

Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground: From An "Aussie" Point of View

by Anne Topp, PassPorter Guest Contributor

So you're a lover of the great outdoors, and maybe like me you're an "Aussie" lover of the great outdoors. What has Walt Disney World got to offer me, you think? After all, a holiday in a quiet secluded National Park with nature all around you it "ain't." What you need is a cabin at Fort Wilderness.

Back in the land of "Aus," I love to camp in quiet, out of the way places, but I also enjoy visiting popular tourist attractions around the world, and I love the granddaddy of them all -- Walt Disney World. We Aussies have to travel huge distances to get to Florida, and it just isn't practical to lug camping gear with us, so that's why I stay at the Fort Wilderness Cabins. You see, I absolutely love all things Mickey, but sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming. I love Fort Wilderness because I get the chance to leave the hectic pace of the parks behind and chill-out in the forest. Even though the cabins are really just mobile homes, they have been "Disney-fied" by being clad in logs for a real woodsy feel. Each cabin has its own wooden deck area with a table and seats and is surrounded by large trees and greenery, giving you a certain amount of privacy from your neighbors. The cabins are set in what Disney terms "loops," (side streets following a circular route) but we Aussies would call them "courts." A tip for experiencing more privacy and forest feel is to ask for a cabin on the outside of a loop, as you will be surrounded by more trees and shrubs.

I won't go into detail here about the interior of the cabins - photos are available in the PassPorter Photo Archive. I will say that they are very comfortable and offer a large area in which to spread out.

The thing I love most about Fort Wilderness is being able to get up in the morning and sit outside on the decking, enjoying my first "cuppa" of the day in the company of squirrels. Now you Americans may be a bit blasé about your squirrels, but let me tell you, from an Australian point of view they are the cutest little fellows. I absolutely love to watch their antics as they scurry about gathering tidbits and the kids will love them too, along with the deer, armadillos, tiny lizards and other animals that call Fort Wilderness home.

There are two pools on offer for guests here. The main pool is located in roughly the center of the resort and is quite large. While it currently

lacks the theming of the other resort pools, it is located in a really pretty area. It has lovely green forest as its backdrop and a little river nearby where you can fish and canoe (rental of poles and canoes is available through the Bike Barn nearby). I also understand that this pool is getting a face lift soon, which will add a waterslide, so that should satisfy the kids. The other pool is right amongst the cabin loops, but again it doesn't offer anything special other than a great place to cool off on a hot day, surrounded by peaceful forest.

There are two Trading Posts (general stores), one down by the lake known as the Settlement Trading Post and the other one near the main pool in the center of the park known as the Meadow Trading Post. The Meadow happens to be the closest store to the cabins. Having said that, it is still quite a walk to get there, but I really enjoyed getting up early and strolling through the woods with the squirrels as my only companions, to get our daily provisions before hitting the parks. You are not encouraged to drive your vehicle around the resort - there's nearly no place to park, just to make sure. However, you are allowed to drive to the Meadow Trading Post and park for a short time while you shop. You will only find basic provisions at the stores but enough to get you by.

Getting to the parks from Fort Wilderness can be a bit of a hassle. As the resort is so huge, they have an internal bus system to get you around. You have to catch one of these to take you to the two main terminals from where the park buses and/or ferries leave. These terminals are located at opposite ends of the resort. If you want to go to Disney Studios or catch the boat to Magic Kingdom you need to catch an internal bus down to the Settlement Depot and transfer there. If you want to go to Epcot, Animal Kingdom, or Downtown Disney you need to catch an internal bus going the other way to the front entrance (Outpost Depot) and transfer there. I admit at first it's a bit confusing but you'll soon get the hang of it. All this does mean you have to allow extra time to get to the parks, so if you're a person who loves to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, then you are better off renting a car. A car also comes in handy to do grocery runs and to visit other attractions in the area, but as Americans drive on the opposite side of the road to us Aussies, we can find it a bit daunting.

Another option if you want to get around the resort and bypass the internal buses is to rent a golf cart. They're not cheap at \$47 plus tax a day, but they would be worth it if you have small children and you're getting home late from the parks, as you won't need to wait for the internal buses to get you back to your cabin. You do need to reserve one as early as possible - you can book up to a year in advance. Oh, and don't forget to recharge them when you park! There are charging posts

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outside the cabins and at the two main bus terminals, by the lake, and at the main entrance.

Now one bit of advice specifically for Aussie visitors regards the time of year to visit Walt Disney World. We have one very large advantage over Americans, and that is, our main holidays are in January and this coincides with one of the quietest times of year at Walt Disney World. You will find crowds are very manageable and the long waits at rides encountered at other times of the year almost nonexistent. Just be aware that the Disney Marathons are held usually the second weekend in January, and that Martin Luther King holiday weekend also falls in January. These two events usually do have a bit of an impact on the crowd levels, but on those days, why not take the opportunity to visit one of the many other tourist attractions in the area such as SeaWorld, Universal Studios, or Kennedy Space Center to name a few?

There is so much offered at Fort Wilderness that you could easily devote several days to on-site activities, but perhaps I will save all that for another time. What I will say to travelers who love the great outdoors, is seriously consider staying at the Fort Wilderness Cabins. Trust me, they are a quiet, relaxing oasis after all the excitement of the amazing parks.

About The Author: Anne Topp has two children and lives in Melbourne, Australia. She owns her own TV Lighting Production Company and simply loves to travel with her kids. She has been to Walt Disney World twice and has just booked her third trip for January 2009.

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