

Visit Walt Disney World® Resort in Style

Is your image of *Walt Disney World* Resort one of sleeping in motel-style accommodations and dining on hamburgers as you roam the theme parks? Well, it's time to change that picture. Instead of a chain motel how about an African-style lodge or a resort with the sophisticated ambience of an exclusive yacht club? Instead of chicken fingers how about Potato Wrapped Florida Red Snapper with a Creamy Leek Fondue, Basil-Crusted Rack of Lamb with a Ragout of Spinach, Shitakes, and White Beans, or Grilled Buffalo Top Sirloin with Sweet Potato Hazelnut Gratin and Sweet Onion Jam? No question about it, *Walt Disney World* offers an abundance of amazing themed resorts and superb restaurants that are perfect for the sophisticated traveler. Here are some of the best experiences to indulge in while touring Mickey Mouse land:

Most Luxurious Resort

Disney's flagship resort, *The Grand Floridian*, 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 offering spectacular views of Cinderella Castle and the *Wishes* fireworks display. You'll also be treated to some of Disney's very best restaurants along with two sophisticated pools, a crescent white sand beach, a full-service health club and spa, tennis courts, and sophisticated shopping.

Most Atmospheric Resort

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge is a stunningly faithful celebration of African wildlife, culture, cuisine, and art. Here the atmosphere literally pulsates with the beat of drums throughout 33 acres of glorious savanna filled with hundreds of roaming exotic animals. The lodge's 5-story thatch roof lobby is a wonder with its massive overhead chandeliers formed by resplendent Masai shields overlooking safari chic seating. Don't even consider a room without a savanna view, well worth every penny for its front row view of the wildlife. The resort boasts an 11,000 square foot pool overlooking the savanna, a full service spa and fitness center, and one of Disney's loveliest restaurants, Jiko, serving international food with an African flair.

Best Resort For Romance

Disney's Polynesian Resort's lush grounds and white sand beaches with views of Cinderella Castle are a dream come true. Tangerine and mahogany tinted longhouses are scattered throughout this luxuriant property where ducks and ibis roam the dense vegetation and thick, grassy lawns. Meandering pathways lined with volcanic rock are tiki torch-lit at dusk, and soft Hawaiian melodies set the mood for memorable nights. Come nightfall, pick a hammock on one of three beaches for a spectacular vista of the *Magic Kingdom* fireworks.

Best Resort For Nature Lovers

I challenge you to keep your jaw from dropping on your first encounter with the awesome eight-story lobby at *Disney's Wilderness Lodge*. Sheer walls of ponderosa pine logs, an 82-foot fireplace, and authentic Pacific Northwest totem poles overlook rugged stone and hardwood floors topped with Native American rugs, teepee chandeliers, and a bevy of "park ranger" staff who roam the lodge attending to guests. Outside is a breathtaking scene of roaring waterfalls, rushing creeks, towering pines, and a boulder-lined, hot springs-style swimming pool, one of Disney's best. On the shores of Bay Lake the resort's very own geyser is surrounded by a steaming expanse of geothermal activity and erupts hourly from early morning until late night.

Best Resort Pool

Stormalong Bay at *Disney's Yacht and Beach Club* offers three acres of winding, watery delight. Here you'll find sandy bottom pools, a giant "shipwreck" waterslide, a tidal whirlpool, bubbling hot tubs, a kiddie pool with its own slide near the beach, and enough waterway to float lazily in inner tubes to your heart's content.

Best Resort Restaurant

California Grill is a definite highlight for any connoisseur of cutting-edge cuisine. The modern decor and constant bustle of excited diners only adds to its drop-dead setting on the 15th floor of *Disney's Contemporary Resort*. Its broad windows present 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 the exceptional New American Cuisine to sensational desserts and the outstanding California wine list, this place has it all. The open show kitchen is a treat, and the cocktail lounge has some of the best views in the house. And don't be discouraged if the coveted window seats are all taken. Head out to the adjoining observation platforms during the fireworks presentation where you'll get a bird's-eye view of the extravaganza.

Most Romantic Restaurant

Victoria and Albert's at *Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa* offers fine dining in an elegant setting combined with flawless service. Honored with the AAA Five-Diamond Award year after year (the only such restaurant in Orlando), diners feast on seven sumptuous, prix-fixe courses served on Royal Doulton china with crystal glasses to the strains of the enchanting sound of harp music. Those seeking a special evening should book the Chef's Table set in a candlelit alcove in the kitchen, perfect for an up-close, behind-the-scenes look at Disney's top chef in action.

Most Exotic Restaurant

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge's premier dining room is *Jiko* (Swahili for "cooking place"), one of the most seductive spaces at a Disney hotel. Floor-to-ceiling windows look out on a boulder-strewn creek while soft, contemporary lighting, fantastically shaped in the guise of bird wings, hangs from a rich, blue ceiling creating the feeling of open space. Giant twin clay ovens draw the eye to the open kitchen where an eclectic blend of creations prepared with African spices and ingredients are turned out in attractive presentations. Accompany your meal with a selection from the all South African wine list, the largest in North America.

In short, Walt Disney World is not just for kids! 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.