

The Grandparents Guide to Surviving (and Actually Loving) Disney: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

After four trips to Walt Disney World with my parents, we've fine-tuned our strategy to achieve maximum enjoyment for everyone.

My dad may be blind, but he enjoys our Disney trips to the fullest extent. While there was a time when he'd ride every thrill ride -- and buy the T-shirt -- he now focuses on enjoying everything else Disney has to offer. I can attest that nothing brings my parents more joy these days than Disney trips with their grandchildren.

Let it go! My number one recommendation is to forget trying to do everything together as one big extended family. As a recovering commando park tourist, I've learned it just isn't fair to expect my parents to tour at our pace all day every day for an extended vacation. Instead, we plan some time apart and even stagger my parents' arrival to the World so that we've gotten the commando touring out of our systems before they've even arrived!

Avoid the heat and crowds. The only thing more unbearable for grandparents than a theme park vacation in extreme heat is adding crowds to that heat and humidity. Work with a travel planner specializing in Disney destinations or do your own research to ensure you choose an optimal time to vacation. If at all possible, escape the highest crowds by avoiding Thanksgiving weekend, the Christmas holidays, President's week, mid-March until at least a week after Easter, and late May until late August.

Splurge on a moderate or deluxe resort. Grandparents need comfortable sleeping arrangements and will appreciate the pillows and bedding at the moderate and deluxe resorts, as well as some extra room to spread out. Deluxe resorts are an extra special treat. From the live music in the lobby at the Grand Floridian Resort to the ambiance of the Polynesian Village Resort to the convenience of the Epcot area resorts for frequent visits to World Showcase, there's something for everyone's tastes. At Animal Kingdom Lodge Resort, my mom was as enthralled with watching the giraffes and other animals from her balcony as she was with any other aspect of the Disney experience.

Enjoy some signature dining. Opt out of some of those over-stimulating character dinners and other buffets and book yourselves some

signature dining instead. While the off-spring are enjoying Boma at Animal Kingdom Lodge, treat yourselves to Jiko. At Wilderness Lodge, head to Artist's Point in lieu of Whispering Canyon Café. Opt for Citricos or Narcossees while the rest are at 1900 Park Fare at the Grand Floridian. Wave goodbye to Chef Mickey and take the elevator to California Grill.

Plan separate special experiences. Plan some special tours that appeal specifically to each grandparent. A highlight for my mom this past winter was the Wanyama Safari at Animal Kingdom Lodge. As a photography buff, nothing compared to getting up close with the animals of the Animal Kingdom Lodge savannah. The five-course meal with new friends at Jiko was an added bonus.

Embrace your preferences. Mom was thrilled to spend an afternoon shopping in Orlando with an old friend while we spent the day at Magic Kingdom with Dad. The highlight of Dad's day? Another round of Pirate's League makeovers with his grand-daughters, followed by a divine fudge brownie sundae sitting in the sunshine over in Fantasyland.

This is YOUR vacation! Ride what you want to ride. See the shows you want to see. Enjoy Carousel of Progress and Hall of Presidents to your heart's content. You don't have to ride Rock 'n Roller Coaster or Tower of Terror, but also don't let anyone stop you. While it took me 15 years to work up the nerve to do Tower of Terror again, my mom had both arms high in the air the whole time.

Don't try to keep up! When you do take on the parks with your commando-touring offspring, know when to call it quits. Ride the friendship boats at Epcot as many times as you like. Claim a bench in the shade and indulge in your favourite treat while you take in the sights and sounds around you. Or head back to your resort to enjoy a nap or a swim.

Book afternoon Fastpasses and sleep in! Do you really need to get there for rope drop? Probably not. Instead, book afternoon Fastpasses for the three experiences you'd most like to enjoy. This may be the best time to meet up with the rest of your party, who, yes, still want to maximize their attraction coverage and get there early. Meanwhile, you can enjoy a peaceful leisurely morning. Order room service and sit on your balcony or lay out in a hammock.

Spend extra time at Epcot. Most grandparents relish the World Showcase at Epcot. With so many exquisite dining options, you could enjoy a different restaurant every night. Linger in the shops and see the

films. Just lose the complaining grandkids (and their parental units) or let them have a nap at American Adventure!

There's something truly magical about multi-generational Disney trips. While someone in the pack may need a scooter or other assistive device, Disney truly is for everyone. Just be sure to discuss your expectations with extended family before you go and spend your vacation doing what brings you joy.

About The Author: Amy Wear is a work at home mom, travel agent, writer, and registered occupational therapist. She lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and specializes in planning magical vacations for people of all abilities at Click The Mouse. You can find her online at <http://www.clickthemouse.ca/amy-w.html>

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