

## Using TouringPlans.com to Plan Your Disney Vacation: A Disney Web Site Review

by Jennifer Schuitema, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I found TouringPlans.com in 2007 while planning my first family trip as a parent.

The goal of a touring plan is to minimize the time spent waiting in line. I read through the predetermined touring plans provided on the web site. And though they included lots of things I wanted to experience, none of the plans were perfect for me. That's when I discovered the personalized touring plan tool available on TouringPlans.com.

One of the things I enjoy with any vacation is the advanced planning. It's a hobby. I like to research ahead of time where I'm going to be, what I'm going to do, and how long it's going to take. The personalized touring plan software is perfect for this when visiting Walt Disney World. But even if you're not an uber-planner, you may still find this program useful. You just might not spend as much time tinkering with your touring plans as I do.

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□ For those of you unfamiliar with TouringPlans.com, it's a Disney planning website with extensive information on all things Disney. One component of this website is a subscription that allows access to the website's personalized touring plan tool. The annual subscription is \$12.95. In addition to this unique tool, the subscription opens up extra data on the website, for example the full Crowd Calendar.

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□ For my most recent trip last October, my planning began at my Dashboard on TouringPlans.com. After entering the dates of my trip, I selected which park we would visit on each day of our trip. I based this on the crowd calendar available on the website, as well as other factors such as parade and fireworks schedules and Evening Extra Magic Hours.

I created my touring plans by using the step-by-step process available on the website. On the first webpage of the process, I selected my date, times, and park. I made sure to indicate if I planned to use Extra Magic Hours on that particular day. Then, I clicked on the "Proceed to Attractions" link.

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□ On the second webpage I chose my attractions. There were three tabs at the top to switch between to select attractions: "Headliner

Attractions & Entertainment," "Shows, Parades & Diversions," and "Seasonal." I found that the second and third tabs could be easily overlooked. It would be nice if these were different colors to make them more obvious.

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□After selecting all my attractions from the three tabs, I clicked the "Proceed to Meals & Breaks" link. On the next page, there were two tabs: "Add a Meal" and "Add a Break." I scheduled in my meals and breaks by setting the time, location, and length. Then, I clicked on the "Proceed to Evaluate & Optimize" link.

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□The final page included my plan. The first thing I did when I arrived here was adjust my "Plan Preferences," which included "Walking Speed" and "Waiting vs. Walking" settings. Directly under these preferences were "FastPass+ Options." I already had my FastPass+ reservations, so I entered the times and attractions into the software. If I hadn't already had my reservations, I could have indicated the number of FastPass+ entitlements I was allowed. Then, the software would have suggested the best attractions to reserve.

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□The next step was found at the bottom of my plan above the provided map. I clicked on the "Optimize" button. This was the point when the software used decades of research by the Tour Plans team to give me the best possible schedule based on historic attraction wait times for that day, attraction capacities, and my FastPass+ reservations.

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□After I optimized my plan, there were a few steps that I wanted to rearrange. I simply clicked on the step I wanted to move and dragged it to its new place in the plan. After placing the attractions in their new locations, I clicked on the "Evaluate" button rather than the "Optimize" button. The software then recalculated my wait times based on my changes. The software alerted me to any problems I had created with the changes I made.

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□Once I completed the process, my new touring plan was saved on my Dashboard. From there I was able to retrieve my touring plans, make changes, and print. I could continue to add and delete attractions, change meal and break times, and rearrange as often as I chose.

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□I also downloaded the app called Disney World Lines by TouringPlans.com to my phone. Using the app I could view my touring plans, optimize, and check off completed steps while in the parks. Though, I still preferred to have a printout of my plans. This helped me avoid being a slave to my phone.

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□I find the software's step-by-step process quite easy to use, but when I

have run into problems, glitches, or questions, the TouringPlans.com team is quick to respond. I've simply emailed [webmaster@touringplans.com](mailto:webmaster@touringplans.com) with my question and included a link for the URL of my plan.

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□Over the years of using touring plans, I've learned a few things that help me have a more successful experience. First, I set the "Walking Speed" setting to relaxed and the "Waiting vs. Walking" setting to minimize walking. I find that those settings build in necessary time that my family needs to move through the park without too much stress, and minimizes the crisscrossing that is sometimes necessary to optimize wait times.

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□Second, I always add ten minutes more to our meal breaks than I think we'll need. We always end up using them.

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□Third, I add an extra "Break" before parades, shows, and especially Fantasmic! to account for the time necessary to secure a spot to watch.

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□Fourth, I'm a big fan of a lengthy afternoon resort break. Even if we are visiting the same park before and after the break, I create two touring plans, one for the morning and one for the evening. There are specific things I like to do in the morning versus the evening. By creating two touring plans, it allows me to divide up the attractions into these preferences while still using the "Optimize" feature.

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□Finally, the most important thing I've learned is to not turn my touring plan into an errands list where the goal is simply to check off all the boxes. It's important to remind myself to slow down, take a breath, and enjoy what we are doing in that moment rather than stressing out about what we haven't done yet. I now use my touring plan more as a guideline, not a recipe... or at least I try really hard.

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□On one of our first trips as a family, we visited Hollywood Studios during the now extinct ESPN: The Weekend. My husband happened to see the legendary basketball announcer Dick Vitale and wanted to have his picture taken. I was so determined to follow my plan; I couldn't see the benefit of stopping for something that so obviously would make him happy. I actually said to him, "You can have your picture taken with Dick Vitale any time. I need to get FP+ for Toy Story right now." This was so unreasonable and absurd, it's embarrassing. In the end, he did get his picture taken, and we got our FP+. We didn't need to cut anything out but the drama.

*About The Author: Jennifer Schuitema is a florist living in Grand Rapids, MI with her husband and daughter. She's enjoyed spending the past decade*

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raising a Disney fan. She looks forward to visiting Walt Disney World each year with her mom and daughter, and occasionally with her husband.

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