

Planning a Trip to New York City: How A Die-hard Disney Planner Plans A Trip Somewhere Else

by Jen Kopfman, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I love planning Disney vacations.

If someone told me I had to plan an entire Walt Disney World vacation, complete with transportation plans, hotel reservations, park tickets, advanced dining reservations, and a detailed touring plan, I could arrange everything in less than 24 hours. Twenty-four? Actually, just give me four hours! So imagine my surprise when my husband and children said "We want to go somewhere else instead of Disney this year."

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□What?!

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□They were serious.

After much discussion, we agreed that New York City (NYC) was our destination. So, I was faced with planning a weeklong vacation to a city I had never visited. That's when panic set in. Why did planning an NYC vacation seem more overwhelming than a Disney vacation?

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□Breathing deeply, I realized I could do this. I'd just plan this vacation the same way I plan our Disney vacations! In case you're faced with the same challenge, allow me to share my newfound wisdom. Here are my top 10 tips for planning an NYC vacation (and getting a small sprinkle of pixie dust too).

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□10. Buy a travel guidebook. Just as PassPorter is my constant companion when planning mouse visits, I knew some expert advice would be needed. Visiting my local bookstore, I obtained two popular travel guides. Once purchased, keep these guidebook(s) in locations where you often settle down to read.

9. Start with transportation and lodging. One warning: although transportation tends to be reasonably priced, lodging is not! There are no value, moderate, and deluxe level accommodations in NYC -- it's more like expensive, outrageously expensive, and celebrities-only pricing. A quick post to [Globetrotting](#), PassPorter's general travel forum, produced some suggested hotels. After extensive research, we purchased a travel package from one of the large travel websites. It included round-trip airfare for four people and six nights in a Midtown

hotel. Thanks to package pricing, our hotel cost was well under the listed rack room rates and at a four-star hotel rather than the three-star options we considered.

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□8. Get a "must do" list from your travel companions. I posted a large sticky note on the refrigerator approximately three months before our vacation. The guidebooks also "magically" appeared in locations where they could be found and browsed at leisure. And slowly, our list grew. It included the usual tourist destinations, stores to be visited, and (thanks to my 16-year-old Food Network addict) restaurants to be tried.

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□7. Research ticket options. I know better than to buy a one-day ticket to Magic Kingdom and a one-day ticket to Epcot if I'm planning to visit both on the same day. So, I looked for the NYC version of park hopper tickets. Several different sites offer combination pricing, but the most practical option for us was [CityPass](#). It included admission to six popular tourist destinations, all for \$79 per adult and \$59 per child (and both of my teenagers were considered children). This purchase offered significant savings compared to face-value ticket prices at each location. If you consider a ticket package, be sure you're really going to use every ticket provided within the time allotted.

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□6. Be flexible with dining decisions. I couldn't make Advanced Dining Reservations 180 days ahead, but I could do some advance planning. My daughter had seen several NYC restaurants featured on Food Network shows. I made a list of her requests, noting their locations. On several occasions when hunger began to strike, I directed us to one of the nearby restaurants from her list. But planning couldn't cover the entire trip. Several times, we wandered the area we were touring, scanning menus at each restaurant we passed until each of us found something that sounded good. This "stumble upon" approach took us to one of our favorite meals of the trip, but we never would have found it if we hadn't been flexible with our dining plans!

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□5. Do not pay full price for theater tickets. (Exception: If your desired show -- like *Wicked* or *Lion King* -- frequently sells out, then buy in advance at face value). But… if you have a little flexibility and are willing to take a chance, try the TKTS booth. They sell tickets for that day's shows at discounted prices. Just by waiting at the TKTS booth for 45 minutes, we got second row seats to *Phantom of the Opera* at a 50% discount! *Mary Poppins* tickets were discounted 40% that day. Locations and hours are on the [TKTS website](#) and they have a helpful smart phone app (see #4 below).

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□4. Get smart phone apps. We used several frequently during our trip. NYCWAY was great for finding things near wherever we happened to

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be. At a museum and need to find somewhere to eat? It listed many options. Finish a tourist destination early and need something else to do? It gave suggestions. HOPSTOP was another app used daily. After entering our current location and desired destination, this app provided the best way to get from one to the other. It was very detailed in providing train transfer instructions for subway first-timers, which we appreciated. The TKTS app (see #5 above) helped us determine which Broadway tickets were available while waiting in line (oops, sorry, in NYC, we waited ON line). Now if only there was an app to tell me how long I'd be waiting on line at the Empire State Building!

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□3. Wear comfortable shoes. I think we walked just as far each day as we did during a typical Disney visit! Make sure every member of your travel group has several pairs of shoes, all comfortable and broken in.

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□2. Get your Mickey fix. My family knew I would rather have been in Florida with Mickey, so we took every opportunity to get a little pixie dust. Jack Sparrow made of Legos at the FAO Schwarz store? Photo op! Huge Disney Store in Times Square? We spent more than an hour! We weren't able to see Lion King or Mary Poppins on Broadway this trip, but that would be great way to add a little Disney to a New York visit. I do have one warning: Mickey in NYC is not the same Mickey we know and love. After visiting the Disney Store, we were crossing the street when we saw our favorite mouse. Dutifully trained, both of my teenagers posed with Mickey while I fumbled to retrieve my camera. As we finished, a shocking event occurred. Mickey spoke! Slowly, I realized what he said. "Tips please?" And I knew we weren't in Orlando anymore. Even with that lesson learned, we still managed to experience small doses of magic during our vacation!

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□1. Take time to stop and smell the roses (and spot the celebrities). During park visits, we like to take time to appreciate the details and the lesser-known attractions (i.e. Animation Academy!). We tried to do this in NY too. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we discovered a scavenger hunt to find artifacts from the Percy Jackson book series. At the Museum of Natural History, we found some of the "characters" featured in the Night at the Museum movies. Just by taking a quick peek around during lunch, we discovered we were dining in the same room as Tommy Hilfiger. Central Park was a great way to appreciate the beauty of this city. These slower moments were some of our favorites.

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□We had a wonderful vacation in New York! Everyone enjoyed seeing a city we had heard so much about, while still experiencing a bit of magic for our Disney-addicts. But guess what I heard shortly after returning home? "We're going to see Mickey next summer, right Mom?" Woo hoo!!

About The Author: Jen Kopfman is a college professor who lives with her husband and two teenagers in South Carolina. She loves planning family vacations but is especially thrilled to be heading back to Walt Disney World next summer.

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