

The Hilton Lake Buena Vista at Disney Springs: A Walt Disney World Off-Site Resort Review

by Nicole Groves, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My husband's employer has an annual awards ceremony and training event in March. They have held this event in places like; Charlotte NC, Dallas TX, and Myrtle Beach SC. I have long dreamed of the day when they might hold this event in Orlando. My dream came true this March!

We were informed late last year that the event would be held at the Hilton Lake Buena Vista (LBV) at Disney Springs. I was immediately thrilled at the prospect of having three free nights at Disney. We decided to book three more nights to make it more like a regular Disney trip.

Hilton Lake Buena Vista is a typical 3 star Hilton. My first impression was that Florida business class hotels have a theme and that theme is, "Controlled Foliage". The hotel grounds were pleasant with large palm trees, flowers and lots of greenery. Inside, the lobby had a sleek, modern look. There were interesting blown glass light fixtures running the length of the lobby. The contrast of dark wood, light marble floors and contemporary light was clean and peaceful. Check in was fast while the hotel staff was friendly and efficient.

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□ Our room was ready so we headed up to unpack. The room was not large nor was it overly small. There were two double beds with a desk and chair at the end of the dresser. The room was finished with another chair and floor lamp in front of the window. There was a view of the other Disney Springs hotels and a partial view of Disney Springs. The windows had blackout curtains. The bathroom was the most functional part of the room. It was a split bath design. One sink was in an alcove with the closet. The other sink was inside the bathroom with toilet and full shower. There was storage under the sinks for our carry-on bag and suitcase, which was a good thing because there wasn't anywhere else to put them. The closet had enough hangers for mine and my husband's clothes, but not the kids. We did have enough drawer space for each kid to have their own drawer while my husband and I shared the last one. We did have to make a "shoe space" for everyone's shoes on the floor at the end of the dresser. It's possible we take too many shoes as this happens every time we're on vacation.

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□ The Hilton LBV claims several amenities; 2 pools, 2 shops including a small Disney Store, 6 restaurants and pool bar with grill and an arcade.

Let me say right up front, we did not use the arcade as we never saw the arcade. I'm sure it's there. Somewhere.

After we settled in our room we headed to the pool area. It was around 2 p.m. on Sunday. We were hoping to grab some lunch and drinks at the pool bar then do some swimming. However, the pool bar staff had other plans! The pool grill had just closed but they could still provide beer, wine and sodas. Not really the lunch I planned. So my husband saved us a table while the kids and I picked up some snacks at the Market Place. I never again saw the pool bar open.

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□The pool had two good size pools with a toddler pool and hot tub. The pools were your basic hotel pool, no slides. The pools were heated and only got to about 6 feet deep, so most people could enjoy these pools. There were a lot of lounge chairs as well as tables with chairs, a gazebo and plenty of towels. The area provided lots of shade.

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□Transportation. What can I say about the transportation at Hilton Lake Buena Vista? Not much. The official company line is, "The Hilton Lake Buena Vista participates in the complimentary Disney Springs bus system." According to the front desk, buses pick up at the Hilton LBV on the hour and the half hour. There is a conveniently marked door for the Disney Parks buses to the left of the main lobby. We never used these buses. Since this was a work trip for Jason we just couldn't be there during such specific times. We found it much easier to use a taxi. The cost averaged about \$30 per day. In my opinion this was much easier than renting a car, where you have to navigate the construction, buy gas and pay at least \$20 to park at the parks. The taxis also drop you off at the same place that the Disney Springs buses drop, which is the \$40 parking lot! Yes! That's right! People are paying \$40 to park. They must be locals. The only time using a taxi backfired was the one day that is was just me and the kids. I had called the bell services desk to get us a taxi. When I got down there it was a white Lincoln MKX, not the usual Mears yellow cab. This guy drove us the longest way possible to Magic Kingdom! Then he wouldn't take a credit card. The cab alone ride was \$28! The ride back that night only cost \$22 with a 20% tip! I did complain to the bell desk manager but there wasn't anything they could do after the fact. I would recommend making sure you get the standard, yellow Mears taxi. These drivers were more honest, helpful and some were very friendly.

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□We didn't eat many meals at the hotel but did usually get breakfast there. There is a small refrigerator & coffee maker in the room. You could bring cereal, milk & other small items to make your breakfast but we opted not to go to the grocery store. Most mornings we would go to the Market Place for yogurt, doughnuts, and fruit. The Market Place

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provides free Starbucks coffee. The last morning of our stay we had vouchers for the Diamond & Gold buffet. This was served in the Italian restaurant.. It was a predictable hotel buffet, eggs, bacon & sausage, a variety of muffins, cereal & fruit with several drinks. One night the kids just wanted to stay at the hotel instead of walking around anymore, so we ordered room service. The room service was very good! I had a goat cheese & prosciutto pizza which had a crispy crust and great flavor. My daughter has the 5 cheese pasta and my son had Buffalo wings. Everyone's food was hot and delicious and delivered in about 20 minutes. It was about \$80 with tip but that is about what you'd pay for most dinners at Disney. I would recommend the room service.

□ The best part about the Hilton Lake Buena Vista is its close proximity to Disney Springs. The pedestrian bridge that serves that side of Hotel Plaza Blvd is located right on the Hilton's property. Just a 5 minute walk puts you in front of the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique! It was fantastic to have such easy access to all that great shopping & food! We were able to enjoy Art Smith's: Homecoming (wonderful!!) the first night. We had an easy time getting to the T-Rex Cafe for lunch one afternoon. It was very convenient to be able to pop over to Disney Springs for last minutes gifts the day we headed home. I really enjoyed being so close to Disney Springs. It's a place we haven't spent much time at on our previous Disney trips.

□ Now for my overall opinion. I need to be honest we haven't stayed "off property" for a Disney trip since 2002, and that was for work also! I prefer the benefits and theming of the Disney hotels. My husband felt the hotel was dated and just lacking the feel he's looking for in a hotel. My kids were not impressed with the pool at all, it just did not appeal to my 12 and 14 year old kids. The Hilton Lake Buena Vista is a fine hotel. The price is competitive for the area and being so close to Disney Springs is a benefit. This hotel caters to conventions. There were three held during our six night stay. I think this would be a good choice for families with little kids who don't swim well or parties of two. Let's say you hit the parks early (be sure to plan at least an hour for travel to get you at the park at open), then come back to the Hilton Lake Buena Vista in the afternoon. Do NOT go back to the parks! Go to Disney Springs! You could bowl at Splitsville, catch dinner & a movie at the AMC dine in theater, maybe do some shopping and eat some more! Seriously you should be eating at Disney Springs! The location of Hilton Lake Buena Vista makes enjoying the Springs easy! So if you're considering a stay in the Disney Springs area check out the Hilton Lake Buena Vista.<

About The Author: Nicole Groves is a stay at home mom who's been married 20 years to a really great guy with whom she shares two teenage-ish kids. She loves all things Disney from movies to the parks and really loves

sharing that with friends and family! She's also active with her local PTA and enjoys teaching a Wednesday 3rd grade Bible study. Nicole Groves is a stay at home mom who's been married 20 years to a really great guy with whom she shares two teenage-ish kids. She loves all things Disney from movies to the parks and really loves sharing that with friends and family! She's also active with her local PTA and enjoys teaching a Wednesday 3rd grade Bible study.

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