

Disney's Polynesian Resort: Resort Review

by Erik Johnson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When you enter Disney's Polynesian Resort, it is like entering a completely different land, while having your feet firmly planted in Walt Disney World. The dark wooden beams and the light colored accents and furnishings of the lobby help to set the mood along with the beautiful plants and trickling water both inside and out, and you can easily be carried away to another place and time. As you enter the lobby from the outside world, you are greeted by a "cousin" who is ready to give you a silk flower lei and a cheery "Aloha!" In the main lobby, gazing at the waterfalls and flowers and plants from the seating areas is wonderful for relaxing and decompressing from a long day of travel or touring the parks. There are many windows and lots of light, both night and day, in keeping with the feeling that you are outside when you are inside!

Even though this is one of the original Walt Disney World resorts, the resort wears its age well and is in excellent condition. It is interesting that the buildings are of different sizes, and along with the beautiful landscaping and paths it really helps to resist any sort of cookie-cutter or barracks impression that you might get at other resorts.

We were assigned a room in the Rarotonga "longhouse," which was very good for us because it was close to the Grand Ceremonial House (GCH, the main building with the lobby) with the shops and monorail station. We were also only a short walk to our van in the parking lot, the theme park bus stop, the guest laundry, and the Ticket and Transportation Center (TTC). The building that is farthest away from the GCH is Tahiti, but that one is closer to the TTC, so it can be more convenient for getting to the parks. On the maps, the resort looks spread out, but while you are there, it doesn't seem that way. Tahiti also seems to have many rooms that have a theme park view. We spent so little time while awake in our room; the view really did not matter much to us. It also seemed we never had to wait very long to board a monorail during our stay. The bus to and from Animal Kingdom was a completely different experience, however. The resort launch service to the MK was fine and fun!

Our room was spacious but kind of dark. There was not nearly enough drawer space for our family of four and although there are two closets one is only half as wide because of the safe and shelving. I am glad I brought along an over-the-door shoe organizer as suggested by PassPorter for our cruise - it really came in handy here, too. There is a

cooler and a coffee maker. The flip-over sofa and bed was pretty comfortable. The flat panel TV was a nice space-saver and even though the remote did not function properly, one call and they delivered another one right away!

At Captain Cook's, the 24-hour quick service cafe, there are still problems with the guest traffic flow because if you want to order, pick up some beverages or something from the cooler and then check out, there can be a pretty big swarm as guests have to backtrack through everything to pick up their tray. The pagers issued for food pick-up and the computerized order entry system helps to speed things up. Pretty much all we got here was breakfast, except for one snack visit when we got flat bread (pizza) and serve-it-yourself Dole Whips - it was all good!

The resort has two table service restaurants; Kona Cafe and 'Ohana. Breakfast at Kona Cafe was excellent! You can get 100% Kona coffee in a French press pot, and the much-celebrated banana-stuffed Tonga Toast, served with maple and strawberry syrups. Some diners may want to split this dish and mix or match with some meat or eggs with another member of their party. Dinner at Kona Cafe was excellent, with sushi and other appetizers, American-Asian fusion entrees, and petite yet delicious desserts. I had the shrimp and scallops dish, everyone else in my party had the beef teriyaki. The Kona Island sushi menu is available to you while you dine at Kona (they are right next to each other) as are the fabulous tropical drinks of the Tambu Lounge! I had the shrimp tempura maki and my wife had the duck pot stickers, and they were both the best we had ever had.

'Ohana's Best Friends Breakfast with Lilo and Stitch was a yummy, family-style meal. Our youngest son did not care for the likioli juice or the pineapple bread, but everyone else loved it. Your table also gets a big pan with scrambled eggs, biscuits, bacon, sausage, and Mickey waffles. On the side is syrup and butter, of course. If you still have room and want more, just ask your cousin for the hour, your server. The main event is a parade with music and Hawaiian Shirt Mickey, Pluto, Lilo and a two-armed Stitch. The characters have leis as do all the guests, once they check in with the host. Then they take a group shot for the optional photo package. It all adds to the ambiance. If you buy the photo package, you can have it added to your PhotoPass account using the event code printed on your receipt. The decorations, including all of the tikis, are very appropriate and add to the fun and ambiance.

If you stay at the Poly (or even if you don't) you might consider taking the time to enjoy the Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show, which occurs nightly on the grounds of the Polynesian. It seemed to be well attended on the night we went. They serve salad, ribs, chicken, pineapple, bread, and

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drinks. It's all-you-care-to-eat, just ask your server for more! Kid-friendly food is available, too. The show is kind of corny, about a girl who comes back home to Hawaii after being on the mainland. They also feature a fire dancer and dancers, and the cast performed "Hawaiian Roller Coaster Ride." I suppose they could have brought out Lilo and Stitch, but maybe that's not very authentic?

Plenty of shopping is also available at the Poly. The shops and amenities on the second floor are: Samoa Snacks, Trader Mickey's (general and Polynesian-themed gifts), a PhotoPass kiosk, and Caricatures kiosk. Downstairs you can find Wyland Galleries, Capt. Cook's Quick Service, Moana Mickey's Arcade, and Bou-Tiki Fashions and Accessories.

Outside at the Polynesian there is more to be found. The Naeaua Volcano-themed pool with water slide and zero-depth entry area is a big draw for families. There is also a quiet pool, Mikala Canoe Club (marina), and Luau Cove. For parents wanting an evening alone, there is Never Land Club. This child care club is open from 4:30 p.m. until midnight and costs \$11/hour per child.

There are special activities every day of the week scheduled for those who have the time for them! These include a hula class, the torch lighting ceremony, beach or pool games and a campfire sing-along. At night, it was very nice to sit at the beach and watch the Electrical Water Pageant and Wishes with the family and a frosty beverage.

Disney's Polynesian Resort is a fantastic place to get away from the rest of the world and still be able to easily get to Disney's parks for either a short or a long stay. Aloha!

About The Author: Erik Johnson grew up in the Washington, D.C. area and works in the city, but still loves to explore the area's many interesting sites. He lives in the country with his wife Kendra and their sons and dogs and cats.

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