

Bringing Along Baby: Strollers and Baby-Wearing at Walt Disney World

by Rachel Smith, PassPorter Guest Contributor

You've decided to travel to Walt Disney World with an infant or toddler.

Take a deep breath; it's not going to be that bad. The key to any successful outing with your little one is planning, so let's make a plan for getting around with her once you arrive on property.

There are two methods of baby transportation that we will discuss: schlepping a stroller and wearing that baby.

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□ One of the first items on your baby registry was probably a stroller. When choosing a stroller for vacation, consider: is it comfortable for your child, can you open and close it easily, and is it easy to maneuver?

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□ Stroller seats are generally the same, but depending on a child's age, you may need a reclining seat and/or padded shoulder straps. Take your stroller out for a long test drive at the mall or a local festival to see how it works for you and your child.

Make sure you can open and close the stroller quickly. No one wants to be that guy at the bus stop fighting with a stroller and holding up the line. Bonus points if you can do this one-handed. Remember that your stroller may not fold easily if the storage basket is full.

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□ Maneuverability is key. Crowds can be heavy and it is quite easy to zip through the masses with a small stroller. My favorite for Walt Disney World is a simple umbrella stroller. Ours is a basic but sturdy hand-me-down with a storage basket and a sunshade. It's much easier to make a dash to the resort buses after fireworks when traveling light. An umbrella stroller takes up less room than a travel system stroller on the bus too.

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□ If you assumed a stroller wasn't needed, but your preschooler's whines tell a different story, strollers are available to rent or buy at the parks. Rental strollers come in single and double and are best suited for toddlers and older children as they are hard plastic and don't offer much support. Rental strollers stay in the park they were rented from, so you'll have to carry that sleeping kid to the car. Another option at the parks is to buy an umbrella stroller. These cost around \$48, have a small sunshade, a mesh storage pouch, and are sturdy and easy to maneuver.

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□ What happens when the friendly but firm cast member informs you

the perfect stroller you spent days researching is allowed into neither The Land Pavilion at Epcot nor the 40-minute-long line at Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin? No worries, just pull out your baby carrier!

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□As with any equipment used with your child, please follow all manufacturer's safety regulations. A reputable local baby store that specializes in baby carriers (as opposed to a big box store or online) will have knowledgeable staff to help choose the right carrier for you and your child and demonstrate proper usage. My local store (www.sproutsoup.com) in Columbus, Ohio offers a carrier rental program and this (<http://betterbabywearing.blogspot.com>) is one of my favorite resources for pros and cons of each type of baby carrier as well as road-tested brands.

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□Especially in a place like Walt Disney World with a constant barrage of new sights, sounds, and smells, it is best to have your baby face you -- not away from you - while in a carrier. When your child is facing you, she can turn away from overwhelming stimulus. Also, be sure the seat created for your child in the carrier is wide and spans to the back of both knees. This creates a seated position and is much more natural and comfortable than some carriers with a narrow strap between baby's legs.

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□There are five general types of baby carriers: Mei Tai, Soft Structured Carrier, Wrap, Ring Sling, and Pouch. Finding the right baby carrier for you is mostly personal preference. Different types of carriers work best for different ages of children. Practice using your baby carrier at home so you and baby aren't a knotted, sweaty mess in the Florida humidity.

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□A Mei Tai carrier is essentially a large square piece of fabric with four long, sturdy straps on each corner. This is a versatile carrier that can be easily shared between adults without having to adjust straps. The baby can be worn on the front or the back of the parent. I've found a Mei Tai easiest to use with an older infant.

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□I am a huge fan of the Soft Structured Carrier for older babies and toddlers. This type of carrier has a large squareish piece similar to a Mei Tai, but instead of simple straps to tie, there are buckles. Many have a padded waist strap that must be adjusted between adults. The baby can be worn on the front, back, or even hip in some brands. I use a Soft Structured Carrier called a Butterfly II made by Beco as my go-to carrier for my 7 ½ month old and used it for my older daughter until she was over 2 years old.

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□A wrap baby carrier has a steep learning curve, but is one of the most

versatile carriers. A wrap is a long piece of fabric that you wrap around yourself and baby. Wraps come in two types: stretchy and woven. Stretchy wraps are for younger babies to be worn on the front. Woven wraps are sturdier and your child can be worn on the front, back, or hip. I wouldn't recommend a wrap for a new babywearer at Walt Disney World, but if you've got enough time to become proficient at wrapping before vacation, a woven wrap would be lightweight and versatile in the Florida heat.

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□ A ring sling was the perfect carrier for my children when they were newborns. A ring sling is a long sturdy piece of fabric worn over one shoulder like a sash. One end of the strip has a set of rings that the other end is threaded through to adjust length. This carrier is very versatile, but places all of the weight of the child on one shoulder.

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□ A pouch sling is similar to a ring sling but the instead of having rings to adjust length, the fabric is a fixed loop. These are purchased in a size determined by the adult's measurements. Like the ring sling, the weight of the child is concentrated on one shoulder.

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□ Our daughters were 2 $\frac{12}{2}$ years and 7 months old on our most recent trip. In order to pack light, we brought along our umbrella stroller and our Beco Butterfly II soft structured baby carrier. This worked well until our first full day at a park. The toddler was asking to ride in the stroller just like the baby. Our first stop after entering the International Gateway at Epcot was the store just inside the gate to buy the red umbrella stroller.

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□ Most of the time, I wore the 7-month-old on my chest or back in the Beco Butterfly II and the toddler rode in her shiny new red stroller. We probably could have done without buying the second umbrella stroller, but it was nice to spend some time without the baby in such close proximity. For only 15 pounds, that kid can put out some heat.

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□ Whatever method you choose for your child, take it for a test run at home. It's much better to realize your stroller has a bum wheel in the comfort of your own town than in the middle of your vacation.

About The Author: Rachel lives in Ohio with her husband and 2 daughters. She spends her free time gardening, knitting, and pinning projects on Pinterest that she'll never get around to actually doing. She can be found blogging sporadically at smithing4.blogspot.com.

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