

The Quest for the West: Adventures by Disney

by Doris & Denny Thompson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Day 1 -- Wyoming Welcome

After weeks of waiting we were finally on the plane approaching Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The view of the mountains as we arrived at our destination was beautiful and heightened the anticipation of the adventure to come. Upon arrival at the airport, we headed to baggage claim where we were met by one of our adventure guides, Chris, who accompanied us to the historic Wort Hotel.

The hotel is breathtaking with its stone fireplaces and grand lobby. Our room was everything we were hoping for and so much more! With lodge pole pine furniture, goose down comforters, western fabrics & decor as well as signature bathrobes, we were in heaven. This room was so comfy that we didn't want to leave, but leave we must because our welcome reception and dinner are next on the agenda. The reception buffet dinner was laced with "getting to know you" type events and before the meal was over we were all fast friends. So now it was time to relax, put up our feet and get ready for day two!

Day 2 -- Grand Teton National Park

Normally this morning would start with a hearty breakfast and an eight-mile bike ride through old riverbeds and breathtaking landscapes in the Grand Teton National Park. But due to inclement weather (a very cold drenching rain overnight) the bike ride was shortened to 6 miles on paved roads for our group. With our camera ready, we were on our way! The Grand Tetons peeked through the cloud cover on occasion and we were able to get a few shots for our scrapbook, but we kept our fingers crossed for at least one good clear shot before we had to leave. We were rewarded for our effort when we came upon a herd of over sixty bison. Fall is a wonderful time of year for this adventure (weather aside) because the deciduous trees are turning their autumn colors and are in stark contrast to the green of the pines that dot the hills. Simply beautiful!

After lunch, guests can choose either a gentle float trip along the base of the Grand Tetons (float trip not available on next year's itinerary) or a whitewater adventure over class II and III rapids! Unfortunately, the raft trips had to be canceled due to the heavy rain. Instead we had a choice to either spend the afternoon shopping or we could visit the National

Museum of Wildlife Art. We chose the museum and were glad we did - the paintings, sculptures, weavings and other assorted mediums were interesting and educational.

Day 3 -- Yellowstone Journey

Following a leisurely breakfast, our Quest for the West continues. We said goodbye to Jackson and boarded our motor coach bound for Yellowstone. But Yellowstone would have to wait until after our boat ride across Jenny Lake and the hike in the Grand Teton National Park.

Upon arrival we ferried across the lake. As we start our hike we encounter a gradual climb that takes us by spectacular views of streams, rapids, waterfalls, and let's not forget the beautiful colors of the fall foliage. The high altitudes and thin air are new to everyone in our group so we stop often for rests and photo ops on our way to the top of the mountain. For those hearty enough to hike the last leg (very steep, rocky switchbacks) the reward is a panoramic view of Jenny Lake from the top of Inspiration Point. Breathtaking!

By this time it's spitting snow and we still have much to see, so back down the mountain we go (which by the way was much easier than going up!), ferry across the lake and board our motor coach. Normally at this point our guides, Jennae and Chris, would present us with a picnic lunch but weather has dictated a change in plans. Instead of a picnic we opt to eat in the nice warm bus while we move toward Yellowstone.

Beautiful, spectacular, breathtaking…these words all seem inadequate when trying to describe the views and vistas along our route. There are just no words that do justice to the Tetons and the wildlife that we saw on this afternoon drive. The moose, elk, and mule deer we spot along the road seem oblivious to the towering mountains that surround us. After all, this is just home to them, but to us it's like nothing we've ever seen before! We have a few photo op stops and on to Yellowstone West Thumb Basin for a tour of the paint pots and mud pots. Next stop, Yellowstone Snow Lodge, our home for the next two nights, but we have no time to dawdle - Old Faithful is scheduled to erupt in just a few minutes. I'm sure everyone has seen Old Faithful on TV but it's so much better in person. You hear and feel the rumble before and during the eruption and our cold temps increased the steam surrounding the water flow. Just fabulous!

No rest for the weary, our day wasn't over yet. The Snow Lodge and Adventures by Disney had arranged a private dinner just for our group. Our dining room has a great view with a wall completely full of windows,

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so when the snow finally arrived we were dining in the warmth while we watched it snow outside. Wonderful & relaxing!

Day 4 -- Trail Blazers

Another chilly Wyoming morning and another day of adventure! We start our day with a morning viewing of Old Faithful. Stan, a park tour guide, was to travel with us today and enlighten us with interesting park details, trivia, and stories of the area. The geyser basin walkways loop around the Old Faithful area and provide great viewing for a combination of paint pots and geysers. Although Old Faithful is the most frequent erupting and well-known geyser, it's not necessarily the most majestic geyser. The highlight of the morning tour was the eruption of Castle Geyser. This geyser only erupts about every 12 hours but its well worth the wait. Once the eruption started it lasted well over a half hour and was as picturesque as anything we've seen to date!

We had another hike scheduled this afternoon so we boarded our motor coach and were off to another geyser/paint pot/mud pot field. Dinner this evening was an adult-only time at the Old Faithful Inn while Jennae and Chris joined the children for a special dinner and evening activities.

Day 5 -- Untamed Nature

Today's morning hike was my favorite to date. The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone was our destination for a hike at the rim and viewing of the upper and lower falls. This was a moderate hike with many viewing and photo op spots that culminated at Artist Point. Walt Disney World fans will recognize the name Artist Point as the table service restaurant at Disney's Wilderness Lodge. Now you know the origins of the name. From the Artist Point lookout we could see back along the canyon to the lower falls and the view was spectacular! The hike is followed by a picnic lunch and then we were off to the dude ranch.

We arrived at the ranch around 4:00 pm and were given our cabin assignments. Yes, that's right; each couple/family would be spending the next few nights in their very own log cabin! These cabins had rustic charm with all the comforts of home. The only thing not available in our cabin was a television but with all there was to see and do I was sure we wouldn't miss it at all! (For any die-hard TV fans, there was a TV in the main lodge.) After unpacking we spent a few minutes taking in the surroundings then it was off to social hour and dinner at 7:00 PM.

Day 6 -- On the Range

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After a hearty breakfast, our group met over at the hitchin' post to be paired up with our ride for the morning. This was horseback riding day and one of the most anticipated activities for all of us. Denny rode Trapper and I rode Gilroy. Let me just say that before this ride was over Gilroy and I became fast friends! I personally have never ridden before and was a little apprehensive. The horses are wonderful and so well trained that even the most inexperienced rider will feel comfortable in the saddle. After a quick riding lesson in the corral we were off. I was expecting a nice flat ride over a meadow or something similar but that was not to be the case. We rode into the hills, through trees, across open areas, through streams, and down hills…we went everywhere! By the time we returned to the ranch it was lunchtime and we enjoyed swapping riding tales while we ate.

Afternoon activities included your choice of horseback riding, fly-fishing lessons, hiking, or just relaxing. Although I was tempted to go riding again, parts of my anatomy were still recovering from the morning ride so I chose to relax on the back deck of the lodge with a good book.

We were all to meet for a story telling session at 5:30 PM near the outside barbeque area. We were in for a big surprise! I won't tell you what the surprise was but be assured that it was something very special and a great time was had by all!

Day 7 -- The Wild West

This was our day to explore the ranch and choose whichever activity tickled our fancy. Many in our group chose to ride horses, others chose to fish, and still others chose to just relax. This was the last day of the trip but the surprises were not over just yet. As we gathered for our farewell dinner Chris and Jennae had a few extra special tricks up their sleeve for our group!

Even without the "Mouse" around every corner this trip was truly touched by Disney magic. Whether you take the Quest for the West adventure or any of the offered itineraries, I highly recommend you choose Adventures by Disney!

About The Author: Denny and Doris Thompson are CruisingCo.com/MouseEarVacations.com travel agents and are looking forward to their next Disney Cruise Line & Disney World vacation in December for Mousefest 2006.

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