

Camping at Walt Disney World: Making Disney Affordable

by Kim McCain, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I became a Disney fanatic rather later in life.

I had never had the privilege to visit as a kid and never thought it was possible. Disney was a dream that we used to watch in TV on Sunday evenings. My husband had several trips as a kid so it wasn't just a dream for him. He said we can do this if we plan, so plan we did.

We had been campers because it gave us a reasonable way to travel and vacation. We decided to use our thrifty camping skills on a trip to Disney. I think the key to any successful trip is the planning. Our first trip was in 1997. Our kids were ages 5 and 7 so we thought it was the perfect time for them. They were old enough to remember the trip and big enough to walk the parks. We didn't want to push them in a stroller making us exhausted while they are rearing to go. The World Wide Web was pretty new at that time but I got a lot of information from the internet. I also called Guest Services and they were a big help also. They knew it was our first trip so they put us in the 1400 loop at Fort Wilderness. This loop was centrally located. It was a short walk to the Campfire program and the movie. Just on from there is the pool and then the store. Things were a lot different at Fort Wilderness back then. Wild animals like rabbits, ducks and Peacocks roamed freely and would come right up to you just like in the movies. Our entire stay was magical. If you bring your own S'more supplies and long sticks, these activities are all free of charge.

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□ We planned all to have almost all our meals in the camper. I have a meal planner spread sheet that I downloaded from Microsoft. I figure out how many of each meal I need. Then I plan on what I am having for each meal. Then I make a grocery list. My camper pantry was big enough to store enough groceries for 2 weeks. We brought a big cooler full of frozen pre prepared food also. Before we left, as I made meals I would cook extra and throw it in the freezer. I put the frozen food in the cooler and it kept frozen our entire trip. Ice is available at all the comfort stations for a fee.

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□ Since it was our first trip we budgeted for a Character breakfast our first morning in the parks. We had reservations at Crystal Palace and were able to enter the park early. We were in awe that morning. It was our first look at Cinderella Castle. We had all you can eat Mickey waffles. The Characters visits us at our table. The kids were able to get

autographs and pictures right off the bat. It was an excellent way to start.

Our days were basically breakfast in the camper then off to a park. We would return back to the camper in the early afternoon for lunch and to rest a little. Then back to the parks. One evening we went to the campfire. We roasted marshmallows around a fire. Then there was a sing a long. Every night they show a Disney movie on a big screen. The warm water of the pool is an excellent way to relax and unwind before bed.

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□Our first trip was only for a few days. Our kids have never been so we just wondered around the parks and did what ever they wanted to do. We have been back as a family 4 other times. Each time was about 5 years after the last. Waiting the 5 years in between really made each trip different. Our previous trips were distant memories and the kids were 5 years older. Lucky for me I found PassPorter. I was able to go through the guide and pick the attractions that I thought the kids would enjoy and were able to do. I made a list of all those attractions for each park. I went to the touring plans and put those attractions in the order that the guide suggests.

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□As a planner I like to do things in order. I put the list of attractions in order on a spreadsheet. The attraction description gives you an idea of wait times and how long each attraction takes. If you needed to make meal reservations you could have a good idea where you would be in the park at a given time. I used these times to plan breaks. Camping has always made it affordable for us to go to Disney as a family. Campsite prices seem to be rising. Discounts seem to be a thing of the past since Disney is no longer offering a AAA discount. So planning our meals and time is we can do to make our next Disney trip affordable.

About The Author: This is Kim's second article. The first one was on Fort Wilderness and their amenities. She has been bitten by the Disney bug, wears Disney apparel when not at the parks and enjoys researching the next trip. Even if it is years in the future.

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