

Hersheypark: A Disney Fan's First Impressions

by Heidi Bamford, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My husband and I decided to take advantage of the long Memorial Day weekend to give our daughters a surprise treat -- a getaway to Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

We packed up the car and drove down on Saturday -- it's about a seven-hour-long car trip from our home in upstate New York. We spent Sunday at Hersheypark, and drove back home to Buffalo on Monday. Our grand scheme was centered on the fact that our girls deserved a break from their hard work at school, and the family could use the "together" time of being in a car, on the road, just the four of us -- to have that time to communicate that seems to be missing in the hectic schedule of the typical school/work/activities week. The trip turned out to be a fun adventure as well as a shot of hard reality; not all adventures go as planned or imagined!

Most of the time, our girls love a surprise. We had surprised them with small and large trips before, but this time, we fell down on the job. We forgot homework and travel books -- things I normally take care of, but this time let slip by; big mistake! I never realized how conscientious they were about homework, and iPods are not everything you need for a long car ride! Plus, we made the trip in our newer and smaller, more gas-efficient car. I think the old gas-guzzling van, even without air conditioning, would have made things easier. Or, maybe it is just that they are almost teenagers.

In any case, all being chocolate lovers, we had always wanted to check out Hersheypark. But we also had a time and budget constraint, so we stayed off-site at the nearby Best Western Inn Hershey and visited the local Giant supermarket where they were offering substantial park ticket discounts for the months of May and June. The ticket discounts were great -- the hotel was OK. The indoor pool was like a chlorine-scented fish bowl, and you had to pass through the corridor of smoking rooms to get to the non-smoking rooms. The free breakfast was a "free-for-all" kind of atmosphere, with one hapless staff member trying to keep the stampeding guests from destroying all the serving equipment in their efforts to down assorted cereals, waffles, sausages, juices, hot beverages, and more.

Upon arriving at the park, we anticipated long lines because of the holiday weekend, and we were right. But I think that the long lines could have been much shorter had Hershey management investigated what

puts the magic in the Magic Kingdom -- it isn't just the whimsical decorations and lovable characters! As we wandered around from one area to another, I began to realize that I was studying the layout, attractions, and operation in comparison to Walt Disney World (WDW). Even though Hershey is not on the scale of a Disney World park, there do seem to be aspects of Disney management that other parks could benefit from.

The most obvious area is that of line management at various rides and attractions. The staff at Hershey Park, although just as friendly and helpful as those at WDW, did not seem to have the knack -- or is it training -- to minimize line buildup. We noticed that they did not ask people "how many" in their party -- so ride seats would often be only half filled since there was no attempt to put smaller parties in to fill up empty seats. In fact, there were far fewer ride attendants at any one ride at Hershey than we have ever seen at WDW, one or two to Disney's usual four to six moving people through.

Another aspect of the lines for rides and attractions was that there was nothing to do but wait, and wait, and wait...no music, no displays of any kind to look at while standing there -- nothing but the people in front of and behind you. Now, I do admit, when lines at WDW are slow and you have to hear that music at Splash Mountain over and over again, you can get a bit uptight. But the almost complete absence of any kind of distraction from the tedium of standing in a line made waiting a very tiring ordeal for all of us. Those little details in design and presentation -- from the spare tires arranged as mouse ears on the floor of the garage at Goofy's Barnstormer, to the mechanical assembly line at Star Tours -- you are constantly engaged in some aspect of the attraction you are about to enter.

So, although the trip was not everything we had hoped it would be, it did turn out to be a fun adventure! Our soon-to-be-13-year-old got to ride a couple of horrifying roller coasters, and our 11-year-old got to overindulge in her favorite chocolate and arcade games. My husband and I got a getaway we could afford as well as a chance to catch up with our daughters on life as middle schoolers. And, although it is fun to check out other parks and destinations once in awhile, I'm always ready to return to my happy place, Walt Disney World!

[For another traveler's takes on Hersheypark, see [Hersheypark, Pennsylvania: A Delicious Park for the Whole Family](#) by Mary Kraemer]

About The Author: Heidi Bamford recently contributed to PassPorter News with an article on the Disney Film Festival. She lives with her family in upstate New York.

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