

The Amtrak Auto Train: How Walt Would Travel

by Dianne Cook, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

We all know how much Walter Elias Disney loved trains. How about you? Would you love to have your car with you at Walt Disney World but dread driving I-95? Then perhaps the Amtrak Auto Train is for you. You travel from Lorton, Virginia to Sanford, Florida while taking in the sights and your vehicle comes right along with you.

The Auto Train leaves Lorton, Virginia around 4:00 pm and arrives in Sanford, Florida at approximately 8:30 am. The train accepts passenger cars, oversized vehicles and even motorcycles. You may pack as much as you like in your car but keep any valuables with you. You will not have access to your car during the trip so plan on taking what you will need for the overnight trip on board with you. It's always a good idea to have a spare key or remote with you in case your keys get accidentally locked inside.

There are many options for traveling on the train. Coach passengers enjoy the Bi-level Superliner, which has wide reclining seats that give you plenty of legroom. Each seat has a footrest, a leg rest, and an individual reading lamp. You will be provided with a pillow and a lightweight blanket.

You also have a choice of sleeping car accommodations. The deluxe rooms are on the upper level only and are accessible by narrow stairs only. They sleep up to three adults with a single upper bunk and a larger lower berth. These rooms also have a private restroom/shower and sink. A deluxe suite is available which are two deluxe rooms connected by a door which is opened for an even larger area. On the lower level are the standard bedrooms for two adults and the family room, which can accommodate two adults and two small children. There is limited space for luggage. Also on the lower level is an accessible bedroom for passengers with mobility impairments. This room sleeps two and has a sink, a vanity and a toilet within the room. An attendant is available on each car to offer you assistance with luggage and to put down your beds.

Meals are included in the cost of your fare and are served in the dining car. Dinner is your choice of five entrees -- a beef dish, a fish dish, a poultry dish, a vegetarian dish, or a chef's special. There are "choo choo chewies" with macaroni and cheese for the younger ones and this is also available in an adult portion. Tossed salad with your choice of dressing, rolls, red/white wine, soft drinks, coffee and tea complete the meal.

Choose from a selection of five desserts. Dinner is served on china and cloth napkins for the sleeping car passengers. Breakfast is continental and you have your choice of cold cereals, warm muffins and bagels, fruit, orange juice, milk, coffee and tea.

Soon after checking in and deciding on your mealtime, you will board. An hour prior to departure, a wine tasting is offered in the lounge car. This includes your choice of a red, a white or blush wine. Also available are trays of cheese and crackers and vegetables and dip. The lounge car is also available for reading, playing cards or simply relaxing. A movie is shown twice every evening. There are always apples, oranges, coffee, tea, cookies and snacks available. You may also purchase alcoholic beverages, pizza, peanuts, and other foods from the bar. The lounge is non-smoking but there is a smaller smoking area on the lower level.

The Auto Train is a great way to see the country. From the Civil War battlefields of Virginia to the South Carolina lowlands to the Palm trees in Florida, you will see some of the most interesting sights in the southeast. Some points of interest are the Potomac River in Lorton, VA. Quantico, VA is home to the famous FBI training facility. In Fredericksburg, VA the train crosses over the Rappahannock River, which is the river that George Washington tossed the silver dollar across. It is also here that General Lee's army repelled Union forces in 1862 in the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. Next is Ashland, VA. Can you imagine riding a train right down the middle of the Main Street? This is what happens here. You can also see Randolph-Macon College. Your journey continues through Richmond, VA (the state capital) and you can see the James River.

The Auto Train stops in Florona, South Carolina for a crew change (not attendants -- but conductors, etc.) and the train is fueled and watered. Then on through Charleston, SC whose black waters are said to be the cleanest in the south, then continuing southward, the train passes Savannah, Georgia and through Jacksonville, Florida and on to Sanford. One of the best parts of the trip is the conductor announcing these different sights as you pass through.

Once the Auto Train arrives in Sanford, the unloading process begins. The cars containing the vehicles are separated from the passenger portion of the train and are taken to the unloading area. It may take up to 90 minutes until the last automobile is unloaded. Hop in your car and begin the 40-minute ride to Walt Disney World. You arrive rested and ready to head to the parks.

For more information on the Auto Train, call 877-SKIP-I-95 or go to <http://www.Amtrak.com>.

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About The Author: Dianne has taken over 25 trips to Walt Disney World. She has two sons who she "raised on Disney" and a husband she "converted." Dianne is a Registered Nurse and Certified Diabetes Educator.

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