

Taking a Disney Cruise out of Galveston, Texas: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Earlier this fall, our family made the decision to take our first Disney cruise on the Disney Wonder out of Galveston, Texas.

The sailings out of Galveston are some of the best-priced 7-night sailings that Disney Cruise Line offers. Since Southwest Airlines flies into the Houston Hobby Airport, I discovered that flying from nearby Maine to Houston was around the same price as flying to Orlando from Maine. Why not visit uncharted territory? I always wanted to see Texas, after all.

It took some legwork to figure out the logistics of flying into Houston and getting to Galveston, approximately an hour away with light traffic. Houston Hobby Airport is a smaller airport serviced largely by Southwest Airlines. We found it very easy to find our way around and staff were very helpful.

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□ We settled on Island Breezes for our shuttle transportation after getting several recommendations from fellow travel agents. While renting a car from the airport was an option, we prefer not to drive in unfamiliar urban areas. After witnessing the traffic as we drove through Houston in the shuttle, I was very thankful that we didn't entertain the idea of renting a car.

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□ It's also important to know that only Enterprise Rental Car does drop-offs in Galveston. Otherwise you will need to pay for your rental car and parking at the port for the duration of your cruise or stay at a hotel that offers parking and shuttle service to the port. Lori Ketcherside covered parking options and what to expect at the Galveston port in her December, 2012 article, [Saying 'Howdy!' to a New Home Port in Galveston: A Disney Cruise Line Review](#).

The service we received from Island Breezes was superb, with our driver ready and waiting for us when we got off the plane, even though we were almost an hour earlier than expected. He explained that they track flight status and show up for when the plane actually lands, whether that is early or late. It was a comfy ride in the shuttle, well equipped with seatbelts and appropriate seating for my 6 year old to safely use her booster seat.

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□ Our destination in Galveston was the Holiday Inn on the Beach. We were very pleased with the location, customer service, and amenities. The rooms and fitness area could use a little updating, but the beds were very comfortable. It was in the mid-80's for our full day in Galveston and we reveled in an afternoon at the extravagant pool -- all to ourselves!

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□ I wasn't taking any chances on missing our cruise, so we had 2 nights to enjoy Galveston before our cruise. We were blown away by the breathtaking scenery of the beach along the Gulf of Mexico, palm trees, and nature all around. Hundreds of birds woke us up, singing early in the morning from the palm trees just outside. We didn't even mind! We enjoyed taking a long walk along the scenic beach and even got to walk out on one of the piers. Coming from Atlantic Canada where the temperatures were already around the freezing mark, we were in heaven! If anything, we were too hot!

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□ We were on foot in Galveston, so we especially appreciated being able to walk to a grocery store just ten minutes away for some fresh food and the all-important 12-pack of bottled water for the ship. That bottled water lasted us the duration of the cruise. It was an added bonus to find Starbucks and a nice Galveston souvenir t-shirt for my husband right there at Kroger.

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□ Next door to the Holiday Inn on the Beach is the luxurious San Luis Resort. Both resorts are owned by the same company. We enjoyed fancy gelato with endless toppings inside the San Luis Resort. This resort is an add-on option with Disney Cruise Line and I'm told the special rates with Disney are a good deal. It was still considerably more expensive than the Holiday Inn next door, so we had opted to stay on budget. If we travel that far again for another cruise, I think we will splurge on San Luis.

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□ Both resorts offer complimentary shuttle service to the port. Many of the hotels charge for transportation to the port, so it's important to clarify that the service is complimentary and whether you need to reserve a time for your shuttle. The 10:30am timeslot was already taken when we checked in, so I was glad that our port arrival for Disney cruise line wasn't scheduled until 12:30pm.

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□ These resorts also offer some shuttle transportation around Galveston on non-cruise ship days to places such as Moody Gardens. A driver wasn't available at Holiday Inn for our day to venture out, but they were more than willing to make arrangements for us with the San Luis driver.

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□ We didn't get time to visit Moody Gardens, but heard many rave reviews about this attraction, which is described as an educational

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tourist destination. Attractions include a rainforest, aquarium, Imax theatre, a seasonal outdoor waterpark, and other attractions. Since the Disney cruises typically run in November and December, most Disney cruisers won't have a chance to take advantage of the outdoor waterpark. The aquarium was also closed for refurbishment during our stay in Galveston.

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□ Just next to the San Luis resort was the perfect kickoff to the night before our cruise: Rainforest Cafe! We felt like we got a little Disney fix right there in Galveston, having previously enjoyed the Rainforest Cafe at Animal Kingdom. Menu prices were also slightly less expensive than the Walt Disney World locations.

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□ This Rainforest cafe also had an elaborate River Adventure ride, reasonably priced at \$5.99/person. My husband and 9 year old daughter thoroughly enjoyed it and found the special effects were on par with what you'd expect at a Disney park attraction.

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□ We enjoyed a smooth ride to the port the next day and relatively easy boarding process, though the port was crowded and felt a little chaotic. On our return we had a bit of a wait for our shuttle, as we were off the ship by 9:30am and our shuttle was scheduled for 11am. Just in case our ship got back late, I had booked us for one more night in Texas at the Doubletree Houston Hobby Airport Hotel, with our flight leaving late the following afternoon. We saw many Southwest Airlines staff at the hotel and concluded that this is one of the preferred Houston Hobby Airport hotels. We were very impressed with the onsite restaurant for both dinner and a breakfast buffet.

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□ The Hobby Airport area isn't particularly attractive and is considerably removed from Houston attractions, so we felt that remaining at the hotel was best. In hindsight, we would have been fine to fly out late in the day from Houston or could have enjoyed one more night in Galveston before getting a shuttle back to the airport the next day.

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□ In upcoming articles, I will discuss what it was like to be Canadian first-time Disney cruisers out of Galveston and the extra special experience of being on a Very Merrytime sailing.

About The Author: Amy Wear is a work at home mom, travel agent, writer, and registered occupational therapist. She lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and specializes in planning magical vacations for people of all abilities at Click The Mouse. You can find her online at <http://www.clickthemouse.ca/amy-w.html>

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