

## Finding Your Favorite Characters: Character Meet & Greets at Walt Disney World

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

There are many reasons to head to a Disney theme park.

But if you have younger members in the family, there's probably a good chance that the characters that Disney is so famed for will be involved somewhere along the line.

Having said that, we have no kids, but you can often find us hanging out, waiting to meet some of our favorite Disney characters. And over the years, we've learned one or two things about finding the characters in a Disney park.

□ The first thing we do before we even head out on a vacation is to decide exactly how much of a sport we're going to make our character hunt this time around. We've had vacations where we've only seen the characters at the meals that we've booked with them, while on other occasions, we've chased them down at every signing we've seen, aiming to fill our autograph books as much as we can. Of course, if you choose the latter approach, you need to appreciate that's going to cut into your vacation time, and may leave you with less time for riding attractions.

□ If you decide to go for the first approach, then hunting down your characters is simple. You need do no more than grab your *PassPorter's Walt Disney World* (you do have a copy, right?) and turn to the Feasting and Snacking chapter. Take a look at what meals tickle your tastebuds, and whether the characters there are ones your family will want to see, and go ahead, and book it.

What about if you're on some serious commando character hunting, seeking every single one in sight in every park? Although this sounds exhausting, this can be a huge amount of fun, as we discovered on one of our vacations. We made a vow to try and fill as much of our autograph books as possible, and we did it, all but about four or five pages. It was hard work, and we definitely needed a plan!

□ You'll find that the major characters, the likes of Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Goofy, and Pluto all draw huge crowds. It's no coincidence that they're often positioned at the entrance to parks to help distract people from their thoughts of hitting the first ride of the day. It all helps to control visitor traffic. Here, some decisions are needed. Do

you want to enjoy Soarin<sup>®</sup>; or Expedition Everest with little or no wait? If so, you need to hit them early on or grab FASTPASSES. If not, then you can enjoy some character time.

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□ Pick your lines carefully, and if they're all pretty long, then think about whether you all want to be in the photo. If not, then you can always split up.

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□ Don't assume that the character meet and greets, such as the ones in Town Square, Future World in Epcot or the Character Landing in Animal Kingdom will be mobbed. We've found exceptionally short waits at all of these locations. It's worth taking a look. Where there's a line for more than one set of characters, then sometimes you'll find one line is very long, while another is pretty short. While the princesses were mobbed, the last time we visited Town Square, we saw Mickey and Minnie with only a five minute wait.

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□ Keep your eyes peeled for characters, and learn where they hang out. They can be devious sometimes! While much of the time they will be obvious, we've found Aladdin and his friends hidden away at the back of Epcot's Morocco, Buzz Lightyear and Woody at the entrance to Tomorrowland, and even the Queen of Hearts wandering around in the walkway behind the Epcot Character Spot.

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□ If you want to get a heads up, then check out [Steve Soares's excellent website](#), or ask when you arrive at a park. These days, character hunting is so much easier, with details printed of where you can find them, and when. If you don't see your favorite on the list, it's still worth double checking, as things can change. As soon as you've got those details, make sure you're in line before your chosen character comes out. Trust me, once they're out, everyone will make a beeline for them, and you don't want to join the line, just to be told by a Cast Member that the queue has been closed ahead of you. We've had that happen to us on many occasions, and it's not a good position to be in, particularly if you have a child with you and you have to explain to them that you can't see Princess Aurora, Stitch, or Chip and Dale.

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□ It's also worth knowing that the characters come out in different garb, depending on the season. During the holidays, you'll often find them dressed up for Yule. One of my favorite memories is of Donald in his seasonal lumberjack outfit, while we were also lucky enough to snag Belle on a cold day close to Christmas in her beautiful (and no doubt warm!) red dress, which was a rare and wonderful photo opportunity for me. Don't forget that, as a Christmas treat, the characters may also visit the on-site resorts, most commonly the deluxe ones.

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□ Sometimes, you get unusual sightings at certain times of the year. The classic example has to be Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party, the only time you can usually guarantee a chance to meet all seven of the dwarves, rather than just Dopey on his own. Easter brings out Mrs. Bunny, while if you like a new character, then the chances are, unless they become exceptionally popular, your best bet is in the six months or so after their movie debuts. You don't see much of Koda and Kenai from Brother Bear or Wall-E any longer.

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□ The true moral of character hunting is like just about everything else Disney. Do your homework beforehand, thinking about which ones you're most desperate to see, then try and find them when crowds are low, first thing in the morning or last thing at night. Keep your eyes peeled for any unexpected sightings, and plan ahead. Oh, and good luck with your character hunting -- it's a huge amount of fun, and very rewarding, if you decide to take the challenge on.

*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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