

Disney + Disabilities = Magic! Enjoying Disney World with Disabilities

by Carol Reynolds, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

We're going to Walt Disney World! These words have become the new American mantra. Walt Disney World is one of the most popular tourist attractions not only in the United States, but in the whole world! And why shouldn't it be? It's magical and wonderful and downright awesome.

A trip to Walt Disney World can be filled with wonder and excitement even if you have a disability. Walt Disney World has made their resort hotels and theme parks very "user friendly" for people with all types of disabilities. Here are some words of wisdom that will help make your stay with Mickey exciting and full of magic!

*Pre-Plan your trip
Get ready to go
You'll have a good time
As you move to and fro*

Log onto DisneyWorld.com. This site offers information on everything you want to know about planning your trip. You can locate schedules and times while becoming acquainted with the attractions and shows at each park. You can build customized maps of attractions and shows you personally want to see. You can view each resort, its layout and room arrangements. If you type in "disabilities" to the search engine, you will be sent to a list of the available services and arrangements Disney has to offer.

Order a Walt Disney World Planning DVD from the Disney website and watch it at home. Read some of the numerous Walt Disney World reference and resource books. Most of the books have special sections on guests traveling with disabilities. PassPorter has an entire book devoted to people traveling with special needs: [PassPorter's Open Mouse for Walt Disney World](#). Another particularly helpful book is: *Walt Disney World with Disabilities* by Stephen Ashley.

Decide if you need to rent a wheelchair or an ECV. Each park rents this equipment.

Arrange a tentative touring plan for each day. Type up a daily schedule and include: what time you will leave, where you will be going, what you will wear each day.

*If you take a plane
You'll fly so high
Be prepared
To touch the sky*

If you are flying, and this is someone's first plane trip, prepare them. Read a book about flying for the first time. Take a visit to the airport. Rehearse a trial run: locate all the elevators and escalators, practice going to check-in, see how luggage is taken, walk to security, watch takeoffs and landings, and arrange for wheelchairs for use in the airport.

*Mickey wants you to stay
With him every night
He offers you incentives
To make your day just right*

Consider staying at a Walt Disney World resort. Disney offers many resort choices and a variety of affordable options. If your schedule allows, try to visit during the value season, which is usually quieter and less busy. If you visit during high season, parks can frequently close when they reach capacity. As a Disney resort guest, you are guaranteed entry.

All of the resorts have special rooms for persons with disabilities. You can also request any other accommodations you may need. Though the resort cannot guarantee you will receive your specified suggestions, they usually make every attempt to accommodate your needs.

Using the Disney transportation system is relaxing and convenient. Options include buses, monorail and boats. Let "Disney do the Driving" works just fine for tired travelers. The whole transportation system is equipped to accommodate wheelchairs.

If you fly, take Disney's Magical Express Service right from the airport. Disney will pick up your luggage, drive you to your resort and deliver your luggage to your room. If you are flying with Disney's partner airlines, you can even check in your luggage and get your boarding passes right at your resort before you leave. Once the Magical Express returns you to the airport, head for security and be on your way. Check the Disney website for the Magical Express Service to see an updated list of participating airlines. If you are not flying with a participating airline, Disney will drop you and your luggage off at the appropriate terminal.

A Guest Assistance card

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Will work just right
 You'll wait in a convenient place
 Every day and night

A very convenient accommodation that Disney has for guests with disabilities is called the Guest Assistance Card. It is designed specifically for persons who need extra assistance -- guests in ECVs or wheelchairs, guests who may not be able to stand for long periods of time, etc. At your first park, stop at Guest Services at the front of the park, and request a Guest Assistance Card. You will receive a 3 x 5 card that is good for the length of your stay and for all members of your party. (You might want to bring a clear plastic sleeve to hold the card, so it doesn't get scrunched during your stay.) When you arrive at an attraction, show your card to the host/hostess, and they will bring your party to the correct queue for your needs. Please note that this card is NOT a FastPass and does not guarantee you a shorter wait, simply a more comfortable wait that accommodates your needs.

Get up early
 And move along
 Or visit a park
 With an evening song

If you stay on Disney grounds, take advantage of Extra Magic Hours. Every morning, one theme park opens one hour early for Resort Guests -- every evening, one park is open three hours later.

If you sleep
 And get plenty of rest
 You'll have more fun
 And be your best

Get plenty of rest. Besides all the walking, everyone will get exhausted just from all the excitement and stimulation they will encounter. Stop in the middle of the day for a swimming or nap break. Return later in the day for a few hours. Get plenty of sleep. When you awake, you will be bright and eager to face another day with a smile. Plan one or two "free" days throughout your trip. These days will help everyone relax and re-energize themselves.

Eat and drink
 Good meals every day
 So you'll be ready
 To have fun and play

Make sure you eat and drink consistently. There are many snack

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vendors and restaurants located throughout each park that can accommodate most diets and allergies. Start with a good breakfast. Make frequent food and drink breaks throughout the day. Keep a few munchies on hand as you walk around. (Mickey ice cream bars are especially delicious.)

Wear a bright color
And you will see
Every member
Of your party

As a group, wear the same bright color shirt each day - the brighter, the better. Colors like bright turquoise, orange, lime green, red, and sunshine yellow work well. Add that color information on your daily schedule. You will easily spot your group in a crowd, and if someone does get lost, you will know exactly what they are wearing.

Use your cell
Keep it handy
Charge it up
And you'll be dandy

Cell phones are invaluable. Before you go, program everyone's cell number in all the phones. If someone gets lost, they can easily be located. If you don't have a cell phone, buy or rent one. Remember to charge your cell phone every night.

A trip to Disney can be a magical experience. Disability-friendly Disney is ready and willing to meet your needs. With careful planning, your Disney trip will be a memory that will last a lifetime.

About The Author: Carol is a frequent visitor to Walt Disney World, She was a nominee for a Disney Teaching Award and is the mother of a young adult with disabilities. She has arranged numerous Walt Disney World trips for family and friends. Carol arranged her latest Disney trip in August 2008 for a group of seven young adults with disabilities and their moms.

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