

Long Distance Countdowns: Sharing the Magic with Far Flung Family

by Cam Matthews, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

I love to countdown to my Disney trips! But for this past June's trip, I encountered a bit of a challenge for the usual trip countdown.

The folks going with us, my sister's family, lived an hour and a half away. My sister had also started a new job after being a stay-at-home mom for twelve years, so her spare time to create a countdown was limited. I thought of creating a calendar on which they could mark off days, but I wanted to share in the excitement. After quite a bit of pondering, I opted for a daily e-mail countdown.

My initial plan was to write up a brief tidbit about the trip, much like writing a pre-trip report update. My daily topics originally included lodging, flights, travel arrangements (parking, Disney Magic Express, etc.), park plans by day, tipping, and dining. After a phone conversation with my niece, I realized that she and her brother were more than ready for me to start. So at 75 days until Disney time, I composed my first countdown e-mail. I will admit that I did not at the start have anywhere near enough topics to cover 75 updates. In essence, this countdown evolved on a weekly, even a daily, basis as I sought inspiration for topics from my Walt Disney World PassPorter, the PassPorter forums, allearsnet.com, and the Internet in general.

□ Every update was comprised of information plus at least one picture. My Dad teases me that I don't know how to write anything briefly. I tell stories the same way, lots of details. In the end each update was a little longer than the brief tidbit of my original plans. Working full-time I didn't always have the luxury of time to recreate the information in my own words though. Because I taught the evils of plagiarism in my high school English classes, I made sure to cite my sources. The citations also linked back to the original source material, so if my family wanted even more information, it was readily available. The photos I selected included personal photos as well as photos from online (e.g. Disney's own website, PassPorter's Archives, etc.). Google became my friend throughout this process for both information and pictures.

□ So what actually made the various countdown updates? First, I started with where we were staying, which comprised two updates as I wanted to share information first about our resort (in our case Animal Kingdom Lodge/Kidani Village), and also about our particular room (a 2-bedroom villa). From the resort I moved on to our daily schedule, including the

park of the day with attraction highlights and dining reservations. Later I wished I had saved the dining installments for separate updates to give me more topics. But if you didn't start at 75 days out, you might not need to do that. I included with each dining update a link to the menus for that restaurant from allearsnet.com. It was at this point just three weeks into the countdown that I realized I was going to need lots more material. For four updates I included Disney trivia questions that I discovered online. Each of these had 10 questions, and after the first one, the answers to the previous quiz.

Eventually, my topics ranged from Disney history and trivia to characters to snack foods. Of course, everyone needs to know what a Mickey Bar, a Mickey Head pretzel, and a Dole Whip are. I covered various Walt Disney World factors that many of us who visit regularly are accustomed to, but those who haven't gone frequently or recently might not be familiar with. These topics included: Disney Magical Express, PhotoPass+, FastPasses, night time shows (e.g. Wishes, Illuminations, etc.), and Extra Magic Hours. By explaining these aspects, my whole family knew just what to expect from the time we landed at the Orlando airport until we boarded Disney Magical Express to come home. Because we would be there for Star Wars Weekends, I outlined the events that I thought they might be interested in. Even though we didn't have much time at Hollywood Studios during the Star Wars Weekend we were there, they were very excited that we got to Darth's Mall. My updates would not have been complete without covering the Veteran of the Day for the Flag Retreat at Magic Kingdom as through some magical pixie dust, my Dad was going to be honored on our Magic Kingdom day. To close out the countdown, the final four updates covered major highlights of Walt Disney's life. I wanted to end with the man who had made this vacation more than just a trip to Florida's sunshine. We were headed to the land of magic and dreams come true.

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□The best part for me was the excitement in the responses my sister sent me. The whole family eagerly awaited each day's update, which most days came early in the evening. When we went for a visit over spring break, I discovered just how excited they were. The proof was in the two 1-inch binders that held every single e-mail I had sent. She had also printed the menus from allearsnet.com that I had linked in the updates for the family to study in preparation for each of our meals. I also learned that my Dad was reading along, and the notebooks had traveled to work and church for friends to look over. Today the binders proudly reside on a bookshelf for anyone to read through, and to my sister's family, they are a reminder of their magical trip to Disney World.

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□Even though my family was 110 miles away from me, we were able to

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share the excitement of counting down the days until Disney time together, at least in a modern cyber-way. I didn't create a calendar with a grid for marking off days nor a chain with links to be torn off daily, but in the end I managed to build a treasured keepsake of our trip for my family.

About The Author: Cam is a Co-Guide for the Disney World and Globetrotting trip report forums and the Library, Darkroom and Porch forums on the PassPorter Message Boards. She already preparing for her next Disney World vacation in October of this year.

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