

Five Tips for a Trouble Free Trip: Avoiding Disappointment With Your Disney Trips

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

A recent discussion with a close friend led me to start thinking about the role of vacation responsibilities and expectations in trip planning.

After this friend booked her Disney trip, she immersed herself in planning. Dining reservations? Check. Park plans? Check. She had a great time creating little surprises for her daughters, reading tips and tricks online, getting outfits and swim suits ready, making sure everything was as perfect as she could make it before they left. I was excited right along with her. This was their first big family trip!

When she arrived home, I couldn't wait to see how it had gone. I ran up to her office only to see a rather disappointed face. She looked exhausted. Now, don't get me wrong, Walt Disney World can be tiring, especially without a good plan and lots of time to relax built in to the schedule. But my friend's exhaustion looked more like disappointment. What went wrong? She was so prepared.

This got me thinking about how a great plan can go wrong… and after some conversations with previous Walt Disney World travelers and a lot of my own experience I've come up with five tips that will hopefully help everyone to come back refreshed and satisfied.

My first tip: Change Your Expectations. "Are you kidding me? I spent big bucks, I've planned every detail, I'm staying at a freaking deluxe hotel. How dare you tell me to lower my expectations! I've been dreaming of the moment my little princess sees the castle since before she was conceived, not to mention that wrap-around hug she will enjoy with Mickey." OK, folks, hate to burst your expectation bubble BUT the reality is this. The second you walk through the dreamlike gates of the Magic Kingdom after a bus ride, security check, and some trouble with your finger print working at the turnstile - you reach the moment you have been dreaming about, waiting for. There she is, your little princess, her eyes about to look down Main Street and yelp with delight and… what, are you kidding me, she has to go potty, now? Then to top it off she sticks herself to the back of your sweaty leg at the sight of Mickey, only to reappear when that large-headed mouse is safely tucked behind the scenes. Does this always happen? Absolutely not, there are going to be dozens of magical moments, but the reality is that they most likely aren't going to be the ones that you expected. Some of

my favorites: The joy my ten-year-old took in watching an opossum trained at Animal Kingdom, my youngest learning to dive under water to gather a sinking toy, enjoying a Dole Whip Float while people-watching, a great conversation on the bus ride to our hotel, and watching my daughters belly dance in Epcot. Changing my expectations has taking some real mental training for me. Instead of expecting my bags to be waiting in the room, I now plan on a six hour delay. I'm delighted when they arrive any earlier. Changing expectations is like tricking yourself into being happy!

The next tip - and this is a big one - dole out the responsibilities!

Here's what I have seen over and over, "You planned it, you booked it, you took care of the packing, details, transportation and now you are in charge when we get there! I'll hang back and relax. Since you did all of that work, obviously you like the planning and prefer me to have a perfect, relaxing trip. Thanks for watching the kids, thanks for knowing where we are supposed to be and when. I'm going to take a wee little nap while you talk to the front desk about transportation. No problem, you review those maps while I take a swim." OH MY GOSH!! This drives me crazy! So, beware… you may love to plan, you may be the Type A personality that wants to be in control, but you most definitely want a vacation! So, here is what you need to do. First, involve everyone in the planning. Lay out maps and books to interest them in the trip, review the rides and shows at each park, ask for their opinions for dining options, discuss the hotel and how the days are planned. Next, dole out the responsibilities! In our family, I take care of dealing with check in, organizing paperwork, packing and unpacking, as well as dining times. My husband is the coffee/drink fetcher, sunscreen applier, stroller organizer, FASTPASS guru, and transportation figure-outer. Both of my girls have a calendar with pictures that they can check to know what's going on each day. They are in charge of their personal items such as pins and money. They also help with basics such as keeping the hotel room clean and putting their clothes away. Speak up, if your spouse doesn't know your expectations, my guess is that they will be happy to relax and leave you to the vacation work.

The next trip-saving tip is to make time for you. We often stay near Epcot and my getaway is to shop in the World Showcase stores by myself. I like to start with a champagne drink in France and then meander through the shops at a turtle-like pace. This usually takes me a few hours. My husband on the other hand likes naps. I try to give him at least an afternoon or two off to take a long midday nap. My kids need a break too! Their break is usually a pirate cruise or cooking lesson and a trip to the hotel gift shop to shop alone. We are a family that travels well together, but trust me, everyone needs some alone time.

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So my second-to-last tip is you need to overcome the, "Oh my gosh, I can't take a nap! There is something awesome to ride, see, buy, drink, eat…" syndrome. It happens to me every time. I lay my head down for a quick cat nap and BING, my eyes open wide. "I bet we could walk to Epcot and ride Test Track and then get fast passes to Maelstrom if I head in right now before our dinner reservations in 3 hours." DON'T DO IT. Fight the urge. Trust me. You will not be happy when you have to deal with a screaming, tired child during dinner. You will be more likely to enjoy the fireworks with your eyes open. Rest, rest, rest. It's not a waste of money, it's an investment in your sanity!

And my final advice is this; expect delays and occasional disappointments. Have you ever read one trip review or heard one travel story that didn't involve a few mishaps? If all was perfect the story would never be half as interesting. Disappointments certainly spice things up. Expect them to happen. I once missed our bus stop only to be stuck with two sleeping children, a stroller, and a missing husband who got off at the right stop. He was not near me in the crowded bus! Turns out this is one of our favorite stories as the bus driver announced, "Would the lady with the two sleeping kids get off the bus" after a frantic call from another bus driver prompted by my husband. Some of the seemingly annoying moments can really turn out to be pretty funny if you know how to change your attitude.

So let's recap:

- 1) Change your expectations. Don't lower your standards, but know that amazing moments are not always the ones you create in your mind.
- 2) Dole out the responsibilities; this is your vacation too!
- 3) Make time for you.
- 4) There's ALWAYS something going on, it's okay to take a nap.
- 5) Expect delays and occasional disappointments, there what stories are made of!

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