

When to Visit Walt Disney World: A Planning Guide

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

If you're anything like me, as soon as you're done with one Disney trip, you're probably already starting to plan the next trip in your head. In fact, if I'm honest, I'm already planning out the next trip before our current one and I'm sure I'm not alone.

But where do you start with planning a trip to Disney? One of the first questions I always find myself asking is, when in the year should we go? Of course, there are many different answers, depending on your family's particular needs.

Many people have no option on when they go, particularly if they have children of school age and they don't want them to miss school, in which case the holidays are the only times to visit. But of course that's the time that every other parent wants to visit as well, making the parks busy, particularly around Easter, Independence Day and Christmas.

We've visited at Christmas many times before, so we're familiar with just how crowded the parks can be. I've still not forgotten the trip I took to the Magic Kingdom on my own two days after Christmas, when the park was already closed to non-resort guests. The wait times for many of the big rides were more than three hours. I'd never felt claustrophobic in my life, but I certainly did that day, there were so many people around. It's not something I'd be eager to repeat.

If you do plan to go at a busy time of the year, then planning ahead is absolutely essential as is an early start. No sleeping around if you're going at a time of peak attendance. The earlier you hit the parks, the quieter they'll be and the more chance you'll have of getting on the major rides. If you're staying on Disney property, then using the Extra Magic Hours in the mornings makes sense.

If you're not early birds, all hope is not lost. Another approach is to use the evening Extra Magic Hours or take advantage of the long park hours that will no doubt be in effect. We've found evening hours can be hit or miss. Sometimes you'll find a park much quieter than you thought and sometimes you may be lucky enough to be able to hit everything in the park pretty quickly, with the exception of the one or two main attractions. One night during the Christmas season, Disney's Hollywood Studios were deserted and we were amongst very few people viewing the Osborne Lights. The reason? The lines for Rock 'n' Roller Coaster and Tower of Terror were still both over an hour at 10:00 pm!

Another option for those with children is to visit Disney during the summer holidays, when crowds are generally lower than during the peak holiday seasons. Of course, you have to offset that with the draining Florida heat, which can be too much for many. The heat seems to kick in earlier each year, with my visit in early May this year proving to be too hot for me, although by mid-October, it's usually very pleasant.

If you are traveling at a hot time of the year, plan to take things as slowly as you can, with plenty of breaks, perhaps mid-afternoon back at your hotel. Don't rush to do too much. There's no point pushing yourself in the heat. And don't forget to drink lots of water throughout the day. Hats and sunscreen are absolutely essential in the brutal Florida sun and it's worth planning a sit down meal for lunch, as that will take you inside into the cool air conditioning for welcome relief from the blistering heat.

Value Season is naturally the cheapest season to travel and generally falls in January, early February, from mid-July to the beginning of October, and from the end of November to mid-December. The middle dates bring the concern of hurricane activity and hot days, although September is offset by the arrival of Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party nights at the Magic Kingdom and, towards the end of the month, the start of the Food and Wine Festival at Epcot.

Perhaps our favorite time to visit is early December. Not only are all the holiday activities, such as the Osborne Lights at Disney's Hollywood Studios, Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party at the Magic Kingdom, and the Candlelight Processional at Epcot all in full swing, but you'll also find the crowds are low. An added bonus is the regular get-together of like-minded Disney fans, with the PassPorter Gathering taking place this year December 10-14, 2009.

The weather can be variable by this time of the year and that's a problem that plagues the winter months. On some days, it's into the 80s, but the next day, the highs may only hit the 50s and the lows could be the bottom end of the 30s. However, it's a problem that can easily be prepared for by layering the clothes you bring, so you can start with T-shirts and put extra clothes on over the top, if you need to.

Another fun time of the year to visit Walt Disney World is during Epcot's Flower and Garden Festival, when the park literally blooms into life with thousands of flowers and numerous topiaries dotted around. Provided you avoid Easter, the crowds shouldn't be too bad and the weather should, for the main part, be very pleasant, especially at the festival's dates have now been brought forward, with it running from March 3--May 16 2010, approximately two weeks earlier than 2009.

Another factor could be special offers or discounts. With the way the economy has been recently, this is something that Disney has very much extended this year, with free dining offered until mid-December. This year also saw the introduction of a seven nights for the price of four offer, which proved to be exceptionally popular. There's no way of knowing for sure, but with park attendances down and difficult times continuing, we could see more of the same for 2010 onwards.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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