

# The Benefits of Solo Travel to Walt Disney World: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Amy Moreno, PassPorter Guest Contributor

To quote comedian Jim Gaffigan, "now there are adults without children who go to Disney, and they are called weirdos. Very nice people. Absolutely crazy."

Well, call me crazy and a weirdo. I've got kids and I went to Walt Disney World without them. And I loved it.

Stressed out and feeling the effects of middle age, I was planning to visit friends living in Europe when my husband was told he had to travel for work. Long story short, with less time to plan and travel, I ended up on a plane to spend four days alone at Walt Disney World. I had always thought it would be fun to do a solo trip to Disney, but I never thought I'd do it. The guilt of leaving the kids behind would be too great. And the loneliness? I've traveled without my husband and kids, but a vacation to Walt Disney World? I'd always noticed how much more relaxed adults seemed at Disney when they had no children with them. And now I understand why. There are many unhealthy ways a person can deal with the sometimes slow and subtle shock of midlife. Going to Walt Disney World is not one of them. In fact, I'd recommend solo travel to Disney to anyone. Here's why.

1. Pacing & logistics. So much of our life is dictated by others (kids, spouses, bosses...). Having a few days when my schedule was my own was liberating. I spent one day walking around all four parks just for the exercise. Other than when I had reservations, I ate when I was hungry and not when someone else was. I was able to stand for an entire performance of the Taiko drummers in Japan with no one tugging on my arm to leave. For two days in a row I went to Animal Kingdom and hung out listening to the Burudika Band. I had forgotten what it was like to do what I wanted when I wanted. In a word, it was fantastic.

Because I only had to worry about the logistics of getting myself and one bag from place to place, I chose to split my stay between Port Orleans French Quarter and Animal Kingdom Lodge. I lingered over a cup of coffee and beignets at Sassagoula Floatwords at French Quarter while journaling (that journal is still covered in powdered sugar). At Animal Kingdom Lodge, I sat on my balcony for an hour watching the animals because no one else needed my attention except that bottle of beer I bought at the resort store. Lucky me, I ended up staying four

extra nights because a snow storm prevented me from going home. So I chose to split the rest of my stay between Coronado Springs and Caribbean Beach. Four resorts in one week. That never would have happened if I had been there with my family of five. I also spent time wandering around other resorts just because I could. Side note: I'm confident I could spend a week at Walt Disney World without even stepping into a park and be very content, just not with my kids. Pretty sure they would hate that.

Tip: Walt Disney World offers bag service between resorts. You can drop off your luggage at Bell Services as you check out of one resort, and they will deliver it to your new resort. A good way to do this is to drop off in the morning and pick up later in the day to give them time to make the transfer (the transfers were done in the afternoon). I used this service three times during my solo trip and was satisfied each time.

2. Fine Dining. Let's face it, eating out as a family is expensive. My kids do not enjoy lingering over a luxurious meal or waiting very long for that meal to come. So my two hour meal at Jiko would have been torturous for them. And paying the bill for five meals would have been torturous for me. I love fine dining and soaking up ambiance. It's not something I indulge in regularly, and even though I did miss sharing that braised lamb shank and the wonderful atmosphere with my husband, it was one of the best meals I've ever had anywhere.

Tips for dining solo at Walt Disney World:

- Check to see if the restaurant where you're dining has a chef's counter where you can sit and enjoy your meal as well as watch what's happening in the kitchen. I did this at Jiko as well as at Beaches & Cream Soda Shop. Different experiences. Both equally great.

- Check out the lounge menu. You might be able to order from the full restaurant menu while sitting in some of the lounges.

3. Recharging. I'm a light sleeper, which means that most of my sleeping since having children has been fitful. And my husband, bless him, wakes me up by snoring, twitching or just by his elevated body temperature. But oh how blissfully I slept at Walt Disney World. I slept so well that upon waking I had to remind myself where I was. You know how exhausted you usually feel after a family vacation? I came home well rested.

Tip: If you plan on staying at a budget resort, look at the events schedule for ESPN's Wide World of Sports. Disney produced events offer special deals to teams and groups at certain resorts. If you want to avoid these large and potentially noisy groups, check to see

which resorts are listed for the event. Unfortunately, if the event is organized by someone other than Disney, they don't list the resort. When I asked a Cast Member on the website if I would be able to find out where these event groups were staying, this was the response. "Generally, we are unable to provide if a group is in house, but [Disney Reservation Center] might be able to provide details about what Resorts those groups have been known to stay at."

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□4. Being Alone. For true introverts, there is nothing so nice as to be around people without having to socialize. You can share experiences with others without saying a single word. A smile here and there shared with another park goer was enough to make me feel connected to humanity without having to exchange a single word for an entire day. Those table service restaurants with counter seating made eating solo extremely comfortable. And being at Disney, I felt completely at ease sitting down at a bar having a drink on my own, something I never do in the real world.

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□Tip: Keep your wits about you. When I travel anywhere, I always let someone know where I am and where I'm going. I'm a very cautious traveler after some hard lessons out in the real world, but I feel safe at Disney as long as I stay aware of my surroundings.

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□5. Connecting with People. I'm an extroverted introvert (yes, this is a real thing). I can enjoy sitting quietly eating a meal undisturbed. But, if I'm in the right mood, I can also enjoy a nice conversation with just about anyone. On the same day that I went to Trader Sam's Grog Grotto enjoying my appetizers without a word to anyone other than the bartender, I had a great time sitting at Tambu Lounge sipping on a Lapu Lapu and chatting with a man who was waiting for his family to join him to celebrate his son's 21st birthday. (A word of warning, the Lapu Lapu is really a drink to be shared. Strong is an understatement). At Teppan Edo, I chatted with a really nice family seated next to me. I actually spent the entire two hours sitting at the counter at Jiko talking to a lovely young woman from Zimbabwe who was working there for a year as a chef. At Whispering Canyon Cafe, I opted out of participating in the jokes the wait staff plays with guests, but I had a great time talking to my waitress who loved her job so much that she commuted more than an hour each way.

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□Tip: It's easy to connect with Cast Members. At places like Animal Kingdom and Animal Kingdom Lodge, cast members are great sources of knowledge about the animals. Many also come from abroad to work for a year and are really enthusiastic about sharing with you about their countries as well as the animals.

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There's a lot to be said for solo travel in general. The safety, convenience and enjoyment to be had at Walt Disney World puts it high on my list of destinations for solo travel. So whether you're a stressed out mom like I was, an empty nester, or maybe you don't have any children but have hesitated going because you're afraid you'd feel self-conscious or lonely, just go!

*About The Author: Amy became hooked on Disney travel during her family's first trip together to Walt Disney World in 2009 when, stepping into the Magic Kingdom for the first time, her oldest exclaimed, "this is the best night of my life!". Since then they have had three more trips to Walt Disney World and two to the Disneyland Resort in California.*

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