

Walt Disney World With Teens? Absolutely!: An Adventurers Guide

by Ann Smith, PassPorter Guest Contributor

There are a lot of people who think Walt Disney World is just for young children. Many of the parents of my teenage sons' friends think that their child is too old to enjoy Disney World. "They'll be bored and complaining." Oh, how I love to prove them wrong.

My oldest son is 14-years-old and has been going to Walt Disney World annually (sometimes two to three times a year) since he was four-years-old. Not once have I ever heard him use the phrase "I'm bored!" at Walt Disney World.

There are so many things for a teen and pre-teen to do and, no, it's not riding Rock 'n' Roller Coaster over and over again. (Even though my teenager did do that once!)

Let's begin at the beginning -- the resorts. If you are staying at a Walt Disney World resort there are so many things to keep a teen amused. Every resort has a swimming pool. My sons like to bring along a couple of those soaker balls. They can toss that to each other for hours in the pool. Many times other kids (and adults) get into the game.

Each resort also has an arcade where teens can go and play all of the latest video games. The only drawback is this can become quite expensive as each game costs between 50 cents and \$1 to play. Teens can go in the arcades without adult supervision.

If you are lucky to be staying at a resort that has a marina, I highly recommend taking advantage of the Family Plan. For a little over \$200 you can have unlimited use of the recreational facilities at the resort for your length of stay -- bicycles, water racers, pontoons, paddle boats, kayaks, etc. Several of these can be used by a child over 12 years old without an adult along for the ride. You can also rent by the hour and by the day. Last May we stayed at Port Orleans Riverside and we purchased the Family Plan. All three of our children (ages 8, 11 & 13 at the time) were able to rent bicycles while my husband and I took a boat ride on the lake. My oldest son was also able to take the Sea Rayer out on the lake by himself.

Okay, now you're ready to go to the parks. We don't like to tour the parks "commando style" -- racing to see "everything" on a tight schedule. We like to visit a park in the morning, then when we get hot or tired (or

both), return to our resort to swim, relax, or play, and then return to the park in the evening! Of course when you are in the parks, your teen will probably want to ride all of the thrill rides. You might think your teens won't want to go to Magic Kingdom to ride Dumbo or the Teacups but they might surprise you! My teen loves getting his picture taken every visit on Dumbo and has never turned down his little sister or Mom when asked to ride Teacups. Another favorite of my kids is the Hall of Presidents. They think it's so cool to see the things they are learning about in school. So, don't pass up an attraction or downplay it as a reason to take a nap -- you never know what might capture your teen's imagination!

One of our absolute favorite times to visit Walt Disney World is in the fall during Epcot's International Food and Wine Festival. My teen has sampled many unique, exotic dishes at the festival, such as escargot and frogs legs. While we would never probably order these delicacies at a restaurant, the Food and Wine Festival is a perfect place to widen your teens' culinary palates and allow them to sample foods they might never otherwise have tried.

Speaking of food, a great restaurant to take a teen is Whispering Canyon Cafe at Disney's Wilderness Lodge. My son has a birthday in October which usually coincides with our trip. One particularly memorable meal was his 11th birthday. We told the server it was his birthday, and we were assured they would do something special. I expected a cake, but much to my delight (and my son's surprise and embarrassment), our server came out with a cake and a microphone in hand and asked all of the girls 14 and under to please come to the table to sing Happy Birthday to Jamie! Jamie sat there very red-faced, but he still talks about that dinner to this day.

While I know safety is an issue everywhere in this day and age, in general we feel safe at Walt Disney World in allowing our teens some freedom. At the resorts, I usually allow my sons to go to the food court and arcade unsupervised. This would depend on the maturity of the child. But if there is too much "together time" you can always consider allowing your teens some freedom within reason. Communication is key -- they must let you know where they are going to be and when they will be returning. In the age of cell phones, there is very little reason to not be able to reach your teens to check up on them!

If you are staying at a Walt Disney World resort you can put charging privileges on your teen's room card. We were hesitant to do this with our son for fear he would lose it but decided to give him a chance to show a little responsibility. Well, he did happen to lose his card but we called the front desk, which immediately stopped the card and then

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issued him a new one once we arrived back at the resort. Having the card also gave him a sense of responsibility. Not to mention, it was pretty great being able to tell him, "Go to the food court and get us some drinks," while we lounged at the pool.

I hope this gives you some ideas for surviving Walt Disney World with a teen. My oldest son will be going to Walt Disney World with his high school band this coming March. Hopefully the lessons we've learned on past trips will come in handy!

About The Author: Ann is a PassPorter Message Board Guide as well as a moderator at the Donny Osmond fan site <http://www.osmemories.com>. She and her husband live in PA with their three children.

Article last updated: 9/13/2007

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