

Visiting Walt Disney World During The Busy Season: Tips and Tricks for Survival

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When you plan a vacation, one of the first things to consider is the time of year you're going to visit.

When it comes to visiting Walt Disney World, many people choose to visit at times when the parks are quieter, but for many, that's not always an option. If you have children in school, as many visitors to Disney do, then you may have no choice but to visit during the busier seasons. So when is Walt Disney World at its most crowded? Around Easter and the 4th of July, along with the week between Christmas and New Years we traditionally see crowds at their very worst, but if you visit around Thanksgiving or Presidents' Week, you can also expect to see higher crowd levels. Essentially, any time when there are major national holidays, you can expect the park to be busier.

Of course, there are some positives to visiting at these times. Firstly, you'll probably need to use less of your precious vacation, especially important for those with very few vacation dates during the course of a year. It may also mean that you don't have to take your children out of school, which can save a real dilemma.

Although there will be more people to contend with in the parks, there are some benefits to visiting at a busy time of year. Disney needs to regularly carry out refurbishment work to the park attractions, known as rehabs, and they tend to do that during quieter times of the year. If you're at the parks during major holidays, you're more likely to find everything up and running for you.

You may also find additional shows or fireworks taking place during your stay. In particular, the holiday versions of Wishes are truly spectacular around Christmas or the 4th of July. Equally, for parades or shows that are not performed every night during slower seasons, such as Fantasmic! or Wishes, you'll invariably find there are more performances when the parks are crowded (sometimes more than once nightly), which can make planning your days easier, as you'll have more choice of when you want to see those things.

Larger crowds usually bring longer operating hours for the parks as well. If you're a night owl, this can really work in your favor, with the Magic Kingdom sometimes open into the early hours, even on days

without evening Extra Magic Hours. If this suits you, it gives you an opportunity to enjoy the parks after a lot of the crowds have emptied out. And if you prefer to be up and at 'em early, that can also work for you, with the Magic Kingdom opening for Extra Magic Hours as early as 7:00 am at the very busiest times.

If you haven't visited Disney at a busy time of the year before, there are a few things you need to know. The first, and most important, thing is that you really do need to plan. While you can be a lot more relaxed when there are fewer people around, if you want to get on the most popular attractions in busy seasons, you really need a game plan. Using Extra Magic Hours if you're staying on property is one way of dealing with that, but another way to combat the crowds is by using Fastpasses. Unfortunately, a lot of people have now wised up to what used to be one of the best kept Disney secrets. To witness that, you only have to be at Disney's Hollywood Studios first thing in the morning to see the line for Fastpasses for Toy Story Midway Mania.

There are various tricks to using Fastpasses and one of the most important things is to first check that the return time fits into your plans for the rest of the day. If you're not planning on staying in that park all day and the attraction is showing a Fastpass return time late in the afternoon or the early evening, you may either need to stand in line or change your plans around a bit.

Also think about which rides you're desperate to get on and which ones you're best served using Fastpass for, as once you get a Fastpass, it'll usually be a couple of hours before you can get another one (that time is marked on the Fastpass). However, if your return time is within the next hour, as soon as that time opens up, then you can grab another Fastpass.

Something else well worth doing before you even get near to Disney at a busy time of the year is to sit down as a group and decide what your priorities are. Narrowing down which attractions are the most important allows you to focus on just getting onto those. Then, if you have additional time in the park and can get on to any other rides, it's a bonus. At busy times, set your expectations perhaps lower than you otherwise would, then if you do run into a few hours' wait and all the Fastpasses are gone (it can happen!), at least you'll get on the rides you really want to do.

Busy times of the year are like any other time of the year, in that the park will be relatively quite straight after opening. So if you can, get there in time for park opening and crowds will then build throughout the day. If a park has morning Extra Magic Hours, you can also expect

that park to be more crowded than the other three throughout the rest of the day - that may be a factor in your park-hopping plans. Another good rule is that attraction queues will die down when the big parades or fireworks shows take place. Just think about how many head off to watch the afternoon parade or Wishes at the Magic Kingdom. If you can live without seeing them, it's a great time to go and ride, but do be careful with parades to ensure that the route doesn't cut off the area of the park that you're heading for. We've fallen into that trap a couple of times before.

Finally, if there are table service restaurants that you're keen to either try for the first time or return to, booking in advance is critical at busy times. Be sure to make those ADRs at 180 days out and don't forget that you can book the first ten days of your stay all at one time, if you'll be staying at a Disney resort. It's well worth either going online or getting on the phone as soon as you can at the 180 day mark for big holidays, such as Christmas Day, Thanksgiving, or 4th of July, especially if you have a big party. Don't forget to be flexible with the times that you're prepared to eat, as that can help to snag some of the prized places to eat.

Going at a busy time of the year to Walt Disney World can be a real challenge, but with a little bit of forward planning, it can also be a great deal of fun and not as much of a problem as you might first think.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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