

# Budget Disney World Transportation: Transportation

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Today we are going to look at transportation options.

So far in our hypothetical vacation, our family of four has decided to go to Walt Disney World from August 16 to August 24. Our family includes Mom, Dad, and two children, ages 9 and 5. And again, we are going to look at all aspects of transportation, from the trip there and back, to the differences in staying on and off property.

Once you have your dates and your resort confirmed, it's time to figure out how you are going to travel. Fly? Drive? First, let's talk about driving. Are you within a one day drive of Walt Disney World? If not, are you a commando style driver, driving straight through? Can you share the driving with anyone else in the car? Is your car in good enough shape to make the trip? Will you be able to put up with your children/spouse throughout a long car trip? And what about cost?

We are going to base our family of four in Philadelphia, approximately 16-17 hours of drive time straight through. The first consideration in cost is the condition of your car. Before beginning any long road trip, you want to have the oil changed, the fluids checked, the tires rotated, and the brakes checked. Sitting on the side of I-95 with a leaking radiator is no way to start your vacation. A little preventative maintenance goes a long way. You also will want to clean your car, inside and out. It's no fun being stuck in a dirty car for 17 hours. Next consideration, of course, is gas. At today's prices, fuel is a huge part of your cost. At \$3.25 or so a gallon, and averaging 25 miles to the gallon, you are looking at about \$50 every 375 miles or so. For our Philadelphia to Orlando trip, that means about \$150 in gas. And, factor in the ride home, so you are looking at around \$300 in fuel to get there and back. If you don't drive through, you will need a place to spend the night. Most Interstates have a variety of chain hotels along the way, and if you are planning to stop, make a reservation in advance. Add about \$75 to the trip for this one way, and another \$75 for the way back. And of course, there is food for the road. We generally pack a cooler with water, fruit and snacks, and you could add sandwiches and yogurts to this. Just make sure you have plenty of ice, and if you do stop, refill your cooler with ice from the hotel. If you are planning on stopping for meals, factor that in to your budget, about \$6/person for fast food, about \$10/person for a sit down meal plus tip.

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The down side of driving is that you take a full day away from each side of your vacation. Our family would need to leave Friday night to arrive on Saturday, and the drivers would be pretty tired on that first day. And you would need to either leave a day early from Walt Disney World, or come back on Monday. The plus side to driving is that you will have your car, and you are free to go where you please! If our family stays off property, they have instant transportation to and from Walt Disney World, and to any other attractions they want to see. If our family stays on property, they can use their car to leave Disney property, which opens up many more dining options. They will also have free theme park parking as an on-site resort guest. Whether on or off property, our family can stop for groceries at a local Orlando grocery store and look to save even more money! Now let's talk about flying. Ticket prices are also feeling the pinch of rising fuel costs, and cheap tickets are getting harder to find. However, our Philadelphia-based family still has several options. There are several relatively inexpensive carriers out there, including JetBlue, AirTran, Southwest and Allegiant Air. You need to decide how much you are willing to spend on airfare, and be flexible! Many times, a flight with a layover will be a little less expensive, if you are willing to go to Orlando, via, say, Cleveland. There are also direct flights that are relatively inexpensive, but many of them take off very early in the morning or very late at night. The best thing to do is to fare-watch. This usually involves checking for good fares every day, and grabbing them when you see them. At 5 and 9, our children may be eligible for a child's discount. For an example, AirTran's current fares are \$83 one way down and \$128 back for our time chosen. That's \$1012 for our family to fly. Makes driving look a little better, doesn't it? ) If you see a cheap fare, be careful of what it entails. Some carriers charge a per-bag fee, some charge extra to choose your seat, some don't let you choose your seat at all, and some have very strict cancellation policies.

If you are flying, you need to make a decision about getting to your resort. Orlando has two airports, Orlando International Airport (MCO) and Sanford Airport. If you fly into MCO, you can take advantage of Disney's Magical Express (DME). DME does not operate out of Sanford. DME is Disney's free bus shuttle to and from the airport. You can sign up for this if you are staying at a Disney-owned resort. Your luggage is taken care of, and you board the DME bus and get ferried to your resort. Your luggage arrives sometime after you do. This is a nice perk, available only to resort guests. But keep in mind that using DME does not allow you a grocery stop. You can also use a transportation service such as a town car company, which will take you to an off-property hotel for about \$112 round trip.

If you decide to rent a car, you first must look at what type of car you need, and what specials are out there. Our family can rent a mini-van

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from a reputable car company for about \$200 for the week. Remember that the cost does not include fuel, and make sure your auto insurance carrier will cover you in a rental car. Even on-property, a car can be a valuable asset, and you will be able to stop for groceries.

There are many decisions to be made when considering your transportation options. You need to look at how you travel, and what you will be comfortable with. Once you figure out how you want to travel, you are ready for the next step!

Check back next week for Part 3: Choosing Theme Park Admission!

*About The Author: Sue Kulick is a resident of the Pocono Mountains and an avid Disney fan. She and her husband, Steve, live in a log home with their Golden Retrievers, Cody and Belle and their cat Tigger.*

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