

Toddlers to Teenagers: Making Sure Everyone Enjoys Their Trip

by Sara Varney, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Four years ago, I wrote an article on ["How Young is Too Young?"](#) Since then a lot has changed!

□ My son is now seven and, in addition to my work with PassPorter, I am now a travel planner affiliated with Mouse Fan Travel. This means I get asked this question more than ever! Recently I have noticed a trend in our area -- families with three or more kids, with ages ranging from toddlers to teenagers.

Over the past few months, multiple clients have expressed concern that their children are "too old" for Disney. Needless to say, it is often difficult to contain the horror in my voice when I answer! So far I've been able to refrain from answering, "Well, I'm 36 so..." But I get it. Taking a jaded "too cool for school" 10-year-old is a different experience than bringing a wide-eyed three-year-old. The situation is even more complicated when you have significant age gaps between your children. How do you create a trip that is magical for everyone from toddlers to teens?

□ The first step is to get everyone involved in the planning process. Pore over your copy of PassPorter's Walt Disney World (giving each person a different colored highlighter helps with this), order the Walt Disney World vacation planning DVD, and check out the Walt Disney World web site. Have each person pick one or two things in each park that are on their "must do" list. Some examples of "must do" items are a ride that your thrill-loving 13-year-old just HAS to ride, or a Princess meal that, without which, your six-year-old's life simply won't be complete. Then commit to at least one of these items for each family member! (You too, Mom and Dad! This is your vacation too!)

□ Once you have the "must do" list in order, it's time to move to the "wanna do" list. And anyone with an older child knows that the "wanna do" list can go on for days, so be sure to put a cap on the number of items each person can contribute! Some examples of "wanna do" items might be a Backstage Tour or a special one-on-one meal with a parent. Maybe a romantic meal alone for Mom and Dad while the kids explore the Neverland Club?

The next step is to adjust your expectations. My trips with my son, now at age seven, differ wildly from his first trips as a toddler! At three, he was fearless and rode anything. At seven, common sense has kicked in

(somewhat) and he is not as likely to go on everything we go on. Plus, he has learned to roll his eyes, so there is plenty of that when Mom and Dad insist on trying on Mickey ears in every store. (Not that this stops us…) Where he used to be happy to sit and watch the fountains at Epcot for hours, he now runs right past them without even looking up, in his pursuit of a seat on Mission:Space.

□ But if you are patient and let the magic come to you, miracles happen. That 12-year-old who was "over" the Princesses, when finding herself face to face with Cinderella, may just melt enough to pose for a picture.

□ Last step--divide and conquer. Yes, vacations are family time. But when you are trying to keep kids of all ages entertained, sometimes a little splitting up goes a long way! I know, I know--little Timmy HAS to see Handy Manny in Disney Junior--Live on Stage. But can his older brother Jimmy go check out Tower of Terror with another grown-up during that time? At least the second time around? And again, this goes for grown-ups, too. Mom, consider hanging at the pool with the kids while Dad grabs a round of golf. Dad, do the same for Mom while she is at the spa!

□ The best thing about any Disney destination is that there truly is something for everyone. From a young one's first ride on Dumbo to your teen's ride-along at the Richard Petty Driving Experience, I guarantee that each person will have their very own "wide eyed" moment!

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