

# Tips for Traveling: A Solo Parents Guide

by Lisa Carder, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Traveling to Walt Disney World as a solo parent can be a challenging but rewarding experience. I have been taking my kids to Walt Disney World solo since 1999, including driving from Ohio most years. As I am writing this we are getting ready to head off for our 8th family trip to the "World." Here are my top ten tips for traveling to Walt Disney World as an only parent.

1. Go at your children's pace. While this is a good idea for all parents, it is especially important as the solo adult. After all, there's no one to hand off a cranky child to.

2. Act like a kid and let your hair down! Being a single parent has many everyday stresses, so use your vacation to relax and be playful. Besides, it does your kids good to see you stress-free and acting silly. I love to sing to the park music and skip and dance through the parks. My kids pretend to be embarrassed, but then they join in the fun.

3. Take care of yourself. Going commando and neglecting your own care makes for a miserable vacation. Afternoon breaks are a godsend for both parents and kids. Even if the kids are too old to nap, 30 minutes of down time in the hotel room lets everyone rejuvenate. I know I need a rest most days, so when we take a break the kids can either read or watch TV quietly while I try to get my second wind. After all, if Momma is tired; no one's going to have a good time!

4. Swim with your kids. No one cares what you look like in a bathing suit, and you will never see your fellow vacationers again. Even I will show my pasty white northern legs at the pool. My kids love it when I get in the pool with them and act like a kid.

5. Let people serve you. Single parents do so much for everyone else, so let cast members take care of you on vacation. Eat at a table service restaurant at least once a day and enjoy not having to juggle your food and the kids. I have a hard time not doing everything myself in my daily life, but when I am on vacation I accept help when it is offered. Smile and say thank you and offer to help someone else if you are able.

6. Get in the picture. Use Disney's professional photographers and PhotoPass to get pictures of your family together. You can ask cast members or even complete strangers to take a picture of all of you with

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your own camera, too. Some of my favorite pictures are ones where we are all together. I also offer to take pictures of families in return.

7. Talk to people. While vacationing with your kids is wonderful, sometimes you need a conversation that doesn't begin with "Why?" All those lines you can't avoid are more fun when you are meeting other people. I seem to find every fellow teacher on vacation, and it is fun learning where people are from.

8. Let your kids have some responsibility. On our first trip to Walt Disney World my kids were 4 and 6. I learned a lot on that vacation! One afternoon I was pushing the stroller, trying to keep track of my 6 year-old, and juggling a tray full of food while trying to find an empty table at Columbia Harbor House. I bet you can guess what happened next. Between the counter and the table my juggling act failed and our drinks toppled to the floor. I was mortified, but I realized that my kids could help out, even as young as they were. From then on the 6 year-old was in charge of the stroller, while I carried the food and found a table. They loved to help and our vacation was much smoother after that.

9. Take advantage of Disney transportation. With Disney's Magical Express there is no need to rent a car, no need to try and navigate. Buses can take you anywhere you want to go and taxis are plentiful if you want a faster or more direct route. The years we drove to Orlando my car stayed parked in the resort parking lot 99% of the time.

10. Bond. I know it sounds corny, but vacations are a great time to have uninterrupted time with your kids. There are so many funny and unique things that only happen on vacation. These shared experiences carry over into our daily lives and connect us. Kids grow up too soon, and I want to treasure the time I get with them. Even this year, when my kids are old enough to go off on their own, they both told me they would rather spend time together. I couldn't ask for a better reward.

Vacations anywhere can be special, but vacations at Walt Disney World are truly magical for our family.

*About The Author: Lisa (aka bobcat on the Disboards) is a Middle School teacher and is headed to Walt Disney World with her kids!*

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