

Budget Disney World Tickets: Park Passes & Dining

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

So, our family of four has decided when to go to Walt Disney World, has chosen their resort, and has decided how they are going to get there. Next on the expense list, park tickets and dining!

Unlike lodging, park tickets do not have seasons. They are the same price on the busiest day of the year as they are on the slowest, rainiest day. There are not many discounts available on tickets, but there are a few things you can do to minimize your costs.

The first decision you make needs to be how many days you will spend in the parks. Do you want to go every day, or do you plan to spend some days at other Orlando area attractions? Do you want to park-hop (see more than one park in one day) or are you content with one park per day? Once these decisions have been made, you can purchase your tickets.

Tickets can be purchased at the park, or in advance online from Disney, various ticket vendors, or from your local AAA office. Most vendors give a slight discount.

So, our family has decided to do 6 park days and they decide not to park hop. The base rate for an adult ticket for 6 days is \$231. A children's ticket for 6 days is \$192. This gives each member of the family entry to one park per day. So our family would be looking at \$846 in ticket media. Deb Wills' site, AllEars.Net, has wonderful information and explains all the differences in tickets and prices.

Disney also offers packages, like the one advertised in the Cinderella Coach commercial we mentioned in the first installment of our money-saving article series. You can book a Magic Your Way package and have your tickets included in the price. You can also get the Disney Dining Plan as an option. Our family has opted to stay at Pop Century (on-property Value resort) and go for the Magic Your Way plan with 6-day Base Tickets. There is not much difference between booking a package and booking separately, other than the convenience of doing it all at one time. And if your tickets are purchased through a ticket vendor, you may actually save a bit over the package.

Not doing a park every day still leaves you plenty of time to enjoy the magic! Our family is going to spend some time resort-hopping. They are

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going to ride the monorails and the boats, explore the trail that goes from Wilderness Lodge to Fort Wilderness, and visit the stables at Fort Wilderness. They are going to enjoy their resort pool, and will visit Disney's BoardWalk to enjoy the entertainment. Then they'll go to Downtown Disney to let the kids explore the Lego store and take in a matinee at the AMC movie theater. And since this is a vacation, they are going to sleep in one morning and have breakfast in their room. Which brings us to our next topic...dining!

First, of course, you have a decision: How do you and your family like to eat on vacation? Do you enjoy sit down restaurants, or are you happier with counter service? Do you want to eat all your meals on Disney property, or do you want to go off-property for other options?

Table service options at Walt Disney World can get a bit pricey, and if you are on a budget, might be better saved for one or two special meals. Disney offers a dining plan for those staying on property. Again, I'll refer to AllEars.net, where she provides a wonderful explanation of the plan.

But there are many other ways to save. If you are staying off property, you can take advantage of the breakfast options provided by your hotel. Many hotels have a coffee maker in the room, which can certainly give the adults a welcome dose of caffeine on the morning! If you are staying on property, you can still eat a cheap, quick breakfast. If you have a cooler, keep it well stocked with ice, or you can rent a refrigerator for the length of your stay (refrigerators are no-charge, standard equipment at Disney's Moderate and Deluxe resorts, but guests at Pop Century and the All-Star resorts have to pay extra). If you have transportation, you can make a grocery stop on the way to your resort. You can stock up on juice boxes, cereal boxes, and other breakfast staples. If you are staying at a Walt Disney World resort, you can also purchase a refillable mug that is good for the length of your stay. The current cost is \$12.49, and you can use it as many times as you like during your stay for coffee, soda, iced tea, and hot chocolate. You can keep snacks and bottled water in your room. A case of bottled water costs between \$5 and \$8 for a case of 24 bottles compared with \$2 a bottle in the parks. You can purchase snack packs, too -- anything from cookies to chips. Pack a few snack packs and bottles of water in your backpack, and you're set for a day in the parks!

Another way to save at the parks is to eat your larger meal at lunch. Most Disney restaurants have similar menus for lunch and dinner, and the lunch prices are generally lower. There is a children's menu for our 5 and 9 year olds, and most meals come in around \$6. At night, you can choose a less expensive counter service meal. Disney offers many

wonderful buffets, where there is a wide variety to choose from at a fair price. Keep in mind that WDW adds a holiday surcharge to meals at certain restaurants during Holiday and Peak seasons, so traveling in off season can help out there, too. You can also go off property for an even better deal. Orlando is not lacking in chain restaurants and fast food places! There's something for every budget. Here is where having a car comes in handy, as you are not limited to your resort or Disney property for your meals.

If you are eating off property, make sure you take advantage of discounts and coupons out there! Pick up any brochures or local vacation flyers available in your hotel, and look for discounts. We'll explore other discounts in the last part of this series.

We are almost done planning our vacation for our family of four!

About The Author: Sue Kulick is a resident of the Pocono Mountains and an avid Disney fan. She and her husband, Steve, live in a log home with their Golden Retrievers, Cody and Belle and their cat Tigger.

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