

# My Three Sons: Walt Disney World with Pre-teen Boys

by Rose Colson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Visiting Walt Disney World is such a treat, isn't it? Visiting Disney with my three boys makes it even more special. We've been vacationing in "the World" since summer 2000; through the years, as the boys have gotten older, we've learned some tricks that may help other families with pre-teen boys. Think Walt Disney World is all Princesses and Fairy Tales? Think again!

Before we get started, let me make some introductions. We are: Mom (that's me, obviously), Avery (13 and quiet), Bailey (11 and thrill-seeking), and Clayton (10 and mischief-making). You'll see occasional interjections from them during the course of this article. We hail from rural northwest Pennsylvania, and I'm a teacher, hence the summer trips.

The first thing we consider, of course, is where to stay. We've stayed off-property, on-property, in a house, cabin, cottage, hotel room, and a tent. Our favorite resort by far, which we've stayed at four out of the eight years we've been going to Walt Disney World, is Fort Wilderness. Three out of those four stays have been in a tent. Tenting at Fort Wilderness in the summer isn't as bad as some might think, but that's another article.

There are so many things for the boys to do at the Fort. Of course, there's swimming and games at the pool; there's the campfire, complete with s'mores, and the movie every night. There are the playgrounds and wide open fields for running around; but the hands-down favorite, and what puts Fort Wilderness ahead of the other resorts we've stayed at, is catching (and releasing, thanks!) the little lizards that seem to be everywhere. ("Salamanders, Mom!") For all of these reasons and more, we love Fort Wilderness and are looking forward to returning this August.

The next thing we discuss is which park to visit first. Epcot usually gets the vote due to Test Track being our unanimous favorite Walt Disney World attraction. Even the quiet guy loves this ride! No trip to Disney is complete without at least four or five rides on Test Track. There's just something about that last few minutes...

Rounding out Epcot's "Big Three" are Mission: Space and Soarin'. They both run a close second behind Test Track. The other "must-dos" include Ellen's Energy Adventure (my favorite because it's dark and cool

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inside), Spaceship Earth, Living with the Land, and The Seas with Nemo & Friends. This year we're also excited about riding the new "Gran Fiesta Tour Starring the Three Caballeros!" in Mexico.

The next park is usually the Magic Kingdom and its "Big Three" are Space, Splash, and Big Thunder Mountains. The darkness of Space Mountain, the last drop of Splash Mountain, and the craziness of Big Thunder Mountain make all three of these the highest priority for us. Pirates of the Caribbean is right up there (I can't tell you how many times they've seen the movies), as is The Jungle Cruise. In Fantasyland there isn't much to hold the boys' attention except Mickey's PhilharMagic. That has become our favorite 3-D movie in "the World."

After Epcot and Magic Kingdom, it's the Disney-MGM Studios. There, the "Big Three" for us are Tower of Terror, Rock 'N' Roller Coaster, and Star Tours -- always in the last row for an extra-wild ride. The boys are divided over their favorite shows at Disney-MGM. It's Indiana Jones for one of them and Lights, Motors, Action! for the other two (although we all HATED waiting in the blazing hot sun to get into the stadium). Finally, we take the Backlot Tour for Catastrophe Canyon, and the Great Movie Ride for all of the awesome movie scenes. ("And the gangster, Mom!")

The last major park is Animal Kingdom. It's "Big Three" are Expedition Everest, Kali River Rapids, and Kilimanjaro Safaris. We rode Everest for the first time last summer and loved it. Be warned, though, that riding it more than two or three times in a row is not advised! The thrill of getting a good soaking on Kali keeps the boys wanting more, and the excitement of seeing so many different animals on Safari makes us want to ride again and again.

The favorite show at Animal Kingdom is Festival of the Lion King, followed by It's Tough to be a Bug. And we always take the short train ride and hike to Rafiki's Planet Watch because the boys enjoy seeing some behind-the-scenes magic. ("And don't forget the sound booth, Mom!") At Rafiki's we never fail to pop into one of the Song of the Rainforest booths for a little sound thrill in the dark.

Okay, so that takes care of the four major parks. Their most important advice to other guys - always do the Big Three at each park!

Which leads us to the water parks. This is a bit more difficult for the boys to agree on because their tastes are so different. They like Typhoon Lagoon for this and Blizzard Beach for that, but we narrowed it down to just a couple of favorites for each park for the sake of my sanity and the length of the article.

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At Typhoon Lagoon, the boys are all agreed on the wave pool being the best part, but Crush-n-Gusher was awesome, too. The two younger guys are a bit more adventurous than the oldest, so they rode it over and over during the Extra Magic Hour one morning last summer. Shark Reef is very exciting, albeit a tad cold, and the lazy river is fun for playing around in.

The favorite attraction at Blizzard Beach is the Toboggan Racers. The youngest guy likes it best because some lifeguard always takes pity on him and shoves him off well ahead of the rest of us. I still win, though! ("Because you're bigger than me, Mom!") Teambot Springs is a hoot because we all get to experience it together and we spin around like a top. The boys enjoy the Ski Patrol Training area, too, although they get restless there pretty quickly, preferring the bigger, more exciting slides.

The last thing to take into consideration, for me, is where to eat so that I can afford to feed these boys for two weeks at Walt Disney World. It's almost always counter service, except for one character meal, which is usually Chef Mickey's at the Contemporary. We eat breakfast at the campsite or on the way to the park. In earlier years, I could get away with the boys sharing a meal and being satisfied. Not so now, my friends! Adolescence has kicked in and the appetite with it. Sometimes even an adult meal - burger, fries, and water- doesn't always fill the boys up so I'm coughing out extra cash for another burger or two. I also make sure the boys eat something besides burgers or chicken, so the occasional salad gets added to the rotation, much to their dismay.

I think that covers the basics. There is so much to do and see in the World, and it always changes. Walt Disney World is, without a doubt, our most favorite place to vacation, and with the three boys, there's never a trip that's not exciting for all of us.

*About The Author: Rose is a teacher and the mother of three sons. They are looking forward to their next Walt Disney World vacation this summer.*

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