

Flying to Walt Disney World from the West Coast: Getting There and Back

by Roger Sauer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I have always envied East Coasters who can drive to Walt Disney World in a day.

While we in Oregon can drive to Anaheim for a Disneyland trip (about a long 16 hour or two easy 8 hour drives), when we plan a trip to the World, we must fly. And given the time to fly, time zone changes, and the vagaries of airline scheduling, we need to do some extra planning before we can even consider park touring strategies, dining reservations, or activities.

Depending on your latitude, aircraft distances from the West Coast range from 2,200 to 3,000 miles. And if you have a layover mid-continent, add a few hundred miles. Of course, airfare costs more from the west. But many of the general rate strategies that any traveler uses can be applicable here:

- 1) Plan ahead;
- 2) Use a travel search engine like Expedia or Orbitz to check prices;
- 3) Consider off peak seasons or times of day to reduce costs;
- 4) Use a travel agent to help you plan if you are a Walt Disney World newbie.

□ When school-age children are involved, cheaper rates may be difficult as vacation breaks mean higher costs for everyone. Oregon, where I live, has a Spring Break schedule for most colleges and school districts during the last week of March. Airlines know this, and Friday and Saturday flights during that week are expensive. Leaving a day or two earlier and returning a day or two later after the break can save hundreds of dollars. Another strategy is to consider the last two (very hot and humid) weeks of August. This is especially effective if schools begin after Labor Day. Both airfares and hotel rates take a dip during this time period.

□ Of course, those without children can take advantage of shoulder seasons (September-mid-November, January- March, and late April through May).

Once the timing of the trip is set, consider the flight times. Early morning flights will arrive in Orlando around 5 to 6 PM depending on connections, if any, due to the three-hour time zone differential. This is difficult for younger children, as parents need to either leave very early in the morning to catch flights or drive to the airport the night before

and stay at a hotel nearby. We have done both. Other than getting to Florida early, there is no other advantage. (And I have always wondered whether guests from out west who arrive later in the day get last choice of rooms.) Flying mid-day will allow you to arrive anywhere from 10 PM to midnight: not a great time to arrive, but body clocks still are three hours behind. Younger children might do better; traffic to Walt Disney World is generally light if you are driving, and there will be few lines at the registration desk. Of course, you might also consider staying at a hotel near Orlando International Airport and get an early start the next morning.

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□ You can still take advantage of Disney's Magical Express the morning after you flight, even if you stay at a hotel near the airport. Just be sure you sign up for the service if you will be staying later at a Disney resort and bring your vouchers to the airport the next day (be sure to not put the DME tags on your luggage, you'll want to collect your luggage at baggage claim so you can use it that night). Most major hotel brands near the Orlando airport have free shuttle buses between their properties and the terminal. We like the Sheraton Suites as each unit has two rooms. Great for families with kids.

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□ Considering a red-eye flight? These flights are difficult for children and adults (like me) who can never manage to sleep on airplanes. You will arrive generally between 7 and 10 AM. Are you ready to take on the World after an overnight flight? Your room may not be ready until 4 PM. We know of people who thrive on getting to Orlando after such a trip, but they made a reservation for the night they were flying so their room would be ready early in the morning. Expensive, but a good way to recapture some lost sleep.

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□ If you like to rent a car when vacationing, Orlando has one of the largest fleets in the world. And routes to Disney from the airport are clearly marked. However, if you are new to the area and are traveling from the West Coast during the Fall, Winter, or Spring, you are likely to be driving at dusk or in the dark after a long flight. Roads can be confusing as you approach Lake Buena Vista. There are several car rental sites on Disney property. Most will provide a shuttle from your hotel for you to their lots. So using Disney's Magical Express can be combined with renting a car once you arrive at your resort.

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□ In the 25 or so trips to Walt Disney World since 1986 we have always had to fly from Oregon. While extra planning is necessary, we have never considered not going because of the distance.

About The Author: The author, Roger Sauer, is a retired Oregon educator who has visited every Disney park in the world. His next trip is this

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September to New Zealand and Australia after a stop at Disney's Aulani resort.

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