

## Traveling to Walt Disney World with a Friend: Talk First, Book Second

by Erin Conrad, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I'm a married woman with two teenage sons. My whole family enjoys trips to Walt Disney World, but I seem to be more of a "Disney nut" than the rest of the family.

So, to get my Disney fix, I've traveled solo once and with friends on two other trips. Both "friend" trips have been fun -- but both required a different type of planning than I've done for family vacations.

Just a quick bit of background: Friend #1 had been to Walt Disney World once, several years ago, with children who didn't really want to be there (I know, what's up with that?), and had decided to not continue with the Disney part of her trip after her second day. We lived close enough to each other that we flew together. Friend #2 was a Disney veteran who had lived in Orlando years earlier, and spent her weekends at the parks, but hadn't been there since. Both our birthdays were within weeks of our trip. She accepted my invitation to come on the trip just three weeks before we left (I had been planning a solo trip, and had flights, hotel, and dining reservations already in place). She also lives in another part of the country, and we had to coordinate flights on short notice.

□ For both trips, my friends and I had a lot of talking to do. Of course, we wanted the trips to be fun and successful, but were we suited to vacationing together? Or would these trips cause such irritation that our friendships would be harmed? We discussed many areas of traveling together before we put down the not-insignificant amounts of money required, and as a result, both trips were fun and brought us closer than we had been. Before you start putting money down on airfare and Disney deposits, consider the following questions:

□ 1. Do your touring styles match? Does one of you prefer a relaxed approach and the other a "planning commando" style? What are your afternoons for, relaxing or re-riding?

□ Friend #2 expressed interest in having a pool break on one or two afternoons of our three-day trip. Pool-sitting holds NO interest for me -- I can read at home. We agreed that if she felt that she needed a pool break, and I wasn't interested in leaving, that she would go back to the room on her own, rest and recharge, and meet me later. We discussed the specific attractions we wanted to see and made a plan, using the Unofficial Guide's free Touring Plans ([touringplans.com](http://touringplans.com)), which she had

used before but I hadn't. She was happy to get up early and get to rope drop every day, which was what I wanted to do on this trip.

Friend #1, however, was much more laid back, and wasn't interested in getting up at the crack of Disney dawn every day. For that trip, that was fine, my life at home at the time was extremely stressful. She preferred to go slowly and explore, and since I had been to Walt Disney World many times, I was happy to play tour guide and show her what I love about Disney. I got her a guidebook, which she read front to back before we left, so she wouldn't be overwhelmed with the size and scope of the parks. She was quite happy with me doing the majority of the planning and telling her where we were going and when, and this worked well for us.

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□2. Are you both in tune as far as money goes? Can you agree on how many table-service restaurants to spend on, or is one of you a budget-only strictly counter-service type of person?

□With Friend #1, we both felt like we could splurge a little bit. She was in a bit better financial position than I was at the time, but we were able to agree that we wanted to buy the Disney Dining Plan, and we were willing to spend the money for the Halloween Party. Since we had talked ahead about how much we could spend for the trip, we never had a conflict about the cost of food or extras.

□With Friend #2, we were both stretching our budgets to take this trip. I had earned the cost of the trip through an extra job, and since she joined me so late in the planning, she had no chance to find the extra funds. I offered to pay the cost of the room; after all, I had already been planning to pay for it when I was going by myself. We agreed that we would pay for food out of pocket, and go cheap. We didn't get any extras, spent little on souvenirs, but we still had a great time! We found lots of free and cheap things to do; we visited some of the other resorts as afternoon breaks, and wore our Birthday Buttons every day and enjoyed the attention (and free desserts!) those brought us.

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□3. If one of you isn't a roller-coaster lover and the other is, will the more adventurous one mind riding solo? And will the non-rider be ok shopping or relaxing while waiting? This didn't turn out to be an issue with either of my friends, since none of us are thrill-seekers. But it's something you do need to talk about -- the time the adventurer spends waiting in line for some of the attractions can be considerable. Make sure you're both willing to compromise. The non-rider could offer to shop or catch a show so the friend can ride Expedition Everest, and the rider could consider passing up that third Yeti-chase so their friend doesn't feel like the afternoon is just hours of wasted waiting time.

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□4. How adaptable are you both? Unexpected surprises -- both good

and bad -- can and will happen. With Friend #1, we had planned a day at Animal Kingdom and a day at Epcot. On our Animal Kingdom day, it rained, and was supposed to keep raining. We decided that Epcot looked easier to handle in the rain, so we switched our days. We were both pleased with that -- and even happier when the rain stopped mid-morning!

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□ Also during that trip, I developed severe pain in my left foot, which made walking extremely difficult -- just in time for our Halloween Party. I really appreciated my friend's help and understanding. We did as much as I could handle, cut our evening short, sadly, and hobbled back to the resort. Had she grumbled about how much money we were wasting, or insisted that I could "work through the pain," that would have made the situation so much worse. You should already know yourself and your potential travelmate well enough ahead of time to have some idea of how you'll handle bumps in the road: weather issues, health concerns, ride breakdowns, two-hour queues, flight delays, parade space-crowders, heat and humidity; but it's worth a chat.

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□ I was lucky -- both friends had similar interests and touring styles to mine, and that helped make both trips work. It did require compromise, however, on all our parts. I'm currently planning a trip with my 20-year-old son, and we'll go through some of the above while we plan. After having two fun trips with two different friends, I'd do it again -- as long as I remember to ask before finalizing our plans!

*About The Author: Erin Conrad is the owner of a website for the parents of performing kids - [PerformersParent.com](http://PerformersParent.com). She is planning a trip with her own performing kid for October.*

Article last updated: 08-09-2012

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