

Planning a Disney Cruise For A Family Group: Our Experience - So Far

by Erica Gannon, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Having been on three Disney cruises with my little family of three (husband and now 8 year-old son) over the past four years (one on the Dream and two on the Wonder), my extended family has heard our stories about how much we love Disney Cruise Line and how eager we were to try out the Disney Fantasy.

So, it took very little convincing to get my sister and her family, my mother and step-father, and my step-mother all to agree to take the plunge with us -- our group of seven adults and four children is booked for a 7-night Western Caribbean cruise on the Disney Fantasy in May of 2014.

I am the travel-obsessed one in my family, so that fact, combined with my previous Disney Cruise Line experience, meant that I became the designated "cruise director" for this trip. Well, let's be honest -- it was self-designated. Like any good obsessive planner, I love spending time doing research, sharing information, and basically being a know-it-all about the ins-and-outs of any trip destination. However, my skills are normally applied to trips for my small family; in other words, it's usually only my husband who has to (pretend to?) listen as I drone on about excursion planning, online check-in dates, and the like. Planning a large group trip has had a number of similarities, but has also been different in some ways. With our upcoming extended-family cruise drawing near, I'd like to share a few things that I have learned during the planning of this trip.

□

01. Use a travel agent. Even if you haven't used one for bookings in the past, you need to rely on one for this kind of trip -- figuring out how to find and book four different rooms of multiple categories all in the same area of the ship is best left to the experts! As a bonus, you're also likely to get some onboard credit for each room by using an agent; be sure to ask about this in advance.

□

02. If you have a lot of tips and tricks to share -- advice about what to pack, reminders about how dining and room service work, explanations about gratuities, etc. -- consider writing them down. Creating a document chock-full of your knowledge can allow you to collect all of your information in one place and let your traveling companions digest it at their own pace. (Translation: you won't be calling them every other day saying "I thought of one more thing I wanted to tell you about the

cruise.") I turned all of my advice into a colorful "newsletter" (using a pre-made Word newsletter template) -- complete with photos from our previous cruises -- that I printed and gave to my family members as one component of a cruise basket at Christmas.

3. If you, like me, are a planner, remember that not everyone wants to plan as much as you do. They may not want to hear what you found out about a port six months in advance. However, they may come to you one or two months before your sail-date and be a lot more interested! If there is an excursion or other activity that you want to reserve well in advance, simply tell your travel-mates what you plan to do and ask if they'd like to join in. There's no need for them to make a decision if they aren't ready to do so, but there's also no reason for you to worry that you'll miss out on something important to you simply because other folks aren't ready to book.

□

□4. Keep others in your group informed about important deadlines. For many of us, the most important date is the first day of online check-in, because this determines your Port Arrival Time. This is one area where you may want to offer a few reminders to ensure that everyone gets the Port Arrival Time that they want -- which, at least for me, is "as early as possible because I want to be on that ship!" In a nutshell, each room has to do an individual online check-in and choose a Port Arrival Time.

(Note that previous Disney cruisers will be able to do online check-in at an earlier date than new cruisers.) The sooner you do the check-in, the more likely you are to be able to snag an early arrival time, which means a lower boarding group number and therefore an earlier boarding. Each room is tied to its own boarding group number, and while you can wait and board along with those who have later numbers, it doesn't work the other way. Since my group planned to board together, and it was important (to me at least!) that we board as early as possible, I was willing to pester a bit with a reminder e-mail and a follow-up to make sure that each room completed the online check-in. And it worked -- early Port Arrival Times for everyone!

□

□5. Communicate with your travel party about important things that will affect the entire group. For example, you'll need to agree on your dining time -- early or late seating? My immediate family has always done late seating, and that has worked for us, but a few others in our party really felt like late seating would be difficult for their families. So, we're giving early seating a try. Who knows? We might decide we like it! Another important question is how much time does everyone want to spend with the larger group? Do people expect to do excursions together, and if so, how will the excursions be chosen? It's unrealistic to expect everyone in a large group to be interested in the same thing -- if it happens, then great, but don't count on it! In my group, I did some research about

popular excursions or activities in each port and let people know the things my family was interested in. For two of our activities (snorkeling in Grand Cayman and a beach day in Cozumel), the rest of the group decided they wanted to join us, while in Falmouth, Jamaica, we'll probably end up splitting into smaller groups and doing different things.

□ The most important thing when planning a cruise with a large group is to be flexible and remember that each person in the group may have different ideas about how to spend a vacation -- some want a lot of relaxing by the pool, others want to explore all the activities the ship has to offer, some want to experience the peacefulness of the ship in the early morning, and others may want to enjoy the adult lounges each night. The beauty of a Disney Cruise Line vacation is that the ship offers something for everyone. And, you can all meet up with each other every night for a wonderful dinner -- no advance reservations or planning required!

About The Author: Erica Gannon is a psychology professor, wife, and mom to an 8 year-old son. She and her family have been to Walt Disney World numerous times, and have sailed with Disney Cruise Line three times. She is currently looking forward to a Disney World trip to celebrate her 40th birthday at the beginning of May, and an extended-family Disney cruise at the end of May!

Article last updated: 04-17-2014

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/disney-cruise-family-groups.html>

Copyright by Erica Gannon. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>

.....