

From Commando-Touring to Crawling: Taking Your Toddler to Disney

by Emma Elliott, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Living in the United Kingdom means that I don't get to visit Walt Disney World anywhere near as often as I'd like, so all my previous visits have involved a lengthy touring plan to tick off all of my favorite attractions.

The day would start at rope drop, food would be eaten on the go, and character meets were a rarity. Then I had a baby, and my first trip to Walt Disney World with a toddler blew all my usual plans out of the window! Here is what I learned from my toddler-led Disney adventure.

Have a plan, then take off half the things you'd planned, and you may be able to actually do a quarter of your initial ambitions. By the time you factor in naps, nappy changes, meeting characters, and toy meltdowns, you're not likely to be seeing all of the park's attractions in one day. So, take it slowly, have your must-sees and then enjoy the day through your toddler's eyes. Look at the sights and sounds that you may have missed while, in more footloose days, you were screeching from one ride to the next. The Seas tank at Epcot was one of my son's favorite attractions. He could have spent the whole day watching the fish and waving to the scuba divers, and we got such a kick out of his enjoyment that we could probably have stayed there all day, too! We also loved finding quiet spots for him to run around, away from the crowds. The Boneyard at Animal Kingdom was one such area, where he was able to run around and burn off some energy.

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□I would also advise you to take your own stroller if you can, the Disney ones are great for carting kit about, but when you're already in an alien environment, it can be comforting for your toddler to have something from home. We also found that he napped well in the stroller, meaning we got to squeeze in some rides while he got some well-needed sleep.

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□Character meals were a must for us, especially the buffets. We got to sit down in the air conditioning, have characters come to us (avoiding the meltdowns outside when we had to queue up to see Mickey) and the choice of food meant there was always something he would eat. Plus, who can resist a dessert buffet?

I'd never even noticed the Baby Care Centers on previous trips but this time around they were certainly on my radar. The Baby Care Center was a great spot for calming down and escaping the excitement outside. He could watch some cartoons, have a peaceful nappy change and we could sit in a comfy chair and relax in the quiet. They were also a dream

location for anyone with babies thanks to the nursing chairs, preparation areas for formula, and baby food available.

☐ If anyone would have asked my son what his favorite part of the holiday was, his answer would almost certainly have been the pool. We stayed at Port Orleans French Quarter and he loved their pool, especially the slide which he was allowed to go down by himself, with one of us catching him at the bottom! Every day we made some time to stroll around the resort, catch the boat to Downtown Disney or splash about in the pool, and it made me so appreciative of staying at a Disney resort and the theming involved. On previous trips we always stayed at the value resorts as they were just a place to lay our heads in between our commando touring. This time around being in a moderate showed us how relaxing your resort can be and how it can give you the perfect break from park hopping.

☐ Another Disney must with our toddler was the parades, especially the now-defunct Hollywood Studios Move It, Shake It, Celebrate It parade, where he was up on his feet dancing with his favorite characters. Parades were like magic to my son, and his eyes would be wide open with wonder as all these characters from his books and DVDs suddenly appeared in front of his eyes and were even waving to him. It was those kind of moments that instantly made me want to move to Florida and enjoy that wonder every day.

☐ If you're planning on visiting Walt Disney World with a toddler anytime soon my top tips would be:

☐- Use switching-off/baby swap so you get to ride ALL the rides you want.

☐- Plan character meals (as long as your toddler's not scared of the giant animals!)

☐- Have a comfy stroller.

☐- Enjoy your resort.

☐- Relax, take some deep breaths and see the magic through your toddler's eyes, it makes the most magical place on earth even more magical!

About The Author: Emma is a former children's magazine editor and now a trainee teacher. She is currently planning her next Walt Disney World adventure in 2014, which will be her first with two children!

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