

## Disney's Grand Californian Resort: A Disney Vacation Club Resort Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

It was a long time coming, but finally in 2009, Disneyland joined the Disney Vacation Club (DVC) with the opening of the Villas at Disney's Grand Californian Hotel.

As DVC members, we couldn't wait to try them out, especially as we loved our first stay at the resort in 2008. As soon as I knew that we'd be returning to Disneyland, I made it my mission to try and book one of those elusive villas, as there are only 50 two-bedroom-equivalent units in the whole complex. Compare that to the Villas at Wilderness Lodge, the smallest DVC resort at Walt Disney World, which number 181, and you get an idea of how tough booking a Grand Californian villa can be. It's tougher still, as we don't own points at the Grand Californian. If you do, it secures you booking rights at 11 months out. For all other DVC members, it's booking at the seven-month mark.

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□ I called DVC Member Services with a great deal of trepidation, but I was amazed to be able to secure a one-bedroom villa for our first night. There was nothing available for our second night, so I put our names down on the waitlist for either a studio or a one-bedroom villa. If one became available, we'd be in line for it. Imagine my surprise when I logged on to the DVC member website the next day, just to check the reservation for night one was in, only to find that we had a one-bedroom villa for both nights of our stay.

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□ We were in for even more of a surprise when we arrived at the Grand Californian and checked in. Our room was wonderfully located on the ground floor, just a few rooms away from the elevators, making it exceptionally easy to get to, even with all the luggage that came with us. We threw open the door and couldn't get over the size of the place. It was massive!

It's not the biggest one-bedroom villa of the DVC resorts, that honor is still kept firmly by Old Key West at Walt Disney World, and Disney's Vero Beach Resort also has larger rooms. However, the Grand Californian villas are still impressive, both in size and in furnishings. The color scheme resembles that of the Wilderness Lodge, with a combination of earthy tones, such as greens, reds and browns, and instantly feels homely as a result.

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□ The one-bedroom villas here sleep a total of five people, with a fold-down sofa and another bed neatly tucked underneath the TV in the

living room, a clever addition. Another highlight was the main bathroom. Not only did it have the Jacuzzi bath that all DVC resorts feature in their one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas, but the walk-in shower was an absolute joy. We both came away wishing that all of the other DVC resorts had facilities like this.

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□So what about the rest of the resort? The Grand Californian is perhaps the best located of the three Disney hotels at Disneyland, with its own private entrance to Disney's California Adventure. That entry is a really nice treat, and helps to cut out the long queues to get into the park. If you want to head for Disneyland Park, then that's only about a five minute walk away, a very pleasant stroll through parts of Downtown Disney. The only downside is that you have to pass the always tempting World of Disney store on your way to and from the park!

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□If you've seen Walt Disney World's Wilderness Lodge, then you have a good idea of what to expect, as both were created by the same architect. The difference here is that it is in Arts and Crafts style, rather than a rustic, National Parks-style lodge. The lobby is a wonderful place to unwind and relax, with lots of places to sit and watch the world go by. There's a huge fireplace to sit in front of, and a pianist who comes out to play from time to time, which add to the relaxing atmosphere. I'm so glad that, on this vacation, we finally had the time to sit and just take everything in.

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□Just off the resort lobby is the Hearthstone Lounge, a beautiful place to sit and enjoy a drink or a light snack. It was somewhere that we'd never managed to find on our previous visits, but we were very impressed with its decor and atmosphere.

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□One of the other highlights of the Grand Californian is the resort shop, Acorn's Gifts and Goods, as we've managed to find some lovely items of clothing during our last couple of visits.

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□I can't finish without mentioning the resort restaurants, even though we didn't get a chance to enjoy them on our most recent trip. For a more informal meal, with some characters involved, head for the Storytellers' Cafe. We've enjoyed a couple of excellent meals here for both breakfast and lunch. Next door is the exquisite Napa Rose, perhaps the finest dining on Disneyland property. It's equivalent to the Signature restaurants at Walt Disney World, with prices to match of course, and a constantly changing menu of various delights.

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□The Grand Californian, for us, is the ultimate resort at Disneyland. It's perfectly located, beautifully themed, and with the addition of the villas, it's become an amazing "home away from home" for DVC

members. If planning a Disneyland visit, it's well worth seeing if you can get a spot in the villas, either with your DVC points, or through a regular hotel reservation.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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