Using Technology to Plan Your Disney Trips: Tech Travels Part 1

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I have been a techie since I was ten years old, after getting my hands on my first Commodore Vic 20 computer, compliments of my grandfather who worked for the company.

At the age of 21, I began an enjoyable career that always involved being surrounded with the latest and greatest personal technology. That being said, it is not a surprise that I immerse myself in tech tools when planning, traveling, and enjoying my trips.

So let's begin with planning. What websites, programs and apps do I use to book and organize my Walt Disney World trips? Here are my top choices for pre-trip booking and planning.

Booking:
www.kayak.com - by far my favorite airfare website and phone app. Easy to use and intuitive. Remembers my last search and is flexible enough to search multiple airports, dates and airlines. It is where I start most airfare searches. From there I branch out to the airlines' direct sites. JetBlue gets my highest rating for an easy-to-use, clean site. www.jetblue.com. Each of these companies, and all of the airlines, offer iPhone apps that make planning on the go, or when you have a free minute, easy and accessible.

www.disneyworld.com offers beautiful photos and it is perfect for viewing and dreaming about all of their onsite resorts. In true Disney fashion, the music immediately sets the tone on each hotel's page. That being said, once I have decided on a few places to stay, I yearn for more information and turn to www.allears.net, and of course www.passporter.com, for more in-depth descriptions and images.

Organization:
I love to organize all of my information, and Techsmith's Jing is the perfect free tool to capture screen images (hotel pics, airline quotes) and organize them in one place. If you are using multiple devices or need to work with someone else to plan together, I highly recommend Evernote, a beautiful notes tool that syncs any type of document to all of your devices.

As you begin to book and those hotel confirmation numbers, advanced dining reservations, and airline receipts start popping into your inbox, don't throw them into a plain old computer folder, send them to

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TripIt! Set up an account on their website, forward your emails to a private email address and voila, they magically transform into an online itinerary viewable through an app and syncable with my next indispensable tool - Google calendar!

  I have been through every stage of Disney World itinerary creation - PassPorter PassPockets (still love them), laminated itineraries on a ring (attach to stroller!), calendar on the hotel wall, wallet-size calendars with dining reservations... but now I am free from paper! Calendar, camera, reminders, communication tool all in one handy device - my smart phone - in my case an iPhone 4S! Sync your TripIt calendar with your Google calendar (www.google.com), add in your daily itinerary and voila, you now have everything in your phone ready to go. I like a 15-minute reminder, set so that it pops up while I'm at the parks. For example: Disney Visa Card free picture at Innoventions starts at 1:00 pm, Dining Reservation at Coral Reef at 6:30 pm. Just remember your charger!

  Have I lost you? Don't worry, let's reel it back in and keep it simple because I have a confession to make, I still love Excel. If you haven't tried Excel for planning and you enjoy something a little less connected - give it a try! Each of our trips has an Excel spreadsheet with multiple worksheets (tabs). Budget, itinerary, groceries, and tips are just few of the ones that I use. There something clean and personal about Excel, I can choose my own colors, organize and put together my plan at my own pace with my preferences. I still throw all of the items I need into my Google Calendar for easy access on the trip - use the notes for details! I drag the spreadsheet into Evernote to have access to it from anywhere.

  So now that you have some planning tools, let's throw in some fun:

Create customized maps
Make dining reservations
Organize, plan and update reservations
Create your own video plan!
Listen to Disney Park Music
GoogleEarth (3D): Familiarize yourself from a sky view!

Download some Apps to get you in the mood and ready:
Packing Pro
Flight +
AAA

About The Author: Justine is the Author of PassPorter's Disney Speed

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Planner e-book. Rumor has it, Justine's love of Disney World stems from being deprived by her non-Disney parents. Much to their dismay, she has more than made up for it, with more than 15 trips under her belt!

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