

Counting Down to Disney (Part 2): The Fun Stuff

by Nicole Courson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Last week we looked at the things you "[Must Get Done](#)" while counting down to your Disney trip. This week we'll look at the "Fun Stuff" to do to help count down the days!

We took our first family trip in 2008 and I truly, truly believe it was the massive success it was because we were ready for it. We'd not only planned, we'd had fun doing it, and here are some great ways for you to do the same:

* **Disney Dinners.** Once a month, we set aside a Friday or Saturday evening and had a family night in with dinner and a movie. If the kids picked the movie we picked the food and vice versa; just so there was a "theme." My personal favorite was Finding Nemo (husband's choice -- he loves that Dorie!) with my kids' menu of Shark Blood Soup and Grilled Crustaceans -- if we'd just called it grilled cheese and tomato soup, it wouldn't have been the same! The other great thing about the Disney Dinners was that some of the older movies that my boys had never seen (like, say, Cinderella) were all new to them -- but then familiar by the time we got to Florida.

* **Pin Bingo.** I loved the idea of the lanyard pins before I'd ever actually seen one, and we bought a lot on eBay. Then we printed out bingo cards with characters on them and played bingo, using the pins as prizes. Jamie's favorite is Stitch and Austin collects the Star Wars pins, but no one was too upset with getting Dumbo or Daisy Duck because they knew that once they hit the parks, they were ready to trade. Dining Reservations. Okay, we went over this already in last week, but it can be fun, too. I let the guys read over the PassPorter's brief restaurant descriptions to get an idea of where they wanted to go, then looked at menus from AllEars.net for the whole family to review before deciding what the best places were for us to eat. Had we not researched restaurants so well, we never would have selected 1900 Park Fare in the Grand Floridian and therefore missed out on what was definitely my husband's favorite meal for character fun. Now, food-wise, we heard all about Le Cellier over in Epcot, but without the great dessert photos (Chocolate Moose, anyone?) our kids might have been reluctant to go there. See what I mean?

* **Countdown calendar.** I'm a sicko for scrapbooking, so I couldn't wait to use all those cute Disney-themed stickers. One year out, we woke up to a "ONE YEAR TILL DISNEY!" page on the refrigerator and mouse-ear pancakes for breakfast. We did the same thing a few more

times, till a "NINETY DAYS TILL DISNEY" sheet took over three months out. Those pages went into my scrapbook with photos and journaling, both making and helping to keep memories for all of us. By the time we got to "ONE WEEK TILL DISNEY!" we were able to post packing lists by the boys' names.

* **The Tigger Box.** Okay, it doesn't have to be Tigger, it can be pretty much any of your favorite characters. A co-worker gave me the funniest toy she found at a garage sale, a battery-operated singing Tigger that ordinarily my too-grown-up-for-Pooh boys would have scoffed at. My husband and I put a note on it ("Ready to ride the Teacups, kiddos?"), wrapped it up in a box, and when the kids opened it they thought it was hilarious. We re-wrapped it and took it to Grandma's, since she was going with us. The second time we did it, we taped \$5 Disney Store cards to Tigger. Once when Austin had the flu, the Tigger box showed up with cough drops and magazines. We got more use out of the Tigger box than any age-appropriate things we might have found at full price ... and tied in more reminders of the fun to come!

* **Magical Music.** Believe it or not, I still have my original LPs (that's a record album, for those of us who are old enough to remember such a thing) for Cinderella, Snow White, and Mary Poppins. I loved putting them on our old turntable stereo on Sunday mornings for brunch. So why not take it a step further, right? With the help of a more technically savvy Disney buff I soon had some great CDs for in the car. The first was called "Classic" with all the oldies but goodies from "Heigh Ho" to "So This Is Love", "Step In Time" and "When You Wish Upon A Star." The Second was "Kids" and was made up of my boys' well-known favorites such as "You've Got a Friend in Me," "Hakuna Matata," and music from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise. And finally, he compiled a special disc of "mood" music, or songs that reminded us of our impending trip. Since it was over the Christmas holidays, we had Goofy singing "Jingle Bells," he found the "Good Morning" song from the Magic Kingdom's opening, and some "pop" songs since we'd be staying at Pop Century. We played those discs in the car, during chores, and practically every day the last week or so before we left for vacation.

* **Surprise! Presents.** Some days, just for the heck of it, we'd surprise the kids with a wrapped gift on their breakfast plates -- nothing too big or pricey, just little things that they needed for the trip anyway. The Disney Outlet online is wonderful for marking down last year's (or even last month's!) character-printed t-shirts, and we snagged a ton of them for just \$5 each. Blank autograph albums with Mickey Mouse pens? Under \$3 each! Also at the Disney Store, we scored with beanbag characters for \$4.99 each that the kids loved. Really, who doesn't love Stitch in their cereal bowl?

* **Disney Cough.** For our boys, we set a goal of \$100 for each of them to take on vacation, figuring they'd be in the parks five days, so that was

.....

\$20 per day. They got regular allowances, but we amped up the excitement by posting a chart for Disney Dough; additional chores they could do for small amounts (carry out some recyclables for a quarter, or fold towels for a dime each). Each time they reached a dollar we put a sticker on it, and this helped them save without cutting into their usual allowance money. They didn't get the Disney Dough till we reached Florida, and it was non-transferable -- strictly spending money.

* **Customized Maps.** Walt Disney World offers free full-color, beautiful maps to all vacation planners! Visit DisneyWorld.com and all you have to enter is your basic info (including reservation number) and you can personalize an absolutely gorgeous set of park maps that come right to your door -- free of charge! My boys spent hours poring over them before we left, and after the trip they made a wonderful addition to our scrapbook.

* **Packing.** Yes, I said packing. Sure, no one's excited about packing for a week-long trip unless there's something in it for them, right? We had a packing scavenger hunt at the local discount store (sunscreen, sunglasses, hand sanitizer) first, then upon arriving home we gave the boys just fifteen minutes to pack their carry-on bags and the results were hilarious. We found everything from beach towels to the dog's dish (no, she was not going with us) to a can of soup (in case my nine year old got hungry). It was a really fun, free activity that had us all laughing and ready for the trip. So ... are you ready yet? Excited? I am! I hope that your trip is as magical and wonderful as ours was. Happy planning!

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.

Article last updated: 11/05/2009

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/counting-down-to-disney-part-2.html>

Copyright by Nicole Courson. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>

.....