

Budget Disney World Lodging: Accommodations

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

You've seen the commercials on TV, "Disney for \$1600 dollars? Yeah, we can do that!" followed by the thundering hooves of six white ponies and a glass coach.

The marketing behind that commercial is great, but most budgets really don't include the \$2700 for the coach and the ponies! While a Disney vacation will never be "cheap" there are definitely ways to do it on a budget and have a fantastic time. Over the course of this four-part series we are going to talk about seasons, transportation, lodging, park tickets, dining, and souvenirs.

The first, and perhaps the most important, decision to make is when you are planning to go. The Walt Disney World Resort divides the calendar into "seasons" and there is a difference in lodging and dining prices during those seasons. There is also a difference in crowd levels, and that can make a difference in your budget, too! For 2011, the Walt Disney World seasons are divided like this:

- * Value season: 1/2-2/16, 8/14-9/29 (for Value and Moderate resorts), 7/17-9/29 (for Deluxe resorts)

- * Regular season: 2/27-3/10, 5/1-6/2, 7/4-16 (deluxes), 5/1-8/6 (campsites), 9/30-10/22 (deluxes).

- * Summer season: 6/3-8/13

- * Fall season: 10/23-12/22

- * Peak season: 2/17-26 and 3/11-4/30

- * Holiday season: 12/16-12/31

Prices for lodging and even some dining increases with the seasons. (More on that later!) The least expensive time to visit is during Value Season. For those traveling with younger children, the decision on whether to take the children out of school needs to be made.

Summertime, spring break and Christmas break are the highest seasons, since that is a common time for families to travel. For the sake of this article, we have chosen August 16-24th for our budget vacation. Our family of four includes Mom, Dad, and two children, ages 5 and 9.

If you make the decision to go during Value Season, you might end up getting better mileage from your vacation dollar. Lines are shorter, restaurants less crowded, transportation easier to navigate. So how does this help your budget? Well, here's how NOT to do it.

One year, my husband and I took my stepson and nephew during spring break. We were resort guests, and we took the monorail to the Magic Kingdom. The driver told us that the park had been closed to all but resort guests by this time, about 4:00 pm. The maximum capacity was 50,000, and the park was already up to 60,000! Due to the crowds, we needed to pick which attractions we really wanted to see. We rode Haunted Mansion, Alien Encounter, and the Tomorrowland Transportation Authority. All FASTPASSES were already gone for the day. We had dining reservations at Tony's Town Square, for which we waited almost an hour to be seated. After dinner, we did Space Mountain and Carousel of Progress. By that time, it was after 10:00 pm, and we were all exhausted, so we headed back to the resort.

Was this the best use of our vacation dollar? Absolutely not. We paid the same price for park tickets that we would have had we gone in September when there are no lines. The boys were disappointed to miss such favorites as Jungle Cruise, Splash Mountain, and Pirates of the Caribbean. It made the price paid for the tickets seem a bit over-the-top to Mom and Dad. So traveling in off-season will help you get more bang for your vacation buck!

So now that you have decided when to travel (during Value Season if at all possible), it's time to decide where to stay. You have two choices; on-property and off-property. There are pros and cons to each, and the difference in the costs can be a deciding factor. Let's look at off-property accommodations first.

Orlando offers a plethora of vacation accommodation choices. Accommodations are available at well-known chain hotels for as little as \$69/night depending on the time of year. Or, you can stay at a hotel that offers suites, which often include a fridge and microwave. One such chain is located three miles from the main gate of WDW, and for \$127/night, you get a kitchenette, as well as access to a free hot breakfast every day. This can be a big savings! There are also many vacation homes available for rent by the night or the week. These often include a full kitchen and a bedroom suite, and can be found for as low as \$79/night! If you are staying off-property, be sure to find out what type of shuttle service your hotel offers. If your hotel does not offer shuttle service, or you want to go other places than Walt Disney World, you will need to figure transportation into your budget. And if you do rent a car, as a day guest, parking at WDW will cost you \$14/day.

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Now let's look at on-property resorts.

On-property will usually cost you more per night. A Value Resort will cost you an average of \$82/night for a standard room. There are no in-room cooking facilities, and no free hot breakfasts! You may not get as much room for your money, but there are perks that come with staying on site. First, you can utilize Disney's free airport transportation service, Disney's Magical Express, to get from the airport to your hotel room (more on that under transportation). Second, you will have access to all Walt Disney World on-site transportation systems: monorail, bus, and boat. Third, you will not have to pay the \$14 day parking charge, even if you have a car with you and drive to the parks. This amount can really add up. For our 8 day vacation, that's \$112 in your pocket! On-property guests can also take advantage of Extra Magic Hours, which can add up to four hours to your daily time in the theme parks. And of course, there is the famous Disney service and theming. If you are looking for a vacation home with cooking facilities, Disney Vacation Club Villas are available for nightly stays, but a studio starts at \$305/night, not exactly a bargain. There are ways to maximize your dining dollar even without cooking facilities, but we'll get to that under dining!

The choice of on- or off-property is a very personal and budget-conscious one. You must take into account the cost, the transportation, the dining, and what is important to you when you vacation. If you like the idea of being immersed in the Disney magic, having the ability to head back to your resort at any time for some down time, and not having to worry about your own transportation, then an on-property resort might be for you. If you don't spend a lot of time at your resort, want to see attractions other than Disney, and love the idea of a free breakfast, staying at an off-property resort might be just the ticket for you!

Read [Part 2: Getting To and From Walt Disney World On A Budget!](#)

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