

Universal Express Pass: Getting Shorter Waits at Universal Orlando

by Michelle Clark, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Universal Orlando's "Express" pass allows guests to bypass standard lines at some attractions. Unlike Disney's Fastpass, Universal Express is not free. The upside of this feature is that fewer people will be utilizing the Express lines, making the waits generally shorter.

What options of Express passes are available for purchase?

Express Plus Passes: These are available for purchase on Universal's website, at the ticket gates, or at certain locations inside the parks. The Express Plus pass allows entry into the Express line once for each participating attraction. You can purchase Express Plus Passes for 1- or 2-park entry. The 1-park pass is good in one park only; you can't use it in two parks on the same day. The 2-park passes can be used in both parks on the same day.

Express Plus Passes range in price from \$19.99 to \$69.99, based upon anticipated demand.

Park to Park VIP Ticket: Includes both park admission and entry into the Express lines. The Park to Park VIP ticket is an upgrade to the Express Plus Pass in that it allows you to use the Express line an unlimited amount of times per day. This pass is good for both parks. Park to Park VIP Tickets can be purchased in 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 days increments. The multiple day passes can be used anytime within a 14-day period from first use of the pass. So if you purchase a 3-day Park to Park VIP Ticket, you can use it on any 3 days within 14 days of first use. These passes will vary in price based upon demand and of course the number of days purchased.

You can expect to pay more for the Express Plus Passes and the Park to Park VIP Ticket during times of peak attendance such as holidays.

Unlimited Express Pass: Allows unlimited entry to the Express lines of participating attractions. This pass is sold only at the gate and is not available on the website. 1-day, 1-park pass is \$62.00 and 1-day, 2-park pass is \$70.00.

Universal Resort Guests: All guests staying in any of Universal's three onsite resorts receive entry in the Express line when they show their room key at the ride entrance. Like the Park to Park VIP Ticket and Unlimited Express Pass, resort guests can enter the Express line an

unlimited amount of times. This perk is available from date of check-in to date of departure. You can maximize this benefit by arriving at the hotel early. Plan to arrive at the resort before the parks open. You can check in and obtain your room keys. Most likely your room won't be ready, but you can store your luggage and head to the parks. On the day you check out your room key is valid all day.

So how does Express work? It's very easy. Just show your Express pass (or room key) to the Team Member at the ride entrance, and they will direct you to the Express line. It's convenient as you don't have to return to an attraction at a specific time. You are free to tour on your own schedule.

How many people can use an Express pass? Each pass is good for one person. So each member of your party will need their own Express pass or onsite hotel room key. Universal's Team Members are usually diligent about checking the validity of passes, so don't try using an old room key!

Where can you use Express? Most attractions participate. However, the two newest attractions, Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit coaster in Universal Studios and Island of Adventure's Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, do not have Express access. Also excluded is the Pteranodon Flyers in Islands of Adventure. It's very important to know if you are planning to visit the new Harry Potter attraction!!

Will I avoid waiting in line altogether? Maybe and maybe not. I've walked directly onto rides in the Express line, and I've waited several minutes. Some attractions have a separate Express line all the way to the loading area, and some attractions merge the Express line with the regular line. But it's always much shorter than waiting in the stand-by line.

Do I need an Express pass? This is probably the most asked question in the Universal forum concerning Express. If you're going at a slower time of year then you probably won't need it. I've been on Labor Day and didn't need an Express pass. But if you are going during a time of peak attendance and have a short amount of time to spend at Universal, it might help you experience more attractions.

Do I have to purchase in advance? No. You can purchase Express Plus and Unlimited Express at the gates, and Express Plus at selected locations in the parks. So if you want to play it by ear and see if you really need Express before you purchase, you have that option.

Which is the least expensive option? I compared Express Plus Pass,

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Unlimited Express Pass, and one night's stay at Royal Pacific Resort for September 4-5. Room keys provide Express access on the day you check in and the day you check out, so I compared 2 days of Express Plus and Unlimited Express Passes for a family of four (2 adults, 2 children):

1-Day 1-Park Express Plus Pass - \$25.99 each x 8 (4 people for 2 days) = \$207.92
 1-Day 1-Park Unlimited Express Pass: \$62.00 each x 8 (4 people for 2 days) = \$496.00
 1 night's stay at Royal Pacific Resort (standard 2 Queen room) = \$219.00

Now we will compare these options to the Park to Park VIP Ticket which includes park admission:

2-Day Park to Park VIP Tickets: 2 adults @ \$262.99 = \$ 525.98
 children @ \$249.99 = \$ 499.98 \$1,025.96

Now add park admission to the previous options: 1-Day Express Plus Pass - \$25.99 x 8 (4 people for 2 days) = \$207.92
 2 Adult Park to Park Tickets: \$134.99 x 2 = \$269.98
 2 Child Park to Park Tickets (ages 3-9) \$121.99 x 2 = \$243.98
 1-Day Unlimited Express Pass - \$62 x 8 (4 people for 2 days) = \$ 496.00
 2 Adult Park to Park Tickets: \$134.99 x 2 = \$ 269.98

2 Child Park to Park Tickets (ages 3-9) \$121.99 x 2 = \$ 243.98
 \$1,009.96

1 night (September 4) at Royal Pacific = \$219.00
 2 Adult Park to Park Tickets: \$134.99 x 2 = \$269.98
 2 Child Park to Park Tickets (ages 3-9) \$121.99 x 2 = \$243.98 \$732.96

All prices were obtained from the Universal Orlando website and are before taxes and fees. These prices are subject to change, so verify all prices with Universal (www.universalorlando.com).

Based upon these numbers, an onsite stay is a better deal than the VIP Park to Park or Unlimited Express. And if you have an additional child it's even better, as Universal allows 5 to stay in their standard rooms.

Universal offer some packages; prices will vary. Discounts on rooms and/or tickets may be available to residents of certain states, AAA members, and other discount programs. Check www.mousesavers.com for any available Universal discounts. If you register your email address on the Universal website you might receive special offers via email. And it never hurts to call Universal directly and ask about discounts. I've found their operators to be very helpful.

About The Author: Michelle Clark is a self-professed thrill ride junkie and the mother of three teens who share in her obsession. Her goal is to experience as many theme parks as possible and stay in every Disney resort before she dies!

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