

Lessons for the Few-Times-In-A-Lifetime Disney Traveler: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Becky Jennings, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I made my first trip to Disney World in 1984 when I was a child and my second in 2001 when I was a young adult. For a decade, I dreamed of returning with my oldest child. We live in California, though, and Florida is several long, costly plane rides away. So I was an armchair traveler for many years, visiting "the World" only via guidebooks, newsletters, podcasts, and trip reports.

This past February, I finally made my Disney dream come true. My 10-year-old and I spent two whirlwind days in Orlando: one at the Magic Kingdom, the other at Epcot. I learned lessons on the trip that may benefit anyone, but especially someone who is like I was: an intermittent Disney traveler who may visit the World only a few times in a lifetime.

Keep crowd levels in perspective. You, like I, may aspire to a Disney trip in spite of disliking Disney-size crowds. This may make you think you can enjoy Disney World only if you visit at the least-crowded times of year. You may assume that light crowds mean little waiting.

My recent trip proved those assumptions to be somewhat mistaken. My daughter and I visited Disney a week before Presidents' Day, a time when (as predicted in the 2015 PassPorter) crowds were on the rise. But rising crowd levels did not inhibit our enjoyment of the parks. In 13 hours at the Magic Kingdom, we experienced 16 attractions. Our longest standby wait was 45 minutes (for Seven Dwarfs Mine Train); I assume that was a short wait compared to waits in Peak Seasons. We managed to snag Peter Pan and Space Mountain FastPasses even though we didn't make reservations until we arrived at the parks. When we went to Pecos Bill's for lunch and Pinocchio Village Haus for dinner, we got our food immediately. And in the evening, we lined up at the last minute for the Main Street Electrical Parade and still had a good view. Our experiences the next day at Epcot were similar: one 45-minute standby wait (for Soarin'), FastPasses for Turtle Talk and Test Track, and no wait for food at Sunshine Seasons. There were clearly crowds in the park, but we did less waiting and more touring

than I had expected to be able to do.

□ In fact, I realized that even if we had traveled at a no-crowd time of year, we would have done some waiting. Waiting seems inherent to the carefully-crafted Disney experience; no-one just "walks on" anything. You wait to get into shows like Hall of Presidents and Impressions de France whether 10 people are there or 100. You don't just get on any ride; you wind your way to it through an elaborate queue. So even if you had the park to yourself, you'd still need to pack your patience.

□ Don't queue up with an empty stomach or a full bladder. Since my touring party had only one day to visit the Magic Kingdom, we dashed from attraction to attraction. Cruising on adrenaline that way, it was easy to ignore the calls of nature. I came to regret that when I got in line for Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. Standing in the slow-moving queue gave me plenty of time to realize I was queasy from hunger and needed a bathroom break. After 30 minutes, I decided we shouldn't ride until I felt better, so my daughter and I left via the chicken exit. Learn from my mistake; don't queue up for a ride until you've attended to your body's needs.

□ That leads me to say:

□ It's not as easy to find a restroom in Walt Disney World as you might think! If you haven't been to Disney World in awhile, you might assume that such a family-friendly place would have obvious restrooms everywhere. But I did not find that to be the case. In the Magic Kingdom especially, restrooms were less plentiful than I expected, and they were difficult to find, even with the help of maps. I wonder if Disney purposely obscures them for aesthetic reasons. If you need help finding a restroom, the best thing to do is ask a cast member.

□ Ponchos are worthless in really bad weather. Pack waterproof windbreakers, umbrellas, and -- in winter -- gloves. I consulted several Disney packing lists as I prepared for my trip. All of them recommended ponchos as a primary form of raingear. So I brought ponchos and one umbrella for my daughter and me to share. This was not sufficient protection from the unrelenting rain we experienced the day we spent at Epcot. The ponchos blew in every direction, leaving our clothes exposed to the elements. I should have brought windbreakers into the park and two umbrellas instead of one. Furthermore, I wish I'd brought gloves. We toured Epcot with a relative who's sensitive to cold weather, so gloves would have kept her more comfortable as we walked through the park in chilly, damp conditions.

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☐ Touring a theme park in the rain is never fun, but more adequate raingear would have kept us warmer and dryer, enabling us to have toured Epcot longer.

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☐ Ride the ride you think you cannot ride. I'm not a fan of thrill rides. But every time I've been to Walt Disney World, I have challenged myself to go on an attraction outside of my comfort zone. In 1984, it was Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. In 2001, Splash Mountain. And in 2015, Space Mountain. The whole walk through the Space Mountain queue, right up to the final moment of waiting to board, I thought about changing my mind and heading for an exit. Space Mountain did terrify me, and I don't think I'll ever ride it again. But I'm proud to be able to say I faced my fears and rode it once. If you, like me, visit the parks only a few times in your life, find a fear and face up to it. You'll pat yourself on the back that you did.

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☐ Other random bits of advice: When you park in a Disney lot, make a point of looking for your row number. It won't be obvious.

☐ Even if you think history is boring, ride Spaceship Earth. It's amazing!

☐ Don't be surprised if you regress on the Carousel of Progress. I had to sit through 1999 four times!

☐ If you shop in only one store, let it be Mouse Gear in Epcot.

☐ Don't bother with the iced coffee at Sunshine Seasons.

☐ Don't try to sit down during "O Canada!"

☐ Finally, if you can't see everything you set your heart on, believe in your heart you'll return to Walt Disney World someday.

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☐ The part of Walt Disney World I most looked forward to seeing was World Showcase. Unfortunately, it was the part of our trip that largely got rained out. Soggy and cold from unremitting rain, we ended up having to rush around the lagoon rather than linger at every pavilion, as I had dreamed of doing. Chances are that if you, too, finally make it to Walt Disney World, you won't get to accomplish everything on your wish list either. You could look at that as a disappointment, or you could look at it as a motivator: a reason to keep reading, listening, dreaming about, and planning for another Disney trip.

About The Author:

☐ *Becky is a wife and mom of three kids in Folsom, California. The next Disney dream she aspires to is a Disney cruise!*

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