

First Time Parents in the Magic Kingdom: A Whole New World

by Erin Sforza, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My husband and I have a lot of experience at Walt Disney World.

We have both been cast members, we were Annual Passholders for over six years, and we attended pretty much every special event a number of times. I'm confident when I say that we both consider ourselves experts on all things Walt Disney World, from the attractions to the recreation options. This holiday season though, when we ventured into the Magic Kingdom, our 9-month-old daughter made us a party of three. How different would this vacation actually be? One thing was sure, Disney World would be different for us from now on.

First and foremost we noticed traveling "light" was no longer an option. Our daughter is nursed, but she also needs her solid foods at this point, so we had her meals, milk for cereal, bowl and spoon, bottles for warming the milk, bib, plus a nursing cover for me. We had changes of clothes in a backpack because we were taking our holiday picture with Santa, not to mention the diaper bag with all of the "bottom care" accessories, and cold liquid teethingers in a small insulated bottle holder. (She cut two "magical" teeth in the hotel the day before!) Last but not least, we had the umbrella stroller carrying our precious little bundle. Two other adults in our party met us at the bus stop in front of our resort, which wasn't too difficult, and headed to The Crystal Palace for breakfast.

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□As a party of two, character breakfasts were fun, but we always envied the happy parents taking pictures of their children with their favorite characters. We were thrilled that it was now our turn. Breakfast was different though, because we ate in shifts; I fed our little one while my husband ate, and then tucked into my food until the characters began to arrive. It was worth the wait. Winnie the Pooh is one of our daughter's favorite people, and the look on her face when she saw him coming was more than we could have hoped for. I didn't expect to be so overcome emotionally watching her discover that her bear was real! In the past, my husband and the rest of our party would chat until the next character arrived, but now we were consumed (as an entire table) with entertaining Aine until the next character came. This included breaking out the toys, walking her around the restaurant, and playing all manner of games with her. All in all it was a great experience, but a little tiring.

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□ Instead of our trademark dash to the attractions, the rest of the day was consumed with keeping our daughter comfortable, showing her all the wonderful decorations in the park, and taking pictures. We changed her into her Christmas outfit and she had her first meeting with Santa! In between frequent diaper change breaks, we rode the Walt Disney World Railroad, which didn't capture her imagination the way the bus did, and also took her on "Its A Small World." She absolutely loved it! There was so much for her to look at and the colors and music were mesmerizing for her. We also rode Prince Charming's Royal Carousel, another colorful, music-filled hit for her. It began to rain after lunch. As a couple, my husband and I would not have been fazed by it, but with our daughter it was different. Making sure she was out of the rain, properly bundled, and the stroller was safely stowed was a lot different than just jogging from awning to awning through the showers. We were definitely not as nimble as we used to be, and gained a new appreciation for those navigating with double strollers.

It rained on and off during the evening. At dinnertime we were lucky enough to have a napping little girl, which allowed the grownups to all eat at the same time. We were able to get quickly through the line to meet Mickey and Minnie Mouse, which was great! Aine was thrilled to meet them both! We grabbed spots for the electrical parade, and I headed off to the Baby Station for the first time that day to nurse her and get her out of the inclement weather for a while. (I had otherwise just found out-of-the-way spots to nurse her, which was pretty easy.) The Baby Station was cozy and clean and gave us just the break we needed. I bundled her back up and enjoyed her first Disney parade with her. It was the best parade experience we'd ever had, and in a great spot despite the fact that we couldn't sit and wait as far ahead as usual, since Aine would not have been able to be patient that long. The characters made such a big deal over her smiling little face, and truthfully, she was hard to ignore waving her arms and legs wildly, and laughing or squealing in delight.

□ Afterwards, we headed down Main Street so that Aine wouldn't be too close to the concussions from the fireworks, and ducked into the shops to say goodbye to the rest of our party and take a break from the weather. We brought her back out into Main Street, where my husband surprised us both with a light-up Mickey balloon, and we watched the fireworks. She was not the least bit afraid, but we moved over to the porch of Main Street Cinema to watch under cover of the roof. After that we went to see the princesses, another photo success! We gathered our things and headed back to the resort on Aine's second favorite ride, the bus, at about 9 pm.

□ Normally my husband and I would have been at the park before

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opening, stayed until the end of Extra Magic Hours, and hit every ride in the park. We would have eaten on the fly, and browsed in the shops for as long as we liked. It was a totally different experience with our daughter. We were completely consumed with sticking to her routine as closely as we could, and not overwhelming her, even planning to head back to the resort for a nap if she needed. We'd never hit so few attractions or taken so few pictures with characters, and I watched to make sure displays weren't being knocked over as my little one "shopped" with us. It was a radical departure for us, but it was also the best Disney trip we've ever taken. We can't wait to see how our daughter reacts to being on the Disney Magic when it sets sail from New York this summer!

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