

# The Kids Are In Charge: Letting the Kids Plan Our Disney Vacation

by Andee Zomeran, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Our dream vacation was getting closer.

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□The plan was to take Emma and Annika, our 11 and 9-year-old daughters, on the best Disney trip of their young lives. During December, we would leave the rainy Pacific Northwest for seven nights on the Disney Magic and another seven nights at Walt Disney World. I had been dutiful in making my reservations for Cinderella's Royal Table and getting tickets for Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party. The hours spent on the computer daydreaming researching would all pay off in the end when everything would go off without a hitch. Then a call came in September that would change our lives.

My husband accepted a job that would move us from the Seattle area to Portland, Oregon during Thanksgiving weekend. six days before our flight to Orlando. Forget trying to plan character breakfasts! My hours were now spent packing boxes. How would we enjoy this long planned getaway when we were so stressed out? It was time to give the kids some Disney planning responsibility.

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□I knew the cruise portion of the trip would be fairly easy. There was little preparation necessary to eat fine meals and lounge in the sun. I was concerned about our Walt Disney World Resort week. When I'm in charge of the planning, it involves a spreadsheet listing times and places to be in precise locations, notated by color. Could I really give this task to two children? And if I did, could I keep my "hyper-planning, I'm-always-right," opinions to myself? It turns out I could, if I remembered these 5 steps:

□1. Kids Can Plan I handed the girls my PassPorter guidebook, showed them websites, and said, "Go to it." Their excitement grew as they decided which attractions they were ready for and less importantly, the food they wanted to eat. Unlike my own planning, they weren't pondering over the delectable menus from California Grill or Jiko. Apparently, Quick Service would suit them just fine.

2. Kids Don't Like to Rush A Disney theme park on a child's timeframe is much different than my own. The girls scheduled our resort vacation to begin at Animal Kingdom. There was no running to the back of the park to grab a Kilimanjaro Safari FASTPASS. We stood and watched the rope drop ceremony, then took a slow stroll past the Tree of Life to the Wildlife Express Train.

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☐ One happy surprise that resulted from kid planning was Rafiki's Planet Watch. This attraction had never made it on my time-sensitive spreadsheet plan. Once inside the Conservation Station, the girls took their time peering through each glass window. We saw tiny creatures being treated in the veterinarian's office, learning that each animal, big and small, gets a yearly physical. We meandered over to the nutritionist's cubicle studying the food each animal eats. And for that Disney touch, low crowds allowed us to spend quality time with Rafiki, Pocahontas, and Jiminy Cricket. Because we were on the kids' schedule, my girls, who are terrified of reptiles, were able to warm up to the idea of petting a snake. I would have never chosen to spend an hour-and-a-half in this area of the park, but now it will be a "must do" on our Animal Kingdom agenda.

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☐3. Kids Are Flexible Day #2 on the kid list was supposed to be spent at Epcot. We arrived and went straight to Test Track and Mission Space before realizing Orlando's record cold temperatures would make the day really, really chilly. My Type-A personality was ready to power through the cold. After all, this was the agreed upon schedule! Emma and Annika wanted none of that and they were happy to come up with a "Plan B." We spent the day riding the monorail and viewing all of the Christmas decorations at the resort hotels. Nothing makes a kid happier on a cold day than buying cookies and hot cocoa from the Grand Floridian's enormous gingerbread house.

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☐4. Kids Need Rest Knowing we'd be up late the night of Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party, the girls decided to take it easy during the day (at Mom's gentle suggestion). We made a leisurely exploration our resort hotel, did some light shopping, and had some quiet time. Upon arriving at the nighttime event, they continued to plan the action. While my schedule would have for sure included Disney's entertaining shows, their agenda was focused on riding Space Mountain over and over again. They graciously granted my request to watch the parade as long as they could have a cup of hot chocolate in their hands. The morning after the party we carried out another plan dictated by the children; we slept in.

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☐5. Kids Know How to Relax Toward the middle of our Walt Disney World Resort vacation stay, it became astonishingly easy for me to "let go." There was no rushing, the girls had the maps, and they could just play while my husband and I followed along. There are benefits to being a repeat Walt Disney World vacation family. Emma and Annika are at home there. They know that if they don't see something this time, there will most likely be a next time. If they've done something before, they don't necessarily have to do it again.

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☐ Shockingly, I was happy to have the kids in charge of our vacation schedule. I didn't worry about an organized agenda being threatened by unforeseen circumstances. The girls were at ease because they didn't have a mom trying to rush them off to the next event. I can't lie; there were things I missed. I didn't get my Tonga Toast for breakfast at the Kona Cafe. I didn't get to wander through The Magic of Disney Animation. Heck, I didn't even get to see IllumiNations! However, my girls taught me lessons that I won't soon forget. Our vacation is about being together. Our vacation is taking time to explore our surroundings. Our vacation will never again depend on a color-coded Excel spreadsheet.

*About The Author: Andee Zomerman lives in the Pacific Northwest and is a wife and mother to a family that loves all things Disney. They seem to be constantly planning their next Disney vacation -- even while experiencing the current one.*

Article last updated: 09-15-2011

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