



BASK WELL

Freshwater Haven

An escape to Aulani, a Disney Resort and Spa, offers an unparalleled experience for the whole family, with its luxurious Laniwai Spa, a step into serenity

As a full-time working mother with two children under the age of 4, moments of wellness and relaxation, although much needed, are few and far between. However, when I learned about Aulani, a Disney Resort and Spa, it sounded like the perfect escape for everyone in my family.

Located on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, Aulani boasts the world-class Laniwai Spa, a gorgeous beach and lagoon for water activities and the magic of Disney all in one. With the ease of a direct flight from San Diego to Oahu on Hawaiian Airlines sealing the deal, we were off. The moment you board the plane, the warm spirit of Aloha washes over you via a welcoming staff, Hawaiian music and chocolate covered macadamia nuts, of course.

Although I had researched the resort before our trip, the beauty and architecture of Aulani surprised in person. More Hawaiian than Disney, the grand lobby incorporates Hawaiian history and folklore, with mythical Menehune peeking out in unexpected places, leaving hidden Mickeys to be found throughout the hotel. As a Disney property, Aulani is naturally family friendly, yet maintains an air of comfortable luxury without being overtly animated.

As Laniwai Spa is located on the first floor of the hotel, you are instantly enveloped by an intoxicating blend of plumeria, coconut, pikake and other tropical aromas the minute you exit the doors. Hawaiian for “freshwater heaven,” Laniwai is truly an oasis, one centered around the healing properties of water. Indeed—from a rainwater suite to a unique outdoor hydrotherapy garden, the gift of water is prevalent throughout the spa.

The element theme continues on arrival. Guests who enter Laniwai are offered a stone from a bowl, each imprinted with a different word, such as strength or balance, and then are escorted down a hallway of transformation, illuminated by a gentle purple glow, en route to its end, where a reminder to leave the past behind to focus on yourself, in the present, is issued. The soothing environment offers the perfect transition to release any stress or concerns and truly relax in the moment.



Laniwai Spa features 15 treatment rooms, with a family treatment room and a fitness center in 18,000 square feet of space. OPPOSITE Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, Hawaii is located next to a tranquil lagoon in Ko Olina, on the island of Oahu.

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At hallway’s end, pause at the water installation created by Disney’s famous Imagineers. Featuring a mystical aura, it combines elegantly reflected light, brilliant color and elements of nature. Expect to be asked to return your stone to the water, but while maintaining its inscribed characteristic within.

A brief tour of the Kula Wai Hydrotherapy Garden reveals the only outdoor hydrotherapy garden in Oahu with herbal pools, a reflexology path, six rain showers, cold and hot whirlpools. At the Pulu Bar, a spa mixology station, select an authentic Hawaiian fragrance to be blended with exfoliating cane sugar or sea salt, moisturizing base oils, such as macadamia, kukui or jojoba, and active Hawaiian herbs for a take-home body polish.

For my first of two spa treatments I indulge in the Signature Lomilomi Massage. This traditional Hawaiian massage is passed down from generation to generation by healing kupuna (elders). With a gentle, rhythmic massage incorporating lomilomi sticks and warm river stones, it had me at “Aloha.”

Designed to release tension, pain and fatigue, all while replenishing the mind, body and spirit with positive energy, I have to say that it was one of the most enjoyable massages I’ve ever had—and I’ve been fortunate to have many. In fact, my therapist, Jenna, was so amazing that I booked

her to give my husband the same treatment the next day.

My second treatment, the Ultra Ageless facial is the ultimate fusion of science and luxury, beginning with an ultrasonic exfoliation to soften and renew the skin, followed by an Oxygen Infusion to restore natural vitality and glow, and ending with light therapy. While not exactly the relaxing experience of a massage (there was a kind of bearable discomfort at times), I really enjoyed the attention to my skin and the fact that, afterwards, it was glowing and dewy.

When you depart the spa, they send you off with a personalized bag of bath salts that correspond to the word on the stone you choose at the beginning of your experience. Coming full-circle, I was surprisingly rejuvenated after an hour or two at the spa and happily maintained my “balance and strength” mantra—even as I attempted to stand-up paddle across the lagoon.

