One Place is Never Enough!: Making the Most of a Vacation

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I'm a great believer in seeing whatever you can in any one vacation. After all, you just never know when - or if - you'll get a chance to return. It took me almost 20 years to return to Disneyland and Las Vegas, after first visiting them as a teenager with my parents, and our trip back to New York in October will be our first since our honeymoon trip almost nine years ago. Time does fly by and that's why, when my thoughts turn to vacation planning, I immediately start to think about how many different things we could see and do during that time.

There are some important lessons I've learnt along the way. It's very easy to cram too much into your schedule and it's also very easy to keep adding extra places you want to visit. To avoid that, you do need to do a lot of planning right at the beginning. You need to be strict with yourself and realistic as well. How much time are you honestly going to need to see a city properly and how much money do you have? Can you really afford to add in somewhere else, with flight prices and gas prices not exactly cheap any longer?

Working out the budget is probably the easier side. All it takes is some calculation of how much it'll cost to get there, either driving or flying. It's worth shopping around and checking various airlines, which may go into airports near to where you're headed. For example, we're flying into Chicago's Midway Airport with Southwest in October, who came up with great fares. On the way out, we'll be heading for O'Hare Airport, as we picked up a great fare with JetBlue.

When it comes to deciding how long to allocate to each place, that's where you need to make some judgement calls. I always find that a good travel guidebook comes in handy to help you make those judgements. It allows you to browse what there is to see and do and work out a list of priorities for while you're there. Armed with that, you can start to work out how long it'll take to visit all of the places you want to see. If you're unsure, it's worth visiting the Globetrotting forum in the PassPorter message boards to ask for advice. The boards are full of well travelled people, who can help answer your questions.

One important thing to consider when travelling between destinations is how long that travelling is actually going to take. For drivers, there are some great websites, such as Mapquest which provide you with directions and details of how long it should take to get between A and B.

If you're flying, you'll obviously know your scheduled departure and arrival time, but don't forget to factor in time at either end of your journey.

These days, you really need to aim to be at the airport a couple of hours before you're scheduled to take off to ensure that you've got time to check in, clear security and get to your gate. That perhaps explains why I tend to go for flights slightly later in the morning now. Somehow the thought of being at the airport ridiculously early just isn't that appealing.

Equally, when you arrive at your destination, you need to remember to allow time to pick up your checked luggage, and then for your travel from the airport. If you're picking up a rental car, then you need to go through the paperwork and go and collect it, before you get on the road. If you're getting a shuttle bus of some kind, you need to factor in time for various stops on the way to your hotel. Even with a taxi, it's worth checking out roughly how long the journey from the airport is expected to take. By the time you add it all up, it can start eating into a fair part of a day that you might have allocated for sightseeing.

Finally, don't forget that you need to program what will work best for you - and those travelling with you. Only you know how much you're likely to achieve in a day. It's important that you're realistic about this from an early stage. I've learnt from bitter experience not to plan too much into a day, as eventually you will hit the wall and that's when your fun-packed vacation suddenly stops being fun. There's nothing enjoyable about having to return to your hotel to take some downtime, because you're too exhausted to do anything else.

We're lucky in that we're able to achieve a lot in a day and see a lot of things, but despite that, it's still important to program time into our days when we won't be on our feet. One good way to do that is to plan sit-down meals for lunch and dinner, or you might like to include an hour or two back at your hotel (which again may require time to travel back there). If you're going somewhere in the car, bus, or train, you may be able to do more when you arrive, simply because your journey includes some sit-down time.

It's certainly a great challenge and very rewarding to plan a vacation that takes in a number of destinations and it's something that any seasoned planner will enjoy. Just be sure that everyone else you're going will enjoy all the travelling you're planning!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every

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Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!

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