

Planning a Vacation to the Magic Kingdom From the United Kingdom: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Lisa Smith-Lester, PassPorter Guest Contributor

A vacation to Walt Disney World takes lots and lots of planning, as we all know.

Travelling from the United Kingdom (UK) involves a great deal of planning, though we are usually able to book and plan a lot further out than guests in the USA due to the offers available to us.

In my case, the first part of the vacation that we book is our accommodation. In the UK, offers are released through the Walt Disney Travel Company allowing us to book up to 20 months in advance to stay on Disney property. For our October 2015 vacation, we were able to book in late April 2014 and we had some very good offers. The package we booked includes our 12-night stay in a 2-bedroom villa at Old Key West, 14-day Disney Park Hopper tickets for the price of 7 days, free Disney Dining Plan and a \$200 gift card. I know we are incredibly lucky to have this offer and to be able to plan so far in advance as I understand the offers released for those in the USA are only for the year we are in and are subject to blackout dates. (As far as I am aware, Easter and from around December 19 are the only exclusions to UK guests.)

□ As this is booked so far in advance, we then have a bit of a wait before we can book anything else. If we wanted to, we could book a Fly Drive package (flights and car rental booked together) at the same time, however for our dates, the price was coming out at over £pound;1000 per person (approximately \$1500) and this only includes basic car insurance. Upgrading to a fully inclusive car insurance package can add anything up to £pound;500 (\$750) on this price. We wait for "flight only" to be released, which is usually around 11 months from the date of return travel. Our flights were booked in very late November, not long after they were released, and at a much more reasonable price of under £pound;600 (\$900) per person.

□ Next comes the research for car rental. Though Disney transportation is great and we will use it on some occasions, we will also be leaving the Disney bubble a few times and having our own rental car makes the most sense for us. There are so many choices to make - do we have the car for our whole trip, how big of a car do we want, which company shall we book with, etc.? The number of car agencies is baffling as are the

many different car sizes that you can book! Thankfully, I found an offer where I could get a 10% discount and 3 additional drivers (needed with our large travelling party) for a reasonable price for a 7-seat Town and Country or similar, a car we have had previously and liked.

We then start looking at airport parking and an overnight hotel for the night before we fly. We live about a 2-hour journey from the airport so we prefer to drive up the day before to shorten our already long travel day, and stay at a hotel near to the airport. For this year, my airport parking is already booked. We use a "Meet and Greet" service where they meet us at the airport on our departure day, take the car away and park it for us, and then when we return, we call them once we have all our luggage and they meet us outside the terminal. It's a great service and a very reasonable price of £60 (\$90) that includes parking for the 20 days we are away for. I have not yet found a good enough deal for our overnight hotel! A chain of hotels called Premier Inn often have family rooms for £29 (\$43.50) so I am hoping for one of these again.

□ Another part of the planning is deciding which other parks we are going to visit and research the best place to buy tickets. We are lucky in that we always visit for at least 2 weeks, so have the time to visit some of the other parks, too. We have decided that this year we will visit Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, and LEGOLAND. We will spend 2 days at the Universal parks and 1 day at LEGOLAND, so I am currently researching the Internet to find the best possible prices for these.

□ One thing we have to do being visitors from the UK is an Electronic System for Travel Authorisation, more commonly known as an ESTA. These cost \$14 per person, are valid for 2 years from the date you complete them and must be done at least 72 hours before travel. The official information from the website is "International travelers who are seeking to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) are now subject to enhanced security requirements and will be required to pay an administrative fee. All eligible travelers who wish to travel to the U.S. under the Visa Waiver Program must apply for authorization and then pay the fee using the following process of completing the application, submitting the application, recording your application number, making payment and then viewing your application." This replaces a form that we used to complete on the airplane to then hand to the Immigration Officer upon arrival in the USA. Without an authorized ESTA, a Visa is required or we cannot visit!

□ We obviously also have the same planning to do as all guests with regard to Advance Dining Reservations, planning our days and time in the parks, making FastPass selections, and saving for the vacation itself.

We also have the unenviable decision of when to exchange our pounds for dollars for spending money and hoping that we get a good rate!

About The Author: Lisa Smith-Lester is a working Mum with two daughters who is visiting again this year, a year earlier than originally planned.

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