

## Confessions of a Recovering Park Commando: Tips to Slow Down and Enjoy Your Disney Vacation

by Lori Ketcherside, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I sat drenched in stale sweat, tired and sore from carrying my four-year-old brother on my back as we trudged from the last ride to our appointed parade and fireworks positions at the Magic Kingdom.

Briefly resting on the curb at the hub as we pushed through our tenth hour in the parks, my slightly melted Reeboks tipped up to allow my feet to uncramp into a more natural position. As the eldest of four, I served dual roles as Sherpa and navigator. Our military strike team of "vacationers" hit every single ride in the Magic Kingdom in clockwise order in a single day.

Several years later, during our Disney-moon, my new husband came away amazed, shocked that you can hit almost everything in any given park in a single day. He hadn't been raised in a "Dumbo or Die" Disney family or heard of a Disney Commando. I knew many others vacationed in a checklist, rope drop and Mickey Bar-fueled rush... I wished there was a way to rediscover the magic.

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□ Around that time, a Dutch study on vacations emerged. According to "How Vacations Affect Your Happiness," "The largest boost in happiness comes from the simple act of planning a vacation." What I found fascinating is those who evaluated their overall vacation "neutral," "stressful," or "relaxing" did NOT have any more happiness after their trip than people who hadn't even been on vacation. (Post trip slump, anyone?) The only people experiencing post trip increase in happiness described vacation as "very relaxing" and felt happier for an extra two weeks following their trip.

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□ How could I invite a "very relaxing" atmosphere into my vacation and still enjoy the whole Disney experience? After entering uncharted waters with Disney cruise vacations, I returned to the parks with a new plan, and found it very different from my once hectic and rushed vacations. I loved it!

Here is what I, as a recovering commando vacationer, do in order to slow down my vacations.

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□1. Get up early. Okay, this can also be a commando thing. Instead of getting up early to rush to an ADR, rise early and wander around the

resort or ship, taking plenty of extra time to appreciate details without rushing. Watch the sunrise or sunset. Without a doubt, the parks and ships are breathtaking. Taking the opportunity to look around and see them during these beautiful times of day allows a time-out to remember how blessed it is just to experience these surroundings.

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□2. Play a game of shuffleboard, swim, bike, run, or hike. Exercise is not just trudging around the parks! Working out every other day during vacation affords vacationers the mental fortitude to vacation in a relaxed fashion. While a commando NEVER uses the pools, (it "wastes park time") kids can have tons of fun in the pool, especially during the hours when the pools empty of parks-bound vacationers.

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□3. Visit the parks first thing in the morning or starting in early evening. The midday lines and the heat are the worst of the day. You will enjoy more while walking slower if you arrive at the beginning or end of the day.

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□4. Enjoy a calm evening. Try one of the fireworks cruises at Walt Disney World. The stillness of the water and the fireworks are beautiful, and you're away from the crowds. On the ships, go out on deck after dinner and watch the stars. The longer you look, the more you see. It is astounding the number of stars you can see at sea.

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□5. Breathe. Just take a moment every so often to look around and breathe. Take up photography. You do not need to be any good at it, for this to help slow you down. The act of looking around for interesting and new details to capture helps ground that moment. The appreciation created in these moments allows enjoyment throughout the day.

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□6. Enjoy (at least) one adults-only dinner per trip. Let your kids enjoy the clubs. On the cruise ships and at the resorts, the kid clubs allow for a little time away from each other to relax and recharge. At Walt Disney World, five different resorts host differently-themed clubs for the kids.

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□7. Skip it. Skip a stage show that doesn't appeal. Skip the main dining rooms at least one dinner per cruise. After all, room service is included during cruises. Skip a parade and free up the schedule for touring with less waiting. Veteran cruisers? Skip the Sail Away party and get a spa treatment. Skip the ADRs at least once per day. If you rise early, eat breakfast before you go to the park. Why arrive to the parks grumpy and starving and miss the least crowded part of the day eating breakfast? Skip it. Addendum-On a cruise, you must catch Jack Jack's Diaper Dash at least once. Baby racing is awesome, hilarious and low key. Remember, "Do less, enjoy more."

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☐8. Enjoy the trip. Ride the train clear around the Magic Kingdom. Take a tender to shore. Kick back and relax on the monorail. Hop on a FriendShip and watch the beautiful waterways flow past. My kids even enjoy Disney's Magical Express. I think this is a step that younger kids intrinsically "get." One day, our's chose to ride the monorail three times in a row, just for fun.

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☐9. Allow for a strategic retreat. Sometimes it is time to go back to the room and crash. Discretion is the better part of judgment.

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☐10. Create your own pixie dust. Bring stickers or glow sticks for your kids to pass out to others as they wait in queue. Let someone ahead of you in line. Let someone in front of you at a parade. Move to let another party sit together. Passing along the pixie dust is Magic everyone can enjoy!

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☐Say it altogether people, as PassPorter Mom Sara always says, "Do less, enjoy more."

*About The Author: Lorelei is a Christian, wife, mother of two, vegan, budding food allergy specialist, blogger, Texan, bookworm and terrible-but-enthusiastic photographer. She sunburns indoors on a cloudy day, but still looks forward to her next Disney cruise next winter!*

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