

# Helping Friends Plan Their Disney Vacation: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Jennifer Schuitema, PassPorter Guest Contributor

If you regularly vacation at Walt Disney World, chances are that eventually a friend, relative, or co-worker will ask your advice while planning their own trip.

Oftentimes these conversations start pretty early on in the planning. They haven't really nailed anything down and seem unsure where to start. At that point, I let them know I'll send an email to help get the planning started.

In the draft folder of my email account I have two documents saved. One is a simplistic step-by-step guide and the other includes my tips and tricks for visiting Walt Disney World. (I periodically read through and update as needed.) I simply copy and paste the text into new emails and send them off. Sometimes that's all that is required. They'll reply to say thanks so much and months later I enjoy seeing their Disney vacation via social media.

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□The step-by-step guide I email is pretty basic. It includes all the necessities without being overwhelming. For example, setting up a My Disney Experience account is one of the steps, but I don't get into all the details of what you can do with the My Disney Experience site. I try to keep each step quite brief.

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□The tips and tricks email is more fun. I make it clear that these are really just things that I've found work well for me and my family over the years. This is the email where I share my love of the Magic Kingdom Welcome Show, watching the second Main Street Electrical Parade from Frontierland, taking an afternoon resort break, etc. It's a collection of tips that have enhanced my family's experiences over the years.

Sometimes the reply to these emails is more than just "thanks so much." Occasionally, they feel more overwhelmed and are looking for more help. This is where it gets tricky for me. I want to help. You could even say I want to tell them exactly what to do and when to do it. If I could invoke mind control, I would. So, the first lesson is that this is not my vacation. It's sort of okay to be a total control freak about my own Disney vacation but not really acceptable to commandeer my daughter's best friend's family vacation.

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□ Therefore, I try to always answer questions with at least two reasonable responses that would satisfy varying circumstances such as budgets or lengths-of-stay. I also try to keep in mind differences in taste and never assume that what I like will automatically satisfy someone else. And once they make a decision, whether I agree or not, all my answers going forward fit within that constraint. I never suggest that a different resort or more days or a change in restaurant would make their vacation better.

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□ My Disney Experience, FastPass+, and MagicBands have added a new dimension to helping a friend with their trip. I've learned that (407) 939-4357 is the number to hand out when technical issues arise, especially log in errors, trouble linking tickets, reservations not showing up, etc. It's best to let Disney technical support solve those issues. But I've happily helped friends choose the best FastPass+ options and pointed out where MagicBands can be customized.

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□ Another lesson I've learned is to not oversell a Walt Disney World vacation. I actually try to temper expectations. Not everything is sunshine and rainbows at Walt Disney World, but a lot of people think it should be, especially when they see the final price tag. I try to point out a few things that are not so terribly pleasant like a packed bus at park closing and a long line at bag-check in the morning. I also try to mention some of the things that seem to catch people off guard like the motel-style exterior entrances at the value and moderate resorts, a long walk from the bus stop to the resort room, and the price of cafeteria-style food. Having realistic expectations will ultimately lead to a more satisfying vacation.

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□ On occasion, I've put together a little Disney care package. It included relatively inexpensive items that I've always found helpful to have at Walt Disney World but may not be immediately obvious items to pack, such as dollar store ponchos. I've also included a countdown paper chain, which is always a big hit.

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□ The last trip I helped with was my daughter's best friend's trip to Walt Disney World. My daughter had a great time helping, too. On each link of the countdown paper chain she wrote the name of an attraction she thought they would like to experience. She also sent her friend links to her favorite on-ride YouTube videos so they could be familiar with the different rides and decide beforehand if they'd like to try them.

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□ Overall, I've really enjoyed helping my friends and family with their Walt Disney World planning. It gives me a little taste of Disney in between my own trips, and sometimes I learn about something new or different that I'd like to try the next time I'm in the World.

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*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 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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