

Our Very Own Amazing Race: Adventure Travel By a Disney Fan

by Justine Fellows, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Disney fans are an unusual bunch.

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□What sets us apart is often our love of planning, dreaming and absolute obsession with creating the perfect trip. We also love the feeling that unexpected surprises may be around every corner. Disney brings us the ability to enjoy all of these passions, but what happens when you want to go somewhere else? Are these quirky attributes transferable?

My family absolutely loves to watch the Amazing Race, a reality show that features teams of two racing around the world to reach amazing destinations, or "pit stops." The ultimate goal, after many weeks of travel and eliminated teams, is to make it to the final three groups, racing home for one million dollars. The show involves travel, puzzle solving, out of the ordinary foods, and facing one's fears; often in the form of heights. Our family constantly talks about wanting to run the race. Would we be good at it? Which family member would do what task? What travel tips would we know that could help us along the way? In fact, pretending to play the race has come in handy when dealing with unexpected airport delays or lost luggage; we just say, "This happens on Amazing Race, what would they do?"

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□After spending some time this summer putting together a holiday trip to Puerto Rico, I realized that sitting still just wasn't going to work for someone like me. I needed to know everything about the island: customs, foods, events, the language, best places to visit, and more. As I began my research and started sharing information with my daughters, my youngest popped the question, "Mom, can you make this into the amazing race?" And in my mind I thought, "Heck yeah I can!"

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□And so it began… Step one, we already had a nice condo on the beach, a rental car and plane tickets…what do we need to make this into a race? The answer: adventures, funky foods and help from the locals. I started with the adventures. We were heading to Rincon, Puerto Rico, and after some research I was able to find a wonderful young couple who own a vacation planning business for the area - <http://www.rinconvacations.com/>. I knew immediately that I had found a good match when the owner called to talk about my needs and wasn't thrown off by my mention of planning the Amazing Race. Within just a few days of e-mails back and forth we had booked the following:

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- ☐• A two-hour horseback ride on the beach through an almond tree forest
- ☐• A four-hour eco-tour complete with six ziplines, a 70-foot rappel, and a boat ride into a cave (complete with fruit bats)
- ☐• A snorkel trip through mangrove groves followed by a swim in a bioluminescent bay
- ☐• A private chef to teach my two daughters how to cook Puerto Rican dishes (and yes, I am brilliant, two hours of babysitting with a full meal to boot!).

In Puerto Rico these were all very reasonably priced, but if cost is a factor, it was easy to be creative and find free options including snorkeling, surfing, public beaches, and more.

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☐ So now I had my adventures, but how in the heck was I going to reproduce the race? Probably the most important piece of the show is the envelopes. The teams are always running towards clue boxes where they have to retrieve a distinct-looking envelope with an even more distinctive pull tear. Inside are clues that include road blocks, fast forwards, and detours. I knew that I could spend a chunk of time creating these, but with some searching online I came across this [little gem of a web site](#) and rejoiced in the fact that I had just gained about ten hours of time! The site gave me beautiful templates that fit perfectly into the tear envelopes, complete with a link to buy them.

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☐ Now the fun began -- my forte, planning! I started "Disney-style" with a nice big spreadsheet. I then entered our travel time, meals at restaurants I knew that I wanted to try, the four scheduled adventures, and some down time. Each day involved between two and five different clue envelopes. The most clues were on travel days, to help keep the kids amused during the "boring" parts. Some were individual tasks and some involved different variations on teams.

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☐ My detours, fast forwards and road blocks included:

- ☐• Finding facts about Puerto Rico in the airport bookstore
 - ☐• Splitting up into teams to shop for two separate lists of groceries
 - ☐• Finding shells and sea glass
 - ☐• Completing the four adventures
 - ☐• Serving Mom and Dad dinner after a cooking lesson
 - ☐• Tasting a different food -- plantains, roasted pork from roadside vendors, empanadillas, coconut
 - ☐• Writing down Spanish words, facts about Puerto Rico, and what they had learned
 - ☐• And much more…
- ☐

☐ Here are some tips we learned along the way:

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☐• Include the directions, grocery list, confirmation numbers, and contact information on the cards. This made our lives really easy (just like the PassPorter pockets!) The girls ripped open an envelope and everything we needed was inside. We were ready to go

☐• The kids not only loved the race, but it actually eliminated complaints and fears. They took it seriously, and did what they needed to finish the tasks. My youngest, who hates being sticky, didn't even mention the four hours spent covered in sand and salt. My oldest conquered snorkeling because she was determined to complete the road block.

☐• Travel time to our destinations became fun. The excitement of the race made the time in the car part of the adventure. The kids helped with maps, and used our iPhone GPS to follow where we were going.

☐• Even people who didn't know the Amazing Race were happy to help us. I had to do a lot of "clue distribution," which usually meant slipping a clue to a random person -- security guard in the airport, flight attendant, horse-back guide... I just said "We are playing a game, would you please give this to the girls" and they were happy, sometimes elated, to participate. The excited JetBlue flight attendant actually delivered the clue in the big basket of snacks.

☐• The girls knew that the race wasn't real but they pretended it was. They never even questioned it. When plans didn't work out or we decided to skip something there were no complaints.

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☐ Our final "pit stop" was on Christmas Eve (wow, my kids are spoiled), complete with the Travelocity gnome waiting out front, the final clue written on the bottom, and Grandma and Grandpa waiting on our pit stop mat. We just couldn't justify the \$40 for [this little number](#). So, the moral of the story? You can be a Disney planner anywhere. I find great joy in organizing, planning and dreaming, so this was a perfect challenge for me. Amazing Race made our trip into an adventure we will never forget.

About The Author: Justine is the Author of PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner e-book. Rumor has it, Justine's love of Disney World stems from being deprived by her non-Disney parents. Much to their dismay, she has more than made up for it with more than 15 trips under her belt!

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