

Four Generations, Four Parks, One World: Multi-Generational Vacations to Disney

by Jessica J.N. Ma'ilo, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The pomp and circumstance of my long-awaited college graduation was nothing short of incredible!

□ It was a hard fought five and a half years (yes, I took a little time off), but it was all worth it to hear my name, walk across the stage and get that empty diploma holder (the diploma came later). I'd be lying, though, if I said I wasn't impatiently awaiting the post-grad reward I'd been working on for a year. A few weeks after my commencement, I was taking my family to the World! That's right, our multigenerational clan was Disney or bust that fateful May, the start of a yearly (at least!) tradition of a week at the Mouse House to ride, revel and, yes, even relax.

Even though I first hit the Disney parks as an infant, this was my first time to be on the planning side. That first trip had a bit of a learning curve. Six of us, my two grandparents, my mom, the kids, and me, in one room at the Polynesian. Enough said. However, I wouldn't trade that trip to the World for the world, watching everyone's eyes light up when the kids walked through Town Square for the first time and laid eyes on Cinderella Castle. It's a cliché, maybe, but that moment is etched on my heart. Magic around every corner, character hugs, and that impeccable service Disney is known for, rounded out the week.

□ But I knew it would be like that. The TV commercials say it. Your friends tell you stories. It's just how it is. What I didn't realize, however, is that there truly is something for everyone at Disney World. I knew we'd love experiencing everything through the eyes of the kiddos as they took everything in for the first time, breathing in the magic. I didn't know that Gramma would leave us in the dust for the gift shops every time we stopped so, "Gramma could rest." Or that Grampa would become a Disney foodie. Or that my mom would conquer her fear of the Tower of Terror!

□ Yes, we all know that Disney parks are known for amazing attractions, but beyond the mountains and 3D experiences are seemingly endless options for everyone. We spent a lot of time on those headliners, but almost five years and ten trips later, we've experienced so much more that Walt Disney World has to offer for all ages and tastes.

Let's start with the grandparents. Mine are in their seventies, and we definitely had lots of breaks in mind for them. I think the rest of us needed the breaks more than they did! Like I said, we often got left on benches outside of gift shops, especially in Epcot. Grampa did take a few breathers, so do stake out a few shady seats or air-conditioned areas for those times that anyone needs to admire the magic from a bench. Innoventions in Epcot is great for this, and there are several comparable areas throughout the parks.

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□When they weren't resting or shopping, both grandparents really enjoyed all the delicious dining options Disney has to offer. In fact, we started a tradition of sending the grandparents out for a "grown-ups only" meal. They've enjoyed Artist Point at Disney's Wilderness Lodge, Coral Reef at Epcot, and Kona Cafe at Disney's Polynesian Resort, just to name a few. Even when dining with the characters, though, we found lots of delicious items around Walt Disney World. Strawberry soup at 1900 Park Fare comes immediately to mind. So. Ridiculously. Yummy.

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□My mom, a decidedly young 50-something, enjoyed a lot of the same things I did while at the World, as well as a little lounging around the resorts. As a bit of a thrill ride junkie, I couldn't wait to make the rounds of the Magic Kingdom's mountain range and check in at the Hollywood Tower Hotel. Mom breezed through the mountains but walked up to the Tower with trepidation. After a little coaxing and seeing a grey-haired grandma saunter into the line, we were soon careening down the elevator shaft...four times in a row. So, encourage the adults to try new things just as you would the kids, they may just find a new favorite!

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□It's no secret that my favorite thing is experiencing Disney with the kiddos. I'll gladly hop in line to ride Mad Tea Party and Prince Charming's Regal Carousel, over and over and over again. I make dining reservations 180 days in advance so we can chow down with Mickey and friends. I live for a great character encounter. All that said, I like some grown-up time, too. It's a given that Disney is a place where people go-go-go to catch the next ride or snag a seat for a Broadway-caliber show, but not everyone may know that Walt Disney World property offers some fantastic spas when mommy needs a little time to wind down after the parks. I enjoyed a wonderful (and decently priced) spa day at the Mandara Spa at the Walt Disney World Dolphin last year, and I can't wait to experience the new Senses Spa at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort and Spa!

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□The little ones, of course, are completely content almost anywhere on Disney property. They love the parks, the pools, and the playgrounds. You name it, they love it. With so much to do, though, it's easy for the

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younger set to get over-stimulated or tire out quickly. We always plan at least one down day mid-trip so everyone can recollect themselves and recharge. My kiddos can spend hours swaying in the hammocks at the Polynesian or watching the zebras graze at Animal Kingdom Lodge.

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□While we try to do something new every trip, we've hardly scratched the surface of all the experiences to be had at Walt Disney World. World-class golf courses, fishing expeditions, Downtown Disney, water parks, tours... the list goes on and includes something for everyone.

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□When traveling with extended family, take some time before the trip and chat about what everyone has on their must-do list. With all of the recreation, entertainment and experiences Disney has to offer for everyone ages one to one-hundred, chances are you'll have to plan another trip to get it done. At least that's our plan.

About The Author: Jessica is a special education teacher by day and travel agent by night. Well, late afternoon and evening. She and all four generations of her family are looking forward to their 2013 trips to Disneyland and Walt Disney World!

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