

When 'Work' Goes to Walt Disney World: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Derry Wade, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I was incredibly fortunate to attend a conference for my job in March 2017 held at Disney's Yacht Club Resort and Conference Center at Walt Disney World. My most recent trip to Disney World was in 2015 when my husband and I brought our two elementary-aged children for a family vacation. When I heard about the conference, I knew right away this would be a different experience entirely.

First of all, I would be traveling by myself (though it certainly is possible to bring family along and many people do). Second, I would be attending the conference for one full day and two partial days and have time off to enjoy the parks for partial days before and in between. Finally, I knew I wanted to maximize the opportunity for fun in my off-hours, and soak up every minute of visiting one of my favorite places in the world. But I had some immediate concerns as well:

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□- Which of the special conference ticket options should I purchase?

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□After reviewing the conference schedule and making my resort and airplane reservations I determined my available time to visit the parks would be on my arrival day, a Sunday, from when I arrived at Walt Disney World (around 2pm) through that evening. I also would have time before and after a pre-conference workshop I was attending mid-day on the following day. I decided I wanted to visit Animal Kingdom Park on my arrival day, as I had never been before and Rivers of Light would be showing that day. For my second day I chose Epcot because I figured it would be easiest to come and go between that park and the workshop next door at the Yacht Club Conference Center.

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□Through a special link provided by the conference I accessed an online portal for purchasing theme park tickets that is unique for conference attendees. The options will vary depending on the arrangements made by the conference organizers. In this case, I was offered the option of purchasing one day park tickets that are valid after either 2pm or 5pm Twilight (discounted) or all day (full price, peak season rates apply). In addition there were special options for multi-day park tickets at discount that also included a choice of one "bonus" experience ticket (either Disney waterpark, either Disney miniature golf course, Disney's Oak Trail Golf Course or the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex). There are also Park Hopper options for all the above. I decided on a two

day base ticket (without Park Hopper) and made my purchase through the special conference portal.

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□ Unlike purchasing tickets directly through Disney's website, when you purchase them through the conference portal there is a stated 48-hour wait until you can expect to receive the reservation number that you need to make Fast Pass+ reservations. When you receive the confirmation email you can link the tickets to your account in My Experience.

- How do I pack for both business and vacation?

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□ Figuring out what to pack was a bit harder. Largely because there was overlap between conference and vacation happening on the same day in a couple cases. And what I wear to travel on the plane is usually different than what I wear in the parks, especially in warm weather. The answer turned out to be the same as for many challenging clothing situations: layers.

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□ For my arrival day on which I was planning to head right to Animal Kingdom after Magical Express delivered me to the Yacht Club Resort, I wore shorts, a t-shirt, and a light cardigan that I could stow in my day pack.

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□ One of the trickiest days to pack for was the second day when I planned to head to Epcot at rope drop, walk back to the Conference Center for a workshop after lunch, and then return to the park afterwards. I ended up bringing two outfits for this day, one a slip-on wrinkle-free business casual dress with cardigan (conference rooms are always cold!) and sandals, and a t-shirt and shorts outfit with comfortable shoes for the park (same cardigan for my day pack). Fortunately I was able to make a quick change before and after the conference time.

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□ My final day, too, was tricky to plan because it would begin with a few final hours of conference time followed by an afternoon at Disney Springs and then a late flight home. The temperature difference between Orlando and home was significant, and I would be sending my luggage ahead with Resort Airline Check-In before noon. I ended up packing another slip-on wrinkle-free business casual dress to wear with sandals to the conference, keeping my comfortable shoes in my day pack, and packing fleece-lined leggings to put on under my dress at the airport so I wouldn't freeze when I arrived home.

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□ - Surprise opportunity

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☐ On the third day of my trip the conference began early in the morning and lasted until 5pm. I had used up my two-day ticket and had not anticipated any additional park time. However, I discovered from a fellow attendee that additional park tickets at the conference rate can be purchased from the hotel's front desk. The idea of visiting the Magic Kingdom for the evening was just too magical to pass up, and I was able to purchase a 5pm Twilight ticket at lunch time to use that evening. To my surprise (and delight), the ticket showed up immediately in the My Experience App and I was able to make Fast Pass+ reservations right away. It turns out that when you are making reservations for just one person (rather than a family of four) there are a lot more opportunities. I was riding the Seven Dwarves Mine Train using a Fast Pass+ by 6pm!

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☐ Final Thoughts

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☐- Take advantage of special theme park ticket pricing for conference attendees, both in advance and during your trip

☐- Pack and dress in layers!

☐- Pace yourself

☐- Despite all the pulls on your attention, work to "stay in the moment" and enjoy every aspect of both the conference and your vacation time

☐- If you have the opportunity to attend a conference located at Walt Disney World: embrace it!

About The Author: Derry Wade works in higher education, is mom of two and hobbyist baker from Virginia who appreciates any opportunity to enjoy and spread some Disney magic.

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