

# Planning for a Disney Vacation - The Coast to Coast Difference: A Disney Parks Planning Article

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

For those of you who are regular visitors to Walt Disney World, over the last couple of years you've become used to the planning changes that have been introduced there. Take the ability to make three Fastpass+ bookings a day, for example. You'll also be used to having the park operating hours out (usually!) in time for you to make your dining reservations 180 days before your trip. This means that the majority of your planning is complete a good couple of months before you travel.

However, head to the west coast to visit Disneyland, and things couldn't be more different.

I encountered this issue while planning our forthcoming Disneyland trip, and I have to say it's been like stepping back in time. Although in fairness to Walt Disney World, I don't ever remember having to make plans quite so last-minute when heading to Orlando.

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□First, let's look at park hours. Now the kindest way I can put this is that the publication of operating hours at Disneyland Resort is sporadic at best. I think they're supposed to be published for the upcoming six weeks, from what I can judge from the calendar display on the Disneyland website. I say "supposed to be," as my experience from stalking the site was that, more often than not, it didn't happen that way. In July, I was waiting (not-so-patiently I might add) for dates to open up in September, and as an example, the first few days of September were showing up on the calendar. However, when I clicked on them, I got the disappointing response of "schedule unavailable," which was very frustrating. This would go on for a few days, then suddenly they would upload a couple of days' worth of park hours. There really didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to it.

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□Now if you think that's exceptionally late for a Disney park to be publishing their hours, there is a reason for it. You cannot book anything until 60 days out, or roughly two months before your vacation. At that point, dining reservations are available online, and I have to say even that is a recent innovation--the last time we went to Disneyland (Christmas 2012), we had to e-mail our requests for all our dining reservations, and wait for an email back confirming them.

Many of you will probably have worked out that there's immediately a

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problem, if you can make dining reservations two months before your trip, but the park hours are only published six weeks beforehand, and you'd be spot on. One of the dining reservations I wanted to make was a dining package for World of Color, the night-time entertainment show at Disney's California Adventure. Without the park hours, I literally had no idea what time World of Color might be showing. You'd have thought that the reservation times would have given me a good idea, but not a bit of it. When I first looked, before I knew the show time of World of Color, I could have made a reservation for a dining package at what turned out to be 45 minutes before the show! Now that would have given me a real problem with eating and still getting to see the show!

□ Let's turn now to FASTPASSES. Visiting Disneyland, you revert to the old system that they used to have at Walt Disney World, i.e. you show up on the day, go to the attraction for which you want a FASTPASS, insert your park pass in the machine, and you get whatever return time is currently on display. There's no booking online beforehand, and your FASTPASS return time has to open up before you can get another one (although there are some exceptions to that, for example if you get a FASTPASS for World of Color you can immediately get a FASTPASS for another attraction). It means if you like the idea of sleeping in late, and getting some FASTPASSES for the afternoon, when the parks will be busier, you're quite frankly out of luck at Disneyland. We absolutely loved Radiator Springs Racers in Cars Land the last time we visited Disney California Adventure, and we certainly weren't alone, as it had massive lines. I know it's still popular, so if you want to ride it, you need to be there at opening to snag those coveted FASTPASSES.

□ Of course, as I'm sure you're getting the idea by now, Magic Bands are just a dim and distant dream at Disneyland as well. The last time we were there, we actually had paper tickets, which really did feel like we'd stepped back in time, although at least the room keys were plastic!

□ I am sure that Disneyland will one day be exactly the same as Walt Disney World when it comes to Magic Bands, and probably Fastpass+, although I do wonder whether they will ever change how far ahead park hours are published, and how far ahead you can book your dining. After all, the majority of visitors to these parks are locals, rather than visitors, whereas the situation is completely reversed at Walt Disney World. One thing's for sure. If you're planning a Disneyland vacation, and you're a Walt Disney World veteran when it comes to planning, for the moment, you're going to find it a very different experience.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland*

Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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