

Walt Disney World With the Grandkids: Travels With Nonny

by Jane Buie, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I sit at my desk with fingers poised, reluctant to strike the first key, hesitant to touch the mouse. I know that when I begin, the photos will stop and **my memories will be on hold**.

The invention of the digital camera is in sync with my evolution as a grandma, "Nonny" as they call me. Through my screensaver **memories of previous Disney trips pass by**, and I am mesmerized.

There's a picture of my oldest granddaughter, Caylie, when she **first met Minnie Mouse**. Another photo of Caylie, now almost 5, is from our recent trip, 6 weeks ago. She's coming around Big Thunder Mountain, holding up her arms, and laughing hysterically. Other photos pass. There's Colton, almost 2, as he reaches for the hook on the end of the Captain's arm. I see my youngest granddaughter, Bella, who recently made her first trip to Disney World at 6 months. She's laughing at Baloo just outside the shops on Main Street. Such wonderful memories bring me to my grandchildren each time I sit down to check e-mail or conduct online business.

I know there are grandparents who aren't sure they can manage a trip to Disney World. **Can I handle my grandchildren on a vacation?** Do we know each other well enough to get along? Will they respect my authority? If the answer is yes, then start planning.

Where in the World do we stay? A travel agent can be helpful but you can also call Disney reservations yourself to schedule a room or a package, including tickets. We **stay on Disney property**, just for the convenience. Usually, one or both of my daughters will accompany us, since my sweet husband feels he must stay behind and tend the home fires.

We **keep active annual passes** because we visit Walt Disney World several times each year. Caylie is old enough to have her own pass, which makes her quite happy. Travel from Houston is 1,000 miles one-way. We usually travel by automobile and it helps that my Suburban has a built-in video/TV. We depart Houston early, usually around 3:00 am, fully stocked with snacks, water, portable lap trays, and videos. The children will sleep, giving us 4 or 5 hours of uninterrupted driving. It's more sensible to trade drivers, making the trip in one day. The children are restless and, if we stop for the night, they find it hard to return to their car seats the next day. Amazingly, we can make this drive in about

17 hours.

Alternatively, **airplane travel is great**. It saves time and wear on the children and grandparents. However, you must make certain that your little ones are flight-worthy. There's nothing like trying to control an 18-month-old who wants to get down and run. Disney's Magical Express shuttle is wonderful from the Orlando airport to the hotels. It's available only if you're staying at a Disney resort. It's reliable, free, and efficient, helping us cope with strollers, luggage, and wayward children.

Disney offers many hotel choices, but speaking as a Nonny and Disney veteran, there's nothing like **convenience and proximity**. The three hotels on the Magic Kingdom monorail line are simply the best. Most of the recent articles that I have read are about economizing, making the most of your money during your visit. However, beyond saving money is another important factor - saving your sanity. Of these three deluxe hotels, the Contemporary is the most reasonably priced, followed by the Polynesian, and the Grand Floridian. Ask for discounts with an annual pass, AAA membership, or others. It's well worth the money. Consider this; you're in the Magic Kingdom and your three-year-old grandson is having a meltdown. Its nap time and the bus back to your resort will take at least an hour. You fold the stroller, try to find a seat, and make several stops before you reach your hotel. You must control your temper while your grandson continues to lose his. Conversely, staying on the monorail line, you can be in air conditioned comfort, shoes off, kicked back in 15 minutes, and, you needn't fold the stroller! After resting, you can quickly return, sanity restored, for the Spectromagic Parade and Wishes.

Having stayed in most hotels on property, I find **the Polynesian Resort is simply the best, hands down**. The grandchildren love the volcano pool and they enjoy the bold bunnies along the beautiful walkways. From the Poly, you can walk to the Epcot monorail and Magic Kingdom ferry boat, or quickly catch the Magic Kingdom monorail. If you aren't hurried, the launch to Magic Kingdom will take you across the lagoon for a different view of Disney property. The best-kept secret is that the Polynesian rooms there are big, especially in the three newer buildings (long houses). We love Tokelau and Tahiti but have a new favorite, Rapa Nui. A parking lot is just outside the long house, unlike the other long houses that you access from the main parking lot. You can drive your vehicle up to the front door to unload your luggage, saving you the cost of a bellman! Also, if it's early enough in the day, you can request a certain building and floor when you check in. We haven't been disappointed yet.

Entry into the parks has been eased by **carrying a clear backpack**.

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Everything is visible, making it a quick trip through security. We bring snacks, hand sanitizer, and filtered water bottles. I carry a portable three-legged stool to sit on for parades, giving my old knees a rest. Add a digital camera and extra batteries, and we are set. At night we throw in sweaters for the children. With the baby, a second clear backpack is her diaper bag. Everything is accessible and the security guards love it! They have even held up one of our backpacks and yelled for the crowd to look and take note. Embarrassing but flattering!

We take **strollers for each child**. Even though Caylie is grown up (in her own mind), she will collapse into her seat as we walk. It's easy to store things underneath and most strollers now fold to a very tight package for airplanes or buses. Luckily there's no need to collapse them on the monorail. We frequently ask Colton, the toddler, to push his own stroller, letting him work off excess energy. Strollers can be rented at each park, so take heart if you don't have one available for travel. And, if you get tired, strollers make a convenient place to lean as you walk.

Our favorite parks are Magic Kingdom and Epcot. They seem to have the most favorable "fun to walking ratio." No matter what parks you choose, **be prepared for a Disney meltdown**. It happens to most ages and will probably strike your grandchild, too. This is translated as a fully blown tantrum stemming from nothing and usually occurring on the second or third day. I attribute it to over-stimulation. The meltdown will pass and, if you're lucky, it's a good time to go back to the room for a nap. It's helpful if you can schedule some down time; a walk around the hotel, a swim, or just TV time. It offsets the excitement that makes children so "goofy." Have fun and enjoy. That's what grandparenting is all about!

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