

Walt Disney World At The Holidays: Tips for Surviving The Busy Season

by Ann Weber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Although we had been to Walt Disney World several times, last year was our first experience going at what is probably the busiest season for the World.

I spent a lot of time researching in preparation for our Walt Disney World trip. After our trip, I realized that even with all of the knowledge I had gained beforehand, I learned even more lessons while there. I want to share with you some of what I learned so that you can have the most magical holiday possible at Walt Disney World.

The first and most important tip is to plan early. Hotels, airlines, and Disney's Advanced Dining Reservations (ADRs) fill early at this busy time of year. We were able to get a very good price on airfare almost 12 months out, so we purchased it. I kept watching as time passed, and the rates only went up. This won't always be true, but frequently it was.

The next tip is equally important -- be flexible. For example, because we made most of our ADRs on the day the reservation window opened (180 days in advance of our trip), we were able to originally get all of the ones we wanted. However our flight times changed at least four times over the course of that year and we found that once we arrived at Walt Disney World, some of our ADRs no longer fit in our plans. So we canceled them and tried to get new ones, but it can be difficult to obtain ADRs on short notice. If you are planning a trip on shorter notice, try some of the less well known locations. At the resort restaurants, we saw several people walk up without ADRs and be seated within a reasonable amount of time. On New Years Eve, we decided we wanted lunch earlier than planned so we could go to the Animal Kingdom to see the special Christmas Parade (a very fun parade!) and do a few things before that park closed. We called the dining reservation number to change our ADR and we were told that Whispering Canyon Cafe, where we had our original ADR, was completely booked for the entire day. This was not surprising for New Year's Eve. We decided to go early and see if we could get in. We were seated in only 10 minutes (almost an hour before our original ADR). The Trails End Buffet at Fort Wilderness is also a less crowded location with good food and a relaxing atmosphere.

At this busy time of year, I recommend staying on Disney property. When the parks start to fill to capacity, you are guaranteed to get into a park every day. You are not guaranteed that you can get into a specific

park (for example the Magic Kingdom may be full but you can still get into Epcot), so remember -- flexibility is key! Additionally, by staying on site, you can choose between a variety of transportation options that best fit your plans.

Go to the parks very early. We found we were able to see most of what we wanted to see each day before the crowds became too overwhelming. On the 29th, we were planning to have a late breakfast at the Grand Floridian and then head into the Magic Kingdom to watch our daughter march down Main Street USA with her high school band. We changed our plans (again, flexibility) and went to the park bright and early since we talked to people who had been turned away the previous day from both the Magic Kingdom as well as Animal Kingdom because the parks had hit capacity. Luckily, by the time they started turning people away, we were already in our park of choice.

Remember, FASTPASS is your friend. FASTPASS is available to everyone, not just Walt Disney World resort guests so take advantage whenever possible. FASTPASS rules and tips change from year to year, so make sure you check the most recent edition of [PassPorter](#) and/or visit <http://www.alleasnet.com/tp/fastpass.htm> before heading out to get the latest tips.

Leave the parks whenever the crowds start to frustrate you. There are many things to do outside of the parks. Take the time to go and see the decorations at some of the resorts. We went to the Yacht and Beach Club, the Grand Floridian, the Wilderness Lodge, and Fort Wilderness. The decorations were amazing at all of these. Don't make my mistake -- remember your camera! Some of the resorts with water have small boats that you can rent and go out on the lagoon. There are several miniature golf courses, and much more. We enjoyed spending time relaxing at our Fort Wilderness cabin. The cabin had two TVs, so everyone did not have to agree on what to watch.

If Disney offers a test run of their New Year's Eve festivities on December 30th, take advantage of this. We do not like crowds, so we decided we would celebrate the New Year in our cabin and get an early start on January 1st to enjoy the parks while everyone else recovered from their late night for New Year's Eve. We noticed that Magic Kingdom was having their Super New Years Eve fireworks at midnight on the 30th. They were also having two SpectroMagic parades that evening, and the park was open until 3:00 am. Our goal for the evening was to see the parade and the fireworks. Any rides that we took were bonuses. Some of the popular rides still had some significant waits, but we were able to find plenty to do for our evening.

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In addition to the special fireworks, some of the outdoor dances, etc. were also running in a practice mode for the next evening. It was fun dancing to the Cha Cha Slide as we were walking (dancing) from Tomorrowland to Frontierland to get ready for SpectroMagic. While we waited in line to watch the parade, my son went into Diamond Horseshoe Saloon where they were teaching line dancing and had a great time doing some old dances and learning some new ones. It was very easy to find a good spot for the parade. Even people coming at the last minute were able to see. After the parade, we decided we would head to Tomorrowland. Due to an unexpected breakdown of Buzz Lightyear Space Ranger Spin while we were on it, we were running through Tomorrowland trying to get to the Castle area when the music started for the fireworks. We decided to stop in the middle of Tomorrowland and wait to see where would be the best place to go for the fireworks. We were happy and amazed to see the fireworks were everywhere and you really could be just about anywhere in the park and have a great view of at least one set of fireworks.

So, if you are planning on Christmas at Walt Disney World, plan, stay flexible, and have a very magical and happy holiday.

About The Author: Ann Weber is an avid traveler who loves exploring new places as well as returning to old favorites such as Walt Disney World with her husband and two teenagers.

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