Hello darlings!

Storybook Stays

The Disney World First Timer's Guide

Everything you need to plan your first magical trip, from tickets and cottages to rides, dining and the little details in between.

HAVE A MAGICAL STAY.

Updated November 9, 2026

WELCOME TO YOUR COTTAGE AWAY FROM HOME

Before you begin

This is the complete planning guide for anyone visiting Walt Disney World for the first time, covering tickets, resorts, rides, dining, character meals, budget and day-by-day tips. All prices, hours and attraction statuses are snapshots, so confirm them with Disney before you book.

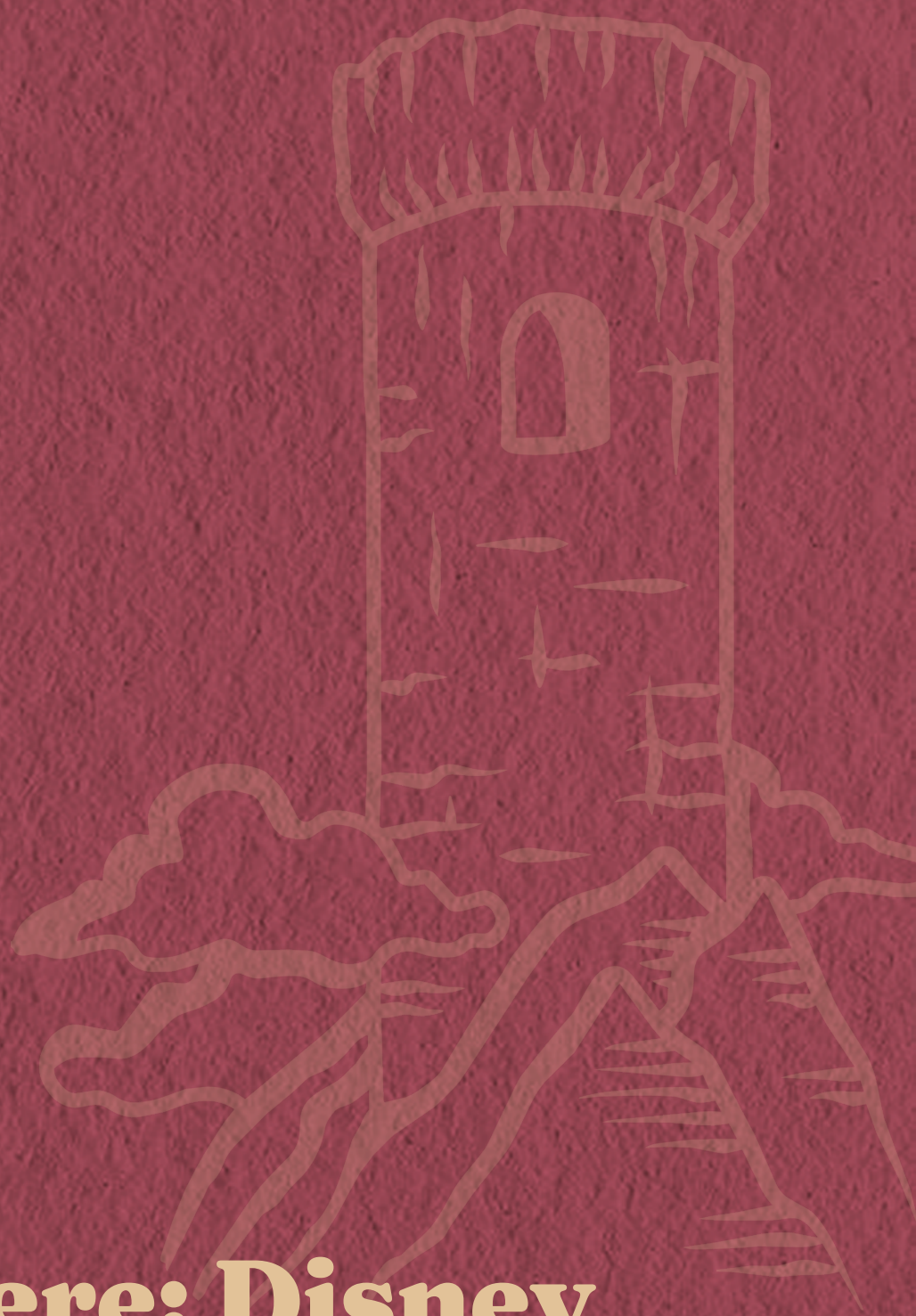
Wishing you an enchanted day!

STORYBOOK STAYS

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CHAPTER 01

Start here: Disney World in 60 seconds

Walt Disney World is not one park. It is a resort the size of a small city, with four theme parks, two water parks, a shopping and dining district called Disney Springs, and more than 25 Disney-owned hotels. The good news is that a little planning turns that overwhelming list into a trip your whole family will love.

PARK	OPENED	BEST FOR	SIGNATURE ATTRACTIONS
Magic Kingdom	1971	Young kids, classic Disney, first timers	Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, Tiana's Bayou Adventure, Haunted Mansion, Space Mountain, TRON Lightcycle / Run, Peter Pan's Flight
EPCOT	1982	Food lovers, World Showcase, a mix of thrills and gentle rides	Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind, Soarin' Around the World, Frozen Ever After, Remy's Ratatouille Adventure, Test Track
Disney's Hollywood Studios	1989	Star Wars and Toy Story fans, thrill seekers	Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance, Slinky Dog Dash, Tower of Terror, Star Tours, Toy Story Mania
Disney's Animal Kingdom	1998	Animal lovers, Avatar fans, adventure seekers	Avatar Flight of Passage, Kilimanjaro Safaris, Expedition Everest, Na'vi River Journey

The 12 rules every first timer should know

1. **Book dining 60 days out.** Table-service and character meals open for reservation 60 days before your date through the My Disney Experience app, and the famous ones go fast.
2. **Download My Disney Experience now.** Tickets, dining, Lightning Lane, mobile ordering, wait times and maps all live in this one app.
3. **Break in your shoes.** Families routinely walk 8 to 12 miles a day. New shoes mean blisters.
4. **One park per day.** A single park easily fills a day. Skip the Park Hopper unless you have a specific reason to buy it.
5. **Arrive early.** The first hour after opening has the shortest lines of the day. Resort guests get Early Theme Park Entry.
6. **Plan a midday break.** Ride a gentle attraction, eat in air conditioning, nap, or go back to the hotel pool, then return for the evening.
7. **Check height requirements before you promise a ride.** Nothing hurts like a child measuring one inch short at the front of a line. The full table is in this guide.
8. **Decide your Lightning Lane plan before you travel.** It is a paid skip-the-line system, and prices change by date and park.
9. **Eat on purpose.** Reserve one or two special meals, then use quick service and snacks for the rest.
10. **Do not try to do everything.** Pick your family's top five attractions per park and treat the rest as bonus.
11. **Expect rain and heat.** Pack ponchos, water bottles and sunscreen no matter the month.

12. **Verify prices and hours with Disney.** Everything in this guide is a snapshot. Disney changes pricing by date, and ride closures happen.

How to use this guide

Read the planning countdown first, then jump to the sections that match your trip. Every price in these pages is a snapshot from the as-of date at the top, so confirm it on disneyworld.com or in My Disney Experience before you book.

CHAPTER 02

Planning countdown: what to book and when

The most important booking dates are the 60-day dining window and the 7-day Lightning Lane window, so mark both on your calendar the moment you lock in your trip dates.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT MATTERS
12 to 16 months out	Pick your travel dates, set a total budget, decide on-site or off-site	Disney resort reservations typically open about 16 months (499 days) before check-in. Holiday weeks and spring break sell out first.
6 to 12 months out	Book your hotel or room-and-ticket package. Watch for discounts (Disney+ Perks, Florida resident, military, package deals)	Rates change often. If a discount appears after you book, call Disney or your travel agent and ask to be repriced.
3 to 6 months out	Buy date-based tickets if you did not buy a package. Link tickets and your hotel reservation to My Disney Experience	Tickets are priced by date, and lower-demand dates cost much less.
60 days before	Book dining reservations at 6:00 AM Eastern, character meals first	Resort guests can book 60 days before check-in for the whole stay, up to 10 days. Cinderella's Royal Table and Chef Mickey's are among the hardest to get.
30 days before	Check dining reservations again, set reminders for cancellations and openings, start your packing list	Cancellations open up tables all the time.
7 days before (resort guests)	Buy Lightning Lane Multi Pass and Single Pass at 7:00 AM Eastern if you want them	On-site guests get a 7-day window. Off-site guests get a 3-day window. Popular rides can sell out quickly.
3 days before (off-site guests)	Buy Lightning Lane at 7:00 AM Eastern	The very best return times may already be gone, so have a backup plan.
1 to 2 weeks before	Check the refurbishment calendar, weather and park hours. Watch your family's pre-trip movie list. Finalize your day-by-day plan	Closures and showtimes change.
Day before	Charge phones and battery packs, screenshot your reservations, set alarms, pack the park bag	A dead phone means no tickets, no maps and no mobile order.
Park day	Be at the gate early, scan in, head to your first priority ride	The first hour is your shortest-line hour.

Your first three decisions

1. **Where will you stay?** On-site gets you Early Theme Park Entry, free transportation, free standard theme park parking and the 7-day Lightning Lane window. Off-site can save real money, especially for big groups. Both are covered later in this guide.
2. **How many park days?** Most first timers do well with 4 to 5 days for the four parks plus a rest day. Shorter trips work too with tighter planning. Sample itineraries are near the end of this guide.
3. **What will you spend?** Tickets, lodging and food are the big three. Lightning Lane, parking, souvenirs and photos are where budgets quietly grow.

CHAPTER 03

When to go: crowds, weather, events and the cheapest days

The best time for most first timers is a school-day week in September, January after the New Year, or late April to mid May, because crowds, prices and heat are all lower. Disney does not publish crowd levels, so every crowd calendar is a third-party forecast built from past wait times.

WINDOW	CROWDS	WEATHER	NOTES
Early January to mid February	Low to moderate, rising near Presidents' Day	Cool and dry, highs in the low 70s F	Lowest hotel rates of the year outside late summer. EPCOT Festival of the Arts runs Jan 15 to Mar 1 in 2027.
Presidents' Day week	High	Mild	One of the first big spikes of the year. Lightning Lane prices jump.
March to Easter	High (spring break)	Warm, highs near 80 F	Best weather, worst crowds. Flower & Garden Festival starts Mar 10 in 2027.
Late April to mid May	Low to moderate	Warm, getting hot	A favorite window for experienced planners.
Memorial Day to mid August	Moderate to high	Hot and humid, highs low 90s F, afternoon thunderstorms most days	Cool Kid Summer events in 2026 ran May 26 to Sept 8.
September	Lowest of the year	Hot, peak of hurricane season	Cheapest tickets and rooms. Some seasonal closures and refurbishments.
October	Moderate, higher on fall break weekends	Cooler	Halloween parties run on select nights at Magic Kingdom.
November, before Thanksgiving	Low to moderate	Pleasant	Many consider the week after Thanksgiving a sweet spot for decorations and lighter crowds.
Thanksgiving week and Christmas to New Year's	Highest	Mild	Highest ticket, room and Lightning Lane prices of the year.

What the calendar means for your wallet

Disney uses date-based ticket pricing, so the day you choose matters as much as the park. For January to October 2027, a one-day, one-park ticket ranges from $119 on the cheapest dates to $219 at Magic Kingdom on the most expensive. A family of four saves roughly $400 on admission by picking a $119 day over a $219 day.

Weather basics

- **Summer:** expect heat, humidity and a daily storm. Outdoor rides pause for lightning, and the Skyliner closes during storms.
- **Hurricane season:** June 1 through November 30. Buy refundable or flexible bookings for late summer and fall if you can.
- **Winter:** mornings and evenings can be chilly. Pack a light jacket and layers.

Day-of-week patterns

Tuesday through Thursday tend to be slightly quieter than Monday and Friday. Event nights change the picture, so check the park hours for the specific day you plan to visit.

Park hours and event nights

On nights when Magic Kingdom hosts Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party or Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party, regular day guests may be asked to leave early (about 6 p.m.), and the normal fireworks and parade do not run. Check the daily hours in My Disney Experience before choosing a Magic Kingdom day in the fall or holiday season.

CHAPTER 04

Tickets and passes

Buy date-based tickets for the number of park days you need, add Park Hopper only if you will truly use it, and pick lower-priced dates whenever your schedule allows. Children under 3 are free, and listed ticket prices are before tax for ages 10 and up, with slightly lower prices for ages 3 to 9.

Ticket types

TICKET	WHAT IT COVERS	WHO IT FITS
Base ticket (1 to 10 days)	One park per day, your choice each day	Most first timers
Park Hopper	Visit more than one park in the same day	Travelers who want a morning in one park and an evening in another, such as EPCOT dinner after Magic Kingdom
Park Hopper Plus	Park Hopper plus water parks and other extras	Longer trips with a water park day
Water Park & Sports option	Adds water park and recreation admissions to a multi-day ticket	Summer trips
Water park ticket	Typhoon Lagoon or Blizzard Beach, whichever is open	A pool-style rest day

What tickets cost for 2027

ITEM	PRICE	NOTES
One-day, one-park, lowest dates	$119 to $139 depending on park	Animal Kingdom $119, EPCOT $129, Hollywood Studios and Magic Kingdom $139
One-day, one-park, Jan to Oct peak dates	Up to about $219	Magic Kingdom reaches $219
One-day, one-park, Nov and Dec 2027 peaks	Up to $229	Magic Kingdom and EPCOT around Christmas and New Year's
One-day Park Hopper	About $206 on a $119 day, up to $301 with tax on peak dates	Multi-day tickets cut the per-day cost
Multi-day tickets	Lower per day than single-day	The more days, the lower the daily price

Prices are before tax and change by date. Confirm exact prices on the official Disney ticket page.

Park Hopper: do you need it?

For a first visit with kids, probably not. A single park fills a day, and hopping adds $87 or more per ticket on a $119 day. Buy it if you want an EPCOT dinner after an early Magic Kingdom morning, or if you want flexibility to chase shorter lines.

Annual passes (as of Oct 6, 2026)

PASS	PRICE	WHO CAN BUY
Pixie Dust Pass	$499	Florida residents
Pirate Pass	$909	Florida residents
Sorcerer Pass	$1,139	Florida residents and Disney Vacation Club members
Incredi-Pass	$1,749	Everyone, no blockout dates

A pass can make sense if you plan more than one trip a year. Passholders get discounts on dining and merchandise and free standard parking.

Discounts worth checking

- **Package deals:** Disney has offered room-and-ticket packages with savings of up to $250 per night at select resorts in 2026. Offers change, so check the current list before booking.
- **Disney+ Perks members:** periodic ticket and room offers, including holiday-season packages with Park Hopper benefits.
- **Florida residents:** room discounts of up to about 35% in 2026 and special ticket offers.
- **U.S. military:** Disney Military Salute tickets and a Disney Celebrates America Military Salute ticket for 2026 at $499 plus tax, plus room discounts. Buying at a military base ticket office or Shades of Green avoids sales tax. Confirm 2027 offers.
- **Free water park arrival day:** resort guests get a free water park day on check-in day on select 2027 summer dates.
- **Kids Eat Free is ending:** the free kids dining plan offered in 2026 is not returning in 2027.

Where to buy

Buy through Disney or an authorized seller. Avoid discounted tickets from unknown resellers, since used or invalid tickets are common scams. Link every ticket to your My Disney Experience account as soon as you buy it.

CHAPTER 05

What it really costs: family budget and ways to save

A realistic first Disney World trip for a family of four costs about $3,600 on a lean plan and $6,200 on a comfortable one for 5 nights and 4 park days, before airfare, and a splurge trip runs past $10,000. These are planning estimates built from the prices in this guide, not quotes.

CATEGORY	LEAN	COMFORTABLE	SPLURGE
Tickets (4 people, 4 park days)	$1,800	$2,300	$2,900
Lodging (5 nights)	$1,000	$1,900	$3,500
Food	$600	$1,100	$2,000
Lightning Lane	$0	$360	$1,000
Souvenirs, photos, extras	$200	$500	$1,000
Total (before airfare and tax)	**$3,600**	**$6,160**	**$10,400**

How the three plans differ:

- **Lean:** off-peak dates, a Value resort or off-site rental, one table-service meal, groceries for breakfast, no Lightning Lane.
- **Comfortable:** a Moderate resort or a nice off-site home, Lightning Lane on the hardest days, one character meal.
- **Splurge:** a Deluxe resort, multiple character and signature meals, Lightning Lane daily.

Room rate snapshot

Rack rates swing wildly by date. Recent snapshots show Value resort standard rooms from about $150 into the $300s on busy 2027 weeks (Pop Century listed at $315 for one March 2027 week), Moderate resorts roughly $290 to $480, and Deluxe resorts from about $500 to $925 and up. Discounts of 15 to 30 percent appear often for off-peak dates.

Lightning Lane price ranges

PRODUCT	TYPICAL RANGE PER PERSON
Lightning Lane Multi Pass	$19 to $45 depending on park and date
Lightning Lane Single Pass	$11 to $25 per ride
Lightning Lane Premier Pass	$129 to $499 per day, depending on park and date

Food prices

Quick-service prices rose again in late 2026, with fountain drinks at $4.99 and regular coffee at $4.99 in affected locations. Character and buffet meals range from about $49 for an adult breakfast to more than $90 for a Cinderella's Royal Table lunch or dinner. Kids ages 3 to 9 are priced lower, and children under 3 usually eat free at buffets.

Parking and transportation

- Resort guests park for free at their hotel and at the theme parks.
- Day guests pay $35 for standard theme park parking ($50 to $60 for preferred, $40 for oversized vehicles). One fee covers all four parks that day.
- Disney buses, monorails, boats and the Skyliner are free.

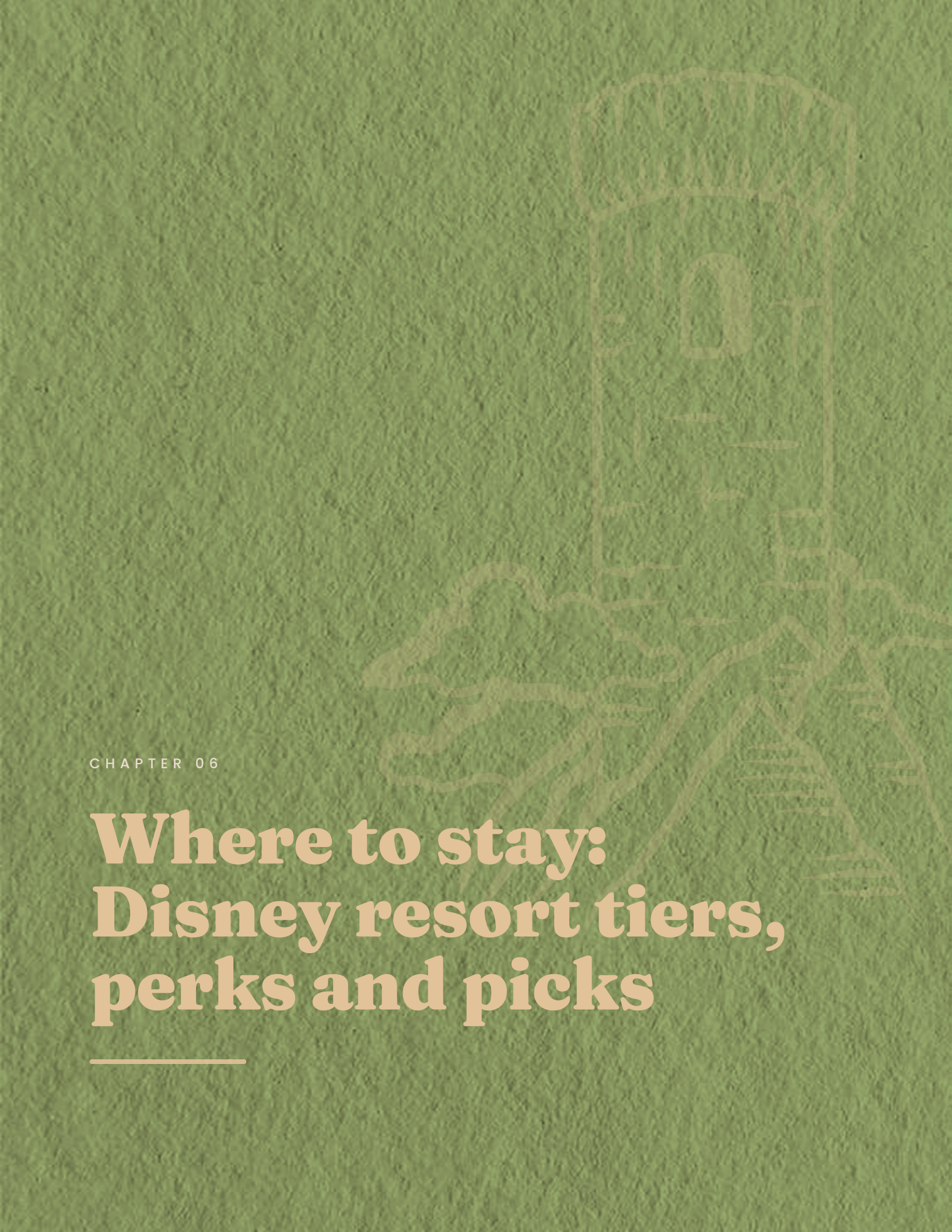
20 ways to save without ruining the trip

1. Choose low-priced ticket dates and shoulder seasons.
2. Buy multi-day tickets, not several single days.
3. Skip Park Hopper unless you will use it.
4. Stay on-site for free parking, free transportation and Early Theme Park Entry, or stay off-site if you need space and a kitchen.
5. Compare your rate to current discounts and ask to be repriced if a better one appears.
6. Eat a big breakfast in the room or rental.
7. Use quick-service for most meals and pick one or two special meals.
8. Share entrees and desserts at table-service restaurants where allowed.
9. Bring sealed water and refill bottles at water stations (free cups of ice water are available at quick-service counters).
10. Pack ponchos, sunscreen and snacks instead of buying them in the parks.
11. Set a souvenir budget per child before you go.
12. Use one pre-trip gift card load as a spending cap.
13. Skip Lightning Lane at parks with short waits and buy it where waits are longest.
14. Use single rider lines when your group does not need to sit together.
15. Rope drop popular rides instead of paying to skip lines later.
16. Take advantage of free perks: monorail and boat rides, resort tours, Disney Springs.
17. Watch for Disney+ Perks, Florida resident and military offers if you qualify.
18. Check Kids Eat Free is not available in 2027 before budgeting around it.
19. Skip the DSLR and PhotoPass add-ons unless you truly want them.

20. Take a midday break at the hotel pool instead of buying another snack.

Free things to do at Disney World

- Ride the monorail, Friendship Boats and Skyliner between parks and resorts.
- Tour the resort lobbies: Grand Floridian, Wilderness Lodge, Animal Kingdom Lodge and the Contemporary.
- Walk Disney Springs, which has free parking and free bus and boat service from resorts.
- Stroll the EPCOT International Gateway promenade and BoardWalk area at dusk.
- Check resort construction notices before planning a visit, since some areas close during refurbishment.



CHAPTER 06

Where to stay: Disney resort tiers, perks and picks

Most first-time families do best at a Moderate resort, or at a Value resort on the Skyliner if budget is tight, while Deluxe resorts are worth it when you want walkable access to a park and room to spread out. Disney has about 25 Disney-owned resort hotels in three price tiers, plus partner hotels with most of the same perks.

What every on-site guest gets

PERK	DETAILS
Early Theme Park Entry	Enter any of the four parks 30 minutes before opening, every day of your stay including check-in and check-out days. Needs a valid ticket and your resort ID (MagicBand or Key to the World card). A selection of rides runs during early entry.
Free transportation	Buses, monorail, boats and the Skyliner at no charge
Free parking	Standard overnight parking and standard theme park parking are free for registered resort guests. Valet is extra (around $42 per night at Deluxe resorts and Coronado Springs).
7-day Lightning Lane window	Buy Lightning Lane up to 7 days ahead for your whole stay, versus 3 days for off-site guests
Extended Evening Hours	Select nights, one park, for Deluxe, Deluxe Villa and select partner hotels only
Free water park arrival day	Returns on select summer 2027 dates for resort guests. Check eligibility when you book.

Early Theme Park Entry and Extended Evening Hours are confirmed through 2027. The Swan, Swan Reserve, Dolphin and Shades of Green also qualify for most of these perks.

Resort tiers at a glance

TIER	RESORTS	TYPICAL FEEL
Value	All-Star Movies, All-Star Music, All-Star Sports, Pop Century, Art of Animation	Colorful, themed, lowest price, food court dining, bus or Skyliner transport
Moderate	Caribbean Beach, Coronado Springs, Port Orleans French Quarter, Port Orleans Riverside	Larger rooms, better pools, table-service dining, more room for five
Deluxe	Contemporary, Grand Floridian, Polynesian Village, Wilderness Lodge, Animal Kingdom Lodge, Riviera, Yacht Club, Beach Club, BoardWalk Inn	Premium theming, signature restaurants, best locations, Extended Evening Hours
Deluxe Villas (Disney Vacation Club)	Bay Lake Tower, Boulder Ridge Villas, Copper Creek Villas and Cabins, Animal Kingdom Villas (Jambo House and Kidani Village), Beach Club Villas, BoardWalk Villas, Old Key West, Polynesian Villas and Bungalows, Riviera, Saratoga Springs, Villas at Grand Floridian	Kitchens and separate bedrooms, ideal for larger families

TIER	RESORTS	TYPICAL FEEL
Campground	Fort Wilderness cabins and campsites	Outdoorsy, golf-cart culture, free parking at your site

Where each resort puts you

AREA	RESORTS	HOW YOU REACH THE PARKS
Magic Kingdom area	Contemporary, Grand Floridian, Polynesian, Wilderness Lodge, Fort Wilderness	Monorail, boat or walking path to Magic Kingdom
EPCOT area	Yacht Club, Beach Club, BoardWalk, Swan, Dolphin	Walk to EPCOT's International Gateway, boat to Hollywood Studios
Skyliner resorts	Pop Century, Art of Animation, Caribbean Beach, Riviera	Skyliner gondola to EPCOT and Hollywood Studios
Animal Kingdom area	Animal Kingdom Lodge, All-Star Resorts	Bus
Disney Springs area	Port Orleans French Quarter and Riverside, Saratoga Springs, Old Key West	Bus to the parks, boat to Disney Springs

Resort-by-resort notes

Value

- **All-Star Movies, Music and Sports:** the lowest rates on property. Standard rooms are identical in price across all three. Best if you will spend nearly all day in the parks.
- **Pop Century:** retro theming, Skyliner access, a favorite value pick for families who want to reach EPCOT and Hollywood Studios fast.
- **Art of Animation:** family suites themed to Finding Nemo, The Lion King, Cars and The Little Mermaid. Great for families of four to six who want a suite for less than a Deluxe room.

Moderate

- **Caribbean Beach:** the Skyliner hub and a good all-around pick for families.
- **Coronado Springs:** large and convention-friendly, with Gran Destino Tower rooms as a more upscale option. Some refurbishment work has been scheduled in 2026.
- **Port Orleans Riverside:** a quiet, charming favorite with Southern-estate theming and rooms that can sleep five.
- **Port Orleans French Quarter:** the smallest Moderate, pretty and calm.

Deluxe

- **Contemporary:** the A-frame landmark where the monorail runs through the building. Walk to Magic Kingdom in 5 to 10 minutes. Home to Chef Mickey's and California Grill.

- **Grand Floridian:** the Victorian flagship with monorail service and 1900 Park Fare.
- **Polynesian Village:** South Pacific theming, a beach on the Seven Seas Lagoon and 'Ohana. Construction at the resort has been extended into 2027, so check current status and views before booking.
- **Wilderness Lodge:** a Pacific Northwest lodge with a dramatic lobby and Story Book Dining at Artist Point.
- **Animal Kingdom Lodge:** savanna-view rooms with wandering animals. Guest-room refurbishments at Jambo House run from May 2026 through January 2027.
- **Riviera:** a Skyliner resort with Topolino's Terrace on the roof.
- **Yacht Club and Beach Club:** walk to EPCOT, share the Stormalong Bay pool complex. Beach Club has Cape May Cafe.
- **BoardWalk Inn:** lively boardwalk setting, the Keister Coaster pool slide, walking distance to EPCOT. Some refurbishment disruption has been noted in 2026.

How to pick

1. **Start with your top park.** Choose a resort with a short, reliable route to it.
2. **Count your sleepers.** A family of five needs a room that sleeps five (Moderate resorts and Art of Animation suites are good fits).
3. **Check refurbishment calendars.** Pools, buildings and transportation close at times.
4. **Avoid Skyliner resorts during the January 2027 closure** (Jan 24 to 30, 2027). Disney runs free buses, but trips take longer.
5. **Compare room rates with packages.** A room-and-ticket package can beat buying separately.
6. **Ask about Preferred rooms.** At Value and Moderate resorts they cost more and often are not worth it unless a short walk to dining or transport matters to you.

CHAPTER 07

Staying off-site in Kissimmee

Kissimmee is one of the best-value bases for a Disney trip, especially for groups of five or more, because a vacation home gives you a kitchen, a private pool and far more space per dollar than most hotel rooms. Full disclosure: we own a vacation rental at Storey Lake in Kissimmee, so we have a bias, and we have tried to weigh the trade-offs honestly.

On-site vs off-site

FACTOR	ON-SITE DISNEY RESORT	OFF-SITE IN KISSIMMEE
Early Theme Park Entry	Yes, 30 minutes daily	No
Transportation	Free buses, monorail, boats, Skyliner	Rental car or rideshare
Theme park parking	Free for registered guests	$35 per day standard, $50 to $60 preferred
Lightning Lane window	7 days	3 days
Space	Hotel room, often sleeps four or five	Multi-bedroom homes, kitchens, pools
Group fit	Several rooms needed for big groups	One home can sleep an entire group
Price per sleeper	Usually higher	Often lower for groups

Popular rental communities

Communities families often compare near Disney include Storey Lake, Windsor Hills, Windsor Island Resort, Encore at Reunion, Emerald Island, Bahama Bay, Sheraton Vistana, Wyndham Bonnet Creek and Margaritaville Resort Orlando. Each has different amenities, so check pools, gate access, distance to the parks and whether the community charges resort fees.

Getting to the parks

Expect roughly 15 to 30 minutes by car to most Disney parks from Kissimmee, depending on the community, the gate you use and traffic. Rideshare costs vary and can spike after fireworks or at park close.

OPTION	PROS	CONS
Rental car	Flexible, groceries, easy day trips	Parking at parks, tolls, car seats
Rideshare	No parking or car seat hassle at the parks	Surge pricing, wait times at park close
Mix of both	Rideshare on busy nights, car on quiet days	Needs planning

Practical off-site tips

- **Parking:** one daily fee covers all four parks. A $35 standard fee for a family adds up over a week, so include it in your budget.

- **Disney Springs shortcut is closed:** since June 28, 2026, free Disney Springs parking can no longer be used to catch Disney buses to the theme parks.
- **Tolls:** Central Florida roads use electronic tolls. Ask your rental company about its transponder program or use a pay-by-plate option.
- **Car seats:** Florida law requires child restraints for young children in cars, so plan seats in advance. Disney buses do not require car seats.
- **Groceries:** stock up on breakfast items, snacks, water and sunscreen for the house. It is one of the easiest ways to save.
- **Lightning Lane:** with only a 3-day window, expect the most popular Multi Pass return times to sell out first. Have a backup plan.
- **Early arrival:** build in extra time for parking and the tram or walk to the gate, especially at Magic Kingdom, where you park, then take a monorail or ferry.
- **Keep your mornings flexible:** rope drop is easier without a bus schedule, but traffic and parking lines can eat time.

Is off-site right for you?

Choose off-site if you have a larger group, want a kitchen and private pool, or plan to mix Disney days with relaxed home days. Choose on-site if you want maximum convenience, early entry and Disney theming around the clock.

CHAPTER 08

Getting around: buses, monorail, Skyliner and boats

Disney's free transportation reaches every park, resort and Disney Springs, and the key is knowing which mode is fastest for each route. Buses serve every resort, while the Skyliner, monorail and boats are faster and more fun for specific trips.

MODE	BEST FOR	NOTES
Bus	Every resort, all four parks, Disney Springs, water parks	Slowest but most universal. Allow 20 to 40 minutes door to door.
Monorail	Contemporary, Polynesian, Grand Floridian, Magic Kingdom, the Transportation and Ticket Center, EPCOT	Resort loop, express line to Magic Kingdom, and EPCOT line
Skyliner gondola	Pop Century, Art of Animation, Caribbean Beach, Riviera, EPCOT, Hollywood Studios	Fast and scenic. Closes during thunderstorms and for annual maintenance.
Boats	Magic Kingdom area resorts, Friendship Boats between EPCOT, the Yacht, Beach and BoardWalk resorts and Hollywood Studios, Port Orleans to Disney Springs	Slower than buses sometimes, but relaxed and fun
Walking	Yacht Club, Beach Club and BoardWalk to EPCOT, Contemporary to Magic Kingdom	A short walk beats a bus
Minnie Van and rideshare	Late nights and tight schedules	Extra cost

Typical park-to-park travel times

ROUTE	BEST OPTION	TYPICAL TIME
EPCOT to Hollywood Studios	Skyliner or Friendship Boat	About 20 minutes by Skyliner, 35 to 45 by bus
Magic Kingdom to EPCOT	Monorail with a transfer at the Transportation and Ticket Center	About 30 to 35 minutes
Magic Kingdom to Hollywood Studios	Bus	35 to 45 minutes
Magic Kingdom to Animal Kingdom	Bus	30 to 40 minutes
Hollywood Studios to Animal Kingdom	Bus	30 to 40 minutes

Bus tips for families

1. **Leave 60 minutes before you want to reach a park.** Buses start running roughly 45 minutes before opening, and the first few fill up.
2. **Check bus times in My Disney Experience** before you leave the room.
3. **Avoid the post-fireworks surge at Magic Kingdom.** Leave before the show, wait it out, or use the ferry to the Transportation and Ticket Center.

4. **Fold strollers before boarding.** Buses have no dedicated stroller storage.
5. **Car seats are not required on Disney buses.**
6. **Ask which bus stop is closest to your building** when you check in.
7. **Look for the bay signs.** Each bay at a park bus depot is assigned to specific resorts.
8. **Water parks usually need a transfer,** often at Disney Springs. Check the Transportation section of the app.

Skyliner details

The Skyliner connects Caribbean Beach (the hub), Pop Century and Art of Animation, Riviera, EPCOT's International Gateway and Hollywood Studios. It closes during storms, so keep a bus backup plan.

Planned closures: January 25 to 31, 2026 has passed. The next annual maintenance closure is **January 24 to 30, 2027**, and Disney runs free buses during it.

Monorail tips

There are three lines: the Resort line (Contemporary, Polynesian, Grand Floridian and Magic Kingdom), the Express line (Magic Kingdom and the Transportation and Ticket Center) and the EPCOT line. Ask a cast member if you may ride in the front car with kids.

Parking recap

Resort guests park free at their hotel and the parks. Day guests pay $35 for standard parking, $50 to $60 for preferred, and $40 for oversized vehicles. Magic Kingdom parking is at the Transportation and Ticket Center, with a monorail or ferry ride into the park.

CHAPTER 09

Your phone is your key: My Disney Experience, Lightning Lane and mobile ordering

The My Disney Experience app (MDX) is where you hold tickets, book dining, buy Lightning Lane, order food, check wait times and find your way around, so set it up at home and keep your phone charged. Disney also sells optional MagicBands, but the app and your room key work without one.

Set up before you go

1. Create or sign in to your Disney account and download My Disney Experience.
2. Add every traveler as a family or friends member so you can share plans.
3. Link your tickets and your hotel reservation.
4. Book dining and Lightning Lane inside the app.
5. Register for the Disability Access Service well ahead of time if you need it (see the special situations section).
6. Screenshot confirmations and pack a portable charger.

What the app does

- Tickets, resort key and park entry
- Advance dining reservations and walk-up waitlists
- Lightning Lane Multi Pass and Single Pass purchases
- Mobile ordering at most quick-service restaurants
- Live wait times, show times, park hours and maps
- Bus and transportation times
- Character locations and PhotoPass photos

Lightning Lane explained

Lightning Lane is Disney's paid skip-the-line system, and it replaced the old free FastPass. Standby lines still exist at every attraction, and the virtual queues that once guarded Tiana's Bayou Adventure, Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind and TRON Lightcycle / Run have been retired.

PRODUCT	HOW IT WORKS	PRICE PER PERSON
Lightning Lane Multi Pass	Pick up to 3 attractions with return times before your visit. After you ride your first one, you can book another, always keeping up to 3 reserved. You cannot book the same ride twice in a day.	$19 to $45, by park and date
Lightning Lane Single Pass	One ride on a headliner not included in Multi Pass. Up to 2 per day.	$11 to $25 per ride
Lightning Lane Premier Pass	One ride on every Lightning Lane attraction in a single park, no return times	$129 to $499 per day. Often sells out on busy days.

Booking windows: 7 days ahead at 7:00 AM Eastern for Disney resort guests (and eligible partner hotels), 3 days ahead for everyone else. You can buy Multi Pass and Single Pass together.

Single Pass rides: Seven Dwarfs Mine Train and TRON Lightcycle / Run (Magic Kingdom), Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind (EPCOT), Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance (Hollywood Studios) and Avatar Flight of Passage (Animal Kingdom).

Multi Pass groups (Group A: pick one, Group B: the rest, as of early 2026, so confirm in the app):

PARK	GROUP A	GROUP B
Magic Kingdom	Jungle Cruise, Peter Pan's Flight, Space Mountain, Tiana's Bayou Adventure	Haunted Mansion, Pirates of the Caribbean, it's a small world, Dumbo, Mad Tea Party, Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Under the Sea, Magic Carpets of Aladdin, Barnstormer, PhilharMagic, Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor, Tomorrowland Speedway
EPCOT	Frozen Ever After, Remy's Ratatouille Adventure, Test Track	Soarin', Spaceship Earth, Mission: SPACE, Living with the Land, The Seas with Nemo & Friends, Journey into Imagination, Turtle Talk with Crush, Disney and Pixar Short Film Festival
Hollywood Studios	Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway, Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run, Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, Slinky Dog Dash	Tower of Terror, Star Tours, Toy Story Mania, Alien Swirling Saucers, Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular, Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage, The Little Mermaid, Frozen Sing-Along
Animal Kingdom	One tier	Expedition Everest, Kilimanjaro Safaris, Kali River Rapids, Na'vi River Journey, Festival of the Lion King, Feathered Friends in Flight, Finding Nemo show, Zootopia: Better Zoogether

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin returned in 2026 after refurbishments, so check where they sit in the tiers. Character meet-and-greets and parades do not have Lightning Lane.

Is Lightning Lane worth it?

Our honest take: buy it for your one or two hardest days, not for every day. It is most valuable for a short trip or a peak week. Skip it on low-crowd days and at parks with short waits, and use rope drop, Early Theme Park Entry, single rider lines and the evening hours instead. If you do buy, book your first selection with the earliest return time so you can book another sooner.

Booking order for advance purchases: most guests find Magic Kingdom (Tiana's Bayou Adventure) and Hollywood Studios (Slinky Dog Dash) sell out first, then EPCOT (Remy's Ratatouille Adventure), then Animal Kingdom.

Mobile order

Most quick-service restaurants let you order and pay in the app and pick up in a window, which saves a lot of time at lunch. Pick up when you arrive, not before, so food stays hot.

PhotoPass

Cast Member photographers around the parks take free photos with your account, and you can buy digital downloads. Decide ahead of time whether you want a package, since prices add up.

Rider Switch

If one adult needs to stay with a child who is too small to ride, ask a cast member for Rider Switch. One adult rides while the other waits with the child, then you swap without waiting in line again.

CHAPTER 10

Magic Kingdom

Magic Kingdom is the best first park for most families, especially those with children under 10, and a full day plus the evening fireworks is the right amount of time. It has the castle, the classic dark rides and the highest concentration of gentle attractions on property.

Quick facts

- **Best for:** young kids, classic Disney fans, first timers
- **Getting in:** resort guests arrive by monorail, boat or bus. Day guests park at the Transportation and Ticket Center and take the monorail or ferry.
- **Nighttime show:** Happily Ever After fireworks, shifted to 9:30 PM in March 2026 (times shift seasonally). Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away is the nighttime parade.
- **Party nights:** neither the parade nor the fireworks run on Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party or Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party nights, and day guests may need to leave early.

What is closed or changing right now (Nov 9, 2026)

- **Tiana's Bayou Adventure:** closed Nov 2 for a refurbishment. Disney's calendar lists a reopening on Dec 18, 2026.
- **Carousel of Progress:** closed since July 2026 for a reimagining. Expected to reopen in late spring 2027.
- **Walt Disney World Railroad:** operating on an altered route because of Frontierland construction.
- **Frontierland:** Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island are gone to make room for Piston Peak National Park. Expect construction walls.
- **Villains Land:** under construction beyond the current park edge.

Land by land

LAND	ATTRACTIONS	NOTES
Main Street, U.S.A.	Walt Disney World Railroad, Main Street Vehicles, Cinderella Castle, Town Square meet-and-greets	Shops open before the park. Cinderella's Royal Table is in the castle.
Adventureland	Jungle Cruise, Pirates of the Caribbean, Magic Carpets of Aladdin, Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room, Swiss Family Treehouse	Aloha Isle serves the famous Dole Whip.
Frontierland	Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (40 in), Tiana's Bayou Adventure (40 in), Country Bear Musical Jamboree	Big Thunder returned in 2026 with new touches. Pecos Bill is the main quick-service stop.
Liberty Square	Haunted Mansion, The Hall of Presidents	Haunted Mansion is mildly spooky, not truly scary.

LAND	ATTRACTIONS	NOTES
Fantasyland	Seven Dwarfs Mine Train (38 in), Peter Pan's Flight, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Under the Sea Journey of the Little Mermaid, Enchanted Tales with Belle, Dumbo the Flying Elephant, Prince Charming Regal Carrousel, Mad Tea Party, it's a small world, Mickey's PhilharMagic, The Barnstormer (35 in)	The heart of the park for young children. Be Our Guest and Gaston's Tavern are here.
Tomorrowland	Space Mountain (44 in), TRON Lightcycle / Run (48 in), Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin, Astro Orbiter, Tomorrowland Transit Authority PeopleMover, Tomorrowland Speedway (32 in with an adult, 54 in to drive alone), Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor	Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin reopened in 2026 after refurbishment. The PeopleMover is a great air-conditioned rest.

Must-do list by age

- **Ages 2 to 5:** Peter Pan's Flight, it's a small world, Winnie the Pooh, Dumbo, Prince Charming Regal Carrousel, Under the Sea, Enchanted Tales with Belle, Haunted Mansion (a preview helps), Magic Carpets of Aladdin, the Barnstormer if tall enough.
- **Ages 6 to 9:** Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, Big Thunder Mountain, Tiana's Bayou Adventure, Space Mountain if 44 in, Buzz Lightyear, Pirates, Jungle Cruise, Haunted Mansion.
- **Teens:** TRON Lightcycle / Run, Space Mountain, Big Thunder, Tiana's, Haunted Mansion, Pirates.

Rope drop strategy

Resort guests can use Early Theme Park Entry (a selection of rides such as Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, Peter Pan's Flight, Space Mountain, Dumbo and Buzz Lightyear has operated during early entry, but check the app). Go to the ride with the longest waits first, then work backward to shorter-wait attractions as the day heats up.

Tips

- **Midday break:** the Hall of Presidents, Country Bear Musical Jamboree, Enchanted Tales with Belle and the PeopleMover are indoor, air-conditioned or shaded.
- **Fireworks viewing:** Main Street and the hub fill early. For a calmer spot, watch from outside Fantasyland or from a resort with a view.
- **Leaving:** the 15 minutes after fireworks end are the worst bus and monorail crunch. Wait it out with a snack or leave before the show.
- **Eating:** Pecos Bill's Cherry Coke Smoked Pork Sandwich and kids quesadilla were a hit on our visit, with lots of seating and strong air conditioning. See the dining sections for character meals at Cinderella's Royal Table and Crystal Palace.
- **Photos:** a Cast Member photographer is near the castle, and the best crowd-free shots are early in the morning.



CHAPTER 11

EPCOT

EPCOT is two parks in one: a front half with big attractions and a back half, World Showcase, that circles a lagoon with eleven country pavilions, and it is the best park for food. Plan a full day, with dinner in World Showcase and the fireworks over the lagoon at night.

Quick facts

- **Best for:** food lovers, families with mixed ages, travelers who want both thrills and gentle rides
- **Entrances:** the main gate, plus the International Gateway for guests walking from the Yacht Club, Beach Club and BoardWalk and for Skyliner riders
- **World Showcase:** typically opens a couple of hours after the park does, so start in the front half
- **Nighttime show:** Luminous: The Symphony of Us fireworks

Attractions

ATTRACTION	HEIGHT	THRILL LEVEL	NOTES
Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	42 in	Thrill coaster, indoor	Single Pass ride. Many call it the best ride at EPCOT.
Test Track	40 in	Fast thrill ride	Back in the top Multi Pass group. Single rider line is available.
Frozen Ever After	None	Gentle boat ride	Reopened in February 2026 with upgraded Anna, Elsa and Kristoff figures.
Remy's Ratatouille Adventure	None	Gentle, motion simulator feel	France pavilion. Early entry ride.
Soarin'	40 in	Gentle glide	A limited-time Soarin' Across America film replaced Soarin' Around the World in 2026.
Mission: SPACE	40 in	Orange is intense, Green is milder	Pick Green for kids who dislike spinning.
Spaceship Earth	None	Slow, dark	A reimagining was announced at D23. Check for closures.
Journey into Imagination with Figment	None	Gentle	An overhaul with Dreamfinder's return was announced.
The Seas with Nemo & Friends, Turtle Talk with Crush	None	Gentle	Great for toddlers
Living with the Land	None	Slow boat	Status has varied during 2026, so check the app.
Gran Fiesta Tour Starring The Three Caballeros	None	Gentle boat	Mexico pavilion
Disney and Pixar Short Film Festival	None	Show	Air-conditioned

World Showcase pavilions

PAVILION	HIGHLIGHTS
Mexico	Gran Fiesta Tour, San Angel Inn Restaurante
Norway	Frozen Ever After, Akershus Royal Banquet Hall princess dining, bakery treats
China	Nine Dragons Restaurant, shops, a good drink menu
Germany	Biergarten family buffet
Italy	Via Napoli and Tutto Italia
The American Adventure	Live-action and audio-animatronic show
Japan	Shops, quick-service and table-service dining
Morocco	Beautiful tilework, Moroccan dining
France	Remy's Ratatouille Adventure, bakeries, Chefs de France
United Kingdom	Rose & Crown, fish and chips
Canada	Le Cellier steakhouse, gardens

Festivals

EPCOT hosts four festivals a year: Festival of the Arts (Jan 15 to Mar 1, 2027), Flower & Garden (Mar 10 to May 31, 2027), Food & Wine (late August to November) and Festival of the Holidays (Nov 27 to Dec 30, 2026, with the Candlelight Processional). Details are in the seasonal events section.

Tips

- **Rope drop order:** Cosmic Rewind, Remy's Ratatouille Adventure, Frozen Ever After and Test Track have the longest waits, so ride them early or use Lightning Lane.
- **Resort guests:** Early Theme Park Entry has included Frozen Ever After, Cosmic Rewind, Mission: SPACE, Remy and Soarin'.
- **Food plan:** budget a snack or small plate stop in several countries instead of one big meal. Festival booths are worth it during festivals.
- **Kids:** Test Track's design-your-car portion is a hit with creative kids. Mission: SPACE Green is the gentler option.
- **Shade and air conditioning:** the Seas and Spaceship Earth give you relief from the heat.
- **Nine Dragons:** we sampled only appetizers on our visit and loved the drink menu, so treat it as a lighter stop.

CHAPTER 12

Disney's Hollywood Studios

Hollywood Studios is the park for Star Wars, Toy Story and thrill rides, and it has the most height requirements of any park, so check your kids' heights before you plan the day. It is a good half-day to full-day park, and it is in the middle of major changes.

Quick facts

- **Best for:** Star Wars fans, Toy Story fans, thrill seekers, teens and tweens
- **Getting there:** bus, the Skyliner from EPCOT and four Skyliner resorts, or the Friendship Boat from the Yacht Club, Beach Club and BoardWalk
- **Nighttime show:** Fantasmic!, with seating that fills early
- **Under construction:** Monstropolis (Monsters, Inc. land), opening in phases from 2027

What changed in 2026

- **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring the Muppets** replaced the Aerosmith version after a closure that began March 2, 2026. It opened May 26, 2026.
- **The Magic of Disney Animation** is scheduled to open on September 14, 2026 in the former Animation Courtyard, now part of the Walt Disney Studios Lot, with an Olaf Draws! experience.
- **Muppets Courtyard, Star Wars Launch Bay and Mama Melrose's** are gone.

Attractions

AREA	ATTRACTION	HEIGHT	NOTES
Galaxy's Edge	Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance	40 in	Single Pass ride. A long, immersive ride and a fan favorite.
Galaxy's Edge	Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run	38 in	Pilot, gunner or engineer roles.
Toy Story Land	Slinky Dog Dash	38 in	Family coaster, one of the hardest Multi Pass picks to book.
Toy Story Land	Alien Swirling Saucers	32 in	Gentle spinning ride
Toy Story Land	Toy Story Mania!	None	Interactive shooter dark ride
Sunset Boulevard	Twilight Zone Tower of Terror	40 in	Drop tower with a spooky story. Scarier than height suggests.
Sunset Boulevard	Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring the Muppets	48 in	Launched coaster with loops
Sunset Boulevard	Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage, Fantasmic!	None	Shows
Hollywood Boulevard	Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway	None	Gentle, great for all ages
Echo Lake	Star Tours: The Adventures Continue	40 in	Randomized missions, often short waits

AREA	ATTRACTION	HEIGHT	NOTES
Echo Lake	Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular	None	Stunt show
Animation area	The Little Mermaid, Frozen Sing-Along, The Magic of Disney Animation	None	Shows and character experiences. The Little Mermaid has a Lightning Lane option.

Savi's Workshop (build a lightsaber) and Droid Depot (build a droid) are extra-cost experiences in Galaxy's Edge that book up, so reserve ahead.

Food

- **Roundup Rodeo BBQ (Toy Story Land):** family-style barbecue lunch or dinner. We loved the biscuits, street corn, ribs and desserts, and the air conditioning is a welcome break. Reviews are mixed among barbecue purists, but it is strong value for families.
- **Hollywood & Vine:** character dining with Minnie and friends.
- **Galaxy's Edge:** Docking Bay 7, Ronto Roasters and blue milk from the Milk Stand.
- **Sunset Boulevard and Echo Lake:** Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater, 50's Prime Time Cafe and Hollywood Brown Derby for sit-down meals.

Tips

1. **Rope drop Rise of the Resistance or Slinky Dog Dash** unless you have a Single Pass or Multi Pass, since these waits balloon fast.
2. **Star Tours** often has short waits, and riding twice is a good value.
3. **Tower of Terror** is a rite of passage, but it can be too intense for sensitive kids even at the height requirement.
4. **Fantasmic!** seating opens about an hour before showtime. Arrive early or watch from the back.
5. **Heat:** this park has less shade. Plan indoor shows, the Runaway Railway and air-conditioned meals for midday.
6. **Toy Story Land** is best in the morning before the sun is high and the crowds build.
7. **Evening events:** Disney Jollywood Nights is a separate-ticket Christmas event at Hollywood Studios through Jan 5, 2027.

CHAPTER 13

Disney's Animal Kingdom

Animal Kingdom is a half-day to full-day park built around animals, Pandora and Expedition Everest, and it is best in the morning when animals are active and temperatures are lower. It is in a transition period, with DinoLand U.S.A. gone and Tropical Americas under construction for 2027.

Quick facts

- **Best for:** animal lovers, Avatar fans, adventure seekers
- **Getting there:** bus. Animal Kingdom has its own bus stops at every resort.
- **Hours:** usually earlier closing than the other parks, so pair it with a resort or water park afternoon
- **Resort guests:** Early Theme Park Entry includes Avatar Flight of Passage, Expedition Everest, Na'vi River Journey and Zootopia: Better Zoogether

What changed in 2026

- **DinoLand U.S.A. closed permanently on Feb 2, 2026,** including DINOSAUR. That site is being rebuilt as Tropical Americas.
- **Rafiki's Planet Watch** closed in February 2026 and reopened as **Bluey's Wild World at Conservation Station**, reached by the Wildlife Express Train.
- **Zootopia: Better Zoogether** opened in November 2025, replacing It's Tough to Be a Bug!
- **Tropical Americas** is expected to open in 2027.

Attractions

AREA	ATTRACTION	HEIGHT	NOTES
Pandora	Avatar Flight of Passage	44 in	Single Pass ride. Flight simulator on a banshee. Intense for some.
Pandora	Na'vi River Journey	None	Gentle boat ride. Check that the Shaman of Songs figure is working before you commit to a long wait.
Africa	Kilimanjaro Safaris	None	Best first thing in the morning
Africa	Festival of the Lion King	None	Stage show
Africa	Gorilla Falls Exploration Trail	None	Walking trail
Asia	Expedition Everest	44 in	Coaster with a backward section and the Yeti
Asia	Kali River Rapids	38 in	Soaking wet raft ride. Bring a poncho or accept wet clothes.
Asia	Maharajah Jungle Trek	None	Walking trail with tigers and bats

AREA	ATTRACTION	HEIGHT	NOTES
Discovery Island	Zootopia: Better Zoogether, Tree of Life Awakenings, Finding Nemo show, Feathered Friends in Flight	None	Shows and the park icon
Conservation Station	Bluey's Wild World, Wildlife Express Train	None	Character meet-and-greets and animal exhibits

Dining

- **Satu'li Canteen (Pandora):** popular quick-service bowls
- **Tusker House (Harambe):** character buffet with Donald, Daisy, Mickey and Goofy in safari outfits
- **Flame Tree Barbecue:** quick-service barbecue with shaded seating
- **Tiffins and Nomad Lounge:** signature dining for adults and a special night

Tips

1. **Do Kilimanjaro Safaris first.** Animals are more active in the cool morning.
2. **Pair a Tusker House breakfast with the safari** since both are in Africa and the restaurant opens before the park fills.
3. **Flight of Passage and Everest** are best at rope drop or with a Lightning Lane.
4. **Pandora glows at night,** so return for an evening walk if you can.
5. **Plan a pool or water park afternoon.** Animal Kingdom's attraction count is lower than other parks, which makes it a natural half-day.
6. **Kali River Rapids:** best on a hot day, and plan a change of clothes for young children.
7. **Check status:** Disney announced work on the Expedition Everest Yeti, so check whether the ride is operating at full effect.

CHAPTER 14

Ride height requirements and thrill levels

Disney World has 21 height-gated rides in 2026, with minimums from 32 to 48 inches, so measure your kids before the trip and again at the ride entrance. Height requirements are about safety, not scariness, and a 40-inch child may still find Tower of Terror terrifying.

PARK	RIDE	MINIMUM HEIGHT	THRILL LEVEL
Magic Kingdom	Tomorrowland Speedway	32 in (54 in to drive alone)	Gentle
Magic Kingdom	The Barnstormer	35 in	Mild coaster
Magic Kingdom	Seven Dwarfs Mine Train	38 in	Mild coaster
Magic Kingdom	Big Thunder Mountain Railroad	40 in	Moderate coaster
Magic Kingdom	Tiana's Bayou Adventure	40 in	Moderate flume with a big drop, some splash
Magic Kingdom	Space Mountain	44 in	Dark thrill coaster
Magic Kingdom	TRON Lightcycle / Run	48 in	Fast, intense coaster
EPCOT	Soarin'	40 in	Gentle
EPCOT	Test Track	40 in	Fast, moderate thrill
EPCOT	Mission: SPACE	40 in	Orange is intense, Green is milder
EPCOT	Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	42 in	Intense indoor coaster
Hollywood Studios	Alien Swirling Saucers	32 in	Gentle
Hollywood Studios	Slinky Dog Dash	38 in	Mild coaster
Hollywood Studios	Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run	38 in	Gentle simulator
Hollywood Studios	Star Tours	40 in	Moderate simulator
Hollywood Studios	Twilight Zone Tower of Terror	40 in	Scary drop ride
Hollywood Studios	Rise of the Resistance	40 in	Long, intense dark ride
Hollywood Studios	Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring the Muppets	48 in	Intense launched coaster
Animal Kingdom	Kali River Rapids	38 in	Soaking wet raft ride
Animal Kingdom	Avatar Flight of Passage	44 in	Intense simulator

PARK	RIDE	MINIMUM HEIGHT	THRILL LEVEL
Animal Kingdom	Expedition Everest	44 in	Moderate to high coaster

Mission: SPACE minimums vary slightly between sources (40 or 44 in), so confirm the current number in My Disney Experience.

Height milestones

- **Under 32 in:** Most dark rides, carousels, boat rides and shows. No height-gated rides at all.
- **32 in:** Alien Swirling Saucers and Tomorrowland Speedway with an adult.
- **35 in:** The Barnstormer.
- **38 in:** Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, Slinky Dog Dash, Smugglers Run, Kali River Rapids.
- **40 in:** The big unlock: Big Thunder, Tiana's, Soarin', Test Track, Mission: SPACE, Tower of Terror, Rise of the Resistance, Star Tours.
- **44 in:** Space Mountain, Flight of Passage, Expedition Everest.
- **48 in:** TRON Lightcycle / Run and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster.

No height requirement, but still be thoughtful

MILDLY SPOOKY OR DARK	GENTLE FOR ALL AGES
Haunted Mansion, Pirates of the Caribbean, Peter Pan's Flight (dark but gentle), Jungle Cruise (jokes and animatronics), Spaceship Earth, Frozen Ever After, Remy's Ratatouille Adventure, Na'vi River Journey	it's a small world, Winnie the Pooh, Dumbo, Carrousel, Under the Sea, Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin, Toy Story Mania, Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway, Kilimanjaro Safaris, PeopleMover

Water park heights

Summit Plummet, Slush Gusher and Downhill Double Dipper at Blizzard Beach and Crush 'n' Gusher and Humunga Kowabunga at Typhoon Lagoon require 48 inches. The Blizzard Beach chairlift requires 32 inches, and the toddler areas Tike's Peak and Ketchakiddee Creek have a maximum height of 48 inches.

Tips

1. Measure your child at home in shoes you will wear to the park.
2. Do not try to boost height. Cast Members measure at the entrance and a child who does not fit the restraint cannot ride.
3. Use Rider Switch so adults can take turns.
4. Watch ride videos and read our park sections before you promise a ride.

CHAPTER 15

What is coming next: new lands and refreshes

Disney announced the biggest expansion slate in Walt Disney World history at D23 in August 2026, but most of it opens in 2027 or later, so a trip before then should plan around construction rather than count on new rides. Announced timelines can slip.

PARK	PROJECT	WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED	TIMING
Magic Kingdom	**Villains Land**	A roller coaster starring Maleficent and a Magic Mirror dark ride featuring villains such as Cruella De Vil, Ursula, Jafar, Scar and Dr. Facilier. Imagineers compared the scale to Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge.	No opening date announced
Magic Kingdom	**Piston Peak National Park**	A Cars land in Frontierland with Cars Ridge Run Rally (an off-road thrill ride) and Miss Fritter's Daredevil Spin-Along (a family spinner), plus a visitor lodge, Ranger HQ and trails. Replaces Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island.	No opening date announced
Magic Kingdom	**Carousel of Progress**	Reimagined with the story shifted forward 60 years and a new Walt Disney audio-animatronic	Late spring 2027
EPCOT	**Journey into Imagination**	Overhaul with Dreamfinder returning alongside Figment	Not announced
EPCOT	**Spaceship Earth**	Reimagined around human connection, the first big overhaul since 2008	Not announced
EPCOT	**Soarin' Across America**	Limited-time film celebrating the United States, running in 2026	Now
Hollywood Studios	**Monstropolis**	Monsters, Inc. land with Disney's first suspended roller coaster, a Welcome to Monstropolis show at The Glob, Harryhausen's table-service restaurant and Archie's Scare Pig Pizza	Everything except the coaster in 2027
Hollywood Studios	**The Magic of Disney Animation**	A return of the animation experience, with Olaf Draws!	Opened in 2026
Animal Kingdom	**Tropical Americas**	Indiana Jones and the Myth of the Jade Serpent, Antonio's Fiesta de Encanto (Encanto), El Carousel de los Animalitos (a carousel)	2027
Animal Kingdom	**Expedition Everest Yeti**	The long-broken Yeti effect to be restored or replaced	Not announced

Closures and construction to know about right now

ITEM	STATUS
Tiana's Bayou Adventure	Closed Nov 2 to Dec 18, 2026
Carousel of Progress	Closed until spring 2027
Walt Disney World Railroad	Altered route during Frontierland construction
Typhoon Lagoon	Closed for refurbishment until Jan 27, 2027
Disney Skyliner	Closed Jan 24 to 30, 2027

ITEM	STATUS
Polynesian Village Resort	Construction extended into 2027
Animal Kingdom Lodge, Jambo House	Room refurbishment May 2026 to Jan 2027
DinoLand U.S.A. and DINOSAUR	Permanently closed
Rivers of America and Liberty Square Riverboat	Permanently closed

What this means for a first timer

- A trip before late 2027 will not include these new lands. Do not buy a ticket expecting Villains Land or Piston Peak.
- Construction walls change walking routes and sometimes park views, so give yourself extra time at Magic Kingdom's Frontierland and Hollywood Studios' Sunset area.
- If your kids are Cars, Monsters, Encanto or Indiana Jones fans, consider timing a visit for 2027 or 2028.
- Always check the refurbishment calendar for the weeks of your trip.



CHAPTER 16

Dining basics: reservations, dining plans, quick service, snacks and allergies

Book one or two special table-service meals 60 days ahead, use quick service and mobile ordering for the rest, and do the math before buying a dining plan. Food is one of the biggest budget surprises, because Disney raised quick-service and character meal prices again in October 2026.

Types of dining

TYPE	WHAT IT MEANS	RESERVATION?
Quick service	Counter service with mobile ordering. Entrees run about $12 to $20.	No
Table service	Sit-down meal with a server	Strongly recommended
Buffet or family-style	All-you-care-to-enjoy, many with characters	Yes
Character dining	A meal where characters visit your table	Yes, book early
Signature and prix fixe	Fixed-price multi-course dining	Yes
Snacks and treats	Kiosks and carts around the parks	No

How reservations work

- **60 days out, 6:00 AM Eastern.** Dining reservations open 60 days before your date in My Disney Experience. Resort guests can book for their whole stay (up to 10 days) starting 60 days before check-in.
- **Be ready at 6:00 AM.** The hardest tables sell out in minutes.
- **Check for cancellations.** Keep checking in the days and weeks before your trip. Many reservations open up.
- **Walk-up waitlists.** Some restaurants take same-day waitlists in the app.
- **Read the policy.** Some meals require a credit card, a deposit or prepayment, and many have cancellation deadlines.
- **Link all travelers** so everyone can see the plan.

Hardest and easiest bookings

TIER	RESTAURANTS
Hardest (book at 6:00 AM sharp)	Topolino's Terrace breakfast, 'Ohana breakfast, Cinderella's Royal Table, Story Book Dining at Artist Point
Moderate (book within the first hour)	Chef Mickey's dinner, Garden Grill dinner, Crystal Palace breakfast, Tusker House
Often easier	Hollywood & Vine, Akershus, Cape May Cafe, 1900 Park Fare

Disney Dining Plan

PLAN (2027)	WHAT YOU GET PER PERSON PER NIGHT	NOTES
Quick-Service Dining Plan	2 quick-service meals, 1 snack, a resort-refillable mug	About $62.78 per adult per night
Disney Dining Plan	1 table-service meal, 1 quick-service meal, 1 snack, mug	Confirm the current price and availability when you book
Deluxe Dining Plan (returns in 2027)	2 table-service meals, 1 quick-service meal, 1 snack, mug	About $163 per adult per night

Credits apply to ages 3 and up. Kids Eat Free was a 2026 perk and is not returning in 2027. Disney sometimes offers promotional free dining in packages, so check current offers.

Our honest take: the plan often costs more than eating out unless you plan several character, signature or buffet meals. Price a typical day both ways before buying. For many first-timers, one or two special meals plus quick service and groceries is cheaper and less stressful.

Quick service and mobile order

Quick-service prices rose in October 2026: fountain drinks are $4.99, regular coffee $4.99 in affected locations and the Contempo Cafe Roast Beef Sub is $14.99. Use mobile order and pick up when you reach the window. Free ice water is available at quick-service counters.

Snacks worth the splurge

- Dole Whip at Aloha Isle (Magic Kingdom)
- Citrus Swirl at Sunshine Tree Terrace (Magic Kingdom)
- Mickey-shaped pretzels, ice cream bars and waffles
- Kringla bakery treats in the Norway pavilion (EPCOT)
- Blue milk from the Milk Stand at Galaxy's Edge (Hollywood Studios)
- Festival food booths at EPCOT during festivals

Allergies and special diets

Tell Disney about every allergy when you make your reservation and again to your server. Ask for a chef or manager if you want help, and carry safe snacks. Many restaurants and quick-service locations can accommodate common allergens, vegetarian and other diets, but menus change, so confirm in the app.

Dining strategy

1. **Limit table-service meals to one per park day,** or one per day for a short trip.

2. **Book breakfast character meals** if you want to save money, since breakfast is usually cheaper than dinner.
3. **Eat in air conditioning at midday** to rest and avoid the lunch rush.
4. **Split big portions** at table-service restaurants where allowed.
5. **Bring snacks and sealed water** into the parks and keep your kids' hunger on schedule.
6. **Use your resort's grocery delivery or an off-site store** for breakfast items, fruit and drinks.

CHAPTER 17

Character dining: every restaurant compared

Character dining puts Mickey, Cinderella and friends at your table for a one-on-one visit, and it is one of the most memorable things a young child can do at Disney World. Chef Mickey's, Topolino's Terrace and Cinderella's Royal Table are the most requested, while Garden Grill, Hollywood & Vine and Cape May Cafe are the best-value picks.

Prices below are from the October 2026 increase, before tax and tip. Child prices are for ages 3 to 9, and children under 3 usually eat free at buffets. Character lineups change, so confirm the roster in My Disney Experience.

RESTAURANT	WHERE	MEALS	ADULT / CHILD	CHARACTERS
Cinderella's Royal Table	Magic Kingdom, inside the castle	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $79 / $49. Lunch and dinner $92 / $57.	Cinderella plus rotating princesses
Chef Mickey's	Contemporary Resort	Breakfast, dinner	Breakfast $62 / $41. Dinner $72 / $46.	Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, Pluto, Donald
Topolino's Terrace	Riviera Resort rooftop	Breakfast	$59 / $39	Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Daisy in artist costumes
Tusker House	Animal Kingdom	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $53 / $38. Lunch and dinner $64 / $43.	Donald, Daisy, Mickey, Goofy in safari outfits
Garden Grill	EPCOT, The Land	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $49 / $34. Lunch and dinner $62 / $43.	Mickey, Pluto, Chip and Dale
Cape May Cafe	Beach Club Resort	Breakfast, dinner	Breakfast $52 / $35. Dinner $52 / $30.	Minnie and friends
Akershus Royal Banquet Hall	EPCOT, Norway	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $66 / $42. Lunch and dinner $69 / $47.	Princesses
The Crystal Palace	Magic Kingdom	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $57 / $37. Lunch and dinner $64 / $46.	Winnie the Pooh and friends
1900 Park Fare	Grand Floridian	Breakfast, dinner	Breakfast $59 / $37. Dinner $69 / $45.	Breakfast: Mary Poppins, Alice and Pooh characters. Dinner: Cinderella, Prince Charming, Lady Tremaine and stepsisters
Story Book Dining at Artist Point	Wilderness Lodge	Dinner	$72 / $46	Snow White, Dopey, Grumpy and the Evil Queen
'Ohana	Polynesian Village Resort	Breakfast (character), dinner	Breakfast $58 / $36. Dinner $69 / $46.	Breakfast: Lilo, Stitch and friends

RESTAURANT	WHERE	MEALS	ADULT / CHILD	CHARACTERS
Hollywood & Vine	Hollywood Studios	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Breakfast $49 / $34. Lunch and dinner $64 / $45.	Minnie and friends in seasonal themes

Which one is right for your family?

IF YOUR FAMILY LOVES	TRY
Princesses	Cinderella's Royal Table, Akershus, 1900 Park Fare dinner
Mickey and the core gang	Chef Mickey's, Topolino's Terrace
Villains and theatrical fun	Story Book Dining at Artist Point, 1900 Park Fare dinner
Winnie the Pooh	Crystal Palace
Animals and a safari vibe	Tusker House
Value	Garden Grill, Hollywood & Vine, Cape May Cafe, Tusker House
A park-day shortcut	Garden Grill at EPCOT, Tusker House at Animal Kingdom, Crystal Palace or Cinderella's Royal Table at Magic Kingdom, Hollywood & Vine at Hollywood Studios
No park ticket needed	Chef Mickey's, Topolino's Terrace, Cape May Cafe, 'Ohana, 1900 Park Fare, Story Book Dining

Restaurant notes

- **Cinderella's Royal Table:** the most iconic and expensive. It includes a photo opportunity with Cinderella in the foyer and a prix fixe menu. Book at 6:00 AM exactly 60 days out.
- **Chef Mickey's:** a loud, celebratory buffet right next to the Contemporary monorail station. Pair breakfast with a monorail ride to Magic Kingdom's rope drop.
- **Topolino's Terrace:** many families consider this the best food on the character roster, with a calmer rooftop atmosphere. Plated, not a buffet.
- **Tusker House:** pair a breakfast with Kilimanjaro Safaris. Books up a little later than the other top picks.
- **Garden Grill:** family-style food in a slowly rotating dining room above The Land's boat ride.
- **Cape May Cafe:** an easy, relaxed pick right by EPCOT's International Gateway.
- **Story Book Dining at Artist Point:** a Snow White fairytale dinner with an enchanted forest feel and a theatrical Evil Queen. Often a calmer experience than the big buffets.
- **'Ohana:** family-style food and skewers. The Polynesian's exterior work may affect lagoon views.
- **Hollywood & Vine:** Minnie's seasonal dining rotates themes. Check which season is running.

Tips for the best experience

1. **Book at 6:00 AM Eastern on day 60** and have a backup restaurant ready.
2. **Bring an autograph book and a pen.** Characters love to sign.
3. **Tell the server about allergies** at check-in.
4. **Picky eaters do best at buffets,** where kids choose their own food.
5. **Photos:** have your phone out and your camera app ready. Characters pose and play at each table.
6. **Arrive on time** and use the restroom first so you are ready when characters come by.
7. **Pick the meal that matches your day.** Breakfast is cheaper and fits rope drop plans, while dinner often means a slower pace.
8. **Check the roster the week before** in My Disney Experience.

CHAPTER 18

Table-service favorites: honest takes from our visits

These are firsthand notes from our own family meals, with menus and prices checked against Disney's current listings. We include what we liked, what is mixed and what to watch for, because honest details help you plan.

RESTAURANT	WHERE	OUR TAKE	PRICE NOTES
'Ohana	Polynesian Village Resort	Family-style dinner after a day at EPCOT. Skewers, noodles and sides arrive at the table. The Piña CoLAVA (Bacardi Raspberry Rum blended with coconut, pineapple and raspberry purée) is the signature drink.	Dinner $69 adult, $46 child as of October 2026 (it was $67 and $44 at our visit). Exterior refurbishment that began in January 2026 may block Seven Seas Lagoon views.
Roundup Rodeo BBQ	Hollywood Studios, Toy Story Land	Biscuits, street corn, ribs and desserts, plus great air conditioning. Mixed reviews from barbecue purists, but solid value for families.	$52 adult, $32 child lunch and dinner. Its official name is Roundup Rodeo BBQ, though many still say Woody's Roundup BBQ.
Pecos Bill Tall Tale Inn and Cafe	Magic Kingdom, Frontierland	Quick service with plentiful seating, full air conditioning and a fun atmosphere. We enjoyed the Cherry Coke Smoked Pork Sandwich, kids cheese quesadilla, Southwest Caesar Salad and chips with queso.	Menu names change, so verify in the app.
Hollywood & Vine	Hollywood Studios	Character dinner with Minnie and friends. Kids under 3 ate free.	The seasonal Minnie's Summertime Dine began May 21, 2026 with no posted end date. Check the current season.
Nine Dragons Restaurant	EPCOT, China	We sampled appetizers only and loved the drink menu. Treat it as a lighter stop rather than a full-meal verdict.	Check the current menu.
Tusker House	Animal Kingdom	Donald's Dining Safari in an African marketplace setting, with a buffet that mixes African-inspired dishes and familiar American favorites. Pairs well with Kilimanjaro Safaris.	Breakfast $53 adult, $38 child.
Cinderella's Royal Table	Magic Kingdom	Unmatched setting inside the castle with a photo with Cinderella and rotating princesses. A true splurge.	$79 to $92 adult. Book at 6:00 AM on day 60.
Story Book Dining at Artist Point	Wilderness Lodge	A Snow White dinner with a menu stronger than most character meals and a theatrical Evil Queen.	$72 adult, $46 child.

Other first-timer restaurant ideas by park

- **Magic Kingdom:** Be Our Guest (Beast's castle), Liberty Tree Tavern, Skipper Canteen, Cinderella's Royal Table.
- **EPCOT:** Le Cellier, Biergarten, San Angel Inn, Via Napoli, Garden Grill, Akershus.

- **Hollywood Studios:** Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater, 50's Prime Time Cafe, Roundup Rodeo BBQ, Hollywood Brown Derby.
- **Animal Kingdom:** Tusker House, Satu'li Canteen, Tiffins, Yak & Yeti.

Menus and operating periods change, so confirm hours and meal periods before booking.

How to pick a dinner reservation

1. Match the meal to the park day and your hotel location.
2. Put the most expensive meal on the day you have the most energy.
3. Avoid scheduling a table-service meal in the middle of your rope-drop hours.
4. Allow 90 minutes for most table-service meals and longer for character dining.
5. Leave a buffer so a late bus does not cause a missed reservation.

CHAPTER 19

Disney Springs

Disney Springs is Disney's free-to-enter shopping, dining and entertainment district, and it is the best place to spend an evening or a rest day without buying a park ticket. Parking is free, and Disney buses and boats connect it to the resorts.

The basics

- **Admission:** free. Parking is free in the garages.
- **Transportation:** free buses from all Disney resorts, and boats from Port Orleans and Saratoga Springs. There are no direct buses to the theme parks, and since June 28, 2026, you cannot use Disney Springs parking to catch a bus to a park.
- **Hours:** typically late morning to late evening. Check the app for the day you plan to visit.
- **Areas:** The Marketplace, The Landing, Town Center and West Side.

Good for families

NEED	IDEAS
Table-service dinner	Raglan Road, The Boathouse, T-REX Cafe, Chef Art Smith's Homecomin', Morimoto Asia, Jaleo, The Edison
Quick bites	Earl of Sandwich, Blaze Pizza, D-Luxe Burger, Chicken Guy
Sweets	Gideon's Bakehouse cookies (long lines), Salt & Straw ice cream, Amorette's Patisserie, Everglazed donuts
Shopping	World of Disney, the LEGO Store, Disney's Days of Christmas, the Marketplace Co-Op
Rainy-day option	Shops and restaurants are indoors or covered

A few of these names change over time, so check the Disney Springs directory in the app.

Tips

1. **Go on a park-rest day.** A relaxed afternoon here fits between park days.
2. **Reserve dinner** for popular restaurants, especially on weekends and holidays.
3. **Arrive early for Gideon's Bakehouse** or be ready for a line.
4. **Parking:** use the garage closest to your shops and note the level number.
5. **Holiday season:** expect decorations and crowds. Check hours and event schedules.
6. **Staying at Port Orleans or Saratoga Springs?** The boat ride is part of the fun.

CHAPTER 20

Beyond the four parks: water parks, resort pools and more

A water park day or a resort pool afternoon is the best way to rest between big park days, and it often costs far less than another theme park ticket. Disney runs two water parks that take turns closing for refurbishment, so confirm which one is open on your dates.

Water parks

	BLIZZARD BEACH	TYPHOON LAGOON
Theme	A melting ski resort	A storm-ravaged tropical lagoon
Big thrills	Summit Plummet, Slush Gusher, Downhill Double Dipper (all 48 in)	Crush 'n' Gusher, Humunga Kowabunga (48 in)
For little ones	Tike's Peak (48 in and under)	Ketchakiddee Creek (48 in and under)
Relaxing	Lazy river, Melt-Away Bay, chairlift (32 in)	Castaway Creek, Surf Pool waves
Status	Open until Jan 26, 2027	Closed until Jan 27, 2027, then reopens
2026 one-day ticket	About $74 adult, $68 child (peak) and $64 / $58 off-peak	About $79 adult, $69 child (no blockout)

Both parks are scheduled to run together in summer 2027. Disney usually pairs a water park closure with the other opening, so one is almost always available. A **Water Park & Sports** add-on lets you swap in water park visits on a multi-day ticket, and Park Hopper Plus includes water park admission. Resort guests can receive a free water park day on their check-in day on select summer 2027 dates, and Typhoon Lagoon hosts H2O Glow After Hours nights in some summers.

Water park tips: arrive early for shaded chairs, bring reef-safe sunscreen and water shoes, and expect lightning closures. The parks close to new arrivals when they reach capacity on busy days.

Resort pools worth a visit

- **Stormalong Bay** (Yacht Club and Beach Club): a sandy-bottom pool complex with slides and a lazy river
- **Keister Coaster** (BoardWalk Inn): a family-friendly slide
- **Big Blue Pool** (Art of Animation) and **Hippy Dippy Pool** (Pop Century): themed value-resort pools
- Most resorts have kids' splash areas and quiet pools.

Some resort pools restrict access to registered guests, so ask at the front desk.

Other things to do

- **Mini golf:** Disney's Fantasia Gardens and Winter Summerland
- **Boat rentals, fishing and horseback riding:** check availability at Fort Wilderness and the resort recreation pages

- **Resort hopping:** ride the monorail or a boat to see the Grand Floridian, Polynesian, Wilderness Lodge and Animal Kingdom Lodge lobbies
- **Extended Evening Hours:** select nights at one park for Deluxe resort guests
- **Holiday and seasonal parties:** separate-ticket events that offer shorter lines and special treats
- **Disney Springs:** shopping, dining and free fun
- **Tours and dessert parties:** Disney raised prices on these in October 2026. Check the current list if you want an extra splurge.



CHAPTER 21

Seasonal events and festivals

Disney's calendar is packed with festivals and parties, and the right event can make a trip, but separate-ticket parties also change park hours and entertainment. Dates below were confirmed as of Nov 9, 2026 unless noted.

EVENT	WHERE	DATES	COST AND NOTES
EPCOT International Food & Wine Festival	EPCOT	Aug 27 to Nov 21, 2026	Included with admission. Food and drink booths.
Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party	Magic Kingdom	Select nights through Nov 1, 2026	Separate ticket. Ended for 2026.
Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party	Magic Kingdom	25 select nights, Nov 8 to Dec 22, 2026	Separate ticket, about $189 to $229 per person, children 3 to 9 save $10. Some nights sell out.
Disney Jollywood Nights	Hollywood Studios	Nov 7, 2026 to Jan 5, 2027	Separate ticket from about $169. Relaxed pace, a bit more grown-up.
EPCOT International Festival of the Holidays	EPCOT	Nov 27 to Dec 30, 2026	Included with admission. Candlelight Processional with a live orchestra and choir.
Holiday season at the parks	All	Nov 13, 2026 to Jan 6, 2027	Decorations, the Cosmic Rewind holiday track list, and Santa's Holiday Grove at Animal Kingdom
EPCOT International Festival of the Arts	EPCOT	Jan 15 to Mar 1, 2027	Included with admission. Food studios and a Broadway concert series.
EPCOT International Flower & Garden Festival	EPCOT	Mar 10 to May 31, 2027	Topiaries, gardens and outdoor kitchens
Cool Kid Summer	All	May 26 to Sept 8 in 2026	2027 dates not announced
EPCOT Food & Wine Festival 2027	EPCOT	Typically late Aug to Nov	2027 dates not yet announced

Party night rules

- A separate ticket is required for Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party, Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party and Jollywood Nights.
- On party nights, Magic Kingdom's day guests may have to leave early, and the regular parade and fireworks do not run. A party parade replaces Disney Starlight.
- Tickets for parties go on sale to resort guests before the public.
- Check party nights before you pick a Magic Kingdom day.

EPCOT during the holidays

EPCOT closes earlier than usual during the Festival of the Holidays in 2026, with Candlelight Processional and Luminous showtimes moved up. Check hours in My Disney Experience.

Hurricane season

June 1 through November 30. If you travel in this window, buy flexible reservations and travel insurance and watch Disney's weather policy.

Choosing a season

YOU WANT	GO DURING
Lowest crowds and prices	September, early January, late April to mid May
Holiday decorations	After Thanksgiving through mid December
Best weather	January to April
Food festivals	Festival of the Arts, Flower & Garden, Food & Wine
Summer fun with water parks	June to August, with a midday break

CHAPTER 22

Sample itineraries for 2, 3, 5 and 7 days

The best itinerary puts your family's top priorities first each morning, a long midday break in the middle and a relaxed evening at the end. Use these as templates and swap parks to match your kids' ages. They assume one park per day, no Park Hopper and resort guests using Early Theme Park Entry.

How to build any day

1. **Morning (rope drop):** hit the one or two rides with the longest waits.
2. **Late morning:** shows, lighter attractions and a character meet.
3. **Midday break:** lunch in air conditioning, then a nap, pool or hotel rest.
4. **Afternoon:** gentle rides and snacks.
5. **Evening:** a sit-down dinner, one more ride and the nighttime show.

2 days

DAY	PARK	PLAN
1	Magic Kingdom	Rope drop Seven Dwarfs Mine Train or Peter Pan's Flight. Fantasyland rides, lunch, break. Evening: Haunted Mansion, Pirates, fireworks.
2	EPCOT or Hollywood Studios	EPCOT: Frozen, Remy, Test Track, then World Showcase dinner. Hollywood Studios: Toy Story Land, Runaway Railway, Star Tours.

3 days

DAY	PARK	PLAN
1	Magic Kingdom	Classic rides and fireworks
2	EPCOT	Rides, then a World Showcase dinner and Luminous
3	Hollywood Studios or Animal Kingdom	Star Wars and Toy Story, or safari and Pandora with an afternoon off

5 days (recommended for first timers)

DAY	PARK	MORNING	MIDDAY AND EVENING
1	Magic Kingdom	Rope drop Fantasyland	Break, then evening rides and fireworks
2	EPCOT	Cosmic Rewind or Remy at rope drop	Soarin', Frozen, World Showcase dinner
3	Rest day	Sleep in, pool or water park	Disney Springs or resort hopping
4	Hollywood Studios	Rise of the Resistance or Slinky Dog Dash first	Toy Story Land, Tower of Terror, Fantasmic!
5	Animal Kingdom	Kilimanjaro Safaris first, then Pandora	Everest, shows, early afternoon exit

7 days

DAY	PLAN
1	Magic Kingdom
2	EPCOT
3	Pool, water park or Disney Springs rest day
4	Hollywood Studios
5	Animal Kingdom
6	Return to your family's favorite park for rides you missed
7	Character meal, resort touring and a relaxed departure

Itinerary tips

- Put a character breakfast on the same day as a park you already planned.
- Do your most intense day first or when everyone is fresh, not at the end of a long trip.
- Do not schedule dinner right after a long midday break unless the family is rested.
- Keep one flexible hour for rain, long lines or meltdowns.
- Save a night for fireworks and another for a quiet dinner.

CHAPTER 23

Special situations: babies, toddlers, teens, rain, heat and accessibility

Most families have at least one wrinkle, such as a baby, a nervous rider, a rainy afternoon or a disability, and each has a known workaround at Disney World.

Babies and toddlers

- **Tickets and meals:** children under 3 do not need a ticket, and they usually eat free at buffets.
- **Strollers:** bring your own or rent one. Disney sets a maximum stroller size, so check the current limits.
- **Baby Care Centers:** each park has one with nursing rooms and supplies.
- **Rider Switch:** lets parents take turns on rides without a second wait.
- **Buses:** car seats are not required on Disney buses, and strollers must be folded.
- **Naps:** plan an afternoon break in the hotel or a quiet spot.
- **Best attractions:** Peter Pan's Flight, it's a small world, Winnie the Pooh, Dumbo, Carrousel, Under the Sea, Frozen Ever After, Turtle Talk with Crush, Toy Story Mania, Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway, Kilimanjaro Safaris.
- **Pack:** formula or baby food, extra clothes, wipes, a sun hat, a portable fan.

Preschoolers and young kids

- Use the height ladder: 32, 35, 38 and 40 inches unlock the most.
- Keep days short, and use Early Theme Park Entry to ride more before heat and crowds.
- Pick one big meal and two small ones, and plan snacks.
- Character meals are a great anchor for this age group.

Teens and tweens

- Prioritize thrill rides: TRON, Space Mountain, Cosmic Rewind, Tower of Terror, Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, Rise of the Resistance, Expedition Everest, Flight of Passage.
- Hollywood Studios and EPCOT are favorites for this age.
- Try festival foods at EPCOT, Savi's Workshop in Galaxy's Edge and party nights for shorter lines.
- Give teens a say in the day-by-day plan, and let them pick one big ride and one meal.

Rain

1. **Pack ponchos** from home. They cost far less than park ponchos.
2. **Do not leave the park too early.** Florida storms often pass in under an hour.
3. **Move indoors:** shows such as Mickey's PhilharMagic, Enchanted Tiki Room, Hall of Presidents and Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage, plus air-conditioned restaurants and shops.
4. **Outdoor rides close for lightning,** and the Skyliner stops during storms.

5. **Protect phones** with zip bags and carry a dry-clothes change for young kids.
6. **After the storm:** lines shorten and the air cools, so it is a great time to ride.

Heat

- Bring sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, cooling towels and small fans.
- Refill water bottles at fountains and drink before you are thirsty.
- Do your outdoor rides early or late and use the midday for air-conditioned shows and meals.
- Watch children for flushed skin, headache, nausea or dizziness, and rest in shade.

Accessibility and the Disability Access Service (DAS)

- **DAS** is an accommodation for guests who cannot tolerate a conventional queue due to a disability, with a focus on developmental disabilities such as autism. It is not a front-of-line pass. It works like a return time.
- **How to get it:** register in My Disney Experience (as early as 60 days before your visit) and complete a video call with a Cast Member to decide eligibility.
- **Who can use it:** the registered guest plus up to three others, for a maximum of four per return time.
- **How long it lasts:** up to one year after approval, according to Disney's recent updates.
- **Rules change often.** DAS has changed several times since 2024, so read Disney's current DAS page.
- **Other accommodations:** Disney offers wheelchair and ECV rentals, ride accessibility information, captioning and assistive devices, sensory guides and service animal policies. Ask at Guest Relations in any park.
- **Free parking and transport:** guests with disabilities can access complimentary self-parking and accessible transportation as listed by Disney.

First aid and lost children

Every park has first aid. If a child gets separated from you, tell the nearest Cast Member right away, and give your kids a phone number written on a wristband or card.

CHAPTER 24

Packing list

The single most important item is a pair of broken-in walking shoes, and the next most important are a poncho, sunscreen, a portable charger and basic medicine. Families routinely walk 8 to 12 miles a day, and a few smart items prevent the most common trip-ruining problems.

Footwear and clothing

- ☐ Broken-in sneakers for every family member, worn for several full days before the trip
- ☐ An extra pair of comfortable shoes for each child
- ☐ Moisture-wicking socks and moleskin or blister bandages
- ☐ Sandals or flip-flops for the pool only
- ☐ 2 to 3 light, breathable outfits per person for a five-day trip, plus one extra for kids
- ☐ Swimsuits and a quick-dry towel
- ☐ A light jacket or layers for winter mornings and evenings, and for air-conditioned restaurants
- ☐ Hats and sunglasses
- ☐ Pajamas and sleepwear

Weather gear

- ☐ Ponchos for everyone (cheaper from home than in the parks)
- ☐ Sunscreen and lip balm with SPF
- ☐ Cooling towels and a small clip-on or handheld fan
- ☐ Refillable water bottles
- ☐ Zip-top bags to protect phones and snacks from rain

Health and comfort

- ☐ Pain and fever reducers such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen
- ☐ Bandages, blister care and antiseptic wipes
- ☐ Motion sickness remedies for kids and adults
- ☐ Allergy medicine and any prescriptions in their original containers
- ☐ Hand sanitizer, tissues and wet wipes
- ☐ A small first-aid kit
- ☐ Earplugs or ear defenders for noise-sensitive kids at fireworks and shows

Tech and documents

- ☐ Portable battery pack and charging cables

- [ ] Phone with My Disney Experience installed and tickets linked
- [ ] A waterproof phone pouch or lanyard
- [ ] Photo ID and your hotel confirmation
- [ ] Screenshots of dining and Lightning Lane reservations

Park bag essentials

- [ ] A light backpack or sling
- [ ] Snacks that travel well
- [ ] A small towel for wet seats and spills
- [ ] An autograph book and a pen for characters
- [ ] A change of clothes for young kids
- [ ] Cash or a card for lockers and tips

For babies and toddlers

- [ ] A compact stroller that meets Disney's size limits
- [ ] Diapers, wipes, formula, baby food and bottles
- [ ] Pacifiers, comfort items and a lightweight blanket
- [ ] A carrier for tired toddlers
- [ ] Sun hats and shade covers

Leave at home

- Heavy DSLR camera bags. Modern phones take excellent photos and cameras are heavy all day.
- Too many outfits. Over-packing makes for a heavy suitcase.
- Expensive jewelry that you will take off for rides and water.
- Anything on Disney's prohibited items list. Check disneyworld.com for current rules on bags, coolers, glass containers and other restricted items before you pack.

CHAPTER 25

Disney movie watch list by park

Watching a handful of the right movies before your trip makes rides, restaurants and characters feel like old friends, and Disney+ has nearly all of them. You do not need to watch everything: go deep on the films tied to your family's most anticipated attractions.

Magic Kingdom

ATTRACTION OR RESTAURANT	SOURCE FILM OR SHOW
Seven Dwarfs Mine Train	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)
Peter Pan's Flight	Peter Pan (1953)
The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	Winnie the Pooh films and shorts
Under the Sea: Journey of the Little Mermaid	The Little Mermaid (1989)
Enchanted Tales with Belle, Be Our Guest	Beauty and the Beast (1991)
Cinderella's Royal Table, Prince Charming Regal Carrousel	Cinderella (1950)
Dumbo the Flying Elephant	Dumbo (1941)
Mad Tea Party	Alice in Wonderland (1951)
The Magic Carpets of Aladdin	Aladdin (1992)
Tiana's Bayou Adventure	The Princess and the Frog (2009)
Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin	Toy Story (1995)
Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor	Monsters, Inc. (2001)
TRON Lightcycle / Run	TRON: Legacy (2010)
Pirates of the Caribbean	The Pirates of the Caribbean films, which were inspired by the ride
Haunted Mansion, Jungle Cruise, Space Mountain, Big Thunder	Original attractions with no source film
Villains Land (coming)	Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and other villain stories
Piston Peak (coming)	Cars (2006)

EPCOT

ATTRACTION	SOURCE FILM
Frozen Ever After, Akershus	Frozen (2013) and princess films
Remy's Ratatouille Adventure	Ratatouille (2007)
Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	Guardians of the Galaxy (2014)
The Seas with Nemo & Friends, Turtle Talk with Crush	Finding Nemo (2003)

ATTRACTION	SOURCE FILM
Gran Fiesta Tour	The Three Caballeros (1944)
Journey into Imagination with Figment	Original characters Figment and, soon, Dreamfinder

Hollywood Studios

ATTRACTION	SOURCE FILM
Slinky Dog Dash, Toy Story Mania, Alien Swirling Saucers	Toy Story films
Rise of the Resistance, Smugglers Run, Galaxy's Edge	The Star Wars sequel trilogy and the wider saga
Star Tours	The Star Wars saga
Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway	Classic Mickey Mouse shorts
Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular	Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring the Muppets	The Muppets films and shows
The Little Mermaid, Frozen Sing-Along, Beauty and the Beast live shows	Their source films
Tower of Terror	The Twilight Zone (TV series)
Monstropolis (coming)	Monsters, Inc.

Animal Kingdom

ATTRACTION	SOURCE FILM OR SHOW
Avatar Flight of Passage, Na'vi River Journey	Avatar (2009)
Festival of the Lion King	The Lion King (1994)
Zootopia: Better Zoogether	Zootopia (2016)
Finding Nemo show	Finding Nemo and Finding Dory
Bluey's Wild World	Bluey (series on Disney+)
Tropical Americas (coming)	Encanto (2021) and the Indiana Jones films
Kilimanjaro Safaris, Expedition Everest	Original attractions

What to watch by age

- **Under 7:** Frozen, The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Toy Story, Finding Nemo, Ratatouille, The Princess and the Frog
- **Ages 7 to 12:** add the Star Wars sequel trilogy, Guardians of the Galaxy and TRON: Legacy, plus Bluey and Zootopia for younger siblings

- **Teens:** the full Star Wars saga, the Guardians trilogy, Avatar, and Hocus Pocus or The Nightmare Before Christmas if you visit during Halloween season

Make it a pre-trip tradition

Build a Disney+ playlist by park, set a family movie night each week before your trip and let each child pick one film that matches the ride they are most excited about.



CHAPTER 26

First-timer mistakes to avoid

The most expensive first-timer mistakes are skipping reservations, overbooking each day and paying for things you will not use. Here are the fifteen we see most often.

1. **Missing the 60-day dining window.** The best character meals are gone within minutes.
2. **Trying to see everything.** Pick five must-dos per park and call the rest a bonus.
3. **Wearing new shoes.** Blisters end days early.
4. **Not measuring kids first.** A child who misses a height requirement at the front of the line is heartbreaking.
5. **Buying Park Hopper by default.** One park per day is plenty for most first visits.
6. **Ignoring the refurbishment calendar.** Rides, restaurants, pools and the Skyliner close.
7. **Booking a Skyliner resort during the January closure.** Buses replace it, and trips take longer.
8. **Skipping the midday break.** Overtired kids melt down in the afternoon, so rest.
9. **Forgetting to charge phones.** Your tickets, maps and orders all live on your phone.
10. **Picking the wrong ticket dates.** Prices swing by $100 or more per ticket across dates.
11. **Assuming the dining plan saves money.** Run the numbers first.
12. **Choosing a Magic Kingdom day on a party night.** The park may close early to day guests and shows are replaced.
13. **Buying Lightning Lane without a plan.** Choose your first selection for the earliest return time.
14. **Waiting on Disability Access Service registration.** Do it before you travel.
15. **Leaving ponchos, sunscreen and snacks at home.** Park prices add up fast.

A few more small wins

- Arrive at the gate early. The first hour has the shortest lines.
- Eat before you are hungry and bring snacks.
- Take photos early in the day and then put the phone away.
- Tell every child where to go if you get separated.

CHAPTER 27

Frequently asked questions

How many days do I need? Four to five park days plus a rest day is ideal for a first visit. A three-day trip works with tighter planning.

What is the best park for a first timer? Magic Kingdom, especially with children under 10.

When do dining reservations open? 60 days before your date at 6:00 AM Eastern. Resort guests can book their whole stay starting 60 days before check-in.

When does Lightning Lane go on sale? 7 days ahead at 7:00 AM Eastern for resort guests and 3 days ahead for others.

Do kids under 3 need a ticket? No. Children under 3 are free, and they usually eat free at buffets.

Do I need a Park Hopper? Usually not on a first visit. It adds $87 or more per ticket on a low-priced day.

Is Lightning Lane worth it? On your busiest day or a short trip, often yes. On low-crowd days, usually no.

Can I bring food and water? Yes, snacks and sealed water are allowed. Glass containers are not. Check Disney's current rules for coolers and bags.

Do I need a rental car if I stay on-site? No. Disney transportation is free.

How do I get from the airport? Disney's free airport shuttle ended in 2022. Options are rideshare, a rental car, or a private or shared shuttle service.

Is parking free? For resort guests, yes (standard). Day guests pay $35 per day at the parks. Disney Springs parking is free.

What is Early Theme Park Entry? Resort guests can enter any park 30 minutes before opening every day of their stay.

What are Extended Evening Hours? Select nights at one park for Deluxe and select partner hotel guests, included with admission.

Is the dining plan worth it? Often no, unless you plan multiple character or signature meals. Price your actual plans.

What is the best time of year? September, early January, and late April to mid May for lower crowds and prices.

How much walking will we do? About 8 to 12 miles a day.

What if it rains? Wear a poncho, ride indoor attractions, eat in air conditioning and wait it out. Rain often passes within an hour.

Are the rides scary? Many are gentle. A few, like Tower of Terror, Space Mountain and TRON, are intense. See the thrill table.

What is Rider Switch? One adult rides while another waits with a child who cannot ride, then they swap without waiting again.

What are party nights? Separate-ticket events at Magic Kingdom and Hollywood Studios that change hours and entertainment.

Is it OK to skip character meals? Yes. You can meet characters in the parks without a meal.

Can I stay off-site and still have a great trip? Yes. Kissimmee homes are a popular value for groups, but you will give up early entry, free parking and free transportation.

What if a ride closes? Check the app's wait times, ask a Cast Member, and have a backup in your itinerary.

Disney lingo

TERM	MEANING
ADR	Advance dining reservation
MDX	My Disney Experience app
LL, LLMP, LLSP, LLPP	Lightning Lane, Multi Pass, Single Pass, Premier Pass
ETE	Early Theme Park Entry
EEH	Extended Evening Hours
Rope drop	Arriving before the park opens to ride first
QS, TS	Quick service, table service
DAS	Disability Access Service
DVC	Disney Vacation Club
ECV	Electric convenience vehicle
TTC	Transportation and Ticket Center
MK, EP, HS, AK	The four parks
Hard-ticket event	A party that needs a separate ticket
Resort ID	MagicBand or Key to the World card

CHAPTER 28

Sources and as-of notes

This guide reflects prices, hours and attraction status as of November 9, 2026. Disney changes prices by date and season, so verify current rates, hours and policies on disneyworld.com or in My Disney Experience before you book. Storybook Stays is not affiliated with Disney.

Pages opened in full

- Lightning Lanes at Disney World Guide, Disney Tourist Blog
- 11 Disney World Big New Ride Announcements, Mickey Visit (D23 2026)
- Disney World Increases Prices at Character Dining, Prix Fixe, and Buffet Restaurants, BlogMickey (Oct 9, 2026)

Other pages consulted through search results

- Tickets: Disney Tourist Blog 2027 ticket prices, DisneyBlog 2027 peak ticket prices, AllEars 2027 ticket prices
- Annual passes: BlogMickey annual pass increase, Oct 2026
- Dining plan: Disney Tourist Blog Deluxe Dining Plan 2027, AllEars 2027 dining plan prices
- Parking: Disney Tourist Blog parking guide, Disney Fanatic parking update
- Resort perks: Mickey Visit 2027 resort hotel perks, WDWMagic Extended Evening Hours
- Closures and refurbishments: WDWMagic Skyliner 2027 closure, Mickey Visit on the Tiana's Bayou Adventure reopening date, WDWinfo closures in November 2026, Disney Parks Nerds Animal Kingdom closures
- Holiday events: WDWMagic holiday season dates, Disney Tourist Blog Christmas 2026
- EPCOT festivals: Resorts Gal festival dates, Disney Park Nerds festival calendar
- Water parks: Disney Tourist Blog water park dates
- Disability Access Service: Disney Tourist Blog DAS FAQ, Inside the Magic DAS update
- Height requirements: Notes from Neverland, WDW Magazine

How we handled uncertain items

- **Budget table:** these are our own planning estimates built from the prices above, not quotes.
- **Room rates:** vary widely by date. Ranges are snapshots from recent reports.
- **Mission: SPACE height:** sources disagree between 40 and 44 inches. Confirm in the app.
- **Character rosters and menus:** rotate, so verify before you book.
- **Storey Lake disclosure:** we own a vacation rental in the Storey Lake community in Kissimmee.
- **Our firsthand notes:** 'Ohana, Roundup Rodeo BBQ, Pecos Bill, Hollywood & Vine and Nine Dragons are from our own visits.

Written by Eric Thomas for Storybook Stays (stayatstorybook.com).

Wishing you an enchanted day!

Welcome to your cottage away from home.

This guide is an independent planning resource from Storybook Stays and is not affiliated with, authorized by, or endorsed by The Walt Disney Company. Prices, hours, closures and attraction details change often, so confirm everything with Disney before you book. Information current as of November 9, 2026.