



The Ultimate Guide to Disneyland

It's not about doing everything — it's about doing the **right things in the right order**. With a plan and a few insider tricks, you can ride more, spend less, avoid meltdowns, and actually enjoy your day. This is your start-to-finish game plan for exploring Disneyland the smart way.



Before You Even Walk In

Start your day **before** you enter the park — this is where most people fall behind.



Download the App

Check wait times, mobile order food, book Lightning Lane rides, and find dining reservations. Download it a few days ahead — it's your biggest time saver.



Getting There

Take the far right lane, park at Pixar Pals, photograph your spot, and walk through Downtown Disney to skip tram lines.



Breakfast

Stop at Beignets Expressed in Downtown Disney — fresh, made-to-order beignets. Try the Fruity Pebbles flavor. Cheaper and better than park options.



Monorail Hack

Enter via the Monorail from Downtown Disney — scan your ticket, skip front gate crowds, and start planning rides early.



First 3 Hours = Everything

Arrive at **rope drop** (park opening) for the shortest lines of the day. You can knock out 3–5 rides quickly while kids are fresh and in the best mood.



With Toddlers — Start in Fantasyland

- Peter Pan — do this FIRST, lines get crazy fast
- Dumbo — great to start, no wait early
- Alice in Wonderland
- Storybook Land Canal Boats — ask for the front seat!
- "it's a small world" — easy and relaxing



With Big Kids — Start with Thrill Rides

- Space Mountain
- Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance
- Indiana Jones Adventure

These rides get LONG waits fast — morning is your best shot. Use this time before crowds build and Lightning Lanes fill up.



How to Move Through the Park

If you take one tip from this guide, make it this: **Do NOT jump all over the park.** That's the fastest way to waste time, walk miles, and end up with tired, cranky kids.

✓ The Smart Way

Stay in one land at a time. Do all your top rides there, then move to the next land once. Think of Disneyland like a **loop, not a zig-zag.**

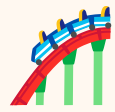
✗ What NOT to Do

Don't go Fantasyland → Star Wars → back to Fantasyland. Don't chase short wait times across the park. This leads to extra walking, wasted time, and early burnout.

★ The ONLY Exception

During rope drop (first 1–2 hours), jump around to hit your highest-priority rides before lines build. After that — stay in one area. This keeps walking minimal, energy manageable, and your day feeling organized instead of chaotic.

📄 🧠 **Pro Tip:** Plan movement around your child's energy — morning = rides, midday = slower attractions + Toontown, evening = bigger rides again. Use snack stops as "reset points" between lands.



Ride Strategy: How to Skip Long Waits

The trick is using a **mix of strategies together**, not just one.



Lightning Lane

Book your first ride early in the day. Keep checking for better times. Don't waste it on short-wait rides — save it for the big ones.



Single Rider

Your best tool for skipping long waits on popular rides. Use it for rides that ALWAYS have long lines.



Rider Switch

One parent rides while the other waits with little ones, then switch without waiting again.



Pixie Dust Tip

If your child is just under a height requirement, cast members may give a "come back" pass to skip the line later. Winnie the Pooh sometimes offers a "Roo Pass" — 2 riders skip the line.



Matterhorn Tip: Left side (Tomorrowland) = faster + rougher. Right side (Fantasyland) = smoother → better for kids.

Midday Strategy + Food Game Plan

Midday = Burnout Zone

Midday has the longest lines and hottest temps. Slow down intentionally:

- Toontown — let kids run and reset
- Disneyland Railroad — perfect for rest or naps
- Enchanted Tiki Room — AC break

These breaks will save your entire day.

Food Tips

Mobile order early, choose a pickup window, and check in while walking over so food is ready when you arrive.

- **Budget Lunch:** Little Red Wagon — famous corn dogs, shareable, great value
- **Sit-Down Meal:** Cafe Orleans — Monte Cristo sandwich, serves alcohol
- **Must-Have Snacks:** Churro + Dole Whip (near Tiki Room)
- **Character Dining:** Plaza Inn Breakfast — most affordable, book early

Share meals — portions are BIG. Bring snacks from home to save money.



Afternoon → Evening Plan

As the sun goes down, **shift back into rides**. Crowds move, temperatures drop, and energy comes back.

1

Best Evening Rides

Big Thunder Mountain (best at night), Indiana Jones (watch app for fluctuating lines), Matterhorn (ride early or late), Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run (shorter at night).

2

★ Real Truth on Wait Times

Ride during dinner (5–7 PM), during fireworks, or **after fireworks** — the lowest waits of the entire day. Evening is NOT automatically short waits for everything.

3



Star Wars Land at Night

Cooler, less crowded, better atmosphere. Try Cold Brew Black Caf at Docking Bay 7 and Oga's Cantina (Bespin Fizz, Fuzzy Tauntaun). Reservations help, but waitlist works. Hidden trick: "Chewie Mode" on Smugglers Run.

Photo & Character Strategy

Photos and character meet-and-greets are some of the **most special parts of your day**. Meeting characters is like meeting your kids' real-life heroes — those reactions are something you don't want to miss.

Use the App

- Find PhotoPass photographer locations
- See where characters are meeting throughout the park
- Check times and locations so you don't miss them
- Screenshot your PhotoPass code for easy access

Disney Credit Card Perk

Free character photo at Star Wars Launch Bay (Tomorrowland) — usually Darth Vader, with free downloads.

Extra Photo Tips

- Take photos in morning or evening (best lighting + smaller crowds)
- Stop when you see a short line — don't say "we'll come back"
- Get at least one castle photo early before it gets crowded
- Take a quick photo in each land for a memory timeline
- Bring your child's favorite costume from home — let them change into it before meeting characters

If you have younger kids, **don't skip this**. These are the moments your kids will remember the most!

💧 Small Savings + 🏨 Where to Stay

💧 Small Things That Save \$\$\$

- Bring a reusable water bottle — free water stations everywhere, quick service spots give ice water
- Bring snacks from home (granola bars, crackers, fruit snacks) to use while waiting in line

These small choices add up to a LOT over the day.

🏨 Where to Stay (Biggest Money Saver)

You do **NOT** need to stay at a Disney hotel. Look for hotels within walking distance.

Top Pick: The Anaheim Hotel

- 5–10 minute walk to Disneyland
- Family-friendly, spacious rooms
- Way more budget-friendly

Nearby hotels: **\$150–\$300/night** vs. Disney hotels: **\$500–\$1,000+/night**. For most families, the value just isn't there — spend your money on the experience, not the hotel.



End Your Day the Smart Way + Final Tips

Option 1: Leave Smart

Watch fireworks from Pixar Pals parking structure. Head out before the big exit rush to skip traffic, trams, and long lines leaving.

Option 2: Stay Late ★

Stay inside after fireworks, head straight to top rides. Enjoy some of the **shortest wait times of the entire day**. Re-ride favorites with way less wait.

The best days aren't the ones where you check off every ride. They're the ones where your kids aren't exhausted, you're not rushing all day, and you actually stop and enjoy what's around you. Your kids won't remember how many rides they rode — they'll remember the churro you shared, sitting next to you on a ride, and how it felt to just enjoy the day together.

→ Don't over plan

Leave room for spontaneous moments — they often end up being the best ones.

→ Don't skip breaks

You and your kids will last much longer and be much happier.

→ Don't show up late

Early hours are the best part of the day.

→ Don't try to do everything

Focus on the experiences that matter most to your family.