

Pin Trading: Not Just At Disney

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Pin trading has taken off at Disney but it's not where I got hooked.

My husband was the Bobsled Track Operations Manager for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. He worked almost 6 years to get the track ready for the Games and during that time the Salt Lake Olympic Committee would frequently give him pins marking significant countdown dates, events, and milestones. He would bring them home and I would tuck them away in a drawer, as they didn't quite fit in with my fashion sense. As the Games drew closer more pins arrived and though I was grateful, I still didn't get it -- until the Games began.

With my husband occupied with work, I bundled up my three-year old-daughter and decided to **give this whole Olympics thing a try**. We hopped on a bus and headed up to Main Street, Park City (only a few miles from our home at the time). The Olympic mascots were parading up and down the street, everyone was decked out in Roots gear, and there were jugglers, live music, food, even people carrying hot chocolate dispensers on their backs! Not the Main Street I had frequented for the last 10 years.

I was soon drawn to a colorful, lively display outside an enormous tent put together by Coca-Cola. Inside, little groups gathered around tables, a nice place to have a Coke but it didn't seem there was much else to it, until we looked closer. Everyone was carrying or wearing felt squares, bandanas, hats, scarves --- **all filled with pins**. My daughter and I moved in to get a feel for what was going on. Ah ha! Pin trading!

On our next trip up to Main Street our pins were neatly organized, tucked away in the fanny pack and ready to trade. First step, **learning pin trading etiquette**:

- Never interrupt a trade
- Never feel bad if the person you ask to trade says no
- Always ask where the trader is from and chat a bit
- Always offer up extra pins to people who are new to pin trading and explain to them how to get started.

Second step, **learn what pins are "in."** The current Olympic pins are the hottest items. Pins from the last Olympics are "out." The FBI, CIA,

local police and fire all have their own pins and these are hard to come by. To me they may as well be Olympic Gold!

By the end of the week I had recruited my best friend into the hunt for pins and our target was law enforcement. On our quest, we met hundreds of fascinating people. (My best friend beat me out by collecting 7 CIA, FBI and law enforcement pins. I got five and yes, I did find time to go to many amazing Olympic events as well!) My three year old daughter also got into the action and learned how to say hello in many languages. **Pin trading opened the door for conversations** that would surely have otherwise been missed; a man at his third Olympic games here to watch his daughter compete, a surly CIA agent from Pennsylvania watching out for our safety, a talkative family from my hometown in New Jersey. It was wonderful!

Though the treasure hunt to find the best pins, especially security ones, was an absolute addiction, I was mostly attracted to **pin trading as a conversation starter**. Both children and adults, especially those from many different cultures, were now meeting and exchanging stories. This is what the Olympic Games are all about!

Of course, there is the commercial aspect to pin trading both at the Olympics and Disney. Pins are expensive and starting even a small collection can cost big bucks. I recommend purchasing some pins on eBay before you leave for your Disney trip. It's best to **buy pins that you won't become attached to** (avoid your favorite character) and make sure that they are official Disney pins so that you can trade with park employees. (Look for the Disney logo on the back of the pin.) Beware of bulk pins, however, which make be fakes.

You don't need many pins; our total collection consists of about 15 pins. What differs from the Olympics is that **Disney park employees (cast members) always say yes to a pin trade** as long as you are trading an official Disney pin. If your child wants one of the pins on a cast member's lanyard it will always be exchanged for whatever Disney pin you offer, no haggling. One park employee searched for a pin for my daughter because he knew she was looking for Simba. He tracked us down in the parade crowd to give it to her! Magic!

Each year we choose a **pin trading theme**. On our last visit it was The Incredibles and our quest was to collect all of the characters. This year my now seven year old has decided to change the theme and trade out The Incredibles for anything to do with horses or dinosaurs. That should be a challenge! It may be hard for me to give up Edna Mode but I can always get her back next year.

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I encourage my children to go beyond a quick trade and start a conversation with the cast member or fellow trader -- it's a wonderful way for kids to **learn the art of conversation**, manners and as an added bonus the ability to recognize who to go to if they are ever lost. Pin trading also gets the whole gang to slow down and look beyond the next ride and explore more of the magic of Disney!

About The Author: Justine works in education, has two outgoing daughters and looks forward to spending a week in Disney each spring!

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