

Finding Relaxation at Walt Disney World: Quiet Pleasures and Small Wonders

by Valanie Bradley, PassPorter Guest Contributor

A visit to Walt Disney World is an exercise in endurance and if you are not prepared, you reach a point where you can push yourself no further. That is the point where no amount cajoling by your children will get you up out of bed for park opening (and vice versa- no frustrated temper tantrums by the parents will motivate the children to loose their hold on the bed). When you reach that point, you have slammed smack dab into the proverbial wall! The military marches through the parks come to a grinding halt and all schedules and itineraries must be tossed out the window. For compulsive planners (i.e., me) it is a hard lesson to learn, but a valuable one.

had it all laid out. I had done this a few times before so I was a little, shall we say, overconfident. My 11-year-old niece and I sliced through the parks and attractions like trained ninjas - avoiding lines, dodging crowds, and keeping just ahead of the masses. We were experts! Who needed a mid-day break? According to that obnoxious pain in my legs on the third day, I did. Our plans screeched to a halt as I smacked broadside into that unforgiving wall. No amount of hot-tubbing or liniment rubbing was going to console my legs to allow for all day racing. So now what?! I had four days left and a pre-teen who did not want to sit around the hotel all day.

Here is what I discovered; Disney parks provide perfect places to relax and slow down. I just never paid attention until I was forced to do so. Here are some of my new favorite things and places at Walt Disney World:

Take a (slow) stroll through World Showcase at Epcot. Grab a quick bite at the Yorkshire County Fish Shop at the United Kingdom pavilion and sit on the benches in front of the World Showcase Lagoon. The breeze from the water is heavenly as the sun dapples over the pond and birds skim the water. It is altogether lovely. Once you're done, you can head over to the pavilion's maze and garden and make time to appreciate the effort that the gardeners put into this place. Stroll over to France and see Impressions de France, something we often skipped before. This is an excellent place to escape the heat and gain a little culture in the process. The Victoria Gardens in Canada and the koi pond in Japan are also very lovely. Take a few moments to enjoy the World Showcase players (special shout out to the awesome Voices of Liberty, my niece's

favorite).

If you are at the Magic Kingdom, visit the utterly charming Rose Garden on your way to Tomorrowland. Here is where I admit that I rather enjoy the non-eventful Tomorrowland Transit Authority. The best part of the ride takes you inside Space Mountain, but I just love watching the whirl of Tomorrowland around and below. It is totally relaxing and it's never crowded. My niece even wanted to stay on for a second circuit, so we did! Once we got off, we jumped on the Carousel of Progress and after another relaxing sit-down left singing "It's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow" as we jauntily walked the path to Mickey's Toontown Fair. We snapped lots of pictures and took in all the wonderful whimsy in this land before hopping on the Walt Disney World Railroad for a breezy trip around the park.

I discovered that the Animal Kingdom is made for relaxing. It has its share of hustle and bustle, but also has built-in ways of taking it easy. You encounter it as soon as you walk in. Usually, we rush right through The Oasis, giving it only a cursory glance as we charge toward Kilimanjaro Safaris or Expedition Everest. But for once, we actually stopped to appreciate the animals and the calming habitats here. Who knew?! I sort of knew, but not really. During the hottest part of the day, the lushness of the foliage here blocks out some of the direct rays. There are caves and bridges, waterfalls and benches, and so many rare and unusual animals - I can't believe I missed all of this! What in the world was I rushing off to again?

Another nice spot that I am somewhat reluctant to share is the seating area at Flame Tree BBQ. We just happened upon a table right next to the water with a prime view of "the drop" on Everest and the screaming people on the train cars. Then there was a boat full of waving and dancing characters that floated by. Umm, OK, why didn't somebody tell me about this? That really was one of the best hours spent.

If you have ever stayed at the Wilderness Lodge, you know that there are all sorts of little nooks and crannies that you can wander through. The lobby is so warm and inviting with rich woods. The place just smells woody and vibrant. You can grab a snack and chill on the porch with the rocking chairs, or make your way to the little footbridge that crosses over the gurgling stream. You can follow the water outside and down rocky waterfalls to the pool, and then mosey on over to the geyser, which erupts every hour on the hour. The whole landscape here is incredible! Pick out a spot on the beach and enjoy the nightly Electrical Water Pageant on Bay Lake.

Ahh! That brings me to possibly my favorite relaxing thing to do. Walk

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out to the pier at the Wilderness Lodge in the very early morning, while the scent of the pine is still fresh and the woodland creatures dart across the paths. At that time in the morning there is still a hazy mist over the water, with the sun barely peeking over the wooded horizon across the lake. Grab a bench on the dock and enjoy this showy display of nature at its finest.

These are only a smattering of ways to have a relaxing good time at Disney parks, and I know you have or will have your own favorites. The point of this was to remind you that, on your next trip, take some time and appreciate the smaller wonders of The World. The thrill rides are exciting and wonderful, but the thrill doesn't last very long. But the quiet pleasures we had, enjoying nature and Disney's details, seemed to make a longer-lasting impression on my niece and me. It seems that we remember these moments with more clarity and fondness than even the more thrilling ones. These magical little moments and details are a major part of what keeps me coming back for more year after year.

About The Author: Valanie Bradley is an avid Disney vacation planner, deal hunter and admitted Disney-phile. She travels each year to the Walt Disney World and assists people in making their dreams come true.

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