

Hawks Cay Resort, Florida Keys

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The Dolphin Connection is the only on-property resort dolphin program in the continental U.S.

As a mother of two and a journalist who has been writing about travel for more than a decade, I can safely say that some of the top things families look for when planning their family vacation is a place that offers an array of activities for every member of the family in one central locale, a place that offers a community ambiance where parents know the kids are safe—and mom and dad can have some time to themselves—and a place that feels like home sans all of life's daily and sometimes stressful interruptions. **Hawks Cay Resort** gets a bright gold star for each of these. I've traveled there a few times with my family, and it always feels so welcoming, so carefree, so much like a family vacation should feel.

"Hawks Cay is different from some of the other properties in the Florida Keys in that we have everything located in one central location, so our tagline—the only 'key' you'll need—references the fact that when you check-in at the front desk with the key that they give you and the key you arrive on, Duck Key, you really don't have to leave unless you want to," says Matt Lawrence, the resort's marketing manager. "Everything is located here on Duck Key within walking distance of our property, whether you want to do charter fishing, or a day at the spa, or if you have little ones who want to spend a day at the camp. We have it all right here and it makes for a seamless experience."

If your clients are arriving in Miami and heading south to the Florida Keys, the drive alone will take them into a blissful state, passing through the upper Florida Keys puts anyone into total relaxation mode and then once they make that left turn into Duck Key, home to Hawks Cay, well there's no turning back to reality, and that's just what you want. It's purely vacation mode. Your clients can, as Lawrence points out, do as much or as little as they want. "A lot of the experiences that bring people back," he says, "are snorkeling, SNUBA diving, fishing, and lounging by the pool. A lot of our guests like spending their days taking it easy, unwinding, relaxing."



The saltwater lagoon is action central.

poolside fun

There are, in fact, five pools for guests to choose from when they are looking to sit back and lounge with, perhaps, a book in hand—or maybe not since most parents are going to want to join the kids in some water fun. Ideal for the little ones are the Indies pool and the Pirate Ship pool, which features slides, water cannons, raining palm trees, and shallow areas that are perfect for new swimmers, although speaking from experience even the younger tweens won't mind hanging with toddlers as long as they get the chance to get a few turns at the slides. Additionally, there's the main resort pool, which is action central, and the adults-only Tranquility pool, as well as the Sunset pool. The latter is located at the *Sunset Village*, so if clients are looking for a quieter pool experience, recommend they book a villa at the Sunset Village. It's a little bit of a walk to the main resort area and the Indies Club, as well as the spa, but worth it if families are looking for some down time.

Regarding poolside fun, however, we haven't mentioned the star attraction, the always-bustling saltwater lagoon, which is fed straight from the ocean. On the lagoon, guests can rent paddleboards and kayaks, hang out on the wooden dock, or sunbathe on a beach chair, but what makes it extra special is that this is a mini beach within a resort, and if you know the area well, you'll know that beaches in the Keys are hard to come by, so this is a true treat.

indies club

One of the key selling points for any family-friendly resort booking is the kids' club, and the *Indies Club* has been recognized by *Travel + Leisure* as one of the "Best Hotel Kids' Programs." It's a full day of supervised activities—open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.—specific to kids, tweens and teens as well as special events for each age group. *Indies Club* camp rates for kids 5 to 12 are \$45 for 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., with lunch; \$38 for half-day (1 p.m. to 4 p.m.), with snack; and \$75 for full day (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.), with lunch and snack.

Activities include hula hoop competitions, water balloon toss, treasure hunts, water polo, soccer shoot-out, ping pong tournament and the like. Additionally, there are several activities that have the kids and adults competing against each other, so it's not all about the kids having fun with the *Indies Club* counselors—the resort does make it a point of creating memorable family time. Of course, families can also rent bikes and tour Duck Key together at sunset or go on a Segway tour with a guide. Or, kids ages 5 to 12 can ditch their parents from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. and join in on a pizza party complete with games, crafts and a movie.

watersports heaven

Beyond the five aforementioned pools and saltwater lagoon, the resort is paradise for watersports enthusiasts. Its marina is superb, and from there families can join in on several excursions that will give them a feel for the surrounding environment. There's everything from parasailing and jet ski adventures, to paddleboard rentals, sunset cruises, kayak rentals and offshore and backcountry fishing. To give your clients an idea of the offerings and pricing, the 1-hour jet ski adventure is with guide and costs \$149 per jet ski, while a 2-hour guided kayak tour is \$50 pp. The latest addition to the resort is the JetLev flying experience, and a must for all families is experiencing the *Dolphin Connection*. The facility, in fact, is the only on-property resort dolphin program in the continental U.S., and families can opt to do an in-water dolphin program, where they swim with the dolphins, interact with them dockside, or become a trainer for a day.



Sunset Village is one of the resort's villages.

dining delights

Beyond the assortment of activities, dining can become a priority when it comes to planning a family vacation, so when recommending Hawks Cay, let clients know that the resort offers several restaurants, plus pizza delivery service right to the guest's front door. Oh, and there's the delectable Emack & Bolio's Ice Cream Shop at the marina.

Late last year, the resort underwent a million dollar renovation in its culinary offerings that included the debut of new restaurants, a poolside tiki bar and a lobby cafe serving a full Starbucks menu. One of the new restaurants is Ocean, the resort's main dining room. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and is the place for a big family sit-down meal with dinner options including seafood, pasta or pizza. Alma, meanwhile, the resort's signature restaurant serving Nuevo Latino cuisine, is actually a great choice for the couple looking for a more intimate night out, so tell mom and dad to leave the kiddies with grandma and grandpa for the evening (everyone can get back together after dinner around the fire pit, located by the main resort pool, to listen to live music). Families hanging out at the *Indies Club* can pick up some quick snacks at the Indies Grill, and there's also casual lounge chair-style dining available at the resort pool and the lagoon from the Beach Grill.

Or, if you book clients a villa accommodation, they'll have a fully equipped kitchen and they can make breakfast, lunch and dinner on their own, and cut down on costs. There's a grocery store at the marina, for those "oops, I forgot the butter" moments.

accommodations to please everyone

And that brings us to the accommodation choices. The resort is divided into villages, plus the main resort itself. In fact, says Lawrence, "we have 37 different room types, including the 2- or 3-bedroom villas. A lot of families really enjoy the villas because they have a washer/dryer, a full kitchen, all the conveniences of home. If it's an extended stay—say around five days or more—the villas are the best option because they can unpack and relax and make that space their own while they are here." The villas are located within the aforementioned villages: *Marina Village* and *Sunset Village*, both offering 2-bedroom accommodations; *Harbor Village*, with 2- and 3-bedroom accommodations; and the *Sanctuary Village*, featuring 2- and 3-bedroom vacation homes with a private splash pool, roomy backyard, open verandah, spacious living area, and upscale amenities.

Additionally, the main resort building itself offers standard guestrooms as well as the very popular lanai guestrooms that walk out directly to the main resort pool. "These are ideal for shorter stays," says Lawrence, "and they offer two queen beds, so small families really enjoy that. They are unique to our property and are definitely in high demand."

Rates for the fall are \$349 for a 2-bedroom *Sunset Villa*, and \$600 for a 3-bedroom *Sanctuary Villa*.

getting there

Hawks Cay is approximately 90 miles south of Miami International Airport (MIA) and 60 miles north of Key West International Airport (EYW), with service from **American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines** and other major airlines.

WHAT TRAVEL AGENTS ARE SAYING...

"The charm and small town vibe of the Keys plus the proximity to Miami is a main reason why people love Hawks Cay. It's the only family-friendly property in the Keys—great for all ages. It's also a year-round property, great for people up north to get away from the cold in winter, and great for Floridians for a weekend getaway with the kids."

—Josh Alexander, Travel Advisor, NY-based Protravel International

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