

## Lessons Learned: Letting Go and Living It Up at Disney

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Kids can see right through you. I have been working hard on my 7 year old daughter to try and get her to loosen up - enjoy life, live for the moment. She has a tendency to want things to be perfect, and if they aren't, she will clam up and get grumpy. A great example is whenever we come across an outdoor fountain with kids splashing around and having a great time. If she isn't in a bathing suit, she is not going near the water. We recently had a major breakthrough outside the Museum of Natural History in New York. She fought us for about 30 minutes as our two year old happily got soaked. She gave in after a long discussion, let go, jumped in and had an amazing time.

A week later, I was confronted with an almost identical situation, only this time it was me without the bathing suit in a lake near our house. My daughters and mother were happily swimming, encouraging me to come in with just shorts and a t-shirt. I wanted to go, but it went against every obsessive compulsive bone in my body. My daughter said, "Mom, you made me do it!" And she was right. She saw right through me! I let go and went for it and had a wonderful swim as well an important life lesson: It's ok to enjoy yourself.

So how does this pertain to a trip to Disney? It's probably obvious, a trip to Disney is the time to let go and let your kids see the kid in you. I recently saw some photos of my friends' husband in Disney. In every picture he could have easily been mistaken for Grumpy! She said that he was miserable. I started to wonder how many parents go to Disney because it seems like some item on their checklist, "Things they have to do with their kids before they graduate from high school". How many parents think of it as a responsibility, not a family vacation?

To me, Disney is not a mandatory sentence but a true family vacation. It's a place where we find something for everyone, that we take time to share in each others joy.

So here are a few things to think about before your trip:

**1. It will not be perfect**, but the way you react to imperfection will make it enjoyable and memorable. Easiest example: rain. If you run back to your hotel annoyed, so will your children. If you decide to throw on a poncho and take advantage of short lines and splashing in puddles, your kids will always remember that you made the best of a situation.

**2. If you are worried about embarrassing yourself, don't.** This is

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Disney - we all look like big kids! Hug a character, participate in the banter at 50's Primetime Cafe, volunteer to be a character in Snow White's story- your toddler will look at you in awe, your kids will find you heroic and your teens will cover their faces and laugh.

**3. Wear a little Disney.** I make it a rule not to wear Disney clothes. I'll admit it, I'm a clothes snob. But when my daughter's bought me a Minnie Mouse t-shirt with "Sassy" written on the back, how could I resist? I love it. And where else in the world is it practically the dress code to wear your favorite characters?

**4. Plan.** Even if you are just a few days out, get together as a family to plan your trips to the parks, activities at your resort and other special excursions. Let everyone have a say. While you are there, step back and share their experience. If it's something they do alone, ask questions, look at pictures, and buy them something special to remember their excursion. If it's something that is not your cup of tea, give it a try. Let yourself go, even if it's a ride on the Tower of Terror with your teenager. Go for it! (Medical reasons for not riding aside of course&hellip;)

**5. No whining.** We have a rule in our family, when ever a kid whines we stop, all sit down and work on "changing our voice". This pretty much means take the whine out of what you are saying. What's the issue? Hunger, exhaustion, heat? Take the time to find the root of the problem and then make sure you take care of it, even if it means leaving the park early. It will make for a more enjoyable trip for everyone in the end.

**6. Do something different.** Try the Segway tour, rent a boat to see IllumiNations, pick something that you never imagined doing or just indulge in doing something you love. Last year we took the "Behind the Seeds" tour for our 7 year old who loves gardening, we planned an hour to play in the new Winnie the Pooh play area for our 2 year old, we sent my husband off for 18 holes of golf and I enjoyed my favorite lounge while the kids had a babysitter.

Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights." Our children learn too, so stop before you react, let go and enjoy!

*About The Author: Justine, the author of PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner: The Easy Ten-Step Program, works in education in Connecticut. She can't wait to run through the fountains with her daughters and husband!*

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