

# Shades of Green Resort : A Walt Disney World Resort Review

by Jennifer Schuitema, PassPorter Guest Contributor

On my family's most recent trip to Walt Disney World in June, we had the pleasure of staying at the Shades of Green Resort.

We traveled with extended family including my father-in-law, a retired Sergeant Major of the Marine Reserves. He was our eligible sponsor, which allowed us to stay at this amazing resort. The eligible sponsor must be staying at the resort and present at time of check in. (The eligibility requirements for staying at Shades of Green Resort can be found here: <http://www.shadesofgreen.org/eligibility.htm>.)

If you are unfamiliar with Shades of Green Resort, it is located across Floridian Way from Disney's Polynesian Village Resort and surrounded by Disney's Palm and Magnolia Golf Courses. It is an Armed Forces Recreational Center owned and operated by the United States Army for the enjoyment of military families. But it was not always a military resort; it was built as the third Disney-owned resort. The Golf Resort opened in December 1973 and was intended to cater to golf enthusiasts. The resort never quite found its audience and was rebranded as the Disney Inn in 1986 with a new Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs theme. Still, the resort struggled, and when the opportunity with the military arose in the early 1990s, Disney leased and eventually sold the resort to the United States Army. Since then the property has been virtually rebuilt and completely remodeled.

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□ This was the second time my family had the opportunity to stay at Shades of Green Resort. We were last there in March of 2008. In between that first stay and our most recent trip we have only stayed at Disney value or moderate resorts. I was excited to see what had changed at the resort and to stay in deluxe accommodations at value resort pricing (and tax-free).

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□ The most exciting change at Shades of Green for families is at the Millpond Pool area. The area underwent extensive renovations in 2014 and reopened January 2015. A large slide was added, which empties into the Hidden Mickey shaped pool. An additional fenced-in area just off the main pool deck includes a splash pad style water area with smaller slides and water cannons (no maximum height was posted). This was a much needed addition to the property, and it really turned out wonderfully. The quieter Magnolia Pool was also renovated and now features zero-entry.

In addition to the pool renovations, the rooms have been updated with new soft goods including the elimination of bedspreads. The rooms are very spacious--the largest standard rooms on Walt Disney World property at 480 square feet. (Grand Floridian standard rooms are 440 square feet.) All the rooms include a balcony or patio with chairs overlooking the golf course, tropical landscaping, or the pool areas. The rooms are furnished with two queen beds, a sofa that converts to a twin bed, a nightstand, table with two chairs, and a large dresser which houses a small refrigerator and coffee pot. The bathroom is large with an additional door separating the toilet and bathtub from the double vanity.

□ My husband used the resort fitness center and was impressed with its offerings. Other resort amenities include a day spa, yoga, golf, scheduled events and activities, ticket office with discounted and tax-free tickets, and resort store with souvenirs, sundries, food, and beverages. (Note: For the purpose of FastPass+ reservations, you may purchase tickets through the Shades of Green ticket office in advance via a provided form. When staying at Shades of Green, the FastPass+ window is 30 days.) In general, we loved all the amenities at Shades of Green. We truly enjoyed the landscaping, pools, lobby, guest room, balcony, and location.

□ There are a few things about staying at Shades of Green that are not as convenient as staying at a Disney-owned resort. The most obvious is the transportation. Since there is no resort-provided transportation from the airport to Shades of Green, we chose to rent a car. This allowed us to stop at Publix to pick up some groceries for the week, which was a great bonus to having our own car. (Parking at Shades of Green is \$5 per day.)

□ Once we arrived at the resort, we relied on Shades of Green buses or Disney Transportation to and from the parks. Unlike Disney buses, Shades of Green buses run on a set schedule. The Shades of Green buses drop off and pick up hourly at a set time at Hollywood Studios, Animal Kingdom, Downtown Disney, and both water parks. They drop off and pick up at the Ticket and Transportation Center (TTC) every 20 minutes. Shades of Green buses do not run to the Magic Kingdom or Epcot.

□ To get to the Magic Kingdom, the best option for us was to walk to the Polynesian and take the monorail. It took us about ten to fifteen minutes to walk. The alternative is to take the Shades of Green bus to the TTC, then a ferry or monorail to the Magic Kingdom. The walk to and from the Polynesian didn't bother me, but I can see how it is not a plus to have more walking after a long day in the parks. However, the

bonus of this arrangement is that it gave us an opportunity to explore the Polynesian, a resort we typically do not visit on our trips to Walt Disney World.

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□ Getting to and from Epcot was the most bothersome to me. The first time we went to Epcot, we took the bus to the TTC and then the monorail to Epcot. We stayed for Evening Extra Magic Hours (in which Shades of Green participates). The monorail was no longer running when it was time for us to return to the resort, so we had to take a bus from Epcot to the TTC and transfer to a Shades of Green bus. That process seemed to take forever, especially late at night with two exhausted kids. On our second trip to Epcot, we ended up taking a taxi back to Shades of Green.

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□ In addition to the sparse schedule and lack of stops at Magic Kingdom and Epcot, riders must show resort identification and driver's license/military ID each time they return on a Shades of Green bus. It's a quirky transportation system that is not particularly user friendly. At this point, one might ask why we didn't opt to drive our rental car to the parks. We would have had to pay the \$17 parking fee each day and the size of our travel party required two cars.

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□ There is a wide variety of dining options at Shades of Green: a coffee stand, grab-and-go cafe, counter-service, table-service, and room-service. The coffee stand, Java Cafe, is right off the lobby-- very convenient--and serves Starbucks. The Express Cafe is also conveniently located as it is adjacent to the bus stop area. The Evergreen Sports Bar is located next to the Millpond Pool area, and a good place to grab a poolside drink or a casual meal of pizza, sandwiches, wraps, or burgers.

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□ Mangino's is the main table-service restaurant at Shades of Green. We ate one family dinner there. The food was not outstanding but not bad. It was a generic hotel-style meal. It was convenient for our large group to meet up there, but I would have preferred to eat at a favorite Disney resort or park restaurant.

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□ Overall, we had an amazing vacation with extended family. The room rates offered by Shades of Green made it possible for all of us to take a week-long family trip to Walt Disney World and stay in a beautiful resort in a prime location. If you are aware and prepared for the differences between staying at Shades of Green and a Disney-owned resort, you will find this resort a great spot to stay for your Walt Disney World vacation. For additional information on Shades of Green and military families visiting Walt Disney World check out [militarydisneytips.com](http://militarydisneytips.com).

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About The Author: Jennifer Schuitema is a florist living in Grand Rapids, MI with her husband and daughter. She's enjoyed spending the past decade raising a Disney fan. She looks forward to visiting Walt Disney World each year with her mom and daughter, and occasionally with her husband.

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