

Making the Most of Split Stay at Walt Disney World Resorts: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Stacey Nyman, PassPorter Guest Contributor

One of my family's favorite parts of a trip to Walt Disney World is the resort we call home during our stay. So far, we have stayed in a total of 13 Walt Disney World Resort hotels in the nine years we have been visiting regularly as a family. Split stays, where you stay at more than one resort during a trip, have made it possible for us to experience such a variety of accommodations. While we don't always have a split stay, we do find ourselves resort hopping during most vacations.

As we sat down to plan our 13-day vacation for July 2017 we knew that we wanted to stay at two resorts. Our family of six became Disney Vacation Club (DVC) members the previous summer. Our point budget isn't huge so we knew that it would only cover a small portion of our vacation. In general, we try to save the resorts with the best accommodations for the end of our vacations. It makes it easier to move into a room with more space and better amenities than going the other direction. Therefore, we allotted the last four days of the trip to a DVC resort, choosing Polynesian, our home resort, as soon as our 11-month booking window opened (we ended up changing to Animal Kingdom Lodge 7 months out). The first nine days we hoped to secure a reservation for two rooms at Coronado Springs Resort.

Plans went astray when we could not book that many days in a row with the same room category due to limited availability. Because we knew we would have to move into a new room anyway, we decided to go ahead and book a different resort and split those first nine days. We ended up booking at Caribbean Beach Resort for the first four nights, Coronado Springs Resort for the next five nights, and our DVC stay at Animal Kingdom Lodge for the final four nights. At that point we were happy and started really getting excited for our trip, until discounts were released! As soon as the summer 2017 promotions were announced we were on the phone attempting to apply the discount to our current reservation. Unfortunately, there was not availability for all five nights of our Coronado Springs Resort stay. We were able to secure three nights and ended up booking two nights at the Cabins at Fort Wilderness. If you lost count, we stayed at four different Walt Disney World Resort hotels during our 13-night stay.

There are several reasons guests choose a split stay. As I stated above, availability might be a problem, especially if you are planning an

extended stay. Discounts drive many to try a split stay. Perhaps someone couldn't get a discount to cover their stay at one hotel as what happened to us. Many times, however, discounts provide a way for a guest to afford a few nights in a hotel that they might not have a chance to experience. Some guests might have a "bucket list" to stay at every Walt Disney Resort hotel. Split stays make that more manageable. Finally, guests might have planned a vacation in a very specific way and having a split stay makes the trip easier. For example, if a guest wants to immerse themselves in the Food & Wine Festival at Epcot during a portion of their trip, staying at an Epcot area resort hotel is a huge benefit, but can be quite costly considering they are all deluxe hotels. The guest might choose to stay at a value or moderate hotel for a portion of the trip to save money and then move to one of the deluxe resorts around Epcot for a few days.

Though split stays are exciting and fun, they can also be daunting and difficult if you are not prepared. Here are some tips to make transitions a bit easier to manage.

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 • Packing: Many times, people pack a suitcase per person. When managing a split stay, it may be helpful to pack a suitcase per hotel, or use packing cubes or other organizational items to keep items separate from one another. Pack another bag just for daily essentials like personal hygiene items, medication, sunscreen, etc. This may not be the best trip to buy a lot of groceries. Remember, whatever you bring, you have to move to the next resort. Think about essentials. Finally, if you only have a few days in a hotel, organization is key. If you are someone who needs to unpack all suitcases in order to relax, some good preparations while packing is important. If you don't feel the need to unpack, I wouldn't recommend it. Living out of the suitcase may be the easiest if you are only staying put for a couple days.

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 • Time Management: Split stays are not difficult to manage, but they do take some extra time. When we move to the next resort, we have to know what our plans for the day are so we can make sure we have enough time to get everything done. Often, on the mornings of the switch, our plans are a bit more relaxed. We won't plan an early breakfast reservation or commit to rope drop or early Fast Pass+ reservations. It is recommended that you check out of the current hotel before checking into the next one. The reservation system will automatically check you out at some point, but it's best to avoid surprises when you go to check into your new hotel, especially if it is before 11 a.m.

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 • Transportation to your next resort: We drive from Chicago, so we always just pack up our van and head to the next destination. But

what if you don't drive? You can always get a cab or an uber to get to your next resort. However, there is an even easier way. Just stop at Bell Services and tell them that you need your luggage transferred to your next resort. They will take care of everything for you and your luggage will be waiting for you at the hotel later in the day. Guests are not allowed to bring luggage on any form of Disney transportation, besides Disney's Magical Express which transports guests to and from the airport.

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- Be prepared to not have a home for a period of time: Chances are high that your room at the next hotel will not be ready until later in the day. If you check out of your current hotel at 8 a.m. and expect to be in your next resort's room immediately, you may be disappointed and in an uncomfortable situation if you don't have easy access to your belongings! Plan ahead for your day and pack everything you may need with you in a backpack. If you are going to a park, simply park what you need and head out. If you plan to enjoy the resort, don't forget to pack your swimsuit and whatever else you would need for a day at the pool.

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- Do your research: When preparing for a split stay, it's best to know everything you can about the resorts you will be visiting. Often due to the nature of a split stay, you may not be staying in one place for very long. By the time you've just started exploring, it may be time to move onto the next part of your stay. Learning about what you want to do and see at your resort ahead of time will be helpful. Once you have accomplished those goals, everything else is a bonus!

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Split stays can be really fun and exciting if your expectations and preparations are in line. They offer a unique view of Walt Disney World and can allow you to experience so much in a shorter amount of time. Whether they happen out of choice or necessity, flexibility is key. Give yourself plenty of extra time. If all else fails, you are at Walt Disney World! Take a deep breath, enjoy the views and have so much fun.

About The Author: Stacey Nyman is the Education Manager at the Swedish American Museum and Brunk Children's Museum of Immigration in Chicago, IL. She is an avid reader and Disney podcast listener. When she isn't at Walt Disney World with her husband and four awesome children, she is planning her next trip.

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