

Planning a Trip to Aulani, a Disney Resort and Spa: A Disney Destination Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

For as many years as I can remember I've wanted to visit Hawai'i.

It struck me as being as a set of paradise islands, with images of brilliant white beaches, with waves striking the shores, and surfers astride them. Inland, I knew that the scenery was green, and lush, created from the volcanoes that formed these islands thousands of years ago.

As soon as I heard that Disney would be building a resort here, that was the trigger I needed to plan a trip there, especially as it would include Disney Vacation Club accommodations. Never have I been so happy to be a member!

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□ In this first instalment about Aulani, I'll look at the planning side of the vacation before you even leave home.

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□ What accommodations are available at Aulani?

□ There's a huge variety of accommodations available, something to do with the fact that Aulani is both a hotel and a Disney Vacation Club resort. Within the hotel, you can choose from a standard room, which is exactly what it says on the tin, a one-bedroom suite, which gives you a separate bedroom, parlor, a full bathroom and a half bathroom, and sleeps up to five people; a much larger deluxe one-bedroom suite, which gives you additional living space, a spectacular master bedroom, two full bathrooms, and an ocean view, while the two-bedroom suite adds in another bedroom, and bathroom, and sleeps up to six people.

The Disney Vacation Club accommodations, which are available for non-Members, if available, are made up of deluxe studios, similar to standard rooms, but adding in a kitchenette, sleeping up to four people, one-bedroom villas, which have a separate living/dining area, and full kitchen, and sleep up to five people, and two-bedroom villas, which add another bedroom and bathroom, and sleep up to nine people. There are also Grand Villas, which sleep up to 12 people, have three bedrooms, and three bathrooms, along with separate living, and dining areas, and full kitchen.

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□ What's the difference between the various views?

□ There are four different views at Aulani. You can choose from either standard, island gardens, poolside gardens, or ocean views.

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□All the rooms we visited during our stay were ocean view ones, and I have to say for us, they were worth it, as we adored looking out over the Pacific. However, the poolside gardens option would give you some wonderful views as well, with the magnificent Waikolohe Valley recreation area taking up the whole area in between the two towers. Those towers are 'Ewa, which faces south (though the word means west on O'ahu), and Waiānae, facing a mountain region of that name farther north along the coast.

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□The views we saw during our stay of the mountains outside Aulani, the spa, and landscaping, which together make up the island gardens view, were certainly breathtaking, and I'd be happy with any of those outlooks from our room as well. The only view that I'd probably avoid is the standard one, with very little to commend it. However, it all depends on your perspective; if the lower cost of the standard view is the difference between going and not going, then I'd take it in a heartbeat.

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□When's a good time to go?

□Staying at Aulani is very similar to stays at either Walt Disney World or Disneyland. Expect to find the resort packed between Christmas and New Year, over Thanksgiving, and Easter. April and early May are popular times to visit, no doubt something to do with the large Japanese market who visit Aulani, as one of their huge holidays is in late April and early May.

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□Aulani is a little less affected by long weekends, given how long it takes to reach from the mainland U.S., but this is balanced out somewhat by the fact that Hawaiian residents can easily enjoy a long weekend here. We spent the Memorial Day weekend at Aulani, and we noticed the resort (and the parking lot!) busier from Saturday until Monday, although it wasn't significantly different to the rest of our stay.

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□January, February, June, September, October, November and December (excluding Thanksgiving and Christmas to New Year) are generally quieter months to visit, and we loved our stay in early to mid November.

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□Temperatures are generally consistent throughout the year, usually in the high 70s or early 80s, although the winter months can be a little wetter. Everything is relative though, and of course Disney has built Aulani on the leeward coast of O'ahu, the sunnier and warmer part of the island. However, smartly, they've built it away from the tourist mecca of Waikiki.

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□How long should we go for?

□ This answer could be affected by the figures in response to the next question about costs. However, when you're planning your trip to Hawai'i, do keep in mind just how long it takes to get there. We had an eight-hour flight from Dallas Fort Worth, and even from Los Angeles, it's a five-hour flight. Therefore, much of your first day could be spent travelling, and don't under-estimate the effect the change in time zones can have on you. Remember as well that coming back to mainland U.S., many flights are at night. You might want to factor that into your vacation, as the redeyes can be brutal. Only the brave would head straight back to work or school the morning after one of those.

□ We went for a total of eight nights, and we felt that was about right, and we wouldn't have wanted our stay to be any shorter. However, if you were travelling from the U.S, as opposed to the UK as we were (admittedly we broke our trip to Hawai'i both ways in Walt Disney World), you could perhaps get away with a shorter trip of maybe four or five nights.

□ How much is it going to cost?

□ This is where sticker shock may set in, as Aulani is not a cheap vacation, but then again, in fairness, neither are the Disney hotels at either Disneyland or Walt Disney World. To stay in an ocean view Disney Vacation Club studio or a standard room in Aulani for the eight nights we spent there in early November 2014 would set you back \$5,844. If views aren't that important to you, you can get a standard view version of either room for a more modest \$4,112. Of course, the price goes up significantly if you want to look at the suites, or the various different sized Disney Vacation Club Villas.

□ There is one other cost for everyone, both Disney Vacation Club Members, and those paying cash for their stays, and that's the daily transient accommodation tax to pay. However, it doesn't amount to much. For our week in a studio, it cost us around \$50.

□ I'm a Disney Vacation Club Member, but I don't own at Aulani. How likely is it that I can get in at the seven-month mark?

□ Of course, this is something that will change from one year to the next, depending on demand. What I can tell you is that during the course of my research, I managed to find availability at the seven-month mark for October, November and early December, which were the periods I originally considered visiting, before narrowing down our trip to early November.

□ If you're anything like me though, you won't want to book your flights until you know you've secured your accommodation, because as you've already seen in this article, staying at Aulani when you pay cash isn't

exactly cheap.

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□ Having looked at the various planning aspects of a trip to Aulani, in the next article in this series, I'll be looking at what happens when you actually get there and start enjoying this beautiful resort.

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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