

Activities at Aulani: A Disney Destination Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

In previous articles, we've looked at [planning a trip to Aulani](#), Disney's resort in Ko Olina, O'ahu, and how to [enjoy yourself at the resort](#).

Once you're at Aulani, you may be wondering where there is to do. Happily, it turns out that there are plenty of activities to enjoy at Aulani -- some an extra charge, and some free.

Rainbow Reef Snorkeling Lagoon: The first Aulani activity that we were told about when we arrived was the Rainbow Reef snorkelling lagoon. The cost is \$15/session for adults (\$10/child), although only \$20 for a length of stay pass (and \$15/child), so if this is something you're interested in, and likely to do more than once, definitely get the length of stay pass. We talked about this, and while the selection of fish looked good through the underwater viewing area they have here, and I'm sure we'd have enjoyed it, I was concerned about getting sunburned. Nearly every day we were there was hot and sunny, and I am prone to burning. Now had Rainbow Reef opened earlier in the morning, or later in the afternoon/evening, I'd have been there like a shot, but with opening hours of only 10:00 am to 5:00 pm while we were there, it didn't work for us. At busier times of the year, the hours are extended, so maybe the trick is to go back when it's a bit busier at Aulani.

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Laniwai Spa: I was also keen on exploring Laniwai, the resort's spa, which offers nearly 150 treatments, including massages, facials, couple's treatments, signature treatments like body polishes, unique massages and exfoliations, and salon services. Before we went to Hawai'i I was warned to be prepared for sticker shock, but for the most part, we thought the prices were reasonable; the one exception was Laniwai. Don't get me wrong, the prices aren't that far off what you'd pay at Walt Disney World, or onboard one of the Disney Cruise Line ships, but certainly with the latter, you can get deals and discounts. That wasn't the case at Aulani at all, no matter how closely I scanned the Daily "Iwa" (their equivalent of the Navigator on the Disney Cruise Line). Much as I loved the facilities, including their unique hydrotherapy garden, I just couldn't justify the cost, so if this is something that interests you, check out the [website](#), have a look at the prices, and be ready to pay them!

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Aulani Shopping: Somewhere that I can almost guarantee you will end up dropping money are at Aulani's shops. There are two, Kalepa's Store,

just off the lobby to the left as you enter the resort, which stocks a good range of Aulani branded clothes, and goods. You'll also find unique items in there, including cuddly toy Disney friends, dressed up in Hawaiian gear, along with Disney Vacation Club merchandise, much of again unique to Aulani. There's a small grocery selection in there, along with a lovely range of souvenirs to take home. They were doing a roaring trade on chocolates while we were there, and the divine Aulani branded dressing gown, which was heavenly, came home with us!

Hale Manu: While not exactly an activity, the Hale Manu shop is a newer addition to the resort. Hale Manu is Hawaiian for bird house, and it's beautifully themed in here, with birds above you. The shop aims towards the higher end of the market, with Hawaiian clothes, Aulani watches, and Maui Divers jewelry. Even if the merchandise doesn't sound like it would appeal to you, the shop is definitely worth checking out.

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□Pau Hana Community Hall: Not everything costs at Aulani though. You can enjoy a range of free activities at the Pau Hana Community Hall, on the ground floor of the Ewa Tower. We took part in the Menehune Adventure Trail, where Aunty (a character you'll become very familiar with during your stay at Aulani, along with Uncle...) guides you around the resort via an interactive handset, helping you to find various things. I don't want to give too much away, that would ruin the surprise, but there were a lot of fascinating extras throughout the grounds, some of which we'd seen earlier in our visit and had guessed would do something (though we didn't know quite what), while others were complete revelations to us. We did this on the last day of our stay, and as a result found it fairly easy, but it would also be a good introduction to the resort.

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□Menehune Statues: Speaking of menehune, little menehune statues are scattered throughout Aulani, with more than 200 of them to find. Menehune literally means little people, and once you find one statue, trust me, you'll become addicted to finding more. They are everywhere, in the Waikolohe Valley, the resort shops, corridors, and even the elevators, and it's a lovely little touch.

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□Disney's Starlit Hui: Something else that's free, and only held on select nights, is Disney's Starlit Hui. It's a celebration of the best of traditional and modern Hawaiian entertainment, with some amazing musicians, including a ukulele duo who really bring new life to this unique instrument, and a stunning singer. Of course, there are a few surprises in there, and it wouldn't be complete without Disney characters, right? This is something not to be missed during a stay at Aulani.

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□ **Disney Characters:** On the subject of Disney characters, there are some, but be prepared; the selection is very limited--just Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, Chip and Dale, and Stitch. That's it. No Lilo, which really surprised us, given her Hawaiian roots, and no Donald, Daisy, Pluto or any other characters. There are regular meet and greet opportunities around the resort, detailed in your Daily 'Iwa, which you can pick up around Aulani each day, or you can meet Mickey, Minnie and Goofy at the character breakfast at Makahiki.

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□ **Dining Fun:** I won't go into detail here about the dining options at Aulani, as that's another story for another day, but suffice to say, in addition to the Makahiki character breakfast, there's also a buffet dinner there nightly. You can indulge for breakfast, lunch, or dinner at 'Ama Ama, the resort's signature restaurant, overlooking the beach beyond, while counter service options can be found at the Ulu Cafe, Mama's Snack Stop, and Papalua Shave Ice -- yes, you can get the famous Hawaiian shaved ice without even leaving Aulani! There are also lounges to enjoy, such as Off the Hook, which is next to 'Ama Ama, and the 'Olelo Lounge, next to Makahiki, which offers live music most nights.

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□ **Excursions:** If that's not enough to keep you entertained, there are also organized excursions, details of which are available on the [resort website](#), although there may be others available during your stay, including a full-day shopping excursion, which was offered a number of times while we were there.

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□ This certainly isn't an exhaustive list by any means, but hopefully it gives you an idea of the multitude of activities available at Aulani to enjoy. It may not have a Disney park nearby, but Disney has certainly made sure that there is still plenty to do... and that's before you even venture outside of Ko Olina, but that's another story for another day.

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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