

Packing Your Park Bag for Disney: Minimalist Packing Tips for Traveling with Kids

by Rachel Smith, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Vacations call for a lot of preparation and planning.

I feel as though a "No, REALLY?!" needs to go here, but that may be due to my fluency in sarcasm. However once I became a parent, my vacation packing list grew into a multi-tabbed, color-coded spreadsheet. I'm basically the Monica Geller of travel prep.

Traveling with children pretty much guarantees that you'll be bringing twice the amount of "stuff" that you'd normally bring, but this pack mule mentality doesn't necessarily have to carry over to your park bag.

☐ Parents assume that the day bag can live in the storage compartment under the seat of the stroller. That stroller gives parents a false sense of security. The stroller will actually spend a good bit of the day parked in what is essentially a parking lot for strollers. Now, the day bag can stay with the stroller, but I never wanted to leave behind the few valuables I carry with me at the park.

☐ On my last trip to Walt Disney World, I took a look around at the day bag choices other parents were making and mentally high-fived myself for packing light. I saw diaper bags packed so full, the parent tasked with carrying it was listing in the sea of merry park-goers. As my spirit animal Rick Steves says, "You'll never meet a traveler who, after five trips, brags: 'Every year I pack heavier.'"

I've not quite made it to that five trip mark after having children, but here is the day bag I pack with three trips to Walt Disney World with children under my belt. For reference, this bag was packed for the needs of a four year old and a two year old.

☐ Let's start with the actual bag. I've taken a different bag on every trip. Like Goldilocks, I've finally found one that's "just right" -- a drawstring backpack. This kind of bag can be purchased almost anywhere. There literally isn't much to it. It's not bulky, so there isn't a lot of fabric to make my back hot while wearing it. I won't be carrying much in it, so I'm not worried about the lack of padding on the straps.

☐ I tend to pack for the best case scenario. I also pack for the morning knowing that we'll head back to the room after lunch for naps. My

evening bag might also include a jacket for the kids and the kids might wear long pants instead of shorts, depending on the time of year we travel.

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□ All four parks at Walt Disney World have Baby Care Centers that sell bibs, diapers, wipes, pacifiers, and anything else you might need. They're also a nice quiet (staffed) place to relax for a few minutes if your kids tend to get overstimulated.

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□ Now, onto the actual contents of the bag:

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□ Diapers

□ You're only going to be out of your room for 4-5 hours at a time, you don't need an entire pack of diapers. If for some reason you run low, either head back to your resort or swing by the aforementioned Baby Care Center.

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□ Wipes

□ Baby wipes are the multitaskers of a day bag. Diaper changes, kids that manage to touch everything, runny noses -- these are no match for a mom with baby wipes.

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□ Snacks

□ For my kids, this is usually a combination of granola bars, pretzels, and peanut butter sandwiches.

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□ Water Bottles

□ I pack a Nalgene for each child and refill in the room with water I've purchased by the gallon from Garden Grocer. My kids aren't used to city water, and I don't want the different taste of the water to be the reason they become dehydrated.

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□ Bib

□ At home, my children are bib-free. However, I pack along a waterproof bib for each of them in my day bag. This means that the syrup from their Mickey waffles isn't worn as a badge of honor all morning.

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□ Sunscreen

□ I can't stand the feeling of sunscreen lotion on my hands, so I pick up a travel size spray sunscreen. I bring it along to reapply throughout the day.

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□ First Aid Kit

□ First Aid Stations are available at each of the Walt Disney World parks, but a small first aid kit with a few essentials will save you from trekking across Epcot to get there.

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□ Disinfectant Wipes

□ If there's a bug going around, my kids will catch it. We do lots of hand washing, but I always wipe down the tables at restaurants prior to seating my children. I cringe a little less when the spaghetti that fell on the table goes back into my child's mouth.

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□ Ziploc Bag

□ These are great for wet/dirty clothes or snacks purchased at the parks that are packaged in an adorable, but impractical container.

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□ Muslin Blanket

□ A lightweight muslin blanket can take the chill off in the morning and can act as a sunshade in the afternoon.

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□ Wallet

□ I pack my "vacation wallet" with just the basics. No cast member is going to ask to see your grocery store loyalty card.

□

□ Phone

□ I have a DSLR, but I'm not about to lug it around the parks. My iPhone camera in combination with PhotoPass photos work just fine.

□

□ That's it. That is my entire day bag for the parks. If you'll notice, I didn't pack a few items that are listed as "Must Haves" on all of the Disney Packing Lists you'll find on Pinterest.

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□ Once my children aged out of baby-dom, I stopped packing toys in the day bag. Walt Disney World's purpose is to entertain children, so I don't feel it is necessary to bring entertainment with me in the parks.

However, I have been known to hand over my smartphone to my kids at a table service restaurant -- I'm not made of stone.

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□ I refuse to pack an umbrella or a poncho. If I need one, and I've ever needed one once, I'll buy one. This is after years of childhood Disney vacations where I lugged the same unused poncho back and forth from Ohio to Orlando. Honestly, I think I still have it somewhere. How old do items need to be to be considered an antique?

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□ I also refuse to pack an extra outfit for the kids in my day bag. I absolutely pack more than one outfit in my luggage for them, but if the kids have had some sort of wardrobe malfunction that warrants an outfit change right then, I'll just buy something from a gift shop. We always plan to buy a new t-shirt or two for the kids every trip, so this cost has already been budgeted.

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□What are your "must have" items in your Walt Disney World day bag?

About The Author: Rachel is a native Ohioan where she lives with her husband, Scott, and two daughters. She plans vacations to Disney and the world at TheTravelSmith.net. In her free time, she is on staff at Camp Throwback, the original adult summer camp.

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