

Yellowstone National Park: Planning with Pixie Dust

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I always knew that all the planning I'd done over many years for our various visits to Disney theme parks would come in handy one day, and so it proved to be on our most recent trip.

It was a three-week, once-in-a-lifetime vacation including a stop at Disneyland, a week on the Disney Wonder cruising Alaska, and a tour of some of the western national parks. The biggest of those that we'd be visiting would be Yellowstone National Park.

Like Walt Disney World, to a first time visitor the park's statistics are almost impossible to comprehend. The park covers a vast expanse that seems to go on forever. In total it's 2.2 million acres, meaning there are huge distances to drive to cover the park to see all the attractions it has to offer. Of course, you've got to allow time to do that, and wouldn't you figure it, most of the big draws are nowhere near each other. Sound at all familiar?

□ Being a Disney planner gave me some real advantages when planning how to tackle the mass of Yellowstone. Having seen how overwhelming big vacation destinations can be, I knew to not try and pack too much into each day, a common mistake made by many first-time Disney visitors, who want to see and do everything. If only!

□ Instead, I tried to do things logically, giving us enough time to take in everything at those various locations. Let's equate it this way -- we all know there's a huge amount to see in the Magic Kingdom, so you wouldn't allow half a day to do it all, unless that was literally all the time you had in your vacation. In exactly the same way, I sat down and worked out which parts of Yellowstone needed the most time devoted to them, through reading up as much as I could find about the park. It was instantly apparent that the Mammoth Hot Springs and Old Faithful areas had the most to offer, so needed more time than other areas. That plan worked really well for us.

Knowing how long it can take to get from one park to another at Walt Disney World made me conscious of planning enough time to travel from one element of Yellowstone to another. And, just like at Disney, as you're on your way, perhaps walking through a resort, or if you're at Disneyland in California, walking through Downtown Disney, you find the journey taking longer, as things distract you. Exactly the same thing happened as we drove through Yellowstone, as we encountered

wonderful sights along the way. The highlight had to be the bison rutting right by the side of the road. Then, a group of them gracefully crossed in front of our car. Well, I guess that's one big difference to Disney, as these certainly weren't animatronic!

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□Disney-honed tactics helped when planning our course of action on each day we were there. It's a bit like heading to Epcot and knowing that you want to make sure you get on Soarin' and Test Track first, before the crowds worsen as the day goes on. So what should be our first port of call on one of our days in Yellowstone? Seeing Old Faithful erupt of course, as the earlier eruptions in the day would no doubt draw fewer visitors than later.

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□Here was where another little trick from Disney came in. You don't want to sit down to watch Old Faithful while everyone else crowds around you. That's a bit like instantly heading to the hub in front of Cinderella Castle to watch Wishes, where you're shoulder to shoulder with thousands of others. Instead, you might want to take a wander and find some equally amazing views from the rose garden or the path leading towards the Crystal Palace, for example. Well, that's exactly the principle we applied. We ended up walking around Old Faithful, through the Upper Geyser Basin, and found our own perfect view where we were on our own. We watched the famous regular eruption shoot water 180 feet into the air with the Old Faithful Inn right behind, putting all the photos and video we shot into wonderful perspective.

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□Speaking of accommodations, if you've ever thought that reserving your meals at Walt Disney World 180 days out is planning ahead, you haven't seen anything yet! You can book your hotel at Yellowstone National Park up to two years ahead! They usually have booking for the forthcoming season, as well as the one following that. We were visiting in September 2011 and I booked our rooms back in August 2010. At that stage, the forward planning that I've honed through all our Disney vacations really paid dividends. I was able to snag some really unique and highly-priced accommodations: a cabin with private hot tub at Mammoth Hot Springs, and a room with the most amazing view over Old Faithful itself at the Old Faithful Inn.

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□We even made our dining arrangements when we booked our room, securing a 7:00pm reservation at the Old Faithful Inn Dining Room for the night we were staying there. If you think getting a Walt Disney World ADR (advanced dining reservation) six months ahead is surreal, try doing the same thing more than a year in advance. I'm a planner, but even I found that a little odd!

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□So the moral of this story is that every time you're planning a Disney

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vacation, you're also learning some valuable lessons that you can apply planning other vacations. The world's a big place, with huge expanses to explore, and by using some of that pixie dust planning, you may just see more than you first thought possible.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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