Preparing Your Child For a Walt Disney World Vacation: 7 Things To Do To Get Your Kid Ready to Go!

by Leanne Phelps, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Are you taking a child to Walt Disney World? A daughter, son, grandchild, or neighbor? Maybe it is his or her first trip and you want to make it magical. Here are a few ideas about how to make the trip (and the anticipation of it!) extra special.

Breaking the news is the first step! Telling your child that he or she is going to Disney World can be lots of fun all by itself. Many people like to share the news by giving their child a Disney stuffed animal, wrapping up a Disney World map, showing a Disney video, or sending a special Disney postcard or letter to the child. For older kids, you could share the news by giving them their own planning guide and a pen. Some people even surprise children by packing their bags in secret and revealing the trip right as they board a plane or jump in the car. However you choose to do it, your child will be thrilled!

If you are involved in the PassPorter Boards Community or another on-line Disney community, you may hear of someone who is going to Disney World before your trip who would be willing to send your child a postcard. When an online friend was at Disney a month or two before we were going, she sent my niece a postcard from her favorite Disney characters saying they couldn't wait to see her soon. My niece was so thrilled! (Editor's note: We call them Fairy Godmailers! Find one in our "Making More Magic" forum.

Countdown the Days -- To help your child know how many days are left before the big trip, you can make a "countdown calendar." This could be in the form of a paper chain where you remove a link each day or it could be a special calendar where you place a Disney sticker every day until you leave. Any type of countdown will not only build excitement, but it might also cut down on the number of times you answer the question, "How much longer until we go to Disney World?"

Get the Kids Involved -- To keep everyone excited while you are waiting for your big trip to start, get everyone involved in the planning! Everyone can contribute ideas for where to stay, eat, and play. Older kids can look at a Disney World map or at your PassPorter and start making a list of "must do" attractions. Some parents give each family member a highlighter of a different color to highlight things that are of special interest to them. Younger kids may enjoy seeing a picture of an

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attraction and giving it a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down."

Do Some Reading -- It is also fun to make a ritual of reading about a different Disney park, ride, show, or restaurant each night before bed or sharing Disney trivia as a family. To keep the Disney magic in the front of everyone's minds, you can take a family trip to your local Disney Store, check out Disney's web site, or go to the movie theater to see the latest Disney release. There are also some great Disney games like Disney Monopoly or the new Disney Scene It! that are fun to play.

Take In a Movie -- For young kids, watching Disney movies can get them familiar with the characters they'll see. You may also need some time to prepare the smaller children for what the characters will be like at Disney World. While watching the characters in the movies or when you see them in photos, you can tell your child what it will be like to see them "in person." Ask your child what he or she might say to Cinderella or Peter Pan. As for Mickey, Pooh, and Goofy, describing how big they will be or that they will not speak out loud might make your child more comfortable when you actually encounter them at the parks. Make note of who your child is most interested in meeting at the parks. Once you arrive at Disney World, check for a schedule of where to find a particular character. You can ask for the schedule at City Hall in the Magic Kingdom, Guest Relations in any park, or at the "Tip Board" near the center of every park.

Kids of all ages will enjoy the free planning video or DVD put out by Disney. You can request one by going to http://www.disneyworld.com or you can even watch it online. This is an excellent planning tool! It will also come with a full color brochure that is fun to look at as well.

Get Dollarwise -- Children that are old enough to manage money will enjoy receiving Disney Dollars as a gift or compensation for chores. I've heard of families who give their children's allowances to them in Disney Dollars for weeks before a trip. That way, once they arrive at Disney World they will have their own "money" to spend (they can't spend it before they get there!) and you won't have to constantly give a yes or no to every request. They can decide what is important to them and use their Disney Dollars accordingly.

Give Goodie Bags -- To add to the anticipation (and to give your child something fun to do in the car or plane) you could prepare a goodie bag to give to the child. This could be given right before you leave or even as a way to "break the news" about your exciting trip. Possible items to include are: Disney coloring book and crayons, autograph book and pen, stickers, candy, sunglasses, disposable camera, wallet with Disney Dollars in it, small puzzles, pins to trade, small stuffed animal, lip balm,

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mini flashlight, etc. If you have Disney maps, you can include them, too!

Whether you use some of these tips or use some wonderful ideas all your own, by the time your special child arrives at Disney World he or she will be more ready than ever to experience the magic that only Disney can bring! Congratulations on embarking on an exciting adventure. Few things are as rewarding as seeing the "World" through the eyes of a child.

About The Author: Leanne Phelps has been enjoying Disney World since college. She and her husband now enjoy visiting with their children.

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