

DISNEY DISH

BY MICHELLE FIRLOTTE

I once read an article that said if you can take a \$100 bill, place it in the toilet, flush it down the drain and not have a heart attack then you are ready for a Disney Vacation! Don't let those Nay Sayers tell you Disney is too expensive or that your kids are too young for a visit to Disney. Read this article and decide for yourself.

As an avid traveller, and a mother of two small children, I know what works for my family in terms of vacation planning, but each family is unique so you must **have a plan that works for you**. Plan out what days you hope to visit the theme parks, what times your kids should/like to have their down times, meals etc.. Some advance planning on hitting certain must see attractions or character meetings don't hurt either. Take advantage of getting to the theme parks early and getting your Disney "Fast pass" ticket to avoid long lines to the hot attractions. You can get all this information prior to your departure from your travel agent who can also plan out an itinerary to help you make the most out of your vacation. Be prepared!

Don't be afraid of **down time at the hotel or resort**. Kids love pools, and most accommodations in Orlando have one. Families who stay on one of Disney's many resorts may choose to return to their rooms for mid-day naps or 'down time'. Many will do this and take in the fireworks later in the evening after everyone is well rested. If you are staying at one of Disney's good neighbour properties, why not visit the theme park one day and stay at the hotel the other day. This is often a way family's get that 'relaxation' in. Going on vacation is not supposed to make you more exhausted right?

The number one question I am always asked is "**what is the best age to visit Disney?**" When Walt Disney was building his dream with his 'imagineers' he got down on the ground to mimic the height of a child to allow him to visualize what the park would look like from a small child's perspective. Basically, the park was built for children of ALL ages. Keep in mind a child's attention span differs with each stage of development, and you know your child best, so try to stick to attractions and rides that are age appropriate. An article of this length can't touch on all of what to do for each age group but your travel agent is a wealth of knowledge here. An advanced itinerary can be extremely helpful. Did you know that many families find that there is so much to do at Magic Kingdom alone that they often take two full days to do it to avoid rushing through it once?



Light weight umbrella strollers are a great addition to your luggage. They are small, light and convenient. They can easily fit younger children (maybe even school aged children) when the walking becomes too much (and believe me – there is a lot of walking so pack your comfy shoes). They are great make shift beds for cat naps as well. Formula, baby food and juice are available at hotel gift shops and the Baby Care Centers located in all the Disney parks. (You can nurse there in a relaxed setting.) Knowing this might make it easier when packing your backpack for the day.

Some concerns arise around rides for adults and smaller children. If your baby's too young for a ride, you and your spouse can "**baby swap**" at the entrance. No, you don't get another child from another family - tell the attendant that you'll hop on the ride first while your spouse and the baby wait for you on the sidelines. Then, when you come off, your spouse can ride while you hold the baby. It is a great way to have the entire family not feel like they are missing out rides or attractions more suited for the older guest.

Plan your vacation to **avoid 'peak times'**. While there is no 'slow' time at Disney, there are certain times where the crowds are a bit thinner than others. Visiting during January (except New Year's Day) until just prior to Presidents' week in February, the week following Labour Day until just prior to US Thanksgiving week and the week following Thanksgiving until the week prior to Christmas tend to have the lowest attendance.

One last tip is to think about **going with another family** (many hands make light work). Disney is not only for the young to enjoy, but the young at heart! It is a **multi-generational** magical experience for all to experience. Grandparents tend to be more involved in their Grandchildren's lives more now than ever. This will not only give them a chance to share the memories, but it nice to have them help out during meal times (or if parents need that alone time to enjoy Downtown Disney or some fireworks). Travelling with another family is also a great option as the kids have other children to experience it with, play with and dream with.

Deciding on the best time to visit Disney is something only you as a parent can make. Children aged 2-8 still believe in the magic. Belle is really a Princess and Buzz Lightyear really can fly! There are also plenty of rides for children of that age group, think *It's A Small World*. Children aged 9-14 are able to ride some of the more 'adventurous' thrill rides and can handle the walking and LOVE the pools. Older children get so much out of any of the theme parks – Epcot is really educational too!

Bottom line, PLAN, ORGANIZE, RELAX AND HAVE FUN! Few vacations have little bumps along the way, especially when travelling with kids. Roll with those little bumps, they could turn out to be the best memory!

Michelle Firlotte is a Travel Consultant for Flight Centre Associates. She can be reached at 380-4516. Visit her website at www.flightcentreassociates.com