

Disney's FastPass; What it is and How it Works

The FastPass was first introduced in 1999 and since then has undergone several transformations. In brief, the FastPass is Disney's way of attempting to regulate the crowds at their most popular rides and attractions. It's a separate ticket of sorts that you must obtain yourself (they're available at the various kiosks scattered throughout the park) that allows you to come back to the participating ride or attraction at a later time (which is stamped at the bottom of the ticket) where you can then wait in the Fast Pass line, a special and generally much shorter line than the regular line. Each of the four major theme parks has a select number of rides and attractions, generally the most popular ones, that offer FastPass as an option. To find out which rides and attractions participate you can check the park guide map, the signs located right at the entry to the rides and attractions, or in this guide as I've included the information in the ride reviews. FastPasses are at times a wonderful way to avoid some of the excruciatingly long lines however there are disadvantages to using them as well. Because you must return during a predetermined window of time and not simply when it is convenient, you may find that you are half way around the park when it's time to come back and ride. It can most definitely make following any sort of organized route through the park a difficult task at best.

Here's How They Work

Not far from the rides that offer Fastpass as an option you will find self service kiosks (clearly signed FastPass). Feed your park ticket into the FastPass kiosk and in just a few seconds out will come both your park ticket and your FastPass. Printed on your FastPass is the name of the ride, the 1 hour window in which you may return to wait in the FastPass line to ride (or watch in the case of a show) and most importantly the time you may obtain another FastPass.

What You Need to Know

FastPasses are not unlimited, they can, and do, run out. The later it is in the afternoon the less chance you have of obtaining a FastPass for many of the participating rides and attractions. Now, I don't suggest hauling the entire family to the far ends of the park just to get a FastPass, but I do suggest that if there is a particular ride or show that you simply must see, as soon as the opportunity presents itself and that ride or show is relatively nearby, take a few extra minutes to get your passes before they're gone for the day. There are however a few exceptions to this...at each of the parks there is at least one ride where the lines grow almost exponentially from the minute the parks opens in the morning. They include Disney's latest and greatest thrill ride; Expedition Everest, at Disney's Animal Kingdom, Aerosmith's Rock 'n' Roller Coaster and the Tower of Terror at Disney-MGM Studios, Mission: Space and Test Track at Epcot, and finally Splash Mountain, Peter Pan's Flight, and Space Mountain at the Magic Kingdom. For this particular group of rides (if they are on your to do list that is -- and it's likely that they are) I would highly suggest having someone go immediately (or at least before 10:45am) to the ride and obtain the necessary number of FastPasses otherwise you may find that you're out of luck and the kiosk out of FastPasses.

Be sure to look at the return time posted at the FastPass kiosk before actually obtaining your FastPasses. As there are limitations on the number of FastPasses that you are able to have at one time, you will want to ensure that you are actually able to return during the window of time that's posted to use the Fastpass...if you aren't don't bother with them. If you don't check the return time (which can be anywhere from 40 minutes to 7 hours or more from the time you obtain the FastPass) you may find that you're stuck with a FastPass you can't use, and to make matters worse, unable to obtain another for a substantial amount of time -- possibly even the remainder of your day.

Don't have the entire family go to the kiosks to obtain their FastPasses, simply have one member, preferably an adult as they will have everyone's park tickets in hand, head to the kiosk and get everyone's passes.

Check the wait time posted at the rides (and look at the line itself to see how it seems to be moving...if it is at all) before you consider obtaining a Fastpass. If the line is short or the wait time posted is under a half hour you probably shouldn't even bother, just head to the regular line and enjoy. If however the line is excruciatingly long and the wait time posted exceeds an hour, then it's time to obtaining a pass.

The rules have changed several times over the years in hopes of perfecting the system (and I wouldn't be surprised if they changed again) however, for now, the general rule for obtaining a second FastPass is as follows; you can obtain a second FastPass after the window of time has begun when you can return to use the first pass, at the time printed on the bottom of the FastPass, or two hours after the time the first FastPass was issued -- which ever comes first. The only exception to this rule is at the Tower of Terror at Disney-MGM Studios. There you can obtain a second FastPass within only an hour of obtaining your Tower of Terror FastPass.

Everyone in your party must have a FastPass to utilize the FastPass line at the rides and attractions.

When you pick up your FastPass, Disney occasionally spits out a surprise FastPass to use at a completely different ride or attraction so be sure to pay close attention when you take your pass from the kiosk.

Word has it there are additional improvements and enhancements to the FastPass system that have yet to be implemented however no official information has been released regarding what they, who they may be available to, or when they may take effect -- The Mouse is a master at keeping such secrets quite safe. Be on the lookout and check www.travel-insights.com for updates.

At the Magic Kingdom

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (Frontierland)

Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin (Tomorrowland)

Jungle Cruise (Adventureland)

The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (Fantasyland)
Mickey's PhilharMagic (Fantasyland)
Peter Pan's Flight (Fantasyland)
Space Mountain (Tomorrowland)
Splash Mountain (Frontierland)
Stitch's Great Escape (Tomorrowland)

At Epcot

Honey, I Shrank the Audience (Imagination; Future World)
Living with the Land (The Land; FutureWorld)
Malestrom (Norway; World Showcase)
Mission:Space (Future World)
Soarin (The Land; Future World)
Test Track (Future World)

At Disney-MGM Studios

Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular (Streets of America)
Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show (Streets of America)
Rock 'N' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith (Hollywood)
Star Tours (Streets of America)
The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (Hollywood)
Voyage of the Little Mermaid (Animation Alley)

At Disney's Animal Kingdom

DINOSAUR (Dinoland USA)
Expedition Everest (Asia)
It's Tough to be a Bug (Discovery Island)
Kali River Rapids (Asia)
Killmanjaro Safaris (Africa)
Primeval Whirl (Dinoland USA)