

Planning Your Walt Disney World Vacation: One Family's Method

by Sharon Justus, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Since we have had children, we have made the trip to Walt Disney World about every three years, so we have recently made our sixth visit to "The World."

There are some things that have become staples for our trips, like certain rides and shows, but as the kids grow and interests change, we have the opportunity to explore new attractions and activities. There are always several things to consider every time we visit Mickey.

With school age children, summertime seems to be the obvious choice for travel. Of course, this is the case for most families so the parks are teeming with people, making for large crowds and long waits. Any time children have a school break makes for heavier attendance at Walt Disney World. We have visited during summer, spring break, late spring, early fall, and between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The usual offering of the free dining plan to resort guests always comes into consideration, but my favorite time to visit is between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Attendance is low which affords short (or no) wait times, and the weather is beautiful, allowing us to wear shorts and t-shirts during the day without being too hot. But my favorite thing about visiting at this time of year is the Christmas decorations in the parks and resorts.

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□ Once the travel dates are set, the planning ensues! They say getting there is half the fun, but I say planning is half the fun. There is the usual talk of everyone's favorites and things they would prefer to skip this time. Then I usually talk with the kids and look at the park maps on the Walt Disney World web site and note the must-do attractions and dining options. Next, I order the custom maps available on the Disney website, indicating the favorites and must-do attractions. The arrival of the maps is an anticipated event! Not only do they highlight the favorites we marked when ordering, they are also personalized.

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□ When we visit the World, I always try to incorporate something new that we have never done. One trip we went to Typhoon Lagoon and Disney Quest, and on another we shopped at Downtown Disney. During our most recent trip, which was between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we rode the monorail loop that services the resorts around Seven Seas Lagoon, stopping at the Grand Floridian Resort to see the life-size gingerbread house and other Christmas decor. Afterwards, we

proceeded to Magic Kingdom for Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party -- another first for us. Something (or things) new always works its way into our plan.

With travel dates and other plans firm, it's time to make room reservations, advanced dining reservations, and purchase tickets. If we are staying at a Walt Disney World resort, room reservations, park tickets, and the dining plan can be purchased as a package with numerous options for each.

□ We have stayed both on and off property, but there are many magical extras that come with staying in a Walt Disney World resort. A family favorite is the wake-up call. We usually request the call for 30 minutes after we will be up so the kids are awake and alert for Mickey. The bus service to the parks and other locations make for convenient and stress-free transportation, and the cleaning staff often leaves towel animals to greet us upon returning to our room. The Walt Disney World resorts also include lots of fun theming in the rooms, outside the buildings, and around the pool areas.

□ Another plus with staying on property, is that the Walt Disney World resorts offer laundry facilities. No one wants to spend their vacation doing laundry, but just doing a couple of loads half-way through our trip means a lot less luggage. I usually do another couple of loads the night before we leave, so we don't have to lug home a bunch of dirty clothing. I take along some of the single-load detergent packs so I don't have to take a box of powder, jug of liquid, or purchase detergent on-site.

□ Once made, the plans for each day, reservation numbers and times, park hours posted for our travel dates, and ticket numbers all go into a master spreadsheet which is printed and referenced numerous times during our trip. Although I handle the logistics of our vacation, the entire family plans the trip so it's not just what I want the family to do. Everyone gets to give as much input as they want and we all get to do our favorite things.

□ Hours are spent researching and planning, but what makes the trip the best once we arrive is being spontaneous and just having fun. After all, Walt Disney World is "The Happiest Place on Earth!"

About The Author: Sharon is married with four children. They are looking forward to planning their next trip to Walt Disney World.

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