

# Learning About Purple Martins

— WITH KIDS



Spot the purple martin nests at EPCOT. PHOTO BY DANNY SHUSTER

BY DANI MORITZ

I was working for Disney Vacation Club when *Disney Files* Editor Ryan March asked, “Want to join me for a special assignment on purple martins?”

The answer, of course, was a resounding yes — as it always was when I had the opportunity to tag along with my favorite Disney writer.

Back then, I had little knowledge about purple martins. However, armed with a quick Google search, I arrived at Disney’s Caribbean Beach Resort with my trusty notebook, eager to delve into the world of these migratory birds.

Since that first encounter, I’ve learned more about these fellow Walt Disney World visitors and now get to continue my studies alongside my daughter, who loves learning at Disney almost as much as she enjoys riding the attractions.

## A TYPICAL RESORT GUEST

While certainly unique among Disney guests, purple martins share some similarities with other visitors to Walt Disney World. Many of these birds, named for the dark, glossy purple tones in their feathers, make an annual pilgrimage to Walt Disney World and take up residence in the resort.

The accommodations for these feathery friends consist of luxurious white birdhouse complexes with multiple rooms, ensuring ample space for Disney’s avian guests. Inside the gourd-shaped houses, you’ll find a pile of pine needles the birds use for nesting.



You'll find nests and more info at Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort.

PHOTO BY DANNY SHUSTER



A pair of purple martins. ©DISNEY

You can find the purple martin lodging across the Walt Disney World Resort, including Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort, EPCOT, and Disney's Animal Kingdom. A boat captain on the Sassagoula River showed one of our editors additional nests for these martins along the river. If you can, take a ride on one of these boats between Disney Springs and Disney's Port Orleans Resorts — your captain may point them out to you!!

**Fun Fact:** Purple martins actually prefer human-made bird houses to natural habitats for nesting, and they've relied on human-made housing since before the Europeans arrived in North America. American Indians would hang empty gourds for the birds.

Each year, this species of birds travels more than 3,000 miles from Brazil to the Eastern United States to build their nests (or room in a Walt Disney World resort-style nest) and start their families. Usually, adult birds begin appearing at Disney each spring, mate, raise their little ones, and then fly south again to the Brazilian Amazon.

Disney Conservationists are learning more about these birds every year thanks to a special magic band the birds receive, equipped with GPS technology. The information is shining a light on purple martin habits and migratory patterns, so conversationists can work to protect these birds, who face a declining population.

#### EDUCATION ABOUNDS

As a Disney mom, I love that the on-property bird resorts give me a chance to teach my daughter, Sagan, about the unique Disney guests. For me, it's important that she learns that humans are only one species that call Earth home. Exposure to other species, such as purple martins, helps her understand, well, the circle of life and how we're all truly connected.

More adventurous Disney parents, particularly those who live on the East Coast, may consider setting up a purple martin nest in their own backyards — using Disney's resort-style accommodations as inspiration.



Disney's birdhouses make it easy for these birds to nest on their annual journey. ©DISNEY

Ideally, you'll want to build a nest that contains multiple elevated purple martin homes as the species are colonial nesters. The purple martins prefer gourd-shaped nests, which you can construct out of a range of materials, including aluminum, plastic, and wood. (There's plenty of information online with detailed tips and instructions).

**Fun Fact:** Once you attract purple martins, they're likely to return year after year — making for an annual experience the whole family can look forward to (almost as much as a Disney vacation).

On your next visit to the Walt Disney World Resort, keep an eye out for these distinctive Disney guests! When you spot the white, gourd-shaped houses scattered throughout the resort, you'll now know exactly what you're seeing. 🐦



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#### MEET DISNEY DREAMER NOAH

Each year, Walt Disney World hosts the Disney Dreamers Academy, bringing together 100 inspiring students from underserved communities to help grow the skills they'll need to leave the world better than they found it.

Last year, we spoke with one of these Dreamers, Noah S., who is passionate about preserving wildlife. Noah volunteers with his local zoo and hopes to be a zookeeper himself one day.

"One of the greatest things about Earth is we have all this life," Noah told *WDW Magazine*. "If all that goes away, Earth's going to be a pretty dull place."

Noah has a soft spot for kangaroos and hippos, but he's also passionate about the animals currently being driven into where humans live because of habitat destruction. His ultimate goal is providing a safe place to which these animals can return — but in the meantime, he wants humans to learn how to safely coexist with animals in shared spaces.

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