

## The Reluctant Mouseketeer: Discovering the Disney Magic

by Nicole Courson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The first time I visited Walt Disney World I was nine years old. To even call it Walt Disney World is a bit of a stretch, because the year was 1979 and the entire resort was made up of the Magic Kingdom. Disney had actually just broken ground for Epcot during our visit. Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom were no doubt stars in some Imagineer's eyes. But to my younger brother Jimmy and I, those days spent endlessly spinning in the teacups and screaming on Space Mountain with our parents were unforgettable.

If we could've gone back, we would have, but as the years went by there were always reasons not to: too busy with soccer/school/family, we were saving for college, and we'd "outgrown" the whole Disney experience by the ripe old age of sixteen, surely.

The truth? I never stopped wanting to go back. In my head I planned a trip for my high school graduation, then for Jimmy's high school graduation, and finally, my college graduation. Except then I decided to get married immediately following college.

Enter the Reluctant Mouseketeer.

We'll call him Mike. He was my Prince Charming, a handsome, kind-hearted man with green eyes and dreams as big as Fantasyland. We dated several years before he joined the military, and following our engagement I told him that I'd secretly dreamed of honeymooning in Walt Disney World for years.

His reaction wasn't what I expected.

"I don't get the whole 'Mouse' thing," he told me, seeming as shocked by my wishes as I was by his lack of interest. "We're adults, isn't that the kind of thing to do with a family someday?"

His reasoning, coupled with the fact that we'd need pretty much every available penny to set up housekeeping in a foreign country, seemed sound. So I agreed, somewhat disappointedly, but still secretly planning a trip in the not-to-distant future.

So I asked again following his next assignment, back in the States. Again, the look of surprised confusion, and he said, "But we don't have kids yet. Why would we want to go without kids?"

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Again, two years later, with our little guy Austin toddling around the living room of our base housing unit, Mike presented me with even more reasons to not go to Walt Disney World: the Florida weather, a too-big-for-our-military-budget expense, and Austin being too little to remember this no-doubt once in a lifetime journey.

I've learned the hard way that there are a dozen easy ways for people to talk themselves out of that Disney vacation: the crowds, the heat, and the expense just being a few of them. And I've also learned that there are far more reasons to go, if they'd just carefully consider their own arguments.

The last time I approached Mike with my Disney vacation plea, I had a battle strategy the size of Epcot. Our two boys were by then nine and eleven, well within the "remembering" range. I was willing to work extra hours to pay for the trip without touching our household budget. We'd stay on property (no driving) at a value resort (low cost), use the meal plan (most expenses paid for before we get there), and visit during the month of December (lowest crowds, low temperature). Our best friends and their kids were in -- they'd been there three times before. My mother, my brother and his family were in, too. All I needed was Mike's okay.

Mike agreed, however reluctantly, knowing when he was beat and under the condition that he could keep any princesses that he found. I readily agreed, dizzy with the thrill of finally making our trip official. He shook his head as we made dining reservations six months out, rolled his eyes as the boys and I sang along with old Disney soundtracks in the car. But being our Prince, he boarded the plane with a smile on his face and a reminder that he was holding me to the princess promise -- he'd be keeping any he found.

Our first day in the Magic Kingdom, my Reluctant Mouseketeer spotted Mary Poppins. His eyes widened. His jaw dropped. His head turned to the rest of us, a look of childlike amazement on his face.

And just like that ... he was one of us.

The adult barrier gradually wore away the next few days, as he sported our son's Stitch hat and taunted my mother into riding the Tower of Terror. He sponsored his own "Beers of the World" tour around the World Showcase, flirted with Lady Tremaine, and on our last day, squeezed my hand and said, "We should do this again. You know, before the boys get too old."

I knew what he was saying, and I know in my heart what he meant. And

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And even as it may sound, I hope we never get too old to go back, because it's the closest thing to magic I've found.

And even the least likely, most charming prince of a husband can become a Mouseketeer with a little bit of planning...and the promise of a princess or two.

*About The Author: Nicole Courson lives in the magical kingdom of Pittsburgh, PA, with her two growing Mouseketeers and Prince Charming. They're planning their next trip to Walt Disney World in December of 2010 -- this time, with Mike's family.*

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