

Amazingly E-Racing the Guilt: Keeping Kids Entertained at Epcot Food & Wine Festival

by Dawn Steinfeld, PassPorter Guest Contributor

So there I was, creeping closer to departure day and deep into the planning for our fourth trip to Disney in five years for what is affectionately called "Jersey Week." (Well, being from Jersey, I'm going with "affectionately.")

Jersey Week also coincides with the Epcot Food & Wine Festival each year and my husband Craig and I had yet to take full advantage of the booths around World Showcase. The reason was mostly that our two youngest boys (Tyler, 11 and Jason, 8) have multiple allergies and our teenager (Zach, 17) is picky and we felt guilty about eating around the world while they had nothing to do. So, what to do, what to do? What could I come up with to keep them entertained and having fun so they wouldn't realize we were dragging them from country to country and food booth to food booth so Craig and I could sample the international wares guilt-free? Then it hit me! How about an Amazing Race around the World (Showcase that is)?!

Craig and I have always loved the television show and thought it would be the only reality show we would ever want to do. Why not combine that with our love for Disney and keep the boys entertained at the same time? As an added benefit, I thought it would help a bit with our sixth grader Tyler's teachers, since he would be missing a few days and this was his first year in middle school. I even emailed Tyler's French teacher for help with the clue for France. But, I'm getting a little ahead.

□ Once I decided that I would surprise the boys with the race, I started doing some research online for ideas. Being a bit anal about my planning and obsessed with details, I wanted the clues to be as close to the race clues from the show as possible. I found a great website for a group that had done an Amazing Race-style scavenger hunt on Sanibel Island, and they had templates for the clue cards I could download. That saved me a lot of time. Again, I'm a bit obsessed with details, so I needed envelopes that looked legit, and I modified the "Detour" and "Roadblock" cards to match those from the show.

□ After I downloaded the clue cards, I needed tasks for the boys to do in each country, so I began searching for ideas for Disney scavenger hunts and facts about the countries in World Showcase. I did find a post from another board about an Amazing Race someone did for their

daughter and took some clues from there. Each country would have a Route Info card with a task for each country, along with a space for the boys to get it stamped by the KidCot station cast members. In addition to the Route Info task, each country would either have a Roadblock where the boys would have to do an additional task, or a Detour where the boys would have a choice to do one of two additional tasks.

To make me feel better about taking Tyler out of school this year, I tried to tie some of the countries into what Tyler was studying in school. He happened to be studying the Tomb Warriors of China and is also taking French so I counted those countries as "educational." (That's my story and I'm sticking to it.) For China, I took a picture of one of the Tomb Warriors from online and told the boys they had to find that particular warrior and tell me when they found him; they also had to take a silly hat picture and get their names written by the cast members in Chinese. For France, I emailed Tyler's French teacher with a request to translate some famous Disney sayings into French, so that Tyler could ask the cast members to help him translate them back into English. We did "When you wish upon a star," "A dream is a wish your heart makes," and "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest one of all?" Tyler's teacher was more than happy to help and thought it was a great idea. Some guilt alleviated, check!

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 □ On the day of the race, I told the boys I had planned something fun for them to do while Daddy and I snacked around the World, and that when they finished, there would be a surprise for them. In keeping with the new Phineas and Ferb World Showcase Adventure, I got each of my younger boys a mini stuffed Agent P and a Vinylmation for all three boys at the finish line. We made the International Gateway entrance the finish line, because we were staying at the Beach Club, and put the prizes in lockers there. Then we made our way to Mexico to start. Here I explained what we were going to do and pulled out the first envelope. I had told Craig about the race, but not what any of the clues were, so he was just as surprised as the boys with the tasks, and I told the boys they could use daddy as a "lifeline" of sorts. Our boys are fun-loving and always up for a challenge, and were excited to get started, so they headed up the steps to the ancient pyramid and the race was on!

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 □ After starting in Mexico, the boys travelled the world, stopping to battle trolls, search for pickles, wish in a well, and flirt with pretty French cast members while translating Disney sayings. They also worked together to name famous Norwegian Vikings and discover what the five tiers of the Goju-No-To pagoda stand for. And for fun, they had to wish on a lamp, stand like a totem pole, run through a hedge maze, and search out this carved stone face making no stony expression.

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□While the boys were enjoying their race around the world, Craig and I were -- guiltlessly -- enjoying some delicious snacks like Hawaiian pork sliders, Australian lamb, Chinese pot stickers, Polish pierogies, and Canadian cheddar cheese soup. The boys were more up to the task of conquering the world than Craig and I were of conquering the food booths. Trust me, we gave it the old college try though.

□So, although my race plans interfered with my husband's original idea to make our own "Call Me Maybe" video around the World Showcase, we had finally found a way to take full advantage of the Food & Wine Festival and have non-pouting, non-foot-dragging, entertained children along the way. The boys had a blast and were thrilled with their new Perry the Platypus, and hey, there's always next year!

About The Author: Dawn lives in New Jersey with her husband and three boys. She loves all things Disney and has been going to Walt Disney World since celebrating her fourth birthday there, the year after the park opened. She and her family are always looking forward to their next trip to the Disney bubble.

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