

Becoming Disney Parents: The Transition from Disney Couple to Disney Dad & Mom

by PJ Pettigrew, PassPorter Guest Contributor

□ We made many trips to Walt Disney World as college students and then DINKS (Double Income No Kids), and considered ourselves Walt Disney World experts, but that comfortable feeling quickly diminished with the birth of our daughter.

Our Disney style was suddenly cramped by this short person who needed naps and didn't meet the height requirements for the good rides. We wondered if our Happy Place was all of a sudden going to create more hassles than we were willing to deal with, resulting in a less-than-happy place for us new parents. I will admit, we had our struggles, especially when our daughter got a bit older, but experiencing Disney through the eyes of a child--seeing the wonder and amazement on her face--is truly a priceless experience.

To give you a bit of background on myself and my family -- I grew up in California, a frequent visitor to Disneyland. My husband was born and raised in Miami, and started going to Walt Disney World in 1974. When our two worlds collided, a Disney family was born. We honeymooned at the Grand Floridian Resort, my first stay on Walt Disney World property, and began a tradition that I hope never ends!

□ Our daughter's first visit to Walt Disney World was at six months old, for her first Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party. I had researched tips on taking young children to Disney before the trip and felt really prepared to tackle this challenge, but there were still issues that we were left to figure out on our own. The first challenge was realizing we didn't own a good stroller to take to the parks. I admit I should have given some thought to our frequent Disney trips when we registered for all those baby gifts, but it must have slipped my mind. We ended up with a basic umbrella stroller for quick trips and the big fancy stroller with the steering wheel for daughter and the iPod jack for us, for those afternoon walks around the neighborhood. Neither of these would work well for a day at the parks. We needed a streamlined stroller that would recline for naps and not be too big for folding on buses.

□ After much research, we purchased a third stroller specifically for our Disney trips, a Combi Cosmo. We chose this stroller because it is pretty light and it folds up very nicely, not just folding together, but the sides also fold in, which makes it very compact, especially when packing a

vehicle to drive to Florida. It also includes a carrying strap to sling it over a shoulder. The one downside was that the basket under the stroller is not as large as other makes and models, but it has suited our purposes wonderfully and quickly became the only stroller we used, even at home.

At first we felt so weighed down having to carry this stroller, diapers, baby wipes, snacks, toys, etc., to ensure we were prepared for whatever happened throughout the day. Our comfort zone was shattered before we even entered the first park, when we realized we couldn't just breeze by security in the 'No Bags' line any more. However, it didn't take long to feel at ease. For the first time, we felt ourselves strolling at a leisurely pace down Main Street in the Magic Kingdom, just enjoying every minute of our daughter's first visit to our Happy Place, instead of rushing to the first ride as usual. The Mayor welcomed us and it felt like we were home again. We started teaching our daughter our family Disney traditions, such as riding Pirates first, having a Mickey Ice Cream sandwich in the afternoon, and a Dole Whip in the evening while watching the parade. Our daughter was wide-eyed and in awe most of the day, but she reached a point where she had experienced sensory overload, and became a bit of a handful. This is when we had our first Baby Care Center experience, and they are a God-send! My best advice is to take advantage of them whenever possible, even if it's just to sit down in the air conditioning and let your child color or read a book. We also had to learn to take a break in the afternoon to go back to our room to relax and take naps (ALL of us!)…no more commando trips! Decompression time is a must, especially on a first trip.

□ We also had to learn the art of the baby swap. Baby swap is great for the parent who gets to ride the ride, but what does the other parent do with the child while waiting his or her turn to ride? Character greetings are always a good diversion during the day, as are shows with short waits, like Carousel of Progress or Country Bear Jamboree, but we learned to save our baby swap rides for later in the evening when our daughter was (hopefully) asleep in the stroller and unaware that one of us was missing.

□ Dining also became an issue. We had always enjoyed the nicer Disney restaurants and worried we would be limited to nothing but character meals from now on. This hasn't been the case exactly, but we did have to alter our plans for the first few years. Our nice dinners had to become nice lunches, as our daughter was too tired and antsy by dinner time to sit still in a nice restaurant. At lunch, she would be hungry and better behaved. Our Brown Derby dinners became lunches and everyone was happy.

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□Our daughter started teaching us, as well. We started stopping to smell the roses…literally! We learned to enjoy playing in the fountains at Epcot and in puddles on a rainy day. Afternoon naps are not a waste of time, and a quick dip in the pool can cool you off in a short amount of time; just don't forget the sunscreen!

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□So, for all you Disney adults who fear all the fun will end when children are added to the mix, please know you are not alone - it can be done and still be enjoyable! Now, our daughter is five years old and is helping us plan our Disney trips. They have truly become a family affair.

About The Author: □PJ Pettigrew is a rocket scientist, life-long Disney fan, and now Disney mom who is enjoying experiencing Disney through the eyes of her daughter as if it were all new again.

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