

runDisney Races - Better with Friends: A runDisney review

by Heather Melito Dezan, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I have been running Disney races with friends for a couple years.

I have never remained with the same group for the entire race, however. At Disney's Wine and Dine Half Marathon on November 9, 2013, I changed this by starting and ending the race with an incredible group of people. With my fundraising team, Team AllEars, 14 of us started out running together at approximately 10:30 pm beginning in Corral H and crossing the finish line hand in hand in three rows at some point close to 2:00 am on Sunday morning. It was not a fast half marathon, but is certainly was a fun half marathon. Though we were placed in various starting corrals, Disney allows runners who are placed in the earlier corrals to move to a corral further back, however, a runner in Corral H could not move up to an earlier corral. Prior to the race, we decided that we would begin in Corral H and just have a great time!

You might ask how you manage to keep 14 people together in a race without alienating other runners around you. As it happens, we came upon a glow mickey sword at Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party the night before and hence the "glow stick of destiny" was born; more to come on the purpose of the sword. Many of our teammates follow the Galloway Run/Walk method and we decided to use the run/walk interval of 1:1. Three teammates were charged with tracking the intervals and at the start of each interval, one teammate, Rich, would hold the sword either vertically or horizontally to signal the appropriate interval.

As this was a night race, we quickly determined that this was the most effective way for us to remain on our intervals and to keep reasonably close together as a group. In addition to the glowing sword, when we changed to our walk interval, we made sure to throw our hands up and yell "walking" to signify to the other runners around us that we would be slowing to a walk. This is VERY IMPORTANT in Disney races since there are so many runners and some of the running paths can be extremely narrow. At about the halfway point, two of our teammates needed to change the interval and ended up finishing shortly after the rest of the group. I should also mention that two members of our group had run a full marathon in Savanna, Georgia earlier in the day and had driven down to Walt Disney World to run the Wine and Dine Half Marathon with us.

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□ We began the race in style with fireworks and shout outs from Rudy Novotny at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex and ran toward Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park. As we approached Animal Kingdom, Christmas music serenaded us and the awesome Christmas tree was up and decorated for us. After a quick group picture in from the Christmas tree, it was time for a bathroom break at real bathrooms just inside the Animal Kingdom. Many in our group decided to use the break, while everyone else waited off to the side, and after I came out of the restroom, we were off and running by the Tree of Life. Our biggest challenge was trying to stay together as a group while navigating the narrow paths through Animal Kingdom. One benefit of running with a group is that no one gets left behind because we are all looking out for each other. Since we had been separated many times within the Animal Kingdom, a couple of the group would run back and forth to do a head count and then instruct our fearless leader as to pace and if we needed to regroup at a meeting spot.

□ I had never seen the Osborne Lights at Hollywood Studios and I was super excited to be able to see them in a relatively empty Streets of America. It is the spectacle that I thought it would be! We even found the hidden cat; be sure to look for it if you go to see the Osborne lights! We stopped to record a special message and to grab some pictures and videos and we were off on our way to the walkway to Epcot and the finish! Beware of the narrowing of the course between Hollywood Studios and the walkway to the Boardwalk and Beach Club and then on to Epcot. Everyone has to summon up some serious patience for this stretch and some people did not, but we kept moving ahead, knowing the finish was up ahead. We made our way to the International Gateway, behind the scenes and through Epcot as a group.

At some point we decided to cross the finish line hand-in-hand to celebrate the race finish. As we approached the finish line, one of our teammates was having a really tough time keeping up so a couple of us were coaching her through the end while the others kept an eye on us so that they did not get too far ahead. We screamed past the finish line, got our medals and refreshments. Off to the post-race party!

□ We decided to meet in Germany at Epcot for the Post-Race Party, where some would partake in adult beverages and maybe grab a bite to eat at one of the Food and Wine Festival booths. After I run it is very difficult for me to eat, so I just sat for a bit since my feet were killing me and then trotted over to the Italy booth to grab some of the super delicious ravioli that they were offering. That is about all I could handle after the night race, so I was ready to head back to the resort where I promptly fell asleep.

❑ I maintain that Disney races are not where you likely will set a personal record, but rather where you can have one of most fun times in a race that you will ever have. The volunteers are fantastic, the cast members are fantastic, the entertainment is fantastic and running with friends is, well, fantastic! I will be back in Walt Disney World in January with my fundraising team, Team AllEars, to run the Dopey Challenge (5k, 10k, Half Marathon and Full Marathon) during Marathon Weekend, where I get to run with my 12 year old son for his first 10k race! I will be running with friends in the other races and then in February I get to run the races of the Princess Half Marathon weekend with my husband!

About The Author: Heather Melito Dezan is a member of Team AllEars. She is looking forward to running the Dopey Challenge in January as part of the 2014 Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend.

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