

The Top Five Ways to Make Planning Your Disney Vacation Magical: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Lauren Bruce, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Call me crazy, but I LOVE planning for our Disney trip. As a mom of two little boys ages 4 and 6, pre-planning is essential to a stress free and magical week. Here are our TOP 5 ways to start your trip on the right foot!

#5- Pay attention to dates (and organize your planning chronologically). Everyone who is reading this article likely knows to highlight the dates that dining is available to book and when Fastpass+ selections open up. We however, take that a step further and highlight the date 2 weeks prior to that. Those 2 weeks are our greenlight to finalize research, check out what's new in the parks, and decide what we want to do! That 2-week window also gives you plenty of time in case some unexpected life event pops up that takes away precious planning hours! The worst feeling when spending hard-earned money on a Disney Vacation is missing out on dining reservations or rides that you really wanted to do because you didn't have time to research or forgot when to book. Set your phone alarms as a reminder, or if you're like me, get out your Sharpies and circle those important dates!

#4- Pre-purchase a few Disney gift cards for everyone in your party. Many blogs (and bloggers) will urge you to purchase souvenirs ahead of your trip to save money. While I think this is a wonderful idea, and HAVE done it in the past, I also know it's not quite the same as your child choosing something of his own AT Disney World. We explain to our boys that they each will be given a gift card with a set amount of money on it to purchase something on our vacation. When prepped, our boys relish in using their gift card and even have learned a bit about budgeting along the way! And... in the effort of always trying to save money, buy those Disney gift cards at Target. If you use your Red card, you'll save 5%! We also (gently) encourage aunts, uncles, and grandparents to buy Disney gift cards for birthdays leading up to a Disney World trip. Not only does that keep too many toys out of your home, it also helps with your souvenir issue. Win-Win!!

#3- Involve everyone in the planning. Before deciding on resorts, restaurants, or Fastpass+ selections, spend some time exploring the different options with your whole party. One of our favorite ways to get excited and "pick" what we want to do is by watching YouTube videos of restaurant reviews or rides. Without doing this, my 6-year-old little boy

would have NEVER asked to dine at Cinderella's castle. When he saw the video, he couldn't believe we could really eat in a castle! Our kids now will even ask to watch "a Disney option" on a Saturday morning! (*Just keep in mind height requirements when doing this!) This trip, we even got Grandpa in on the action who is now looking forward to Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue!

I then keep a Disney notebook with things they mention that "really look cool" or favorite characters they want to meet. That way when it's time for decision making, I know everyone will be excited with our plan.

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☐#2- Study the MAP. This may be the least exciting suggestion of the planning process, but often the most useful. Before you book any Fastpass+ selections, download and print all of the park maps that you will be visiting.

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☐Circle the location of any advance dining reservations you have already made and give yourself plenty of travel time. Whether you are using a touring plan software like what is available through PassPorter or creating your own spreadsheet, knowing the map is key. For example, without studying the map of the Magic Kingdom, you may be thinking it's a great idea to make Fastpass+ reservations back-to-back for Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, and Space Mountain right after your lunch reservation at Be Our Guest because those are coveted FastPasses. If you're studying the map in advance, you'll realize you will be rushing from one end of the park to another.

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☐Our suggestion is to create blocks of time for each area of the park and plan your Fastpasses accordingly. This creates a much more leisurely pace to your day and better allows you to soak in the ambience that is Disney. If your family's #1 attraction that you must ride is Space Mountain, give yourself plenty of time to explore Tomorrowland before your next Fastpass+!

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☐And… finally…

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☐#1- Keep one special surprise! To whomever falls the bulk of the Disney planning, this is your way to make a little extra magic. While I am a proponent of involving all of your traveling party in most of the planning, one special surprise adds a final sprinkle of pixie dust! This can be big or small or anything in between! Working on a budget? Pre-purchased glow sticks/necklaces wrapped up can be a great surprise when the sun goes down. If you have some serious sweet-tooths in your family, a dessert party may be perfect. And, if you are in the mood to splurge, something extra like a tour, a Pirates cruise, a dinner show, or trip to Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique would certainly fit the

bill. This year we are planning to rent a pontoon boat after our 1900 Park Fare brunch and set sail around the Seven Seas Lagoon! Whatever you choose, the smiles all around will be worth the secret keeping.

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□ Here's to happy planning and a magical vacation!

About The Author: Lauren Bruce is the wife of a fellow Disneyphile and Mom of two rambunctious boys! Lauren just started blogging about their love of Disney and other family travels at www.expeditionfun.wordpress.com

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