

Disney Vacation Planning for Canadian Guests - Part 2: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

In [part 1](#) of this series, we talked about important Disney vacation planning differences that Canadians need to know.

Now we will take a closer look at some of the best and worst times for Canadians to travel to Walt Disney World. I will talk in generalities about crowd patterns, but always bear in mind that any day of the year can be a crowded one at Disney -- and what feels crowded to one person may not feel crowded to another.

Taking the kids out of school? No problem! I'll risk a huge generalization and say that Canadians have far fewer restrictions than Americans typically do when it comes to taking kids out of school for family vacations. Most provinces don't give parents a set limit on missed school days, though I'm told there is one somewhere on the books. Until our kids are in the upper grades or are heavily involved in extracurricular activities, we are generally free, within reason, to take our kids out of school for vacation so long as there are no academic concerns. Scandalous, I know! And we don't even make up snow days.

□ This means that many Canadians can take advantage of discounts that happen in the fall and winter months, which go a long ways in compensating for our current low Canadian dollar. We can also avoid traveling during the most crowded times of the year. Besides, most of us can't cope with the high heat and humidity in Florida in the peak summer months.

□ Escape the snow-apocalypse! There is nothing better than a brief escape from Canadian winter. It feels like heaven on earth to leave six feet of snow behind and land in the Florida sunshine! Sure, there are no guarantees of hot weather in Florida during the winter months, but "cold" is a relative term. For most of January and the first half of February, you can usually enjoy very manageable crowds at Disney parks. You may need to wear a sweater or light coat, but with few exceptions, the only people wearing parkas on the coldest days are the Disney Cast Members!

If you do choose to travel at this time, always bear in mind the possibility of encountering winter storm delays. Whether you are flying from home or a U.S. airport, I always advise allowing at least one buffer

day at the start and end of your trip for unavoidable winter travel disruptions. Travel insurance is also crucial.

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□American vs. Canadian holidays: There are several important holiday differences to take into account.

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□President's week. Say what? This school vacation week happens in New England and other states. It falls around the third week of February. Crowds at Disney World are very high and in sharp contrast to most of January and the previous two lower crowd weeks of early February. Don't make the mistake of heading to Disney this particular week after someone told you that February is a low crowd time.

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□March break vs. Spring break periods. While the Canadian provinces stagger their school "spring break" vacations throughout the month of March, American spring breaks can happen anywhere from about the second week of March until late April. Since March break falls during the first full week of March in the province of New Brunswick, we usually get a leg up on the spring break crowds, heading home just in time for when things get very busy.

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□Easter crowds are mayhem. Note that while Canadians typically only have a long weekend, many states time their school spring break around Easter. The general rule of thumb to escaping Easter crowds is to avoid traveling to Disney approximately two weeks before and after Easter.

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□Summer Vacation Differences. The vast majority of Canadian schools have summer vacation from late June until Labor Day. It would be easy for Canadians to make the mistake of thinking they'd avoid the summer crowds by visiting the World in late May or early June. It's important to be aware, however, that many states are on summer vacation from late May until early August. Other states follow the same summer vacation patterns of the Canadian provinces.

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□Crowd levels are steadily very high from late May until the last week of August. In recent years, Disney has offered an enticing free dining promotion to only Canadians for the last two weeks of August. Late August used to be a safe bet for more manageable crowds, but word got out and reports are that you can no longer count on lower crowds.

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□See you in September! So far, most of September, after Labor Day and until Food & Wine Festival begins at the end of the month, is a good bet for lower crowds. Naturally, kids are back in school and most parents aren't going to take them on vacation when the school year is just getting underway.

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☐ If you homeschool, don't have school age kids, or decide to take advantage of the lower September crowds, be prepared for continued very hot and humid weather. Much like late August, afternoon thunderstorms are the norm.

☐ Canadian vs. American Thanksgiving. Since we often have some extra teacher professional development days around Canadian thanksgiving, you may think this would be a good time to head to Orlando. This same weekend usually falls around Columbus Day, however, and several states have school holidays as well. If Americans are going to miss even a couple of days of school, they will often choose this time.

☐ Also keep in mind that American Thanksgiving falls at the end of November. While early to mid-November can be a great time to go to Disney, the World becomes very crowded in the week leading up to Thanksgiving Day. Flight prices also soar at least a week prior to American Thanksgiving.

☐ Christmas holidays. The crowds during the school Christmas holidays are the highest of the year, especially between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day. I recommend only visiting Disney during this time if there is no other time you can travel. Expect the parks to be full to capacity every day with two hour lines for many attractions.

☐ If you want to take in all the festivities without the extreme crowds, early December can be a wonderful time to visit. The decorations are up in full force and special holiday themed events are happening throughout the parks.

☐ When is the best time to go? There are pros and cons to traveling to Disney any month of the year. Your work and family schedule will largely dictate when you can travel. If you have lots of flexibility, decide on your priorities, such as whether hot pool days are more important to you than lower crowds at the parks. Or perhaps you don't want the potential stress of flying during the winter months. As many Disney fans like to say, any day at Disney is better than a day at home!

☐ P.S. Don't miss O'Canada at Epcot. Martin Short and the scenes from Atlantic Canada near my home get me choked up every time!

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