Sheraton Vistana Village: Off Site Orlando Resort Review

by Roger Sauer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

During trips to Walt Disney World, many PassPorter Newsletter readers may have passed the signs for a large Sheraton Vistana Resort on Highway 535 south of Downtown Disney.

But do you know there is a newer sister property only a couple of miles east? Sheraton Vistana Villages offers one, two, and three bedroom high quality villas in close proximity to Disney while providing a quiet distance and respite from the bustle of the theme parks.

The villas in this timeshare resort are available for use by the general public when there are vacancies due to owners not using their units. The resort is spread out over 95 tropically-landscaped acres in four "communities:" Bella, Key West, Amelia, and Augustine. Several themed pool areas welcome guests along with two workout areas featuring game rooms and tennis and basketball courts. The pool by the main building highlights a waterfall while another cluster of buildings offers a kid-friendly pirate ship pool and splash zone. And for adults several "quiet pools" are available. Theming here is generic Florida with some community variations: a pirate ship in Augustine, and old Key West buoy in, you guessed it, Key West.

□ Bringing or renting a car is useful at this resort. There is no Magical Express to whisk you from the airport. However, free transportation is available to the Disney parks. The shuttles run regularly. The shuttles to Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure are also complimentary as is the shuttle to Sea World which is a short drive east. A shuttle to and from Orlando International Airport costs approximately \$55 for up to five people; cab is about \$47 one way.

□ The villas include kitchens or kitchenettes and laundries in each. There are small one bedroom, larger premium one bedroom, two bedroom and a few three bedroom units. During our stay we were in a premium one bedroom of about 900 square feet, more than ample for two adults. This unit in Building 2 on the 5th floor was newly renovated and beautifully appointed in a Tuscan style.

There was a full kitchen and large bath with three sink areas in adjoining spaces. The separate bedroom has a TV and whirlpool bath. Living areas offer a sleeper sofa so even the smaller one bedroom allows for four adults. Because we were in the top floor, we had a vaulted ceiling which added to the spaciousness of the villa. Each unit had a

screened veranda; this helps keep bugs away but does cause a closed-in atmosphere while sitting outside. All villa interiors and common areas are non-smoking.

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□ One feature that guests will either love or hate depending on their relationship with cooking is the availability of any high quality gas barbecues near the many buildings. These are very well maintained by the staff. Generally speaking, it is not unusual to strike up conversations with other visitors from around the world while grilling one's dinner entree in the evenings.

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□ The resort offers a small restaurant, Flagler Station, for casual meals and a gift shop for sundries, t-shirts, and souvenirs.

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□ If you are in the cooking mood, a Publix supermarket is about half a mile north across International Drive. (This is the store I wish we had in Oregon.) And if your shopping extends beyond groceries, the Premium Outlet Mall is just west of Publix. This mall offers standard outlet shops with a few higher end stores such as Coach, Fendi, and Kenneth Cole. There is a food court and also a Disney-operated "Character Corner" featuring heavily discounted Disney park souvenirs, pins, and apparel. If you don't mind wearing a 2012 WDW sweatshirt in 2013, this may be the place for you. And pins are about half price.

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□ My wife and I have been in Disney Vacation Club (DVC) for twenty years and love the DVC resorts and amenities. But the quality (though not the theming) of the specific unit where we stayed surpassed that in the DVC units we have used in those twenty years. We will be returning to Sheraton Vistana Villages in December for two weeks. We'll bank our DVC points for next year. Lest this sound overly promotional, we do not own any interest in this resort.

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□ Guests may want to take advantage of a "free" breakfast at the resort, but this is part of the timeshare sales process. Nothing is free and you will spend over two hours with a salesperson and timeshare sales tactics. We suggest passing on this.

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□ There are seasonal and assorted discount rates available online at spg.com or Sheraton.com. Members of Starwood Preferred Guest can get rooms for 10,000 points per night with fifth night free or \$60 plus 4,000 Starpoints per night. Online rates run about \$119 per night for standard one bedroom. Deals may be obtained by renting from owners through a number of websites such as VRBO and Timeshare Users Group.

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□ The Sheraton Vistana Villages are located at 12401 International Drive,

Orlando, Florida. It can be reached by phone at 407-238-5000. Its website is <http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=5607>

About The Author: Roger Sauer, an Oregon native, has visited every Disney park and resort in the world over the past ten years. The next big trip for him and his wife, Donna, will be New Zealand and Australia in the Fall and Europe with a Disney TransAtlantic cruise in the Spring of 2014.

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