

# Planning Your Disney Vacation with FASTPASS +: Testing the New FASTPASS+

by Tamera Maresh-Carver, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I am not a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants Disney traveler.

You will never find me pulled over at the entrance asking, "What do you guys wanna do first?" At 180 days out I make all dinner reservations, I plan the days at the parks from Dumbo to Pirates (friends laugh at what they call my Payton Manning play book of Excel spreadsheets), and am there for rope drop, even in the off season. Look, we all know how exciting an upcoming trip can be, and part of the fun for me is listening to podcasts and learning. Planning the trip is a way to cool my heels while waiting for D-Day.

This September's test of the FASTPASS+ System at Magic Kingdom seemed to be made for me, a perk for the planning set! Further evidence of the Boy Scout motto at work! And, boy, was I prepared! The reality is, however, that the system is super simple. I can imagine it being used on a smart phone, on the run, by those less prone to planning. Let me clue you in to how it works and some of the cool perks associated with it.

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□ For those readers unfamiliar with the old-school FASTPASS, it's about getting an appointment time to ride an attraction. While others hoping to enjoy the attraction wait at the Standby Entrance queue, those with a FASTPASS avoid most of the queue and are granted quick admittance to the ride. Right now, FASTPASSES are obtained by physically going to the attraction, scanning the Key to the World Card or park ticket in a machine, and obtaining an appointment for the closest available one-hour period when you can return to experience the attraction. The appointment is printed on a paper ticket issued by the machine. Rides like Soarin' and Toy Story Midway Mania will run completely out of FASTPASSES, even in the off-season -- obtaining a pass early in the day can be important for any attraction, when crowd levels are high. You can only obtain a new FASTPASS when your last one has "matured," and that time, too, is printed on the pass. So if you have a FASTPASS for Space Mountain between 2:00 pm and 3:00 pm, you may be able to get a FASTPASS for another ride after 2:00 pm.

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□ Rather than the paper pass, FASTPASS+ uses a credit card-type pass, with all of your FASTPASS selections programmed on it. You don't have to physically go anywhere but your computer to plan your FASTPASSES.

For the test, Disney allowed us to choose up to four experiences from among a short list of attractions, to obtain a pre-loaded FASTPASS. The test was for Magic Kingdom only, and the sampling of attractions eligible for FASTPASS+ testing were: Space Mountain, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Splash Mountain, and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. Similarly, listed on our test, but not available when we attended, were each of the parades and shows (maybe something Disney will test in the future, prime viewing spots?). The website for the test was simple, we chose selections for each traveler, accepted a choice of proposed times, and then could adjust those times based on what better suited your schedule.

Once we arrived at the park on our test day, we simply touched the card to a Mickey-shaped sensor located at each attraction's FASTPASS entrance and again at the other end of the FASTPASS queue. It was awesome! We traveled with our son in a stroller and my mother in a wheelchair, and I can't tell you how much time and trouble it saved us by not having to cross the park to obtain FASTPASSES in person.

Juxtaposed to our second Magic Kingdom day on that trip, using the old-style FASTPASS, I would guess it saved me more than a mile of walking. Similarly, on the FASTPASS+ day I was able to plan our day land by land, rather than crisscross the park to meet appointment times. Of course, it is Disney, and there is always an added touch. At each FASTPASS ride they knew we were celebrating my Graduation and congratulated me (I wasn't wearing a button.) What a great personal touch!

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□ I can report that at the Magic Kingdom I saw FASTPASS+ sensors at all FASTPASS entrances, and even at some queues that have previously never been FASTPASS rides (Goofy's Barnstormer for example), so it would appear it is a direction in which Disney has some investment. The benefit and agony will most likely come in how Disney administers the system. I can't imagine it getting as competitive as Advanced Dining Reservations, because so many additional slots are available, and for the test, Disney limited the amount of FASTPASSES a single guest could obtain. I can even imagine a day, using this system, where my family could sleep in and not hit a park at rope drop. But don't tell them that please, I can't have you getting their hopes up.

*About The Author: Tamera Maresh-Carver lives with her Family and Golden retriever in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and has been visiting Walt Disney World since she was ten years old. She is looking forward to their next trip in 2014.*

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