

Horseback Trail Rides at Disney's Fort Wilderness: A Walt Disney World Activity Review

by Kristen Bieber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

"Git along little doggie" to Walt Disney World!

Yes, that's correct, you can take a horseback trail ride at Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort. Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort offers horse-centered experiences for all ages, perfect for the beginning or first time rider.

If you are looking for a fun and relaxing experience at Walt Disney World, take a trail ride at the Tri-Circle-D Ranch. My husband and I took our two children there for their first horseback riding experience. We started by calling Walt Disney World Recreation at 406-WDW-PLAY for a reservation. Trail rides are offered daily, weather permitting, at 8:30 am, 10:00 am, 11:30 am, 1:00 pm, and 2:30 pm. Children must be at least 9 years old and 48 inches tall, and riders must be under 250 lbs. Plan on getting to the ranch at least 30 minutes prior to your reservation time.

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□The Tri-Circle-D Ranch is located just past the main gate of the Fort Wilderness Resort. If you are driving, park in the main lot in the front of the resort and walk to the ranch. If you are on a bus, get off at the Outpost Depot stop at the front of the resort. If you enter the resort by boat, hop a bus from the Settlement Depot to the Outpost Depot stop. As with any Walt Disney World reservation, make sure to leave plenty of travel time to get to the ranch.

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□When you arrive at the ranch there is a small building with a help window, where you check-in for your trail ride. You will have to fill out a small amount of paperwork, and sign a release for yourself and for each of your children. They will also weigh everyone (this is done discreetly). You will be directed to a small bank of lockers to store all of your belongings, including cameras, so get a few shots right away before the ride. You can keep your phone in your pocket, but use at your own risk; if you drop it the group will not stop for you to pick it up! Children are required to wear helmets, and adults are encouraged to as well. These are provided at no cost.

Now the fun begins! A cast member will pair you with your horse. The kids were a bit apprehensive once they were face to face with these beautiful and large animals. The cast members were wonderful with the

kids, and helped them become comfortable with their horse. You mount your horse and then they tie it to a hitching spot to wait while everyone else saddles up. This gave the kids some time to become comfortable with sitting on their horse and the subtle movements and sounds of each horse. Once everyone is ready to go, they play a safety message and directions on how to guide your horse. I had a few moments of nervousness watching my children sitting atop the horses; but I quickly learned everything is done with the safety of both the guests and animals in mind at the Tri-Circle-D Ranch.

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□ Two cast members accompanied our trail ride, one leading the group and one trailing behind. This is a very leisurely ride through the woods and trails of Fort Wilderness. If you are a very experienced rider or are looking for something more than a slow paced ride, this may not be for you. The horses know the trail, and don't require much (if any) direction from you. The Walt Disney World website touts that the woods are filled with deer, rabbits, armadillos, and ducks. We didn't see any, but that did not lessen the experience at all! I could hear small giggles from the kids as they were enjoying their ride. Both of our kids could be heard talking and praising their horses. The cast member at the rear of the group would ride up alongside each child periodically, to see how they were doing. They also offered assistance to anyone having any trouble.

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□ We enjoyed the relaxing 45 minute trail ride through Fort Wilderness Resort; so much that we were sad to leave the ranch. The first thing my daughter said when we were done was, "When can we do this again?" It was a fun and positive first time horse riding experience for our children. The cost for the 45-minute trail ride was \$46 per person for both children and adults.

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□ For those kiddos who are under 9, or not quite 48 inches tall, pony rides are offered near Pioneer Hall (get off the bus at the Settlement Depot). Children must be at least 2 years old, under 80 lbs., and under 48 inches tall. You do not need reservations, and cost is around \$5-\$10 (cash only).

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□ There was a time when our children were too tall for the pony rides, yet too young for the horseback riding. Even though they were tall enough, and under the weight limit, they were not allowed to ride. There is no gray area with Disney's height/weight/age requirements. If you find yourself in this predicament, you still have options.

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□ For a family experience, you can take the Fort Wilderness bus to the Settlement Depot and check out the stables. There you can see the beautiful horses that are in the parades at Magic Kingdom and that pull

the trolley on Main Street. This is a free experience!

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□ There are also two choices for horse-drawn rides at Fort Wilderness. Wagon rides are available for the whole family from Pioneer Hall twice daily at 6:00 pm and 8:30 pm. The cost is \$8 for ages 10 and up, and \$5 for ages 3-9 for a 25 minute ride. It is first come first served for wagon rides, reservations are not available. Carriage rides on the other hand do take reservations (call 407-WDW-PLAY), and leave from the entrance of Crockett's Tavern. Carriage rides are \$45 for 25 minutes and can include up to 4 adults or 2 adults and 3 children.

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□ A trail ride at Tri-Circle-D Ranch at Walt Disney's Fort Wilderness was a wonderful first-time horse riding experience for our children. If you are looking to take an afternoon off from the parks on your next Walt Disney World vacation, look into horsing around at Fort Wilderness!

About The Author:

□ *Kristen is wife to Jordan, and proud mom of Jack and Lucy. She loves to get to Walt Disney World as much as possible to escape the cold Minnesota winters!*

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