

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa: A Resort Review

by Winston Chapman, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When Walt Disney World opened in 1971, it was a shadow of what we know today. The Magic Kingdom, Fort Wilderness Campground, Contemporary Resort, and Polynesian Village Resort were the principle structures of what was to be known as the "vacation kingdom of the world." However, the company at that time had a long-term plan for WDW that was very different from what came to be. Walt Disney's EPCOT concept was on hold, the Magic Kingdom was already targeted for change and expansion, and additional hotels were past the drawing board stage, ready to come to life around Seven Seas Lagoon. In addition to the Polynesian and Contemporary, Disney intended to add the Persian, Venetian, and Asian resorts, all along the monorail line, which would have taken a more circuitous route than it does today. Of course, those other hotels never materialized, and most of Disney's construction has taken place elsewhere on property, far from the Magic Kingdom area.

The Michael Eisner era saw the construction of Disney's Grand Floridian Beach Resort, which opened on Seven Seas Lagoon in 1988. Although routine maintenance and rehabs are the norm at Walt Disney World hotels, the Grand Floridian has changed little in its nearly 22 years. A convention center opened in 1992, the name became Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa in 1997, and a new pool surfaced in 2001, but much is still the same at Disney's spectacular flagship resort.

There are 900 guest rooms and suites at the GF, with an average standard room size of over 400 sq. ft. The rooms are located among six buildings: a central main building (which also houses the shops, lobby, registration desk, monorail station, and most of the restaurants) and five "lodge" buildings named for islands in the Florida Keys. The architecture of the hotel and the styling of its rooms were inspired by the Victorian era beach resorts of the late 1800's and early 1900's, such as the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego and Henry Flagler's Royal Poinciana in Palm Beach. Thus, a typical room will exude old-world charm with soft colors, antique style furniture, and luxurious accents. As with all Walt Disney World resorts in the deluxe category, rooms open onto interior hallways and have balconies or patios. You can find coin-operated washers and dryers in all the buildings, though valet laundry and dry cleaning are available. Marble-topped double sinks, flat-screen televisions, in-room safes, and mini-refrigerators are the norm, and most rooms have two queen beds with a daybed, although

king rooms and sleeper sofas may also be an option. Rooms with access to a club lounge and concierge services can be booked in the main building or in the Sugar Loaf lodge. A wide variety of suites, with or without club access, are spread throughout the resort.

Recreation options abound at the Grand Floridian. Guests can swim in one of two pools (one themed, the other "quiet"), relax in the hot tub, or sunbathe on the beach. Boat rentals are available at the marina for excursions on Seven Seas Lagoon and Bay Lake. Athletes might enjoy time on the tennis courts, jogging around the lagoon, or a workout at the health club. If pampering and/or looking your best is on your agenda, schedule one or more services at Ivy Trellis Salon or at the Grand Floridian Spa, where you can enjoy facials, massages, exfoliating treatments, wraps, manicures, pedicures -- the list goes on and on. For the young (or young at heart), the video arcade demands a visit. Children have access to a playground near the Mouseketeer Club, which provides childcare to Grand Floridian resort and restaurant guests. Shoppers can spend time browsing for gifts, upscale clothing and apparel, bath products, and sundries. Honestly, there are more than enough recreation options for anyone who might want to take a whole day off from the parks. Just in case that's not your cup of tea...

The Grand Floridian enjoys an unparalleled location and excellent access to the theme parks. If you're a Magic Kingdom fan, there couldn't be a better place for you, since the park is literally just three minutes away via monorail or a tranquil ten-minute boat ride on the lagoon. Getting to Epcot is almost as easy and even more fun, since you'll get to ride the monorail through the Contemporary and change to another monorail at the Transportation and Ticket Center for a scenic journey that winds around Epcot's Future World and affords great photo opportunities. Hollywood Studios, Animal Kingdom, and Downtown Disney can be reached by direct buses from a stop just outside the lobby. And if you love food...

You've come to the right place! Arguably, the GF has some of the best and most varied dining at Walt Disney World. Want characters? Head to 1900 Park Fare. Prefer casual dining? Try the Grand Floridian Cafe. Just need a quick, inexpensive bite at 3:00am? Gasparilla's Grill and Games is open 24 hours a day. Looking for something more upscale? Citricos and Narcoossee's might be your best bet. How about an adult beverage in the Garden View Lounge (which also serves afternoon tea) or in Mizner's? Never want to leave your room? Order room service! If you want to go all-out, then Victoria and Albert's five-star dining room offers an experience that you won't ever forget. The dining options at the GF are a far cry from what you'll find at many other WDW resorts, so much so that you might want to check them out even if you're staying

elsewhere.

There's so much information available about the Grand Floridian in [PassPorter's Walt Disney World](#), at PassPorter.com, on Deb Wills' web site (AllEars.net), and in countless other Walt Disney World guidebooks and internet resources. Instead of going into belabored detail on all of the wonderful things the resort offers, I'd like to touch on the one thing that guests dislike about the resort: its price!

Let's do some comparing. In 2010, during "value seasons," a room at Disney's All-Star and Pop Century Resorts can go for as little as \$82 (nightly rack rate). At the Wilderness Lodge, which is in the deluxe category along with the GF, the rate would be \$240. The GF comes in at \$410, and that's for a standard room. Does anyone have sticker shock yet? Before deciding that you can't afford it or that it couldn't possibly be worth the price, let me tell you that I've never paid rack rate at any WDW hotel since I started going back as an adult. Seasonal discount codes, AAA rates, special packages, and other money-saving opportunities are out there; you just have to look for them.

MouseSavers.com is my favorite website for finding deals at WDW hotels, and I visit it almost every day. I'm headed back to the GF in September 2010, and I'll be saving 40% with a Bounceback offer.

Despite my love for the other two monorail hotels, there's just nothing like staying at the Grand Floridian. From your arrival, when you first walk into the lobby and see those amazing glass domes and monumental chandeliers, you'll know that this is truly a special and unique place to stay.

About The Author: Winston Chapman lives in Atlanta, GA but was raised in Nashville, TN by parents who loved WDW almost as much as he does! His first trip was sometime in the mid-1970's (in a baby stroller), and he has made many return trips since then, always staying at the monorail resorts. He is also an active member of the PassPorter.com online community and a budding part-time travel agent, in addition to owning a thriving education consulting firm in Atlanta.

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