

Top 10 Tips to Earn Your First RunDisney Medal: A runDisney Event Article

by Kristin Turner, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I am really not a runner.

Don't let the three Run Disney medals hanging on my wall convince you otherwise. My pace has never been all that great and I've never thought to myself, "Wow, I can't wait to lace up and go for a run today." But I am here to tell you that anybody with two stable legs can train for and finish a Disney race. And it's absolutely worth it.

Disney is probably the most fun and exciting location one can think of for an organized race. Tutus and tiaras? Yes! Running through Magic Kingdom? Yes! Being cheered on by Belle, Cinderella and Jack Sparrow? Yes! Somewhere towards the bottom of the list is that pesky little detail that it all requires you to run a substantial distance. Still the allure of the experience brings out people of all shapes, sizes and speeds. A Disney race is a bucket list event for lots of people who (like me) don't consider themselves runners and have never done anything like this before. And we all started out with nothing but a desire for a challenge and a good pair of running shoes.

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Here are my top ten tips for earning your first Run Disney medal.

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1. Pick the right race and register the first day it's open. Run Disney is extremely popular, and some races have sold out in less than an hour. Make sure you are prepared to log on and register. Pick a race that not only fits well into your calendar, but also your realistic expectations. There is nothing wrong with picking the 10K or even 5K, if you feel like that's going to challenge you. WDW Marathon Weekend in January is the longest distance and tends to bring out the more serious runners while the Princess Half Weekend in February is more of a bucket-list event for women of all shapes, sizes and speeds. All race weekends typically feature several races leading up to the signature event and a special challenge medal for those runners who feel compelled to run all of them.

2. Pick a training plan and stick with it. Run Disney has partnered with Jeff Galloway. He is an Olympic runner who has designed a system of running that includes short walking intervals. His method is perfect for beginners who feel intimidated at the thought of jogging long distances. Check out the Galloway training programs on the Run Disney website. He has customized plans for every race and all require only three runs a

week. There are many other training programs and apps available for runners, so find one that works best for you and stick with it.

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□3. Always stay at a Disney resort on property. You will be waking up very early for most Run Disney races. You typically need to be walking to your corral no later than 4:30 am. The reason for this is that they need to get most of the race through the parks and off the streets before the parks start to open around 9 am. For my first Run Disney race, we stayed at a nearby hotel off property. We had to wake up even earlier to give ourselves time to drive from our hotel to the Epcot lot. Then we had to walk to the race area from the lot. After the race, we then had to walk back to the car and wait to be let out of the lot. We waited one hour to get out of our space. I was starving, sweaty, exhausted, and in serious need of a restroom.

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□ For my second Run Disney race, we booked a room at the Caribbean Beach Resort. We walked to the nearest bus stop from our room and a waiting bus escorted us directly to the race area. Super easy! Our bus ride didn't take but a few minutes since we were already on property and not far from the race start. When the race was over, we hobbled directly to the bus and it took us back to our bus stop at the resort. The buses are sitting just past the finish line waiting on you to arrive, which is a blessing for your exhausted legs. There is a bus for every resort. They also offer buses from each resort to the Expo where you pick up your bib. If you are considering flying into Orlando, staying at a Disney resort for the race ensures you will never need a rental car.

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□4. Plan a fun race day outfit. Even if you feel silly doing it, you will wish you had once you arrive at the race. It's not necessary to wear an entire costume. Pinterest is a great place to get ideas and inspiration. Be sure your plans adhere to the costume guidelines for your race. It is possible to purchase items at the Expo before the race, but I'd advise against wearing anything for the first time if you are concerned it might become an irritant around mile 3 or so. That's around when you'll start to see discarded items on the ground that people gave up on. It's a good idea to give your costume a test run at home before the race, if you can.

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□5. Determine ahead of time if your goal is to simply finish or beat a time. Most people don't set a personal record at a Disney race because there is too much fun to be had along the course. And if it's your first time doing something like this, it's probably a noble goal to just see the finish line. There's nothing wrong with aiming for a set pace, however Disney races are unique and you need to be prepared for that. There will be lots of tempting moments in the race where you will want to stop. All along the course there will be photo

opportunities with rare and unique characters. You decide if you want to run past or get in line for a photo. Keep in mind that even though you stop moving, the clock does not. If you are near the back of the pack and worried about being swept, don't stop for photos!

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□6. Know race etiquette. Start in the corral you were assigned on your bib. It is acceptable to move back a corral (to run with someone), but you can't move up a corral. If your race does not assign corrals, line up according to the pace you know you can maintain. Otherwise you risk being run over at the start.

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□Read the official guidebook you will receive and familiarize yourself with the rules. Strollers and dogs are typically prohibited from Run Disney events.

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□If you plan on using walk intervals, please be considerate of the runners around you. The course can get crowded, and it's rather annoying to be running directly behind someone who comes to a sudden stop to start walking. Raise your hand to signal you are about to stop, move to the right side, and then check behind you to make sure you aren't about to get knocked down by the runner on your heels.

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□If you are running with a larger group, try to maintain a single file line through the course. Walking or running with three or four people abreast will block out everyone behind you.

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□7. Make sure you can maintain the minimum pace. At the back of the race there will be walkers with balloons. They are considered the end of the run. As long as you stay ahead of the balloons, you should be okay. There will be volunteers and staff encouraging you to pick up the pace. If you fall behind, they will pull you and put you on a bus. The minimum pace is a 16 minute mile. Use an app or GPS watch to track your pace. If you struggle to stay under this pace in training, do not fret. The time is based on when the last runner in the last corral crosses the start line. So start at the front of your corral to give yourself as much cushion as you can.

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□8. Check the weather and dress accordingly. All Run Disney events at Walt Disney World are held in the cooler months and most start in the wee hours of the morning. This means temperatures can drastically change between the start of the race and the finish. The Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend and Princess Half Weekend are held in January and February, when Florida weather can be very unpredictable. If you are worried about being chilly at the start of the race, bring an inexpensive jacket or long-sleeved shirt that you should have already taken to Goodwill. As the race begins or when you start to warm up,

simply drop the item in a marked bin or off the course. All items are picked up after the race and donated to charity.

☐ 9. On the course, run the shortest distance possible. This is something that I have struggled with in past races. A certified race has been measured from end to end. For instance, a half marathon course must be 13.1 miles regardless of the route the runner takes. So the certification process measures the shortest distance between the two points. What this means is that it's possible to stay on course and run a lot more than 13.1 miles. It can be very disheartening when your GPS says you should be finished but you just passed mile marker 12. Not only are you running farther than you need to, but your official race time is based off 13.1 miles instead of the 14 you actually ran. The remedy for this is to run as straight a line as you can and hug the inside of every turn. You can research "running tangents" to learn more about this. At my last Run Disney race, I simply made an effort to run on the inside of all the significant turns in the course. I still ran about 3 tenths of a mile too far, but I had at least one run off the course towards a port-a-potty and on a crowded course some bobbing and weaving is inevitable.

☐ 10. Celebrate! Wear that medal with pride! Plan a special dinner after the race to celebrate or hit up a Disney park. Remember, even if you come in last place you still beat everyone at home on the couch.

About The Author: Kristin Turner is a travel agent specializing in Disney Destinations. She loves helping others experience the magic of Disney. Kristin lives in North Carolina with her husband and daughter. You can find information on her agency, Pirates and Princesses Travel, here: www.facebook.com/PiratesandPrincessesTravel

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