

## All-Star Vacation Homes Near Walt Disney World: A Review

by Jennifer and Dave Marx, Authors of the PassPorter Walt Disney World Resort guidebook  
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Do you love Walt Disney World but miss the comforts and space of your home? With our growing family, we prefer to stay in more than just one room when we travel. We can book suites or connecting rooms, but it gets expensive fast! So when we wanted to have a mini-reunion with Dave's brother's family this past January, we tried out a vacation home (by All Star Vacation Homes) near Walt Disney World.

### Basic Information:

All Star Vacation Homes  
Address: 7822 W. Irlo Bronson Hwy.,  
Kissimmee, FL 34747  
Phone: 888-249-1779 or 407-997-0733  
Check-in time: 4:00 pm / Check-out time:  
11:00 am  
<http://www.allstarvacationhomes.com>

Now, if you have a copy of PassPorter Walt Disney World 2005, you'll know that All Star Vacation Homes is a PassPorter advertiser. Because we want to offer our readers only the best, this visit was used to familiarize ourselves with the company's vacation homes and service. All Star staff was aware of our identity. So while this report was prompted by the business relationship, we made it clear that we would call things as we see them.)

### How We Booked

We began by visiting All Star Vacation Homes web site at <http://www.allstarvacationhomes.com>. This is a web site after our own heart -- it's very detailed! We found descriptions and photos of all the vacation homes, plus the dates they were available. We had a ball looking at the various houses available -- they come in four categories: condos & town homes (2-3 bedrooms), luxury homes (3-6 bedrooms), resort homes (3-7 bedrooms), and estate homes (4-7 bedrooms). Based on the number of people joining us, we calculated that a seven-bedroom estate home would work best. And -- wow -- what a steal... the price for our stay during the Martin Luther King holiday weekend was about \$450/night (that includes taxes and the mandatory fees, like cleaning and processing). The one-bedroom, on-Disney-property villa we'd booked during MouseFest cost more than this. Two-bedroom vacation homes through All Star Vacation Homes start at about \$150/night. We opted for pool heat (a January necessity) and a crib rental, which added a bit more to the total. Unlike booking a Disney hotel room or villa, you are able to reserve the exact vacation home you want. There's a \$200 non-refundable deposit required at the time of booking. Payment is due 30 days before arrival, and it's non-refundable at that point (you may want to opt for travel insurance, which is reasonably priced). Once our vacation home was reserved, we received an e-mail confirmation form along with arrival directions.

Tip: PassPorter readers can get one of two special deals -- either a free mid-size Enterprise car rental with a 7-night reservation at Luxury, Resort, or Estate series home (with pool) or \$125 off a 7-night reservation at a Condo or Town Home. Just type "passport" as the promotional code or mention "PassPorter" when reserving over the phone. You can only use one promotional code or special for a reservation (and they aren't available during holiday season), so do check the web site for other deals -- for example, there may be seasonal specials that offer even better savings.

### First Impressions

After arriving at Orlando International Airport and picking up our rental car, we followed the directions to the All Star Vacation Homes office on US 192 in Kissimmee, just south of Walt Disney World. We'd arrived close to midnight and the office was closed, but easy instructions were provided to open their lock box and retrieve an envelope with the house keys. It took all of 5 minutes. The next thing we knew we were pulling into "our" neighborhood, where we entered a security code to open the security gate. Pulling into "our" home's driveway at 8015 Acadia Estates, we were quite impressed. The house was grand yet inviting, with gas-lamps flickering on either side of the garage and the foyer light on.



8015 Acadia Estates

### **A Look Inside**

We were really floored when we saw the inside of the house (no pun intended). It was just gorgeous... and huge! We immediately checked out the seven bedrooms - we had to stake out our territory before the rest of the family arrived. Our house had three master bedrooms (each with a bathroom) on the ground floor, and four more bedrooms upstairs (two more masters and two kid-styled rooms each with two twin beds, that shared a bathroom). We laid claim to the best master bedroom on the first floor-it also happened to be the one with the crib in it (this was a very nice wooden crib, not a Pack 'n' Play). Our room had French doors leading out to the patio and pool and a very large bathroom with an oversized tub. Of course, all the rooms had TVs and combination phone/clock/radios.



*Our master bedroom (with crib!)*

### **Lots of Space... and a Pool!**

Once we'd deposited our luggage in our respective rooms (Allie chose a room with two twin beds decorated with a princess theme and hosting the PlayStation 2), we checked out the rest of the house's 3354 square feet: A big 52" screen TV in the living room, fully-equipped upscale kitchen, dining room with a table already set for six, Dell computer with high speed Internet access, game room with pool table and foosball... the list goes on and on. Words do not do this house justice. Jennifer took a break to feed Alexander while Dave snapped many photos of the home.

Our favorite part was just outside the sliding glass doors (which had child safety locks, by the way) -- a large, screen-enclosed pool deck with a kid's wading pool (it looks like Mickey with huge ears!), good-size swimming pool, round hot-tub, and patio table with chairs. A small cascade of water poured into the pool from the elevated hot tub (see photo) whenever the jets were turned off - a nice added touch. The pool area also had a child safety fence, which was secured upon our arrival. As soon as Alexander was asleep, we snuck out to the pool for a late-night swim. It was absolute heaven. We did have a bit of a challenge finding the hot tub controls-they were all the way across the deck, on the wall near the pool's shower. Brrrr! on a chilly evening! We sure were glad we had pool heat! (You need it for the hot tub, too, or you'll have a cold tub!)



*A bird's-eye view of the kitchen and living room*



*Our private pool and hot tub*

### All Star Vacation Homes Office

The next morning we left Alexander and Allie with Jennifer's mom and visited the All Star Vacation Homes office. We must admit we were expecting a small outfit, and we were pleasantly surprised to find a relatively large suite of offices with more than seven employees present (at our count). They were very organized, professional, and welcoming. Here we picked up some PlayStation games for Allie (no charge). DVDs were also available to check out. The receptionist was available to answer questions, give directions, and make arrangements to purchase Disney park tickets (they get delivered to your vacation home, so you can do this over the phone, too). There were also free Internet terminals here for those guests who don't have Internet in their vacation home.



*Dave and Sara Moore at the All Star Offices*

### Other Vacation Homes

The friendly folks at All Star Vacation Homes also gave us a tour of some other homes so we could pass along our thoughts to our readers.

The homes in the All Star "inventory" are all investment properties, intended to be rented full-time. All Star provides all management, cleaning, and maintenance services, and holds all owners to strict standards of quality. Owners are free to participate in the furnishing and decorating of their properties, leading to some very distinctive choices between homes. There's clearly some competition between the various owners, both to express their own taste and personality, and to attract more business. The homes are scattered throughout a variety of community developments just south of US 192 in Kissimmee, although as the company has grown All Star has begun to develop entire communities for its own needs. In the near future the company plans to open a central community and recreation center to serve all its properties.



*A large living room in an estate home*

Every home we saw was impressive. We saw both smaller and larger homes. All were decorated nicely and had excellent layouts. We saw one home with an enormous pool deck-you could host a wedding reception there! And the some of the town homes have adorable, private "splash pools" which look like very large hot tubs -- and guests in those homes still have access to a large community pool. The condos feel the most like Disney's on-property villas. The condos are located in large buildings and are part of a larger resort community, with a clubhouse that features a fitness center, arcade, movie theater, playground, and small store.

### Hangin' Out at the House

Once the rest of the family arrived later that day, we set out to put the home through its paces. The kids had a little pool party of their own one evening. We spent the better part of another day hanging out in the game room, shooting pool and chatting. We made breakfast in the kitchen and ate in the dining room. We watched some movies on the big screen TV. We used the Internet to check our message boards and search Google for a nearby restaurant. We used the phones to call the office. We used the washer and dryer to clean some of Alexander's baby clothes. We had a couple of late night sessions in the hot tub. Every bedroom was slept in, every bathroom was used. The only problem reported was with the hot/cold faucet in one of the bathrooms -- Dave's niece Melanie thought it was labeled wrong, but on inspection it was fine, just a bit different than what she had at home. Everyone raved about the house and we had a great time!



*Jennifer's mom uses the computer*

### Was It Worth It?

We have to be honest -- we hadn't tried a vacation home before. Why? We were concerned about transportation to the parks. We were concerned about quality. Mostly, we were concerned about losing the "magic" of a Disney vacation. Our fears were (mostly) unfounded. With the rental car, getting to the parks was actually faster in some cases than waiting for Disney transportation (we were literally five minutes from Disney's Animal Kingdom). The home was well furnished, clean, and attractive -- very upscale. And it didn't feel like someone else's home either -- it was decorated like a hotel suite. Oh, and there was no selling going on here -- no one tried to get us to buy a vacation home or timeshare. And thanks to all those extra private amenities we don't normally get when we stay on Disney property, we still felt the magic, even if it wasn't Disney magic. At the end of the stay, we all agreed that it had been delightful! We even day-dreamed a bit about returning with for another reunion in a couple of years.



*Dave and Alexander enjoy the big screen TV*

Now, don't get us wrong -- we don't think a vacation home is right for everyone, nor right for every visit to Walt Disney World. So here are the pros and cons of a vacation home stay that might help you decide if it's right for you:

#### PROS:

- Much, much more space for the price, including entertaining space
- Amenities, amenities, amenities
- Kitchen facilities
- Private pool and hot tub with luxury, resort, and estate homes
- Ease of transportation in many cases
- Ideal for large families and groups

#### CONS:

- Not "on-property" so you need to rent a car
- You need to stay at least four nights
- Not for those who want to spend under \$100/night
- Deposit not refundable; entire payment must be made 30 days before arrival and it's not refundable after that point.

We're now believers in the vacation home concept... and we highly recommend All Star Vacation Homes! And we'd love to hear from you and get your comments and experiences. Please write to us at [jenniferanddave@passport.com](mailto:jenniferanddave@passport.com) so we can include your comments here for others to learn from.

### Some Thoughts About Staying Off Property

No matter what, an extended stay at a Walt Disney World resort provides a unique atmosphere that can't be duplicated outside of Disney property. It's like visiting a tropical isle. Once you're on the "island" the cares and honky-tonk of the world outside disappears, and your focus shifts to enjoying the parks and other pleasures of Walt Disney World.

However, not every vacation benefits from this "all parks, all the time" focus. Sometimes you want to concentrate on your family and/or friends, rather than be distracted by the goings-on around you--to make Disney the "spice" rather than the entire meal. When you're off-property the pull of Disney's parks become less irresistible, opening the way for more one-on-one quality time with your loved ones. A vacation home delivers added living spaces that make it easier to socialize as a group, space that you don't have to share with strangers. And you definitely get more bang for the buck.

Still, not all the differences are positive. Dinner "at home" is a matter of cook-in, take-out, or hop-in-the-car, and the choice of restaurants on US 192 is a bit spotty. A couple of big, everyone-pitches-in meals will be fun, but cooking every meal "at home" or dining at the same old chain restaurants is nobody's idea of a vacation. We still prefer to have at least half our meals at Disney's distinctive restaurants. In the absence of Disney's on-property transportation system it's harder for various parts of the group to split-up and go their own way--if you haven't driven down to Orlando, you may need several rental cars to give everyone the freedom they desire. And whether you're leaving the magic of your vacation home or the magic of Disney's parks, the special feelings are going to deflate a bit when you hit the highways. But when we compare this downside to the wonderful times we had with our extended family... we'll take family any day!