

# The Fab Five Family at Walt Disney World: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Taryn Hearn, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Have a big family? Love the idea of a trip to Walt Disney World? Love the idea of staying on property even more? Not sure it's possible to make your dream come true?

Here are my best tips for making a dream come true trip to Walt Disney World with a family of five or more.

## Your Most Important Decision

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□ One of the most important decisions to make at the start of the planning process is deciding when you will travel. Walt Disney World sets hotel room prices according to four "seasons" of the year. The seasons are not contiguous but instead fluctuate according to the expected crowd levels. You know about the old supply and demand, right? Well, when it's Christmas time and everyone wants to see the beautiful Christmas decorations at the parks and resorts, Disney is going to charge more for their hotels. When the summer heat is still beating down, and the kids are heading back to school, not too many people are heading to Walt Disney World. That's when the prices for rooms will drop significantly, and Disney will often offer additional incentives to get you to visit - such as a percent off of rooms or a free dining plan.

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□ The four seasons on Disney's calendar are Value, Regular, Peak, and Holiday. Holiday covers the very busy Christmas through New Years period. Peak includes many of the other holiday time periods, such as Easter and summer vacation time. The Value season includes times that people are not likely to travel, such as right after Christmas, when kids go back to school in late August, and between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Regular is most of the rest of the times of the year that are left, such as late April and May. In addition to the four seasons, Disney categorizes their hotels into four options: Value, Moderate, Deluxe, and Deluxe Villas. Value resorts are the least expensive. Deluxe and Deluxe Villa resorts are the most expensive. Moderate resorts fall in the middle, probably closer to the Value end of the spectrum.

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□ Location, Location, Location

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□ Finding a place to stay on property at Walt Disney World for a family

of five or more can be a little tricky, especially when you are travelling on a budget. One of the least expensive ways to stay on property with five or more people is to rent two separate rooms at a Value resort, such as All Star Movies. However, as reservations for adjoining rooms cannot be guaranteed, this option wouldn't be great for a family that must stay in the same room together (such as two parents and three children). Another option that won't break the bank is Port Orleans Riverside. Being a moderate resort room rates range in price from \$182-\$285 a night (including tax) for a standard view room. The room setup is two queen beds with a bunk-size pull down bed. The hotel has a Louisiana Bayou feel to it with a boat ride to Downtown Disney available directly from the resort.

One of Walt Disney World's newest offerings for larger families is Art of Animation. The family suites at Art of Animation sleep up to six people at a more budget-friendly rate of \$303 a night (including tax) in the Value season. Although, Art of Animation is newer, All Star Music also offers a similar setup with family suites. Another fun option are the Cabins at Fort Wilderness. The cabins are 500 square foot, 1-bedroom units that sleep up to six people. Starting at \$303 a night (including tax) during the Value season, these units are in the Moderate category.

□ Several of the deluxe resorts have standard rooms that can sleep five people between two queen beds and a daybed. The following resorts fall into this category: Beach Club, Boardwalk Inn, Contemporary, Grand Floridian, Polynesian, Yacht Club. The prices at deluxe resorts can vary quite widely. A standard room at the Contemporary in the value season starts at \$400, while a standard room at the Grand Floridian during the same season starts at \$582. Amenities at the Deluxe resorts vary as well. Grand Floridian has its own spa, while Beach Club has a mini-waterpark available to guests.

□ A few of the Deluxe and Deluxe Villas have non-standard rooms that can sleep five or more in one room. The 1-bedroom villa at Jambo House at Animal Kingdom Lodge and the 1-bedroom villa at Bay Lake Tower at The Contemporary can each sleep up to five people, but both are at a higher price point than the rooms I have mentioned so far. The Jambo House and Bay Lake Tower villas are \$594 and \$632 a night (including tax) during Value season, respectively.

□ Many of the Deluxe Villas include 2-bedroom villas that will sleep up to eight or nine people (10 in select rooms). Also, lesser known options such as 1-bedroom Suites at Animal Kingdom Lodge or Deluxe Room Club Level at Wilderness Lodge will sleep up to six people, but all of these options are nearing the \$1,000 a night price point.

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## ☐ More Tips for Touring With a Family of Five or More

☐ Traveling with five or more people is no easy feat. Just packing can be quite an endeavor. If you're travelling for longer than a few days, consider washing part way through your trip. All Disney properties have washing machines and dryers available on site in a laundromat-style room. Often, they are near the pool, so you can throw in a load and relax by the pool while you wait for your clothes to wash. Pop back in, and switch to the dryer; then relax some more, and you're done. Deluxe Villas that are 1-bedroom or larger have washing machines and dryers inside the unit.

☐ A good strategy for pleasing everyone is to ask each person to pick their top must-see attraction or ride for the day. If you can, book FastPass+ reservations in advance for as many of these options as possible. Go for the rides that have a height restriction, as those are likely to be the ones that run out of FastPasses on the day of your visit. Also, if possible, try to get your FastPasses for early in the day. You will be able to reserve more FastPass+ once you have used the initial three you reserved.

☐ Some restaurants are certainly more conducive than others at accommodating larger parties. Be aware that all parties of six or more (including infants) will be charged an automatic 18% gratuity at sit down restaurants. Also note that some restaurants claim they don't guarantee that a party of five or more will be seated together. The Crystal Palace is one such restaurant. If you're paying out-of-pocket for meals (as opposed to dining with a Walt Disney World meal plan), restaurants with a buffet or family-style eating are your best bets.

*About The Author: Taryn is a homeschooling mom of 4 kids who likes to take advantage of that fact by traveling during Value Season . She has been to Disney nine times with the kids. She and her husband are looking forward to their first kid-free visit to the World in February 2015.*

Article last updated: 01-22-2015

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