

PassPorter's® *Personalized!*

Our Holidaze

customized by Jennifer Marx



PassPorter's Personalized! -- Jennifer Marx's Edition

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Congratulations, Jennifer!

First, congratulations are in order -- you're going to Walt Disney World!

This special book is customized and created just for you based on your personal trip details. While it doesn't replace a regular guidebook, it does do a great job at collecting and presenting your trip information in the classic PassPorter format. And as an added bonus, we collected various facts and articles for you in this personalized edition to provide additional information and build your excitement!

You can use this personalized edition early in your trip planning or after you've pinned down all the details -- it's completely up to you! And if your trip details change after you create this guide, you can return to create a new version based on your new details.

The articles and information in this guide are from the extensive PassPorter Article Collection and are always the most recent version available at the time the guide is created.

We hope you have a great trip!

Jennifer and Dave
PassPorter Founders and Authors

Our Trip Details

Trip Organizer: Jennifer Marx

Traveling with: Alexander

Getting there by: Plane

Departing on: Thursday, December 10, 2009

Returning on: Monday, December 14, 2009

Staying at: Disney's Pop Century Resort

Notes: Attending these PassPorter December Gathering events:

PassPorter's Traditional MVMCP Fireworks & Parade Meet

Friday, December 11, 2009

Time: 15 minutes before Wishes (time to be confirmed when Wishes time is confirmed)

Place: Tip board, Magic Kingdom

Join your host's Cheryl (Chezp) & Lorie (Minnie Lor) to watch the fireworks followed by the 2nd parade.

2nd Annual PassPorter Dinner by the Lagoon Meet

Saturday, December 12, 2009 @ 5:00 pm.

Place: Yorkshire County Fish Shop

Join your host Deb (Eeyore Tattoo) for Fish and Chips or whatever as we gather around for a casual dinner.

Perfect for families and solo travelers. Everyone welcome!

2nd Annual PassPorter Italian Margaritas & Illuminations Meet

Saturday, December 12, 2009 @ 8:30 pm.

Join your host Heather (ilovedisney247) for Italian Margaritas or wine or beer or whatever you like to drink followed by Illuminations

PassPorter's 4th Annual Ornament Exchange Sunday, December 13, 2009

Time: 8:20 pm (should give us enough time before Osborne Lights Meet)

Place: In front of the Writer's Stop in DHS

Join your host's Betty Sue (BettyBeBop), LeAnn (Lagoon & Lorie (Minnie Lor) to exchange ornaments.

The Rest of the "World" For Kids: A Helpful Glance

by Ann Weber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When heading to Walt Disney World, everyone thinks about Magic Kingdom when taking younger children. And Disney's Hollywood Studios has become Pre-school Central with the Playhouse Disney character meals. So we don't need to plan a lot of time for Epcot and Animal Kingdom, right? We thought this as well on our first trip and did not plan nearly enough time for these other two parks.

We discovered Epcot's Kidcot fun stops on our second trip and our children, then 8 and 10, thoroughly enjoyed them even though Disney lists Kidcot fun stops as an attraction for preschoolers. Kidcot fun stops are located in each of the 12 countries in Epcot. When you stop at your first country, your child will receive a paper mask on a wooden stick. They will have the opportunity to start decorating it. Then as they move around the World Showcase, they will receive an additional charm to attach to the mask as well as a stamp on the handle at each country visited. You can also purchase "passports" at many of the stores in Epcot which you then have stamped at each stop. Older children may enjoy the passports more than the masks. Although the masks were inconvenient to carry around all day, my children (now 13 and 15) still have them in their rooms. Some of the Kidcot stations are difficult to find but you can ask any cast member in the country to direct you. You may also find that the stops can be crowded during the busy season.

In addition to the Kidcot Fun Stops, your children will probably enjoy some of the live entertainment offered at the World Showcase. For our children, the Dragon Legend Acrobats in China and Maturiza the Taiko drummers in Japan were their favorites. You can find information about the different performers and their schedule at <http://pages.prodigy.net/stevesoares/>. Our children did not enjoy Off Kilter or the British Invasion even though they typically like musical shows.

As far as rides in the World Showcase go, Maelstrom in Norway and the Rio del Tiempo in Mexico offer boat rides with enough visual interest to keep children engaged. You should prepare your small ones for the troll in Maelstrom that makes your boat start going backwards.

As you wander around the World Showcase, there are also many places to stop and have fun. At The Outpost between China and Germany there are drums to play when a presentation is not going on and

hard-to-find characters such as Belle and Jasmine can be found near France and Morocco respectively. Last but not least, if your children are school age, they will enjoy seeing a country they studied about in school. My daughter had just finished studying Mexico before our first trip. She was able to share a lot of what she learned in school with us as we toured. She was then able to take additional information back with her to her classmates. This aspect of our trip was especially helpful when we were asking about having an excused absence from school for the trip.

Disney's Animal Kingdom is another park with many options for younger children to have fun and learn. In the Animal Kingdom you will find six Kids Discovery Clubs, which are spread across the park. Each location has an interactive activity and a special booklet used to collect stamps at each location. If your child completes all six stops (this is difficult due to the large size of the Animal Kingdom) they receive special stamp. If you hope to complete all six stops, be sure to check what time the Kids Discovery Clubs close. Traditionally they close at 4pm even on Extra Magic Hour evenings. My kids loved exploring the Kids Discovery Clubs. They were able to learn something new while having a great time.

Another fun area for kids in Animal Kingdom is the Boneyard. The Boneyard is full of places to climb and slide. It also has a large sand pit where your children can dig for "fossils." Yes, they will get dirty here, so make sure you plan ahead for this. Although the playground is covered, it can still be quite warm since it is not enclosed or air conditioned. When we were there, we noticed a lack of space where parents could sit and rest while keeping an eye on their little ones.

Another hidden treasure we found on our last trip to Animal Kingdom was GI-TAR DAN in Camp Minnie-Mickey. If your kids watch Barney or other sing-along type children's programming, they will jump right in with GI-TAR DAN's animal sing-along. If your children are not shy, make sure they are up front so they can interact with him. We stumbled on his act by accident (it is very close to the restrooms in this area) and left with smiles on our faces (and aches in our stomachs from laughing so hard). He was teasing the kids and my usually shy daughter was fully involved and having the time of her life. Later in the day GI-TAR DAN moves to Conservation Station at Rafiki's Planet Watch. You can find his latest schedule at Steve Soares' web site.

Another fun stop for your children is the Affection Section at Rafiki's Planet Watch. Your children will have the opportunity to pet and see animals up close and personal. My children let mom and dad pet the animals first, and then they joined in as well. Disney provides sinks and

hand sanitizers so you can clean up after the encounter.

Although this list is nowhere near all-inclusive of the things your children will enjoy at the Animal Kingdom and Epcot, it has hopefully helped you see there are many things there for them to experience. Just remember that when you are looking at your guide maps, both the Kidcot Fun Stops at Epcot and the Kids Discovery Clubs at the Animal Kingdom are marked on their respective park maps with a "K" in a red box. They are worth stopping at!

About The Author: Ann Weber is an avid vacation planner. Now that the two years of planning the Alaska adventure is behind her, Ann is diving into plans for her family's upcoming Disney Christmas vacation.

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/the-rest-of-the-world-for-kids.php>

How I Helped My Scaredy-Cat Kid: A Parent's Guide to Overcoming Fear

by Courtney Agnello, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My daughter has always been the cautious type. She sleeps with all the lights blazing. Her definition of a thrill ride is a whirl on the carousel. On a bench, please - those horses go up and down pretty fast! Then there's the issue of theme park characters. How about the time she watched a parade at Sesame Place perched on my husband's shoulders? Lovable little Elmo made her so nervous that she threw up on her poor father's head. So when she was five and we decided to make our first trip to Walt Disney World, it occurred to us that she could be the only kid on Earth to hate everything there. How were we going to help her overcome her fears and turn possible nightmares into Magical Moments?

Before Trip Preparation

As they used to say on Saturday morning cartoons, knowledge is power. Long before we left for Orlando we tried to let Katie know what to expect of the different rides, the characters she might meet, and so on. We felt this would help take away the power her fears had over her. We went through guidebooks (PassPorter's KidTips are great), and pored over the list of attractions on the Walt Disney World web site. She let us know her perceived scariness level of each one, which helped us decide some things to definitely delete from our touring plan!

We also watched (many, many times...) the Disney Sing-a-Long Songs DVDs, which were an invaluable - and enjoyable - tool. On these DVDs, kids interact with the characters in the Disney theme parks while singing songs that fit the theme of the show. While still at home, she was able to become familiar with the environment of the Disney parks and see the real-sized characters having fun with kids around her age. Bonus: our family also learned some Disney songs we would not have otherwise known. Now we can "Walk Right Down the Middle of Main Street USA," and sing it to boot.

SPOILER ALERT FOR CHILDREN: We also did something controversial that worked for us, but might not for every family. We decided to fill her in on the "grown-up secret" that the non-speaking characters are really people in costumes. I know this was a risky move! The thought of cartoons come to life was blowing our little girl's very logical mind. We wanted to remove the mystery without ruining the magic. To that end, we treated the concept of the characters the way

we deal with the idea of there being a Santa Claus in every mall at Christmastime. We let her know that while Mickey and his pals are real, they cannot be everywhere at all times to visit with the many children who visit Walt Disney World. They need wonderful helpers who will make their guests feel just as special as they would themselves. She responded so well to this tactic. She was thrilled to be trusted with this extraordinary secret and kept her promise not to spoil the magic for other kids. I have no doubt that knowing about the characters helped her feel more grounded and less fearful around them.

During Our Trip Even with all the groundwork we laid, there were still things at Walt Disney World we had to overcome. It took a day or so of acclimation for her to feel easy around the characters. Luckily, they seemed to sense her feelings immediately and won her over more often than we would have believed. I will never forget our meal at the Crystal Palace, where Piglet signed her book, "To Brave Katie." And then there was a momentous occasion - she hugged Tigger. Yes, I said she hugged Tigger! With everything we did at home to prepare her, she would not have made the progress she did if not for these amazing cast members. I will be forever grateful to them.

There were some other things that caused Katie anxiety besides character contact. The first one was her intense fear of the dark. While we were aware that there are many dimly lit rides, we had no idea of just how many and just how dark they really are! Almost every ride is pitch black at some point. We addressed this by giving her a small, pen-sized flashlight. She was instructed to only shine it inside the car in which she was riding, and only down at her feet. Being able to do this let her have someplace bright to look, and reminded her that she was still in the real world without interfering with the experience of those around her.

Another source of worry for her combined her trepidations regarding both characters and the dark - the stage shows. The Voyage of the Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, the Lion King... all have dark parts and characters galore! We solved this by sitting all the way in the back row. She still didn't like being in the theaters, where she felt a little trapped until the end of the show. However, she used her flashlight in the same way as she did on the rides during the dark parts. She coped as best she could and sometimes that's all one can ask of a five year old, isn't it?

Lessons For Next Time

Now that she is almost eight, she's a little bit older and wiser - more experienced in the world and the ways of Walt Disney World. But she still hates the dark and will not go near a costumed character at a

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birthday party. As we are in the midst of planning this summer's Disney vacation, what lessons from our last visit will help us?

We will definitely bring the penlight. One thing we did not count on last time was the effect of loud noises in some of the attractions and during the fireworks. We are adding earplugs to our packing list. And we are again going over lists of attractions as a refresher. We have found posted videos of many rides on YouTube. We have "ridden" Expedition Everest in our living room almost every day! Speaking of rides, we realized that forcing her to go on something will not mean that she will suddenly enjoy it. We will listen to her more.

For her part, she seems willing to try some new things. Without pressuring her we've begun, shall we say, some subtle convincing... "Test Track only goes as fast as our car, did you know that?" "As a matter of fact, you do not really go anywhere on Soarin' - you just feel like you are part of a giant movie. Isn't that cool?" Even if she doesn't give those a shot, I bet she will at least get off the bench and on to one of those wild horses on Cinderella's Carousel. And that will be a Magical Moment itself.

About The Author: Courtney Agnello is the mother of three. Her articles on several television shows have been featured on pop culture and reality TV web sites. She and her family are counting down the days until their upcoming Walt Disney World vacation.

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/how-I-helped-my-scaredy-cat-kid.php>

Taking Kids Out of School For a Disney Trip: A Vacation Dilemma

by Roger Sauer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Part 1: The Decision

Three scenarios:

Family A takes its vacations during the summer when school is out and Dad has his annual two week time off for a trip.

Family B has two parents working and need to coordinate their times off for a vacation. Needless to say, this sometimes means vacations during the school year.

Family C has a single parent working a job with no paid vacation. If there is a vacation at all, it must be during off-seasons when prices for lodging are lower. These are invariably during the fall or early winter.

The decision to take students out of school for any vacation is now driven by numerous social, educational, and economic factors. As a retired school administrator (including service as a high school principal) I was often called on to deal with students whose attendance was impacted by parental vacation decisions. Simply put, my position was that students need to be in school when it is in session. Absenteeism is strongly correlated with lack of success in school. To paraphrase Woody Allen, "Half the secret of success is simply showing up."

However, as the three scenarios above indicate, times have changed. America may have moved beyond the agrarian calendar that drove its educational system a century ago, but that same calendar refuses to give up the wheel. Just as families have changed, the types of vacations (and even the ability to have one!) have also changed.

And sometimes the school calendar and vacation windows simply do not cooperate. This means that decisions to take trips during the school year including those to Disney World should be made with foresight and an open consideration of a variety of factors. While there is no one good answer for every situation, what follows is a series of questions that should be discussed as plans are made. Part 2 is a set of activities that can help one maintain an element of educational rigor during a Disney World vacation on school time.

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FAMILY ISSUES:

* Do parent work schedules allow for time off during non-school periods?

* Can the family afford vacation costs during school vacation periods (read: Peak Season)?

* Can the parent(s) properly supervise homework assigned during the absence?

* Can the parent(s) properly develop a series of activities that take advantage of Disney World and the travel itinerary?

* How many days will the student remain out of school?

* Can the trip be scheduled so as to minimize days of school missed? More than a week can set any student back.

STUDENT ISSUES: These should be answered for every student and more critically for student in grades 6-12

* Does the student want to go? Your college-bound senior may like the idea but not the timing. Is there a responsible adult available to serve as a guardian in your absence?

* Has the student been successful in school?

* Has the student missed more than ten school days in the past year?

* Is the student enrolled in a performance class (band, choir, and orchestra) or an extra-curricular activity that would be missed during the trip?

* Is the student in the habit of doing homework on a daily basis?

* Is the student enrolled in special education, accelerated, or other specialized program?

SCHOOL ISSUES:

* What are the state law and district and school policies regarding pre-arranged absences from school?

* Will the teacher/s assist the student in assigning homework for the trip?

* Will the student be able to make up work on his return from the trip?

* Can any element of the Disney World experience be used to supplement or enhance the material covered in specific classes? Remember that most educators have worked in a system that starts in the fall, takes winter and Spring Breaks, and shuts down in the summer. It is sometimes assumed by educators that the rest of the world is on this schedule.

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As one can see, the answer to the question posed in the title of this piece is: It depends. My own view is that, if the parents are forced to take time off during school time, they will. But if they have a choice of vacation times, then they need to seriously consider the second and third question sets and weigh the pros and cons. These all lead up to a single compelling question: Can my child afford to be away from direct instruction and participation at school for the duration of the trip?

PART 2: Educational Opportunities- Those Taken and Those Missed

If the decision is made to remove students from school for a trip, it has hopefully been done with the blessing of your student's school and that teachers have cooperated in providing homework in advance. This is not always as easy as it seems; one would like to think that teachers can just whip out the assignment for the next week or two at the drop of a hat -- some can, some cannot. Hopefully, it will not be busy work. On the other hand, are you ready to help Sally with her calculus? Again, the decision for an older student will be in part driven by the student, and Sally might rather be in calculus class.

But if you have homework with you, your students should be able to do some of it in the car on the way to the World or on the airplane. The educational advantage of this is obvious, as should be the lesson that "play" time sometimes requires "work" time.

Even if there are no lessons to do, your job as parent-mentor can be enhanced by providing supplemental work materials at a grade-appropriate level. Any bookstore or American Automobile Association store can provide these types of workbooks. And, if the student is old enough, the simple act of reading is beneficial. Bring BOOKS in their carry-ons!

A couple of years ago my daughter by necessity had to arrange a vacation during school time. My twin grandchildren, Colin and Caitlin, had reading books as well as a journal that they were expected to complete. Each journal had a page with the date at the top. Each filled out boxes on each page covering topics like naming three activities of the day and their favorite event, person, or place of the day. They were also asked to draw something they saw that day. My daughter also had them do the World Showcase tour with Passports to have signed at the Epcot Kidcot stations.

One key to providing some thinking skills in the trip to Walt Disney World is MAPS. Traveling to Orlando either by plane, train, or automobile can be enhanced by having younger children learn the

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geography through which (or over which) they are traveling. Maps from AAA can be a godsend. Similarly, the park maps can be used to let children plot their daily activities. Disney makes beautiful, customizable family-specific maps for free and they can be ordered through the Disney World website www.disneyworld.com

Advanced students interested in art and architecture can learn a great deal through the recently published Imagineering Field Guides to the Walt Disney World parks. And, of course, the parks themselves and especially Epcot and Animal Kingdom can be considered living lesson plans. Even as experienced an educator as I recognize that a trip to Harambe Village is going to be more memorable than Miss Feeny's scintillating lecture on African quadrupeds!

So the decision is yours to make. But in doing so, be thoughtful about your own family's flexibility to travel, your children's educational needs and maturity, and how YOU can make a school time trip to Disney World educational as well as fun.

About The Author: A native of Oregon, Roger Sauer is retired from school administration. Since retiring he and his wife Donna have traveled to Europe for Disneyland Paris, to China and Tibet, and most recently, Japan. They have been members of Disney Vacation Club since 1993 and have traveled to Florida once or twice a year since joining. They have three children and five grandchildren. Their next trip to the World will be in December.

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<http://www.passporter.com/articles/a-vacation-dilemma.php>

Preparing Your Child For a Walt Disney World Vacation: 7 Things To Do To Get Your Kid Ready to Go!

by Leanne Phelps, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Are you taking a child to Walt Disney World? A daughter, son, grandchild, or neighbor? Maybe it is his or her first trip and you want to make it magical. Here are a few ideas about how to make the trip (and the anticipation of it!) extra special.

Breaking the news is the first step! Telling your child that he or she is going to Disney World can be lots of fun all by itself. Many people like to share the news by giving their child a Disney stuffed animal, wrapping up a Disney World map, showing a Disney video, or sending a special Disney postcard or letter to the child. For older kids, you could share the news by giving them their own planning guide and a pen. Some people even surprise children by packing their bags in secret and revealing the trip right as they board a plane or jump in the car. However you choose to do it, your child will be thrilled!

If you are involved in the [PassPorter Boards Community](#) or another on-line Disney community, you may hear of someone who is going to Disney World before your trip who would be willing to send your child a postcard. When an online friend was at Disney a month or two before we were going, she sent my niece a postcard from her favorite Disney characters saying they couldn't wait to see her soon. My niece was so thrilled! (Editor's note: We call them Fairy Godmailers! Find one in our "[Making More Magic](#)" forum.

Countdown the Days -- To help your child know how many days are left before the big trip, you can make a "countdown calendar." This could be in the form of a paper chain where you remove a link each day or it could be a special calendar where you place a Disney sticker every day until you leave. Any type of countdown will not only build excitement, but it might also cut down on the number of times you answer the question, "How much longer until we go to Disney World?"

Get the Kids Involved -- To keep everyone excited while you are waiting for your big trip to start, get everyone involved in the planning! Everyone can contribute ideas for where to stay, eat, and play. Older kids can look at a Disney World map or at your PassPorter and start making a list of "must do" attractions. Some parents give each family member a highlighter of a different color to highlight things that are of special interest to them. Younger kids may enjoy seeing a picture of an

attraction and giving it a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down."

Do Some Reading -- It is also fun to make a ritual of reading about a different Disney park, ride, show, or restaurant each night before bed or sharing Disney trivia as a family. To keep the Disney magic in the front of everyone's minds, you can take a family trip to your local Disney Store, check out Disney's web site, or go to the movie theater to see the latest Disney release. There are also some great Disney games like Disney Monopoly or the new Disney Scene It! that are fun to play.

Take In a Movie -- For young kids, watching Disney movies can get them familiar with the characters they'll see. You may also need some time to prepare the smaller children for what the characters will be like at Disney World. While watching the characters in the movies or when you see them in photos, you can tell your child what it will be like to see them "in person." Ask your child what he or she might say to Cinderella or Peter Pan. As for Mickey, Pooh, and Goofy, describing how big they will be or that they will not speak out loud might make your child more comfortable when you actually encounter them at the parks. Make note of who your child is most interested in meeting at the parks. Once you arrive at Disney World, check for a schedule of where to find a particular character. You can ask for the schedule at City Hall in the Magic Kingdom, Guest Relations in any park, or at the "Tip Board" near the center of every park.

Kids of all ages will enjoy the free planning video or DVD put out by Disney. You can request one by going to <http://www.disneyworld.com> or you can even watch it online. This is an excellent planning tool! It will also come with a full color brochure that is fun to look at as well.

Get Dollarwise -- Children that are old enough to manage money will enjoy receiving Disney Dollars as a gift or compensation for chores. I've heard of families who give their children's allowances to them in Disney Dollars for weeks before a trip. That way, once they arrive at Disney World they will have their own "money" to spend (they can't spend it before they get there!) and you won't have to constantly give a yes or no to every request. They can decide what is important to them and use their Disney Dollars accordingly.

Give Goodie Bags -- To add to the anticipation (and to give your child something fun to do in the car or plane) you could prepare a goodie bag to give to the child. This could be given right before you leave or even as a way to "break the news" about your exciting trip. Possible items to include are: Disney coloring book and crayons, autograph book and pen, stickers, candy, sunglasses, disposable camera, wallet with Disney Dollars in it, small puzzles, pins to trade, small stuffed animal, lip balm,

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mini flashlight, etc. If you have Disney maps, you can include them, too!

Whether you use some of these tips or use some wonderful ideas all your own, by the time your special child arrives at Disney World he or she will be more ready than ever to experience the magic that only Disney can bring! Congratulations on embarking on an exciting adventure. Few things are as rewarding as seeing the "World" through the eyes of a child.

About The Author: Leanne Phelps has been enjoying Disney World since college. She and her husband now enjoy visiting with their children.

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<http://www.passporter.com/articles/child-preparation-for-walt-disney-world.php>

Airline Security: 10 Important Tips and Reminders

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Travel, and especially air travel, has become more challenging since 9/11. Airport security procedures seem to be in a constant state of flux. The big changes came on 12/31/2002, when U.S. law required that all baggage (checked and carry-on) be inspected prior to departure. Since then, changes have been fast and furious. These ever-present changes are hard enough for frequent flyers, but when a family's first flight takes them to their first visit to Walt Disney World or Disneyland, the situation must be far more daunting.

While this article is too brief to contain a full primer on airline check-in and security procedures, we hope these tips on hot topics for vacation travelers will help ease your mind and prepare for your journey. Note: These recommendations may become outdated very quickly, so always check with your airline a few days before you depart, to learn the latest conditions for your trip. A trip to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Travelers & Consumer Web site at <http://www.tsa.gov> is also a great idea. Also, note that this article focuses on domestic travel within the U.S. Requirements for travel outside the U.S. will be different, and are generally beyond the scope of this article.

1. Documentation

Have government-issued photo ID for every traveler 17 and older, and keep it handy, as you'll have to show it frequently. If children traveling with you have the same last name, the parent or guardian's photo ID will be enough. It can help to have a birth certificate for each child, but it's rarely necessary. We suggest passports for all adults and children who expect to travel on a regular basis, as there's no better form of ID out there.

At most airports you'll be required to present a boarding pass at the passenger security checkpoint. Tickets, confirmation slips, and itineraries may not be accepted. Some airlines now let you print your boarding pass at their web site, and you can now often get a boarding pass at curbside check-in and/or at e-ticket check-in kiosks in the terminal, as well as at the regular ticket counter.

2. Passenger Security Checkpoint

This is the checkpoint between the main terminal and the gate area. Did you know it's illegal to bring any prohibited item to the checkpoint?

While you may have the option to dispose of the item(s), security personnel also have the option to arrest you! If circumstances allow, you can leave the security line to put the prohibited item in your car or make arrangements with the airline to transport it as checked baggage. However, if you choose to abandon the item at the checkpoint, you can't get it back.

3. It's Not a Joke

Of course, we've known for years that it's illegal to joke about bombs, hijacking and related matters at the airport. Be sure your children (especially pre-teens and teens) know this, too. One adolescent joke at the checkpoint can put a real crimp in your vacation.

4. Passing Through the Scanners

The metal detectors are more sensitive than they used to be. Here are some of the items that routinely trip the alarms: Small change, keys, eyeglasses, belt buckles, jewelry and body piercings, underwire bras, surgical implants (orthopedic screws and plates included), shoes with metal shanks (you often won't know this until the alarm goes off), and clothes with metal studs or buttons. If you're wearing a coat you'll have to remove it and send it through the X-ray scanner. We suggest transferring all items in your pockets into a purse, waist pack, briefcase, zippered coat pocket or similar item before you reach the checkpoint, to speed your progress through the line. If you know your shoes will trip the alarm, remove them and run them through X-ray. And who needs an uncomfortable underwire poking into her ribs anyway? Consider a sports bra, and travel in greater comfort.

5. Traveling with Children

It pays to mentally prepare your children for the inspection. They'll have to put their toys and other prized possessions through the X-ray machine, and pass through the metal detector. Infants and small children are subject to inspection, just like the grownups. An unexpected wand or pat-down can be traumatic for everyone in the family, so be sure children know what to expect, as it can happen to them, too. If they're big enough to walk through the scanners unaided, encourage them to do it, but also consider the chaos if your child dashes off on his/her own (send one adult through first, followed by children, with an adult bringing up the rear).

6. Inspections and Privacy

Inspections and screenings are mandatory. If you refuse to comply with an inspection, you're off the flight. You may not even be warned of this possibility before it happens. If you have concerns about passing through the scanners, talk to the inspector prior to entering.

Passengers with small children, disabilities, medical implants, religious

concerns, and the like will have a much easier time if they tell the inspectors up-front, and discuss the best way to proceed through inspection. Passengers with medical pacemakers are advised to carry the appropriate ID with them (although it's not required). You can request a private inspection, should an inspection be necessary. The inspectors are trained to respect religious and medical sensitivities, and same-gender inspectors will be provided except in extraordinary circumstances. Individuals with body piercings may want to remove them prior to travel, as the jewelry will have to be removed (in privacy) if it trips the scanners. You can read much more about these issues at the TSA web page: <http://www.tsa.gov>.

7. Film

The TSA has a separate fact sheet on this topic. Professional and advanced amateur photographers may want to read the entire thing, at http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/editorial_1035.shtm. Here are a few key points for all travelers:

- Do not pack film in your checked luggage; the screening equipment can damage undeveloped film.
- The X-ray equipment at the passenger security checkpoints (carry-on items) should be safe for film speeds lower than 800 ASA/ISO, but each time a roll of film passes through the equipment, more damage can be done. Even the TSA warns that five trips through the scanners are more than any roll of film should receive. The scanners may not be strong enough to ruin "regular" film, but they can degrade image quality, especially after multiple scans, and can hurt many special-purpose films (medical, professional photo, etc.).
- You can ask that film be hand-inspected. The TSA asks that you re-package film in clear plastic containers to speed the inspection, and recommends against using lead-lined bags for carrying film, as these bags will still have to be opened and inspected. (Lead lined bags may still be advisable for trips out of the U.S., as procedures differ in other countries.)
- To avoid complications, we suggest you buy and process your film while on vacation. All Disney resorts and the Disney Cruise Line have next-day processing services, or you can mail exposed film to a processing lab. This may cost more, but those photo opportunities can be priceless. Once the film has been developed, it can't be damaged by the scanners.

8. Locking Checked Luggage

Now that the TSA is screening all checked luggage, there's always the

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possibility that your luggage will have to be opened for inspection (whether the TSA is hand-inspecting all luggage at your airport, or if your bag must be opened for further inspection following an electronic scan). In most cases, this will not be done in your presence. The TSA recommends that you not lock your checked luggage, as the lock may have to be broken and will not be replaced. If it's necessary to open a bag for inspection the TSA places a colored seal on the luggage afterwards, and a notice inside the bag to advise you that the bag has been inspected. The TSA is working on a program to provide color-coded security seals to all passengers. If the TSA then has to inspect the contents of a bag that color-coded seal will be replaced by a seal of a different color. Until that new system is in place, the TSA recommends you use plastic cable ties, available at most hardware stores. These inexpensive ties can be used like a lock to hold zippers closed, and can be removed easily by the TSA. You can open them later with a scissors or nail clipper (see the next section).

9. Not-So-Prohibited Items

Many personal items that had been prohibited in carry-on luggage can now be brought on board. These include round-nosed scissors, nail clippers, nail files, tweezers, knitting needles, and eyeglass repair kits including screwdrivers (larger screwdrivers are still prohibited). "Personal care or toiletries" in small quantities (3 oz. or less) are also allowed (see the section below). The full list of prohibited items changes regularly. The current list can be downloaded or viewed at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>. Of course, the major prohibited items are still all on the list. As has been the case for a while, knives, hand tools, and sports items like baseball bats, hockey sticks and golf clubs must go in your checked baggage.

10. 3-1-1 Rule for Carry-On Liquids

Remember the 3-1-1 rule when you want to carry on personal items that are liquid, such as shampoo or sunscreen. Here's how it works: You may carry on liquids in 3 (THREE) ounce or less (by volume) bottles, but these must be placed in 1 (ONE) quart-sized clear, plastic, zip-top bag, and you can only have 1 (ONE) bag per passenger, which must be placed in the screening bin when you walk through the security checkpoint. Note that the one-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring, and it's necessary that you consolidate all of your bottles into one bag to speed up the security screening. You may still put liquids in your checked luggage without worrying about sizes or bags, though.

Whew! That's a lot of stuff, but with a bit of advance knowledge you'll fly thorough the preliminaries and your fellow passengers won't be delayed

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behind you.

About The Author: Dave Marx is the co-founder of PassPorter Travel Press and co-author of many bestselling travel guidebooks.

View the latest version online at: <http://www.passporter.com/articles/airline-security.php>

Flying with Kids: Staying Safe and Sane

by Christina Holland-Radvon, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

When it comes to family travel, no one plans or worries quite like a parent. I should know -- I'm an expectant mother, nursing a toddler, and I'm a travel agent. Planning and worrying are what I do best.

Traveling with children can present some unique challenges. Here are a few of the toughest situations when it comes to flying with kids:

The most important thing you can do to smooth the way for a fun and hassle-free flight is to book a non-stop flight during the time of day when your children usually nap. Mid-week, mid-day (naptime, yay!) is considered an off-peak time. Consider booking your flight then to take advantage of that quiet time of day. If this doesn't work into your schedule, don't get discouraged! Get creative!

Keeping your kids busy and distracted is that much easier with handy little travel gadgets like portable DVD players. I've found them on sale for as little as \$150 -- less than I would usually pay to rent one for a ten-day trip! Other tried and true distractions include photo albums made just for little hands (be sure to include photos of grandma and grandpa or the puppy you're leaving with a neighbor), magnetic memo boards for mess-free drawing, and fun tactile experiences like blind-folding your toddler and asking him to name different objects that you put in his hands. Feathers, beanie animals and other favorite stuffed toys, matchbox-type cars, and favorite snacks like Cheerios or teddy bear graham crackers would be perfect for those little hands to touch, feel and giggle over. You can even ask a flight attendant for an ice cube to put into your toddlers palm. With or without the blindfold, he'll be fascinated by the melting ice. Just remember to watch him carefully so he doesn't try to eat it!

Seating arrangements and take-offs/landings are probably the two greatest concerns of flying with young children. Whether or not to buy a ticket and bring a safety seat for your infant is a personal decision. Weigh the benefits and disadvantages carefully before you decide. Yes, the extra seat is more expensive and the safety seat is kind of a pain to tote around along with the rest of the luggage, but your child has their own space (and so do you) throughout the flight. You can also be assured that your child will be safe in the event of extreme turbulence if he is safely buckled into his own seat.

Bring along something child-friendly to give your child to suck to ease them through those take-offs and landings. Pacifiers and bottles of

water work well for bottle-fed children. Breastfeeding works great, but can be difficult if your child is buckled up in their seat. You can learn how to nurse your child while he is buckled in, but learn how to do so by practicing at home long before your trip. Another option for exclusively breastfed babies who are adverse to the feel of an artificial nipple is to use your pinky as a pacifier. Be sure your hands are very clean by washing them in the restroom as soon as you board the plane.

About The Author: Christina is a PassPorter Message Board Guide.

View the latest version online at: <http://www.passporter.com/articles/flying-with-kids.php>

Disney's Pop Century Resort: The Newest Value-Priced Hotel On Property

by Jennifer and Dave Marx, Authors of [PassPorter Travel Guidebooks](#)

Auld acquaintance shall be remembered at Pop Century, the Walt Disney World Resort's newest value-priced resort. By the time the final phase of construction is done (no date is projected at press time), each of the 20th century's decades will be immortalized for its contribution to popular culture. Pop Century Resort is located in the Epcot area on the northeast corner of Osceola Parkway and Victory Way.

Ambience at Disney's Pop Century Resort

Whether you're 8 or 80, a blast from your past awaits at Pop Century. In what will actually be twin-sister resorts when complete, Pop Century Classic Years and Pop Century Legendary Years surround a 33-acre lake and are connected by a scenic bridge (called the "Generation Gap"). Go from the quaint days of Main Street U.S.A. "to infinity and beyond" in eye-popping style with a uniquely themed check-in lobby, food court/shop/lounge, and pool bar. Outside, giant cultural icons fill the senses, including a monumental Rubik's Cube (r), a billboard-sized laptop computer, and the biggest Big Wheel (r) ever parked in a front yard. The themes continue with six imaginative themed pools. Each guest lodge building is festooned with cultural icons and "groovy" catch phrases.

Resort Layout & Rooms at Disney's Pop Century Resort

The 2,880 guest rooms that are open in Pop Century Classic Years are situated in five differently themed areas encompassing a total of 10 guest lodges. Pop Century Classic Years celebrates the decades of the 1950s, '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s. Opening at some undetermined date, Pop Century Legendary Years will take us back to the 1900s, '10s, '20s, '30s, and '40s. Themed courtyards are formed between two or more of the ten T-shaped guest lodges. Each decade's theme is reflected in the guest room decor, but rich, wood-grain furniture adds elegance to the fun. Rooms have either two double beds or one king bed, a large TV with remote, a small table with two chairs, and a roomy chest of drawers. Rooms hold up to four guests plus one child under three in a crib (a folding crib is available on request). Rooms are small -- about 260 sq. ft. -- but as with the All-Star Resorts, furnishings allow adequate floor space. Rooms have no private balconies or patios, but each offers climate controls. Amenities include soap, housekeeping, large in-room safe, table-side modem jack, iron and ironing board, and voice mail. Inquire at check-in about renting a small refrigerator for \$10/night.

Eating & Drinking at Disney's Pop Century Resort

Pop Century Classic Years has a large food court with a variety of food stations. The eatery is open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Typical menu items include a breakfast platter (\$5.99), a double cheeseburger (\$6.89), and vegetable lo mein (\$6.59). Purchase a mug for \$12.49 and get unlimited refills from the beverage bar (which includes frozen Cokes). A pizza delivery service is available in the afternoons and evenings, along with seasonal snack carts.

Relaxing & Playing at Disney's Pop Century Resort

For Athletes: The 12' wide lakeside path is ideal for walks and jogs. The lake does not offer a marina, but we hear that surrey bikes may be available for jaunts around the lake when the resort is done.

For Children: A quiet playground and play fountain is located within the resort (see map on page 78 of *PassPorter's Walt Disney World* guidebook for locations).

For Gamers: An arcade is located in the resort's main building.

For Shoppers: The resort offers a large shop with Disney logo merchandise, clothing, sundries, and some snack foods.

For Swimmers: Cool off in the main pool with a wading pool, and two smaller themed pools. Classic Years' pools are shaped like a bowling pin, a flower, and a computer; Legendary Years' pools (not yet open) will resemble a crossword puzzle, soda bottle, and highway sign. There are no spas (hot tubs) at this resort.

Transportation at Disney's Pop Century Resort

Buses (see chart in *PassPorter's Walt Disney World* guidebook) are outside the main building of the resort. Stops are well-marked and offer benches and shelter. Bus service is prompt and efficient. Destinations other than those below can be reached by changing buses at Disney's Hollywood Studios or Epcot (daytime) or Downtown Disney (evening). Parking is freely available, though you should study the map to find the closest lot to your room.

Tips and Notes for Disney's Pop Century Resort

The 33-acre lake between these resorts is an added perk for a value resort -- the equivalent All-Star Resorts have no ponds, lakes, or rivers. The lakeside promenade and Generation Gap bridge are a total delight. Frequent park benches line the path, and "roadside" signs note landmark cultural events of each era. Note, however, that you cannot yet walk all the way around the lake.

Epcot's IllumiNations fireworks are visible across the lake. Best views are from the '50s B and C buildings -- try the fourth floor!

Food court patrons are treated to a dance routine performed by the

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resort's cast members at breakfast and dinner! They do the Twist at 8:00 am and the Hustle at 6:00 pm. Be there or be square!

While Mom or Dad checks in, the kids can enjoy a big-screen video theater. Be sure to take in the memorabilia exhibits, too.

A children's pop-jet fountain is tucked away in a corner between the '60s and '70s -- look for a statue of Goofy and a red Corvette.

Plan to either carry your own luggage or wait a while (perhaps 45--60 minutes) for the resort's luggage service to drop it off at your building. Arrangements to pick up luggage on your departure day should be made the night before.

Coin-operated laundries are located near each pool. Bring lots of quarters -- wash loads and dry cycles are \$2.00 each.

We've heard that the Legendary Years section may open its guest rooms as "family suites" similar to All-Star Music (see page 37 of *PassPorter's Walt Disney World* guidebook). Check-in time is 4:00 pm. Check-out time is 11:00 am.

Best Locations at Disney's Pop Century Resort

Rooms at Pop Century vary only by location within the resorts and floor level. For convenience, we recommend the '50s, '60s, or '70s (Classic Years) -- they are closest to pools, food, and transportation. Our personal pick is the '70s (at Classic Years) as it is relatively quiet and has good views from most windows. Note that several buildings offer excellent views of Hourglass Lake, notably '50s B & C, '60s, and '70s A. If you seek quiet, request a room on the third or fourth floors. While the Legendary Years buildings are not yet open, when they are, we recommend the '10s, '20s, and '30s.

Room Rates at Disney's Pop Century Resort

2009 room rates begin at \$82 for standard rooms and \$97 for preferred rooms. 12.5% tax is not included in above rates. Preferred rooms are in the guest lodges closest to the main buildings (the '60s at Classic Years). There is a \$10 per person charge for the third and fourth adult in a room, but no extra charge for children under 18. Rooms may face parking lots, pools, the lake, or courtyards. Higher rates in price ranges are for weekends and holiday periods (see page 29).

Disney's Pop Century Resort Quick Facts

Address: 1050 Century Drive, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830
Phone: 407-938-4000 g Fax: 407-938-4040

About The Authors: [Jennifer and Dave Marx](#) are the founders of PassPorter Travel Press/MediaMarx, Inc. and the authors of dozens of bestselling books. They live in Ann Arbor, Michigan and frequently travel within the U.S. and abroad.

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/disneys-pop-century.php>

The Art of A Smooth Check-in At Walt Disney World: Save Time and Trouble On Your Next Trip

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor and Host of Travel Girl podcasts

So I have to think about checking in? Is it not enough that I have planned for hours, reserved dining, memorized the maps, pre-purchased the park tickets? I know, sounds crazy, but you have to trust me on this one - checking in the right way can make the difference between a smooth, problem free trip and one struck with issues. Here's the biggest problem when you check in to any hotel- you're excited and in a rush! Who wouldn't be? You've just tackled car rides, plane trips with screaming children, shuttle rides, baggage lugging, stroller collapsing, juice spilling, hours of travel, and you are psyched! You made it, you're still alive and you only lost one child for a brief moment. You are ready to rip off the tags of your brand new shorts, don your favorite Mickey tee, slap on the sunscreen and head out. STOP!!!

Trust me. Take a breath. Hold out the anticipation for just a few more minutes. Plunk your spouse and the kids in front of the Disney movies in the lobby and prepare to spend some time perfecting your trip, this is the last step in a perfectly planned out vacation. Here's what you need to do:

1. Have your paperwork ready, including hotel confirmation numbers, any requests you made such as a crib in your room, your park tickets if they do not come with your package, your list of dining reservations, activity reservations, and any special events.
2. Start at check-in. Make sure to verify everything -- dates, room location, will they be sending the crib, has your luggage arrived and if not, when should you expect it. Make sure that your Keys to the World -- your hotel keys that look like a credit card -- include everything in your package, hotel room, dining plan, and park tickets. You also have charging capabilities on this card so make sure to check the limit and set a limit for your children old enough to go off on their own. REMEMBER that you must have all cards when you head to the parks -- park tickets are on each individual card.
3. Next stop, lobby concierge. Don't do it later, trust me, just get it all over with. At the lobby concierge desk have them print the list of your dining reservations - make sure they are all correct. Pick up any event

tickets such as Hoop Dee Doo Revue. Get maps, park times, and the resorts calendar of events. There may be a craft activity for the kids or movie on the beach that you otherwise wouldn't know about. Ask for any coloring books, stickers, and hidden Mickey hunts that they might have to keep the wee ones amused.

4. If it is your first time to the resort have them explain the transportation options, find out where the bus stops are and make sure to take a map to find your way around.

5. If you bought your park tickets separately, concierge can put the tickets right onto your Key to the World to make it more convenient.

6. Lastly, ask any questions that you may have, the lobby concierge staff will be your best friends throughout the trip!

I know that not rushing to your room or out to the pool may be VERY difficult but I promise you, careful and thoughtful check-in is the last step to planning a perfect Disney World vacation!

About The Author: Justine Fellows, the author of [PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner: The Easy Ten-Step Program](#), works in education in Connecticut. She is also the host of [Travel Girl's\(TM\) Tips for Disney World](#) podcasts

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/smooth-disney-check-in.php>

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Finding Answers: A Disney Guide

by Jennifer and Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Authors

Have Disney Questions? Chances are good that the answer is available somewhere! Here are our top ten ways (in order) to find answers to your questions about Walt Disney World, Disneyland, Disney Cruise Line, and general travel

1. Read the Manual! Check the [PassPorter guidebook!](#) You probably already have one if you're reading this and virtually all our readers tell us it's a great resource. We keep a copy right by our computers -- yes, we wrote the book, but do you think we actually remember everything we've ever written in it? Anyway, when we're looking for an answer to a question, PassPorter is the first place we check. We use both the table of contents and the index to find what we seek.

2. Check the Archives. Search our newsletter archives (you are [subscribed](#), right?). We've been doing newsletters for years now, and every issue has a feature article as well as lots of updates and news. To view the archives, visit the Newsletter Stand. If you haven't subscribed, you can do so quickly at the same page -- it's free!

3. Call Disney and ask. We do this frequently when we have a question we haven't addressed in the PassPorter guidebook. Here are some helpful phone numbers:

General Walt Disney World information - 407-824-4321

Dining at Walt Disney World - 407-939-3463

Tours at Walt Disney World - 407-939-8687

Orlando International Airport information - 407-825-2001

General Disneyland information - 714-781-7290

Dining at Disneyland - 714-781-3463

General Disney Cruise Line information - 888-325-2500

You'll find more numbers in the back of the PassPorter guidebook, too. And here's [another list of helpful numbers elsewhere on PassPorter.com](#), plus one from [AllEarsNet](#).

4. Search the Boards.. Do a search the PassPorter message board -- chances are very good someone else has asked the question already! To search the message board, click the Search link at the top of the board, type in one or two words that relate to your question, and click Search. For example, if I wanted to check on renovations at the Disney resort hotels, you could type "renovation" to get several hits. If you don't find what you're looking for, consider alternate words, for example "rehab"

instead of "renovation."

5. Ask Others. Post your question in the appropriate forum on the PassPorter message board. Our members and moderators enjoy answering questions, and most questions get several replies. To post your question, first locate the forum that it best fits into, click it, then click the Add New button, and type your question. Please keep in mind responses won't be immediate -- it may take hours or even days to get a reply, especially if your question is esoteric. We have no policies that require questions to be answered by our members or our volunteer Guides, but we all try our best! If your question hasn't received a reply after a couple of days, feel free to return to it and reply with something like, "Still searching for the answer to this question -- can anyone out there help me? Thanks so much!" Replying to your original question in this manner will force the topic to the top of the topic list in that forum and make it more visible to members.

6. Google It. Search for it on the Internet. We recommend the Google search engine for excellent results:

7. Go Web Surfing. Visit specific Disney-related Web sites for information on your topic. AllEars.net (<http://www.allears.net>) is a particularly good repository of information which we recommend you check. You'll find more good Disney Web sites at: <http://www.passporter.com/wdw/webunofficial.htm>. And don't forget <http://www.disneyworld.com>.

8. Check Other Forums. Search other message boards and discussion groups for information on your topic. Here are our recommendations:

DIS (Disney Information Station) - <http://www.disboards.com>

Intercot - <http://www.intercot.com/discussion>

Tagrel - <http://www.tagrel.com/forum/>

Disney Echo - <http://disneyecho.emuck.com/>

Disney World Trivia - <http://www.disneyworldtrivia.com/forums/>

WDW Magic.com - <http://forums.wdwmagic.com>

LaughingPlace.com - <http://mb.laughingplace.com/Msgboard.asp>

9. Ask More People. Post your question on one or more of those same boards or groups we mention above. Different people have different experiences.

10. Ask Us. Send us an e-mail at [jenniferanddave \(at\) passporter.com](mailto:jenniferanddave@passporter.com). We will do our best to answer you! We do receive hundreds of e-mails a day, however, so we can't promise anything. But we will try!

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When you do find your answer, we encourage you to post it here in the message boards for others who follow to find. The more you contribute, the more you (and everyone else!) gets out of it.

Happy hunting!

About The Authors: [Jennifer and Dave Marx](#) are the founders of PassPorter Travel Press/MediaMarx, Inc. and the authors of dozens of bestselling books. They live in Ann Arbor, Michigan and frequently travel within the U.S. and abroad.

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/finding-answers-to-questions-about-walt-disney-world.php>

Counting Down to Disney (Part 1): What You Must Get Done

by Nicole Courson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Congratulations…you're going to Walt Disney World! Whether you are celebrating your college graduation or planning the vacation of a lifetime with your kids and parents alike, this is a big deal and planning is key. It may seem as if once the hotel is booked and the tickets are purchased, the work is over, right? What can be left but packing a suitcase and boarding the plane?

Wrong!

There's so much to do! For the sake of keeping it straight, planning for Disney in our house can be divided into two basic categories: **Must Get Done Stuff** and Fun Stuff. With a little bit of looking at your calendar and some imagination, you might be able to check off more than one item on your "to-do" list at a time.

First, we'll cover the "**Must Get Dones.**" These are the basics.

* **Pick your plan.** Your PassPorter will give you a much more detailed and informative descriptions of this process, but basically you need to decide what you'd like to include on your trip. Want to pay for your meals ahead of time? Check out Disney's Dining Plans, with everything from a value-priced Quick-Service plan to the foodie's dream, Deluxe Dining. Or if you're planning to visit the water parks more than once, add it onto your ticket -- you'll save money and time. Do you see yourself doing a park each day, or jumping from one to the other? The Park Hopper Option is something to think about.

* **Book your trip.** Whether you use a travel agent or book directly with Disney, be sure to be informed and clear about which resort you've chosen, the exact dates and how many rooms/guests there are. Also, be very clear with them about any special needs or preferences, such as proximity to pool, room with a view of the lake, etc.

* **Make meal reservations.** Whether you go with the Disney Dining Plan or not, you'll have to have advance dining reservations for all the sit-down restaurants on resort/park grounds. Don't make the mistake of thinking you'll just eat wherever -- you really need to plan this. Believe it or not, Advanced Dining Reservations (ADR) are available 180 days out from your trip's start date. And if you'd like to book seats at Cinderella's Royal Table, you'd better do just that -- those seats go fast!

* **Make event reservations.** Pretty much everything at Walt Disney

World that's "extra-recreational" takes a reservation or ticket. If you're planning on attending Mickey's Christmas or Halloween celebrations, tickets will go on sale between six and three months away from your arrival date. Want to go parasailing around one of the lakes, see a Cirque du Soleil extravaganza over at Downtown Disney, or learn to surf at Blizzard Beach? Be sure to make reservations early.

* **Make travel plans.** Start perusing the airline deals well ahead of when you want to buy them -- this gives you a chance to know when the best is time to get the lower prices for your airfare. Some airlines might run weekly specials and others might give you better rates for leaving on a Tuesday night rather than Wednesday morning. Once you've found the perfect flight, be sure to call back and tell Disney when you're arriving -- every Disney resort guest receives complimentary Disney's Magical Express transportation to and from their hotel, and while it's a big hit for convenience and "fun" factors, it'll save you a bundle, too.

* **Start a "to pack" list.** Again, your PassPorter will be much more helpful with this, but the basics can be covered with my list of the four Ws: Who, Where, When and Weather. Just because it's Florida doesn't mean you won't need a parka in December -- I can tell you that from experience and a serious dent in my parents' travel budget! Be sure to pack for daytime play and comfort, for those nicer restaurants in the evening, for chilly evenings on Main Street watching Wishes as well as early morning jaunts to the water parks. And make a second list of things like sunscreen, baby powder (chafing), extra batteries for the camera, ponchos (yes, it does rain in the happiest place on earth and the same ponchos at the dollar store here will cost you at least \$5 there).

* **Finalize your budget.** No doubt you've been over it with a fine tooth comb a hundred times by now, but it can't hurt to revisit it. Remember the incidentals: tips ARE NOT included in meal plans, souvenirs for the kids (or the adults!) should be allotted for, and tipping your housekeeper (or mousekeeper) is recommended.

* **Finalize your tour plan.** Do not attempt to bamboozle your way willy-nilly through the parks with kids from sunup to sundown! It's not fun for anyone. Use your dining reservations to plan which days to visit which parks (if you didn't do it the other way around already). Be sure to plan downtime because everyone needs it. Whether it's lying around the pool mid-afternoon or going back to the resort early to let little ones play in the arcade while adults have a drink in the cantina, downtime in Walt Disney World is a must!

* **Charge up your essentials.** Two-way radios and cell phones are wonderful for keeping in contact when touring the parks, and those pesky handheld games your kids love can actually be handy when you're waiting in line for Space Mountain ... again! Got your camera, camcorder, MP3? Be sure to pack the chargers, too; all those necessities are nothing but paperweights after day two if you don't!

* **Lastly -- relax!** The minute you cross under the Walt Disney World sign, blast the radio or cheer with the little ones in the backseat because this is it -- you're finally there! Exhale and embrace every minute of it. Next week, we'll move on to the "Fun Stuff" you can do to help you count down the days until your Disney trip.

About The Author: Nicole Courson lives in the magical kingdom of Pittsburgh, PA, with her two growing Mouseketeers and Prince Charming. They're planning their next trip to Walt Disney World in December of 2010 -- this time, with Mike's family.

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Counting Down to Disney (Part 2): The Fun Stuff

by Nicole Courson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Last week we looked at the things you "[Must Get Done](#)" while counting down to your Disney trip. This week we'll look at the "Fun Stuff" to do to help count down the days!

We took our first family trip in 2008 and I truly, truly believe it was the massive success it was because we were ready for it. We'd not only planned, we'd had fun doing it, and here are some great ways for you to do the same:

* **Disney Dinners.** Once a month, we set aside a Friday or Saturday evening and had a family night in with dinner and a movie. If the kids picked the movie we picked the food and vice versa; just so there was a "theme." My personal favorite was Finding Nemo (husband's choice -- he loves that Dorie!) with my kids' menu of Shark Blood Soup and Grilled Crustaceans -- if we'd just called it grilled cheese and tomato soup, it wouldn't have been the same! The other great thing about the Disney Dinners was that some of the older movies that my boys had never seen (like, say, Cinderella) were all new to them -- but then familiar by the time we got to Florida.

* **Pin Bingo.** I loved the idea of the lanyard pins before I'd ever actually seen one, and we bought a lot on eBay. Then we printed out bingo cards with characters on them and played bingo, using the pins as prizes. Jamie's favorite is Stitch and Austin collects the Star Wars pins, but no one was too upset with getting Dumbo or Daisy Duck because they knew that once they hit the parks, they were ready to trade. Dining Reservations. Okay, we went over this already in last week, but it can be fun, too. I let the guys read over the PassPorter's brief restaurant descriptions to get an idea of where they wanted to go, then looked at menus from AllEars.net for the whole family to review before deciding what the best places were for us to eat. Had we not researched restaurants so well, we never would have selected 1900 Park Fare in the Grand Floridian and therefore missed out on what was definitely my husband's favorite meal for character fun. Now, food-wise, we heard all about Le Cellier over in Epcot, but without the great dessert photos (Chocolate Moose, anyone?) our kids might have been reluctant to go there. See what I mean?

* **Countdown calendar.** I'm a sicko for scrapbooking, so I couldn't wait to use all those cute Disney-themed stickers. One year out, we woke up to a "ONE YEAR TILL DISNEY!" page on the refrigerator and mouse-ear pancakes for breakfast. We did the same thing a few more

times, till a "NINETY DAYS TILL DISNEY" sheet took over three months out. Those pages went into my scrapbook with photos and journaling, both making and helping to keep memories for all of us. By the time we got to "ONE WEEK TILL DISNEY!" we were able to post packing lists by the boys' names.

* **The Tigger Box.** Okay, it doesn't have to be Tigger, it can be pretty much any of your favorite characters. A co-worker gave me the funniest toy she found at a garage sale, a battery-operated singing Tigger that ordinarily my too-grown-up-for-Pooh boys would have scoffed at. My husband and I put a note on it ("Ready to ride the Teacups, kiddos?"), wrapped it up in a box, and when the kids opened it they thought it was hilarious. We re-wrapped it and took it to Grandma's, since she was going with us. The second time we did it, we taped \$5 Disney Store cards to Tigger. Once when Austin had the flu, the Tigger box showed up with cough drops and magazines. We got more use out of the Tigger box than any age-appropriate things we might have found at full price ... and tied in more reminders of the fun to come!

* **Magical Music.** Believe it or not, I still have my original LPs (that's a record album, for those of us who are old enough to remember such a thing) for Cinderella, Snow White, and Mary Poppins. I loved putting them on our old turntable stereo on Sunday mornings for brunch. So why not take it a step further, right? With the help of a more technically savvy Disney buff I soon had some great CDs for in the car. The first was called "Classic" with all the oldies but goodies from "Heigh Ho" to "So This Is Love", "Step In Time" and "When You Wish Upon A Star." The Second was "Kids" and was made up of my boys' well-known favorites such as "You've Got a Friend in Me," "Hakuna Matata," and music from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise. And finally, he compiled a special disc of "mood" music, or songs that reminded us of our impending trip. Since it was over the Christmas holidays, we had Goofy singing "Jingle Bells," he found the "Good Morning" song from the Magic Kingdom's opening, and some "pop" songs since we'd be staying at Pop Century. We played those discs in the car, during chores, and practically every day the last week or so before we left for vacation.

* **Surprise! Presents.** Some days, just for the heck of it, we'd surprise the kids with a wrapped gift on their breakfast plates -- nothing too big or pricey, just little things that they needed for the trip anyway. The Disney Outlet online is wonderful for marking down last year's (or even last month's!) character-printed t-shirts, and we snagged a ton of them for just \$5 each. Blank autograph albums with Mickey Mouse pens? Under \$3 each! Also at the Disney Store, we scored with beanbag characters for \$4.99 each that the kids loved. Really, who doesn't love Stitch in their cereal bowl?

* **Disney Cough.** For our boys, we set a goal of \$100 for each of them to take on vacation, figuring they'd be in the parks five days, so that was

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\$20 per day. They got regular allowances, but we amped up the excitement by posting a chart for Disney Dough; additional chores they could do for small amounts (carry out some recyclables for a quarter, or fold towels for a dime each). Each time they reached a dollar we put a sticker on it, and this helped them save without cutting into their usual allowance money. They didn't get the Disney Dough till we reached Florida, and it was non-transferable -- strictly spending money.

* **Customized Maps.** Walt Disney World offers free full-color, beautiful maps to all vacation planners! Visit DisneyWorld.com and all you have to enter is your basic info (including reservation number) and you can personalize an absolutely gorgeous set of park maps that come right to your door -- free of charge! My boys spent hours poring over them before we left, and after the trip they made a wonderful addition to our scrapbook.

* **Packing.** Yes, I said packing. Sure, no one's excited about packing for a week-long trip unless there's something in it for them, right? We had a packing scavenger hunt at the local discount store (sunscreen, sunglasses, hand sanitizer) first, then upon arriving home we gave the boys just fifteen minutes to pack their carry-on bags and the results were hilarious. We found everything from beach towels to the dog's dish (no, she was not going with us) to a can of soup (in case my nine year old got hungry). It was a really fun, free activity that had us all laughing and ready for the trip. So ... are you ready yet? Excited? I am! I hope that your trip is as magical and wonderful as ours was. Happy planning!

About The Author: Nicole Courson lives in the magical kingdom of Pittsburgh, PA, with her two growing Mouseketeers and Prince Charming. They're planning their next trip to Walt Disney World in December of 2010 -- this time, with Mike's family.

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Five Tips for a Trouble Free Trip: Avoiding Disappointment With Your Disney Trips

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

A recent discussion with a close friend led me to start thinking about the role of vacation responsibilities and expectations in trip planning. After this friend booked her Disney trip, she immersed herself in planning. Dining reservations? Check. Park plans? Check. She had a great time creating little surprises for her daughters, reading tips and tricks online, getting outfits and swim suits ready, making sure everything was as perfect as she could make it before they left. I was excited right along with her. This was their first big family trip!

When she arrived home, I couldn't wait to see how it had gone. I ran up to her office only to see a rather disappointed face. She looked exhausted. Now, don't get me wrong, Walt Disney World can be tiring, especially without a good plan and lots of time to relax built in to the schedule. But my friend's exhaustion looked more like disappointment. What went wrong? She was so prepared.

This got me thinking about how a great plan can go wrong… and after some conversations with previous Walt Disney World travelers and a lot of my own experience I've come up with five tips that will hopefully help everyone to come back refreshed and satisfied.

My first tip: Change Your Expectations. "Are you kidding me? I spent big bucks, I've planned every detail, I'm staying at a freaking deluxe hotel. How dare you tell me to lower my expectations! I've been dreaming of the moment my little princess sees the castle since before she was conceived, not to mention that wrap-around hug she will enjoy with Mickey." OK, folks, hate to burst your expectation bubble BUT the reality is this. The second you walk through the dreamlike gates of the Magic Kingdom after a bus ride, security check, and some trouble with your finger print working at the turnstile - you reach the moment you have been dreaming about, waiting for. There she is, your little princess, her eyes about to look down Main Street and yelp with delight and… what, are you kidding me, she has to go potty, now? Then to top it off she sticks herself to the back of your sweaty leg at the sight of Mickey, only to reappear when that large-headed mouse is safely tucked behind the scenes. Does this always happen? Absolutely not, there are going to be dozens of magical moments, but the reality is that they most likely aren't going to be the ones that you expected. Some of my favorites: The joy my ten-year-old took in watching an opossum

trained at Animal Kingdom, my youngest learning to dive under water to gather a sinking toy, enjoying a Dole Whip Float while people-watching, a great conversation on the bus ride to our hotel, and watching my daughters belly dance in Epcot. Changing my expectations has taken some real mental training for me. Instead of expecting my bags to be waiting in the room, I now plan on a six hour delay. I'm delighted when they arrive any earlier. Changing expectations is like tricking yourself into being happy!

The next tip - and this is a big one - dole out the responsibilities!

Here's what I have seen over and over, "You planned it, you booked it, you took care of the packing, details, transportation and now you are in charge when we get there! I'll hang back and relax. Since you did all of that work, obviously you like the planning and prefer me to have a perfect, relaxing trip. Thanks for watching the kids, thanks for knowing where we are supposed to be and when. I'm going to take a wee little nap while you talk to the front desk about transportation. No problem, you review those maps while I take a swim." OH MY GOSH!! This drives me crazy! So, beware… you may love to plan, you may be the Type A personality that wants to be in control, but you most definitely want a vacation! So, here is what you need to do. First, involve everyone in the planning. Lay out maps and books to interest them in the trip, review the rides and shows at each park, ask for their opinions for dining options, discuss the hotel and how the days are planned. Next, dole out the responsibilities! In our family, I take care of dealing with check in, organizing paperwork, packing and unpacking, as well as dining times. My husband is the coffee/drink fetcher, sunscreen applicator, stroller organizer, FASTPASS guru, and transportation figure-outer. Both of my girls have a calendar with pictures that they can check to know what's going on each day. They are in charge of their personal items such as pins and money. They also help with basics such as keeping the hotel room clean and putting their clothes away. Speak up, if your spouse doesn't know your expectations, my guess is that they will be happy to relax and leave you to the vacation work.

The next trip-saving tip is to make time for you. We often stay near Epcot and my getaway is to shop in the World Showcase stores by myself. I like to start with a champagne drink in France and then meander through the shops at a turtle-like pace. This usually takes me a few hours. My husband on the other hand likes naps. I try to give him at least an afternoon or two off to take a long midday nap. My kids need a break too! Their break is usually a pirate cruise or cooking lesson and a trip to the hotel gift shop to shop alone. We are a family that travels well together, but trust me, everyone needs some alone time.

So my second-to-last tip is you need to overcome the, "Oh my

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gosh, I can't take a nap! There is something awesome to ride, see, buy, drink, eat…" syndrome. It happens to me every time. I lay my head down for a quick cat nap and BING, my eyes open wide. "I bet we could walk to Epcot and ride Test Track and then get fast passes to Maelstrom if I head in right now before our dinner reservations in 3 hours." DON'T DO IT. Fight the urge. Trust me. You will not be happy when you have to deal with a screaming, tired child during dinner. You will be more likely to enjoy the fireworks with your eyes open. Rest, rest, rest. It's not a waste of money, it's an investment in your sanity!

And my final advice is this; expect delays and occasional disappointments. Have you ever read one trip review or heard one travel story that didn't involve a few mishaps? If all was perfect the story would never be half as interesting. Disappointments certainly spice things up. Expect them to happen. I once missed our bus stop only to be stuck with two sleeping children, a stroller, and a missing husband who got off at the right stop. He was not near me in the crowded bus! Turns out this is one of our favorite stories as the bus driver announced, "Would the lady with the two sleeping kids get off the bus" after a frantic call from another bus driver prompted by my husband. Some of the seemingly annoying moments can really turn out to be pretty funny if you know how to change your attitude.

So let's recap:

- 1) Change your expectations. Don't lower your standards, but know that amazing moments are not always the ones you create in your mind.
- 2) Dole out the responsibilities; this is your vacation too!
- 3) Make time for you.
- 4) There's ALWAYS something going on, it's okay to take a nap.
- 5) Expect delays and occasional disappointments, there what stories are made of!

About The Author: About the Author: Justine, the author of [PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner: The Easy Ten-Step Program](#), works in education in Connecticut. She is also the host of [Travel Girl's\(TM\) Tips for Disney World](#) podcasts.

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Lessons Learned: Letting Go and Living It Up at Disney

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Kids can see right through you. I have been working hard on my 7 year old daughter to try and get her to loosen up - enjoy life, live for the moment. She has a tendency to want things to be perfect, and if they aren't, she will clam up and get grumpy. A great example is whenever we come across an outdoor fountain with kids splashing around and having a great time. If she isn't in a bathing suit, she is not going near the water. We recently had a major breakthrough outside the Museum of Natural History in New York. She fought us for about 30 minutes as our two year old happily got soaked. She gave in after a long discussion, let go, jumped in and had an amazing time.

A week later, I was confronted with an almost identical situation, only this time it was me without the bathing suit in a lake near our house. My daughters and mother were happily swimming, encouraging me to come in with just shorts and a t-shirt. I wanted to go, but it went against every obsessive compulsive bone in my body. My daughter said, "Mom, you made me do it!" And she was right. She saw right through me! I let go and went for it and had a wonderful swim as well an important life lesson: It's ok to enjoy yourself.

So how does this pertain to a trip to Disney? It's probably obvious, a trip to Disney is the time to let go and let your kids see the kid in you. I recently saw some photos of my friends' husband in Disney. In every picture he could have easily been mistaken for Grumpy! She said that he was miserable. I started to wonder how many parents go to Disney because it seems like some item on their checklist, "Things they have to do with their kids before they graduate from high school". How many parents think of it as a responsibility, not a family vacation?

To me, Disney is not a mandatory sentence but a true family vacation. It's a place where we find something for everyone, that we take time to share in each others joy.

So here are a few things to think about before your trip:

1. It will not be perfect, but the way you react to imperfection will make it enjoyable and memorable. Easiest example: rain. If you run back to your hotel annoyed, so will your children. If you decide to throw on a poncho and take advantage of short lines and splashing in puddles, your kids will always remember that you made the best of a situation.

2. If you are worried about embarrassing yourself, don't. This is

Disney - we all look like big kids! Hug a character, participate in the banter at 50's Primetime Cafe, volunteer to be a character in Snow White's story- your toddler will look at you in awe, your kids will find you heroic and your teens will cover their faces and laugh.

3. Wear a little Disney. I make it a rule not to wear Disney clothes. I'll admit it, I'm a clothes snob. But when my daughter's bought me a Minnie Mouse t-shirt with "Sassy" written on the back, how could I resist? I love it. And where else in the world is it practically the dress code to wear your favorite characters?

4. Plan. Even if you are just a few days out, get together as a family to plan your trips to the parks, activities at your resort and other special excursions. Let everyone have a say. While you are there, step back and share their experience. If it's something they do alone, ask questions, look at pictures, and buy them something special to remember their excursion. If it's something that is not your cup of tea, give it a try. Let yourself go, even if it's a ride on the Tower of Terror with your teenager. Go for it! (Medical reasons for not riding aside of course…)

5. No whining. We have a rule in our family, when ever a kid whines we stop, all sit down and work on "changing our voice". This pretty much means take the whine out of what you are saying. What's the issue? Hunger, exhaustion, heat? Take the time to find the root of the problem and then make sure you take care of it, even if it means leaving the park early. It will make for a more enjoyable trip for everyone in the end.

6. Do something different. Try the Segway tour, rent a boat to see IllumiNations, pick something that you never imagined doing or just indulge in doing something you love. Last year we took the "Behind the Seeds" tour for our 7 year old who loves gardening, we planned an hour to play in the new Winnie the Pooh play area for our 2 year old, we sent my husband off for 18 holes of golf and I enjoyed my favorite lounge while the kids had a babysitter.

Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights." Our children learn too, so stop before you react, let go and enjoy!

About The Author: Justine, the author of PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner: The Easy Ten-Step Program, works in education in Connecticut. She can't wait to run through the fountains with her daughters and husband!

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Being the Ideal Guest: Tips and Reminders

by Brad Randall, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Perfection. Isn't that what we truly want when we plan a vacation? After all of the preparation and expense, we want our experience - our hotel, dining, and all of our entertainment - to be the best that they can be! Sure, things can and do go wrong, but we aim high. In fact, that desire for excellence is one reason so many of us return to Disney theme parks again and again -- we know that, on the whole, the Walt Disney Company sets high standards and delivers a quality experience for our vacation dollar.

On our last vacation to Walt Disney World, one less-than-perfect moment wasn't the fault of Disney or a lack of planning, but rather had to do with another guest, who rudely tried to elbow his way to the front of a check-in line at the Sci-Fi Dine-In Theatre. This got me to thinking about the "role" of the guest: How do guests add to or detract from the whole vacation experience? What makes an ideal guest? And (gulp!) am I an ideal guest?

To find out, there could be no better source than those fine people who have been there, done that, and wear the nametag: cast members! Let me admit from the start that I am not a Disney employee and have never worked at a theme park. I have, however, been fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of many current and former cast members (and employees of other non-Disney theme parks), both in person and online, and I really admire and respect the work they do. I've also come to learn that the ones who have been at it for any length of time have seen it all -- good, bad, and ugly -- and most have formed strong opinions about what makes a good guest. (Thanks especially to the regulars at www.StupidGuestTricks.com for their suggestions!)

Here are just a few tips I've gleaned from their experience:

An ideal guest is considerate. This seems basic, but cast members say that common courtesy will take you a long way towards becoming an ideal guest! This means, of course, thinking about how your actions affect others, and treating other guests and cast members with respect. It's the simple things -- waiting patiently in line (unlike the guest at the Sci-Fi Dine-In Theatre), or following instructions (like "move all the way across the theater, filling in all available seats" rather than stopping in the middle and making people climb over you) -- that can make life easier on everybody. Of course "vacation stress" can get to any of us,

especially when things start going wrong, but in those situations an ideal guest tries to keep his or her focus on calmly solving the problem rather than berating other guests or cast members.

An ideal guest respects the rules. Courtesy is high on the list of priorities that cast members themselves follow, but it is not the highest item -- safety is! Unfortunately, many guests seem to think that vacation time means complete freedom from any restrictions, and that is not the case. There are laws and regulations that must be followed, most involving safety, and a vital part of cast members' jobs is making sure those rules are enforced. When workers have to tell guests not to climb on walls, or to refrain from jumping over ropes or chains, or to smoke in designated areas, or that the guest's precious munchkin is not tall enough to ride a certain attraction, they are not doing so to be mean or to persecute anyone, but to protect the guest and others.

Cast members who operate attractions with height restrictions encounter parents every day who try to beg, plead or cajole the cast member into letting their too-short child ride. These parents either don't realize -- or don't care -- that the restrictions are safety matters, and that they are putting their child at risk of injury if he or she rides. (Stories are numerous, too, of parents who try to dodge the rules by making their child "taller," stuffing the child's shoes with things such as tissue, toys, and in one notorious instance, ice cream bars -- quick, measure him before they melt!) An ideal guest respects the rules -- and the people enforcing them.

Which leads to the next tip...

An ideal guest who is a parent... is still a parent. Too often, cast members observe parents who think that they are on a vacation from responsibility for their children. Stories abound of parents letting their kids engage in unsafe or disruptive behavior: climbing walls, standing up on trains, making noise during attractions. Others seem to think cast members are babysitters, and will leave their very young children unattended. Once, in Disney's Animal Kingdom, a worker who was rearranging strollers outside the Pocahontas show found a sleeping infant -- the baby's parents had parked her in her stroller and gone in to watch the show!

Most of us parents realize that we should keep closer watch on our kids while on vacation, not less -- but this is another way some guests can be less than ideal.

An ideal guest goes with the flow. Sure, we aim for a perfect vacation, but the real world does intrude from time to time, even on Disney

property. Illness, crowded parks, bad weather, ride closures, lost luggage ... all of these and more can put a dent in an otherwise nice day. One way to minimize disruption, as well-informed PassPorter readers already know, is to plan ahead: bring rain ponchos, medications, research the anticipated crowds and weather. But still things will pop up that you just can't plan for.

A "go with the flow" attitude will carry the ideal guest a long way -- things go wrong, now how can we have fun anyway? Cast members who work in Walt Disney World's water parks say that they get a chuckle every time one of Florida's regular afternoon rain showers occurs, because many of the guests will squeal in surprise and leave the pool to find shelter. That's understandable if there's lightning around, of course, but in that case Disney would be getting you out of the water themselves. If it's just rain, well, you're already wet, right? Why not stay in? Speaking of rain, many savvy local guests have learned that those brief showers have a way of clearing out the parks, so they'll make a point to go when it's raining so they can enjoy the shorter lines! The ideal guest takes that same attitude and enjoys him or herself no matter what the circumstances.

An ideal guest is informed. Cast members marvel at people who pay thousands of dollars to vacation at a Disney resort but who apparently don't know what to expect when they get there. One Epcot worker recently reported meeting a couple from Italy who rode Spaceship Earth and then asked how to get back to the monorail -- not realizing how much more there is to the park! While you can enjoy any of Disney's theme parks without much planning, vacations work much better when you know what to expect. (I must confess, on my first vacation of any length to Walt Disney World, I wasn't too informed, either -- but hey, it was my honeymoon. I had other things on my mind!)

Similarly, visitors sometimes display frustration when an attraction is down for rehab ("I traveled 2000 miles just to ride _____!" is an oft-heard complaint). As savvy PassPorter News readers already know, there is abundant information available online, including data on the parks themselves and long-term ride closures. There are also posted signs that give updates at the parks, and cast members themselves are a great source of information. There is no need for anyone to visit a Disney park uninformed.

An ideal guest asks questions. This may seem to contradict the previous suggestion, but not really. If you aren't sure of something, don't be afraid to ask -- cast members are there to help!

Of course, the previous "be informed" hint might save you some

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embarrassment. Some cast members enjoy exchanging amongst themselves funny questions they've been asked: "What time is the 3 o'clock parade?" is a perennial favorite. (Pity the poor soul at Epcot who actually asked, apparently referring to Spaceship Earth, "What time do they roll the big ball out?") But fear not, cast members also recognize that we're on vacation and our brains sometimes shut off, so don't spend time in frustration when you need information. Instead, allow yourself the luxury of experiencing that famous Disney service and ask for help.

An ideal guest gives feedback. Most cast members really want to make your trip special, so it helps them to know how they are doing, both good and bad. Guests are often quick to complain when something isn't perfect, but sadly, not many pass out compliments.

I've always taken notes on my trips, but last year I began recording when a cast member went out of their way to add "magic" to our trip. When I returned home I wrote a brief letter to Guest Services at Walt Disney World, listing for each instance the time, location, the first name of the cast member, and a brief description of the incident. A few days later my wife received a phone call from Guest Services thanking us for the letter, and letting her know that the people named -- and their supervisors -- were being notified of the compliment. That was very satisfying, and a great way to repay some special cast members for their kindness.

You can write Walt Disney World Guest Services at PO Box 10,000, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. The Disneyland address is PO Box 3232, Anaheim, CA 92803-3232. You can also stop by any Guest Services desk to leave comments.

Finally, an ideal guest is a kid or kid at heart. Disney parks are special for children, to be sure, but cast members also love interacting with grown-ups who get caught up in the "magic." Recently on a Disney online discussion board, cast members who "work with" the Disney characters were asked what they thought of adults who wanted to meet, pose with, or hug the characters. The response was unanimous; they'd much rather have adults who are excited to see the character than have them grump around and act like they're above it all.

Disney parks are great places to relax and have fun, and you miss out on a lot of magic if you act too cool to enjoy it. So go ahead, be a kid; laugh, smile, skip, give a character a hug. You're miles from home, so who's going to know? To this day, one of my favorite memories is when I was walking alone in a hallway onboard the Disney Wonder cruise ship and had a chance encounter with the Big Cheese himself. For one glorious minute, I had Mickey Mouse -- to me, the real Mickey Mouse --

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all to myself. I couldn't stop smiling for the rest of the week!

So there they are; tips for being the ideal guest. You might have noticed that following these guidelines not only help cast members; they also help you to enjoy your vacation more! And having your vacation be magical is everyone's goal -- guest and cast member alike.

So... how do you measure up?

About The Author: Brad Randall is a Dallas-area attorney, the married father of two boys, and veteran of several trips to Disney parks and two Disney cruises. He and his family plan to return to Walt Disney World in December 2007, his first holiday-season trip since his honeymoon. He thinks he might be able to pay more attention to the decorations this time.

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/being-the-ideal-guest.php>

Ten Surprising Things You Should Never Leave Home Without: A Planning Guide

by Jessica Kimble, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I know you. You're the prepared one, ready for everything on this vacation. You planned, you packed, and you've checked and rechecked all the details. I also know that once you're there, there's always that one thing that makes you smack yourself on the forehead and exclaim "Why didn't I pack that?" I've had those moments on more than one vacation. I didn't forget my bathing suit, I didn't leave my driver's license at home, but I did always think of some little thing that would have made the trip just that little bit easier. Here's a list of ten things I never thought I'd need until I got there!

1. I'd packed the medications for my son for all his "just in case" scenarios. Who knew I would be the one to slip on a freshly washed sidewalk at Port Orleans French Quarter and sprain my ankle? I cringed handing out \$15 for 50 name brand acetaminophen at the gift shop. Mental note to self: Next time, pack drugs for Mommy.

2. One of the best investments I've made is in a small six compartment screw/nail organizer I purchased from the hardware section at Target. In each little slot we pack a different kid-friendly, non-melting, snack. I chose dried fruits and cereals. It's really handy in the parks, especially when your little one bellows an "I'm hungry," and you're just about to the front of the line for Haunted Mansion. You can keep refilling this throughout your trip, saving you time from standing in food lines and saving you money.

3. One word ... Ziploc. Those fabulous little baggies have so many uses when you travel. First use them to pack any liquids in; shampoo, body wash, toothpaste, contact lens solutions, perfumes, etc. I once had a shampoo leak into my luggage. While I was holding my suitcase under the shower head wondering how many times I would have to rinse this thing, I had my Ziploc bag moment. I also use Ziplocs to hold a wet wash cloth in my fanny pack. I use it to wipe sticky hands and faces and it comes in handy when you need a nice cool down. Store your souvenirs, the golf balls you've collected at the parks, or the pins you've purchased that day to keep them from rolling or falling out of your bags. Use a sandwich sized bag for, well, a sandwich. Take your restaurant leftovers to snack on later. We've also used Ziplocs for wet pants caused by those "oops" moments when my son was too excited to get to the bathroom quick enough. And of course you'll need a gallon sized bag to keep your

PassPorter dry on rides like Kali River Rapids at Animal Kingdom!

4. I always pack a small package of laundry soap and a stain stick. The stain stick is stored in a small snack sized Ziploc and carried with us everywhere. Treat the stain, then hand wash the item in the sink. I purchase single-load size powdered laundry soap from my local Laundromat. It saves me from having to worry about running to the laundry during our trip or worrying about ruining that favorite shirt. I also like to wash out our bathing suits after a few swims.

5. Anyone with children knows that accidents happen. Kids get overtired or overexcited and can accidentally wet the bed or get sick in bed. My son chose Christmas Eve to throw up in bed. I waited five hours for someone to be available in housekeeping to bring us clean bedding. To prevent this from happening again, we've purchased a waterproof mattress pad. The pad folds-up small and can be easily packed and placed under hotel sheets. We also request upon check in an extra set of bedding. That way, for the middle of night accidents, we are already prepared. No waiting up for housekeeping, no wet mattress, just a quick change of the sheets and we're back to bed!

6. I think most people bring along anti-bacterial foam or gel to clean dirty hands when you can't get to the bathroom to wash them. It's also a good idea to use a little after you've been riding rides to eliminate cold germs. I also bring along antibacterial wipes. Call me obsessive, but I have used them to wipe down our rented strollers, the port-a-crib the resorts provide, the TV remote and the clothing bars in our room. The only thing I want to bring back from vacation is a tan and some awesome souvenirs!

7. This may sound silly, but I will never go to Walt Disney World without bringing along an empty suitcase. Of course I don't plan to go overboard and buy a t-shirt from every park, and that cute Tigger plush, and the new mouse ear wine topper, and the Buzz Lightyear Laser Gun ... but I do. I learned the last trip that if your suitcase is over the airlines weight limit you have to pay extra, \$50 extra, in order to check your luggage. Avoid paying, pack an empty suitcase, then you won't be like me, dumping your suitcase out on the airport floor trying to make things weigh less.

8. Bring along a list of your current medications and copies of your prescriptions. If something is lost or misplaced, you won't have to worry about a 24-hour turn-around time at your doctor's office. Also do a bit of research on what your insurance will cover locally. It doesn't hurt to know what physicians or dentists are covered by your insurance policy so you don't have to go to the trouble of submitting claims later or

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paying the cash up front.

9. Coupon organizers are great for things other than coupons. I've purchased one from the local dollar store that I use and reuse for our trips. The plastic organizer has six different slots with tabs, one I use for traveler's checks and cash, one for our Disney tickets and room key (including Fast Passes), one to hold receipts of purchases and meals, one for the papers that show my items being sent back to the resort, one pocket for important information (driver's license, what my son was wearing that day, in case he got lost) and the last pocket for priority seating information. It helps me keep organized, with all the essentials in the right place, and my receipts handy so I don't go over budget on our trip.

10. Last but not least bring along your PassPorter book(s). Just because you've done your research, made your advanced dining reservations, and packed all you think you'll need, doesn't mean that plans won't change. You'll need it if you decide that you'd rather eat some sushi tomorrow instead of lasagna, or to make sure you didn't miss out on a show or attraction you forgot about last visit. Or maybe you didn't like taking the taxi from the airport and would like to find another option; it's all there in your PassPorter!

So these are ten of my forehead smacking moments. The important thing is that I learn from these mishaps, having snacks on hand, protecting my PassPorter from the sudden downpours with a Ziploc, and packing the easiest of all suitcases, an empty one, to tote my treasures home. Saving money, saving time, preventing or at least being able to handle those minor mishaps, makes it that much easier to relax and enjoy!

About The Author: Jessica Kimble (a.k.a. disneyjessi on the PassPorter Boards) resides on the shores of Gun Lake, Michigan with her son Gavin and ferocious cat Tigger. Together they can never get enough Disney and are eagerly anticipating the chance to visit Walt Disney World again soon!

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Walt Disney World On A Budget: Park Passes & Dining

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

So, our family of four has decided when to go to Walt Disney World, has chosen their resort, and has decided how they are going to get there. Next on the expense list, park tickets and dining!

Unlike lodging, park tickets do not have seasons. They are the same price on the busiest day of the year as they are on the slowest, rainiest day. There are not many discounts available on tickets, but there are a few things you can do to minimize your costs.

The first decision you make needs to be how many days you will spend in the parks. Do you want to go every day, or do you plan to spend some days at other Orlando area attractions? Do you want to park-hop (see more than one park in one day) or are you content with one park per day? Once these decisions have been made, you can purchase your tickets.

Tickets can be purchased at the park, or in advance online from Disney, various ticket vendors, or from your local AAA office. Most vendors give a slight discount.

So, our family has decided to do 6 park days and they decide not to park hop. The base rate for an adult ticket for 6 days is \$231. A children's ticket for 6 days is \$192. This gives each member of the family entry to one park per day. So our family would be looking at \$846 in ticket media. Deb Wills' site, AllEars.Net, has wonderful information and explains all the differences in tickets and prices.

Disney also offers packages, like the one advertised in the Cinderella Coach commercial we mentioned in the first installment of our money-saving article series. You can book a Magic Your Way package and have your tickets included in the price. You can also get the Disney Dining Plan as an option. Our family has opted to stay at Pop Century (on-property Value resort) and go for the Magic Your Way plan with 6-day Base Tickets. There is not much difference between booking a package and booking separately, other than the convenience of doing it all at one time. And if your tickets are purchased through a ticket vendor, you may actually save a bit over the package.

Not doing a park every day still leaves you plenty of time to enjoy the magic! Our family is going to spend some time resort-hopping. They are

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going to ride the monorails and the boats, explore the trail that goes from Wilderness Lodge to Fort Wilderness, and visit the stables at Fort Wilderness. They are going to enjoy their resort pool, and will visit Disney's BoardWalk to enjoy the entertainment. Then they'll go to Downtown Disney to let the kids explore the Lego store and take in a matinee at the AMC movie theater. And since this is a vacation, they are going to sleep in one morning and have breakfast in their room. Which brings us to our next topic...dining!

First, of course, you have a decision: How do you and your family like to eat on vacation? Do you enjoy sit down restaurants, or are you happier with counter service? Do you want to eat all your meals on Disney property, or do you want to go off-property for other options?

Table service options at Walt Disney World can get a bit pricey, and if you are on a budget, might be better saved for one or two special meals. Disney offers a dining plan for those staying on property. Again, I'll refer to AllEars.net, where she provides a wonderful explanation of the plan.

But there are many other ways to save. If you are staying off property, you can take advantage of the breakfast options provided by your hotel. Many hotels have a coffee maker in the room, which can certainly give the adults a welcome dose of caffeine on the morning! If you are staying on property, you can still eat a cheap, quick breakfast. If you have a cooler, keep it well stocked with ice, or you can rent a refrigerator for the length of your stay (refrigerators are no-charge, standard equipment at Disney's Moderate and Deluxe resorts, but guests at Pop Century and the All-Star resorts have to pay extra). If you have transportation, you can make a grocery stop on the way to your resort. You can stock up on juice boxes, cereal boxes, and other breakfast staples. If you are staying at a Walt Disney World resort, you can also purchase a refillable mug that is good for the length of your stay. The current cost is \$12.49, and you can use it as many times as you like during your stay for coffee, soda, iced tea, and hot chocolate. You can keep snacks and bottled water in your room. A case of bottled water costs between \$5 and \$8 for a case of 24 bottles compared with \$2 a bottle in the parks. You can purchase snack packs, too -- anything from cookies to chips. Pack a few snack packs and bottles of water in your backpack, and you're set for a day in the parks!

Another way to save at the parks is to eat your larger meal at lunch. Most Disney restaurants have similar menus for lunch and dinner, and the lunch prices are generally lower. There is a children's menu for our 5 and 9 year olds, and most meals come in around \$6. At night, you can choose a less expensive counter service meal. Disney offers many

wonderful buffets, where there is a wide variety to choose from at a fair price. Keep in mind that WDW adds a holiday surcharge to meals at certain restaurants during Holiday and Peak seasons, so traveling in off season can help out there, too. You can also go off property for an even better deal. Orlando is not lacking in chain restaurants and fast food places! There's something for every budget. Here is where having a car comes in handy, as you are not limited to your resort or Disney property for your meals.

If you are eating off property, make sure you take advantage of discounts and coupons out there! Pick up any brochures or local vacation flyers available in your hotel, and look for discounts. We'll explore other discounts in the last part of this series.

We are almost done planning our vacation for our family of four!

About The Author: Sue Kulick is a resident of the Pocono Mountains and an avid Disney fan. She and her husband, Steve, live in a log home with their Golden Retrievers, Cody and Belle and their cat Tigger.

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<http://www.passporter.com/articles/walt-disney-world-on-a-budget-park-passes-and-dining.php>

Tips for Traveling: A Solo Parents Guide

by Lisa Carder, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Traveling to Walt Disney World as a solo parent can be a challenging but rewarding experience. I have been taking my kids to Walt Disney World solo since 1999, including driving from Ohio most years. As I am writing this we are getting ready to head off for our 8th family trip to the "World." Here are my top ten tips for traveling to Walt Disney World as an only parent.

1. Go at your children's pace. While this is a good idea for all parents, it is especially important as the solo adult. After all, there's no one to hand off a cranky child to.

2. Act like a kid and let your hair down! Being a single parent has many everyday stresses, so use your vacation to relax and be playful. Besides, it does your kids good to see you stress-free and acting silly. I love to sing to the park music and skip and dance through the parks. My kids pretend to be embarrassed, but then they join in the fun.

3. Take care of yourself. Going commando and neglecting your own care makes for a miserable vacation. Afternoon breaks are a godsend for both parents and kids. Even if the kids are too old to nap, 30 minutes of down time in the hotel room lets everyone rejuvenate. I know I need a rest most days, so when we take a break the kids can either read or watch TV quietly while I try to get my second wind. After all, if Momma is tired; no one's going to have a good time!

4. Swim with your kids. No one cares what you look like in a bathing suit, and you will never see your fellow vacationers again. Even I will show my pasty white northern legs at the pool. My kids love it when I get in the pool with them and act like a kid.

5. Let people serve you. Single parents do so much for everyone else, so let cast members take care of you on vacation. Eat at a table service restaurant at least once a day and enjoy not having to juggle your food and the kids. I have a hard time not doing everything myself in my daily life, but when I am on vacation I accept help when it is offered. Smile and say thank you and offer to help someone else if you are able.

6. Get in the picture. Use Disney's professional photographers and PhotoPass to get pictures of your family together. You can ask cast members or even complete strangers to take a picture of all of you with

your own camera, too. Some of my favorite pictures are ones where we are all together. I also offer to take pictures of families in return.

7. Talk to people. While vacationing with your kids is wonderful, sometimes you need a conversation that doesn't begin with "Why?" All those lines you can't avoid are more fun when you are meeting other people. I seem to find every fellow teacher on vacation, and it is fun learning where people are from.

8. Let your kids have some responsibility. On our first trip to Walt Disney World my kids were 4 and 6. I learned a lot on that vacation! One afternoon I was pushing the stroller, trying to keep track of my 6 year-old, and juggling a tray full of food while trying to find an empty table at Columbia Harbor House. I bet you can guess what happened next. Between the counter and the table my juggling act failed and our drinks toppled to the floor. I was mortified, but I realized that my kids could help out, even as young as they were. From then on the 6 year-old was in charge of the stroller, while I carried the food and found a table. They loved to help and our vacation was much smoother after that.

9. Take advantage of Disney transportation. With Disney's Magical Express there is no need to rent a car, no need to try and navigate. Buses can take you anywhere you want to go and taxis are plentiful if you want a faster or more direct route. The years we drove to Orlando my car stayed parked in the resort parking lot 99% of the time.

10. Bond. I know it sounds corny, but vacations are a great time to have uninterrupted time with your kids. There are so many funny and unique things that only happen on vacation. These shared experiences carry over into our daily lives and connect us. Kids grow up too soon, and I want to treasure the time I get with them. Even this year, when my kids are old enough to go off on their own, they both told me they would rather spend time together. I couldn't ask for a better reward.

Vacations anywhere can be special, but vacations at Walt Disney World are truly magical for our family.

About The Author: Lisa (aka bobcat on the Disboards) is a Middle School teacher and is headed to Walt Disney World with her kids!

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/tips-for-traveling-as-a-solo-parent.php>

Top 10 Disney Questions: Answers From a "Disney Expert"

by Terry Rohrer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Your friends know you as the "Disney Expert." You own every guide book and have over 50 Disney-related web sites bookmarked. Any conversation usually leads to something Disney related. When your friends are thinking about going to Walt Disney World, you are the first phone call they make. Sound familiar? Do you often get asked questions about where to stay, what tickets to get, or even what ride to do first?

As one of these so called, or self described, "Disney Experts," I often find myself helping friends, and even friends of friends, plan their trips. Of course, the first thing I do is tell them to get the PassPorter and read it. That way they have some idea of what they are getting into. But I thought I would put together a list of my most asked questions to help the other "Disney Experts" out there.

1. Do you really have to plan for a Disney vacation?

Chances are if you are reading this newsletter, your answer to this question is a resounding, "Yes!" Once your friends get a guide book and see how much there is to do, they may get overwhelmed. But you need to give them some idea as to why you do the planning -- to avoid over-crowded parks, to make sure they get the meals they want, etc.

2. When is the best time to go?

The short answer is, "Go when kids are in school." But if taking kids out of school is not an option, direct them to the chart in your PassPorter that shows crowd levels and costs throughout the year. If a school schedule is not an issue, be sure to tell them about the special events that may interest them -- Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party, the new Pirates & Princesses events starting next year, the International Food & Wine Festival, etc. And you must, as a friend, tell them about Hurricane season. You may lose a friend if they have to spend two days trapped inside a hotel room or their flights get canceled.

3. Do you stay on Property or off?

This will be a personal preference of the person being asked. We always recommend staying onsite, because of the theming of the resorts and the Disney transportation system. You have to give people enough information to help them make their own decisions here. Make sure

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they know the difference between a Disney owned and operated Resort, a Disney Good Neighbor Resort, and off-site accommodations. Then let them make their own decisions! Choosing a Resort is probably the most personal decision a family can make during the planning process.

4. Which Disney Resort should we choose?

This question always leads me to more questions. Are they on a budget? What is important to them - pool theming, location, inside hall? How many people are in their party? We all know the issues that come with having a family or 5 or more… I will then refer them to the PassPorter and www.disneyworld.com so they can see what each resort has to offer.

5. How do you get there?

Once again, more questions for you to ask. Do they have a budget, do they like long car rides, and do they need a car when they get there? This is when I explain why I plan so much in advance - I start looking at air fare and gas prices to decide whether to fly or drive. I have a little boy and he does okay for a few hours in the car but for us it is an 18 hour drive. I know I can only take "Are we there yet?" for so long! But if they want to see the beach, Kennedy Space center or have family to see, then driving may be their only option. I tell people to look for web sites that have games and ideas for traveling with kids. I also tell them to join AAA as car problems only happen when you don't want them to. Another reason to plan ahead!

6. What ticket option should we get?

As before, more questions on my part. How long are they going for, do they think they will really use the Park Hopper option? This seems like a straightforward question but it may be the most complicated. You're going for 5 days then get a 5 day ticket, right? But with all the different options there is a little more to look at. I also tell people to think ahead -- will you be returning to Disney World in the near future? An Annual Pass may be their best bet. I tell people to consider how long their trip will be and if this is a once in a lifetime trip or potentially just the first of many. If this is a 10 day trip and they will be back in a year or two, they may only need park admission for 7 or 8 days. If this is a once in a lifetime trip, 7 day trip, then consider adding on the Park Hopper and Water Park option so they can see as much as possible during their trip.

7. Where should we eat?

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Now that they have started planning you get the question about what restaurants to eat at. And you should have more questions. Budget, what type of food, do you want to meet the characters, etc. Our family is early to rise so we have a character breakfast almost each morning. You can eat a ton of food for a little bit of money, the meals have all been great and you get the characters to come to your table. No waiting in line to see or meet them. This saves time in the parks to ride the rides. Also, do they want to try new types of food? Are the kid's picky eaters? The menus at www.alllearns.net will give them some idea as to what each restaurant offers and what the price range may be. Once again, if you schedule your trip you can find a place to eat at the park you are at. By doing this you will not be one of the ones waiting for a table or in the long lines to get a meal when you should be riding the big rides when the lines are smallest.

8. When do I do the Magic Kingdom?

This question also depends on the make-up of the party. For younger kids, you may want to save the Magic Kingdom until later in the trip, or everywhere else pales by comparison. For older kids, this is less of a concern. This can be when you explain about Extra Magic Hours (if you haven't already covered them in the on-site vs. off-site debate) and the merits of using a touring plan like those suggested in PassPorter. This will allow them to decide what they want to see and what they can miss. After they do this I get with them and make sure they have not missed something good because they didn't understand what it was. For example, friends of ours did not have Buzz Lightyear Space Ranger Spin on the list because they thought it was a spinning ride and they get sick easy.

9. What is FastPass?

This is when you really get to look like an expert! You need to tell them how to get the FastPass, how to read it and when they can get new ones. I will tell friends with small children to use their tickets to get extra FastPasses and Mom or Dad can go 2 times with the older children. This is also a good time to explain the "Baby Swap". You now will be a friend forever.

10. What else is there to do besides the 4 theme parks?

This is where the Disney expert shines. You have been there enough to know that it takes more than just 4 days to see it all. We tell them about the water parks and Downtown Disney. Of course my wife tells them about the shopping. I tell them about the Adventurers Club. We tell them to take in a dinner show if it is in the budget, or book a fireworks

cruise. It is these little things that make the trip even more special.

Now, I am sure they will have more questions and if you don't know the answer then don't be shy, tell them you have not done that or just don't know. But keep it in mind so you can ask how it was when they get back and add it to your next vacation. Don't overwhelm them with details; just point them in the right direction. The planning is half the fun, so resist the urge to do too much planning for them. (Especially tough if you do not have a trip in the works!)

Either way, just make sure to remind them to have a good time and take lots of pictures to remember the magic.

About The Author: Terry Rohrer is the father of two and contributed an article on meeting Disney's PhotoPass program in the July 20, 2006 issue of PassPorter News..

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