

## Making the Wait Magical: Disney Countdown Tips

by Jennifer Retzlaff, PassPorter Guest Contributor

You can find them all over YouTube or facebook, the tear jerking videos of kids finding out they are going to Walt Disney World for the first time. The joy from the kids radiates out of these homemade videos, bringing smiles to faces everywhere.

Knowing the right time to tell your kids about a Disney trip is a hard decision to make for parents. Tell them too early and you end up with six months of whining, but if you tell them too late you miss the joy of planning together. When we decided to take our daughter (then four) and son (almost two) to Walt Disney World for the first time, I knew I wanted to tell them early. I wanted to use the time before the trip to immerse my kids in Disney while teaching them about the parks and the magic to be had by all. Throughout the three months leading up to our trip, we did a variety of different things to keep the magic alive.

Gifts were the first way to keep the magic going as we waited for our trip. Each week our kids received a small present and letter from one of the Disney characters. The purpose of these gifts were two-fold. One, I wanted the kids to be excited about Disney, but secondly I also wanted to educate them about Walt Disney World. These letters from the characters would talk about different Disney rides, shows, or restaurants. Characters would either just give facts about their favorites or ask questions about Disney that would cause our kids to search for the answers in different Disney books. Our daughter's favorite was an art kit sent to her by Rapunzel. The letter told our daughter they might not be able to meet as Rapunzel was busy painting (this set us up for not having to stand in the four-hour long line when at Magic Kingdom). Rapunzel then talked about how Flynn liked Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular because of the sneaky tricks and how Maximus liked playing in the boneyard at Animal Kingdom. The letters were a fun way to allow our daughter to learn about Disney. With the letters though came small gifts from the characters. These weren't expensive gifts, but things I found at the Dollar Store or items like pajamas that they'd need anyway. Receiving these gifts and letters every week kept the kids excited about Disney but also taught them about the parks, rides, and shows they'd be seeing.

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□As our kids were young, we wanted them to understand what some of the shows would be like. We went online a lot to watch YouTube videos of parades, shows, and even some rides. My husband and I love

Fantasmic but as our kids were four and two, we were worried that they'd be scared. We found some video coverage of the show and talked through what was happening. Doing this ahead of time allowed our kids to ask us questions they might have and prepare them for what was going to happen. It was a great bonding experience and a fun way to keep the Disney magic going as we counted down.

□ Activities were another way we kept the magic going as we anxiously waited for our trip. Writing letters to Disney characters was a fun activity for our daughter. We took time to write to Mickey and friends about coming and she told him what she was excited about. Her excitement when she received a letter back was Disney magic at its best. As we got closer to our trip we used this time to get ready. We made a Disney calendar and chain that helped us countdown that last month of the trip. Even though our kids were too little to really understand a calendar, the Disney pictures and repetition of the pictures helped them figure out how many days (or sleeps as they call it) were left until the trip. You can find all sorts of amazing Disney countdowns now on the internet. Not only are they fun to countdown with, but they are also fun to make these together. Mousekeeping envelopes were another fun and magical adventure we did together during our wait. We used Disney stickers and scrapbooking paper to design our own mousekeeping envelopes. We also made a variety of small crafts together such as pixie dust cards, luggage tags, and stroller signs during our wait. Although they were small craft ideas, it was a fun way to work together and talk Disney.

During our last few weeks, we made a shopping list for our daughter. We headed to Target and allowed her to shop for her needed items. She loved being able to choose what flavor of lip gloss, and color of hand sanitizer she would have in her bag. Although it wasn't Disney related, she had a great time and it definitely kept the magic going for us. We also did this with her airplane carry on bag. We made a packing checklist and allowed her to pack on her own. These are both things that I would have had to do anyway, so why not make it a fun adventure?

□ Finally, in the last few weeks before we left, we started to play new games to keep the magic going while also teaching our kids about Disney. We'd play, "Which park am I in?" where we'd give clues about different rides and we'd have to guess which park it was in. The goal was to hopefully prevent some meltdowns while there of them wanting to ride Splash Mountain while we were in Animal Kingdom. Other easy games were "What ride am I," and "what princess am I?" These are all fun entertaining ways to keep the magic going while learning about the parks.

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□Deciding whether to tell your kids early about your Disney trip can be a hard choice, but I loved having the time with my kids to talk, plan and giggle about the upcoming vacation. Hopefully some of these ideas will help you create a magical wait for your family as well.

*About The Author: Jennifer currently works teaching seventh grade social studies in Iowa. She loves Disney and hopes to return once again in a year, for a large family trip.*

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