

## Disney's Wilderness Lodge: A Resort Review

by Erin McAuliffe, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Disney's Wilderness Lodge opened its doors for the first time on May 28, 1994 in the Magic Kingdom area of Walt Disney World. The resort is modeled on the historic Old Faithful Lodge in Yellowstone National Park circa 1904. Upon entering the lobby, no longer are you in Central Florida but in a majestic National Park Lodge, where the staff is more than happy to welcome you home. The lobby is home to an eighty-foot-tall fireplace, a built to scale replica of the Grand Canyon's rock layers, rocking chairs, two five-story-tall totem poles, tepee-topped chandeliers, and much more.

During the holidays the Wilderness Lodge is decked out for the season with wreaths and garlands adorning the walls, while a 60-foot Christmas tree decorated with theme appropriate decorations and 60,000 lights take center stage in the lobby.

Rooms come with the choice of three views. Standard View faces out over the parking lot or driveway. Woods View rooms face out over the trees towards either the Magic Kingdom (although the Magic Kingdom cannot be seen, you may get a glimpse of a passing monorail or fireworks display) or the Wilderness Lodge Villas, which opened as part of the Disney Vacation Club in November 2002. Courtyard View looks out over the pools or Bay Lake upon which the resort is situated.

The Villas at the Wilderness Lodge is a free-standing Disney Vacation Club building adjacent to the Wilderness Lodge, offering studio, one- and two-bedroom vacation villas. The Wilderness Lodge and the Villas at the Wilderness Lodge share all facilities, and villas are available to the general public as well as to vacation club members.

The Wilderness Lodge houses 728 guest rooms that are approximately 340 square feet in size and come with either a single king bed, two queen beds, or a queen bed and a set of bunk beds, along with a sink area containing two vanities and a separately enclosed shower and toilet. Each room comes equipped with a television, table, chairs, coffee maker, refrigerator, hair dryer, iron and ironing board and small in-room safe that is adequate for storing airline tickets, traveler's checks/cash and some jewelry. For any other valuables, arrangements can be made at the front desk.

Another option for families is the Junior Suites, which are 500 square

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feet and have a kitchen/living room and a large bedroom with two beds. Along with the amenities found in the regular rooms, the suites also come equipped with a sofa bed and wet bar.

Concierge rooms, located on the seventh floor, offer either a woods view or courtyard view. In addition to the regular amenities, concierge guests receive bathrobes, nightly turn down service, a continental breakfast and various snacks and drinks throughout the day at the Concierge Lounge.

The Wilderness Lodge is considered to be a Deluxe resort and is priced accordingly, although it is typically the least expensive resort in this category. There are four different rate seasons throughout the year: Value, Regular, Peak and Holiday. Quoted rates do not include Florida Sales Tax or County Resort Tax and are based on double occupancy. Children under the age of 17 stay free when staying in the same room as an adult.

Transportation to and from the Wilderness Lodge is offered through the boat dock and the bus depot. Boats can take guests from the Wilderness Lodge to Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground, the Contemporary Resort and the Magic Kingdom. Buses are available to every park, including the Magic Kingdom, the Transportation and Ticket Center and Downtown Disney.

The Wilderness Lodge has two full-service restaurants, a lounge and two snack bars.

Artist Point is a full service restaurant that serves dinner daily from 5:30 pm to 10:00 pm. It serves Pacific Northwestern cuisine. Well known for its Cedar Plank Salmon, Artist Point is one of the few restaurants to annually receive the rare Copper River Salmon.

Whispering Canyon Cafe is a family restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. All-you-can-eat skillet meals are a popular menu choice and range in price from \$10.99 for breakfast to \$22.99 for dinner. Little ones are kept entertained with the hourly Pony Express rides held throughout the restaurant.

The Territory Lounge is situated adjacent to Artist Point and is a relaxing lounge that serves a range of micro-brews, espresso and cappuccino along with light snacks between 5:00 pm and 10:00 pm nightly.

Roaring Forks Snacks is open daily from 6:00 a.m. to midnight with food offered at hot and cold stations and what is known as "Grab and Go,"

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which includes items like fresh fruit, boxed cereal, etc. There is a small seating area to one side for those wishing to eat a quick breakfast before heading off to the parks for the day without having to return to their rooms. Refillable mugs are available for purchase for \$11.99 and can be used for unlimited coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and fountain drinks for the duration of your stay.

The poolside Trout Pass Bar operates under seasonal hours.

Room service is available for breakfast from 7:00 am until 11:00 am and dinner is available from 5:00 pm until 10:00 pm.

Many activities are available to Lodge guests. The main pool begins in the lobby as a bubbling hot spring before flowing outside and over Silver Creek Falls, finishing in the pool, which contains a short water slide. There are two hot tubs, lounge chairs, tables and umbrellas available for use around the pool. A quiet pool is adjacent to the Villas at the Wilderness Lodge and is open to all guests.

Guests can take in the sun on the beach at the edge of Bay Lake, take advantage of the three-quarter mile wooded path that runs between the Wilderness Lodge and Fort Wilderness by taking a walk, going for a jog, or taking a ride on a bike that can be rented at the Teton Boat and Bike Rental, located near the beach. Bikes can be rented for about \$10 per hour, while small speed boats can be rented for about \$40 per half hour. A 120-foot geyser spouts off every hour on the hour between 7:00 am and 10:00 pm daily and can be viewed from the main lobby, the courtyard or the walkway located just behind the pool.

There are many quiet areas to be found throughout the Wilderness Lodge that overlook either the lobby or the courtyard and are a great place to curl up with a good book after a long day traipsing through the various parks.

The Electrical Water Pageant runs nightly on Bay Lake and passes by the Wilderness Lodge at approximately 9:35 pm, although it may be canceled due to inclement weather.

The Mercantile stocks a variety of north-western and Wilderness Lodge themed merchandise, Disney plush and various sundries and the Disney character totem pole just outside the doors makes for a wonderful photo opportunity.

The Cub's Den is available for children aged 4-12 and is open from 5:00 pm to midnight daily. Kids are kept entertained with video games, storytelling, arts and crafts, and Disney movies. Reservations are

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recommended and can be made by calling 407-WDW-DINE (407-...).

Make sure to spend time exploring the Wilderness Lodge. One way to do this is through the Wonders of the Lodge Tour which is offered at 9:00 a.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays where you will learn about the Lodge's architecture, landscaping and artwork, including all the metalwork, totem poles and paintings.

*About The Author: Erin is an Executive Assistant and long time Disney enthusiast. She is looking forward to her next visit and first stay at Pop Century in October 2007 before returning to the Wilderness Lodge for the holiday season in December 2008.*

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