

## Animal Kingdom Lodge: The Perfect Resort For Teenagers

by Michelle Clark, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Probably the biggest decision a family makes when planning a trip to Walt Disney World is choosing where to stay. Even after deciding to stay "on property" (in a Disney-owned resort), the process has just begun. With over 20 resorts, Disney has a resort for just about any taste and budget. Each family is different and has unique likes and dislikes.

We decided to take our family to Walt Disney World during the Christmas season. Most of our prior trips had consisted of "commando" touring. Early on I learned an important tip: Get up early and hit the theme parks before the crowds arrive to avoid long lines. When my children became teenagers, I learned a new lesson: Teenagers don't want to get up early and hit the theme parks before the crowds arrive! So we decided that this trip would be a fun, low key, relaxing vacation. I promised that I would not pressure my kids to get out of bed and onto a theme park bus. After much deliberation, we selected the Animal Kingdom Lodge for this trip. It turned out to be the perfect choice for our teens, which made the trip much more enjoyable for Mom & Dad!

So what made Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge resort so appealing to our teens? Here are a few examples:

All guest rooms are accessible via interior corridors, and our kids wouldn't have to walk outside to separate buildings. This safety factor put Mom and Dad at ease. Also, our rooms had bunk beds, so no one had to share a bed with their sibling. Ahhh, the sound of peace!

We booked a pool view room, which was the perfect location -- close to the arcade and food court, two areas visited often by our teens. We felt completely comfortable sending them to the food court with their room key whenever they got the munchies. The menu at The Mara, the Lodge's food court, included those important staples in any teenager's diet -- hamburgers, french fries, chicken fingers, and pizza. The chocolate muffins were a big hit for a late breakfast. Of course every breakfast was a late breakfast for those sleepy teens! Since our room was so close to The Mara, it was quick and convenient to use the refillable mugs. And since you can pre-purchase an arcade card for video games, no more scrambling for quarters every day!

For family meals, Boma offers a great variety of food choices for everyone's tastes, from the adventurous eater to the sweet tooth to the

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picky eater. Our teens really enjoyed breakfast at Boma, especially the made-to-order omelets.

The expansive lobby of the Lodge has many seating areas, which is a perfect place for a teen to "chill out" when that hotel room becomes a bit crowded. Another one of their favorite places to sit and relax was around the fire pit located to the rear of the lobby at the Arusha Rock.

The pool has one of the best water slides on Disney property, and plenty of lounge chairs for sunbathers. The hot tub was another place our teens liked to hang out.

Did you think I wasn't going to mention the wildlife viewing? Even though we didn't have a savannah view room, our teens enjoyed watching the animals on the three savannahs. Their favorite time to see wildlife was at night when a Cast Member brought out night vision goggles. There was a balcony next to our elevator on Zebra Trail with rocking chairs and viewing binoculars. Our teens loved to take pictures there. There are also Cast Members posted at the savannah viewing areas to answer any questions about the animals.

There is so much to see and explore in the Animal Kingdom Lodge that it can keep even the shortest attention spans entertained. They found the various displays of artwork in the Lobby and the hallways interesting, and it is possible that they may even have learned something. Cast members are easy to find and love to volunteer information about the displays.

Zawadi Marketplace is probably their favorite gift shop in Walt Disney World. (Mine too!) They loved to browse through the collections of African-inspired gifts, as well as those classic Disney souvenirs. There is a large selection of jewelry, and they usually come back with quite a wish list. Often there is an artist in the shop drawing or painting who graciously allows teens to observe them at work.

We found the bus service at Animal Kingdom Lodge to be very efficient. We never waited more than 10 minutes for a bus, if at all. Since we let our older teens sleep in and join us later in the day at the theme park, we felt better knowing that they wouldn't wait long for a bus. Their two favorite parks, Animal Kingdom and the Disney Hollywood Studios were both short rides.

If you ask my teens today which Disney resort is their favorite, they will all answer without hesitation "Animal Kingdom Lodge." In fact, they have already told us that we should stay there on our next Disney trip. I'd recommend it to anyone planning a trip that includes teenagers!

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*About The Author: Michelle Clark is a self-professed theme park junkie and the mother of three teens. Their family has made nearly a dozen trips to the Orlando theme parks resorts, and is currently planning a trip to several theme parks in the Northeastern U.S. Michelle is also a Guide on the PassPorter Message Boards.*

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