

DISCOVER THE SOPHISTICATED SIDE OF WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT

Is it possible for sophisticated travelers to really enjoy themselves in the land of Mickey Mouse? Absolutely! *Walt Disney World* Resort has undergone an amazing transformation with an abundance of fantastic themed resorts and sumptuous dining choices.

Maybe your image of Disney is of lackluster, motel-style accommodations. Not so! All of Disney's Deluxe Resort choices are unique and offer that special Disney touch. You'll find them to be adorned with impressive lobbies, painstakingly landscaped grounds, first-rate restaurants, elaborately themed pools, and gracious accommodations. All offer top-notch recreational facilities and services. In fact it can be quite difficult to choose which fantasy you wish to indulge.

Let me tell you about my favorites:

- ❖ ***Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa***, with its red-gabled roofs and Victorian elegance, draws inspiration from the grand Florida seaside "palace hotels" of 19th-century America's Gilded Age. Just a short monorail ride to the *Magic Kingdom*®, it spreads along the shore of the Seven Seas Lagoon with spectacular views of Cinderella Castle and the *Wishes* fireworks show. Aquatic enticements include a crescent white sand beach dotted with brightly striped, canopied lounge chairs, a large sophisticated pool in the central courtyard, a new beachside Florida springs-style pool, and a classy marina sporting a wide assortment of watercraft. A full service health club and spa, tennis courts, 5 restaurants, two lounges, and sophisticated shopping round out the list of exceptional offerings.
- ❖ A navy blue blazer should be in order for a stay at ***Disney's Yacht Club Resort*** where guests find the sophisticated ambience of a posh Eastern seaboard hotel of the 1880s. Fronting Crescent Lake and a sliver of beach that stretches over to the adjoining *Disney's Beach Club* Resort, it's just a short stroll to *Epcot*®'s International Gateway entrance and only a boat ride away to *Disney's Hollywood Studios*®. Best of all is the Yacht Club's 3-acre mini-water park complex, Stormalong Bay, offering sandy bottom pools, a giant "shipwreck" waterslide, a tidal whirlpool, bubbling hot tubs, a kiddie pool with its own slide next to the beach, and enough length to float lazily in inner tubes to your heart's content.
- ❖ ***Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge*** is a stunning celebration of African wildlife, culture, cuisine, and art. Its authentic architecture and 33 acres of grasslands filled with hundreds of roaming, exotic animals is simply a stroke of genius. The six-story horseshoe-shaped structure is surrounded by a landscape of golden boulders, tall bamboo, yellow flame trees, pampas grass, copperpod trees, and date palms. In its 5-story thatched roof lobby are massive chandeliers formed by resplendent Masai shields, a large mud fireplace, and handsome safari-chic seating. From common lookouts as well as from 90% of the guestrooms are wonderful views of playful zebra, lanky giraffe, sprite gazelle, huge ankole cattle, herds of wildebeest, flocks of exotic birds, and more, with over 200 animals in all.
- ❖ Last but not least is ***Disney's Wilderness Lodge***, a dramatic depiction of an early

1900s national park resort. I challenge you to keep your jaw from dropping open on your first encounter with its awesome eight-story lobby of ponderosa pine logs, a massive 82-foot tall fireplace, and authentic 55-foot Pacific Northwest totem poles. Outside is a breathtaking scene of sparkling waterfalls, rushing creeks, and towering pines. The sound of crickets is heard beneath the bridges and along the meandering pathways lined with natural grasses, junipers, and wildflowers. And on the shores of Bay Lake is the resort's very own erupting geyser surrounded by a steaming expanse of geothermal activity.

What about Disney's dining choices? Once just a hot dog and hamburger haven, Disney's reputation for dreadful theme park food is now a thing of the past. Think Pan Roasted Striped Bass with Aromatic Rock Shrimp Lemongrass Risotto, 6-Hour Braised Veal Shank with Orzo Pasta and Soy Glaze, or Cornbread Stuffed Quail with Foie Gras and Sauce Maltaise. It's just a mere sampling of the incredible meals to be found at many of the over 270 dining spots on Disney property. In a radical culinary transformation Disney hired top-notch chefs to create exciting menus for some of the highest rated restaurants in the country and first-rate sommeliers to fashion outstanding wine lists.

Here are some of Disney's best restaurants:

- ❖ **California Grill** on the 15th floor of *Disney's Contemporary* Resort offers an unbeatable panorama of the *Magic Kingdom* and the Seven Seas Lagoon along with picture-perfect views of the *Wishes* fireworks show. From pristinely fresh sushi to exceptional New American Cuisine to sensational desserts and an outstanding California wine list, this place has it all. Don't be discouraged if all the coveted window seats are taken; two observation platforms offers a bird's-eye view of the fireworks extravaganza.
- ❖ For top-notch and innovative seafood specialties, head to **Flying Fish Cafe** at *Disney's Boardwalk* Entertainment District where entrees such as Potato Wrapped Florida Red Snapper with a Creamy Leek Fondue are the norm. Contemporary and trendy, yet whimsical, this restaurant will absolutely delight the senses with its festive room of flying fish mobiles, sea blue sparkling mosaic floors, and golden fish scale pillars. Don't forget to save room for the unforgettable desserts, in particular the caramelized banana napoleon.
- ❖ Fine dining in a sophisticated setting combined with virtually flawless service sets **Victoria & Albert's** in *Disney's Grand Floridian* Resort & Spa apart. Here in this AAA Five-Diamond awarded restaurant you're served a sumptuous seven-course meal on white linen set with Royal Doulton china and sparkling crystal. Those seeking a special evening should book the Chef's Table found in the kitchen, a spot perfect for an up-close, behind-the-scenes look at Disney's top chef in action.
- ❖ *Disney's Animal Kingdom* Lodge's premier dining room is the seductive **Jiko** where floor to ceiling windows look out on a boulder-strewn creek. Twin clay ovens draw the eye to the open kitchen where an eclectic blend of creations prepared with African flair are turned out in exotic presentations. Accompany your meal with a selection from the all South African wine list, one of the largest in North America.

So, for those who think that *Walt Disney World* Resort is just for kids, think again! It's a world of fantastic resorts and innovative dining just waiting to be explored. You may never even make it to the parks.

Provided the following credit is given, you are welcome to reprint this article for free.

Cara Goldsbury is the author of *The Luxury Guide to Disney Vacations* and *The Luxury Guide to Walt Disney World Resort*. She is Chief Executive Concierge at [Glass Slipper Concierge®](#) and has appeared as a leading Disney expert on two Travel Channel specials, Disney Splurge! and Disney Royalty. She has also been cited numerous times in national news articles, in such notable publications as Forbes Traveler, as an expert on the *Walt Disney World®* Resort. Visit Cara at wdwLuxuryGuide.com.