

Pack Your Pixie Dust: Creating Magical Moments for Others on Your Disney Trip

by Keely Hutton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When planning a vacation to Walt Disney World, we envision the dream-like scenario we've seen played out in countless commercials.

The problem is if cast members and characters don't meet that impossible standard on our trip, we are left feeling let down. So, is lowering our expectations the solution to avoiding disappointment? No. You can remain realistic about your vacation and still ensure many moments of family magic.

"How?" you ask. Simple. Create your own.

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□ Veteran Disney vacationers refer to those unmistakably magical moments created by cast members and characters as being sprinkled with Pixie Dust. But creating pixie dust moments is not exclusive to Disney employees. You, too, can sprinkle magic throughout your entire vacation, and it begins before you ever leave home.

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□ When packing, be sure to include some gratitude. Many Disney websites have templates for small thank you cards, aptly named Pixie Dust cards, which can be shared with deserving cast members. Simply print them out, or, if you like, create your own. Make it a family activity. The process will help build excitement for your upcoming trip. Give your children some Pixie Dust cards to share on your trip. They are a perfect way for shy children to express their gratitude. This small gesture will mean the world to Disney's hard-working cast members.

Another pre-trip tip is picking up surprise treats to share. A visit to your local discount store can provide a treasure trove of small, inexpensive gifts, from glow necklaces to light-up pens. Most of these stores carry a large assortment of Disney-themed activity trinkets, such as stickers and toys. Give your children packs of glow necklaces and stickers to share with other kids at nightly parades and firework shows. You will create magical moments for your children, and the children and parents near you. By the end of the show, you may out-rank the Fairy Godmother in the making dreams come true department.

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□ Aside from cards and gifts, you can create magical moments by tapping into your spirit of adventure. Many times, the less popular rides and attractions prove to provide the most magical moments. At the

Magic Kingdom, opportunities like waking Tink at Tinkerbell's Treasures, searching for hidden paintbrushes on Tom Sawyer Island, being a guest conductor on the Walt Disney World Railroad, or decorating the tree at Ye Olde Christmas Shoppe can become cherished memories for young and old, alike. All of these little-known gems are buried throughout the parks, just waiting to be discovered. A quick on-line search for Disney World secrets and tips can provide you with a map to unearth these hidden treasures.

□ High-tech gadgets, globe-trotting clues and friendly cast members make touring Epcot a fun, interactive experience you won't soon forget. While waiting for your turn to ride Test Track or Soarin', explore the hands-on exhibits at Innoventions or take a relaxing trip through the refurbished Spaceship Earth. When exiting the ride, spend some time reconstructing a 3-D skeleton or sending friends email photos from the interactive games and activities found at Project Tomorrow: Inventing the World of Tomorrow. If adventure is what you seek, take a unique tour of the World Showcase by picking up a free Kimmunicator and joining Team Possible. As Kim Possible's honorary secret agents, you will follow clues and foil supervillains while learning about eleven different countries and their cultures. Take the time to interact with the World Showcases's knowledgeable cast members. They can provide you with unique insights into their countries and cultures. Ask cast members to sign your autograph book and write "hello" in their native language. These world ambassadors love to teach others about their homes, and by the end of the day, you could be multilingual.

□ The key to magical moments at Disney's Hollywood Studios is participation. Aside from the popular, pulse-racing rides and heart-stopping stunts, there are multiple opportunities to become part of the show. Cast aside your insecurities and interact with one of the quirky characters roaming the park or volunteer for a role in one of Disney's productions. They're always looking for willing victims, I mean, guests, to embarrass. If you are not comfortable with being the center of attention, don't shy away from watching the hilarious ad-libs of Hollywood's Studios talented cast. They are always on the lookout for enthusiastic volunteers. So whether you are hungry for your big break in show biz or are most happy watching from the audience, relax, and enjoy the show.

□ At Disney's Animal Kingdom Park the magic is in the details. In your rush to Kilimanjaro Safaris and Expedition Everest, take a moment to soak in the gorgeous landscaping. Choose one of the quiet detours that will take you off the beaten path through lush vegetation and beautiful animal exhibits. Marvel at the 400 carvings that adorn the Tree of Life, or take a leisurely train ride to learn about animals and conservation.

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Because, let's be honest, what guest can deem his or her vacation magical without first earning a certificate in Poopology from Rafiki's Planet Watch?

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□ In every Disney commercial, there is one ingredient essential for a magical vacation: the characters. When you picture your perfect trip, what characters do you see? Mickey? Cinderella? Buzz? Well, you're not alone. Every guest entering the park is looking for those beloved characters, which can lead to long lines and cranky kids… and parents. Not the best formula for magic. Usually characters come out for autographs in groups of two or more. If every guest in the park is lining up to see Mickey, take a look around. Who else is available? Less popular characters, like Mr. Smee from Peter Pan and Governor Ratcliffe from Pocahontas, may have shorter lines and be able to spend more time with you. On a recent trip, while the line for Peter Pan stretched past Magic Carpets of Aladdin, we found Mr. Smee all alone. He spent five minutes drawing hearts around his picture in our autograph books and funny sketches next to his fellow Neverland characters. When we showed him a picture of the crocodile, he ran over to inform Captain Hook, who immediately tried to scale a nearby pole. We talked about our interactions with Smee more than any other character that trip, including the main Mouse.

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□ The last step in creating your own magical Pixie Dust is simple, smile. Smiles are easy to pack and don't require extra baggage fees, but you'd be amazed how many people forget to bring them on vacation. Sure, it's easy to wear a smile when you discover you've received a free room upgrade or when there is no line for Space Mountain. But I urge you to try one on while waiting 70 minutes to ride Dumbo or when it rains on your Spectromagic parade. At first it may feel uncomfortably tight, like a new pair of Mickey ears, but if you wear it throughout your trip, those around you will remember to wear theirs. The magic of smiles is that they are contagious; share them with every guest, cast member, and character you meet.

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□ So load up your sunscreen and swimsuits, but don't forget to pack your Pixie Dust. There's no need to set off on a quest to shake the dander off some poor, unsuspecting fairy; Pixie Dust is easy to find. Just pack up your thank yous and small treasures, bring along your spirit of adventure, hike up your smile and watch your spirits soar. The magic will be yours!

About The Author: Keely Hutton is a mother of two, writer, teacher, and fan of all things Disney. When she is isn't writing or planning a trip to Disney, she can be found at her karate dojo, working out the stress brought on by a tough day of revising.

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