

WESTERN NEW YORK **Family** M • A N • E

VOLUME 36, #5
JULY 2019

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Tips for Making
Travel Easier!

RAISING DIGITAL KIDS

.....
**My Child Is A
HACKER!**

TWEENS & TEENS

.....
**Good Girls,
Bad Names**

INSIDE: Healthy Child, Healthy Family - Pull Out and Save!

WESTERN NEW YORK Family MAGAZINE

July 2019 • Volume 36 • Issue 5

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PRINTED BY:
Commercial Printing Division
The Post-Journal, Jamestown



**WE ARE AN
AUDITED
PUBLICATION**

CIRCULATION (copies printed): 20,000

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sion of an advertisement does not constitute
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PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS: MAILED FIRST
CLASS, IN AN ENVELOPE SAME DAY
ISSUE IS DELIVERED FROM THE PRINTER:
\$28 one year, \$52 two years, \$75 three years.
Phone & online orders accepted with credit
cards. Gift subscriptions available. Single
copies & back issues by mail, \$2.50.

IF YOU MOVE: Missed issues will not be re-
placed if we do not receive an address change
before issue mailing date.

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FAMILY TRAVEL

— by Kathryn Streeter



Head South to Hawks Cay Resort in the Florida Keys

Halfway down the iconic 125-mile Florida Keys island chain, Hawks Cay Resort in Duck Key stands today as “reimagined” and better than ever, showcasing smart, modernized facilities and guest-pleasing details. Following a \$50 million renovation after the devastation of Hurricane Irma in 2017, the 60-acre award-winning, family-friendly resort reopened with great fanfare late last year. They dedicated a full year to thorough repairs and upgrades to ensure the safety and enjoyment of their guests. It was well worth it, as the popularity of the resort is as sound as ever.

We arrived at the resort after a scenic 2-hour ride from the Miami Airport, which includes views over the Everglades. The Overseas Highway (U.S. 1) runs the length of the keys, with mile-marker designations starting at Florida City (mile-marker 127.5) and ending in Key West, at “0.” Hawks Cay sits in the Middle Keys (mile-marker 61.1) and the group I was traveling with stopped for lunch at Mrs. Mac’s Kitchen in Key Largo, where we devoured hogfish, a rare treat, and scrumptious Key Lime Pie.

When we pulled up to the resort, the rocking chairs gently swaying on the veranda immediately put me in relaxation mode. I was struck by the friendly environment — the culture is palpably etched with a welcoming spirit. VP Managing Director Sheldon Suga says it best: “Our culture here is to care for everyone.” Rather than staff consulting a handbook describing protocols, he told me, care is

engrained in the fabric of their community so that it emerges naturally.

A seal of approval from the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) reassures families that the resort is a leader in caring for anyone with special needs. Every ‘crew’ member on staff projects an arms-open approach to all guests, keenly aware of their needs. Matt Lawrence, Director of Marketing, explains that serving kids on the spectrum means attending to details, such as altering the phone ring at the front desk to not stress those with sensory challenges. Suga says that if a tantrum happens, it’s okay. “Why do people make such a big deal about outbursts?” Families will find this is a place where they can relax and breathe easy.

For those with physical needs, getting around the resort will be hassle-free, promises Suga, because trams are designed with ramps. But “if someone doesn’t feel comfortable taking the tram, we’ll go pick them up in an individual golf cart.” It’s who we are, he says.

Parents are encouraged to contact the resort in advance about their family’s needs, as much for the benefit of the child (with special needs) as for their own peace of mind, Suga said.

It’s evident from sheer observation that multi-generational family gatherings are commonplace at the resort. With grandparents and parents corralling kids in the lobby, splashing kids in the pool, and cradling babies, Hawks Cay is a tender picture of family fun.

Accommodations & Food

Various layouts offer families choices, with 177 rooms and 250 two-three bedroom villas. Views range from ocean to pool. I was particularly interested in the Family Guestrooms, featuring bunkbeds. This thoughtful layout sleeps five and gives families something to “wow” about with one king bed and a non-traditional bunkbed (the bottom bunk is full-size). For those wanting their own kitchen, the plentiful villa options will appeal, as will the grocery home-delivery service to stock everyone’s favorite vacation munchies.

If a member of the family has specific dietary restrictions, the resort likes to have a conversation in advance to plan ahead. The head chef is alerted and coordinates with each food and beverage manager to flag a family’s order. Suga’s culinary team is equipped with a cross-contamination kit. They’re keenly aware that cross-contamination can result in an emergency.

Lawrence told of parents who stopped by at the conclusion of their stay to express thanks for caring for their child with severe food allergies. The mother had previously cooked all her child’s meals when on vacation and couldn’t relax 100%. This time, she felt like she’d had a vacation herself. “You could see the emotion on their faces,” Lawrence said.

One of the six restaurants on the resort is **Coral Grill**, located in Coral Cay, the kids’ area. Families are more than cared for as they hunker down for the day around the family-designated pool and the nearby Pirate Ship Pool, two of the five resort pools. Servicing the area, Coral Grill offers tasty grilled cheese for the kids frolicking about and cool cocktails for moms and dads.

The **Tiki Grill** is perfectly placed overlooking the popular saltwater lagoon and ocean. The restaurant buzzes with good vibes and soft happy breezes. I was impressed with the generous portions — enough for kids to share meals if desired. But if you’re comfortably spread out in lounge chairs by the pool nearby, no need to get the kids out of the water. Salads, burgers and cold beers can be brought to you.

I loved the upper deck at **Angler & Ale**, a perfect spot for kids to watch fishing and recreational vessels come and go

while dining. If you've been out fishing and caught a "big one," Angler & Ale will prepare your catch per their popular "Hook & Cook" dining option. And, if you stop in during Captain's Hours (2:30pm-5:30pm), you'll find light bites and drink specials to tie hungry tummies over until dinnertime.

Activities & Experiences

Parents will be grateful for the many complimentary resort perks, especially the array of kids' activities. Consult the website or conveniently placed sandwich-board by the main pool for a daily schedule of resort events. Water-balloon toss, cornhole competition, face painting or s'mores at dusk along the lagoon definitely appeal to the kids!

Coral Cay Activities and Adventure Center, an area designed with just the kids in mind, offers creative fun. Kids of all ages will have a place to land, with the interactive Pirate Ship Pool featuring slides, tunnels and water-spewing cannons, crafts, and mini-golf. For the littlest ones, babysitting is available. Children can take advantage of the activities offered through Camp Hawk, for ½ day or full day or targeting special itineraries, such as the Environmental Educational Program which partners with the Everglade Foundation Program for kids to delve into marine and bird life.

For children with special needs, parents can choose one-on-one sessions with camp counselors for no extra charge. "We're not going to charge more if your child needs individualized care, that's not the business we're in," says Suga.



Teens will love the **game room** devoted to them with Wii, Guitar Hero, pizza & movie and foosball options. Outside, basketball courts and a sports field will keep the kids on the move.

Kids should be forewarned that **pirates and their friends** frequent Hawk's Cay Resort. To see them in action, families can gather about the popular Pirate Ship Pool for their free performance. Appearing alongside the sassy Priscilla the Pirate Queen will be Clarence the First Mate, Captain Hawk, and the alluring Koral the Mermaid. Afterwards, kids can have a personal photo-op with their favorite character, so get your cameras ready, parents! When not performing, look out for these explosive personalities gallivanting about the resort, bringing laughter to kids and adults alike and generally leaving good vibes in their wake.

At the **Dolphin Connection**, visit the resort's beloved dolphins, an experience sure to impact your kids in surprising ways. Whether choosing the Discovery, Encounter, or Dockside Experience, connect with these smart gentle creatures and appreciate their magical draw. Kids with physical needs have easy access to the dolphins using a ramp. Families who'd rather not sign up for the program can still thrill to the dolphins' tricks and antics from surrounding walkways accessible to all guests.

Booking a private snorkeling adventure through **Sole Watersports** for the family will allow the captain to cater to your needs and whims. Visit a popular sandbar beloved by locals, where kids can splash and enjoy the crystal clear water. Add a Sunset Tour to your vacation to forever remember the brilliant Florida Keys sunset.



Sunsets are also observable at the resort. Plan ahead for your family to see it, a unique moment to cherish. On the morning you rise with the sun, take advantage of the coolness of the day by using complimentary comfy **beach cruiser bikes** for a family ride through the other Duck Key islands. If needed, request bikes with training wheels and/or a trailer attachment for the kids.

Guests may take complimentary **paddleboards or kayaks** out on the salt-water lagoon, a focal point of the resort. Parents will be thrilled to expose their kids to a new activity in a low-risk environment. The small lagoon, with no waves or current to contend with is encircled by relaxed guests in chaise lounges.

A **daytrip to the beach** is easy, with Sombrero Beach a quick 10-minute drive away. If you care to venture a bit further, Lawrence suggests heading across the legendary Seven Mile Bridge (mile-marker 47) to Sandspur Beach at Bahia Honda State Park (mile-marker 36.8) for an unforgettable beach experience.

Travel Tips:

Learn more about the resort's Swash-buckling Pirate Show: <https://www.hawkscay.com/kids-and-teens/swash-buckling-pirate-show>.

Complimentary guest perks at a glance: <https://www.hawkscay.com/about-hawks-cay-resort/whats-included-your-stay>.



Kathryn Streeter is a Washington, D.C. freelance writer.