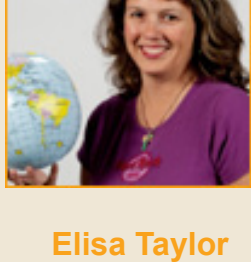




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**Elisa Taylor**

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## The Travel Tip

The weather in Orlando is volatile in winter and can be warm one day and sunny and very chilly the next. Make sure you bring a woolen cap, gloves and scarf. When you're out on the sunny but chilly day, it's still quite cold and bundled up means comfort and happiness.

## May Your New Year be Filled with Adventures!

Welcome travel enthusiasts to this month's edition of Passages. We hope your holiday travels have gone well, and you were not one of the unlucky ones who got stuck in the snowstorms in various parts of the country. Holiday travel can be fraught with unexpected delays with the winter weather — you have to deal with fog, rain and snow that can delay or cancel flights. We always recommend you carry an overnight bag that includes sundries and a toothbrush and toothpaste should you get trapped for many hours in an airport and need to freshen up. You can't avoid unforeseen travel problems, but you can be prepared for them.

This issue is all about [Walt Disney World Resort](#). One of our staff members spent the holidays at the four theme parks in Orlando, Florida gathering all of the insider tips and tricks to make your next Disney World trip a winner. We also have a lot of experience with [Disneyland](#), so we thought this was the perfect opportunity to point out the subtle and sometimes obvious differences. Because size does not always make the experience better just different, so we want you to have all of the information to help your decision-making process of which resort is right for you. Since there is so much to say about the parks, this issue will be a little longer than normal. We don't want to scrimp on valuable details.

Sincerely,

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## The Walt Disney World Resort Deluxe Feature

Simple logistics tell you a lot about Disney World, and the first fact is that Walt Disney back in the early '60s shortly before his passing in 1966, acquired 300,000 acres that would soon comprise the land that now houses the four major theme parks — Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom (in order of each park's opening). This land represents approximately the same acreage as the city of San Francisco — so our first words of advice, you should plan on walking and covering a lot of distance over the course of your stay. Yes, bus, Disney Monorail and ferry systems connect all of the parks and resorts, but you still have to walk the rest of the way. This information doesn't suggest you don't walk a lot in Disneyland either — you do, but you will have even more land to cover, because you also have twice the theme parks to explore.

Before we describe the individual parks, here are some important recommendations on lodging and food. All Disney resorts are nice, so it's really a question of, "How nice?" We stayed at Coronado Springs Resort, which was probably a two-and-a-half perhaps three-star resort. It had a fun Mayan ruins area in the swimming pool for the kids all lit up at night. The rooms were perhaps a little small overall, but adequate, as you're not going to be in your room that much. Next time, though, we would choose the Grand Floridian as more our families' taste and style. It's beyond gorgeous with a grand southern mansion architectural style and a four-star resort.

We also strongly recommend the Deluxe Dining Package. You are given a central card that also acts as your Park Hopper and dining pass. You can eat at the dining plan's designated Disney restaurants, which offers a vast choice of fine-to-mid-level restaurants and snack bars. You will be shocked at the value you receive. You could easily spend \$500 on a single meal when you spent only \$800 (that cost varies depending on your selected package) for the entire plan — and that is just one meal that includes appetizers, main course and dessert for the entire family. Believe it or not, we left with approximately 40 extra points on our plan. So, if you have the Deluxe Plan, please don't hold back and eat to your stomach's content. You should plan to leave very full and satisfied by your dining experiences. And for the most part, the food is excellent.

### Magic Kingdom

Let's start with Disneyland's sister park, the Magic Kingdom. First thing you will notice is that Christmas lights and decorations pale in comparison to Disneyland, which seems to go all out on its Christmas lighting and magnificent tree placed center in Town Square that acts as the entrance to Main Street. Now this decision maybe because Hollywood Studios, the sister park to Disney's California Adventure, contains the Osborne Family Street of Lights, which (see photo) is absolutely incredible. Now we don't want to express any negativity, because it's all relative, because when it gets down to it, all things related to Disney and Christmas are fantastic.

Here is the significant difference between the Magic Kingdom and Disneyland — and it's this sense of intimacy (not customer service but a sense of place). You get the impression that by the time Disney built the Magic Kingdom, the Imagineers had learned how to move people effectively through the parks vs. Disneyland where you're confined to a smaller space. For example, at Disneyland you can watch the bakers bake through the glass and the peppermint candy canes pulled by hand, which you can later purchase a ticket to get your homemade candy cane — this service is not available in the Magic Kingdom. So, it's smaller touches the Magic Kingdom misses. Again, it's relative and not a negative just a difference.

On the opposite extreme, you have so much more room to move around within the park. You are shepherded through the crowds and lines more effectively. You are always moving and doing with ease - even during the heavy Christmas traffic, and that can be a real plus for those who don't enjoy the feeling of being packed together with strangers. Outside the parks, same thing - Disney has truly mastered moving large numbers of people in, out and around the parks so it's impressive what they do in an organized fashion.

Major theme park differences are the Haunted House does not convert to the Tim Burton's "Nightmare Before Christmas"; Pirates of the Caribbean is not set in the French Quarter, and therefore, you do not take your boat ride through the Bayou but rather down straight into the Pirate's Cove; in Tomorrow Land, the People Mover still exists and it's surprisingly fun as it takes you in and out of Space Mountain; in Fantasy Land, it's a Small World attraction is not set outside nor is it decorated inside with Christmas exhibits; Cinderella's castle is designed and built differently and looks very unique from its predecessor; and smaller exhibits such as Winnie the Pooh is a longer, more interesting version with a fascinating touch-screen honey fall where children can smear the honey about with their hands.

There is no Matterhorn — this roller-coaster ride has been located in the Animal Kingdom as Mount Everest, and it's pretty spectacular with the hairy hand of the Yeti ready to capture you in his mighty grip (scary for all ages). The Indiana Jones ride doesn't exist, but a similar Dinosaur ride does reside over in the Animal Kingdom where an equally scary T-Rex comes out with his mouth open and big teeth exposed ... duck or he'll eat you. The new Finding Nemo submarine ride is located in Epcot, and it's not a submarine at all. The Nemo attraction in Epcot located in Future World offers a similar projection-screen experience only travelers hop into seashells much like the Haunted House conveyor system where they are routed through the projection screen story where at the story's conclusion the projections overlap real aquariums. Upstairs is an actual aquarium exhibit complete with a dolphin show.

Other attractions are similar with minor differences. Big Thunder Mountain Railroad is longer with more animatronics and exhibits to glance at in mere seconds as you thunder past in your railroad car. Br'er Rabbit still makes an appearance at Splash Mountain, but the early part of the animatronics displays are different scenes from the story, but rest assured you still take the rapid and steep trip down the waterfall in the front. Tom Sawyer island is all there but it's not a manmade lake it sits in the middle of, but rather an actual pre-existing water body that Disney worked around - and there is a lot of standing water and lakes all over the parks in general. The Lincoln Exhibit is replaced with all the presidents in history with a new President Barack Obama speech at the end.

### Epcot

Next up is the great surprise — Epcot. Friends told us Epcot wasn't that exciting so we had low expectations going in. Turns out, interesting and entertaining to one person is, of course relative, because we adored Epcot. In fact, Epcot was our favorite theme park along with Hollywood Studios coming in a close second.

At Epcot, you walk right into Future World where that world-famous globe with concrete monuments in front of it with thousands of tiny pictures of contributors sitting in front. The steel globe is an attraction that takes riders from their past into their future. Riders slowly rise up to the top of the globe through various exhibits about communication and then ride backward with a unique computer program where you design your future world. It was an unexpected pleasure. Other rides to enjoy include the Three Caballeros located in Mexico; Maelstrom located in Norway; and the aforementioned Finding Nemo where we enjoyed the three seagulls declaring, "Mine! Mine! Mine!" We purchased a sweatshirt with the gulls and the phrase, which received many fun comments.

In our opinion, the best things about Epcot were the various countries located on the backside curve of the park. Young children will not be as enthralled as adults, so maybe save this for date night. Try and make dinner reservations well in advance for any restaurants located within the country of your choice (Germany's buffet looked incredible), because it's nearly impossible to get once you're in the park. Don't despair, though, if you cannot get a reservation, because the quick-service foods are four-star treats. We enjoyed Germany's and France's foods the most. Respectively Germany sold perfectly spiced bratwurst, savory sauerkraut and buttery Bavarian pretzels. Now follow that up with France's ham/turkey and cheese sandwich on a soft baguette and a famous pastry such as an authentic Napoleon — you can't lose.

### Hollywood Studios

The sister park to Disney's California Adventure, Hollywood Studios' attractions are obviously derived from movies and movie sets. This park had the absolutely amazing Christmas decorations with the aforementioned Osborne Street of Lights with over a million "dancing" lights adorning the buildings of back-lot New York City and San Francisco. Make sure you go at night to watch the light display go off and then enjoy the snow showers afterward.

Our favorite part of Hollywood Studios is the Ariel show, which the little girls love. An abbreviated story of the Little Mermaid is acted out. The story of Walt Disney is shown in the same area, and for Disney buffs, the museum tour is interesting and fascinating to see how Walt Disney with some support from his brother Roy built the magical world of Disney. Other attractions we enjoyed included: Toy Story Mania, which is identical to the one in California; Grauman's Chinese Theatre that takes you through an animatronics exhibition of old Hollywood glamour and stars; and Disney's Studio back-lot tour where a special effects exhibition takes place.

We had two favorites in this park. We definitely enjoyed the Indiana Jones Stunt Show. Make sure you watch it at night to get the full effect of the fireworks. We also loved Lights, Motor, Action, which is a rip-roaring car stunt show that features impressive car jumps, motorcycle stunts, and water-sports action. It's loud, fun and spectacular.

### Animal Kingdom

Now before we review this park, we admit we were there on a cold, dreary day. Park goers told us that the Animal Kingdom is the coldest and hottest park in the resort. All bundled up in hat, gloves and warm coats, we headed out, because most of the Animal Kingdom features outdoor exhibits. Check the weather and dress appropriately, you will be affected.

The newest park in Disney World, the Animal Kingdom's crown jewel is the Mount Everest roller coaster, which was a scary, delightful surprise. Not your usual coaster, it takes you up the steep hill ... up, up, up, until you hit an unexpected end and then backwards you fly until you turn back around to face your scary neighbor, the Yeti, reaching gigantic hairy arm down to scoop you up. Follow up your Yeti encounter with a ride through the Mount Kilimanjaro Safari into the real African grasslands where you encounter giraffe grazing high treetops, wildebeest lounging in the middle of the grasslands or lions asleep on the rock tops. The safari takes about 30 minutes to drive through, so sit back and take a load off your likely tired, sore feet.

We have so much more we could say, so watch the blog for more details. If you would like to experience the wonders of Walt Disney World — and especially at Christmas — make your reservations well in advance. You can start by contacting Elisa Taylor at [etaylor@worldlesstraveled.com](mailto:etaylor@worldlesstraveled.com).



Cinderella's world-famous magical castle.



Aladdin's ride in Adventure Land.



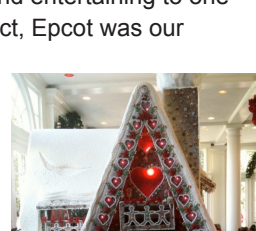
Osborne Street of Lights located in Hollywood Studios.



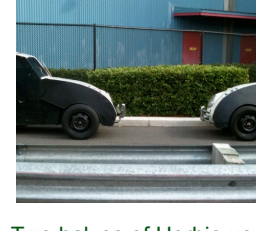
Entrance to the Pirates of the Caribbean.



The Haunted Mansion



Thousands of pounds of sugar, eggs, and flour went into the creation of this life-size gingerbread house located in Epcot.



Two halves of Herbie used for the stunt car exhibition in Hollywood Studios.