

Extra Magic Hours - Yes or No?: Walt Disney World Touring Strategies

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Here's a dilemma that no doubt has crossed the minds of many a Disney fan:

Do I go to the theme parks for Extra Magic Hours or not?

First, I should explain a little bit about Extra Magic Hours, and what they are. As a special treat for guests at Walt Disney World-owned resorts, and those staying at the Swan, Dolphin, Shades of Green, and Downtown Disney Hilton, one of the four theme parks is open either an hour before it opens to the general public, or two hours beyond regular closing (it used to be three hours in the evening, but that changed from the start of 2013).

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□So surely it's obvious that everyone who's lucky enough to enjoy a perk like this should take advantage of it? Well, yes, and no. Of course, if every single guest who was eligible for Extra Magic Hours hit the same park at the same time, then it would be pretty packed in there! While that doesn't happen during the Extra Magic Hours sessions, that can be the affect during public operating hours at whichever park(s) offers Extra Magic Hours that day. It's a well-known fact that the park that has the perk in the morning will be busier than the other three for the rest of the day. Conventional wisdom therefore says that if you want to avoid the crowds, don't go to a park that's offering Extra Magic Hours.

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□However, what happens if you can be there right at the beginning of the day? Well, it's no different to park opening on any other day, really. Sure, there may be crowds there, but just how large will depend on the time of the year. One thing's for sure, it will be much quieter at that point than later on in the day, when the general public arrives.

How about Extra Magic Hours in the evening? The same principle applies in reverse. The later you stay, the more the crowds will diminish, as people have enough and head back to their resorts.

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□With this in mind, the first thing you need to think about when deciding whether to take advantage of Extra Magic Hours is how your family functions. Are you early risers? If so, getting up early may not be an issue for you, even if you're on vacation. After all, if you're already going to be awake, you may as well be enjoying yourself. On the other hand, if you're night owls, and don't hit the parks until mid-morning, then perhaps staying up until late night, or even the early hours of the

morning at the busiest times of the year, won't be an issue for you.

□ However, because the hours are at either end of the day, whatever you do will eat into time in another way. If you need to get up early one day, partying late the night before may not be the wisest choice. Equally, if you don't hit the sack until after the clock strikes midnight, while you may not turn into a pumpkin, rope drop at the parks the next morning may not work so well for you.

□ Something else to keep in mind is that you won't be able to enjoy every attraction in the park during Extra Magic Hours, with only selected attractions open during these times. Admittedly, they are usually what are often called the "E-ticket" attractions, the headline rides such as Test Track, Space Mountain, Rock 'N' Roller Coaster, and Expedition Expedition. However, alongside them, you'll find plenty else to keep you occupied. The list does change from time to time, so you're best off checking on the [Walt Disney World website](#).

□ As there are fewer attractions, it can still mean long waits, so don't make the mistake of assuming that you'll just be able to walk on to everything that's open. We've seen Standby Times of 100 minutes-plus for Toy Story Midway Mania at 11:00 pm, but on that same night, we were also able to stroll through parts of the park, just taking in the atmosphere, with barely anyone else around, as everyone was standing in line for a headline attraction. It made for some superb memories for us, although I wonder whether those who were in line felt the same?

□ As well as fewer attractions, you'll also find fewer places to eat or shop during the extra hours. We've been very disappointed before, after coming to the nasty realization that we were still hungry during the late evening, but there wasn't much available to us. Sure, there were some choices, but they were few and far between, a lot more limited than during the day.

□ Despite this, the Extra Magic Hours can be a major plus point, particularly during the hotter months. There's nothing worse than trying to make your way around the parks when it's hot, and humid outside, as it just drains your energy. On one trip, when we experienced record breaking heat for that time of year, we took to getting up early, getting into the parks, and getting out before the weather became too much for us. And if you're visiting at a busy time of the year, they may offer you the quietest wait times you'll see during your vacation.

□ What to do is very much dependent on what you think will work best for you. Personally, I love taking advantage of Extra Magic Hours whenever we can, and when it fits into our schedule. It's a neat perk,

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and if it's available to you, let's be honest, it would be a shame not to try it out at some point.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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