FLORIDIANA

MEMORY MAKERS

WITH A LITTLE PARENTAL PREMEDITATION, THE DISNEY MAGIC CAN TRANSCEND GENERATIONS

BY MARY MURRAY



COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS ORLANDO

THE FOUR SEASONS RESORT ORLANDO OFFERS FREE SHUTTLE SERVICE TO DISNEY THEME PARKS (INCLUDING MAGIC KINGDOM), BREAKFAST WITH GOOFY AND HIS PALS, AND ROOMS WITH BALCONY VIEWS OF THE RESORT'S WATER PARK AND DISNEY FIREWORKS.



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Walt Disney World was a cornerstone of my childhood. My family became annual passholders during the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration and visited regularly through the late 2000s. The "Remember the Magic" parade tune still lives rent-free in my brain—as do echoes of my mom whispering, "Mickey Mouse is waiting," as she woke us up for what was destined to be a magical day.

I'm the mom now, and when it came time for my kids' first visit, I felt overwhelmed by how much the Disney experience has changed in recent years. Would that same magic still exist amid the battle for Lightning Lanes, the hunt for TikTok-famous snacks, and the challenge of sneaking in a nap for my toddler?

I'm happy to report that the magic is very much alive—with the appropriate planning. That starts with choosing the right hotel for your family. For us, that was the Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort.

As the name suggests, this AAA Five Diamond resort is on Disney property and offers such conveniences as complimentary park shuttles and early entry. There's also magic aplenty. Guests can attend Breakfast with Goofy and His Pals, watch Magic Kingdom and Epcot fireworks from their balconies, and book princess makeovers at the spa. Pair all that with exceptional dining at Ravello, known for its handmade pastas and wood-fire pizzas, and Capa, a Michelin-starred steak house with Spanish flair, to arrive at a destination the whole family can get behind.



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A key part of any Disney vacation with young kids is swimming at your hotel. The Four Seasons Orlando doesn't just have a pool—it has a full-on water park with a lazy river, two slides, and a splash zone. My 5-year-old son took countless turns down the slides and my 2-year-old daughter gleefully splashed nearby, all while my husband and I sipped drinks from The Lakehouse restaurant and watched from lounge chairs.

Since opening in 1971, Walt Disney World has grown to four theme parks and two water parks. While it's tempting to try to do it all, you'll have greater success if you're realistic about what your kids can handle. We opted for a shorter trip, with full days at Magic Kingdom and Animal Kingdom (a request from my tiger-obsessed son).

Magic Kingdom is essential for first-timers. Is there anything more magical than strolling along Main Street, U.S.A. toward Cinderella's Castle, the scent of popcorn in the air? We rope-dropped the park and rode The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh before redeeming Lightning Lanes for Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. Other highlights? Parent-swapping for Tron Lightcycle Run, watching the updated Country Bear Musical Jamboree, cooling off with Dole Whips in Adventureland, and checking out the refreshed theming at Tiana's Bayou Adventure.

But the best part of the day came at the very end, after we'd returned to the Four Seasons and ordered room service. Right before my son dug into his mac and cheese, he looked at me and my husband and said: "Aren't we lucky?"

That was the most magical moment of all. *(fourseasons.com/orlando, disneyworld.disney.go.com)*



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