



Disney World ON A BUDGET

Money-saving tactics for Walt Disney World tickets, hotels, transportation, dining, and more.

DISCLOSURES & COPYRIGHT

This guidebook is not authorized or endorsed by, or in any way officially connected with, The Walt Disney Company, Disney Enterprises, Inc. or any of their affiliates. All trademarks, service marks, and trade names are proprietary to Disney Enterprises, Inc. and its subsidiary, affiliated and related companies, as the case may be. For official Disney information, visit [Disney.com](https://disney.com).

While we aim to provide accurate and up-to-date information, we make no representations as to the accuracy or completeness of any information herein or found by following any link in this guidebook. We cannot and will not accept responsibility for any omissions or inaccuracies, or for any consequences arising therefrom, including any losses, injuries, or damages resulting from the display or use of this information.

For personal use only—sharing with others in part or full violates the copyright on this guidebook.

Copyright Frugal Travel Productions LLC 2026



@THEBUDGETMOUSE

SUPPORT@THEBUDGETMOUSE.COM



WELCOME TO THE MAGIC!

Sweaty in the parks researching for you

A Disney World vacation is complicated and expensive. That's why I'm so glad you've found me and this guide! I promise it will help you have the best possible experience at Disney World while not overpaying like most people do.

I've been visiting Disney World for 40 years and have been sharing budget-friendly Disney planning advice online for the past 12 years as my full-time job. I am happy to answer any questions that arise as you work through this guide - just shoot an email to support@thebudgetmouse.com.

Thank you so much for supporting my mission to help families have an incredible Disney vacation that doesn't break the bank.

Much love,

Leah Althiser

[@thebudgetmouse](https://www.thebudgetmouse.com)

Click on chapter titles to skip to that chapter.

- CHAPTER 1 -

PRINCIPLES OF SAVING AT DISNEY WORLD

How to structure a budget-friendly vacation.

- CHAPTER 2 -

TICKETS & THINGS TO DO

What tickets to buy plus free/cheap things to do.

- CHAPTER 3 -

ACCOMMODATIONS

Affordable places to stay and how to book them.

- CHAPTER 4 -

TRANSPORTATION

How to get to/from Orlando and around town affordably.

- CHAPTER 5 -

FOOD & DINING

How to eat well on a budget at Disney World.

- CHAPTER 6 -

SOUVENIRS & MORE

Tactics to keep your additional spending under control.

C H A P T E R

1

PRINCIPLES OF SAVING

DISNEY WORLD CAN BE MUCH LESS EXPENSIVE

Walt Disney World is the **most popular family travel destination in the world**—and also one of the most expensive.

There are definitely overpriced things at Disney World that will drive up the cost of your trip.

The key to an affordable trip is **knowing how to avoid money traps and spend only on things that offer good value.**

In this guide, I'll show you exactly where to spend and where to save to get your money's worth out of your vacation.

“

I've taken my family to Disney World again and again for half of what others pay.

”





FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SAVING

First of all, the majority of people plan their Disney World vacation on the Disney World website.

They plug in their preferred dates and take Disney's suggestions for putting their trip together - where to stay, what tickets to buy, whether to add a Dining Plan or not, etc.

This is how most people end up overpaying for their trip. Disney is masterful at “upselling” - i.e., getting you to spend more money than you planned through upgrades and add-ons.

My goal is to help you put a trip together without falling for Disney's upselling tactics. In this chapter you'll learn **my four principles for planning a trip with all of the magic and none of the overspending:**

- **1: When You Go REALLY Matters**
- **2: There's No “Perfect” Length Of Trip**
- **3: Maximize Your (Very Expensive) Park Tickets**
- **4: Know What's Worth Paying For**

WHEN YOU GO REALLY MATTERS

Years ago Disney moved to **“dynamic” date-based pricing** for almost everything - hotels, park tickets, Lightning Lanes, and sometimes even dining.

They did this in an effort to **better distribute crowds** throughout the year, and it actually achieved its mission - crowds are now more consistent than they have ever been.

If you have any flexibility with when you visit, **you can potentially save thousands of dollars on your trip by going at a less crowded time.**

Package: Resort Room & Ticket

September 26 – October 1, 2027 | 2 Adults, 2 Children (9, 7)

[View Important Details](#) | [Edit](#) | [Remove All](#)



Disney's All-Star Movies Resort

Standard Room

[Edit](#) | [Remove](#)



3-Day Ticket with Admission to 1 Park Per Day

Valid any 3 days from Sun, Sep 26, 2027 through Fri, Oct 1, 2027.

[Edit](#) | [Remove](#)

Offer Subtotal

\$ 2,827.54

Package: Resort Room & Ticket

December 27, 2026 – January 1, 2027 | 2 Adults, 2 Children (9, 7)

[View Important Details](#) | [Edit](#) | [Remove All](#)



Disney's All-Star Movies Resort

Standard Room

[Edit](#) | [Remove](#)



3-Day Ticket with Admission to 1 Park Per Day

Valid any 3 days from Sun, Dec 27, 2026 through Fri, Jan 1, 2027.

[Edit](#) | [Remove](#)

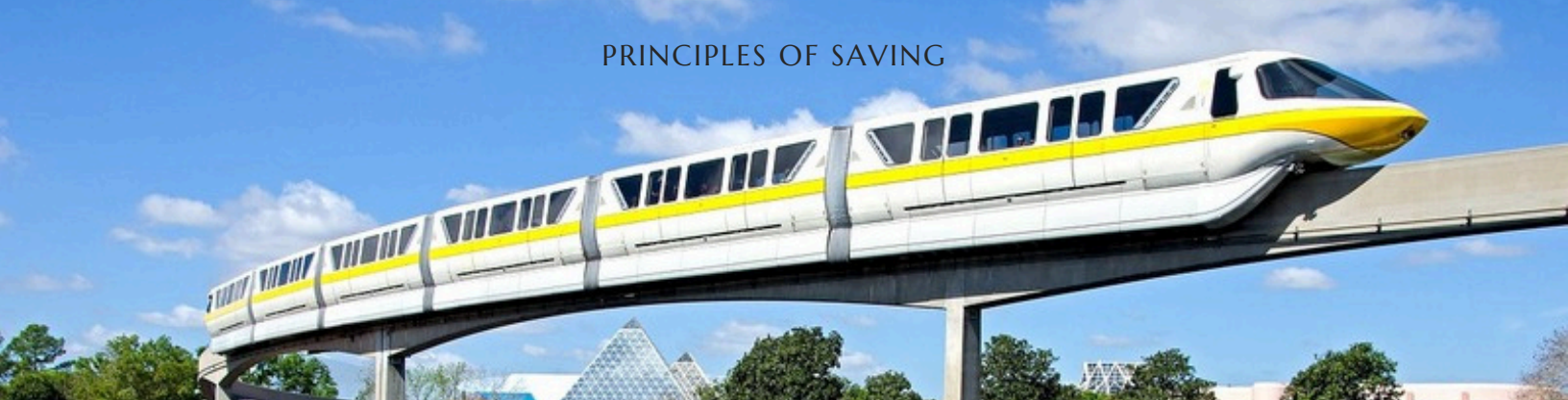
Offer Subtotal

\$ 3,953.56

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the cost for a five-night stay at Disney's All-Star Movies Resort (one of my favorites) along with three-day tickets for a family of four.

The exact same vacation costs 40% more during peak time compared to low season. And that's not even taking into account the additional cost of Lightning Lanes, which also fluctuate wildly with crowd levels.

If you choose to stay at a Moderate or Deluxe Resort, you are looking at **thousands of dollars saved by visiting during low season compared to peak times.**



Disney has actually made it very easy to find lower cost dates to visit on their website.

By comparing the cost of a one-day ticket to the parks on different dates, you'll quickly see the lower-cost times to visit. In general, the same pattern applies to resort prices and Lightning Lanes.

[Click here for a link to the ticket calendar](#) and select a one-day ticket.

< September 2027 >				
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
		1	2	3
		\$119+	\$119+	\$134+
6	7	8	9	10
\$144+	\$119+	\$119+	\$119+	\$144+
13	14	15	16	17
\$144+	\$119+	\$119+	\$119+	\$139+
20	21	22	23	24
\$149+	\$119+	\$119+	\$119+	\$149+
27	28	29	30	
\$119+	\$119+	\$144+	\$149+	

And if you don't want to pore over the Disney site, I've marked below-average cost (and crowd) dates on the calendars on the following page for you. **Many of these dates are when kids are traditionally out of school.**

Best Dates To Go To Disney World 2026

Calendarpedia
Your source for calendars

recommended dates are highlighted in green

January						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

February						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

March						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

April						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

May						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

June						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

July						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

August						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

September						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

October						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

November						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

December						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Best Dates To Go To Disney World 2027

The Budget Mouse

Dates highlighted in green are recommended

January						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

February						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28						

March						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

April						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

May						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

June						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

July						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

August						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

September						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

October						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

November						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

December						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Holidays are highlighted in red

© Calendarpedia® www.calendarpedia.com

THERE'S NO PERFECT TRIP LENGTH

A visit to the Disney world website will leave you thinking that the only way to "do Disney" is by going to all four theme parks on your first visit.

Explore All 4 Theme Parks



Magic Kingdom Park



EPCOT



Disney's Animal Kingdom
Theme Park



Disney's Hollywood
Studios

Photo credit: DisneyWorld.com

I actually **advise AGAINST trying to visit all four parks on your first trip**, because it usually leads to trying to do too much and ending up exhausted.

So please do not believe the Disney propaganda machine that no trip is complete unless you visit all four parks. Instead follow one of the suggested itineraries on the next page and know that **whatever the length of trip fits in your budget, you can have an incredible visit with your family.**

Picking which parks to visit is difficult - here's an overview to help.

Magic Kingdom



Magic Kingdom (MK) is the quintessential Disney park - if you only visit one, this will likely be it. There are over 50 attractions here including the TRON coaster and Tiana's Bayou Adventure. Has the most rides with low or no height requirement, making it a favorite for families with young kids.

EPCOT



EPCOT (EP) is my favorite park. It has more rides than most people think, including the Guardians of the Galaxy coaster and Remy's Ratatouille Adventure. Visiting (and eating in) the countries of World Showcase is a highlight.

Hollywood Studios



Hollywood Studios (HS) is a must-do for fans of Star Wars and Toy Story, with lands dedicated to each. Has the most "high thrill" rides of any park so the most popular with older kids/teens. 7 stage shows and a unique nighttime show, Fantasmic.

Animal Kingdom



Way more than a zoo, Animal Kingdom (AK) contains "Avatar Land" and several other popular rides. The most beautiful park and has no nighttime show, making it the best choice for back-to-back park days. Getting a bunch of new attractions in the coming years.

SAMPLE TRIP ITINERARIES

There's no "perfect" length for a visit to Disney World. Here are ideas:

1
park

LONG WEEKEND / 2-NIGHT STAY

Day 1: Check in, pool/water park, Disney Springs

Day 2: Magic Kingdom

Day 3: Character brunch at a resort, check out

2 - 3
parks

4/5-NIGHT STAY

Day 1: Check in, pool/water park, Disney Springs for dinner

Day 2: EPCOT or Hollywood Studios

Day 3: Sleep in, brunch/lunch and activities at other resorts, afternoon at pool, activities and dinner at resorts

Day 4: Magic Kingdom

Day 5: Character brunch at a resort, check out

3 - 4
parks

6/7-NIGHT STAY

Day 1: Check in, pool/water park, Disney Springs for dinner

Day 2: Animal Kingdom (closes early)

Day 3: EPCOT or Hollywood Studios

Day 4: Sleep in, brunch/lunch and activities at other resorts, afternoon at pool, activities and dinner at resorts

Day 5: Magic Kingdom

(Optional rest day): Sleep in, brunch/lunch and activities at other resorts, afternoon at pool, activities and dinner

Day 6/7: EPCOT or Hollywood Studios

Day 7/8: Character brunch at a resort, check out

MAXIMIZE YOUR PARK TICKETS

Unless you choose to stay at a very pricey resort, theme park tickets will likely be the #1 expense of your vacation.

If you can reduce the number of days on your ticket by just *one*, you can potentially **save over \$600 for a family of four**.

4-Day Ticket with Admission to 1 Park Per Day
Valid any 4 days from Tue, Oct 13, 2026 – Mon, Oct 19, 2026.

2 x Ages 10+ (\$677.84/ticket)

2 x Ages 3-9 (\$659.84/ticket)

Subtotal \$2,849.26 USD

3-Day Ticket with Admission to 1 Park Per Day
Valid any 3 days from Tue, Oct 13, 2026 – Sat, Oct 17, 2026.

2 x Ages 10+ (\$534.11/ticket)

2 x Ages 3-9 (\$520.01/ticket)

Subtotal \$2,245.28 USD

Now you might think you'll be sacrificing the quality of your vacation by reducing your number of park days from four to three.

But I'd argue that **you'll actually have a far better vacation experience**, because you'll get more out of your days in the parks and not run yourself ragged.



A better approach is to **maximize your very expensive time in the parks** by arriving early (the parks actually open *well before* their posted "opening" time), using a good touring plan, taking an afternoon break to recharge, and returning later for lower crowds and evening fireworks.

Since very few families can get up early and stay out late day after day without meltdowns, taking a day off between park days during your trip is highly recommended.

With this approach, **you will see and do more in the parks than most people** and actually get your money's worth out of your park tickets.

KNOW WHAT'S WORTH PAYING FOR

Sticker shock is common at Disney World if people aren't prepared for the prices. The way to beat sticker shock is to **know what's overpriced, what offers good value, and have a plan for avoiding money traps.**

Here's what to avoid that's NOT worth it:

- **Fireworks Dessert Parties:** Not worth the sky-high cost to watch the same fireworks show 10 feet away.
- **The Disney Dining Plan:** Unless you're drinking alcohol with every meal and using credits strategically, you will lose money on the plans.
- **Bottled water:** There is free filtered water all over the parks plus free ice water at any dining location with fountain drinks.
- **Resort convenience food/items:** Don't pay \$5 for a tiny bottle of orange juice - instead [get groceries delivered to your resort](#) with all of the basics.
- **"After Hours" event tickets:** The price-per-hour to be in the parks is sky high and you can get similar short waits with a good touring plan.
- **Some Character Meals:** I only suggest one Character Meal per trip, for breakfast/brunch, and on a day you don't have a park ticket. Otherwise it is difficult to get good value from them.
- **Lightning Lane Premier Pass:** You can have a similar experience with a good touring plan and save \$300 per person.



WHAT'S WORTH IT

Conversely, there are some things that offer incredible value at Disney World:

- **Staying at a Disney Resort:** This is the one decision that will impact your vacation the MOST. **There is incredible value at every single Disney Resort:** free parking and transportation, free daily resort activities (with no resort fee), extra time in the parks, advance Lightning Lane booking, etc.
- **Lightning Lane Multi Pass & Single Pass:** The second most important thing that will vastly improve your experience in the parks. See Chapter 2.

Cantina de San Angel, Epcot



Disney's All-Star Movies Resort

- **Quick Service Meals:** Some "Quick Service" dining locations offer better food for half the cost of nearby table service restaurants. There is excellent bang-for-your-buck at good quick service restaurants, some with great theming and unique food.
- **Resort Refillable Mugs & Popcorn Bucket:** Unlimited free refills of coffee/soda/etc, at any resort for the length of your stay plus a great souvenir with [these mugs](#). Buy a popcorn bucket at the start of your trip and get \$2.25 refills.
- **Park Tickets:** You get not just mind-blowing rides but Broadway caliber shows, character interactions, parades, and fireworks that will make your jaw drop. The parks are hard to beat for \$/hour entertainment-value.

THE PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Before we go any further, I want to show you that **it's entirely possible to save over \$8,000 on a week-long Disney vacation for a family of four** by applying all of the money-saving principles you're about to learn:

6 Night Deluxe WDW Vacation

for a family of four
without The Budget Mouse

TOTAL **\$13,488**

HOTEL COSTS \$3,480

6 nights at Animal Kingdom Lodge \$3,480

TRANSPORTATION COSTS \$2,028

Flights (average \$382 RT) \$1,528

rental car \$500

PARK TICKETS \$4,620

6-day park hopper tickets from Disn \$3,400

LL Multi Pass x 6 days \$700

LL Single Pass Purchases \$520

FOOD COSTS \$2,660

quick service breakfast x6 \$420

quick service lunch x6 \$490

table service dinner x6 \$1,250

drinks \$300

snacks \$200

SOUVENIRS \$700

6 Night Deluxe WDW Vacation

for a family of four
using all of the tips in this guidebook

TOTAL **\$4,822**

HOTEL COSTS \$1,000

5 nights at AKL on DVC points \$1,000

arrival night with Hyatt points \$0

TRANSPORTATION COSTS \$154

taxes on flights booked with points \$44

uber to/from airport \$80

uber around WDW \$30

PARK TICKETS \$2,378

4-day discounted tickets \$1,933

LL Multi Pass x 3 days \$300

LL Single Pass x 2 rides \$145

FOOD COSTS \$1,090

grocery delivery \$100

quick service lunch x6 \$300

quick service dinner x5 \$250

character brunch x1 \$200

refillable mugs x4 \$90

snacks \$150

SOUVENIRS \$200

C H A P T E R

2

TICKETS & THINGS TO DO

[click here to return to the main menu](#)

WHAT YOU DON'T NEED A TICKET FOR



Something that surprises most first-time visitors is just **how much there is to do at Walt Disney World OUTSIDE of the theme parks!** Before you decide how many days of park tickets you need, first become familiar with all of the things you don't need a park ticket for.

- **Transportation:** Unlike at Disneyland, you don't need a park ticket to ride Disney transportation including the monorail, buses, boats, and Skyliner. This makes getting around on days without park tickets fun and easy.
- **Resort Activities:** Every Disney Resort has extensive daily free/cheap activities including pool games, marshmallow roasting, movies, crafts, and more. [See examples here.](#)
- **Disney Springs:** A huge shopping/dining/entertainment zone that doesn't require a park ticket. Accessible via bus/boat.
- **Character Dining:** Some of the best Character Dining is NOT inside the theme parks. Meet princesses, Mickey & friends, and even the Evil Queen and Seven Dwarfs at the Disney Resorts.
- **Boardwalk Area:** There's dining and entertainment here and it's just a lovely place to walk. Accessible via boat and Skyliner.
- **Water Parks & Miniature Golf:** Disney has two excellent water parks and two fun miniature golf courses. They charge admission but are not inside the theme parks.

THE FOUR MAIN TICKET TYPES

Kids under 3 are always free, and ages 3-9 are \$10 less than adults.



1 PARK PER DAY

The base or standard ticket that allows you to enter only one park per day. Prices vary by park and by the day. Visits do NOT have to be on consecutive days - e.g., you have 5 days to use a 3-day ticket.

PARK HOPPER

Allows you to visit as many parks as you want in one day. Costs an extra \$75–\$100 per person for any ticket length. Can't add for just part of a multi-day ticket.



WATER PARK AND SPORTS

Can add to 2-day+ base tickets; allows a visit to a water park, ESPN, or golf for each day (e.g., 3 visits on a 3-day ticket). Costs \$80 per person for any ticket length.

PARK HOPPER PLUS

Visit multiple parks on each day plus receive visits to the water parks, ESPN, or golf for as many days as your ticket. Costs \$115 per person for any length of ticket.



DO I NEED THESE TICKET ADD-ONS?

Disney loves to sell you “add-ons” that drive up the cost of your trip.

Park Hopper is an add-on that allows you to set foot in more than one park in a day. **For most visitors, this isn’t necessary** since there is SO MUCH to see and do in each theme park.

It doesn’t make sense to spend \$400 more (for a family of four) to switch parks unless you have been to the parks many times and have a compelling reason (see below).

When does it make sense to pay for Park Hopper?

Magic Kingdom hosts holiday parties 3–4 nights per week from August through December. The park closes at 6 pm those nights, so if you are just visiting that day you’ll get five fewer hours and no fireworks.

However, **the park has MUCH lower crowds on these days because of this.** So if you want to experience Magic Kingdom with low crowds on one day then return another night for fireworks, it just might be worth it to pay for the Park Hopper add-on.



What about the Water Parks & More add-on?

Again, most first-timers will barely have time to experience the basics at the parks, resorts, and Disney Springs.

If you are visiting from roughly Memorial Day ‘til Labor Day and staying at a Disney Resort, you’ll get [free water park admission](#) on your check-in day.

If you can’t make it on check-in day and are a big enough fan of water parks to make a day of it, then it makes sense to pay for this add-on. Otherwise, skip it.

SPECIALTY TICKETS EXPLAINED

LIMITED TIME TICKET OFFERS

Disney has been offering discounted tickets with special rules lately. **These tickets offer an excellent opportunity to save money without sacrificing quality!** For example, the 4-Park Magic Tickets limits you to one visit per park (so you can't go to Magic Kingdom twice, for example) but saves you up to \$150 per ticket. If one of [these current offers](#) works for your dates/plans, definitely take advantage.



MILITARY DISCOUNT TICKETS

These are the heaviest discounted tickets available. There are different ticket types, and eligibility rules are complicated - [this is a great resource for figuring them out](#). Some of these tickets are not date-based, so you must make a park reservation for each day on your park ticket. Offers change each year, so your best bet is to [visit this page to find the latest offer for US Military Members](#).



FLORIDA RESIDENT TICKETS

If friends or grandparents live in Florida, people are often curious as to if they can purchase [heavily discounted Florida resident tickets](#) for them. As a rule, no, **but children do not have to have valid ID to use their park ticket**. So if a friend/relative is willing to go pick up the physical tickets at a ticket office for your kids, they technically can use them without any issues. Adults will get their ID verified for resident status.



MAGIC KINGDOM HOLIDAY PARTIES

Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party and **Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party** are "hard ticketed" events that take place in Magic Kingdom select nights from August to December.

This means that your regular daily park ticket does NOT grant you admission - you need a separate ticket for these parties.

On party nights, Magic Kingdom closes to day guests at 6 pm (you will be escorted out if you aren't wearing a party bracelet) and the park is only open to party guests from 7 pm–12 pm.



Even though the official festivities don't start until 7 pm, **you can enter Magic Kingdom as early as 4 pm with just a party ticket.**

The parties feature special parades, fireworks, stage shows, complimentary treats, shorter lines for rides, as well as some very popular character meets.

The parties are PRICEY, averaging \$200 per person. Are they worth the cost? Not really. Are they lots of fun? Absolutely. I wouldn't recommend them for first-timers unless you can arrive before 4 pm and hang until midnight, and don't mind the extra cost for more time in Magic Kingdom.

HOW TO PURCHASE TICKETS

Once you've figured out which ticket type and length works best for you, you're ready to purchase. Here's **where to buy and how to pay for your tickets** for the most savings possible.

WHERE TO BUY

- **One- and Two-Day Tickets:** The best prices are actually available [through the Disney World site here](#). There are no publicly available 1- or 2-day discounted tickets.
- **Three-Day+ Tickets, Special Event Tickets:** The best prices out there (and I check EVERYWHERE) are through [Undercover Tourist](#). They also have a 365-day refund policy (unlike Disney which offers no refunds) after paying a small restocking fee.

HOW TO PAY

- If you are buying your tickets from the Disney site, I suggest paying with [discount Disney gift cards](#) from Target or elsewhere. They will save you 5% (or more) on the cost of your tickets which can easily save you \$50–\$100.
- If you are buying from Undercover Tourist, your purchase will code as travel (as opposed to “entertainment” when bought from Disney). That means you can “erase” part or all of your purchase with travel points and miles earned from [this excellent card](#) or from [my #1 favorite travel rewards card here](#).

**** ARE THERE BETTER DISCOUNTS??**

The short answer is yes, there are discounted “conference tickets” which I personally use. Since they could be considered ethically questionable, I only explain how to find and use them [inside my membership here](#).

SHOULD I PAY FOR LIGHTNING LANES?

The second biggest way to improve your vacation (right after staying at a Disney resort) is **strategically buying Lightning Lane passes for your park days.**

I happily save in other areas so that I can afford Lightning Lanes.

But you can easily overspend on these “skip the line” passes if you don’t know which passes to buy and which are a waste of money.

PREMIER PASS: \$129–\$449*

The new super-pricey [Premier Pass](#) allows you to skip the line once per ride in one park for one day without any reservations or selections required - just show up and ride.

While it is undeniably convenient, it represents horrible value since you can achieve pretty much the same effect with the much cheaper passes and a good touring plan! This one is a hard no for anyone budget-conscious.

MULTI PASS: \$16–\$38*

Lightning Lane Multi Pass (LLMP) allows you to skip the line from a select group of attractions for one day. Can be used in multiple parks and unlimited times until all time slots for every ride are gone for the day.

When used with good strategy, Multi Pass can offer excellent value. Most visitors are clueless about how it works so if you study up you can skip the line all day! Get details on the next page.

SINGLE PASS: \$10–\$25*

Single Pass allows you to skip the line on just one ride. It is less valuable than Multi Pass, but still makes sense to purchase for certain rides (see p. 26).

**All prices are per person and per day (for Premier and Multi Pass) or per attraction (Single Pass).*

LIGHTNING LANE MULTI PASS

LLMP allows you to skip the line for a group of attractions.

When you buy LLMP for the day, you can make **three advance LL selections before your visit - but that's just the beginning.**



The real value from LLMP comes from the fact that **you can continue to make a new selection every time you redeem one** - again and again until the park closes. Here are my rules for buying Multi Pass:

- **Magic Kingdom** - always buy - it is good for 18 rides here!
- **EPCOT** - almost always buy unless it is a very slow day
- **Hollywood Studios** - always buy IF you want to ride the thrill rides. If you are visiting with toddlers you won't need it.
- **Animal Kingdom** - I have never needed it here - you can ride everything with a short wait without it.
- **Park Hopping** - always buy since it works at multiple parks

[Click here for my full guide on how to use Multi Pass.](#) Also, I often use [Standby Skipper](#) to get better value out of LLMP (use code **BUDGETMOUSE25** for \$5 off).



SINGLE PASS

There are some attractions that are NOT included with LLMP. These are **the most in-demand rides in the parks** and Disney upcharges for them.

With one exception, I tend to NOT buy Lightning Lane Single Pass (LLSP) for these rides, and instead use other approaches to avoid long waits such as:

- Rope Drop/Early Entry
- Park Close
- Rider Switch

You do NOT have to buy a LLSP for everyone in your party. Just purchase for those who want to ride.

WHEN SHOULD I BUY?

Here is my advice for each of the five rides that require Single Pass to skip the line:

TRON Lightcycle/Run (MK) is one ride I always buy Single Pass for. It is NOT open during Early Entry and gets a long line at park close (since it's fun in the dark) so it is worth it to buy the Single Pass.

Seven Dwarfs Mine Train (MK) can be ridden at park close with a very short wait or during Early Entry (though the crowds are not fun). I don't buy unless I can't do either of these.

Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind (EP) I only buy if I can't ride during Early Entry.

Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance (HS) can be ridden during Early Entry or at park close so I only buy if I can't ride either of those times.

Avatar: Flight of Passage (AK), If you can arrive for Early Entry or stay until park close you can ride with a <30-minute wait. Otherwise it's worth it to buy LLSP.



SAVING ON TICKETS SUMMARY

A summary of my best advice for saving on tickets and Lightning Lanes.

- ✓ Buy as few days of park tickets as possible and take advantage of all the cheap/free things to do at the resorts, Disney Springs, and more.
- ✓ If you are visiting in the summer, take advantage of free Water Park admission on check-in day for everyone in your party.
- ✓ Get full value from your park tickets by arriving early (well before the park “opens”), using a good touring plan, taking an afternoon break, then returning for all of the nighttime entertainment.
- ✓ Either buy discounted tickets with a card that offers travel statement credit or use discounted Disney gift cards to purchase your tickets.
- ✓ Only buy ticket add-ons and special event tickets if they will significantly improve the quality of your trip. Otherwise, skip them.
- ✓ Only buy Lightning Lane passes when you truly need them and spend some time learning how to get the most value from Multi Pass.

C H A P T E R

3

ACCOMMODATIONS

[click here to return to the main menu](#)

WHERE TO STAY

“Where should I stay?” might be the #1 question I get asked.

Your overall Disney vacation experience is greatly impacted by where you stay. That’s because this choice affects **how you get to the theme parks** and your flexibility with scheduling your days.

First I’ll share some **common pitfalls when it comes to deciding where to stay**, followed by my suggestions.

I’ve stayed at all 25 Disney Resorts and just as many other places not run by Disney, so you’ll know this isn’t based on just a few visits!

Disney’s Animal Kingdom Lodge



Disney’s Polynesian Village Resort

First, here are all of your options in the Orlando area:

- **Disney-Run Resorts (25):** Hotels owned and operated by Walt Disney World; their names will always begin with “Disney’s” e.g. *Disney’s Pop Century Resort*
- **Hotels On Disney Property NOT Run by Disney (13):** Hotels located within the boundaries of Disney World property but run by another company; e.g. the Swan & Dolphin, Bonnet Creek Resorts, and Disney Springs hotels
- **Other Hotels:** There are hundreds of other hotels in the Orlando area that are located “off property”
- **Short Term Rentals:** There are also hundreds of apartments and homes bookable through Airbnb and VRBO (among others)



THE OFF-PROPERTY MYTH

The first pitfall I'm addressing is the prevalent myth that staying off-property is always cheaper than staying at a Disney-owned resort.

Here's a breakdown of why it often isn't true:

Price comparison (not including tax):

- **Disney's All Star Movies Resort**

- Room: \$149
- Parking at resort: Free
- Parking at theme park: Free
- Resort fee: \$0
- **TOTAL: \$149**

- **Similar Non-Disney Hotel**

- Room: \$109
- Parking at resort: \$23
- Parking at theme park: \$35
- Resort fee: \$18
- **TOTAL: \$185**

At first glance, the off-property hotel appears \$40 cheaper. But after ALL costs are factored in, the Disney Resort is the winner. When comparing places to stay, **be sure to factor in the cost to park at both the hotel AND the theme parks, as well as resort fees and even cleaning fees for rentals.**

MORE PITFALLS

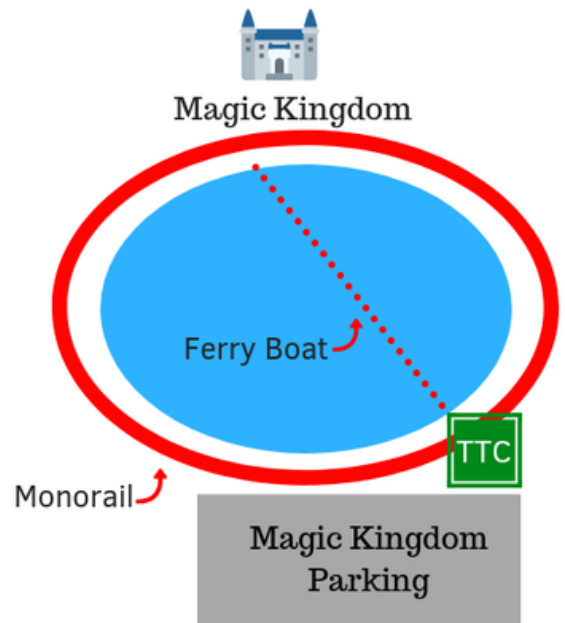
Here are other pitfalls I see often.

First, an off-property hotel advertises “free transportation to the theme parks” as a benefit.

What they don't say is:

- 1) The shuttle only departs at 9 am which means you will arrive at the parks far too late to take advantage of low crowds in the morning
- 2) You have to make a reservation for the shuttle at least 24 hours in advance
- 3) The bus drops you off at the Transportation and Ticket Center only and you have to use Disney transportation to get to the parks, adding even more time to your trip.

As you can see, **this shuttle option is highly impractical**. If you stay off-property, plan on driving yourself or taking an Uber/Lyft.



Another common pitfall is folks **not understanding how getting to the front gates of Magic Kingdom actually works**.

If you drive yourself, take a rideshare, or take an off-property shuttle, you will first find yourself at the Transportation and Ticket Center (TTC).

From there, you will have to take either the Monorail or Ferry Boat to get to the front gates.

The only way to get dropped off right at the gates and bypass the TTC is to arrive via Disney transportation - bus, boat, or [Minnie Van](#) (not budget-friendly).

If you are visiting Magic Kingdom more than once on your trip, the convenience of Disney transportation alone is reason enough to stay at a Disney resort.



DISNEY RESORTS OVERVIEW

As I've already said (*probably too many times*), I **highly recommend staying at a Disney-owned and operated resort for the best vacation experience and value.**

You'll get free parking everywhere, fast and free transportation to the parks, excellent customer service, well-maintained resorts, incredible resort activities (with no resort fee), and valuable perks such as [Early Entry](#), a 7-day advance Lightning Lane booking, and [Extended Evening Hours](#) (Deluxe level only).

Disney Resorts are grouped into three main categories based on price and amenities: Value, Moderate, and Deluxe. Here are the resorts in each category and approximate prices: (*my personal favorites are highlighted*):

Value Resorts

All Star Movies

All Star Music

All Star Sports

Pop Century

Art of Animation

Average Nightly Rate
\$150 - \$350

Moderate Resorts

Caribbean Beach

Coronado Springs

Port Orleans -

Riverside

Port Orleans -

French Quarter

Average Nightly Rate
\$225 - \$550

Deluxe Resorts

Animal Kingdom Lodge

Beach Club

BoardWalk Inn

Contemporary

Grand Floridian

Polynesian Village

Wilderness Lodge

Yacht Club

Old Key West

Saratoga Springs

Riviera Resort

Average Nightly Rate*
\$500 - \$1,000+

**Significantly lower rates available when renting DVC points (more on this soon)*

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE DISNEY RESORTS



Disney Value Resorts

260 sq ft rooms with two queen beds. Bus and Skyliner transportation; food courts; playgrounds; and themed pools (no water slides or hot tubs).

Disney Moderate Resorts

314 sq ft rooms, some that sleep five. Bus, Skyliner, and boat transportation; quick and table service dining; pools with slides, hot tubs, and water play areas.



Disney Deluxe Resorts

350 sq ft+ rooms, most sleep five. Some walkable to parks and on the monorail line. Excellent dining, incredible pools, fitness centers, and gorgeous lobbies.

ROOM-ONLY VS PACKAGES

If you have perused the Disney site at all, you will already know that it will encourage you to book a package with park tickets and a Dining Plan when you are booking one of their resorts.

In most cases, booking a package with Disney is NOT recommended.

Before the pandemic, I actually would have told you to book a package such as the popular “Free Dining” offer in order to save money.

But Disney has made these offers, including Free Dining, less and less valuable to guests in recent years (they got on to us saving too much money).

Disney’s All-Star Music Resort



Disney’s Beach Club Resort

Now, in most cases, I recommend booking a “room only” reservation and linking tickets afterwards for the most savings.

Another benefit to booking a room-only reservation as opposed to a package is that **you’ll have a more flexible cancellation policy.**

You can cancel a room-only reservation **up to 8 days before check-in without penalty.**

Packages require full payment by 30 days before arrival and incur a \$200 fee if you cancel after that.

DISNEY DISCOUNTS EXPLAINED

A baffling (and sometimes frustrating) part of booking a Disney Resort are the discounts.

I never NOT seen Disney offer a discount on it's hotels. What varies is the % discount and what hotels are included. The takeaway is this - **do not trust the "rack rate" pricing on Disney's site, especially if you are looking far in advance!**

Why does Disney do this? Because so many people book their vacation well in advance, by three to six months out they know what resorts aren't as full as they would like at that point. So they offer an incentive to book these resorts with a discount.

If you [check out the current discounts from Disney here](#), you will see that the farthest they generally extend is ~six months in the future.



Save Up to 30% on Rooms in Late Summer and Early Fall

- At select Disney Resorts Collection hotels
- Most arrivals from July 30 to October 3, 2026
- For stays of 5 consecutive nights or longer; other savings available for shorter stays

Offer Type: Room

MANY people book before this and don't know to check back for discounts later. If, after booking, you find a discount that applies to your stay, you can call or chat with Disney and ask them if they can apply the discount to your booking.

If you are booking a Disney Resort stay or package well in advance and don't want to have to monitor the discounts, I suggest [getting connected with a travel agent here](#). We will automatically apply discounts for you and there is no cost to use our travel agent services.

HOW TO SAVE ON DISNEY RESORTS

There are four main ways to book a Disney Resort. **Here they are, ranked in order from least savings to most:**

- Book through a Disney travel agent
- Book directly with Disney yourself
- Book through a third-party site (e.g. Priceline)
- Renting Disney Vacation Club (DVC) points

Each of these makes sense in different scenarios. Here's when to do each.

When To Book With A Travel Agent

Disney travel agents (TAs) can be really helpful when you're not sure what would be the best place to stay, or want to be hands-off with future discounts.

They are paid by Disney so it actually costs you nothing to have one book your trip for you.



Disney's Coronado Springs

I suggest [getting a quote here](#) if you want help. Just know they will manage your reservation, so any changes will have to be done through the TA.

When To Book Directly With Disney Yourself

If you're staying at a Value or Moderate Resort, already know what room type you want to book, and the cost on the Disney website is less than my recommended third-party sites (see the next page), go ahead and book with Disney.

HOW TO SAVE ON DISNEY RESORTS

When To Book Through A Third-Party Site

Many are surprised to learn that it is possible to book Disney Resorts through a third party (travel consolidator).

Why I sometimes do this:

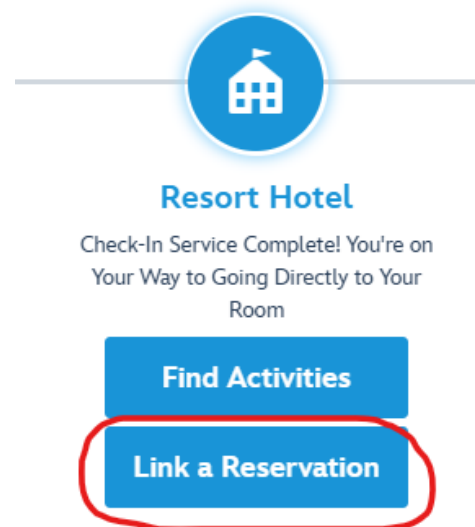
- Disney releases blocks of rooms to third-party sites so sometimes there are rooms available through third parties that are sold out on the Disney site
- Third parties include Disney room-only discounts in their rates, and many times are able to offer **ADDITIONAL discounts on top of the Disney discounts**
- You still get all Disney benefits and perks

While there are MANY travel consolidators that have Disney Resorts available, there are only two I recommend - [Undercover Tourist](#) and [Priceline](#).

The reason is that **these sites send you your Disney confirmation number immediately after booking**, making it very easy to link your reservation to your My Disney Experience account.



You just copy this number, visit the Disney site, find this option to link a reservation, and paste it in. It will then show up in your plans.



BOUNCE BACK OFFERS

Another very unique discount available at Disney World is unofficially called a **“bounce back offer”**. Disney refers to it as the “Save On Your Next Stay” discount.

It is a discount that is only available while you are in Walt Disney World, or up to 7 days after you check out.

The typical offer is for 35% off Deluxe Resorts, 30% off Moderates, and 25% off Value Resorts.

There should be a flyer in your room (check inside the guide) with the current discounts.

You can [see the available dates for the current bounce back offer here](#).

To book, you can either call 407-939-5277 or you can actually book online during or right after your stay - just scan the QR code on the flyer in your room to go to the online booking portal.



KEEP THE MAGIC GOING AND SAVE
when you book your next stay within 7 days of your current checkout date.

**SAVE UP TO
35%**
ON ROOMS
at select Disney
Deluxe or Deluxe
Villa Resorts

**SAVE UP TO
30%**
ON ROOMS
at select Disney
Moderate Resorts

**SAVE UP TO
25%**
ON ROOMS
at select Disney
Value Resorts

Check Rates and Reserve Your Next Stay!

To get started on this special offer, check hotel room availability—or contact your Travel Professional—by August 3, 2026

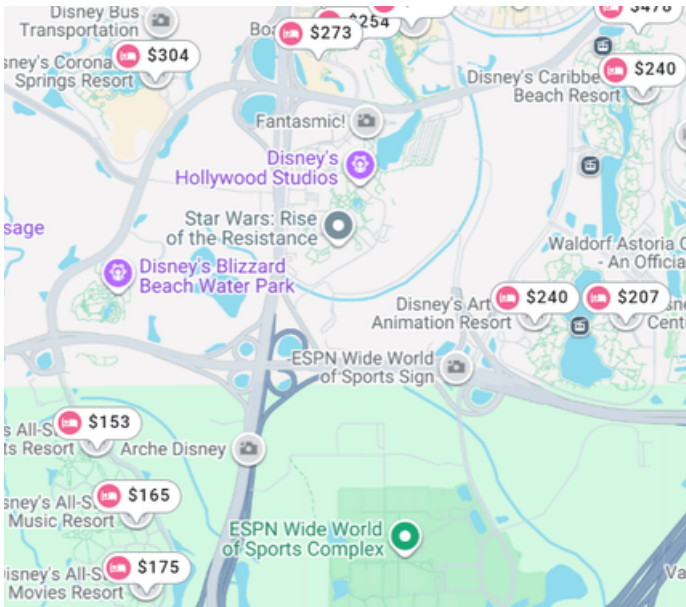
[Check Availability](#)

You can change or cancel up to 30 days before check-in with no penalty, so it's a great way to lock in a solid discount - especially on the Value and Moderate Resorts.

HACKS FOR THE BEST PRICES ON DISNEY RESORTS

The primary tool I use to find the best prices on Disney resorts is [Google Travel](#).

That's because **it allows me to compare the prices at all Disney Resorts in one place** - including rooms I can book directly with Disney and those through third parties.



I search for "[Lake Buena Vista Hotels](#)" on [Google Travel](#) to get results mostly within Disney World. Select a result, then pull down the calendar which shows you the price any night of the year at that resort!

Disney's All-Star Music Resort

[Overview](#) [Prices](#) [Reviews](#) [Photos](#)



Tue, Oct 20



Wed, Oct 21

October

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1 \$366	2 \$210	3 \$229
4 \$194	5 \$143	6 \$143	7 \$129	8 \$768	9 \$241	10 \$203
11 \$768	12 \$158	13 \$148	14 \$135	15 \$178	16 \$185	17 \$190
18 \$143	19 \$132	20 \$121	21 \$126	22 —	23 —	24 \$462
25 \$171	26 \$125	27 \$125	28 \$145	29 \$197	30 —	31 \$203

I generally use this calendar feature just for research to find the best resort for my dates, or the best dates for the resort I want to stay at.

I then book either through [Disney World](#), [Priceline](#), or [Undercover Tourist](#), depending on which site offers the availability I want and the best price.



Disney's Old Key West Resort

RENTING DVC POINTS

The way to get **the deepest discounts on Disney Resorts** (up to 70% off) is by renting Disney Vacation Club (DVC) points.

I have been using this approach for the past 15 years to stay at Disney Deluxe resorts for far less than what you'll pay through Disney - e.g., \$160 per night for a room that's \$600 from Disney.

There's a LOT to know about this approach, so much so that I wrote another guide just for this - [click here to get it for free](#).

Here's a quick overview of the pros and cons of this method:

PROS

- Save 30 to 70% off Disney's prices
- Can add a Dining Plan to your reservation without tickets
- Extended Evening Hours in the theme parks for FREE
- All other Disney Resort benefits included

CONS

- Restrictive cancellation policy (travel insurance recommended)
- Must pay 50–100% upfront
- Best rooms book up 7–11 months in advance

Renting DVC points works best if you are booking more than 7 months in advance and are 100% committed to this vacation (much like Disney tickets, you can make changes but once you pay, that money is sunk into being spent at Disney).

OFF PROPERTY RECOMMENDATIONS

While I clearly prefer staying at an on-property hotel - **sometimes staying at a Disney Resort doesn't make sense** - e.g., if all Disney Resorts in your price range are booked, or you're traveling with a large group that wants to stay together.

Here are places I have stayed personally that I would recommend:

- The [Disney Springs hotels](#) have regular bus service (less frequent than Disney buses), Early Entry privileges, and some can be booked with points.
- [Hyatt Hotels Near Disney World](#) - these are reliably good hotels which can be a steal when booked with Hyatt points (see the next page).
- The [Swan/Dolphin hotels](#) offer huge value - walking distance to the parks. Early Entry and much lower prices than other Deluxe Resorts, but with far less magic than Disney resorts.

Disney Swan



Lelani Beach House

A common way to visit Disney World with a large group is to rent a house nearby through Airbnb or VRBO. The problem with these is the quality varies tremendously and you might not get help if you need it.

That's why I recommend [Lelani Beach House](#). It is lovingly maintained by a local family who you can reach easily if you have issues, has gorgeous Disney-themed rooms, **sleeps up to 20 people comfortably**, and has a private pool. It's a 15-20-minute drive to the parks but the space and quality make the drive worth it. [Click here to learn more and book.](#)

BOOKING HOTELS WITH POINTS

One of my FAVORITE ways to save money on travel is by leveraging points and miles I earn through responsible credit card use.

I will go into much more depth on this topic in the next chapter, but there are a few accommodation options bookable with points that I want to mention.

Sadly, **using points for Disney Resorts is limited to paying yourself back with statement credit** after booking. While this isn't getting the best value from your points, it still helps.

If you are up for driving yourself to the parks and are ok missing out on the perks of staying on-property (such as on arrival night or departure day), there are some good options for hotel point redemptions close to Disney World.

[My #1 favorite travel card](#) has points that transfer to Hyatt and can be used to book [these excellent places to stay](#).



Hyatt Place Lake Buena Vista

The [Hyatt Place near Disney Springs](#) has rooms that sleep six people, an excellent free breakfast, and can be booked for as little as 6,000 points (equivalent to \$60). It's such a great deal that I have stayed here on many occasions.

My other favorite brand for super affordable stays on points is [IHG](#). The quality of these hotels (such as Holiday Inn) varies dramatically, so definitely do your research before booking.

But if you sign up for [an IHG credit card](#) and earn a solid bonus, it can be enough for a 6- or 7-night stay (every 4th night is free). This can really help make a trip affordable.

C H A P T E R

4

TRANSPORTATION

[click here to return to the main menu](#)

SAVING ON TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION

This chapter will cover how to save money on flights, airport transfers, car rentals, and parking.

Many people are surprised to learn that **about half of the visitors to Walt Disney World drive to Orlando** for their vacation.

Of the other half, almost all are flying into **Orlando International Airport** (its airport code is weirdly MCO), and the rest into smaller airports located nearby, such as Orlando Sanford Airport (SFB) or Daytona Beach Airport (DAB). **Disney is approximately 30 minutes by car from MCO.**



Transportation might be my favorite part of a vacation to save money on, **because of how easy it is to score cheap or almost free flights and car rentals using points and miles.**

About 15 years ago I started learning how to earn points and miles for travel by paying for everyday expenses with a credit card instead of a debit card. This one habit has quite literally changed our lives for the better.

I'll share some of what you need to know in this chapter, but I also suggest [taking my free one-hour Intro To Reward Travel video course](#) if you want to learn how to start traveling for almost free with rewards.



FLYING TO ORLANDO

I hate to say this, but **most people overpay for their flights to Orlando**. I fly 20+ times per year and I see these mistakes over and over again:

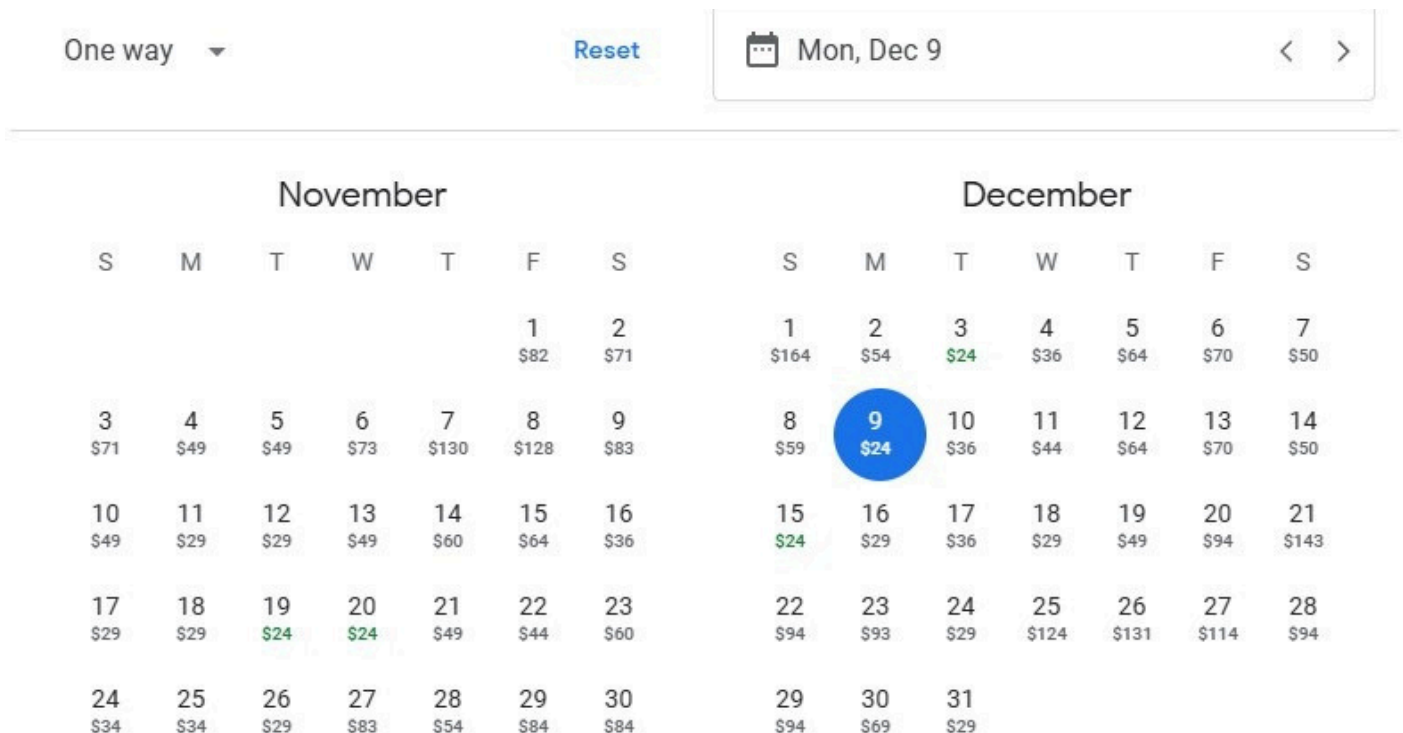
- Searching for a round-trip flight instead of one-way
- Booking WAY too far in advance
- Getting gouged with charges for seat assignments, bags, etc
- Booking basic economy and being left high and dry

I'll show you some simple strategies to keep you from overpaying.

If you don't fly often, I'd start by viewing [all of the non-stop flights from Orlando on FlightsFrom.com](#) to find the best airport to fly from (nonstop flights are always preferred to making connections).

If you are flying domestically, **rarely is it helpful to book flights more than three months in advance**. Airlines release sale fares about 12 weeks in advance, so if you are buying before then, you're often paying too much.

Next, use [Google Flights](#) to **search one-way** from your airport (or select multiple airports to see all of your options).



MORE FLIGHT TIPS

Once you've searched, you'll see all of your options for flights and can filter by nonstop only, certain airlines, time of day, etc.

	6:04 PM – 8:02 PM Frontier	1 hr 58 min RDU-MCO	Nonstop	Airbus A321neo 28 in	0 0 \$50	▼
	7:15 AM – 9:05 AM Southwest	1 hr 50 min RDU-MCO	Nonstop	Boeing 737-700 (Scimitar Winglets) Pax 31 in	1 0 \$99	▼
	7:00 AM – 8:46 AM Delta	1 hr 46 min RDU-MCO	Nonstop	Airbus A320 31 in	1 0 \$104	▼

My preferred airlines are Southwest, Delta, and American because I can book those flights easily with points and miles (see the next page).

But I'm personally not loyal to any airline and have flown all of them including ultra low-budget-airlines such as Frontier.

My cautions with airlines such as Frontier are 1) pay careful attention to their rules regarding bags and seat assignments, so you are truly comparing apples to apples; and 2) be aware that delays are more common since they keep their planes VERY busy. But if you can travel light and are flexible, they can save a lot of money.

I often fly one airline to Orlando and another one back. Even if I am flying the same airline, **I always book my flights separately.** This makes it much easier to change just one leg later without having to cancel the entire trip.

Once you are ready to book, **ALWAYS book directly with the airline** and not through a travel consolidator. This makes it much easier if anything goes awry.

Also, please **NEVER book basic economy.** It just isn't worth the savings. If you need to change anything you are out of luck and out all of your money. Just pay slightly more for options in case you need them.



BOOKING FLIGHTS WITH POINTS

In many situations, it is possible to fly your family round-trip to Orlando with the welcome bonus points or miles from just one credit card.

Depart
Choose your depart flight
Raleigh/Durham, NC (RDU) to Orlando, FL (MCO)

2026 JUL	2026 AUG	2026 SEP	2026 OCT	2026 NOV	2026 DEC	2027 JAN
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday		
1 14,500	2 6,500	3 6,500	4 6,500	5 6,500		
8 14,500	9 6,500	10 6,500	11 6,500	12 6,500		
15 14,500	16 6,500	17 6,500	18 6,500	19 7,500		

EARNING POINTS

If there is an airline that you know you want to fly to Orlando, I suggest checking out its co-branded credit card offers ([here are some faves](#)).

I'd look for a card with an annual fee under \$150. If there aren't any decent offers for your preferred airline, consider a flexible travel rewards card such as [Capital One Venture](#) or [Chase Sapphire Preferred](#). You can transfer these points to airline partners and book flights directly with the airlines.

After card opening, just put everyday spending on this card and after you've met the minimum spending requirement, you'll receive points or miles you can redeem for flights. You'll just pay \$5.60 in taxes/fees per person per flight.

For example, here are many flights with Southwest for 6,500 points each way (so 13,000 round-trip). It would take 52,000 points to fly a family of four roundtrip.

A decent welcome bonus on a card such as Chase Sapphire Preferred (my #1 favorite card) is 75,000 points. This meaning you'll be able to fly your family to Disney World for almost free, and have points left over to help cover your hotel stay or tickets. [Click here for more details.](#)

AIRPORT TRANSFERS

If you are flying into MCO, staying at a Disney Resort, and just visiting Walt Disney World (I hear there are other theme parks in Orlando??), I **recommend not renting a car.**

You'll be able to get everywhere you need to with Disney transportation and if not, Ubers are readily available.

For getting back and forth to the airport, here's what I recommend depending on the size of your travel party and your budget:

- 4 or fewer people: Uber or Lyft will be your fastest and most affordable option. You can request an Uber with a carseat. If you are new to rideshares, [click here to learn the basics](#).
- 5+ people: I suggest the private transportation company [Away We Go](#). Their price will be more than two Ubers, however, they will be waiting at the airport with a private van that holds up to 11 people with as many car seats as you need. Use code **BUDGETMOUSE24** for 10% off any ride.



CAR RENTALS

If you are staying off-property or visiting other Orlando attractions, then renting a car makes sense.

I use [the site AutoSlash to find the lowest rates for rentals](#) AND to [monitor my rental for price drops after booking](#).

I always recommend **booking a reservation you can cancel any time** since rental companies are known to drop their prices dramatically if they have high inventory.

Also, if you have a Costco membership, always compare rates with [Costco Travel](#).

Last, you can use [points from my #1 favorite card](#) for car rentals - free is always better!



PARKING INFO & FAQs

If you aren't staying at a Disney Resort, **here are the daily parking costs at any Disney World park:**

- **Standard parking:** car or motorcycle – \$35
- **Preferred parking:** car or motorcycle – \$50, \$55 or \$60
- **Oversized vehicle parking:** Camper Trailer, RV, Bus, or Tractor Trailer - \$40

The parking gates open 90 minutes before the official “park opening”.

Once you pay for parking for the day, **you can leave, return, and switch parks and not have to pay again** - just be sure to save your receipt.

You can pay for parking with a credit/debit card, Mobile Pay, cash, or even [discount Disney gift cards](#).

Parking at the Disney Resort where you are staying is free. There was a short period after the pandemic where Disney charged guests for parking, but it is once again free.

Disney has made it difficult to drive and park at resorts other than the one at which you are staying. In general, **you'll only be allowed to park at another resort with a confirmed dining reservation**, and then only for 3 hours. Parking is still free for anyone dining at the resort.

And while **you can park at Disney Springs all day for free**, you can no longer ride buses from Disney Springs to a resort unless you can confirm that you are staying there. There is no overnight parking allowed at Disney Springs.

OTHER TRANSPORTATION TIPS

TOLL PASS

If you are renting a car at the airport, an unexpected cost you can get hit with is a **daily toll fee from the rental company**.

For example, Hertz charges \$13.99 per day to cover your tolls for the trip. This adds up to close to \$100 for a week-long trip.

A more budget-friendly alternative is **Orlando Visitor Toll Pass**, which lets you pick up a free hang tag from a vending machine at the airport and only pay discounted tolls when you use the toll roads. [Read more about the program here.](#)

RESORT-TO-RESORT TRANSPORTATION

As I've mentioned before, all forms of Disney transportation are free - Monorail, boats, Skyliner, and buses.

But keep in mind that **Disney transportation just connects the resorts with the parks and Disney Springs**. There is no resort-to-resort transportation provided.

If you want to visit other resorts, your best bet is to take a bus to a Magic Kingdom or Hollywood Studios, then use Disney Transportation to visit the nearby resorts (e.g., ride the monorail to the Contemporary or Polynesian).

Another option is to use Uber or Lyft to get from resort to resort.

WHEN TO LEAVE

Most people don't know that the theme parks **open to ALL guests about one hour before the posted park opening time**. You can take pictures, get some coffee and pastries, and get in line for your first ride.

Here's my suggested schedule if you are staying at a Disney Resort and *want to take full advantage of Early Entry*:

- If you are taking the monorail or Skyliner, be at the stop **75 minutes before park opening** (e.g., 7:45 am for a 9 am park opening).
- If you are taking a bus, be at the stop **90 minutes before park opening** (e.g., 7:30 am for a 9 am park opening).

C H A P T E R

5

FOOD & DINING

[click here to return to the main menu](#)

FOOD & DINING OVERVIEW



Here is an overview of my approach to saving money on food:

- **Bring food along:** Unlike most tourist destinations, you ARE allowed to bring your own food and drinks into Magic Kingdom! Just no alcohol, no glass, no loose ice, and no hard-sided coolers.
- **Buy a souvenir popcorn bucket:** Souvenir popcorn buckets start at \$14 and allow you to get refills for only \$2.25 at any popcorn cart for your entire trip. This includes the delicious maple popcorn at the Canada pavilion in Epcot.
- **Bring a water bottle:** There is now (good tasting) filtered water available at refilling stations in the park - search for locations in the app's map. You can also get free ice water at any Quick Service dining location.
- **Eat breakfast in your hotel room** before you head to the parks. To dodge sky-high resort prices, I have groceries delivered to my resort with breakfast items such as cereal, fruit, yogurt, and pastries (details on the next page).
- **Eat mostly Quick Service/snacks on park days** so as to not waste time in the parks. But beware - the quality varies (see recommendations).
- **Do a Character Meal at a resort on a non-park day:** Disney Resorts have great character dining and you'll have more time in the park for rides. Book the latest breakfast reservation and make it your big meal of the day.

AVOID STICKER SHOCK

I am so accustomed to food prices at Disney World that they no longer surprise me.

However, if you aren't prepared, they can give you a nasty shock.

I actually find prices to be LESS expensive than sporting events and concerts, though that isn't saying much.

Here's what to expect to pay:

- **Bottled water:** \$4
- **Fountain Drinks:** \$5
- **Beer/Wine:** \$10 and up
- **Cocktails:** \$15 and up
- **Mickey Ice Cream Bar:** \$7
- **Quick service entrees:** \$10–\$18
- **Table service entrees:** \$20 to \$40
- **Character Breakfast:** Adults: \$50 and up; Kids \$30 and up

My #1 tip for saving money on food is to **know how much everything costs in advance**, so you can plan where you want to spend and where you want to save money.



I'll share all of my tactics for not overspending on food in this chapter, but keep in mind that this advice is mostly for how my family and I like to eat.

For example, we like to eat a light breakfast in our room, have a snack or two in the parks in the morning, then sit down for a quick service lunch around noon.

If a sit-down brunch every day makes it feel like vacation to you, then by all means do that! Please take my advice with a grain of salt.

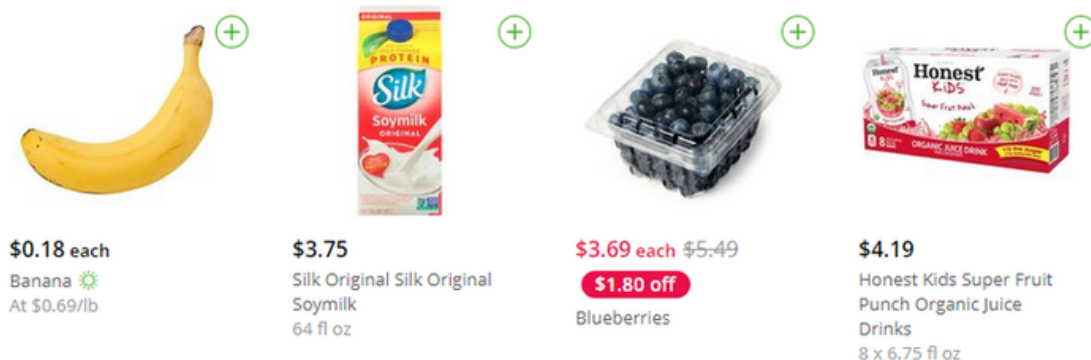
GROCERY DELIVERY

Convenience and breakfast items are horribly overpriced at the Disney Resorts, so I get a grocery order delivered to my resort at the start of each trip.

Bell Services will hold your order for you and keep refrigerated items cold. You can then either pick your groceries up yourself at the desk, or call from your room and have them delivered (for a \$6 fee).

I use DoorDash for grocery delivery because I get complimentary DashPass as a benefit of [having this card in my wallet](#).

Other good options are Instacart, Walmart+, or a free trial of Amazon Fresh for Whole Foods delivery.



IMPORTANT: Standard rooms (not Disney Vacation Club Villas) at many resorts have a “beverage cooler” in the room, as opposed to a proper mini-fridge. Though I have kept yogurts in them for many days without any issues, I would NOT suggest them for anything that spoils easily.

Here’s what I regularly order:

- Fruit for breakfast
- Granola or cereal
- Juice
- Yogurt
- Protein bars
- Hard boiled eggs
- Individually wrapped snacks to take in your park bag
- Bottled water or gallon jugs for refilling water bottles
- Beer/wine
- Snack food for poolside
- Spray sunscreen



RESORT REFILLABLE MUGS

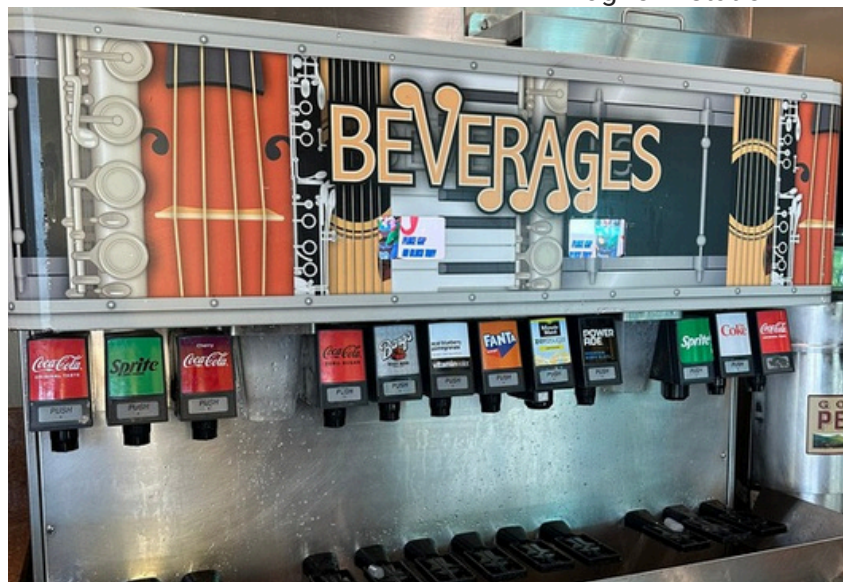
Disney Resort refillable mugs are **hard plastic 16-oz travel mugs with a handle and lid**. They have an RFID-enabled chip in their base that allows **unlimited drink refills at any Disney World resort hotel** of coffee, tea, soft drinks, iced tea, and hot chocolate. The mugs work for 14 days at resorts only - not in the theme parks.

They are not cheap (currently \$23+tax) but if you are staying at Disney World for 4+ days and use them for coffee and one other drink daily, they will definitely pay for themselves. They're also a fun souvenir.

You can take your mugs with you when visiting other resorts and use them for free drinks there.

If I'm going to grab lunch at a quick service restaurant at another resort, I bring my mug along so I don't have to buy another drink.

A mug refill station



DISNEY DINING PLAN OVERVIEW

The Disney Dining Plans are basically a way to pre-pay for dining before your vacation starts. The plans are certainly not for everyone, so here's a guide to whether or not they might make sense for your trip.



First, **you can only add a Dining Plan to a Disney-owned hotel stay**, so you can't buy one if you are staying "off-property".

Next, **kids under 10 get a free dining plan for each adult on the plan in 2026**. Visiting with two young kids makes the plan MUCH more affordable since the kids are free.

Alcoholic beverages are included with the plans, so if you're buying them anyway, the plans will likely save you money.

Here's a chart that compares what you get and the cost of the two different plans (keep in mind anyone 10+ is charged the adult price):

Disney Dining Plan 2026 Prices		
	Credits (per night)	Cost(including tax)
Quick Service Dining Plan	2 Quick Service Meals + 1 Snack	\$60.47 (adult)\$0 (child)
Disney Dining Plan	1 Table Service Meal + 1 Quick Service Meal + 1 Snack	\$98.59 (adult)\$0 (child)

Each person also gets a [resort refillable mug](#) to use for the length of stay.

If you like the idea of a more "inclusive" feel to your vacation where you don't worry about the cost of every menu item, you will likely enjoy the dining plans. I prefer the Quick Service Plan myself, since the cost of one or two table-service meals (which is all I like to do) is less than the cost of upgrading to the full Disney Dining Plan. [Read more about the plans here.](#)

FAVORITE BUDGET-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

If I am eating on a budget, I stick with mostly quick service restaurants, and an occasional table service restaurant or lounge. **Here are my favorites - click on the name to see the current menu with prices.**



Pecos Bill



Satu'li Canteen



Connections



Woody's Lunch Box

MAGIC KINGDOM

- [Pecos Bill Tall Tale Inn & Cafe](#)
- [Columbia Harbor House](#)
- [Sleepy Hollow](#)
- [Liberty Tree Tavern](#) (table service)
- [Crystal Palace](#) (character dining)

EPCOT

- [Connections Eatery](#)
- [La Cantina de San Angel](#)
- [Les Halles Boulangerie & Patisserie](#)
- [San Angel Inn](#) (table service)
- [Space 220 Lounge](#) (very difficult reservation to get)

HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS

- [Docking Bay 7 Food & Cargo](#)
- [Woody's Lunch Box](#)
- [Sci-Fi Dine-In](#) (table service)

ANIMAL KINGDOM

- [Flame Tree Barbeque](#)
- [Satu'li Canteen](#)
- [Nomad Lounge](#)

RESORT DINING

The best dining at Walt Disney World is found at the Disney Resorts - NOT in the theme parks.

You'll find everything from gourmet brunch for under \$15 per person at [Primo Piatto](#) to Michelin-starred \$300 per person [Victoria & Albert's](#).

You'll have to Uber or use Disney transportation creatively to get to other resorts for dining (or drive and park for three hours with a dining reservation).

Here are my personal favorite places to dine that offer excellent value at the resorts:

- [Beaches & Cream](#)
- [Boma](#)
- [Contempo Cafe](#)
- [Geyser Point Bar & Grill](#)
- [Landscape of Flavors](#)
- [Primo Piatto](#)
- [Sebastian's Bistro](#)
- [Trader Sam's Grog Grotto](#)
- [Wailulu Bar & Grill](#)

CHARACTER DINING

Character Dining is EXPENSIVE. It's also a great way to meet up to four characters at once without having to wait in any lines.

To keep costs under control I suggest **one character dining experience per trip**. Ideally this would be on a non-park day, however if kids want to dine with the princesses or Winnie the Pooh, your best options are in the parks.

These are my favorites:

- [Topolino's Terrace](#) (Breakfast only)
- [Akershus Royal Banquet Hall](#)
- [Chef Mickey's](#)
- [Cape May Cafe](#) (Breakfast only)
- [Crystal Palace](#)
- [Tusker House](#)



DINING DISCOUNTS

If you aren't an Annual Passholder or DVC Owner, the easiest way to get dining discounts is to be a [Chase Disney Visa cardholder](#) - **even the no-annual-fee card offers dining and merchandise discounts!**

When you pay with the card you'll save 20% at all Joffrey's coffee locations and 10% off select dining locations (*alcohol excluded and blackout dates apply at some locations*). [Check this page for the current discounts](#), but here's what's available at the time of writing:

Disney Resorts Locations

Boma – Flavors of Africa
 Jiko – The Cooking Place
 Sanaa
 Beaches & Cream
 Cape May Cafe
 Flying Fish (see restrictions)
 Sebastian's Bistro
 Steakhouse 71
 Three Bridges Bar & Grill
 Toledo: Tapas, Steak & Seafood
 1900 Park Fare
 Cítricos (see restrictions)
 Grand Floridian Café
 Narcoossee's
 Olivia's Cafe
 Kona Cafe
 Boatwrights Dining Hall
 The Turf Club Bar and Grill
 Whispering Canyon Cafe
 Ale & Compass Restaurant
 Yachtsman Steakhouse

Theme Park Locations

Tiffins
 Roundup Rodeo BBQ
 Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater Restaurant
 The Hollywood Brown Derby
 Biergarten Restaurant
 Coral Reef Restaurant
 Le Cellier Steakhouse
 Rose & Crown Dining Room
 Spice Road Table
 Crystal Palace
 Diamond Horseshoe
 Jungle Navigation Co. Ltd. Skipper Canteen
 Liberty Tree Tavern
 The Plaza Restaurant
 Tony's Town Square Restaurant

C H A P T E R

6

SOUVENIRS & MORE

[click here to return to the main menu](#)

SAVING ON MERCHANDISE

There's no denying that the merchandise team at Disney World is doing their job well - everything is clever, cute, and hard to resist.

Some families spend thousands of dollars on merchandise on their vacations, while others spend little to none (that's us).



Either way, here are some ways to save money and keep spending in check:

- Any [Chase Disney Visa Card](#) now offers 10% off any merchandise purchases when you pay with the card (they used to require a \$50 minimum spend).
- I buy Disney t-shirts and mouse ear headbands ahead of our trip at Amazon, Target, Walmart, Poshmark, and ThredUp. I usually pay less than \$10 as opposed to \$35+ in the parks.
- [Discount Disney gift cards](#) are a great way to keep spending in check. Give one to each kid and let them decide how to spend it on whatever they want.
- When my daughter was little I would [prep for our trips at the Dollar Tree](#). Many people like to have “Tinker Bell” visit the room to give small gifts to keep the gimmes away.

SAVING ON PHOTOS

Capturing memories of your Disney vacation is a priority, and Disney makes it very easy to get great photos.

There are two different services relating to vacation photos and lots of ways to save money on photos.

The first service is called [PhotoPass](#). It refers to photos taken by photographers, on rides, or at character experiences.

PhotoPass photographers are stationed all around the theme parks. **They can take a picture for you for free with your cell phone** (just one phone per party) and also take professional pictures that get linked to your account when they scan your MagicBand or park ticket.

The photos stay in your Disney account for 30 days after your visit, and you can **purchase digital downloads and order affordable physical prints** and photo gifts.

As a perk of LLMP, you get **free PhotoPass ride photo downloads** from the day (or days) you purchase LLMP. These are always our favorites.



If you are a [Chase Disney Visa](#) Cardholder, you'll get access to [special character experiences in the parks](#), including **free PhotoPass photo downloads from the meet and greet**. This is a valuable perk of the card.

Your most expensive option for getting access to all PhotoPass photos is purchasing a [Memory Maker package](#). I have never found these to be necessary since the free photos I get are always sufficient and more authentic. But if you want to completely offload photo taking, this is the way to go.

STROLLERS

Since you will likely walk 5–8 miles per day, you'll find that kids who have long outgrown strollers at home will want one on this vacation.

I've found that a **lightweight, easy-to-fold stroller brought from home works best**. Kids can even take turns riding in it.

Other options are to rent a stroller there, but the strollers at the parks are hard plastic (i.e. uncomfortable) and expensive. Your best bet is to rent from a company that delivers to your resort, such as [Kingdom Strollers](#).



MAGIC BANDS

[MagicBands](#) are waterproof, adjustable wristbands that can be used as your room key, park ticket, and more. While they aren't necessary, they are convenient and fun.

The MagicMobile feature in the Disney World app has made it possible to essentially use your phone as a MagicBand. [Click here to learn how.](#)

For this reason, I **only suggest purchasing a MagicBand for kids who don't have their own device.**



SAVING ON SPECIAL EXPERIENCES

Disney offers an array of special experiences they call “Enchanting Extras”.

For example, [Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique](#) (BBB) is the most popular Enchanting Extra at Disney World.



It’s essentially a **princess makeover inside Cinderella Castle in Magic Kingdom**. They offer several packages, including the most affordable, the “Fairy Tale Package”. You get the full makeover experience and all of the included accessories, but you just bring the dress for the makeover with you instead of selecting one there.

This package is \$110 less than any other, and since you can often acquire a princess dress for cheap online or even free (just ask around to see if anyone has one their princess has outgrown), I definitely suggest it if you are on a budget.

You can pay for BBB with a discount Disney gift card for even more savings.



If you are a [Disney Visa Cardholder](#) you can save 15% off select [“behind the scenes” guided tours](#). I have done a few of the least expensive options and think they offer outstanding value.

SUMMARY

Here is a quick review of the strategies used for the sample trip shown on page 17:

- Rent DVC points to save 70% on your stay at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge
- Use Chase Ultimate Reward points for your free arrival night hotel stay
- Use points for your flights (just pay \$5.60 in fees)
- Use free Disney transportation and rideshares to get to/from airport and resort to resort
- Buy heavily discounted park tickets (e.g. 4-Park Magic) and only buy Lightning Lane passes when necessary
- Use grocery delivery for breakfasts and snacks
- Eat mostly quick service dining except for character brunch on a resort day
- Buy Resort Refillable mugs
- Limit souvenir budget with discount Disney gift cards and affordable items bought ahead of time

6 Night Deluxe WDW Vacation
for a family of four
using all of the tips in this guidebook

TOTAL	\$4,822
HOTEL COSTS	\$1,000
5 nights at AKL on DVC points	\$1,000
arrival night with Hyatt points	\$0
TRANSPORTATION COSTS	\$154
taxes on flights booked with points	\$44
uber to/from airport	\$80
uber around WDW	\$30
PARK TICKETS	\$2,378
4-day discounted tickets	\$1,933
LL Multi Pass x 3 days	\$300
LL Single Pass x 2 rides	\$145
FOOD COSTS	\$1,090
grocery delivery	\$100
quick service lunch x6	\$300
quick service dinner x5	\$250
character brunch x1	\$200
refillable mugs x4	\$90
snacks	\$150
SOUVENIRS	\$200

I hope this guide has inspired you with the MANY ways there are to save money at Walt Disney World!

THANK YOU!

I truly hope you found this guide helpful. Thank you so much for supporting my efforts to help families experience all of the magic of Disney World while staying within their budget.

If you have any feedback or questions, please don't hesitate to contact me - I love hearing from readers. Email me at Leah@thebudgetmouse.com or find me over on Instagram - I'm [@thebudgetmouse](https://www.instagram.com/thebudgetmouse).

I hope you have an incredible vacation!

XO, Leah

