

The Rest of the "World" For Kids: A Helpful Glance

by Ann Weber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When heading to Walt Disney World, everyone thinks about Magic Kingdom when taking younger children. And Disney's Hollywood Studios has become Pre-school Central with the Playhouse Disney character meals. So we don't need to plan a lot of time for Epcot and Animal Kingdom, right? We thought this as well on our first trip and did not plan nearly enough time for these other two parks.

We discovered Epcot's Kidcot fun stops on our second trip and our children, then 8 and 10, thoroughly enjoyed them even though Disney lists Kidcot fun stops as an attraction for preschoolers. Kidcot fun stops are located in each of the 12 countries in Epcot. When you stop at your first country, your child will receive a paper mask on a wooden stick. They will have the opportunity to start decorating it. Then as they move around the World Showcase, they will receive an additional charm to attach to the mask as well as a stamp on the handle at each country visited. You can also purchase "passports" at many of the stores in Epcot which you then have stamped at each stop. Older children may enjoy the passports more than the masks. Although the masks were inconvenient to carry around all day, my children (now 13 and 15) still have them in their rooms. Some of the Kidcot stations are difficult to find but you can ask any cast member in the country to direct you. You may also find that the stops can be crowded during the busy season.

In addition to the Kidcot Fun Stops, your children will probably enjoy some of the live entertainment offered at the World Showcase. For our children, the Dragon Legend Acrobats in China and Maturiza the Taiko drummers in Japan were their favorites. You can find information about the different performers and their schedule at <http://pages.prodigy.net/stevesoares/>. Our children did not enjoy Off Kilter or the British Invasion even though they typically like musical shows.

As far as rides in the World Showcase go, Maelstrom in Norway and the Rio del Tiempo in Mexico offer boat rides with enough visual interest to keep children engaged. You should prepare your small ones for the troll in Maelstrom that makes your boat start going backwards.

As you wander around the World Showcase, there are also many places to stop and have fun. At The Outpost between China and Germany there are drums to play when a presentation is not going on and

hard-to-find characters such as Belle and Jasmine can be found near France and Morocco respectively. Last but not least, if your children are school age, they will enjoy seeing a country they studied about in school. My daughter had just finished studying Mexico before our first trip. She was able to share a lot of what she learned in school with us as we toured. She was then able to take additional information back with her to her classmates. This aspect of our trip was especially helpful when we were asking about having an excused absence from school for the trip.

Disney's Animal Kingdom is another park with many options for younger children to have fun and learn. In the Animal Kingdom you will find six Kids Discovery Clubs, which are spread across the park. Each location has an interactive activity and a special booklet used to collect stamps at each location. If your child completes all six stops (this is difficult due to the large size of the Animal Kingdom) they receive special stamp. If you hope to complete all six stops, be sure to check what time the Kids Discovery Clubs close. Traditionally they close at 4pm even on Extra Magic Hour evenings. My kids loved exploring the Kids Discovery Clubs. They were able to learn something new while having a great time.

Another fun area for kids in Animal Kingdom is the Boneyard. The Boneyard is full of places to climb and slide. It also has a large sand pit where your children can dig for "fossils." Yes, they will get dirty here, so make sure you plan ahead for this. Although the playground is covered, it can still be quite warm since it is not enclosed or air conditioned. When we were there, we noticed a lack of space where parents could sit and rest while keeping an eye on their little ones.

Another hidden treasure we found on our last trip to Animal Kingdom was GI-TAR DAN in Camp Minnie-Mickey. If your kids watch Barney or other sing-along type children's programming, they will jump right in with GI-TAR DAN's animal sing-along. If your children are not shy, make sure they are up front so they can interact with him. We stumbled on his act by accident (it is very close to the restrooms in this area) and left with smiles on our faces (and aches in our stomachs from laughing so hard). He was teasing the kids and my usually shy daughter was fully involved and having the time of her life. Later in the day GI-TAR DAN moves to Conservation Station at Rafiki's Planet Watch. You can find his latest schedule at Steve Soares' web site.

Another fun stop for your children is the Affection Section at Rafiki's Planet Watch. Your children will have the opportunity to pet and see animals up close and personal. My children let mom and dad pet the animals first, and then they joined in as well. Disney provides sinks and

hand sanitizers so you can clean up after the encounter.

Although this list is nowhere near all-inclusive of the things your children will enjoy at the Animal Kingdom and Epcot, it has hopefully helped you see there are many things there for them to experience. Just remember that when you are looking at your guide maps, both the Kidcot Fun Stops at Epcot and the Kids Discovery Clubs at the Animal Kingdom are marked on their respective park maps with a "K" in a red box. They are worth stopping at!

About The Author: Ann Weber is an avid vacation planner. Now that the two years of planning the Alaska adventure is behind her, Ann is diving into plans for her family's upcoming Disney Christmas vacation.

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