

Keeping Toddlers Entertained at Walt Disney World: Traveling with Kids

by Melissa Solbach, PassPorter Guest Contributor

□ We went to Walt Disney World last year for the first time.

My son was six, and we had a pretty good idea how he would react. My daughter on the other hand, was two weeks away from her third birthday, and if you have kids, you will understand when I say that toddlers can be somewhat unpredictable!

Part of our problem was that while the oldest was tall enough to ride on almost everything, there were many attractions the little one could not ride. While splitting the family up for parts of the day wasn't our first preference, my husband and I found we really enjoyed having some one on one time with each of the kids. However, I don't think either of us was prepared to entertain the toddler as much as we needed to.

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□ To save you some of the lessons we learned, I've come up with 10 strategies to help distract your youngster, even at the Happiest Place on Earth.

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□1. Food and Drink. This is the most obvious of course, and there is no shortage of amazing treats at Walt Disney World. Our first day there it poured rain, so we spent a lot of time running from one covered location to another. Fortunately, because we spent more time in gift shops than I had expected, we stumbled on the snack packages of Chip & Dale Snack Company Tiny Treats and Mickey Puffy Cheese Crackers. Our cranky toddler was near melt-down levels, yet she happily sat right back down in her stroller and munched away after we bought these. The best part, they only cost approximately \$3 and it took nearly three days before she worked her way through the whole package. It was a steal at twice the price, and that cannot be said very often at Disney!

2. I have collected pressed pennies since before we had children. Many of the pressed penny machines are hand-cranked, but some have electronic buttons. My toddler loved getting to pick which penny we would get from each machine, and liked to hand it back to me to put in our penny book. Maybe your thing is trading pins or collecting Vinylmation -- just find something personal to your family and include the kids.

□3. The shows at Walt Disney World are always amazing, and toddlers love repetition, so a great tip is to catch a show a second or third time with your toddler, while the rest of your party is on one of the bigger rides. We watched the stage show at Magic Kingdom three times, from

three different vantage points, and my toddler was just as fascinated each time. It will also give you both a chance to go get a treat and sit down for a few minutes and rest. This tactic worked great for us when my husband took our oldest to Stitch's Great Escape and then met us after the show in front of the castle.

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□4. There is also a practical side to being split up, and that is the option of putting half of your group on a ride and then going to get a FASTPASS for another attraction. We viewed it a little like playing a strategy game, forcing us to use our time as wisely as we could. And putting the tickets into the FASTPASS machine is just hilarious for a little one. She could have done that all day!

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□5. We had originally planned to go back to our condo so our toddler could rest, but past the first day, that just didn't happen. We discovered that if we put her in the stroller and walked around at nap time, she would often fall asleep right there, and then we could stroll over to a shady spot and sit down while she slept.

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□6. Our children both know how to utilize our iPhones, and that came in very handy at Walt Disney World. We also have some old iPod Nanos that we passed down to them when we got the phones. You might consider taking your old devices and loading them up with things that are guaranteed to keep your toddler amused. They used them to play games, look at pictures and videos from previous days, and take pictures. Speaking of, that brings me to the next tip…

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□7. Cameras are endlessly entertaining for a toddler. Don't be afraid to give your child a camera of her own and let her snap away. The different perspective certainly adds to your collection of photos at the end of the trip.

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□8. People-watching is one of my favorite things to do in large crowds, and I discovered on this trip it is one of my daughter's favorites as well. We sat and talked about what color shirts people were wearing, or why that kid might be crying, or where we thought that family might be from. I was always surprised at her insights and the things she noticed first.

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□9. We did a few character meets on our trip, but found that having patience in long lines was not a strong suit for our toddler. And then, actually meeting the character was very overwhelming, so this goes down as a theoretically good distraction, but only for especially patient or outgoing children. Our daughter was pretty leery of the characters at first, so we had to adjust our expectations, and that might be the case for you, too. We tried a few meet and greets during the week to help

prepare her, but by the time the characters came out at Chef Mickey's, she still was not exactly outgoing, though she was happy to pose for pictures with them.

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□10. The last strategy is really a general life lesson when raising toddlers, but I think it bears repeating here. Make an effort to give your child options, so they feel like they are getting to help decide things. The beauty of this is if you do it often enough for the small stuff, they may not fight you as much on the big stuff. For example, every time we got to the Transportation and Ticket Center, we let the kids decide if we'd take the ferry or the monorail. You could also let your toddler pick where to sit at one of the big shows, like Fantasmic! at Disney's Hollywood Studios, or where to watch a parade. Little folks don't get to make many decisions for themselves, and we found that giving her options helped our little girl feel included.

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□A vacation to Walt Disney World can be exhausting and overwhelming for anyone, much less the youngest member of your family. They will be tired and cranky and frankly, you may just have to pick your battles on this trip and let slide some stuff that normally doesn't fly at home. If you can put a few more minutes into your planning to think about what strategies you will use when you see your toddler on the edge, you might just save everyone a few tears at the Happiest Place on Earth!

About The Author: Melissa lives in the Midwest with her patient and easy-going husband and their two children. After hours of exhausting and thorough research for a trip to Walt Disney World last year, she is looking forward to the thrill of planning another trip sometime soon. Yes, her family thinks she is a little crazy, but enjoy the fruits of her hard work too much to complain!

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