

Disney From the Driver's Seat: Behind The Scenes with Quicksilver Tours & Transportation

by Sandy Bostwick, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My flight arrived 20 minutes early. I planned to wander around Orlando International, but there was my driver, Douglas, holding the sign with my name. He explained that he tracks flights on his cell and the home office expedites drivers so no one has to wait. Before I knew it, I was settled into a Lincoln Town Car and on my way. Ah, to be royalty!

The tone for a trip starts and ends with the transportation. Quicksilver drivers, Douglas and Vinnie, shared their thought on what it is like to be part of the action in one of the top family vacation spots in the country—Orlando, Florida.

"You share personal moments that are usually pretty happy," said Vinnie. "It's more fun if I am the same driver when they get here and bringing them back to the airport, but that is just a chance." Douglas enjoys the reactions at the gates of Walt Disney World. "I love when the kids yell Mickey, Minnie, YAY! I'm always looking through the mirror to see the faces."

Vinnie, a former Walt Disney World cast member, studied hospitality management at Valencia Community College. "I've always liked driving, and I like people, so when a friend told me about a job taking people to Disney from the airport, it sounded like fun. I think guests can tell if you really appreciate taking them to their hotel." His cutest fare was a chatty little girl who had just learned that passengers don't jump from the plane with a parachute at the end of the flight. He still e-mails one newly-married couple who he enjoyed speaking with during the ride. "He sent me an e-mail that his wife is pregnant and I was so pleased," Vinnie said. "It could be a friendship for a lifetime. Each and every day that I come to work, I enjoy it and always have a great time, especially when guests appreciate me!

Douglas left San Paulo, Brazil when a friend invited him to work in Orlando. "I've been working for Quicksilver since the beginning in 2002," he says proudly, adding that he met his wife in Orlando. He recalls a Wyoming family who borrowed \$10,000 for a five night stay at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort with their small children, remembering that one had an obvious disability. "When the little girl came through the Disney gate, she became so happy and that was the Daddy's dream come true!" He remembers one woman's last Disney trip after cancer

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left her with a year's life expectancy. "She is always on my mind," he said. "I hope she is alive. I never saw her again."

For worry-free travels, Douglas advises travelers to double check the flight and hotel information given to their transportation company, and to take time to read all directions for pick-up, especially if taking one of the group travel options. "Some people use the elevators and go straight to the carousel to claim luggage," he said. "On the web site, we promise we'll be waiting with a sign at the bottom of the escalator. Orlando is a big airport, so you need good information when you leave the plane." He also suggests that passengers allow themselves to be pampered. "When you hire a chauffeur, let him act as a chauffeur, let him open the door and treat you like royalty. You should expect VIP service, not a cab."

Vinnie suggests marking luggage with a large bright sticker or name tag for easy identification as the bag travels around the carousel. When it comes to happy travels, "It's all about being positive," he emphasizes, remembering a family who demonstrated this. "They were supposed to fly in the morning and they ended up flying at nine at night. I picked them up at one in the morning. The parents were saying 'Tomorrow is a new day and we are going to have a great time' for the kids."

"Most of the time my guests have been in the plane for hours and they need to be cheered up. They have great expectations, and that starts at the moment that they land at the airport, so we are part of their vacation. We should always present the best and cheer them up if they need it and make sure they really experience the excitement from the start," Vinnie continues. "With families I always start with kids. I ask them about their favorite characters. I like to guess their age. I find that little trick really gets them to open up. When you pick them up you are a stranger to them, and it's fun when you don't feel so much that way at the end. Sometimes things don't go right. It rains, or bad things happen, but to ask questions about the good things is the best way."

Douglas finds that most of his clients are looking to make the most of their visit by cutting transportation time. "If you lose four hours on your vacation, that costs money," he explained, referring to shuttles or buses that might wait to be filled, make several stops along the way, and can't wait if you are unexpectedly delayed. For the return trip, "We recommend two and a half hours, 30 minutes to ride and two hours in the airport because we never know how bad is the traffic or how bad is the security line. If the customer checks luggage at the hotel, we can drop that recommendation to two hours, but not all airlines check the luggage at the hotel. I see sometimes families losing the bus and they have to call a cab otherwise they lose the flight," he continued, remembering a family at Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort who missed

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their bus for a flight to France. "I was there dropping people off and the wife called me over and asked if I can give a ride. The office said I can help her. We are not usually allowed to do this because our service is pre-arranged with a reservation, but in that situation, the boss let me do that."

Even when all goes smoothly, a ride back to the airport bears the tone of closure. "On the way, they are excited about starting a vacation. On the way back, the Daddy is broke, Mommy is tired, and the kids are mad because they have to go back to school," Douglas laughed. "The little ones wear their Mickey ears and are carrying animals but on the way out it is party all over."

Vinnie uses a few tricks to end on an up note. "Sometimes the kids are a little bit sad, so the best way is to ask them about their vacation and what was their favorite ride. When they start talking about their vacation, they get that smile again from remembering. I always say they can come back again. Asking their favorite food from the vacation always helps."

In my final vacation hours, a sudden downpour with fierce lightning delayed the Epcot shuttle boat indefinitely. I trekked to the nearby Dolphin on foot, arriving fifteen minutes late, soaked, and stressed. Vinnie searched the lobby, holding his sign high and looking serious. HE WAITED! His positive thinking magic immediately brightened my mood. I pulled dry socks and shoes from my luggage, before he took it away and opened the car door. I settled into the comfy leather seats of the Cadillac Escalade and adjusted the temperature to just right as the sun poked through the clouds. Ah, to be royalty!

About The Author: Sandra Bostwick is an occupational therapist, music therapist, and adjunct professor at County College of Morris. She owns Creative Learning Studios and enjoys motivational speaking and writing. She has experience in the travel and entertainment industry on land and sea, but dreams of earning a Walt Disney World cast member pin one day. She is an expert peer reviewer for the PassPorter guide books and can be reached at Speed_of_light_2@yahoo.com.

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