

On the Road to Walt Disney World: Doing "The Drive"

by Jennifer and Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Your family's summer road trip to Walt Disney World is just around the bend, and maybe you're beginning to identify with the Clark W. Griswold family, from "National Lampoon's Summer Vacation." Then again, with a **little planning**, maybe your journey won't be a comedy of errors. Head down to the local video store, rent a copy of "Summer Vacation," enjoy the family's visit to Roy Wally World, and learn how NOT to drive cross-country. Afterwards, you may find some of these tips useful:

Nobody likes a late-night motel hunt, so if you **reserve a hotel room ahead of time** you'll be the family hero. If you'd rather keep your schedule flexible, create a list of alternate stopping points that offer decent meals and lodging (don't forget the phone numbers). Phone ahead during the afternoon, once you have a better idea of how the day is shaping up, to be sure there's a room waiting for you.

Keep the kids busy. Many families bring enough games and activities to last the entire journey, and some invest in DC-powered TV/VCR/DVD combos, or portable DVD players. Books-on-tape (or CD) are another great idea. The Harry Potter books are more than enough for a two-day journey in each direction.

Nothing is more expensive or frustrating than a breakdown when you're far from home. **Service your car before you leave** -- check the tires, brakes, transmission and air conditioning, change the oil, and top-off all fluids. Take extra care if you're driving your motor home or pulling a trailer-schedule a checkup several weeks in advance, just in case you need a special part.

Let's not fool ourselves. Driving is still **more dangerous** than flying. Improve your family's odds by switching drivers frequently and traveling no more than 500 miles per day. 24-hour marathon drives may get you there sooner, but you'll pay for it in risk and exhaustion. And face it, after a high-energy Disney vacation, the last thing anyone needs is a drowsy driver behind the wheel on the way home.

Make the most of your **AAA membership**. The auto club offers travel discounts, the latest news on highway construction, all the maps you can possibly want, and their famous Trip-Tik route planning service.

Veteran Disney drivers will appreciate the **highway interchange on I-4** in Orlando. Exits 26C and 26D feed Osceola Parkway, which is the most direct route to Disney's Animal Kingdom, Blizzard Beach, Disney's Wide World of Sports, Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, the All-Star resorts, and the Pop Century Resort.

Why put your vacation on hold until you reach Disney? **Plan visits to nearby points of interest.** Just what roads do lead to Orlando, and what are the sights?

East Coast travelers usually cruise south on I-95, switching to I-4 near Daytona. Popular side trips along the way include Washington D.C., Williamsburg, VA, Cape Hatteras, NC, Charleston, SC, and the Daytona/Cape Canaveral area in Florida.

Drivers a bit farther inland (to as far west as Pittsburgh) pick routes that include I-77, I-79 and/or I-81, eventually joining I-95 in South Carolina. For a great side route for history and nature buffs, stay on I-81 all the way to Knoxville, TN, where it joins I-75 for the march through Georgia. National Parks and Civil War battle sites dot the route from Gettysburg, PA down through the Shenandoah Valley (Disney wanted to build a theme park here), and on through the Smoky Mountains.

I-75 figures into the plans of most Midwest drivers, which is nearly anyone from Ohio to Chicago, St. Louis and beyond, as nearly every preferred route merges with I-75 before it reaches Georgia. The Chattanooga Tennessee/Northern Georgia area has a variety of interesting natural and historic sites, and it's a perfect choice for your half-way stopover. Those farther south and west inevitably gravitate towards I-10, which hugs the Gulf coast until it, too, meets I-75 in Florida (who can resist a stop in New Orleans?) Once on I-75, Disney World-bound travelers head south past Ocala, Florida to Florida's Turnpike, which cuts southeast towards Orlando and I-4.

Tip: If your route includes I-75, consider Dave Hunter's invaluable guidebook, *Along Interstate 75* (Mile Oak Publishing). Dave maps out every mile from Detroit to the Florida border (and back) in loving detail, covering the services available at each exit and every point of interest along the way. This is a **great book** for anyone pulling a trailer or driving a motor home, as Dave's maps even show elevation changes along the way. (Note: With more families driving to Walt Disney World this year, sales of this popular guide has been brisk. If your local store can't get it, you'll find it at Amazon.com).

About The Authors: [Jennifer and Dave Marx](#) are the founders of PassPorter Travel Press/MediaMarx, Inc. and the authors of dozens of

bestselling books. They live in Ann Arbor, Michigan and frequently travel within the U.S. and abroad.

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