

“Stepping Out In Disney World”

By Andrew Freirich

Think of a magical place that transports you back in time, into the future and around the world all in one week. The only place on earth is “**Disney World**”. For the young and old alike, Disney World’s theme parks, resort hotels and restaurants offer a lifetime of memories. It also brings back dejavue for many of us visiting again through the eyes of our children. This year Disney is celebrating it’s **50th** anniversary called the “*Happiest Celebration on Earth*”. What perfect timing.

Planning your trip:

In planning our trip, I kept in mind the plethora of options in arranging a week at Disney World. After carefully researching their website www.disneyworld.com, we selected the **Animal Kingdom Lodge** a deluxe resort which is part of a 33 acre wildlife reserve. We love the African theme, ambience, and diverse viewing opportunities of the animals that inhabit the grounds of the resort. Upon entering the resorts lobby, the hand crafted rich woods; imported native tapestries, renowned art, and vibrant colors, authentic to Africa are abundant and thriving. We were up-graded to the Concierge level, which is on the 6th floor, which offers exclusive access to the Kiliminjaro Club, and offers continental breakfast, and three additional light meal servings through out the day and evening.

The **Animal Kingdom Lodge** does an amazing job, at creating one of the most authentic experiences, other then going on an African Safari. Most rooms and patios offer your own private viewing experience and breathtaking close up’s of Giraffes, zebras, wildebeests, ostrich and native African birds that freely roam. I especially enjoyed watching the animals at twilight, 12 midnight and 7 a.m., where they were most active.

Our Agenda:

Our goal for this trip was to have an active vacation, visit all the theme parks, and indulge in the culinary pleasures of Disney’s dining experiences. We also intended to enjoy our resort, the Animal Kingdom Lodge, with all it’s amenities including the pool, nature walks, animal programs and it’s exceptional restaurants such as Jiko and Boma, which offer traditions of African food and culture.

Stepping to a healthier you:

I always encourage readers, friends, and colleagues that health is achieved, not bought. You have to work for it. Plan your exercise and exercise your plan. Be an active person in all areas of your life. In planning a vacation, you would be surprised how easy it is to walk or exercise your minimum daily requirement of 30 minutes. Vacation destinations offer so many opportunities to be active. In our case, we would be walking 6-8 hours per day, while experiencing the various theme parks, restaurants and attractions Disney

World has to offer. I am sure many of you have done the same. You are about to find out how many miles we actually walked for the week. The results were quite amazing!

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***Note**, remember to drink plenty of fluids, apply and re-apply sun screen, wear a hat, wear comfortable footwear, don't forget to eat, and enjoy yourself.

Counting your Steps:

In order to count our steps, every morning I attached a pedometer to my belt, which would compute the total steps/miles each day we walked for the week. Please note that everyone's step length is different, but on average, 2250 steps is approximately one mile walking. Renting a stroller is highly recommended for toddlers, as an added bonus, the additional weight and resistance will add to your workout.

Theme Park Highlights

Disney's Animal Kingdom is a sprawling 500 acres of jungles, forests, and a vast savannah divided into five theme parks. Animal Kingdom marries thrilling rides like "Kali River Rapids" and animal attractions real and imaginary including "Kilimanjaro Safaris", and "Pangani Forest Exploration Trail" as well as wonderful entertainment like "Festival of the Lion King", "Pocahontis and Her Forest friends" and "Mickey's Jammin Jungle Parade". We enjoyed all of the above and much more.

Epcot Center

Epcot Center transports you around the world, back in time and into the future all in a 300-acre theme park. We especially enjoyed the world showcase pavilions, which have eleven nations that offer, entertainment, attractions, restaurants, and an authentic, experience in each country. As well as Epcot's new ride "Soarin" which takes you on a simulated hang glider over California's natural wonders and landscapes.

The Magic Kingdom

The first of Walt Disney's theme parks, which occupies 107 acres and offers seven themed lands. The Magic Kingdom is the grand daddy of the theme parks, and seems to bring back generations of memories to all who have walked down main street before. We had a fantastic time, visiting our favorite exhibits, attractions and rides.

Disney-MGM Studios

A working film, TV studio and theme park on 154 acres. Notable attractions were Voyage of the Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast and Play House Disney.

Enjoyable Dining Experiences

Princess Story Book Dinner at the Norway Pavilion in Epcot Center

The Princess Story Book Dinner is a new interactive dinner where every the whole family gets to dine with all of Disney's famed princesses, including Cinderella, Ariel, Jasmine, Belle and Sleeping Beauty, The affection and attention the princesses give to each child is truly genuine.

Jiko at Animal Kingdom Lodge

"Jikos" which means (The Eating Place) at the Animal Kingdom Lodge offers African rhythms, dimly lit candles, rich African architecture and an exquisite nuevo African dining experience. Jikos also offers a wonderful children's menu.

Alfredo's at the Italian Pavilion in Epcot Center.

Alfredo's is a fun authentic interactive Italian experience filled with music, singing, and traditional napkin waiving, while the waiters serve up delicious Italian food. A must see is the "Illuminations" fireworks show case at 9.p.m. each evening.

Coral Reef, Seven Seas Pavilion Epcot Center

If you are a seafood lover, enjoy aquariums and want an interactive experience all in one restaurant, the Coral Reef is that perfect blend. We spotted sharks, stingrays, starfish, groupers, and sea turtles through out the evening. I chose the highly recommended signature entrée, farm raised Tilapia "Oscar" pan-seared with a delicious crab cake and asparagus. Dessert was nothing less then amazing, we had the Coral Reefs most popular and signature dish "The Chocolate Wave" Wow!

California Grill, Contemporary Hotel

An exquisite Five Star dining experience. California Grill is one of the most popular restaurants in all of Disney's resorts and parks. The sushi, sashimi and variety of meats and seafood are fantastic. Each evening a breath taking view of the Magic Kingdom's fireworks showcase can be seen from it's balcony.

Daily Walking Log (Steps/Miles)

Day One:

Animal Kingdom/Epcot Center

Princess Story Book Dinner, Norway Pavilion Epcot Center

Total steps 9831 = 4.36 miles

Day Two:

Animal Kingdom
Dinner at Jiko, Animal Kingdom Lodge
Total steps 9363 = 4.16 miles

Day Three:

Animal Kingdom Resort/ Pool / Epcot Center
Dinner at Alfredo's, Italian Pavilion Epcot Center
Illuminations Fireworks display Epcot Center
Total steps 8120 = 3.6 miles

Day Four:

Magic Kingdom
Dinner at Jiko, Animal Kingdom Lodge
Total steps 8364 = 3.71 miles

Day Five:

Disney –MGM Studios / Epcot Center
Dinner at Coral Reef, Seven Seas Pavilion Epcot Center
Total steps 10,988 = 4.88 miles

Day Six:

Goofie and Minnie Breakfast at the Beach club Resort
Animal Kingdom Resort
Total steps 8361 = 3.76 miles

Total steps/miles walked for six days

55,027 steps (divided by 2250)
24.456 miles Note* *26.2 is the distance of a marathon.*

Travel Details and Notes:

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge: Is where the spirit of Africa comes alive!
Go to www.disneyworld.com or call **1-407-938-3000**, for reservations call **407-939-6244**. Disney offers a broad range of accommodations and packages to suit you needs. The new "Magic Your Way" lets guests customize their dream vacation, which includes, hotel, park tickets, meals, transportation and other extras.

Dining: Disney World offers more than 150 restaurants to please your pallet and price range. I pre-planned our dinners a few weeks in advance. This is highly recommended to ensure you get reservations at desired restaurants and character themed meals. For reservations call **407-939-3463** for all your dining needs.

Jet Blue: Jet Blue has direct flights from JFK to Orlando, which is approximately two hours, and offers a genuinely comfortable flying experience with their oversized leather seating, Direct TV service in all seats, and excellent customer service. Cost of the flight \$240 RT. For more information go to www.jetblue.com or call (1-800-JETBLUE).

Thrifty Car Rental: I highly recommend renting a car, if you are going to be staying at Disney World for a week. Even though Disney offers's plenty of transportation. I found renting your own car to be more comfortable and convenient especially with a busy agenda and traveling with a four-year-old child. For more information on prices, cars and locations: go online to www.thrifty.com or call (1-800-847-4389).

Canon: The Power Shot SD 400 a pocket size 5 mega- pixel and 3x optical zoom digital camera is an exceptional camera and one of the best camera choices in the market place. Prices range between \$300 and \$399. Best to buy an extra SD card. For more information on all Cannon cameras go to www.canonusa.com

Nike: Nike offers a plethora of walking and running shoes. Best to have quality walking or running shoes with an active vacation, your feet will thank you. For a catalog of Nike shoes please go to www.nike.com

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