

Hospitality

A True Destination Resort



Four Seasons Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort (above); a Park View Room (below)

An Interview with Thomas Steinhauer,
General Manager, Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort

EDITORS' NOTE Thomas Steinhauer assumed his current post in 2013. A 20-year veteran of Four Seasons, Steinhauer made the transition to Orlando in July, joining the pre-opening team as the Resort prepared to open in 2014. His more than 30-year hotel management career has taken him across the globe. He has developed deep industry knowledge and expertise at key Four Seasons properties including the iconic Four Seasons Hotel New York and Four Seasons Hotel Boston. He also served as General Manager and Regional Vice President of the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea.



Thomas Steinhauer

PROPERTY BRIEF Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World® Resort (fourseasons.com/Orlando) is located within the gates of a residential community, Golden Oak at Walt Disney World® Resort, which is just five miles from the Magic Kingdom® Park and four miles from Epcot®. Accommodations include 443 guest rooms and 68 suites with versatile connecting options ideal for families and groups of friends traveling together. A Tom Fazio-designed golf course has been refurbished and is managed by Four Seasons. Indoor and outdoor treatments are available to be enjoyed in the spa's 18 treatment rooms and gardens. The five restaurants include a modern Italian ristorante, a southern poolside BBQ experience, and a 17th floor rooftop steakhouse with views of the nightly fireworks at the Magic Kingdom® Park and Epcot®.

What kind of need in the market has this property filled and have things evolved as you expected?

This particular market had been missing a pure luxury product. People have identified Orlando for many years as a volume market, be that conventions, Disney, parks, or entertainment.

Lately, the city itself is coming into its own in many ways. Looking at the investment in infrastructure here, be it an arts and cultural center, sports teams, or the facilities being built around it, Orlando is going through an exciting transition.

With that comes the demand for a higher product in order to complement the product Orlando is known for. Even though other luxury brands have been represented, they have typically been attached to larger volume properties, even on the same footprint.

Our completely pure luxury product is located within 10 minutes of Disney parks and other attractions; it is, however, an area that is tucked away from the hustle and bustle.

This development around us, which is all brand new, is called Golden Oak, and it's a residential community. There are about 100 homes so far and there will be another 100 homes completed over the next few years. The beauty of it is that we're completely surrounded by woods and we have a golf course nearby, so when guests drive in through

the gates and arrive in this upscale multimillion-dollar home environment, they feel they've arrived at a unique oasis in Orlando. We are the anchor property at the end of this development, and we're surrounded by forests. It is a beautiful arrival. Being situated on 26 acres gives us the ability to give everybody the experience they are after. If a guest is someone with kids, A Kids for All Seasons Camp and playground, basketball, volleyball, tennis, and a rock climbing wall will keep them busy. Whether at the interactive splash zone or the family pool with a view of the lakes, there is a chance for families to have a good time and relax as well.



In addition, we offer an adult-only pool. Orlando is not only about kids. It's possible to come here and have a completely different experience for the romantic or seasoned traveler who wants to go to Epcot for a day or two and then hang out in a destination resort.

Word of mouth being the most powerful endorsement, we find our story is getting told through social media. By the time they're departing, most guests have written reviews or shown pictures to their families and friends, so there is instantaneous feedback.

We have had a lot of people come here and try us, and the comments have been phenomenal

thus far. This has triggered occupancy levels that are fabulous, given our relatively short tenure in this market.

Is there an effective understanding in the market that this is not what one would think of as a Disney resort?

The message is pretty straightforward. Typically, people who visit Disney, or come in even just for the entertainment piece only, need a place to sleep. Depending on what service they demand, they will choose their accommodations according to price point, but it is all about what to do during the day. This typically ties into an average stay of two to three days.

Our message from the start has been that this is a destination resort where guests can enjoy their vacations, with the benefit of being near all of the attractions. Although fun, it can be stressful to go to the parks every day. If guests stay longer, they can spend the same number of days at the parks by going every other day. This might make the vacation more enjoyable for all.

What is true luxury today and has it become more about personalized service?

Luxury is not only about quality products anymore. It is also about memorable experiences, flexibility for the guests, and the ability for guests to get what they need when they need it. There is the basic quality of the product itself that can be touched and felt. We also respect that guests' time is valuable and help them maximize their experiences by cutting through any barriers to their desired result. For instance, many people that visit the parks will book VIP tours. Personal guides will assure a great park experience, including moving everybody to the front of the lines. This costs extra, but represents true value for guests because they are maximizing their experience.

Luxury is also about considering each person individually. Each family member has specific needs, so we cater to those with the variety of food we offer, the accommodations that are appropriately considered, the facility offerings, transportation, etc.

Today, it's all about relaxation. Guests want to do what they want to do but also have the time to recuperate with our spa service or our recreational offerings, as well as our dining experiences – it all comes together. There is a higher price for higher quality, but there is an elevated experience that goes with it. Our staff members are friendly and genuine, and able to adapt and respond to specific needs, sometimes without even being requested. In the end, luxury is the absence of worry. ●